THE RISE AND DECLINE OF WELFARE CAPITALISM
AND THE EMERGENCE OF A UNION
IN IVORYTON, CONNECTICUT: 1900 - 1941

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History 334
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May 5, 1980
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The goal of this paper is to study a small piano keyboard manufacturing company and its relationship to the town that grew up around it, and whose character and life were defined and dominated by it. This relationship changed dramatically in the period between 1925 and 1941.

At the beginning of this period, the company, its employees and the community as a whole existed in a symbiotic relationship that has been classified by many historians under the general heading of "welfare capitalism". The company owned the houses that more than fifty percent of its work force lived in, the only grocery store, a hotel which served as a men's boarding house, a women's boarding house, a community center and a baseball field. By 1941, the company (Comstock-Cheney Corp.) had merged with another company (Pratt-Read Corp.) from a neighboring town. It had divested itself of all interest in employee housing, the store and the community center. A union had been formed by the employees, and recognized by the company.

Not coincidentally, these events occurred during the worst economic depression in American history, and the biggest political realignment and redefinition of American government in the 20th century. Furthermore, these events occurred when the children of the first generation immigrants (who had heretofore comprised the bulk of the work force) became employees.

The task here is to piece together the recollections of some of the participants in these events, together with newspaper accounts and company records. From this collection, I hope to analyze some of the cause-effect relationships between the events
mentioned above. This analysis is important in gaining a better understanding of these events if they are considered in isolation. In other words, one can better understand Ivoryton's history for its own sake.

There is, however, a larger opportunity here. In studying this transition in Ivoryton, one can gain a better understanding of broader themes in American history. Using Ivoryton as a laboratory, one can test the theories of historians regarding the general topics of: Americanization of immigrants, the change in attitudes between first and second generation immigrants, welfare capitalism, the effects of the Depression on business philosophy and employee attitudes, the cultural and ethnic dynamics involved in union organization and many others. Therefore, it is my intention to set my analysis of these events in the context of what some historians have written about these themes based on their studies of similar events elsewhere.

The following is a brief summary of some of the secondary works I consulted before beginning to study Ivoryton. This is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of these works. They are discussed here only insofar as they have been used to define the questions that I have chosen to ask. They will be referred to later as reference points in defining the context into which my conclusions are placed. The first three are studies of specific companies. The second three are general works about welfare capitalism.

Amoskeag is a study of a company of the same name and a company town (Manchester, New Hampshire) in decline. It is particularly relevant to this project because it illustrates,
through oral interviews, the psychic shock of life-long employees whose world had been abruptly rearranged. It documents employee resentment to the drastic cost-cutting measures that were introduced after a change in the management structure occurred. The old management group were descendants of the original founders and had strong familial, moral and emotional ties to the community, the workers and the traditions of corporate paternalism. They shared with workers an attitude that the company and the community were, in some sense, a "family". The new management group (outsiders from Boston) had none of these encumberances and was committed, first and foremost, to making the company turn a profit. The resentment and loss of security felt by employees as a result of these attitudes and measures is important in explaining the rapid erosion of long standing loyalty to the company. Equally important, however, is the other side of this coin. Many employees retained their loyalty to the company and blamed the union organizers for undermining the old order, which they felt was a very good one. They felt the cost-cutting measures were a response to unionization rather than the other way around.

A similar change in management occurred in Ivoryton in 1937. The domination of life by the company was not as omnipresent nor the changes as dramatic as in Manchester. However, there are some parallel themes in the attitudes of the new management and in the changing (and unchanging) loyalties of employees.

Chapters 3 and 4 of "American Electrical Workers: Work, Struggles, Aspirations, 1930-1950" by Ronald Schatz give an account of the changes that occurred in employer-employee relations
as the Depression worsened. The most significant of these changes, as it relates to this project, was the psychological effects that reduced pay, job status and job security had on workers. This is especially true with workers who had previously been in higher status jobs. This eroded the notion that the company's interest and their own were compatible and thereby encouraged union activity.

This is an important theme to consider in studying Ivoryton because the merger resulted in the elimination or downgrading of many high skilled positions when two separate work forces were combined at one physical setting.

The Emergence of a U.A.W. Local by Peter Friedlander is an in-depth study of all the personal, social, cultural and ethnic dynamics involved in the successful organization of a union in a small factory. Because of the limited amount of information available concerning the immediate events involved in the union's initial organization, I am only able to comment on one of Friedlander's conclusions. He argues that first generation immigrants were extremely deferential to authority. They had "feelings of deep fear and submissiveness, in spite of an equally strong hatred and resentment" of their bosses. He contends that the first generation immigrant was afraid to confront management head on and waited until the risk had been reduced by the union organizers, who were of second generation immigrant stock. The loyalty of first generation stock was then transferred to the union leadership, even though they remained fearful of management.
They transferred their "community orientation" to the union and supported it wholeheartedly, although they did not attempt to assume leadership positions.

This is an important theory to consider in Ivoryton because there was a large influx of second generation workers during the period under consideration.

Chapter 6 of Daniel Nelson's book *Managers and Workers* entitled "The Rise of Welfare Work" gives a good account of the social philosophy of welfare capitalists and the way that they sought to implement it via school teachers, social workers and ministers. Prominent in this philosophy was the feeling of responsibility that employers had to acculturating or "Americanizing" immigrants. This process included providing for an immigrant employee's moral, educational, and recreational needs as well as food, shelter and employment. An awareness of this noblesse oblige dimension of welfare capitalism is important in understanding a system that does not always make sense from a "dollars and cents" or "class struggle" perspective. It is, as will be shown, not absent in the minds of the men who ran Comstock-Cheney.

An article by David Brody entitled "The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism" 5 draws the same general picture that Nelson does. Which is that "welfarism" did arise out of a genuine concern by capitalists for the well being of the workers as well as the realization that a stable work force was, in the long run, more profitable than a transient or strike prone one. Brody ties the end of this system to the severe downturn in the business cycle. He says that workers were more satisfied than not in
paternalistic employment and that "American industrial relations might well have continued on its paternalistic course but for the Great Depression." Combs was founded on a plat of land.

Stuart Brandes in *American Welfare Capitalism* sharply disagrees with Brody. He views corporate paternalism primarily as a form of control of workers, playing down the utopian idealism of welfare capitalists. For Brandes, welfare capitalism is a necessary intermediate stage between the *laissez-faire* "Gilded Age" of the late 19th century and the New Deal-inspired unionism of the late 30's. He sees it as a stalling tactic by capitalists seeking to prevent the inevitable. He contends that "welfarism" was on its way out because workers were largely dissatisfied with it and employers were becoming convinced of its inability to control workers. Brandes disputes Brody's conclusions by saying that the Depression merely finished off a system that was already dying.

Both of these arguments have some validity. Both can be used to gain a better understanding of the events in Ivoryton. Both will be referred to, without trying to prove or disprove either. However, some aspects of each argument seem more appropriate than others in explaining these events and will be acknowledged as such.
The Development of a Company Town: 1900-1925

The Comstock-Cheney company was founded in 1798 by Samuel Comstock. At that time, it manufactured small ivory products. Its location was far (7 miles) from the nearest town, Essex. The reason for locating "out in the woods" was that it was an ideal spot to locate a water powered factory. The water source descended precipitously in the half mile ahead of the factory location. This made it possible to build two dams, and hence two mill ponds in that stretch of river. Two ponds offers a greater degree of control of the water level as seasonal highs and lows affect it.

It was a very small factory at this time and continued at a relatively slow growth rate for most of the nineteenth century. During this time it employed mostly native Yankees from the nearby farms and towns.

In the late nineteenth century business began to expand. As the demand for ivory products began to grow, the company had to look for other sources of labor. This demand began to be filled by European immigrants. The first group were Swedes, beginning in the 1890's. A small group of Germans and a small trickle of Italians and Polish began to arrive around 1900. Between 1910 and 1920 the Italian and Polish became the major immigrant groups.

Because the factory was located so far from any town, and because this large expansion of the labor force was filled by homeless immigrants, the company had to provide housing. The company began building houses and renting them to employees.
sometime around 1900. One woman recalled that her father and mother arrived there in 1902 and had to wait three months before they could move into their newly built house. In 1905, $10,000 was allocated to the house building account for that year. By 1910 it was at a high of $20,000. In 1907, house number 47 was sold to a Swedish employee, (indicating that by then, at least 47 of approximately 135 total houses had been built). The house building budget remained around $10,000 per year after 1910 until 1917 when it dropped to $5,000 and to $3,355 in 1918. I found no record of any money allocated for that purpose after that until 1922. 

The houses were different sizes and shapes and scattered out at different parts of the hilly landscape surrounding the factory. All houses had small lots, varying from about one-half to two acres. The houses were allotted according to the size of the family and rent was reasonable. It was between $9 and $12 a month during the 1930's. A maintenance man employed by the company made all necessary repairs and did painting. Fuel was not provided. Employees could either buy coal from a local dealer or cut firewood for $1 per cord from company land.

In 1917, the company moved a building from a neighboring community and renovated it for use as a men's boarding house. This building was dubbed the Ivoryton Hotel. Its main occupants were unmarried immigrant males, and males from neighboring communities who commuted home on weekends.

In 1920, the "Ivory Lodge" was built across the street from the hotel. The primary occupants of this boarding house were unmarried female employees.
Applying, there was not any of the strong moral supervision in these houses that was prevalent in other similar communities. The Comstock's did not seem to have the strong evangelical orientation that characterized many of the welfare capitalists of that era. Although some of the Comstock family were active in two of the three churches, there was no pressure to attend any of them or any other official policies regarding employee morality.

In 1918, the company purchased the town's only general store from an owner who was going broke. According to one woman, his demise was the result of his lenient credit policies. A barber shop was purchased by the company in 1920 and put under the jurisdiction of the Store Committee.

In 1916, a baseball field was developed behind the factory site, complete with bleachers and a grandstand. This was constructed as a recreation center for employees but was largely an outgrowth of the personality of the then president of the company E.M. Comstock who was a "baseball nut." He "played in college and when he came to work he thought we ought to have a baseball team in town." Although inter-town teams played on the field, the main event was the Comstock-Cheney company team. This consisted of regular employees and college baseball players who were put on the payroll but allowed to practice baseball during work hours. This team then played other factory teams. These games were major events attended by the whole town.

In 1906 Comstock-Cheney Hall was built as a community center. This was the location of town meetings, elections, high school graduations as well as entertainment. The range of entertainment included plays by professional acting troupe as well as plays that were organized, directed by, and acted in by
employees. Dances, boxing matches and silent movies were also included.

"An Amusement Committee was formed in 1920 by the Board of Directors to "look into forms of amusement for employees." This committee later turned over the baseball field to the employees as a recreation field.

The "Wheel Club" was instituted around this time also (not sure of the date). This was "mostly for men". It had a bowling alley, pool tables and card tables.

The elementary school was apparently not under the direct supervision of the company as it was in similar communities. There was no high school in Ivoryton, the nearest one was located in Essex. There was, however, some communication between the elementary school and the company, as one man remembers. "In those days, when you got wailed at school, you got wailed at home too. There was the best pipeline between the factory and that Ivoryton school that you ever seen. When my dad got home from work he already knew what I did in school."

The school did serve as a socializing agency for children of immigrants, but it was not in any direct relationship with the company in this respect. Children were expected to learn English from their friends. No interviewee remembered any objections by teachers to immigrants speaking in their native language to each other in school. Similarly, at the work place there were no official programs to teach English. New immigrant employees were given on the job training by a member of their own nationality. Some learned English rapidly. Some only learned enough to communicate about their specific work tasks and remained so throughout their lives.
The school served as an informal welfare agency in many respects. One lady (a child of immigrant parents) recalls: "In my own case, I had all older brothers so I was the first girl to start going to school, and many times I wore boys shoes and things like that. And they, the teachers did try to help me by giving me clothes." (Question: Was it ever done contemptuously?) "No, no, in fact I think they kind of favored me, felt sorry and were trying to help me out." However, she recalled that teachers changed the names of several Polish students to make them easier to pronounce and spell.

As was mentioned above, the company attempted no direct control of the churches or ministers. Members of the Comstock family were active in the Episcopal and Congregational churches and were probably large contributors. One family member donated the land that the Congregational church was built on and a substantial percentage of the cost of construction. However, the only qualification attached to this contribution was that the church remain in that denomination. (It later changed denominations and the contingency was waived.) In any case, company control of these two churches would have been irrelevant as a means of influencing the work force because the Italian and Polish workers attended Catholic churches in neighboring towns.

Another contribution of a member of the Comstock family was a substantial percentage of the cost of the town library.

Medical assistance was not provided in a formal way by the company. However, many interviewees confirmed that there were informal channels through which the company provided families with assistance in extreme cases. One man recalls:
If a husband died, and there was three or four kids, without tooting their horns, they took care of it. They weren't the kind that were throwin' their money around right and left every time somebody wanted it. But if somebody was in trouble, they helped!

One woman remembers her family receiving $500 in a lump sum in 1918 when her father died (not in a job related death) while in the company's employ, but isn't sure if it was from a company insurance policy or directly from the company.

One can only speculate about the degree to which this philanthropy was related to the beneficiary's being in the better graces of management. However, this largesse was not a matter of policy and therefore carried the implicit warning that it could be removed.

It is difficult to make a definitive statement about whether all these programs were instituted to "control" the workers, or if they developed as the result of a genuine sense of social responsibility on the part of the management. Certainly there are elements of the former insofar as some of the programs were institutionalizations of the Comstock family's personal interests and beliefs. "Control" seems to be a strong word to use in the instances mentioned so far. If it was "control", it was the kind that most of the workers did not have strong objections to. All interviewees, even those more critical of the company, conceded that it was a better place to work than most other places in the area at the time. One woman who lived 78 of her 80 years there said,

"This town was the Comstock's town, that's all you can say. (Pause) And it was a good town. It was much better than it is now. Everybody kept their places nice. You never saw any garbage and cans and everything laying in the
street the way you do now. ... In those days it was different. The company kept their places up. And whenever you wanted anything done, why, like papering or painting, you got it. They had a man who went around and kept them up."

Another man, a longtime Yankee employee recalls:

"You have to remember, it was a different world then. When you look at this town now compared to the way it was then, you wouldn't believe it. I can't even believe it and I lived through it. To try and compare the way the workers had it then with now - well there's no comparison. Those immigrant workers, they had an allegiance to the company. When one got a job here, pretty soon his relatives came from Poland or Italy and worked there and they were glad to work there. And the company was glad to have them."

However, while the arrangement was mutually beneficial, there were certain unspoken or quietly spoken warnings about certain behaviors and political beliefs. This was especially true during the 1920's. One daughter of Polish immigrant parents recalls:

"The older men. Like our parents' generation. They all were told. (To vote Republican) And they said so. ... And they were afraid. They had that fear, apparently enough, in them, that they - they did it. And ... another thing. They weren't even supposed to talk about it (politics) and they didn't. You know, those people, their lives depended on this (living and working here) and they did what they were told to do."

One man recalls being called into the office of a high company official after having talked to several groups of workers about the need to "get together". This incident occurred in 1928.

"I went walkin' in there. There he is sittin' behind this big desk. ... He had a big fireplace there, with tusks, you know a big set a' (elephant) tusks standin' beside the fireplace. So he says, 'What's this stuff you're spoutin' around here?' He says, 'You know - that's socialism. I could have you arrested and thrown in jail for that, for preachin' socialism.' He said, 'Your father worked here all these years and he's been a good man. I don't know how he ever sired a son like you.' He says, 'You know you're fired, don't ya?' I says, 'I don't give a damn.' He says, 'Well, where you think you're gonna work now?' I said, 'Well you don't think that Ivoryton
This encounter is important not only for its humor (the firebrand was eighteen at the time), but to illustrate the point that many of the immigrant workers probably did regard it as the only place in this world to work. Therefore, the line of reasoning which was used so ineffectively on this young man would have been very effective, even if only implied, to one who had strong ties to the community, no education and a large family to feed.

If one uses the word "control" here as Brandes uses it, there was not as much overt control in Ivoryton as in many other company towns. Brody's argument that workers were more happy than not in paternalistic arrangements seems to be more applicable in this case. There was definitely a distinct social order in Ivoryton, but it was one that was maintained not by force and not longer than one generation.

There was a distinct deference to what one lady referred to as "high mucky-mucks" in the early 1900's, but that had faded by the late twenties. At the beginning of this period, Yankees tended to hold higher positions in the shop and in town than did Italians and Poles. Additionally, Poles and Italians who were "in town" considered themselves to be of higher estate than those who lived in the farmlands adjoining the town. An "out of town" man recalls:

"The 'in town' people were a step above the people out in the farmland. ... Those people that worked, they had a regular weekly paycheck. Those people - the children of those people used to lord it over us, ya know. They wanted to show that they were a step above us."
As the mobility of the immigrant groups into higher positions in the work place occurred, the distinctions between the different groups broke down. As the distinctions between the lower groups eroded, so did the distinctions between workers and high level management personnel.

In painting a picture of Ivoryton in the teens and twenties it is important to realize that the Polish (Warsaw St.) and Italian (Little It'ly) communities are satellite communities, each a part but yet separate from the hub of Ivoryton itself. These communities had their own distinct flavor and life separate from the rest of Ivoryton.

The houses in these communities were farmsteads, owned by the occupants, not company housing. Each had a small amount of acreage which provided a limited amount of self sufficiency. In this sense they were part of a company town and not part of it.

"Everyone had what they needed. Because they raised all their own food, had all their own cows, chickens. As far as food goes there was no problem. Everyone had what they wanted and what one didn't have the other had, and sort of, ah you know, got them for each other. It was the buying power that was not that good."

It was this lack of buying power that drew these people to work at Comstock-Cheney. But as is shown in the above quote, the people in these communities were dependant on the company in a less absolute way than were the workers who lived in the company housing.

The existence of these satellite communities with their own community centers and activities had a limiting effect on the degree to which the recreational and cultural programs of the company affected their lives. For example, the Polish
community had a Sobieski Club and later a Polish Falcons Club which held dances, mutual assistance societies, religious meetings and drinking parties.

It is important, then, to realize that while the company and its facilities were the center of all activity in Ivoryton, it did not have everyone's undivided attention. It also did not have absolute power over life and death, because virtually everyone had the possibility of an alternate source of food other than the company store open to them. These are important distinctions to make in differentiating Ivoryton from other company towns in which every aspect of life was dominated by agents of the company. In Ivoryton, one would have to have been extremely unfortunate, or profligate to "owe his/her soul to the company store". People who were more critical of the company mentioned that some people could only have a few dollars pay after their rent and store bill was deducted, but no one recalled anyone being in debt on pay day.
The Depression: Decline and Merger 1925 - 1937

The Depression of the 1930's was a key time period in the life of American welfare capitalism. As was mentioned above, it is an important turning point in both Brandes' and Brody’s analysis. Both agree that, as the Depression got worse, it became more difficult for employers to maintain welfare programs and that they gradually discontinued all of them. Brody claims that the Depression cut short a system that both employers and employees would have liked to continue. Brandes claims that the Depression was merely the final blow to a system that was about to die anyway. An examination of the events in Ivoryton in this period may shed some light on this controversy. Because Comstock-Cheney merged with the Pratt-Read Co. in 1937, it is necessary to consider events at both companies in arriving at an answer.

The economic well being of Comstock-Cheney seems to have been in decline long before the 1929 downturn. Profits had been declining steadily since 1923 (see Table 1). However, profits took a severe nose dive in 1929 and the company operated at a loss for the next four years.

In many similar companies, this severe downturn resulted in drastic cutbacks of employee "welfare" programs. Because entertainment programs were not as extravagant or as costly in Ivoryton, and because the physical plant was already existant, we can assume that these were not affected as drastically as those in some towns were.

During this period, many people were laid off. Those who remained were working reduced hours. One man who quit in 1932 said they were only working three days a week then. Attempts were made to "share the work" among the employees who remained, except
where interchangeability was not possible.

In 1931, the monthly dividend paid to stockholders was reduced from 1% to ½%. This 1% had been a constant figure at least as far back as 1917, with the exception of a few months during the 1921 depression. In 1932, each share was reduced in value from $25 to $15. This transaction transferred $420,000 from capital stock to the surplus cash account. Wages were reduced in 1932; it is unclear from the document how much. I found no evidence of any other wage reductions during the Depression.

The rent charged to employees in company houses was determined on a pro-rata basis according to how many hours they worked that month. (The less hours, the less the rent.) Rents were waived entirely for those who had been laid off. Similarly, credit at the store was extended further than it had previously been. At the time of the merger in 1937, the store corporation which had previously run at a profit was in debt to the company by $7,000.

It may be reasonably concluded from all these figures that the company substantially continued its welfare measures during a period of very slow business activity. Wages were cut after dividends to stockholders were cut and capital stock was devalued. This differs sharply from the practices of some companies who continued to pay stockholders their usual dividends while cutting back on employee benefits. It may be said with some assurance that the "paternalism" of the Comstock-Cheney management group was not abandoned as the Depression got worse. However, they did eventually come to the realization that they were on a sinking
ship. The managers of Comstock-Cheney were rooted in the
ditions of an era that was fading fast and were reluctant to let
go. James A. Gould was not a part of the paternalistic tradition.
Gould was elected president of the Pratt-Read Co. in neighboring
Deep River in 1932. Prior to that, Pratt-Read had been a strongly
paternalistic company dating back to 1828 when Julius Pratt
founded the manufacturing company in Meriden. Pratt-Read had had
economic woes similar to those of Comstock-Cheney (see Table 2).
Gould was an outsider who is said to have been put on the Pratt-
Read board of directors by New York banking interests to protect
their investment. He had been on similar missions before and
was considered a "trouble shooter". * Gould was an aggressive
and innovative business man. His presence on the Pratt-Read
board of directors must have been impressive since he was elected
president after only a few years. At any rate, his election can
be considered a turning point in this story. One man's recollec-
tion summarizes Gould's business philosophy; "He came here
through the banks, he had one thought in mind: make it work or
liquidate it." Gould's letter of acceptance to the stockholders
began by saying: "Many drastic changes will have to be affected.
These we are prepared to go ahead with immediately." 13

In the four years that followed, Gould introduced many new
products and aggressively expanded the market and sales of the
company (see Table 2). Among other lesser innovations, he

* This information is based on testimony from three interviewees,
I was not able to substantiate it with any documents.
introduced the "viviphone" and "Emicon" which were the original equivalents of the Lowrey organ. Another factor contributing to the upsurge in sales was the introduction of a smaller spinnet piano that was more popular and affordable than the old grand pianos.

Although Pratt-Read's sales volume was expanding during these years, its physical plant was outdated. Products had to be transferred between different buildings during the production process. On the other hand, Comstock-Cheney's physical plant was more modernized. They had a superior electrical power plant and all operations were concentrated under one roof. It was for this reason that Gould approached the Comstock-Cheney management group about the possibility of a merger.

The Comstock family was initially cold to the idea, but the sad state of business at Comstock-Cheney must have created a strong economic incentive to merge. One interviewee remarked: "They had the business and we had the plant and money, and there wasn't enough business to support both of us."

Gould was said to be the "aggressor" in the merger deal and his philosophy of business was to affect the terms of the merger and set the tone for the new company. One interviewee remembers:

"He came in here with the attitude that 'We're in the piano making business not in the housing business.' He wanted to get the company out of the business of keeping up the houses. It was costly and a pain in the ass. You had to pay somebody to go around repairing them, somebody to go around collecting rents, somebody to handle complaints. He was strictly business and felt that we should get out of housing."

Consequently, the terms of the merger agreement mandated that the stockholders of Comstock-Cheney would form a separate
corporation, the Ivoryton Realty Company. This new corporation would assume full ownership of the store corporation and its building, Comstock-Cheney Hall, the club house, the hotel, the girls boarding house, and eighty-five tenement houses and all land upon which these structures sat. This corporation sold the houses during the early forties, giving first right of refusal to occupants.

To compensate for this concession to the Comstock-Cheney stockholders, the par value of Comstock-Cheney stock was reduced from $15 per share to $10 per share while the Pratt-Read stock retained its full value. This resulted in a loss of $210,000 in the value of Comstock-Cheney stock. The Pratt-Read stockholders held a total of 60,000 shares in the new corporation, while the Comstock-Cheney shareholders held only 42,000. Consequently, the board of directors of the new corporation was comprised of only two members from the Comstock-Cheney group and eight from the Pratt-Read group. This bias was to be reflected in the lower level management structure of the new company.

One employee recalls the change over as being very traumatic for bosses and employees alike.

"Well, when they merged with Pratt-Read everything changed. Well, the Comstocks, they were all old, it was R.H. and A.W. and they all retired and it was the Deep River crowd, Mr. Gould and people like that and they all came down and took over. All the Ivoryton bosses were out of a job. (Pause) A big, big change... It was all the Deep River people and Deep River bosses. It wasn't the same. Mr. Walkley, who was a boss forever down in the lower shop, he was out of a job. And ah Dow Weber, the superintendent in the shop. He was out of a job. ...

"Everybody was very uneasy. We didn't know what was gonna happen. I remember Mr. Walkley was sitting on this platform one day, when the big shots from Deep River came through. And here he was, sitting down reading a newspaper. He got very uneasy."
Managers were not the only ones replaced. The merger of the two work forces was a gradual process in which positions that were duplicated, when the two work forces merged, had to be thinned out. While the combination of the two work forces was carried out over a period of two years, there were immediate outbacks when the merger occurred. A person who was then a lower level management official recalled how this process occurred:

"Everyone was laid off (on the day of the merger)... and we were given the job, by the people in management, to have the plant running by Monday. But only have the people we wanted. Which was a heckuva decision. But that was the time to sorta get the best (workers) and come out the best we knew how. ... There was some bad apples in the bottom of the barrel, there always are, and those were the ones we let go. It was a time, (which you could do in those days - you can't do that sorta thing today), to pick the best of the lot ... perfectly accepted procedure."

One may infer from these recollections that the work force of the new company was a very nervous and insecure one. To make matters worse, 1937 proved to be a very bad year with a sharp decline in sales. If the workers in Ivoryton felt that their security was in jeopardy, those from the Deep River plant must have felt worse. The following newspaper account from the Deep River New Era newspaper of Nov. 27, 1937 offers a good illustration of the fear of workers themselves and the community as a whole.

"The Pratt-Read Co., for nearly a century and a half the industrial backbone of this quiet community, has fallen victim to the current 'business recession' and is even now transferring the bulk of its operations to the neighboring village of Ivoryton. ... To the ill-concealed dismay of residents here, the venerable company has been forced to unify its production... in Ivoryton. Although some of the employees in the ivory piano key department will be retained, of necessity a certain percent will have to be dropped. James Gould ... said that bosses and indirect labor would be more affected by the change than factory hands because the merger of activity would preclude the present duplication of effort and supervision. ...
... explained that the change was 'necessary' to cure the 'hangover' of the 1936 merger. ... 'At this time', he said, 'because of the extent of our business we were warranted in maintaining two plants. But with business collapsing the way it is, this is no longer warranted. It is equally obvious ... that some people in our employ will have to be dropped.'"

... It should be noted here that some interviewees say that Gould had no intention to continue operations in the Deep River plant, but that he was trying to calm the outrage in the Deep River community by a gradual pull out. Thus, the article continues:

"It is important to remember," Mr. Gould added, 'that we consider the two communities as one - they are separated only by three miles - and while the number of employees will have to be reduced, we do plan to continue the same ratio of employment in the two towns, even though some employees will have to commute to Ivoryton.' ... In the hope that business will improve, none of the machinery ... will be dismantled and the factory space will remain vacant, 'ready' as Mr. Gould put it, 'to start up again on a moment's notice.'"

Sales increased dramatically in every one of the next four years (see Table 2) but production never returned to this plant. Later newspaper accounts of more transfers and layoffs contain similar assurances from Gould. In April 1938, a local businessmen's committee was formed for the express purposes of persuading Pratt-Read to resume operations in Deep River or to find another company to locate there. Another newspaper article speculates that:

"There always remains the possibility that these buildings will attract ... firms ... who are seeking a rural environment and a solution to their labor problems. ... It is not a forlorn hope that some wide awake manufacturer will see in the vacated buildings an ideal opportunity with an ample supply of high grade labor right at the door." 15

The picture that emerges from these accounts is one of a very insecure community and work force. In a few short years the old order had changed. Workers who had previously felt
a strong kinship with the family that ran Comstock-Cheney, no longer felt that they could trust the new management group to look out for their interests. Outsiders who had no familial ties to the community, and who were expressly committed to setting a more "businesslike" tone in employee relations had taken over. Additionally, people from two separate work forces with the same skills were competing for a smaller number of jobs. These factors reduced employee security and future expectations significantly. However, corporate paternalism was a two-sided coin. If management no longer expected to carry on paternalistic employee relations, it could no longer expect the unquestioning deference to authority that it had commanded in the old system. This shift in the attitudes of both employer and employee would be the introduction to a new order. The response of employees to the "strictly business" attitude of the company would be the formation of a union. The old social contract of the company town had been revoked by the company. The employee response would not come for a couple of years. At the time of the merger, jobs were too scarce to risk starting a union. However, the loss of security and loss of confidence in management provided the psychological groundwork in the minds of the employees. When business picked up and jobs were easier to find, this change in employee attitudes would come to fruition.

There were some other changes in the community that deserve mention. Put together, they provide a general sense of the ways in which the old order was fading. Just as the new company had adopted a more businesslike stance, so had local merchants. In the following conversation, a brother and sister recall the
changes at a local feed store.

Sister: "Their (her parents) biggest bill was for the animals' feed. The grain company, that was Pramm's, carried my parents for quite a few years."

Brother: "And we didn't get outa debt with them until after the war started and they never refused us.

Sister: "And they (her parents) paid what they could. If they'd happen to sell a cow or something, they'd pay a small amount. And they (the store) knew that they'd get it eventually. Those were terrific people - to carry us - you know. Today you wouldn't find anybody that would do that."

Brother: "Ya, and even the offspring, even the next generation, ah, Mr. Pramm's son. He wouldn't do it. It was a completely different world for him. He just didn't believe in carryin' on business that way. A lotta things changed that way."

Later in the interview, the lady referred again to this last conversation as a point of comparison to the company and its policies;

"It (the company) became more business. There again its the younger ones coming along and they don't have the humanity that the old timers had for each other. Then it got so everyone was looking out for himself."

The Italian and Polish communities were changing during this period in other ways. In the period when most adults in these communities were first generation immigrants, the two groups distrusted one another even though they were on the same level of the social ladder and went to the same church; where, according to one man, "the Italians sat on one side, the Polish sat on the other side and the Irish sat in the middle."

One second generation Polish lady who subsequently married an Italian, illustrates some of the animosity between the two groups.

"They (her husband's family) were the only Italian family on this street. All the rest were Polish. ... The Polish people did not care for the Italian family. And the Polish store down there, lots of times, wouldn't sell them some of
the things they had. It's true. And there were a few little scraps and squabbles over that. And when we started going together, the Polish women down the street came down and talked to my mother. They thought it was terrible she was allowing her daughter to date an Italian fella ... not because it was that Italian fella, but any Italian fella."

This animosity was much less prevalent in the second generation. This generation was becoming adults in the 1930's and were much more willing than their parents to socialize with those of other nationality groups.

Another sign of change in the Polish community was the institution of the Polish Falcons club in the early 30's. This group broke away from the Sobieski club. The Sobieski was the original social center of the Polish community. However, it was dominated by first generation immigrants who became increasingly unwilling to meet the social needs of the younger generation. The Sobieski was dominated by older Poles from rural southern Poland while the Falcons was oriented toward immigrants from central Poland near Warsaw, and second generation Poles. The new club had a bigger variety of entertainment that included gymnastic classes, basketball games and dances.

Another significant change in Ivoryton was the voting patterns of its residents. Prior to 1932, Ivoryton held overwhelming Republican majorities in Presidential elections very similar to Essex proper. Beginning in 1932 in Ivoryton, (the second district of Essex) the Republican majority diminished from what had been a 4 to 1 margin in 1924 to an almost even match by 1936. As a point of comparison, the first district remained overwhelmingly Republican throughout. (see Table 3)

Another important factor in the changing complexion
of the town is the increased use of the automobile and the mobility that it made possible. The community became less central to the lives of the residents. A newspaper article in 1938 announcing the sale of Comstock-Cheney Hall is a good illustration of the way the automobile was changing the character of life. The building was being sold because "as automobiles became more plentiful the patrons of the silent films were able to leave the village to patronize the talking movies in other places and gradually the building became less useful to the community." This increased mobility also made other things possible not the least important of which was the possibility of working in another town. This therefore was another important factor in the workers decreased dependence on one company.
This final episode in the transition of Ivoryton will illustrate the employees' response to the changes in the community and the work environment. In the previous sections, workers have been participants but have not taken the initiative in directing the changes in their environment. This initiative is the result of a fundamental change in the attitudes and self-conception of workers. The initial core group of people that mobilized the union movement were, in some senses, extraordinary people. The union movement was not a spontaneous response of long time employees who woke up one morning and discovered that the old order had changed. Rather, it was the work of a very few individuals who realized that an employee response to these changes was appropriate. These people then cultivated the soil that had been fertilized by the events of the previous three years. The psychological groundwork had already been laid and the organization was a relatively rapid process once the leadership was developed. Bill Gilbert, the full-time organizer from the United Furniture Makers Union, remembers that it was about six months from the time he began to organize until the union was recognized. The following is an account of the events of this six-month period in 1940 and 1941.

The union was first contacted by Dave Peterson, a second generation Swede and Louis Schmelke, a second generation German. Both were long-time employees at Comstock-Cheney and in their mid-fifties at the time. By all accounts, the overriding concern of these men was the inability of the employees to cope with
arbitrary firing and favoritism of employees by the company and the absence of any mechanism for resolving grievances. The rate of pay was not a priority.

Bill Gilbert recalls:

"Many of them had the complaint that they had no vehicle to present grievances. These were the concerns that led to the general need for a union. Not just economic reasons."

One lady whose husband became active in the union early on recalls that before the union, "You had no say in anything and you know, the younger generation wanted a say in things."

One woman who was a member of the original core group recalls an incident that exemplifies her feelings about the need for a union:

"He (her foreman) was fixin' my machine and she (a female employee) come walkin' by and he said 'God, is she homely'. And I said, 'Ya, I guess she is.' And he said, 'I think I'll get rid of her.' And I says, 'Is she doin' her job?' And he says, 'Oh ya.' And I said, 'Well, I don't see how you can get rid of her.' Then I was thinkin' - I didn't quite dare say it but I thought - 'You wait, you louse. We get a union in here and we'll see if you'll get rid of somebody 'cause they're homely.'"

Although, the older employees were reluctant to participate at first, the security issue was the decisive one in persuading them to join. Bill Gilbert recalls:

"Security was more important to the older people. They'd seen promises broken. They'd seen that kissing rear ends wasn't the way to go. They had more at stake (in this respect) than the younger ones did."

The older employees were, however, initially very receptive to the idea of a union.

Gilbert recalls that he began his efforts by getting support from community leaders and developing a leadership block among the employees. One of these community leaders was Oshen Ray, a Republican first Selectman of Deep River. He had, according to
one lady, "something against Pratt-Read". We can surmise that he was acutely aware of the problems that the merger had caused the small businessmen and unemployed workers in Deep River. He must have shared the sense of frustration that others in Deep River had at the company's policies, as the previously quoted newspaper articles related.

Another community leader contacted was John Kalamari. He owned a small bar and grill in Deep River, and probably shared some of the same concerns that Ray did. He had had union experience, according to Bill Gilbert, in "New York or Bridgeport." He was very influential among the Italian community who, as a whole, were suspicious of unions and reluctant to join.

Another important female organizer of the original core group came from a Swedish unionist background. Her parental influence and outside reading were central to her understanding of employer-employee relations. The following are some of her recollections about this.

"Some people, when we were gonna organize, they figured that to have a union it just meant money. But I had known from listening to my father (and my father belonged to a union then - always had) ... that money isn't all of it. ... I knew then that seniority and the right to bargain and the grievances procedure - those are so valuable. You know! Seniority and all those mean more than money."

(Question: Why would a thirty year old have been worried about seniority instead of high wages?)
"I wasn't worried about me. I could go get a job anywhere. ... I could see all the injustices for labor. And I was a great reader and I had read - Oh! What was that wonderful book about the slaughterhouses out West, in Chicago? ... I read that and I saw all these (same) injustices toward the people at Pratt-Read."

In the following story she illustrates a good example of the change in attitudes between herself and the people who had grown up with, and been happy with, the old system.
"They always thought Mr. ______ was so great. ... Bringing the baskets here. Being so nice to the poor people, bringing them a little turkey or chicken or something, or a fruit basket at Thanksgiving or Christmas because they were poor people. And they were poor people! Used to burn me up! That's why I always said 'Pay'm a decent salary and they'll get their own chickens!"

The general characteristics of the core group of activists fit the conclusions that Friedlander made about such people. They were not first generation immigrants. They had some union experience in their family background. They were generally more educated than the rest of the workers. They did not (according to one interviewee) have any strong religious orientation. Friedlander's conclusion that first generation immigrants joined the union after it became less risky to do so also seems to hold up in this case. All interviewees agree that the older employees were initially reluctant but very supportive later.

One lady organizer recalls:

"You had to nudge 'em a little, the older ones. They were more afraid of it, afraid of losing their jobs, than the young ones were. They didn't say 'Oh sure I'll sign' right away. I had to ... say 'Look, Mary, why don't you sign. It'll be better for all of us.' (And she replied) 'I-I-I don't know.' But they finally did."

Bill Gilbert maintains that although they were reluctant initially, the older workers were the strongest element in the union and insured its success.

Another parallel with Friedlander's study here is that certain strong personalities in each department were key figures in the process of getting employees to join. The following story offers a good example of this process.

"I'd get one (to sign up) but they'd say, 'Don't tell anybody,' cause they were afraid. But I'd do it just the
same. I'd go to the next person and tell them, 'So and So signed up.' (And they replied) 'Ya?' (Pause) And the day I got Rosie Stone (pseudonym) to sign! She was oh a loud-mouth and tough!... And she signed up. Oh boy! I ran around. She didn't tell me not to tell anybody but I guess she didn't expect me to. So I went around telling everybody 'Rosy signed!' Soon as I said that - Boy! Did those things come in. They all raced to sign up. Oh brother - then it started going like that. Then we mentioned all those in the other departments that signed and then it was easy. ... After she signed they all fell like flies."

Much of the organization outside of the shop was carried on in the Scandinavian club in Deep River and the Polish Falcons club in Ivoryton. After a short period of time there was overwhelming support for the union.

There was no strong opposition among the employees to the union. Those who tended to oppose it were not vocal in their opinions. One lady recalls: "They didn't talk too much. The ones that were against it (the union) didn't say much. They didn't get involved. They were playing safe. If it got in they were gonna be on the winning side. If it didn't - then 'I told you so.'"

Another factor in the relative ease with which the union won recognition was the fact that there was a power struggle in management at the time. Gould was trying to bolster his position as president. He had experience with unions at another company. He is said to have wanted the union to succeed because he was the only top level management official with union experience. Therefore, the presence of a union bolstered his position as president because he "knew how to handle them" and presumably no one else could make that claim.

Gilbert recalled the first meeting of company officials with representatives of the then unrecognized union. He reported the Gould was "reasonable" while other management officials were "glaring down at us. They thought we were the next thing to
Communists.

The range of people who had signed cards was so broad that, according to Gilbert, "Gould could see there was no use fighting it." There was no election. The National Labor Relations Board simply checked the cards against payroll signatures to make sure there weren't any fraudulent cards and then certified the union.

The first contract had provisions for seniority rights on a cross departmental basis, the right to arbitration, a definition of grievance procedures and a five cent an hour raise. This was a fairly substantial raise considering most workers' hourly rate was between thirty and forty cents. Thus the final stage in this transition was complete. There was apparently no drastic change in the mode of labor relations that precipitated the move to unionize. No big event that created a spontaneous reaction among employees. Rather, it was the culmination of a gradual change of attitudes by employees about themselves and their employer. The response to the lack of security brought on by the change in management was slow in coming.

This can be attributed to the fact that business was improving rapidly by the early 40's. Jobs were easier to get and therefore more risks could be taken.

Another factor that made unionization easier in 1941 than it had been in the mid thirties, was the policies of the New Deal. Francis O'Connor, the man who was then regional director for the United Furniture Workers, commented:

"It wouldn't have happened without the New Deal. It got a lot easier in the 40's than in the 30's. There were thousands waiting to be organized and not enough skilled organizers. You could organize a place at lunch time in the parking lot. Because it happened when it did, Pratt-Read was a relatively easy place to organize."
Conclusions

It is necessary to close this project with a few statements about the different theories mentioned in the introduction. The following is a summary of my conclusions about their applicability to the events in Ivoryton.

Although more evidence is needed in this area, it does appear that Friedlander's conclusions are correct. First generation immigrants were reluctant to back the union at first but were very supportive later. However, this behavior was found in most long time employees, not just those who were immigrants. Union organizers tended to be of second generation stock and were generally more educated (if only in an informal sense.) Furthermore, they had some exposure to or experience with, unions before. Also, certain key individuals acted as opinion leaders and, once they agreed to the union, the others followed at a comparatively rapid pace.

The erosion of employee confidence and security that provided a strong impetus for union organization in Schatz's study of electrical workers seems to have been present at Pratt-Read. However these feelings were only visible in developing a new attitude among employees in a long-term perspective. There was no immediate response to the loss of security felt by employees. This is largely attributable to the fact that the change in management came during a severe economic slump. The response came when the economy had improved and jobs were easier to find.

The Amoskeag study relates a strong resentment to the change in management. As the old family management group was replaced, and as new cost-cutting measures spelled the end of the old order,
workers' loyalties changed. They became less trustful of man-
agement and felt that they had been betrayed. As has been shown,
these feelings were prevalent in Comstock-Cheney's older employ-
ees. Another parallel between the two companies is the fact
that many long-time employees blamed the union for forcing the
company to change its policies, even though the union arrived
four years after the merger. One life-long employee's remarks
typify the reactions of many others like her.

"There wasn't the good feeling that there was before the
union. The employees were divided. The old feeling was
gone. There was no more intimacy."

Elements of both Brandes' and Brody's theories are applic-
able to Ivoryton. Brody's argument seems to be more applicable
to the pre-merger Comstock-Cheney plant. The old management
group was, in general, unwilling to change the welfare policies
of the past. Brandes' theory seems more applicable to the pre-
merger Pratt-Read and post-merger management group. Under Gould's
direction, the new company aggressively sought to remove the
welfare policies that they thought were no longer appropriate
because of their costliness.

It is more difficult to make a statement about how these
theories apply to employee behavior. In general, workers at
Comstock-Cheney were satisfied with the old system. However,
there were some very substantial changes in the self-conception
and world-view of the children of immigrants who were beginning
to comprise a large portion of the work force. Perhaps Nelson's
theory that welfare capitalism was in decline after it had
done its job of "Americanizing" immigrants is worth consider-
ing here. If the merger had not occurred for another ten years,
perhaps the old system would have died a natural death. Perhaps the children of immigrants would not have tolerated the system that was designed to meet the needs of their parents - needs which were very different from their own. However, like most events in history, these events do not provide a neat laboratory model with which one can test theories. This scenario was short-circuited by the merger. However, it does seem fair to say that the union was the employees' response to the changes in management policies rather than the other way around. The changes in management policies seem to be more attributable to the need to cut costs caused by the extreme downturn in the business cycle, than to employee unrest or unmanageability. Therefore, Brody's theory seems more plausible in explaining the events in Ivoryton.
Table 2

Table 1

Net Sales and Gross Profit and Loss Figures for the

Annual Net Profit of the Comstock-Cheney Co. (These figures are taken from the minutes of the board of directors meeting.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Net Sales $</th>
<th>Gross Profit and Loss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>332,112</td>
<td>183,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>164,851</td>
<td>53,670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>90,629</td>
<td>38,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>46,553</td>
<td>12,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>31,223</td>
<td>116,998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>10,650</td>
<td>12,279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>-146,480</td>
<td>-25,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>-122,206</td>
<td>167,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>-35,186</td>
<td>167,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>-135,051</td>
<td>167,520</td>
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<td>1933</td>
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<td>1934</td>
<td>6,682</td>
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<td>1935</td>
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<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>-18,854</td>
<td>167,520</td>
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Table 2

Net Sales and Gross Profit and Loss figures for the Pratt-Read Co. (These figures were taken from Federal Income Tax returns for each respective year.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Net sales</th>
<th>Gross profit and loss</th>
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<tr>
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<td>$2,105,470</td>
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<td>1933</td>
<td>203,686</td>
<td>-207,549</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1940</td>
<td>1,253,129</td>
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Table 3

Voting statistics in presidential elections
(from official voting records at the Essex town hall)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1st district (Essex proper)</th>
<th>2nd district (Ivoryton)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>163</td>
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<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>147</td>
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<td>1932</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
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Footnotes


5. David Brody, "The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism"


7. These figures are all taken from the minutes of the Comstock-Cheney board of directors meetings on: 2 July 1905, 13 July 1910, 28 Dec. 1907, 7 Jan. 1911, and 8 Jan. 1918, respectively.

8. Ibid. 29 March 1920

9. Ibid. all from 1917 to 1932

10. Ibid. 7 Dec. 1932

11. Ibid. 15 Jan. 1932

12. Ibid. 16 Nov. 1936

13. This letter is included in the minutes of the Pratt-Read board of directors meeting on 4 Feb. 1932.


15. Ibid. 24 Dec. 1937

16. Ibid. 16 Sept. 1938