WORKING MENS SOCIETIES IN MIDDLETOWN CONNECTICUT:


PATRICIA NEUMAN
AMERICAN SOCIAL HISTORY
FALL SEMESTER-1979.
MR. HALL
Throughout the second half of the Eighteenth Century and early part of the Nineteenth Century, New England was in the process of extensive change. The expanding economy and developing industries were beginning to replace the small-scale means of production. Having evolved from a predominantly rural region in which the organization of social, economic and political structures were simple and informal, New England began its transformation into a relatively complex society. The inhabitants of the region, specifically in Middletown, Connecticut, had to adjust in order to function in this changing society.

Industrialization and the growth of commercial capitalism was gradual and sporadic. As late as the 1830's and 1840's, American workers, unlike their British counterparts, seemed on the whole unconcerned by any apprehension of economic expansion. While they did not identify with a particular class with its own clearly defined interests, the working men of Middletown nonetheless contributed to formed societies which, their assimilation during these decades of great change.

Two such societies of working men were established during the late 1820's and early thirties: The Franklin Society of 1829-1831 and The Mechanics Society of 1832-1836. The combined study of these two Societies, similar in purpose and in the socio-economic diversity of their membership offers instructive insights into the concerns and interests of the working men and their perceptions of the society in which they lived. Through an investigation of these Societies, an attempt will be made to ascertain the economic and social status of the members, their social, economic, political and intellectual aspirations and the means by which the Societies endeavored to accomodate the members' goals.

The Franklin Society was comprised of approximately ninety young men between fifteen and thirty years of age. Of the twenty-three names listed in Table I, eight were artisans and small merchants, five were relatively large scale manu-
facturing artisans and/or merchants, with ten unknowns. Because the average member was in his (for only men were permitted to join either Society) teens or early twenties, information regarding their economic status between 1829 and 1831 is sparse. During the brief span of the Society's existence, many of the members were in the military service and of those enlisted, few had permanent jobs. Moreover, the law exempted from taxation young men in the first two years of establishing their career and without specific tax records, it is difficult to discern their economic status. Details of the members' occupations, tax payments, government and military service for the Franklin and Mechanics Societies appear in Tables I and II.

Like the Franklin Society, the Mechanics Society is comprised of artisans, manufacturers and merchants. Of the twenty-two men listed in the Records, seven were artisans, four were merchants, two were professionals with ten unknowns. Upon the basis of their real property, none appear to have been farmers.

Specific information concerning the members of The Mechanics Society of 1832-1836 is more easily found than details of the Franklins for two reasons: first, because the average worker was older and already established in an occupation, his name was more likely to be listed in the census, and the details of his property enumerated in the tax lists; second, the tax lists beginning in the year 1835 were far more specific than those of previous decades. It is, therefore, possible to gain an indication of many of the Mechanics' social and economic status.

With the majority of members artisans and merchants, it is interesting to note that two professionals were listed as members of the Mechanics Society. One of them, Griswold, was not yet settled in his legal career. Nor was he independently wealthy. And his association with men of this socio-economic range is therefore not surprising. The reason for Hubbard's participation, however,
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*In presenting data for both the Franklin and Mechanics Societies, I have had
is not as clear. He was by far the wealthiest of all the members. In fact, the
tax which he paid in 1835 ($1008) is nearly equal to the combined tax ($1098)
paid by all the other members. Perhaps he joined because of his association
with the manufacturers, Watkinson and Russell. Alternatively, as a pillar
of the community, he may have worked with the Mechanics in order to direct
the Society's development and focus its concerns. But there is little evidence
to support the latter. While Hubbard may have helped to create the substance
of the Mechanics' Constitution through his position as Recording Secretary, his
name is never mentioned or suggested in the minutes in reference to anything
beyond his official duties. Possibly, in looking forward to his entrance
into politics, he may have seen his association with these men as being politically
expedient. Or perhaps he joined the society for the same explicit reasons as
did most of the artisans, merchants and manufacturers; self-education and intellectual
improvement.

In comparison with the general population of Middletown, the members
of the Mechanics Society appear to be either financially "comfortable" or prosperous. Using house ownership as an indication of their wealth and lifestyle,
thirteen of the nineteen members listed in the Tax Assessment of 1835 owned at
least one home. In contrast to the 52.6% of heads of households in the city
to make some assumptions in order to supplement gaps of information. Some
of the members are not listed in the tax records (The Grand Levy of 1835). This
may be because they do not reside within the Town of Middletown. Some of the
men stated to be artisans in 1835 based upon 1820 information may have switched
occupations, but from their tax payments and property holdings, the assumptions
for 1829-1836 seem to be well-founded. Similarly, deductions based upon the
percentages of home and time piece owners are subject to the fact that the census
taker of 1835 did not account for heads of households who owned more than one
time piece or home in his accumulative assessment. The comparative statistics
of men in these Societies with the general population of Middletown, therefore
is not precisely accurate. Given these possibilities for error, my approximated percentages are submitted as sufficiently accurate to be useful and significant.
of Middletown, as much as 58.4% of the Mechanics owned the homes in which they lived. As the general population was unable to so, most of the members were wealthy enough to afford a private home.

The ownership of time pieces also indicates the members' wealth and prosperity. Listed separately on the tax list of 1835 (along with taxes on books, horses, cattle, turnpike shares, carriages- to take examples), possession of a time piece was considered an indication of some wealth during the early part of the Nineteenth Century. Fifteen of the nineteen Mechanics mentioned in the City Tax List owned at least one time piece. And eight of those fifteen owned more than one. To compare the Mechanics with the general population of Middletown, heads of households owned 78.9% and 57.8% respectively. This difference of approximately 20% suggests that the Mechanics may have been somewhat more wealthy and industrious than the average resident of Middletown; for the ownership of watches and clocks indicates a desire to use time efficiently and productively.

Looking at their property, members of the Franklin Society do not appear either as wealthy or ambitious as members of the Mechanics Society. According to the Tax List of 1835 (taken four years after the group had stopped meeting), only five of the eleven members listed owned their own homes (45.4%) and seven of the eleven owned at least one time piece (63.6%). Three owned neither house nor time piece. While the proportions of property ownership are less than those of the Mechanics Society, the statistics are not directly comparable. First of all, much of the relevant information about the Franklins is not available. Secondly, because the Franklin Society was comprised of a younger,
less established membership, many of them still lived with their parents. The property which may have later been taxed as their own (such as a time piece) may have still belonged to their parents. Also, members who lived with their families were not taxed for their own homes. To take an example, neither of the Southmayds listed in the Franklin Society were taxed for a house. But, at the same time their father as well as may of their relatives were already established in their occupations as merchants- and owned the houses in which they lived. Thus it is likely that the younger Southmayds who belonged to the Franklin Society resided with their family. Judging by the accumulated information concerning the Franklin (including property ownership, tax assessment, occupations and participation in local government), it is likely that these young men belonged to a similar variety of socio-economic levels and occupational groups as the members of the Mechanics Society.

Unlike the English guilds, these Societies were not composed of tradesmen of a common, single economic division. They were, rather, an upwardly mobile group of politically active individuals striving to assimilate into the developing society. The following description of Mechanic member, taken from his obituary in the Hartford Courant serves to illustrate the kind of man who joined the Societies:

In 1817 he (Clark) went to Middletown and established a printing office - the firm name being Clark and Lyman. In 1822, they dissolved partnership and Mr. Clark bought out Mr. Lyman's share and formed a partnership with his (own) brother. Meanwhile Mr. Curtiss, publisher of the Middletown Gazette died. The Clark brothers bought the office and enlarged and published the paper which was solidly under Horace Clark's control as editor and manager.

Soon after he secured an interest with Buckland, Stearns & Co., ivory comb manufacturers, and remained in business for 30 years. (He was) One of the original petitioners in 1825 for a savings bank.

Equally typical is a man like Allen May, a simple carriagemaker who owned neither
house nor timepiece, but was still active in both the Franklin and Mechanics Societies in addition to serving as Selectman on the Town Council. The members of the Societies seem to have shared a common concern for productivity and industriousness. Their membership, therefore includes both young men just entering into the world of capitalistic entrepreneurship as well as the more established merchants and manufacturers who had already attained some personal success in the expanding marketplace.

In his study, Master Mechanics in New England, Gary Kornblath found a similar economic and occupational stratification as was evidenced in the Middletown Societies:

Membership was generally restricted to master craftsmen and independent manufacturers, men who had worked their way up through the craft hierarchy from apprenticeship to proprietorship of their own shops or business. Their notion of the "mechanic's arts" bridge the gap between pre-industrial and industrial society.³

Determination of membership in the Massachusetts and Middletown Societies was based upon similar interests: regardless of their wealth and occupational range, the members of these associations were linked to their respective organizations by their mutual desire to understand the means by which they could best function within the changing structures of society.

As a part of his study of the working-class in early Nineteenth Century British Britain, E. P. Thompson also examined Mechanics Institutes. Although the English working men's associations were often accused of being radical, Jacobin, "nurseries of disaffection" and schools "for the diffusion of infidel, republican and levelling principles", Thompson maintained that these societies were geared primarily to the development and establishment of "middle-class values". The Mechanics Institute in Leeds for example was:

from the outset controlled by sponsors from the middle class, and notably by Nonconformist manufacturers; in Bradford and Huddlesfield it was, for a period, controlled
by Radical artisans. After the Mid-Twenties, the tendency was general for the custom of artisans to give way to that of the lower middle class and for the orthodox political economy to come into the syllabus.

As a further example, Thompson explains how Francis Place, the mentor of the Lancaster Mechanics Institute began his career modestly as a journeyman breeches maker before going on to become a politically active and financially successful employer. As Kornbluth found in his analysis of the comparable Massachusetts Societies, Thompson asserts that the central focus of these Societies (directed by Place) was "the building of bridges between the artisans and middle-class" and "the sober, respectable artisans and his efforts at self-improvement". The Franklin and Mechanics Societies of Middletown in the Thirties shared this fundamental concern.

Labor unions, local trade societies and even the first labor party were formed in other areas of Northeast America during the prosperous years between 1825 and 1837. But the Franklin and Mechanics Societies were not created to promote the rights of working men. In fact, in some instances, they supported ideas which were directly antithetical to those advocated by specifically labor oriented groups. In a discussion of the developing solidarity and self-consciousness of labor during this era, Alice Felt Tyler enumerates the "demands of labor which were much the same everywhere". Amongst other interests, she claims that labor supported "the abolition of imprisonment for debt" and "the revision of the militia system". These two demands are quoted not because of their inherent significance, but because they contradict the decisions informally claimed by the Societies in their debates. (See Table Three, questions eleven and seventeen). The members of these Societies seem to have felt more closely allied with the established order than they did with many of the dissatisfied labor oriented groups. # Jarvin Morse notes:
Since less than 10% of the (Connecticut) population were engaged in manufacturing, the wage earning class was too small to form a party which could carry out a distinctive program in society or politics. Connecticut laborers of the early 19th Century did not develop a spirit of class consciousness and although Mechanics clubs advocated legislation for the benefit of wage earners, few people conceived of the working class as having ambitions or needs different from those of Society in general.

In one noteworthy case the Franklins and Mechanics asserted a view often expressed by distinctly working class organizations. Regarding the issue of economic expansion and industrialization, the members advocated productivity but were wary of the advent and use of modern machinery. Middletown and indeed most of Northeast America was not fully industrialized. The men feared that the entrance of unfamiliar machinery might diminish what had been their autonomous control of the means of production. Thus it is not surprising that the members supported the establishment of large manufacturers (Table Three, question twelve) but, like many of the working class groups, the Societies claimed that "labor saving machines (were not) an advantage to the people of the United States". In spite of this shared apprehension towards machinery, neither the Franklins nor the Mechanics identified with the "working class". They did not see themselves as having interests clearly distinct from others in the general Middletown community and, contrary to Morse's assertion, neither Society actively supported legislation to help the laborer.

Along with the economic and social concerns, many members were interested and active in local politics. Professionals, merchants and artisans from the Franklin and Mechanics Societies served as jurors, tything men, selectmen and Civic Authorities on the Town Council. Approximately 52.6% of the Mechanics and 47.6% of the Franklins held an office at some time on the Town Council. This involvement in local politics, an active interest pursued by a surprisingly large percentage of the members, is characteristic of the kind of man who joined these Societies. They were anxious to look after their own interests
and also wanted to help the community-at-large. In Democracy in America, Tocqueville suggests that it was mostly men of some wealth who felt the need to enter into politics in order to be sure that the Council acted in such a way that would not conflict with their best interests. That artisans owning little real property were also elected or appointed to the Council may indicate their optimism concerning their future prospects. From Tocqueville's view, the large number of members on the Town Council suggests that many of the members viewed themselves as productive members of society anxious to acquire, maintain or increase their personal property. In addition to his analysis, based upon the members' interest in history, political structures and the general state of American society (evident in Table Three), these men appear to have believed quite sincerely that their participation in local government was necessary and beneficial to the community.

In addition to their participation in local politics, the Franklins and Mechanics seemed to have identified with the established order and frequently asserted their fundamental patriotism. They expressed an overriding faith in American institutions and the ideological basis upon which many American laws were established. The members repeatedly voted affirmatively on the issue of whether or not the Executive should have the power to pardon (Question three) and confirmed their belief in the need for political parties in a Republic (Question eighteen). According to Morse, the citizens of Connecticut who had previously been "controlled by a spirit of inertia" were, by the 1830's, "attempting to realize in a literal sense the democratic ideals proclaimed by the patriots of Revolutionary America."

J. H. Plumb examined comparable associations of working men in Eighteenth Century Britain whose records also reveal an interest in politics and political ideology. Plumb explains that during this particular era of economic and social
change in the provinces of England (1750-1770), the growth of population and
wealth combined with the introduction of increasingly complex methods of trade
and technology led to the demand for education and "a high degree of literacy
both in clerks and artisans".

By 1768 there was a well established Conversation Club
at Liverpool which met weekly and debated general, and
specific political questions. One week, they debated under
what conditions was a man most free? Another week, whether
political liberty could possibly be achieved in England
without the introduction of the ballot box. Plumb argues that members' discussions reflect, significantly, a "hitherto
unsuspected political awareness in the provinces".

The existence of this kind of society in Middletown fifty years later
indicated the political consciousness of the American colonists. It is
most likely that the Franklin and Mechanics Societies were a legacy of
British Institution which had emerged during the previous century and were
still functioning in the 1830's.

Given the members' social background and their political interests, what
specifically were the Societies goals and how did they hope to achieve them? During
late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries, many working-men's Societies
were organized throughout the Mid and North Atlantic region for the primary
purpose of providing insurance, a form of mutual aid, for members who were
unable to support themselves or their families without assistance. In Middletown,
in 1774, the Friendly Society was established to promote "sociability, Good
Humour and innocent Cheerfulness" as well as to assure the financial security
of its members. In a study of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics Associa-
tion(1795) and the Salem Charitable Mechanics Association (1817), Kornblath
found that the Massachusetts Societies were, similarly, "mutual benefit societies".

Unlike the earlier societies of Massachusetts and Middletown, the Franklin
and Mechanics Societies had no concern for mutual benefits. Nor were they primarily a social, fraternal organization, like the Freemasons. According to the Constitution of the Franklin Society:

2. The object of this Society shall be improvement in Debate, Composition, Declamation and learning and Science generally
4. To effect the objects specified in article second, the Society shall hold meetings, as it is found convenient, for Lectures and Dissertation illustrating the Sciences, and useful arts, for disputations and such other exercises as shall be thought expedient.

Both the Franklin and Mechanics Societies expressed a primary purpose of self-education and intellectual improvement. Significantly, Kornbluth discovered that the charitable working men's societies which he studied from the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries "later became centers of educational activity by sponsoring libraries, lecture series and schools for apprentices."

The minutes from both the Mechanic and Franklin Societies, although scantily, confirm this desire for education. The bulk of their records are concerned with the official functions of the Society, the procedures by which meetings should be run, the rules of election and the criteria for the admission of members. Both Societies discussed, in relative length and detail their respective libraries. The Franklin Society was very concerned that it should receive the books of the "late" Franklin Society which had existed thirty years before. In fact, as mentioned during their third meeting in May 1829, part of their motivation in establishing the Society was "for the benefit of journeymen, apprentices and other youths under the age of twenty-one". The Franklins were anxious to insure a source of education for themselves and for succeeding generations.

The Mechanics Society also established a library. Because the minutes are otherwise brief and vague, the fact that they requested and then recorded
specific books for their library is significant. The selection of books which they ordered (including Plutarch's Lives, Jone's patents Library of Useful Knowledge, Do Rollins Ancient History, Franklin's Works, History of England, History of Insects, Encyclopedia America) indicates their desire for self-improvement through a general education.

Lectures were also arranged for the enlightenment of the members. During the meetings, the men discussed the possibility of finding someone qualified to lecture on any one of a variety of subjects ranging from Health and Science to Philosophy and Law. The Mechanics Society set up a search committee to organize a lecture series "for the benefit of the Society". On October 10, 1832, the Secretary announced that "Professor A. W. Smith of Wesliun University will deliver a course of 12 lectures." Members were also permitted to form classes to study the sciences in order to "Improve their minds".

Along with the establishment of a library and the organization of lectures and classes, regular debates provided their most important means of education. While, unfortunately, the details of the specific debates and ensuing discussions were not recorded, a look at the kinds of issues that they debated (and in some cases, their respective resolutions) is instructive. They are listed in Table Three.

Evident from the question is the members' interest in a wide variety of issues. Along with politics and economics, the men discussed literature, metaphysics, history and morality. Morse notes:

About 1830, Connecticut was visited by the mania for self-improvement which was sweeping over the eastern part of the United States. People became obsessed by the idea that anyone could infinitely expand his mental capacity.

The members of these Societies were sincere in their manifest desire for a general education and intellectual improvement.

In an article entitled "History of Middletown" which appeared in the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTIONS FOR DEBATE</th>
<th>RESOLUTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do men enjoy a greater degree of happiness in a state of civilization than Nature?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are lotteries beneficial to Community?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ought the pardonning power to be vested in the Executive?</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is self-interest the ruling principle of man?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Is punishment by death ever justifiable?</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ought Slavery in any case be tolerated?</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Is a miser of more benefit to Society than the spendthrift?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Is there more pleasure in anticipation than in actual enjoyment?</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Does love influence the actions of men more than fear?</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Was Brutus justified in killing Cesar?</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Ought imprisonment for debt be tolerated?</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Ought large manufacturing establishments to be encouraged in the United States?</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Were the American people justifiable in executing Major Andre?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Did the Russians justly declare War against the Turks?</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Was the conduct of the first settlers towards the Aborigines justifiable?</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Ought circumsitacnial evidence be admitted in cases of trial for life and death situations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Ought the present militia system be abolished?</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Are political parties beneficial in a Republic?</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Is it probable that the present government of the United States will remain unalterable in 100 years?</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### QUESTIONS FOR DEBATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20. Are the benefits resulting from the French Revolution equivalent for the bloodshed, misery and other evils caused thereby?</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Ought property to be a requisite for the rights of suffrage?</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Ought the male sex exert a greater moral influence in community than the female?</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Is there anything in the Bible to justify mankind in enslaving the Africans?</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Has Washington been a greater benefactor to the world than Franklin?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Are labour saving machines an advantage to the people of the United States</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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newspaper, The Constitution, on February 18, 1879, Mrs. M. J. Rockwell describes another educational society founded in early Nineteenth Century Middletown:

In 1808, a debating society was formed which was soon succeeded by the Friendly Association organized on a more enlarged and efficient plan and to which the property of Debating Society was transferred. The objects of this association were, "the discussion of questions on various subjects, the recitation of dialogues and selected pieces, original composition and declamation, public lectures, 22 together with a permanent library for the use of its members.

While the records of the aforementioned association are not available, it appears to be quite similar in both form and purpose to the Mechanics and Franklin Societies. Mrs. Rockwell goes on to discuss the Association's effective-

* The majority of these topic questions were taken from the Franklin Society Records. Because the few topics actually recorded by the Mechanics Society are similar, if not identical to those listed by the Franklins, extrapolations based upon the questions and resolutions of Table Three may apply equally to both Societies.
ness:

This (Society) has already existed more than 40 years and is still in vigorous operation. The influence of the institution has been to create a taste for reading and inquiry not only among the members, but in the families in which they belong, to elicit and strengthen talent and elevate society. 23

Through the example of a particular individual, she illustrated how these societies provided the opportunity for a "youth of small means, by diligent application and good conduct (to) rise to honorable distinction and eminent usefulness". Education through these societies was perceived as a springboard for personal achievement.

With their explicit commitment to intellectual improvement, the Franklin and Mechanics had no reason to antagonize or alienate the community-at-large. They were therefore careful to disassociate themselves from all temporal issues. Specifically recorded in both of the Constitutions is their desire to avoid all discussion of either local political issues or religion. According to the Constitution of the Franklin Society:

No questions involving the truths of Christianity, or calculated to elicit remarks tending to injure the feelings of any religious denomination shall be discussed by this Society.

The Mechanics also asserted that there would be no discussion of politics or religion. Both Societies purposefully avoided the community's disapproval which, for example, Joshua Stow and The Infidels had previously evoked. They were conscientiously non-provocative and portrayed themselves as a group of socially responsible men of "a good moral character".

One expression of their concern for morality and social responsibility was evident in their disapproval of alcohol and its inevitable undesirable consequences. Temperance was a major and controversial issue during the years in which these Societies were established. Because many of the members believed that an efficient and thus sober population was necessary for the
community's productive development, they supported the Temperance movement.

In their meeting of August 27, 1829, the Franklin Society recorded:

Resolved, That in the belief that a total abstinence by the temperate from the use of ardent spirits is the most effectual means of arresting the progress of intemperance, a vice, that has desolated out land, brought a reproach on our national character, and threatens to sweep away our free institutions and feeling that the young men of our country are peculiarly called on to act efficiently in this cause. Resolved, that we approve of the efforts of the Friends of Temperance, and we judge ourselves as a society and as individuals to use our influence in favor of total abstinence of the use of distilled spirits. 26

The members voted to print the above resolution in the Middletown Gazette shortly thereafter.

Alexis de Tocqueville observed and commented upon the remarkable tendency of Americans to group together in order to articulate a common belief on a particular issue.

As soon as several Americans have conceived a sentiment or idea that they want to produce before the world, they seek each other out, and when found, they unite. Thenceforth they are no longer isolated individuals, but a power conspicuous from the distance whose actions serve as an example; when it speaks, men listen.

The first time that I heard in America that one hundred men had publicly promised never to drink alcoholic liquor, I thought it more of a joke than a serious matter and for a moment could not see why these very abstemious citizens could not content themselves with drinking water by their own firesides.

In the end, I came to understand that these hundred thousand Americans, frightened by the progress of drunkenness around them wanted to support sobriety by their patronage. They were acting in just the same way as a territorial magnate who dresses very plainly to encourage a contempt of luxury amongst simple citizens. 26

The Franklins and the Mechanics, like the groups of which Tocqueville speaks, used their combined strength to encourage the community to respect specific moral values and to behave accordingly. Connecticut-historian Jervis Morse went as far as to say that, due to the inherent conservatism and the continued dominance of the Church, "learning (as that which occurred in these Societies)
flourished for its moral rather than cultural value."

Membership and participation in these Societies, then, provided the working men of Middletown several rewards. First, the men could learn through lectures, debates, courses as well as informal discussions how to capitalize upon the expanding economy and the changing social structures of the community. Second, because America was still very much in the formative years of its development, the members, through these Societies, could try to understand the ideological bases of democracy and the effectiveness and necessity of new political structures. Third, the members could work together in order to examine, discuss and in some cases proclaim new moral guidelines which they believed were most suitable in a "modernizing" society. Fourth, the Societies provided the men with a general education to accommodate their manifest desire for intellectual improvement. Although most of the Franklins and Mechanics did not attend University (only the elite had this advantage), they nonetheless expressed great intellectual curiosity. The men wanted to learn about the causes and consequences of the changing community in order to understand the inevitable impact upon their personal and professional lives. The emergence of many clubs, associations and even religious groups indicate individual and combined efforts to find new ways of understanding and assimilating to these changes, thus easing the process of their socialization. The Franklin and Mechanics Societies helped to facilitate the achievement of these desired aims.
1. The transformation of "the community" into "the society" is based upon Thomas Bender's "Community and Social Change".

2. Hartford Courant, February 14, 1876, p. 4.


9. Town Vote and Proprietors Records


14. The Friendly Society Records, Preamble


17. The Franklin Society Records, May 1829.


23. ibid.

24. ibid.

25. The Franklin Society Records.


1. Bender, Thomas, "Community and Social Change"


10. Limits of the Second Company, Sixth Regiment, Town Clerks Office, Middletown, Ct.


23. United States Census for Middlesex County, 1820, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Ct.

24. United States Census for Middlesex County, 1830, Welleyan University, Middletown, Ct.