The Emergence of a Class Structure

The white inhabitant of Ohio, obliged to subsist by his own exertions, regards temporal prosperity as the chief aim of his existence; as the country which he occupies presents inexhaustible resources to his industry, and ever-varying lures to his activity, his acquisitive ardor surpasses the ordinary limits of human cupidity: he is tormented upon every path which fortune opens to him; he becomes a sailor, a pioneer, an artisan, or a cultivator, with the same indifference, and supports with equal constancy the fatigues and dangers incidental to these various professions; the resources of his intelligence are astonishing, and his avidity in the pursuit of gain amounts to a species of heroism.

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America

To describe the transformation of a western settlement from village to city requires more than simply itemizing statistics. Just as Cincinnati developed physically, in terms of its population and the dimensions of its environs, so the character and personality, the inward life of the city, changed with its material proliferations.

Rough, untutored, and crude, the young settlement in the earliest stages seemed to compensate for its cultural deficiencies by the openness of its society, its egalitarianism, friendliness, and neighborly spirit. The loose

1. Although conditions in early Cincinnati were not entirely unlike those in more sparsely settled areas in the backwoods, from the outset the city possessed unique advantages denied to rural hinterlands. The characteristics of urban society which immediately appeared in Cincinnati were not found in the “frontier” districts of Ohio until many years later.
class structure had not yet begun to harden into caste. Numerous and promising economic opportunities enabled men to grow rich with the town. But as the successful accumulated their fortunes and the town grew populous, newcomers arriving in the twenties and thirties met different kinds of obstacles from those faced by the original settlers. Most of the comforts of life, to be sure, could now be obtained. A greater variety of merchandise filled the shelves of the local merchants. Theaters and museums offered entertainment for those with the leisure and means to enjoy them. The schools had improved. Yet rents were high and wages not quite so attractive as they had been when editorials in the local press invited the exploited mechanics of the East to seek a haven in this western paradise. Transients from the seaboard and immigrants from abroad now discovered signs of a social hierarchy almost unknown to a previous generation. Slums, paupers, and class distinctions as well as societies, private clubs, literary magazines, parades, and epidemics indicated that the city had come of age.

The character of this new or maturing society, as I shall show, hardly substantiates the conception of an egalitarian West free from the class stratifications of an older society. Such a view fails to distinguish properly between the urban and the rural West, just as it neglects to consider the forces which were affecting American society in general during the first half of the nineteenth century. Invidious class distinctions are not surprising in the urban localities, East or West, where striking disparities in wealth and the diversity of occupations sharpened class lines earlier than in less-populous districts. Furthermore, after consulting the most penetrating among the contemporary observers at this time, can anyone doubt the existence of a tension between the "haves" and "have-nots" which was felt in every section of the country?

The emergence of a defined, if not inflexible, class structure went unnoticed by many myopic European travelers. Having no sympathy for the American experiment and contrasting, rather uneasily, the freedom and opportunities of the lower classes in this country with the limited privileges of their own well-managed proletariat, they wondered how this "multocracy," this hodge-podge of classes, maintained its stability. But the more discerning observers, European and American, saw through this apparent social chaos. They detected the forces which preserved a nice equilibrium between the propertied and the unpropertied; they recognized the "practical intelligence" of the middle classes.2 From among the rich, the well-born, and the talented,

2. G. W. Pierson, Tocqueville and Beaumont in America (New York, 1938), 551.
from among the men who feared the excesses of democracy and wished to
save the people from themselves, they watched a new kind of aristocracy
emerging. These frustrated "aristocrats," so it seemed, defeated at the polls
by the masses they feared, might pay "obsequious attentions to the prepon-
derating power,"3 but they dreaded "the ascendancy of ignorance"4 and
despised the people. What Tocqueville, Harriet Martineau, and James
Fenimore Cooper deduced from their analyses of American society is borne
out in periodicals of the day, in the messages of the school and church. And it
is reflected, too, in the social gradations and class hostility from which no
part of the country at this time was entirely free.

Cincinnati was no exception. The observation made in 1835 by some
easygoing critic, that no class in the city claimed "exclusive pretension to
fashionable superiority," that rank was unknown and birth discounted, and
that an even distribution of wealth prevented the formation of an aristocracy,
is most unreliable.5 During the 1830s the encroachments of the unproper-
tied alarmed the rich and conservative in the Queen City no less than similar
manifestations frightened their compatriots in New York, Philadelphia, and
Boston. And they met the demands of the opposition, so the Jacksonians
charged, with the same cries of insubordination, disunion, and Agrarianism
which were calculated to distract the judgments of the public.6 From the
bench and bar, the pulpit, press, and schoolroom, preservers of order de-
nounced "agrarianism" (a horrific symbol of subversiveness but having no
precise signification)7 and resolutely opposed the leveling doctrines which
would make one man as good as any other.

3. Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, ed. Francis Bowen (Cambridge, 1864), I,
229.
6. Cincinnati Advertiser and Ohio Phoenix, July 20, 1836.
7. "Agrarianism" carried for the average American in the 1820s and 1830s the same con-
notations as "bolshevistic" a century later. More specifically, it referred to the sans culottes who
"have been taught to think, that they have the right and power to cheapen food—to destroy
distinctions—and to distribute property" (CCLG, Feb. 25, 1837). The following is a sample of
the kind of anti-agrarian propaganda that appeared in the conservative press:

This party, who are opposed to the workingmen's party, inasmuch as they wish all the
wealth of the world their own, without working for it, are, there is reason to fear, increas-
ing in our land. As a specimen of their logic, we present the following which we heard
the other morning opposite the U.S. Bank.—"There," says one stout, hearty, ragged
fellow to another, "there's where they keep our money Tom, now I guess we'd better go
and get some of it." "But," said the other, taking out his tobacco-box, (for beggars have
the luxuries tho' not the necessities of life) "But how's that I say, how's that money
These evidences of class differences and mutual distrust had not become apparent until about the time that Cincinnati obtained her cityhood. As early as 1810 Dr. Daniel Drake had described the inhabitants as hardworking people, independent, and moderately well off. "By far the greatest number are mechanics," he reported. "The rest are chiefly merchants, professional men, and teachers. Wealth is distributed more after the manner of the Northern, than the Southern states; and few or none are so independent as to live without engaging in some kind of business." In this year and up to the incorporation of the city in 1819, one finds little evidence of large fortunes, poverty, or glaring class distinctions.

Yet signs of class friction, symptomatic of what Philip Hone was to regard in 1834 as a national spirit of insubordination, a hatred for the "well-to-do and the enlightened," began to appear by the depression years of the 1820s, and in the 1830s the attacks against "agrarians" and "demagogues" bent on stirring up the "ignorant" and the rejoinders of the enemies of "vested rights" filled the Cincinnati press. "Tyrants" and "levellers," warning and threatening each other in the pages of their respective newspapers, testified to the growing tension. Bankrupts solemnly inveighed against social inequalities and affirmed the natural rights of the sufferer to relieve himself: "As well may the Grecian kiss the Turkish scimitar, or the West India slave the bastinade, as an American to love this government which so disregards his rights." Conservatives criticized the spreaders of "class hatred," those "aristocrats of anarchy" who tore down rather than built up, and bred more

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10. "The numbers and respectability of the Mechanics in this City, induce a belief that a useful and interesting Paper, devoted principally to them, and the advancement of their interests, would receive a liberal and generous support" (*Magnet I* [1827]: 3). Such support, as it happens, was not forthcoming, but the sentiments of this passage are interesting. The *Western Tiller* printed a plea for a workers' newspaper in the same year which was much more class-conscious: "In this very city it has become a greater disgrace to be an industrious man than to be a dishonest one. Men who by frauds of various kinds have swindled the farmer, the manufacturer, and the mechanic and the common labourer out of the proceeds of their patient industry are now very respectable and snub the people they robbed" (Feb. 23, 1827).
real "aristocrats" by their ravings than the conspiracy of the bankers. One of the city's literary ornaments openly advocated a responsible aristocracy on the order of the Society of the Cincinnati. He condemned the aristocracy of wealth which changed its membership "on the democratic principle of rotation in office," which dignified "plebeian blood" and degraded the "patri- cian." If a popular sheet complained of the menial status of the female domestic and protested that "honesty and chastity are not strangers to poverty," a more refined journal carried this unwestern-like sentiment:

When we hear a speaker declaiming about popular enlightenment to an illiterate assemblage, we cannot but suspect that he means to cheat the auditory—if this be not his purpose he must be ignorant himself, for who does not know that the mass of every population is incapable of appreciating subjects above their absolute necessities and every day intercourse . . . ?

These scattered excerpts, revealing as they do the dissensions and suspicions usually attributed to a later day, reflect rather dramatically what changes were taking place in this western city. As the population steadily increased and capital accumulated, the gulf widened between the merchant and the mechanic, and men grew more conscious of status and position. The laborer, said James Hall, began to dislike the banker, and the "masses" became "imbued with the opinion that wealth and poverty, commerce and labor, education and the want of education, constitute hostile interests." When Tocqueville visited Cincinnati in the fall of 1831 and spoke to some of the leading citizens, he found them a little uneasy about Ohio "democracy." Bellamy Storer, Salmon P. Chase, and Timothy Walker, all prominent lawyers and politicians, seemed to fear the possible effects of widespread suffrage and criticized the choices of the people. Asked by the astute visitor whether the "excessive development of the 'democratic' principle" did not frighten him, Timothy Walker candidly confessed it did. "I wouldn't say so in public," Walker said, "but between ourselves I admit it. I am frightened by the current that is carrying us on. The United States, it seems to me, are in crisis; we are at this moment trying out a 'democracy' without limits; every-

12. CCLG, Aug. 30, 1834.
14. True Blue and Castigator, Feb. 27, 1832.
thing is going that way. But shall we be able to endure it? As yet no one can say positively.”

Some thoughtful citizens, however, appeared to be more disturbed by the weakening of republican principles than by the threat of their excessive application. They began to note the presence of a caste spirit, seen in the rush toward the professions and the lowered status of the laboring classes. As one writer put it:

Birth and wealth are far too potent in our republic still; worth and talent too impotent. Why are the blacksmith and carpenter unfit companions for the merchant and lawyer? Is it because they are ignorant? We fear not; for though they may be ignorant and vicious, let them acquire wealth, and presto, the mechanic is a gentleman.

The mechanic is not rated as high as the professional man, this writer continued, because he is poorly paid in comparison; the lawyer’s labor may be just as unintellectual as the carpenter’s and more narrowing, but the prestige surrounding the higher-paid occupations is not owing to their intellectual character. Many traders are respectable men whose business requires less knowledge and talent than a hat maker’s.

A Cincinnati lawyer explained this undignified rush to the upper walks of life in the philosophic spirit of Tocqueville. The American love for titles and offices he attributed to an ardent thirst for distinction; the democratic leveling process could not destroy this urge. In place of hereditary titles American ambition had to be satisfied with “military titles, government offices, state dignities, and more than all, in the universal longing for the learned professions.”

These are emphatically the aristocracy. Is a man member of one of these? He is learned,—by his diploma; a gentleman by prescription; and being both learned and gentle, he is, at once, raised above the canaille, and becomes a member of that very respectable body, genteel society.

Critics of Cincinnati’s “soi-disant nobility” noted how the well-to-do condescendingly referred to the working classes as “respectable,” “a large and respectable body of wood sawyers,” a “respectable colored man,” or a grocer’s

17. Pierson, Tocqueville, 561. See also Ophia D. Smith, The Life and Times of Giles Richards, 1820–1860, in Ohio Historical Collections, vol. VI (Columbus, 1936), 32.
boy of "respectable connection," while they applied the adjective "eminent," "gifted," or "learned" to the successful.\textsuperscript{20} A writer in the bawdy and outrageous \textit{True Blue and Castigator}, a scandal sheet for the lower orders, ironically advised his readers to accept their "humble inferiority" and not bother to aspire to the higher ranks. Speaking as a member of the upper circle, he defended a superiority, maintained "in our estimation, at least, by dint of more costly dress, smoother hands, and a certain ineffable grandeur of stride, which our freedom from manual labor enables us to assume."\textsuperscript{21}

After fifty years of growth, Cincinnati society had become heterogeneous and complex, crisscrossed by social lines—lines not always apparent to the casual observer but obvious to any person who took the trouble to look. The rich and influential, comprising for the most part the mercantile businessmen and their legal advisers, lived in respectable residential districts and dominated, as we shall see, the economic, social, and cultural activities in the community. Civic minded and public spirited as many of them were, they moved in exclusive circles, sent their children to private schools, and married them off to their social equals. They occupied the positions of bank and insurance directors, organized forums and lyceums, served on school committees, and supported the Presbyterian or Episcopalian churches. When important visitors stopped off at Cincinnati, these prominent citizens furnished the entertainment. During periods of national or domestic crisis, it was they who called the meetings and offered the usual resolutions. Their wives led and officered the various "female" societies, and their sons and daughters danced at the most lavish balls and cotillions.

Less wealthy than the business element, but in some instances equally influential and respectable, were the professional men—the doctors, clergymen, editors, and teachers.\textsuperscript{22} They belonged, strictly speaking, in the same social bracket as the merchant, although their status might well depend upon the reputation of their patients, parishioners, readers, and pupils. Those who catered to the well-to-do Presbyterian or Episcopalian elements, who taught the children of the "best families," or who reiterated the correct Whiggish sentiments in their columns became automatically more socially acceptable than the professional men deriving their incomes from the lower orders. But the professional classes, as we shall see, were particularly active

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{CMWGLSA} V (1836): 175.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{TBC}, Mar. 12, 1832.
\textsuperscript{22} These are discussed in later chapters.
in all the civic and philanthropic enterprises of the city and therefore belonged to a higher social category than the rank and file.

The bulk of the city’s population, of course, comprised what, for the sake of convenience, might be called the lower-middle class and the lower class, although I realize that these terms can have no precise meaning in such a flexible society. By the first, I mean the clerks, skilled workmen, storekeepers, and minor tradesmen who might border on the substantial class above them or the working men below. In the lower classes I include the transients, the poor immigrants, the semi-skilled, the Irish deckhands and draymen, in short, the heavy workers. And at the bottom, forming a kind of lowest helot class and exploited by all, are the hated, disfranchised blacks.23

In contrast to the varied activities of the influential set, the small tradesmen, artisans, mechanics, and day laborers performed their own important if not so dramatic functions and participated in the city’s community life. Living in the less-fashionable districts and devoting no time to the polite accomplishments, they nevertheless had their own society and enjoyed modest recreations. They swelled the congregations of the Methodists,24 Baptists, Campbellites, and Universalists; they paraded during civic celebrations and elected their popular candidates. Although conscious of their inferior status, they accepted the role of working men with no sense of servility and respected every honest calling. Some gradually merged with the elastic aristocracy; others sojournered in the city for several years, gathered a small competence, and then went on further west to become landed proprietors.

The blacks, submitting to periodic assaults by Cincinnati hoodlums, lived in the worst tenements, as they do today, and performed the most servile tasks. However low the condition of some white workers, they considered themselves superior to the Negro. Those slum districts south of Third Street and running from Broadway eastward for several blocks along East Front were reserved for them and the poorest among the whites. There lived the transient population25 in an area of ill-smelling brickyards and warehouses. As early as 1816 this vicinity was noted for its poverty and wretchedness.


Such, in broad outline, was the organization of Cincinnati society during the years from 1819 to 1838. It now remains to discuss in greater detail the character and position of these various city types. In the following accounts of the businessman, the lawyer, and the so-called lower orders, emphasis will be placed on their position in the social hierarchy, their "reputability," one might say, and their role in city life. A few cursory remarks have already been made about the doctor, the clergyman, the teacher, and the educator, but those professional groups will receive closer attention in the chapters which follow. As Cincinnati was primarily a commercial city, managed and dominated by mercantile capitalists, we may begin appropriately with an analysis of the businessman, the linchpin in the social framework.

"It will require but little reflection to satisfy us," wrote a spokesman for the Cincinnati mercantile and banking interests, "that the resources of this country are controlled chiefly by that class which, in our peculiar phraseology, we term 'the business community'—embracing all those who are engaged in the great occupations of buying, selling, exchanging, importing and exporting merchandise, and including the banker, the broker, and the underwriter."26 To James Hall, who made this statement, and to well-known celebrants of the merchant class like Edward Everett, Charles Sumner, Freeman Hunt, and Horace Bushnell, it was natural and proper that businessmen should occupy the key position in American life. Was not every American, in one sense, a trader? The physician traded his "benevolent care," the lawyer his "ingenuous tongue," the clergyman "his prayers."27 The American's reputability, as Thorstein Veblen once observed, increased in direct proportion to the amount of the community's wealth he had absorbed.28

And because the acquisition of property was not always in itself a very heroic or noble activity—because, too, the Franklinian receipt for getting ahead embodied a list of rather homely and prosaic virtues—orators on baccalaureate day and biographers of the rich usually romanticized the successful businessman. They flattered the beneficence of his calling. They compared his genius to Napoleon's and described his financial coups in the same spirit.

that they would report another Jena or Austerlitz. It is no accident that Emerson's portrait of Napoleon should, by implication, eulogize as well as impugn the American middle-class businessman.

One principle of action, said James Hall, had animated the commercial classes of the West, had enabled them to gain control of western wealth and resources and thereby enrich the country as well as themselves. What was this powerful driving force, more responsible for the growth and aggrandizement of the United States than those "high sounding words," patriotism, public spirit, and liberal institutions?

Whether it be called avarice or the love of money, or the desire of gain, or the lust of wealth, or whether it be softened to the ear under the more guarded terms, prudence, natural affection, diligence in business, or the conscientious improvement of time and talents—it is still money-making which constitutes the great business of our people—it is the use of money which controls and regulates every thing.

Hall's candid and realistic explanation of the dynamic or driving forces in American economic life (Theodore Parker said the same thing with different intentions) was too materialistic to stand without any qualifications.

If the rigid code of success maxims meticulously set down and popularized by teachers, politicians, ministers, lawyers, and merchants emphasized undeviating attention to business, it also emphasized the obligations of the successful man to society. Honor followed wealth, but so did responsibility. The pursuit of riches, condoned and encouraged by public opinion, was conventionally regarded as an aid to future benevolence rather than end in itself. The carry-over of the old Puritan notion of "stewardship," the sacred duties of God's favored few to society as a whole, found expression in the thousand and one statements about the moral responsibilities of the merchant.

Thus a truly successful merchant became a kind of sanctified Maecenas, the patron of the arts, the sponsor of educational enterprises, the encourager of literature and science. He engaged actively in all the progress for civic

29. Hundreds of discussions of the success code can be found at this time. Most of them elaborate on the perennial themes and emphasize business zeal, caution, and self-reliance (CCLG, Feb. 23, 1833); for a classic treatment of the theme, see J. D. Cobb, An Address...the Epanthean Society of Miami University...1837 (Oxford, Ohio, 1838).

30. The West, 25.
improvement. Because of his familiarity with finance, because he had developed shrewdness and tact in the handling of his own affairs, nature had equipped him admirably to supervise public undertakings of all kinds. Activities of this sort, according to James Hall, also blunted "the vulgar prejudice, which supposes that men who possess or control wealth enjoy exclusive privileges."31 By contributing generously to the public good, the merchant demonstrated his willingness to pay for his superior position. The "organ of acquisitiveness," then, if properly controlled, developed manufacture, trade, and commerce and fostered a lasting culture.32 Materiality was thereby translated into spirit.

Few among Cincinnati's new elite, the landowners and gentlemen traders, approximated the heavenly archetype, but taken as a whole, they equaled any comparable group in the country in resourcefulness, enterprise, and public spirit. Self-made men for the most part, they possessed the greatest confidence in their own abilities and in the future of their land speculations. Although, like their fellows in other western communities, they enjoyed a reputation for rashness and imprudence and were noted for their "readiness to embark on large and hazardous operations,"33 the most astute among them tempered speculative tendencies with prudence and chose the slower but safer road to wealth. In a growing city like Cincinnati, at least in the early decades, it was not difficult to achieve a modest success.

Innumerable examples of success in the Cincinnati business world might be recorded, but the stories of men who rose from humble beginnings to wealth and eminence are sufficiently similar to permit some generalization. Let us imagine some young Fortunatus who leaves his birthplace (it may be Poughkeepsie, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Northampton, Liverpool, Quincy, County Derry, Alsace, or Trenton) and arrives with his family in Cincinnati in 1813. Here his father, who has already forgotten his disastrous business reverses in the East, opens a lumber concern. His older brother enters the grocery business, and the young aspirant, with Franklin's maxims fresh in his mind, takes a position as clerk in a large wholesale produce firm. In a few years, he invests his savings, supplemented by loans from his older brother, in a consignment of pork, and with the profits derived from this venture, he

31. Ibid., 22.
32. Under a sordid aristocracy of wealth, it was argued, "mutual dependence and mutual protection—equality of rights and human happiness are gone" (CMWGLSA V [1836]: 260).
purchases a lot in the suburbs. The panic almost ruins him in 1819, but he still manages to buy some choice lots which his bankrupt fellow citizens have been forced to sell at prices far below their real value. From small speculations of this kind, he opens a grocery store of his own, establishes a brokerage firm, or goes into the pork business. He also owns part interest in three steamboats, a flour mill, and an iron foundry and collects rent from a store on Front Street. In 1826 he marries the daughter of a well-to-do manufacturer of sugar machinery who had come with his family from Scotland in 1820. Nominally a Presbyterian before his marriage, he now, at the instigation of his pious wife, attends the Reverend Mr. Wilson's church regularly.

During the next period our businessman acquires more property and begins to assume a prominent place in the economic and social life of Cincinnati. He becomes a director of the Franklin Bank and the Cincinnati Insurance Company. With his brother already a director of the Commercial Bank of Cincinnati and the president of the Cincinnati, Lebanon, and Springfield Turnpike Company, his financial position is firmly fixed, and he moves in the charmed circle of the Findlays, the Grahams, the Greenes, the Lawrences, and the Burnets. His growing wealth now enables him to devote more time to his social duties. In 1836 he is elected school visitor on the

34. The yearly expenses for our hypothetical merchant might correspond roughly to the budget of a Cincinnati merchant, Charles Neave, who in 1829 recorded the following expenditures for his family of seven:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House Rent</td>
<td>$ 275.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages for domestics</td>
<td>$ 84.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Window blinds &amp; pins</td>
<td>$ 20.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cushion for church</td>
<td>$ 5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaving</td>
<td>$ 6.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bootblackening</td>
<td>$ 8.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School expenses</td>
<td>$ 8.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Wright's bill</td>
<td>$ 48.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. expenses (clothing, household articles)</td>
<td>$ 330.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yearly subscription to Langdon's Reading Room</td>
<td>$ 4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>$ 205.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood and Coal</td>
<td>$ 67.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Cream and soda water</td>
<td>$ 5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting door &amp; hearth</td>
<td>$ 4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fines and taxes</td>
<td>$ 250.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>$ 2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenses to Louisville</td>
<td>$ 32.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicines</td>
<td>$ 17.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking glass</td>
<td>$ 21.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groceries (tea, coffee, candles, wine, flour)</td>
<td>$ 199.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amusements of all kinds, (balls, theaters, circus, museum)</td>
<td>$ 21.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1830, more expenditures for furniture and traveling brought the total to $1,468.37. In 1831, increased household expenses and expenditures for amusements, charity, and doctor bills brought the total to $1,651.06. In 1832, Neave spent only $1,648.75, although his house rent increased from $275.00 to $350.00 and his pew rent jumped to $26.00. Neave MSS, Library of Ohio Historical and Philosophical Society, Cincinnati.
Whig ticket and in that same year serves on a committee to welcome Daniel Webster, who is speaking at a public banquet. He is elected secretary of the Ohio Mechanic's Society, corresponding secretary of the Western Academy of Natural Sciences, and vice-president of the Western Emigrant Society. His scientific tastes explain his admiration for Dr. Daniel Drake, who cures his son of cholera and invites him and his wife to attend one of the social evenings at Drake's house. Our hero's daughter, now a fashionable young lady fresh from Dr. John Locke's select female academy and the toast of the Bachelor's Ball, becomes engaged to a rising young lawyer from Boston impressed by her "western" vivacity and her father's substantial reputation. Since his nephew has already married a Whiteman or an Irwin or a Longworth, his family is fused with the "ruling caste," dictators of fashion who set the tone of society and pull the strings of city government. His wife is still active in church affairs, but she has switched from Joshua Wilson's church to the swank Second Presbyterian Church of Lyman Beecher. His daughter is an Episcopalian.

A story of this kind might at first seem farfetched and exaggerated, but although most poor boys never attained the eminence of this hypothetical citizen, a good many roughly approximated it, and some rose even more rapidly. Of course, family background, wealth, and education were important considerations in receiving an individual into the Cincinnati hierarchy, particularly after the twenties, but every successful man possessed the passkey which would ultimately open the doors of society. Cincinnati placed no insuperable class barriers in the way of the aspiring, nor did her leaders shut themselves off from the mass of the citizens. Her aristocracy, if it could be dignified by such a name, included the practical, the able, and the shrewd—men who lent their names, their money, and their labors to the ever-multiplying city organizations and institutions, whether of a charitable, cultural, or social nature. The qualities and philosophy of this mercantile elite, as we shall see, helped to explain Cincinnati's greatness and her limitations.

Rivaling the merchants in prestige if not always in wealth, and playing an equally important part in community life, the lawyers of Cincinnati deserve special consideration in a study of this kind. No clear-cut distinction between lawyers and businessmen in Cincinnati can be made,35 it is true, since

most attorneys, in addition to their law practices, engaged in land speculations and invested in commercial and industrial ventures. Yet the unique influence of this profession can be attributed to something other than their financial success.

Lawyers had exercised enormous influence in America ever since the decades immediately preceding the Revolutionary War and had "trained more American heroes and leaders," one historian has noted, "than any other profession."³⁶ During the first half of the nineteenth century, law became the stepping-stone to political preferment. The lawyer performed the highly important service of at once articulating the aspirations of the common man and stabilizing society. As the orator he glorified all public occasions; as the conservative he guarded property from popular encroachment and sanctified the shibboleths of the respectable.

But although lawyers, as a class, were on the side of the propertied, they carried on positive and needed functions for the young republic. Who else could have untangled the labyrinth of litigation which inevitably accompanied our expanding economy? And where was legal advice more necessary than in Cincinnati, a community of merchant and land speculators, where steamboat collision cases and innumerable controversies over real estate filled the docket in the Court of Common Pleas? It is hardly surprising, after all, that lawyers achieved social prominence in Cincinnati from the very beginning and that, by 1819, the twenty-six lawyers listed in the city directory were placed in the "first class of society."³⁷ A decade later, the Cincinnati bar, now over twice the 1819 number, won further commendation for the intelligence and probity of its membership.³⁸ And it continued still to draw more practitioners.

The mounting numbers of lawyers had already troubled a Cincinnati writer in 1826. Lamenting the overcrowding of this "honorable" profession, he described the prospects and hazards in store for western attorneys. Taken as a profession, he said, they were "about as needy as their worst enemies could wish them."³⁹ Moreover, even during bad times, they had to keep up appearances and not degrade themselves by any manual labor. The lawyer lived or starved by the law or else he gave it up altogether. Moses Brooks,

³⁸. Caleb Atwater, The Writings of Caleb Atwater (Columbus, 1833), 175.
³⁹. LHCG, July 14, 1826.
editor of the *Saturday Evening Chronicle of General Literature, Morals, and Arts* and a lawyer himself, could only attribute the phenomenon of forty lawyers subsisting on a slender docket in 1827 to the extreme cheapness of provisions in Cincinnati; at that time there was one lawyer for every five hundred potential clients (including women and children). Yet in the face of all these discouragements, the number of lawyers increased. As one writer in the Cincinnati press maintained: “The law is a profession at once so noble, and in this country so important, that its ranks will always be crowded with aspirants after fame and political distinctions.”

However great the surplus of lawyers in Cincinnati, a relatively small group of legal lions monopolized the bulk of the law business. A snobbish and talented Harvard graduate from Massachusetts could discover only a few brilliant exponents of “the diverse beauties of the Law” during his stay in Cincinnati in 1831 and 1832; the majority of lawyers in the city he contemptuously set down as “mechanical preachers” who writhed like Laocoon in “the agonies of a plea” and intimidated the jury into reason. “In these throes,” the easterner commented acidly, “you will pardon the speaker, if Grammar and correct pronunciation be forgotten. They are beneath the notice of an orator when thus in the very whirlwind of his eloquence.” Those were the pettifoggers who crowded the western courthouses, the men who made a precarious living on three or four suits a year. But if pickings in the court dockets were slim, other economic opportunities enabled the lawyer who had not yet “arrived” to sustain himself during the legal slumps.

Most of them, lured by Cincinnati’s commercial reputation or already established as “pioneer” settlers, invested their earnings successfully or unsuccessfully, made lucrative marriages in some instances, and actively engaged in civic life. One has only to recall Jacob Burnet, the unreconstructed Federalist, who made a fortune, lost it, and made it again; who participated in politics, manufacturing, and commerce and speculated successfully in real estate. Another, David K. Este, came to Cincinnati in 1813 after graduating from Princeton. Six years later he married the daughter of William Henry Harrison and, after her death, the daughter of an influential judge. Judicious

42. Jewett to Willard, Cincinnati, May 8, 1832, Jewett Letters (Rosenbach Company; Philadelphia); James M. Miller, *The Genesis of Western Culture: The Upper Ohio Valley, 1800–1825*, in *Ohio Historical Collections*, vol. IX (Columbus, 1938), 59–61.
experiments in real estate made him a wealthy man. In 1838 this cold, conservative, and pious lawyer became a judge on the Ohio Supreme Court. Still another Jersey native, Nicholas Longworth, otherwise known as the "Croesus of the West," began his career as a lawyer but soon gave it up for the more congenial occupation of managing and increasing his large properties. Not so active in civic affairs as Bellamy Storer, Charles Fox, James Gazlay, and other well-known lawyers, Longworth nevertheless varied his duties as bank director, city trustee, and turnpike director with lighter diversions. He served as manager of the Musical Fund Society and acquired a not altogether deserved reputation as a patron of the fine arts.

But the very personification of the successful lawyer was Timothy Walker, who came to Cincinnati in 1831 with the blessings of George Bancroft and the commendations of Harvard's President Quincy, "married $50,000 and, a very interesting damsel," and straightway rose to fame and fortune. Aptly described as "one of those universal men who live and grow mighty in any soil," Walker helped to give the "Queen of the West" a reputation for being a Yankee city. His exceptional scholarship while an undergraduate at Harvard had prompted the authorities to offer him a tutorial position in mathematics, but Walker preferred to teach at Bancroft's Round Hill school in Northampton after his graduation. Throughout his life he seemed drawn to the world of letters, yet after he had made his decision in 1826 to read law in a Boston office instead of accepting George Ticknor's invitation to become a reader for Prescott, the historian, he never wavered from his first resolution. Friendship with writers and scholars—luminaries like Jared Sparks and Joseph Story—helped to compensate for his sacrifices. Edward Everett had written to Walker, now in Cincinnati: "Stick to the law or abandon it. It cannot be cultivated (along) with anything but politics & hardly that." Walker followed his advice. He became one of the city's leading lawyers, helped to organize a law school, and wrote an impressive textbook which won him a national reputation.

The career of Walker in Cincinnati is interesting, because it shows how ambitious young easterners, smug and arrogant as they frequently were, could coolly select the most promising western locality and set out to make a fortune. There was something dramatic about Walker's decision to migrate

44. Jewett to Willard (?), Cincinnati, May 8, 1832, Jewett Letters.
45. Everett to Walker, Medford, Nov. 13, 1830, Walker MSS (Ohio Historical and Philosophical Society, Cincinnati).
to Cincinnati, although in no sense could it be described as a pioneer venture. "You have an opportunity of rising with the rising glories of the home of your adoption," wrote a friend of Walker's in 1831. "At times I cannot but envy you & others, who have gone from amidst their friends & relatives, to gain a name and character among strangers, with no other reliance than what their heads & hands afford them." Walker and men like him certainly should be included in any account of the Westward Movement, even if they placed more reliance on their heads than on their hands.

Walker modified his first impressions of Cincinnati, radiating exuberant optimism in the years to come, but the young law student's letter to Bancroft in August of 1830 reflects the confidence of the times, a confidence shared by Walker's vigorous and enterprising associates:

Business, stirring active unremitting business, is the habit of this place. Refinement begins to make its appearance, but it must gain ground slowly. The wealth of the population was made here. It is not great compared with the Atlantic cities, but the wonder is that a congregation of needy emigrants from all points of the compass should so soon have laid even the foundations of wealth. My expectations are fully realized with what Cincinnati is; and my imagination hardly sets any bounds to see what it is destined to become. In 20 years more it will be in the center of the U.S. and I see no reason why it may not be the seat of government. Its situation and resources cannot be exceeded. The globe does not contain a richer patch than that between the two Miamis. My profession is crowded here as it is everywhere else. When there are fishes there will be fishermen. But the members are mostly young, and there are none very terrific about their abilities."

In a very short time he could declare himself as "indescribably happy" in his new home, enjoying all the business he wanted, and "quite a man of affairs." Other lawyers did not find the law so congenial or remunerative and, dissatisfied with their prospects, turned to other tasks. Ex-lawyers, men like Charles Hammond, Benjamin Powers, E. D. Mansfield, Benjamin Drake,

46. Robbins to Walker, Boston, July 9, 1831, Walker MSS.
47. Walker to Bancroft, Cincinnati, Aug. 28, 1830, Bancroft MSS (Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston).
49. Walker to Bancroft, Cincinnati, Jan. 15, 1832, Bancroft MSS.
James H. Perkins, James F. Conover, and Moses Brooks, edited the city's most influential and respected newspapers and became powers in the community. Tied to the mercantile element by choice and predilection, they characteristically reflected the opinions of the merchants and, as we shall see, defended their interests.

Lawyers, too, were influential in city government and frequently gave up their practices temporarily to run for state and national offices. Most of the influential lawyers in the city, sharing the political views of their clientele, voted the Whig ticket, although politically ambitious "demagogues" like Robert T. Lytle and James Gazlay might cater to the "wool hat" boys. The latter furnishes a good example of the popular lawyer-politician.

Coming to Cincinnati from New York in 1813, Gazlay immediately incurred the anger of the merchants by getting debtors out of jail, defending draymen, and running on popular tickets. His career as a Jackson man, his attacks against the wealthy Findlay-Torrence faction in 1824, and his stand as the defender of the plebeians against the aristocrats won him a seat in Congress and provoked the following lampoon from Thomas Pierce, Cincinnati's poet satirist:

On every theme, what'er betide,
Damaleon takes the rabble's side,
And vaults upon the mob to ride
   To some high post of profit.
The mob, at best a skittish hack,
Long used to start, and fly the track
Finding a jockey on his back
   Kicks, rears, and throws him off it.\textsuperscript{50}

Gazlay edited the liberal \textit{Western Tiller} from 1826 to 1827 and wrote in later years some long-winded poetic philosophizings and heavy-handed satires.\textsuperscript{51} Nevertheless, he was, in many respects, an acute thinker and a vigorous journalist, and unconventional enough to criticize the mumbo-jumbo of the law. In opposition to his colleagues, who regarded "the truths and excellencies of religion and law" as "equally indisputable,"\textsuperscript{52} Gazlay attacked the wording of laws as degenerate and confused and advocated simpler phraseology.\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{50} Thomas Pierce, \textit{The Odes of Horace in Cincinnati; As Published in the "Western Spy and Literary Cadet,"} during the year 1821 (Cincinnati, 1822), 37.
    \item \textsuperscript{51} See \textit{ Races of Mankind, with Travels in Grubland by Cephas Broadluck} (Cincinnati, 18\textsuperscript{-}).
    \item \textsuperscript{52} \textit{LHCG}, Sept. 21, 1819.
    \item \textsuperscript{53} \textit{Western Tiller}, Sept. 22, 1826.
\end{itemize}
Whatever their politics or prejudices, whether radical like Gazlay or conservative like Walker, these versatile, ambitious, and canny men gave character and standing to the community. No other group participated so energetically in Cincinnati life or carried such influence in the directing and molding of public opinion. It would not be too rash a generalization to say that the lawyers, or those with legal training, comprised the most gifted element in Cincinnati.

In a dynamic and heterogeneous society whose social distinctions depend almost entirely upon considerations of wealth, it is impossible, as I have said, to chart all the fine gradations of rank and reputability. That businessmen and lawyers, at least the successful ones, occupied the top rungs of the ladder is probably a safe assumption. Teachers, physicians, and clergymen, too, if accepted and patronized by the influential in Cincinnati, might claim a similar social status. But below this privileged nucleus remained the bulk of the city’s population, a majority ranging in descending order from the moderately well-to-do to the lowest paid and socially inferior.

Class lines, as I have previously indicated, were still fluid. No insuperable barriers prevented the mechanic or clerk from merging into the city elite after he had acquired enough property, but not many managed to do so. The laboring classes themselves, usually referred to in the city press as the “bone and sinew” of the Republic and the “artificers of our greatness and prosperity,” did not as a rule enjoy the prestige of the business and professional groups. Nor would it have occurred to the men who had come up the hard way—these bankers, steamboat builders, wholesale merchants, and meatpackers—to start their own sons at “the bottom.” Nevertheless, any enterprising man, they believed, could equal their performance. Family background, earlier opportunities, and schooling might serve as temporary advantages, but the poor boy with ambition and character could not be permanently submerged; the idle scion of a wealthy family, on the other hand, would ultimately give way to his poorer but more energetic rival.

Since large numbers of the population in Cincinnati who had not yet “arrived” apparently shared this view, one cannot use the vague and collective term “laboring classes” to refer to a class-conscious proletariat. But it can be said that a small number of citizens among the artisans, mechanics, clerks, and day laborers keenly felt their low status and resented it. Outwardly, few signs of social distinction impressed the foreign observer in America. Each citizen remained equal before the law, no class demanded special respect
from another, and men of all classes and degrees mingled indiscriminately in business. At the same time, private social coteries rigidly excluded inferiors, and "numerous artificial and arbitrary distinctions" were springing up, "by means of which," Toqueville observed, "every man hopes to keep himself aloof, lest he be carried away against his will in the crowd." What he called "private associations" formed "within the pale of political society" belied the egalitarian appearance.

But in no sense were these Cincinnati coteries formidable groups organized for the systematic exclusion of the underlings. Most of the hardworking citizens, moreover, spent little time brooding about their social positions. If some mechanics seemed to be ashamed of their low place in society, as Timothy Flint believed, and failed to realize "the intrinsic utility of their calling," most of them hoped and expected to improve their conditions; at least they never adopted a servile attitude. Timothy Walker, who had no great love for Jacksonian democracy, saw in the equality of rank and opportunities the safeguards for property. "I know of no people," he said of Ohioans in 1837, "who manifest so little deference for mere wealth, family, or station; and, at the same time, show so much respect for meritorious labor, in whatever sphere. Yet, in this strong feeling of equality, there is little or nothing of the leaven of agrarianism. Almost every one has acquired something already, and is striving for more; and such are pre-disposed to be satisfied with things as they are." Demagogues and their "pitiful dupes," he believed, might try to disturb this equilibrium, but as long as "the HAVE—if I may so express it—so far out-number the HAVE-NOTS," agrarianism would never thrive. The threat of the "Autocracy" of the rich he regarded as humbug dished out by the politicians.

Walker's rosy picture of this egalitarian democratic community passed over class disharmonies which hardly jibed with his description, but his conclusions probably reflected the general view. If perfectly equal opportunities did not always obtain, speakers and writers reminded the mechanics that Franklin, Watt, and Fulton had risen from lowly origins and showed them men in their own city who had won wealth and prominence by following the precepts of the success code. Most of the citizens did have a stake in the society, however small, and faith in the Franklinian maxims.

Designed to raise the enterprising lowly to wealth and respectability, the success gospel hammered home the importance of Poor Richard's familiar virtues: perseverance, industry, frugality, and character. From the baccalaureate addresses and public orations emerged the ideal of manhood, the businessman personified, whose virtues were those most highly prized by a commercial society. One's place in society depended on the degree to which one could approximate this ideal, and the sages carefully advised the aspirants to higher ranks how they might obtain their objectives. If a young man did not indulge his appetites or succumb to indolence, if no diversions distracted him from his occupation, whether they be social amusements or useless controversies, he would succeed. Above all, the wise neophyte kept away from "impractical" and "illusory" projects and pursued his calling with zeal and caution, steering a nice balance between rashness and indecision, guarding his credit and his reputation, and obligating himself to no man.

Not everyone, as I have previously indicated, accepted these optimistic affirmations unchallenged. Some Cincinnati malcontents and cynics flatly denied them; others, who did not doubt their own capacities to get ahead, nevertheless resented the supercilious and snobbish behavior of the men who had already become rich. Few of these workingmen dissenters had the opportunity or ability to express their suspicions in print, but they found their spokesmen among certain professional groups in sympathy with their cause and among the educated in their own ranks.

What did these class-conscious men observe? How did they happen to arrive at their position when the majority of their countrymen unthinkingly accepted the "public truths"? Personal experiences must have convinced a good many that the dice were loaded against them, but it did not require any remarkable acumen to notice that Cincinnati in the 1820s and 1830s was no poor man's paradise.

The city had increased in size and prosperity, it is true, but the rough and bounteous living, the simplicities and equalities of a primitive river town, as we have seen, had given way to more restricted conditions of a settled community. Latecomers in the twenties and thirties discovered no windfalls. Most of the land had been bought up, the professions were crowded, and earning a living had become a hazardous undertaking. Artisans and mechanics who had managed to escape the surfeited eastern labor markets found that western depressions could be as disastrous as those back home.

And where was the vaunted western equality and friendliness? Some of the complainers, particularly the militant trade unionists in Cincinnati,
seemed especially sensitive to the snobbishness and coldness of the rich. Why exult about our impartial government, they asked, "if distinctions obtain in society, almost as broad as between the Russian lord and his serf"? Cincinnati's false social standards also filled the abolitionist editor James G. Birney with disgust:

Men of the most groveling minds and unworthy moral characters may take their stations as "patricians," after fully succeeding in some speculation in town-lots, or government land—or pork, or flour, or tobacco, or cotton, or sugar. It makes little difference, whether the speculation be made in their own means—whether any thing of their own be hazarded in the enterprize, preliminary to the initiation. Perhaps the greater peril in which another has been placed, the more undoubted the title of the successful aspirant to an elevated seat in the aristocratic synagogue.57

Cincinnati working men and women rarely begrudged the financial successes of their superiors, but they smarted at any sign of condescension.

It had become clear to some discerning critics, moreover, that low wages and high living costs made it increasingly difficult for the "sturdy mechanic" to get a foothold on the success ladder. Around 1815, cheap land and a labor shortage had forced the western employer to offer well-nigh double the wages paid in the East.58 By 1827, however, when the population had become more dense and free land correspondingly scarcer, working conditions differed but little in the two sections. Perhaps cheaper rents and a relatively low cost of living in Cincinnati still gave the mechanics an advantage over the eastern workers, in spite of a comparable wage scale,59 but the western worker nevertheless faced serious disadvantages rarely referred to in the optimistic reports of the city boosters, yet which help to explain the protests of the discontented.

As early as 1819 an English observer noted with surprise that clothing in Cincinnati cost about three times as much as in England and that the employer frequently paid the worker's daily wage of $1.12 in depreciated cur-

57. Philanthropist, July 22, 1836.
58. Isaac Lippincott, A History of Manufactures in the Ohio Valley to the Year 1860 (New York, 1912), 73. In 1814, a New Englander wrote home to his friends: "This town is like a seaport. It is a fine place for mechanics; carpenters and masons can take jobs and make from five to ten dollars per day; bricklaying is $3.50 a thousand; carpenter's work goes by measurement at a high rate. Mechanics here can make their fortunes in five years" (C. E. Cabot, "The Carters in Early Ohio: A Glimpse of Cincinnati in Its First Quarter Century," New England Magazine XX [1899]: 350).
59. WT, June 29, 1827.
nergy or in trade. To be sure, this was a depression period when the methods of payments he described were common throughout the country, but low wages and long hours did not disappear with the depression. A cordwainer employed in the Ohio River cities in 1825 worked fifteen hours a day; after deducting his room and board, about $3.50 remained as a weekly average. If he and his friends pressed their “Boss” for a raise, they faced the threat of “scabs.” Carpenters and joiners in the same year protested successfully against the “sunrise to sunset day,” but most employers did not accede so easily to the demands of labor organizations. Frequently, as in the case of the Typographical Society of the Journeymen Printers, they met requests for an increase in the wage scale by importing strike-breakers from outside cities.

Women in Cincinnati worked under less favorable conditions than did the men during the twenties and thirties. Throughout the country, it is true, a similar situation prevailed, but employers in a comparatively new community might have been expected to pay their female help better wages than the prevailing eastern rate of $1.25 a week for a sixteen-hour day. Matthew Carey’s disclosures about the poverty and privation among the seamstresses in the East applied equally well to their western sisters. As early as 1831, prompted by the reports of Carey, one of the city papers had called upon the local benevolent societies to investigate working conditions for seamstresses. The matter was dropped until 1833 when the Working Man’s Shield discussed the question of women’s compensation and urged higher wages on the grounds of justice and policy. Higher wages would ensure the support and education of children who, if neglected by their impoverished mothers, might otherwise become a burden on the community. A seamstress rarely made more than forty cents a day, the Shield reported, and out of this sum, she had to pay for all the necessities of life. Since no family could subsist on this amount, she inevitably became a charity case, her children went uneducated, and the community suffered.

Influential citizens, conscious of their responsibilities, met the problem by

62. LHCG, Aug. 1, 1825.
63. Parthenon, Feb. 15, 1828, 159.
64. NWR XXXVIII (1830): 141.
65. CCLG, May 21, 1831.
establishing a "Female Workhouse" organized and managed by the wives of prominent Cincinnati men. "Mrs. Dr. Beecher," as she was called in the press, "Mrs. Dr. Mansfield," and the Mesdames Foote, Findlay, Howell, Neff, Guilford, Ayeleott, Bakewell, Garrard, Goodman, and other women of that class directed the activities of some of the deserving poor and conducted a registry for servants in the same building. Only unemployed women who could not support themselves as servants were aided; it was expected that this provision, which excluded from Workhouse benefits those women eligible for jobs as servants, would mitigate the acute shortage of domestics in Cincinnati. No unemployed woman received work unless she had first obtained a written certificate from one of the directors testifying to her honesty and competency. The trustees hired a superintendent to assign the work and examine the finished products. Expanding its activities, the Workhouse became later a kind of employment agency. Its trustees went out searching for "charitable objects." They sought out respectable homes for the children of poor widows; they distributed assignments and received completed work. In general, their organization tried to relieve the poverty and distress among those of the lower classes who had not benefited by the city's prosperity.  

Even as early as 1819, when Cincinnati became incorporated, paupers hunted for cast-off clothing, and the city had its share of the suffering unemployed. James Flint, always an honest observer, admitted that he had first considered Cincinnati beggars improvident and dissipated, because he never dreamed extreme poverty existed in the West. But he later apologized for such "a hasty and ungenerous opinion."  

By 1820 it was becoming clear to some citizens in Cincinnati that the lower classes might suffer misfortunes through no fault of their own. Thus, one "Friend of the poor," in advocating a "Soup-House" for the destitute, made the following observations:

It is a fact well known that the times are extremely distressing, even among individuals generally who have heretofore been considered in easy circum-

67. CCLG, Feb. 21, 1835. The children of the poor were frequently licensed out as apprentices. Male apprentices in Cincinnati usually worked from 5 A.M. to 7 P.M., and in some instances from 4 A.M. to 9 P.M. It is no wonder that the Cincinnati papers were always filled with advertisements for runaway apprentices. The following entry (from Neave MSS) in the account book of a Cincinnati iron merchant reveals the method by which a mother would lease her daughter and the terms of the transaction:

I have this day taken Jane for the term of Five years, and for her services I am to clothe her, and give her one quarter of schooling, and pay her mother, Kitty Foster, Ten dollars. Five of which I have this day paid her, leaving a ball. [balance] of $5.00.

68. Flint, Letters, 228.
stances; and from daily observation it must be admitted, that many, very many, of small means, in various parts of our city, are at this inclement season actually suffering from the common comforts of life, particularly the articles of food and fuel. Numbers who seem willing to labor for their daily bread cannot always obtain employment, and in numerous instances, after laboring for days and weeks, are gravely told they must wait for their pay until a more convenient time. Those, therefore, who are wholly destitute of money and unable to get credit, must unavoidably suffer beyond description.\(^6^9\)

In 1822, 1829, and again in 1831, to take sample years, one finds the same conditions described. It would be a mistake to exaggerate the extent and intensity of poverty in the city, yet during Cincinnati’s growth from 1819 to 1838 large numbers of people, particularly recent European immigrants and transients, created serious problems for charitable organizations. Cincinnati had become aware of a “rich” and a “poor.”

It must be again emphasized, therefore, that the description of a friendly, egalitarian, and prosperous society presented by the city boosters must be somewhat qualified by the above considerations. The city poor tended to distrust upper-class disinterestedness and upper-class benevolence. That is why, as we shall see, they formed their own mutual benefit societies instead of relying upon the generosity of the richer citizens (see chapter 4), and that is why trade unions gained at least a temporary footing in Cincinnati. Indeed, the very existence of a “Trades’ Union Society” in the thirties would seem to indicate that Cincinnati workingmen no longer regarded their own interests as identical with the interests of their employers.\(^7^0\) At least, that is the sense of the long and eloquent preamble to the constitution of their Society:

Our republican institutions, based upon man’s equal rights, have been the boast and admiration of every American. And we have cause to feel proud

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\(^6^9\) LHCG, Jan. 7, 1820.

\(^7^0\) The trade union movement which developed in Cincinnati at this time was part of a remarkable but short-lived labor awakening (1827–37) which began in Philadelphia and quickly spread to the large cities of the seaboard and interior (John R. Commons and Associates, *History of Labour in the United States* [New York, 1918], I, 424–37). Commons believed that this was an indigenous movement and that its leaders were American-born (see “Labor Organization and Labor Politics,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* XXI [1907]: 325), but I am unable to determine the origin of the Cincinnati labor leaders who participated in the national movement. One of them, David Snellbaker, attended the National Trades’ Union Convention at Philadelphia in 1836 and proposed that the assembly investigate the system of speculation which permitted the drones to profit at the expense of the workingman (Commons and Associates, *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society* [Cleveland, 1910], VI, 270). Another labor leader, W. P. Stratton, was elected vice-president of the National Typographical Union at its convention in 1837 (ibid., 353). The entire problem of the origins of labor leaders during this period at 1 the inter-city connection of trade unions requires further investigation.
of them, when we contrast the liberty extended to the citizen of our republic, with the servile degradation of the subject under a monarchical government. But of what advantage is it for us to exult, that our admirable system of government knows no difference between individuals, if distinctions obtain in society, almost as broad as between the Russian lord and his serf? And who that has observed the general sinking of the political and social condition of the workingman, in the progress of our country from poverty and simplicity to wealth and grandeur, has not been startled at the rapidity with which we are approximating to such a state? "Wealth is power"—and where is the truth of this adage oftener exhibited, than between the rich employer and the poor workingman—the freeman by our laws, becomes a bondsman by his necessities. But "in union there is a strength"—and this is the working-man's lever, opposed to that which has not been inaptly compared to the imagined lever of Archimedes. The wealthy manufacturing monopolist of the north anathematizes combinations among workmen, and says "Let individuals regulate their own wages," but repels the cry of the southron, "Let trade regulate itself." The exclamation from both, blazons forth a spirit of equity which neither possess. On the individual system, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the employer will have the power of dictating, and the working-man be left the only alternatives of submission or starvation, as has been fully exemplified by the oppression in some of the large manufactories of this country, and the murderous course that has been pursued towards the working classes in other countries.71

It is interesting to contrast the tone of this preamble with the pronouncements of the early trade societies. In 1819, for instance, the Master Carpenter and Joiners' Society of Cincinnati prefaced its constitution with a preamble in which it defined the function of the association: "to maintain good understanding between employer and employed, prevent and adjust

71. Constitution and By-Laws of the General Trades' Union of the City of Cincinnati and Vicinity (Cincinnati, 1836), 3. It should be pointed out that similar preambles and manifestos were being issued by central trade unions in most of the large cities of the country (New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore), for this was the era (1834–37) when weak city locals were evolving into a loose but coordinated national federation. The rising cost of living compelled the workingman to resort to strikes and boycotts. All the issues which later were to plague both employer and employee—picketing, scabs, the open shop problem—appeared during these inflationary years. One authority estimates that over two-thirds of the urban wage earners were organized into unions in 1835 and 1836 (Frank T. Carlton, Organized Labor in American History [New York, 1920]). The panic of 1837 ended one of the most promising labor movements in the history of the country. The preamble and constitution of the General Trades' Union of Cincinnati, similar in spirit to those of other city federations, further indicates how the developing communication facilities could bind hitherto isolated urban centers and reduce sectional differences.
disputes, make and establish equitable prices for various kinds of work done by them, promote mechanical knowledge, and constantly endeavor to advance the interest of all those in the above branches." 72 By 1836, however, Cincinnati employers had become the "crafty classes," and the Working Man's Friend, established in that year to redress the grievances of the Queen City workers and arouse them "to the consideration of their rights and privileges," 73 attacked the oppressors of labor instead of trying to heal misunderstandings.

Delegates from eleven different societies representing the cabinetmakers, coopers, cordwainers, curriers, hatters, plane makers, printers, saddlers, harness makers, tin-plate workers, and tailors had met in the winter of 1836 to organize the General Trades' Union of Cincinnati and elect officers. 74 The constitution, drawn up and ratified, provided for a proportional representation of trade society delegates to the central council, two delegates for every twenty members. Each society paid a monthly dues of 6½ cents per member, and any society "wishing to repel Aggression, or desirous of striking for Hours and Wages," had to give written notice to the president of the Central Council. The president then called a special meeting, and if two-thirds of the delegates agreed, pecuniary aid was granted to the striking society after the first six months. Once a society won support from the General Trades' Union, each member applying for benefits received a weekly stipend of $2.50 "during the continuance of the stand out." 75 A married man received an additional dollar a week for his wife and twenty-five cents for each child under twelve years of age living at home. If a person wished to leave the city and pledged himself "not to return during the continuance of the stand out," the General Trades' Union paid five dollars towards his traveling expenses. Workers who earned extra money during the strike had to deduct the amount from their benefit payments, and any man who "scabbed" was immediately ousted. Finally, the General Union barred all discussions of politics and religion.

In its struggle for survival the General Trades' Union was assisted by the extraordinarily articulate if short-lived periodical previously mentioned, the Working Man's Friend. Drawing most of its material from the eastern labor press, this left-wing paper defended the principles of labor unions, urged intelligent participation in politics, and encouraged educational enterprises.

72. Constitution of the Carpenters and Joiners' Society of Cincinnati (Cincinnati, 1819), iii.
73. Working Man's Friend, July 16, 1836, 1.
74. Daily Cincinnati Republican and Commercial Register, Jan. 30, 1836; WMF, July 16, 1836.
It refuted the charges that labor unions were hatched in the minds of foreign conspirators and sought to prove, on the contrary, that the United States’ own swindling aristocrats, the men of finance, were themselves engaged in “a deep and hellish conspiracy” with the “titled ruffians” of Europe.\textsuperscript{76}

Unions had to come. When government, instituted to prevent the weak from being devoured by the strong, failed in its obligations, oppressed men federated to ward off the aggressor. Since justice and equal rights did not prevail, combination was necessary, and it was this combination of “Nature’s noblemen,” inspired by the same spirit which imbued the Pilgrims and the thirteen states, which made the “privileged orders tremble.”\textsuperscript{77}

Since the beginning of time, the editors of this paper declared, men had united their wealth, talents, and energies “in order to accomplish for their individual and general benefit, various enterprises which individually they could not accomplish.” The primitive moral law of mutual cooperation, practiced by early American settlers, had enabled each individual, with the help of his friends, to erect his house and roll his logs. Through mutual assistance men had covered the sea with ships, dug minerals from the earth, and enriched themselves. Heretofore, such unions of enterprise only benefited the “great ones of the earth.” But now, “thanks to the general diffusion of knowledge,” which had “at last dawned upon the poor man,” the said poor man saw that he could unite with his fellows to gain his rightful share in the world’s blessings. Of course the “employing and consuming classes” opposed him in this effort, assailed him “from the bar, the pulpit, the forum, in public or in private.” Public journals, in particular, owned or influenced by the rich, accused him of attempting to fasten a despotism upon the country. Necessity therefore compelled the poor man to enlist all his talents and energies against his would-be enslave and fight for the privilege of setting a price upon his own labor.\textsuperscript{78}

In the face of employer opposition, the Working Man’s Friend advised the brave and liberal working people of the West to join together in societies and “present a firm phalanx of freemen to the enemies of freedom . . . join and cooperate with their brethren in the east,” and guard against insidious party spirit. “It will make but little difference to the working men who are their rulers, if they are to be slaves.” Working men must elect representatives who

\textsuperscript{76} WMF, July 16, 1836, 1.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 30.
firmly oppose "exclusive privileges, who have the interest of the people at heart and not on their lips alone."

Let not the people be constantly looking to the great men of the country (so called) for assistance, the times do not so much require brilliancy of talents, as they do honesty and firmness, and one firm man, of clear though plain understanding, would do more good, than a dozen of those meteorig chatters who fill the columns of our newspapers with long speeches, which may dazzle superficial minds for the moment, but as to enlightening or benefitting the country, they are of as much benefit as the ignis fatuus to the benighted traveler.79

Western labor leaders not incorrectly predicted the assaults upon the principles of unionism from pulpit, bar, and press. When the implications of what the Working Man's Friend was preaching finally dawned upon these guardians of opinion, they fought the claims of the radicals with ridicule, reasoned argument, and abuse. The early twenties had been disturbed by little working-class insubordination. A few conservatives criticized the mechanics' lien law as "aristocratical,"80 and Whig leaders were a little disturbed by the political affiliations of some mechanics, but in general the propertied had no cause for concern. Signs of labor unrest appeared in 1826, however, when two striking Cincinnati hatters were sentenced to three years at hard labor in the penitentiary for beating up a journeyman scab from Maysville.81 Cincinnati editors now began to refer apprehensively to workingmen's parties and to campaign against "agitators and demagogues," men "who would bring down all above them, not because they wish all equal, but because the only mode by which they can rise, is by the degradation of the virtuous and the energetic." The "virtuous and the energetic" still maintained a paternalistic tone, advocating the education of the "lowest of our population" and urging employers not to pay their help on Saturday, as this practice inevitably led to expenditures, dissipation, and brawls.82

With the establishment of the Cincinnati General Trades' Union, the bombardment of the labor union idea by the conservative press became hot and heavy. Attempts to organize unions throughout the country were termed "conspiracies against societies" and "anti-monopoly monopolization." The

79. Ibid.
80. LHCG, Nov. 9, 1822.
81. Mercantile Daily Advertiser, Sept. 18, 1826.
82. CCLG, Dec. 4, 1830; Oct. 5, 1833.
leading Whig editor in Cincinnati scoffed at the prospectus of a proposed labor sheet, "The Cincinnati Trades' Union, and Advocate for Equal Rights," and called its sponsor, James Underwood (a Cincinnati labor leader), a radical Johnny Bull; the Queen City, the editor implied broadly, could get along very well without this modern Jack Cade. Jokes of this kind were common enough, but a criticism of trades' unions reprinted in a Cincinnati paper from the American Quarterly Review reflected the attitude of the more serious and realistic Cincinnati employers.

Labor unions and other such Agrarian schemes, declared the writer of this article, could never prevail in the United States since they repudiated the spirit and promise of the country. Here every man has "a stake in the hedge. He is rich in posse if not in esse." America makes every man a conservative, because every man possesses "the capacity for accumulation," and "a pair of hands are the basis of many a fortune." Appeals to the rich and poor, save in the larger cities, would never be effective. Agitators ought therefore to realize that they must tax "not only the wealth of the rich, but the energy of the enterprising," that they must overcome not only the "ostensible array of the community" but the "potentialities which lie behind it." The writer of the article concluded with an admirable, if slightly idealized, picture of American yeomen as

those men whose labor places a roof over their heads, a chicken in their pot, and yearly adds a field to their farm. Such persons have no time to speculate on "natural rights" and no inclination to appeal to natural law. Society encourages and protects them, they therefore have no quarrel with society. Oppressed they feel they are not, for they are men and citizens, pares inter pares. Their liberty is absolute, provided they respect private rights and the public peace. They owe nothing to clemency, nothing to magnanimity, nothing to generosity, for justice and law know no such attitudes. They may be deceived for a time, but they cannot be drawn or driven into long-continued or excessive wrong. Their moral instincts are not deadened by brutifying tasks, or their cupidity quickened by the sight of luxury they can never reach. They look forward towards hope, instead of backwards on despair. Their inheritance is not a life of toil and a pauper's obsequies, but the fruits of industry protected by freedom; competence on the one side and contentment on the other.84

83. CG, Feb. 9, March 17, 1836.
While the above characterization of average American laborers in the first third of the nineteenth century contains some truth, it also reflects a certain amount of wishful thinking. To make out the Cincinnati mechanic of the thirties as a class-conscious proletarian, permanently bound to his occupation and battling an entrenched middle class, would of course be ridiculous; and yet one cannot help seeing in the above portrait a Whiggish conception of what the mechanic or laborer ought to be, rather than what the mechanic actually was. One notices, too, the tendency of some conservative spokesmen to attribute their own essentially rural outlook to the city mechanic or to depict him as a sturdy and aspiring eighteenth-century artisan imbued with the ideas and prejudices of his employer. Thus, they speak of the "frugal mechanics and artificers" of Cincinnati whose object of union

is the moral and intellectual elevation of their ranks, the general diffusion of intelligence, the preservation of our republican institutions, and the desire to obtain that political influence which will lead to the protection of the manufactures and domestic industry of our common country.\textsuperscript{85}

But as we have seen, many working-class people in Cincinnati did not feel obliged to look out for the interests of their employers. They did wish to improve themselves, but they realized that after a full day's work, few men or women had the energy to study the sciences and the arts, as James Hall recommended, and exploit the advantages unknown to the richest two centuries ago.\textsuperscript{86} How apprentices were to educate themselves after sitting or standing from 5 A.M. to 7 P.M., "without exercise to excite the blood or cheer the spirits,"\textsuperscript{87} Hall did not say. It would have required more than libraries and educational societies to harmonize class differences.

Inter-class disharmony and conflict were all the more intensified because the class distinctions and snobbery in this mushroom community clashed with the sturdy republicanism which still persisted from the early days. Readers of Mrs. Trollope's record of her Cincinnati experiences will recall her account of the direct and forthright bluntness of the butcher and the domestic. Mrs. Trollope was not the only one who complained of the servant problem. Wealthy matrons in Cincinnati had to continue performing their own housework because no self-respecting girl would seek a job which so obviously implied inferior status. When girls did accept domestic service,
they were so untrustworthy, insolent, and even dishonest (if we are to believe their detractors) that someone in 1823 suggested a blacklist to exclude the dishonest "help" from future employment.\textsuperscript{88} Women preferred to work at lower-paid and more tedious occupations than engage in menial housework.

Clearly, then, the myth of a unified egalitarian western community must be dismissed. The urban West, as well as the urban East, presents a bewildering and complex pattern of cliques and pressure groups, social, political, and economic, sometimes resisting each other, at other times working together for the common good. The dynamic which keeps the society ever moving is money and property, and the financial elite, the merchants and their professional helpers, are also the social and the political elite. It now remains to be seen how this variety of interests met civic responsibilities.

\textsuperscript{88} LHCG, Apr. 29, 1815; Jan. 13, 1823.