Michael Bettencourt

Photoessays

Block & Tackle Productions Press

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The 1922 Textile Strike in Manchester, NH • The Moving Wall

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To María Beatriz - always in all ways

The 1922 Textile Strike in Manchester, NH

SAMUEL BLODGET: "As the country increases in population we must have manufactures, and here, at my canal, will be a manufacturing town that shall be the Manchester of America."[1]

VOICE OF WORKER: "We are human beings, but the Amoskeag officials cannot seem to get that through their heads. They seem to think we are a lot of cattle."[2]

WILLIAM AMORY [treasurer of AMC, retired in 1876]: "In the name of the [Amoskeag Manufacturing] Company, I would acknowledge our obligations [to those] who have recognized and accepted our mutual dependence…as the only basis of growth and prosperity to either."[3]

VOICE OF WORKER: "We will not stand for the injustice meted out to us by Amoskeag for the sake of profiteering."[4]

POEM:
The breaking dawn reveals the way
Amoskeag, our Amoskeag.
Co-operation wins the day
Amoskeag, our Amoskeag.
Thy sons and daughters with their might
Will keep thine emblem ever bright.
Success and fame are thine by right
Amoskeag, our Amoskeag[5]

VOICE OF WORKER: "And my last question to you…When did God give our beautiful city to the Amoskeag?"[6]

Several good accounts exist in the Manchester Historic Association of the great textile strike in 1922. Edmond Valade wrote *The Amoskeag Strike of 1922* for his Master's degree. The Amoskeag Manufacturing Company itself, oddly, published a history of the strike and kept several volumes of clippings. What follows is not meant to be complete; it simply tells a story that in itself is quite dramatic and revealing about life in our city and to give the reader a literal and figurative picture of what happened for nine months during 1922.

[A technical note: The accompanying pictures were copied from the newspaper clippings kept by the Amoskeag on Kodak Tech Pan film shot at EI 100 and developed in HC110(B) at 68 degrees. They were then printed on Ilford Multigrade III Deluxe using a #5 filter.]

* * * * *

Even today, several generations after the death of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, people still swap the names "Amoskeag" and

"Manchester," and with some justice; after all, the same engineers who built the mills also laid out Manchester's streets, and at times the mills employed half of all Manchester's available workforce. In 1915, George Waldo Browne, the Amoskeag's official historian, could say with all confidence that "Manchester and manufacturing seem synonymous terms."[7]

But they really weren't. Underneath the harmony, strains between the Amoskeag and its workers had always simmered, like lava working its way to the surface. In the weave rooms and dye houses and millyard the workers did not always thrill to what Mr. Browne called "the great enterprise"; instead, they often saw a company more interested in paying good dividends to its stockholders than a living wage to its workers.

By 1922, seven years after Mr. Browne's homage to harmony, the lava broke through. 12,000 Manchester mill workers walked off their jobs and shut the mills down as part of a New England-wide strike involving over 30,000 workers. For nine months, from February to November, Manchester's textile workers fought for higher pay and shorter hours against a company that said it needed lower pay and longer hours to maintain its profits. In the end the workers lost, and 1922 forever killed the myth that "Manchester and manufacturing were synonymous."

To understand the 1922 strike, you have to go back almost a hundred years, to 1831, when the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company began. A group of Boston financiers, loosely known as the Associates, built the Amoskeag. They wanted to make a lot of money in textiles, but they didn't want their dividends to be threatened by the kind of labor unrest they'd seen in the "dark, Satanic mills" of Manchester, England.

So they devised a plan to create a stable and contented workforce. They would provide benefits designed to "improve" the lives of their workers. In return for not being treated like machines, the workers would stay loyal to the company and continue to generate profits and dividends for the owners.

In short, the owners created a corporate welfare policy, which cast the company in the role of generous father and the workers as obedient children. Over the decades the specifics of this policy would change, but never its guiding principle: The rightful place of workers was to accept the father's gifts unquestioningly, and in return make profits, not trouble.

In 1838, when the Amoskeag began building the actual mills, the policy worked this way: For each mill built on the east bank of the Merrimack, Amoskeag would also build company housing, where the workers would live at easy rents. In return, the workers agreed to have their lives regulated, not only on the job but off as well, such as required church attendance and a ten p.m. curfew.

This version succeeded very well because the first crop of workers the owners got were the docile young daughters of New England farmers, what one owner called "a fund of labor, well-educated and virtuous." Their work was hard -- sun- up to sun-down 6 days a week -- and weekly pay could run as high as the princessly sum of $2.73! But compared to the hard life on a farm, the economic opportunities of factory work were liberating. As one worker, Ann Appleton, said, "I tell you, it is grand to be a boarder. I leave my work...and then I come home and do as I please." Such agreeable workers made Manchester an "industrial Garden of Eden."

But the innocence of Eden did not last as long as the Associates would have liked. Only a decade and a half after the company began, workers were pushing to get a bill passed through the state legislature shortening the work day from twelve hours to ten. While many respected people, like ministers and politicians, considered a ten-hour day a humane policy, the Amoskeag was irritated at this challenge to its authority, and for almost ten years it avoided doing what the law said, finally agreeing to an 11-hour day in 1853.

But in 1855 the Amoskeag tried to bring back a twelve-hour day, arguing that they needed the extra two hours to remain economically competitive. People from ministers to newspaper editors advised that the Amoskeag's new policy "should be resisted by every fair and legitimate means,"[8] and the workers took their advice seriously: They went out on strike.

For over three weeks the strike paralyzed the Amoskeag. The workers held mass meetings and parades, supported overwhelmingly by the city's population. These "5000 sons and daughters of the pilgrims," as one editor called the workers, would chant "So go for the Ten Hours, / Then go for the Ten Hours, / For we know that is right"[9] as they met day after day at the town hall to organize their activities.

The workers ultimately did not get what they wanted -- the most Amoskeag would do is go back to the 11-hour day -- but the strike exposed the Achilles heel of the Amoskeag's corporate welfare policy: Benefits would only buy worker loyalty as long as wages and hours were fair. But if the workers felt that their

wages and hours were threatened, they would toss the benefits aside like a wool sweater in summer. Wages and hours were bread and butter; benefits were dessert.

Another strike in 1886, this time over wages, made this painfully evident to the Amoskeag's owners. The workforce had changed from 1855 to 1886. During the decades after the Civil War the Yankee "natives" with names like Clarke, Smyth, Stark, and Kidder had had to move over for a LeBlanc from Canada, a Stenzel from Germany, a Pilkowicz from Poland, a Theodorokopoulos from Greece, part of the great flood-tide of immigration from Europe. By 1890, the foreign-born made up almost half of Manchester's population,[10] and the Associates now saw that their profits and dividends were being produced by workers whose loyalty was to their parish, their neighborhood, their country of origin, but not to the Yankee managers and stockholders.

The Amoskeag owners had been watching this change, but they didn't know how to control it. What could they do?

By 1912, they had an answer: a "new and improved" corporate welfare policy. Where they had once offered housing and religion to the mill girls, they would now offer the Textile Club and cooking classes, dental care and baseball games.

The programs were extensive, and all free: health care, with an accident ward staffed by a doctor and trained nurse where injured workers could recuperate, a dentist, and nurses who visited employee families in their homes; classes in a variety of subjects like cooking, sewing, and Domestic Science; clubs in photography, music, and skeet shooting; recreational facilities for children like gardens where they could grow vegetables and a playground equipped with swings, slides, and a wading pool. One enduring legacy of this welfare program is Textile Field, now known as Gill Stadium, where on opening day in 1913 10,000 people turned out to see the Boston Red Sox play the Manufacturer's League All-Stars, made up of players drawn from the mills (and a couple of Boston Braves who joined the Manchester team "to give battle royal to the visitors").

But as well-intentioned as these policies were, they missed the point of the strikes in 1855 and 1886: the workers wanted more say about hours and wages and the quality of their lives in the millyard. The owners wanted the workers to accept such offerings as low rents and hospital care as their main meal; the workers knew the meat and potatoes lay elsewhere.

But even if the policies could have made the workers more loyal, changes in the textile industry itself made their loyalty irrelevant. To understand these changes, however, you need to have a sense of just how large and sprawling an enterprise the Amoskeag was. In 1912, the Amoskeag is near its peak as the world's largest cotton textile mill. Thirty major mills stand in the Amoskeag millyard, each equal to an entire textile mill elsewhere. The mill buildings are sectioned into three divisions -- Northern, Central, and Southern -- and run for a mile and quarter along the east bank of the river and an almost equal distance along the west bank. They hold a total of 8 million square feet of space, or almost 184 football fields, equal to the square footage of the towers at the World Trade Center in New York City. The Amoskeag houses 74 separate cloth-making departments, three dye houses, 24 mechanical and electrical departments, three major steam power plants, and a hydroelectric power station. Its own machine shops and foundries can design and build almost every piece of machinery it needs.

You walk down toward the millyard from Elm Street, a street laid out eighty years ago by Amoskeag engineer Ezekiel Straw; from Elm Street you see the company's belltowers, raised high like sentinels over the city.

Inside the yard are miles of roads and railroad tracks, and walking between the four- and five- and six- and seven-story buildings is like walking at the bottom of deep canyons. Two canals rush through the yard, and both the canals and buildings curve gently to follow the bend of the river, breaking up the scene into identifiable spaces.

Inside the weave rooms and dye houses, amid the thunder of looms and carding machines, the "operatives" make cotton goods like ginghams and shirtings, tickings and denims, sheetings and bags, chambrays and toweling. You pass through rooms where they pick, card, comb, and spin, transforming heavy bales of cotton into slender thread. For a moment, you are engulfed by the roar of the Amoskeag's 24,000 looms, a noise so loud people read each other's lips because they cannot hear one another. To keep the threads from breaking, the humidity is kept high and the windows are closed to cut down on drafts. The air swirls with lint like fine snow. They make cloth ten to eleven hours a day, six days a week.

The buildings shake as giant turbines and flywheels, powered by water and steam, spin thousands of leather belts attached to miles of pulleys and shafts, some moving so fast that sparks of static electricity would jump between your

fingers and the belt. At quitting time 15,000 workers stream out of the millyard at quitting time, go home to eat and rest, then stream back in twelve hours later.

In 1912, these 15,000 "operatives" wove 4,715,790 yards of cotton cloth per week, 245 million yards in a year. That's 50 miles of cloth per hour, almost 500 miles a day, 147,119 miles per year, enough to girdle the earth 6 times.

But the Amoskeag, as large as it was, only had 3% of the textile market. Many other mills were also reaching these heights, and the industry began to suffer from overcapacity. Though World War I postponed dealing with the problem, by the 1920s it couldn't be avoided: too many spindles were spinning too much cloth. The snake had begun to feed on its own tail. The result: lay-offs for many, partial work weeks, reduced wages, and lengthened work days for those who remained. By the end of 1920, the entire cotton section of the Amoskeag ran only the first three days of the week. Life for the workers inside the mills turned hellish. Work speed-ups, stretch-outs, and worn-out machinery took their toll, and the cost of living always outran Amoskeag wages, a situation worsened by a 22.5% wage cut in January 1921.

However, as their paychecks dwindled, they read in the newspapers how the Boston men still continued to receive their dividends. As they scraped for extra money, they read how the Amoskeag had stockpiled a $40 million surplus during World War I. The final insult came on February, 1922: a 20% wage cut for all hour and piece work on top of the 22.5% the year before, and increased working hours from 48 to 54. Mills all over New England made a similar announcement. With a single voice, mill owners had wiped out all the wage gains workers had made during World War I.

The only choice: Strike!

All over New England 30,000 textile workers took to the streets, in Nashua and Pawtucket and Lawrence, in Suncook and Lowell and Providence. In Manchester, under the guidance of the United Textile Workers of America, which had been organizing in the mills since World War I, over 12,000 workers voted "Yea" to walk out. By February 13, the mills of Amoskeag became what one labor leader later called "silent cemeteries." The workers not only wanted to restore the wage cuts but also shorten the work week to 48 hours. "8 hours" became the rallying cry: "8 hours for work, 8 hours for rest, 8 hours for what we please." During the strike, instead of saying "hello," workers would greet each other with the phrase "8 hours."

Though no one in Manchester knew the strike would ultimately last nine months, from the beginning the workers, under the direction of their union officials, organized themselves for a siege. They put together brigades of pickets, sent out battalions of volunteers to raise funds, sponsored a corps of speakers to travel nationwide and gather support for the strike. Because of this kind of organization, the Rev. Herbert Jump could truthfully say that "for a city in a state of industrial war, Manchester exhibits a curious calm."[11] No Pullman or Homestead here, no Pinkertons, no dead in the streets.

For a time, the strikers enjoyed the support of the entire city, with even the mayor contributing money to their strike fund and doctors and druggists offering free medical care. They also got help from outside the city: bakers in Lynn, Massachusetts, sent a thousand loaves of bread, other unions contributed money to the strikers' relief fund, and even an Amoskeag stockholder -- Mrs. Elizabeth Glendower Evans -- supported the strike with her money and time. By March they had a commissary open to dispense food; two more would open later, along with a restaurant, sometimes servicing 20,000 people a day. As one headline said, they were READY FOR PEACE BUT PREPARED FOR A LONG STRUGGLE.[12]

But the workers were fighting the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company; with its $40-million-dollar surplus, it, too, had hunkered down for a long fight. During the entire nine months of the strike the Amoskeag never once changed its stand: they needed the 20% reduction in wages and a work week of 54 hours because of Southern competition. The ministers of the city tried to get the sides to negotiate. The union agreed; Amoskeag refused. Why? 20%, 54 hours, Southern competition. The mayors tried; the state Labor Commissioner tried; the governor tried; the federal government tried. The answer: 20%, 54 hours, Southern competition. Even the bishop, The Right Reverend George Albert Guertin, tried: 20%, 54 hours, Southern competition. To the end the Amoskeag never changed its monotonous tune.

Was the Amoskeag being destroyed by Southern competition, as it said over and over again? The union didn't think so, publishing articles in March that showed that wages and living expenses between the north and south were about equal. Even southern mill owners said that "southern workers are probably in better shape" than workers in any section of the country.

And the company's actions showed it didn't think so either: in May it bought the Stark Mills, improving the price of its stock, and in December, a month after

the strike ended, the company declared a stockholder dividend. In the middle of the strike it was so confident of not losing its buyers that it declared it wouldn't be taking orders for the spring of 1923.

But even if Southern competition did pose a real threat, the Amoskeag never acted as if that threat was the central issue in the strike. Instead, the Amoskeag acted as if the workers had betrayed the company by going on strike; instead of negotiating, the Amoskeag seemed to prefer, as one journalist said, "a lone, slow, lingering and half-hearted course toward [the] ultimate surrender" of the workers.[13]

And they had the guns to force such a surrender. They had bought the police chief, Michael Healy.[14] Governor Albert Brown, who refused to convene a special session of the legislature to consider a 48-hour work week, was also the treasurer of the Amoskeag Bank, which owned thousands of shares of Amoskeag stock. New Hampshire Senator George Moses blocked a federal investigation of the Amoskeag. The courts prevented the strikers from picketing the gates of the mills. City parks commissioner Frank Carpenter, an Amoskeag stockholder and trustee, denied permission to anyone from outside Manchester to speak at the union's weekly outdoor meetings (including an ex-Governor of the state).

Yet the workers showed incredible grace under this pressure. In April, two months after the walk-out, they staged a silent parade of solidarity, thousands of workers marching four abreast in a three-mile circuit around the city. On Labor Day, five months later, they staged another parade, equally large, equally peaceful. In June, the Parks Commission banned outside speakers at the workers' rallies. When union vice president James Starr, a non-Manchesterite, rose to speak, everyone wondered if he would defy the ban. Instead, with a grin on his face, he raised a placard which read "Eight hours. I am forbidden to speak. Stick. We win." When the court issued an injunction prohibiting picketing at the company gates, the workers went to the courts to modify the injunction rather than challenge it in the streets. Again and again the workers showed remarkable restraint, prompting one local newspaper to state that Manchester "has the best class of textile workers in the country.[15]

* * * * *

Writers about the strike have offered a number of reasons why the strike remained as peaceful as it did: the lack of a violent labor history in Manchester, the paternalistic policies of the Amoskeag, the fact that many of the strike leaders had had long careers with the Amoskeag. But another reason has

never been explored: the women who participated in the strike. Since most Amoskeag workers were women, most of the strikers were women, and once the decision had been made to walk off the job, they invested their time and talent in everything from keeping body and spirit together at home to raising relief funds on tag days to running an employment agency that tried to find jobs for strikers. Their presence "humanized" the strike because they made it clear from the beginning what they were fighting for: not ideology, not an abstract principle of justice, not confrontation for its own sake, but simply a better life for everyone, a life not ground down by unceasing toil and inadequate compensation forced upon them by a company more interested in its stockholders than its workers.

At the most basic level they did daily "front line" service. They kept the families together, stretching the food, mending the clothes, performing extra work as a maid or cleaning lady to bring in money. In fact, as one woman noted, the workers struck in part to ensure that families would not be torn apart by the inhumane schedules imposed by the Amoskeag:

> It's hard enough for a mother of children to get to work at 7:15 in the morning after giving the little ones breakfast and making them ready for school. You can appreciate what it means to the tired mother and the hungry children to widen the gulf between them in the evening. It is too much tax on human endurance and the mother of children should not be required to suffer this loss of sleep, this additional labor in a hot mill and this extra deprivation of the companionship of her children.[16]

The women also collected much-needed money for the strikers' relief fund, money used, as one newspaper put it, "to care for women and children whom the big walkout may distress."[17] This process usually involved selling "tags" or "flowers," and such work often took the women far afield. One news report in the *Leader* mentioned that dozens of women went periodically to Boston and Lawrence at the request of union employees to solicit funds, and on February 20, "several hundred young ladies who canvassed the city" sold 25,000 tags for a total of $4783.16. Tag sales also took women to Concord, Suncook, Penacook, and Maynard, Massachusetts.[18] The tag sale provided a constant source of funds until Manchester Mayor Trudel banned them within city limits in August.[19]

Women also participated heavily in picketing the company gates. Pictures of the picket lines in local newspapers almost always featured women (though the newspapers always called them "girls") with captions like these: GIRL STRIKERS DO PICKET DUTY OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT OFFICE OF AMOSKEAG CO.[20] One marvelous picture shows a group of women making fun of strikebreakers. The caption writer obviously didn't know quite what to make of the picture, so he

split the difference between the felicitous and the vulgar: FAIR STRIKERS "RAZZ" WORKERS.[21]

At a more tactical level, women helped "advertise" the strike and gather support from the around the state, the region, and the country by becoming members of a union "speakers bureau." The Rev. Herbert Whitelock, pastor of the People's Baptist Tabernacle Church and sympathetic to the strike, held oratory classes for strikers to teach them, as one headline put it, "How To Act On [The] Platform and Present Their Facts Forcefully."[22] Armed with this oratorical training, the women traveled to different parts of the country to lecture about the strike. For instance, Freda Stenzel and Yvonne Baker traveled through Pennsylvania to inform unions about the Manchester strike, while Josephine Soderquist, a member of the strategy board for the textile and metal trades council, spoke at the Twentieth Century Club at 3 Joy Street in Boston's Beacon Hill. There she explained that the reason for the strike's generally peaceful tone lay in the fact that "the strikers were in control of the strike themselves and had refused to allow radicals to come in and dominate the situation."[23]

This speakers bureau composed of local women complemented the organizing visits by more nationally and internationally known women in the labor movement, such as Sarah Conboy, the secretary-treasurer of the United Textile workers, and Mary Kelleher, an international organizer for the UTW. The weekly outdoor rallies often featured women on their speakers' roster, such as Mary Thompson, the director of the Women's Trade Union League in Boston, who had extensive labor experience in the American and British labor movements.[24]

Women also met with the powers-that-be to discuss the strike. They went to Concord to testify to state committees about the strike, especially about one of the strikers' most fervent demands: reducing the work week to 48 hours. One newspaper story quotes Ella J. Hickey, a 25-year veteran of the Amoskeag, as saying that the 54-hour week meant that she had "no opportunity to sit down and that the size of her pay depended on her ability to keep one foot on the treadle constantly."[25] A group of "West Side women" tried to meet with the bishop to let him know "the full extent of the suffering that is being endured by the martyrs to strike principles." (He refused to meet with them, preferring that they write him a letter.)

* * * * *

Keeping the strike intact meant a huge organizing effort, and here women played an important bureaucratic role in running the agencies that fed, clothed,

and counseled the strikers. Several names stand out. Freda Stenzel, who was a member of the speakers bureau, also helped co-manage with Archie Chardonnet the strikers' unemployment office, organized to find work for strikers either elsewhere in the city or the region. She took responsibility for assisting women, and in a newspaper profile, the writer said that "she has developed into one of the best speakers and executives among the Amoskeag strikers."[26] In September 1922 she attended, as a delegate, the textile labor convention at Fall River, Massachusetts.

Eva Collins acted as secretary for the General Relief Committee, the agency in charge of co-ordinating all the money and goods collected for the welfare of the strikers. She helped manage three commissaries and a restaurant. The commissaries dispensed food to families, handling up to 5000 people a day. The restaurant, located in the basement of Sweeney Post on Concord Street, provided inexpensive meals.

Gertrude Pelton headed the General Relief Committee's investigative branch, responsible for checking the accuracy of every application for assistance. She broke the city down into nineteen districts, and every day her staff of fifty inspectors checked on strikers to make sure they were getting what they needed and that no one received goods they didn't deserve. When a journalist asked her what the strike meant to her, she said

> we are fighting for the maintenance of homes in keeping with American standards. People must realize that decent homes cannot be maintained when workers have to stay in the mills fifty-hours a week for the paltry average wage of fourteen dollars and sixty cents, which is what the Amoskeag officials would have us do. We belong in Manchester.[27]

In her employee file at the Manchester Historic Association sits a typewritten note calling her an "agitator" for her participation in the strike.

Other women's names come up often in press accounts and legal documents. Yvonne Baker entered the mills at the age of 16 and actively pursued work in the union as a member of the grievance committee, a delegate to the weavers' convention in 1918, and a dues collector for the UTW. As an active strike committee member, she represented the workers at the May meeting in which Mayor Trudel was accused of being an agent of the Amoskeag.[28] Laura Leblanc was the business agent of the Manchester Weavers union and a traveling speaker, Louise Gagnon sat on the voter registration committee of the Non-Partisan campaign, an effort to gather support for the 48-hour bill, and Mary

Fleming worked side-by-side with her husband Dennis Fleming, a Manchester resident and an active union official.

And when it came time to do more than just politely run the agencies and keep people occupied, the women stationed themselves right in the front ranks.

While Rev. Jump had it mostly right when he said that Manchester appeared unusually calm for a city at economic war, stresses were building up just below the surface, and on June 5, they broke through. On that day, the Amoskeag opened the Coolidge Mill, located at the west end of what is now the new Notre Dame Bridge. The company did this at the suggestion of Governor Brown, who had suddenly found space in his heart for strikers "who are needy...and desiring to work."[29] (Remember that Governor Brown was also the treasurer of the Amoskeag Bank, a major stockholder in the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company.)

On the morning of the 5th thousands of strikers massed outside the Coolidge gates as a handful of workers, mostly overseers and maintenance people, went into the mill. The crowd shouted at the scabs while the police tried to keep them moving along.

The next day, however, on the 6th, tempers flared. At quitting time, the strikers discovered that the strikebreakers, instead of coming out the Coolidge gates, had taken the overhead bridge across McGregor Street to leave by a door at the back of #11 mill. The crowd rushed to the exit, in the words of one journalist, "now in a fever heat, shouting and jeering, [massing] themselves at the entrance to give any worker who might emerge a warm welcome."[30] The crowd verged on rioting.

The women took the lead. Lydia Pilkowicz became the first person arrested, for throwing a snuff box. (She later received thirty days in prison.[31]) Another woman, Victoria Cirochan, was also arrested for trying to drop a bag of sand on the head of a strikebreaker. Dragged by Officer Welch to the police box on the corner of Amory and Main Streets, Victoria kept up a running harangue, part of the crowd following along and cheering her. There were other reports of strikebreakers being hit in the face and shoved to the ground. Altogether the police arrested fifteen people, half of them women.

Union vice president James Starr and union officials managed to calm the crowd down, but the day wasn't over yet. The action shifted to the police station and nearby Merrimack Common (what is now Victory Park). Four thousand

strikers massed on the Common as the police brought the suspects in, and officers arrested several others, including women, when they refused to move along. Events got so tense that when four strike leaders showed up to inquire about bail for the arrested strikers, Police Chief Healy arrested them on the spot for "aiding and abetting and inciting to riot." One news report declared, "Not since the night of the 'Red' raids on January 2, 1920, have there been so many prisoners booked in such short order."[32]

But even though they were now booked at the station, the women continued their defiance - and their obligations. Some sent out for their youngest children so that they could nurse them, while others made sure that their children were looked after by friends or neighbors. On the next day, June 7, when the officers released the women on bail,

> a cheer went up from a crowd which had gathered in front of police headquarters as the seven women who were arrested Tuesday evening in the disturbance at the Coolidge mills filed out, babies in their arms, on their way to their homes after spending the night at the station. [The babies had] spent most of their time in court chewing away at doughnuts which had been given to them at the station.[33]

Even at the height of this confrontation, the women had managed to undercut the authority of the police by insisting that prison did not stop them from being mothers and wives. This domestic edge helped them retain their own dignity and gave the crowd of strikers an amusing yet powerful image to fuel their own good fight. As one letter writer said, "Thank God that He gave us working women broad shoulders."[34]

In fact, this image of the woman as a kind of "fighting mother" gave the battle against the original injustice of wage cuts and extended schedules a deeper legitimacy. These women were not fighting for a creed or an ideology, something the Amoskeag could have branded "radical" and thus undermined. They fought instead for their lives, for a better life for their children and their fellow workers. The women taking care of their babies in jail humanized the struggle in a way no set of humanistic principles ever could. They gave the strike what was often called by writers and ministers "the human element" of the conflict. This "human element," more than anything else, made the citizens of Manchester sympathetic to the workers' cause.

Charles Power, a journalist for the strike-friendly *Boston American*, quickly picked up on this power that the women had to give the strike its human dimension. Whenever he wanted to argue the rightness of the strikers' cause,

he almost never quoted one of the male strike leaders. Instead, he would use the voice or experience of a woman to crystallize his point. For example, in a piece titled "Women Bearing [The] Brunt," he painted a clear picture of the spirit of the women during the strike:

> Spartan-like fortitude in withstanding the temptation of forsaking principle for the gain of material comforts is being reported each day. While the reporter watched the strikers come and go the story of a woman just outside the Manchester city limits was told.
>
> Her husband has long been stricken with the great plague, and she has been the bread-winner for the family, earning sufficient as a weaver to make both ends meet. Frequent offers have been made her and others, of work if they would return to their looms in the mill on the fifty- four-hour-a-week basis.
>
> "I talked it over with my husband," she explained, "and he agreed with me that it would not be right to go back. Better that we have less than at present than forsake the big idea, when we feel we are right."
>
> This woman has scoured the country-side seeking odd jobs where she could earn a few dollars at a time, rather than yield.[35]

To be sure, Power's quotations are sometimes very polished, and one has to suspect that what he wrote was not a verbatim transcript of what was actually said. Yet by constantly using a woman's voice to underscore the importance of the strike, he implicitly argued that making working life better for women workers would be making it better for *all* workers. [36] In other words, what was good for working women was good for everyone, a truth underscored in the 1923 debate in the state legislature over the 48-hour bill. In arguing for the "public welfare" of a shorter work week, ex-governor Robert P. Bass presented studies that showed a 54-hour week actually killed women and children because of increased injury and fatigue; reducing the weekly schedule to forty-eight hours for women and children would actually better the lives of *all* workers.

* * * * *

The confrontation, powered by the kind of strong class- and social interests of workers like the letter writer who simply signed herself "A Woman," scared the powers-that-be:

> WOMAN'S SIDE OF STRIKE
>
> We all know the textile mills cannot operate with any chance of profit at all unless the women and children work also The weaving is done mostly by the women so they are in a way the producers of the wealth so much enjoyed by the stockholders.....You can't persuade the women, you can't

> coax the women, you may club the women, but nothing will bring them back to do your work unless you slack down your machines to the old speed before the war....[We will] work 48 hours and no more.[37]

By June 8 the courts had granted Amoskeag a temporary injunction preventing the strikers from picketing the gates or talking to strikebreakers, forbidding them, as one writer stated, "from doing much else than eat and sleep." (It was later changed to allow limited picketing.) On June 10 Parks Commissioner Carpenter slapped a ban on any outside speakers at strikers' gatherings. Police Chief Healy was even given permission to tell residents around the Coolidge mill that they couldn't go outside their houses while workers from the mill were passing by.

Through all this the strikers acted politely, playing by the rules. But June 5, the opening of the Coolidge mill, in many ways marked the beginning of the end of the strike, though even by the fall, when other sections had opened and a quarter of the workforce had returned, strikers voted overwhelmingly to reject a 20% wage increase because the Amoskeag still wanted to keep the 54 hours. But with winter threatening and a shortage of funds and food, the union officials called off the strike, saying that the fight for the 48-hour week would now be fought in the legislature. (Ironically, it died there the next year.)

The 1922 strike ended the century-old effort of the Boston Associates to buy the loyalty of its workers. The union and the strikers had challenged Amoskeag's fatherly control, and they and the city paid dearly for their disobedience: $7 million in lost wages, businesses starved into bankruptcy, untold dollars lost in taxes, workers blacklisted as agitators and troublemakers.

After 1922, the Amoskeag would move to protect its profits and dividends. In 1925 treasurer F.C. Dumaine convinced the stockholders it would be better to invest the company's surplus in other ventures rather than modernizing the mills and seeking out new markets and products.[38] Dumaine took $18 million away from the mills and put it in a holding company, leaving the mills with insufficient capital, overaged equipment, a weak textile market, and a demoralized work force. If the mills succeeded, the stockholders would collect their dividends from profits; if they didn't, the stockholders would be the first in line at the bankruptcy court.

Dumaine's actions in 1925 dates the beginning of the end for the Amoskeag mills, and the next eight years were marked by constant demands for speed-ups, stretch-outs, and wage cuts. Anger grew and resentments smoldered until

on May 19, 1933, the workers struck again. Only this time the strike was not "polite"; too much anger had built up over the decade. On May 23, 3000 workers attacked overseers, second hands, and clerks leaving the mill; forty people were injured and fifty people arrested. The mayor and police chief Healy decided to request four divisions of the National Guard, who were quartered in the mill when they arrived.

The workers won their demand for a 15% retroactive pay raise, but conditions continued to deteriorate, with another strike in August 1933 and a series of "sitdowns" during 1934, ending with 7000 workers walking out in the nationwide textile strike that same year.

Still, many believed that the Amoskeag would endure forever, an illusion shaken in September 1935 when the mills suspended operation, and forever shattered on Christmas Eve, when the company filed for re-organization.

And even the river which had so long sustained the Amoskeag knew the end had come. In March the Merrimack, swollen by rain, snow melt, and ice jams, raged over its banks, as if it wanted to erase the buildings that had bloomed along its waters. Much of the machinery was destroyed and debris filled the basements and first floors of the mills.

The Amoskeag was dead.

A U.S. Senate investigation of the Amoskeag in 1936 concluded that "the activities of the holding and manufacturing companies savor of nothing short of financial sabotage." They were right, but only partially. In a sense the 1922 strike also "sabotaged" the century-old illusion that what was good for Amoskeag was good for Manchester. And in a roundabout way, good came out of that. In 1936, after the death of the Amoskeag, a group of Manchester citizens bought the millyard and all its machinery. By 1947 the buildings had 122 different companies in them, employing 12,000 people. People swore that never again would Manchester be held economic hostage by a single company, and the diversity that rose from ashes of the Amoskeag has helped the city grow and prosper.

Perhaps equally important, the 1922 strike, if only briefly, sabotaged the belief that workers are simply interchangeable pieces of the large machine called a corporation. We can all take pride in their courage because their story reminds us that for every Donald Trump inflated with the hot air of debt, thousands of

others whose names and faces we will never know get up every day to make the world, our world, run.

Endnotes

1 Quoted by Randolph Langenbach, *Boston Globe Magazine*, March 9,1969.
2 *Boston American*, 11/20/22
3 George Waldo Browne, *The Amoskeag Manufacturing Co. Of Manchester, New Hampshire, A History* (Printed by the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, 1915), 202
4 *Boston American*, 7/24/22
5 Quoted in Tamara K. Hareven, *Family Time & Industrial Time: The Relationship Between The Family And Work In A New England Industrial Community* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 45
6 *Leader*, "The Letter Box," 9/5/22
7 Browne, *Amoskeag*, iv.
8 James P. Hanlan, *The Working Population Of Manchester, New Hampshire, 1840-1886* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981), 71.
9 Ibid, 73.
10 Hareven, *Family Time*, 16.
11 *Leader*, 4/17/22
12 *eader*, 3/10/22
13 *Boston American*, 9/18/22
14 The "donation" is listed in the semi-annual accounts made up for the Amoskeag's treasurer's office for the six months ending May 20 and December 2, 1922. The amount is listed in the "Division of Contingent Account" for the "Manchester Police Department." For the first period, to May 20, the amount was $2262.50; the second period, $691.65.
15 *Mirror*, 4/11/22
16 *Boston American*, 7/24/22
17 *Boston Post*, 2/17/22
18 *Leader*, 3/9/22; *Leader*, 2/20/22; *Leader*, 2/23/22
19 *Mirror*, 8/4/22
20 *Mirror*, 8/11/22
21 *Boston Advertiser*, 6/10/22
22 *Leader*, 4/7/22
23 *Leader*, 3/20/22; *Herald*, 3/28/22

24 *Union*, 3/6/22
25 *Boston American*, 1/23/23
26 *Boston American*, 7/15/22
27 *Boston American*, 6/28/22
28 Hareven, *Family Time*, p. 335
29 *Leader*, 5/27/22
30 *Mirror*, 6/7/22
31 *Leader*, 6/8/22
32 *Mirror*, 6/7/22
33 *Mirror*, 6/7/22
34 *Leader*, "Leader Letter Box," 9/5/22, signed "A Mother"
35 *Boston American*, 6/18/22
36 *Leader*, 1/24/23
37 *Leader*, "Leader Letter Box," 8/1/22
38 Arthur M. Kenison, *Dumaine's Amoskeag: Let The Record Speak* (Manchester, NH: Saint Anselm College Press, 1997). See "The Strike of 1922" and "Corporate Restructuring."

Pictures of the Strike

AMOSKEAG MANUFACTURING CO.

NOTICE

Commencing Monday, February 13, 1922, a reduction of Twenty (20) per cent. will be made in all hour and piece rates in all departments of the Amoskeag.

At the same time the Running Time of the Mills will be increased from forty-eight to fifty-four hours per week, in accordance with the schedule posted herewith.

February 2, 1922

W. P. STRAW, Agent.

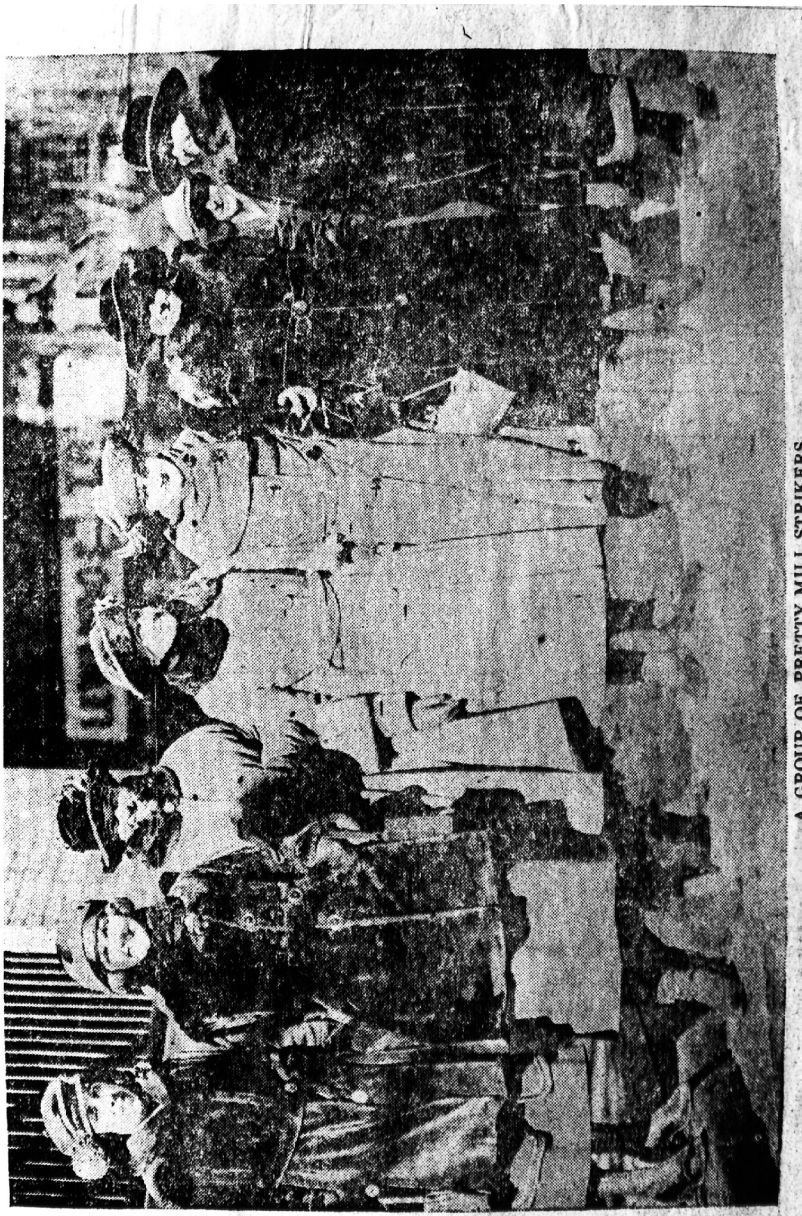
Pretty Marie Beland of Manchester patrolled her picket post at the Amoskeag Mills, the largest in the world.

Leaders of Textile Union Forces

Dennis M. Fleming, president of Textile council (left) and James Starr, vice president of National Textile union body.

While leaders yesterday arbitrated with mill owners these strikers picketed the Granite st. gate of the great Amoskeag Mills in Manchester, N. H. (Staff photo)

Helen Healey, one of the pickets at Manchester, N. H., where clergymen of all denominations yesterday heard arguments by workers with a view toward arbitration. Preliminary parleys were successful.



A GROUP OF PRETTY MILL STRIKERS

Seven of the mill workers who are out on strike in Manchester, N. H., in protest against a cut in wages and longer working hours. The girls and women are taking a prominent part in the peaceful picketing of the Manchester mills. (Photo by Fred T. Huntington, Post Staff Photographer.)

MANCHESTER STRIKERS SELL TAGS TODAY. Left to right, Mary Gleason, Anna Paulman, Mrs. J. Monahan and Mrs. Sears will direct the campaign to secure funds by a "Manchester Tag Day" in aid of strikers of the Amoskeag Mills and their families. Hon. Cla Room.

A wind of near-gale velocity and a driving blizzard proved no check of picketing activities at Amoskeag Mills, which were guarded by striking workers throughout the storm.

Manchester strikers sold tags to sympathizers in the first move to gain funds for their cause. Gtrtrude McGreevey is the fair tag seller.

THREE BIG FIGURES IN LOCAL STRIKE SITUATION

—Union and Leader Art Department.

Thomas McMahon (center), president of the United Textile Workers of America, who is directing the striking textile workers in Rhode Island, Vice President James Starr (left) of the U. T. W. and William Larkin (right) of Lowell, Mass., international organizer of the Machinists' union, who conferred this morning on the local situation, and met with the Manchester Ministerial association this afternoon at the Y. M. C. A.

Commissary Opens With Trade Rush; Union Card Necessary to Buy Goods

Public Evidences Sweet Tooth in Insistent Demand for Corn Balls

Union and Leader Art Department.

Left to right, Irma Hermsdorf, James Buckley, Anna O'Brien and James Charnley leaving Machinists' headquarters, 801 Elm street, with baskets of corn balls which were quickly sold to people on the streets. The girls did the selling while the young men carried the baskets and saw that they were replenished.

MORE TAG DAYS TO HELP STRIKERS

Photo by Art Studio

Treas. Thomas Kane's clerks and assistants at the Amherst street union commissary receiving 1000 loaves of bread sent by the Jewish Bakers' Union, Local 183 of Lynn, Mass., to the textile strikers of Manchester as their donation to help win the fight. Supplies are brought by truck weekly from the Lynn bakeries.

Worked 54 Hours as Youth, Dumaine Tells Mrs. Evans

—Union and Leader Art Department.

Mrs. Gwendolyn Glendower Evans, Bay State social leader, snapped by a Union and Leader photographer for the first of her pictures in any newspaper.

THOUSANDS WATCH; TO CONTINUE OPERATIONS, AMOSKEAG ASSERTS

THRONG WATCHING FOR WORKERS TO REPORT AT COOLIDGE MILLS

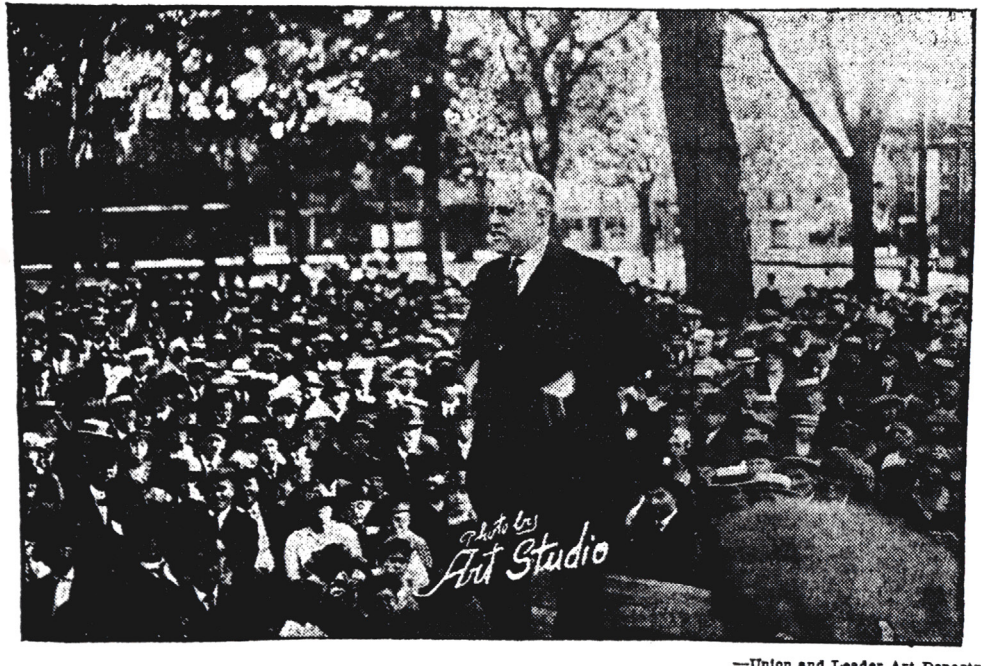
Photo taken at opening of Coolidge mill gates this morning showing crowd of strike sympathizers walking about streets in vicinity in dense throngs. They stuck to the sidewalks and their orderly conduct was later praised by Chief M. J. Healy.

These Folk Guarantee Strikers Good Meal

Photo by Art Studio

Textile operatives on duty at the union restaurant located in the basement of Sweeney post, American Legion hall, on Concord street, where hundreds of strikers are being served meals, morni ng, noon and night at cost price.

Workers Stand Fast for Davie's Terms of Strike Settlement

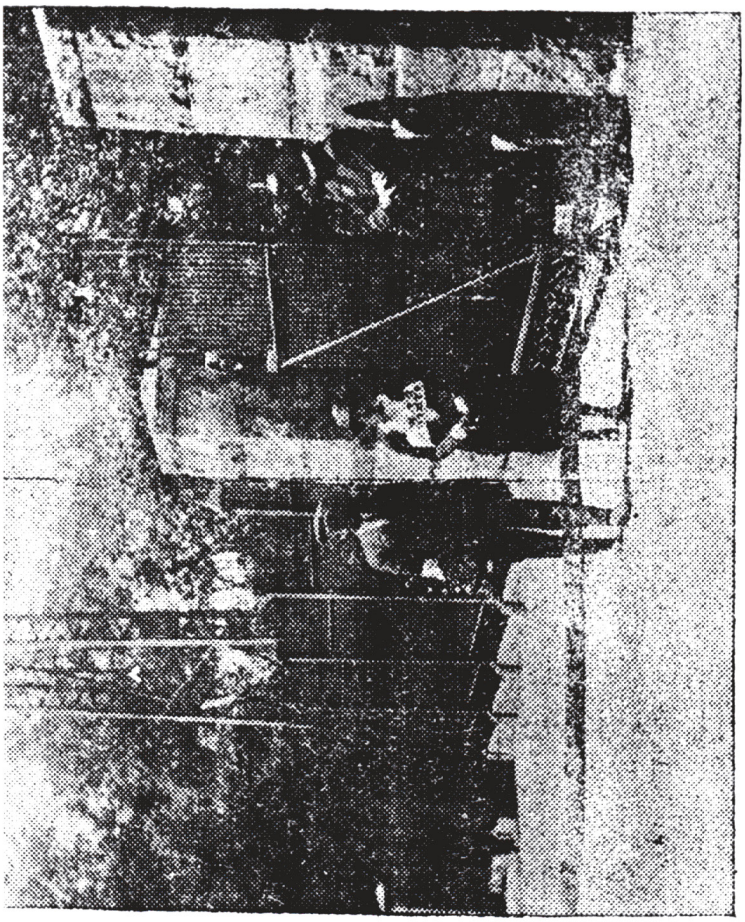


—Union and Leader Art Department

Rev. Herbert R. Whitelock, add ressing crowd of 3,000 strikers at first open air meeting of workers Sunday.

Thousands Line Streets To Watch Opening of Coolidge Mill Gates

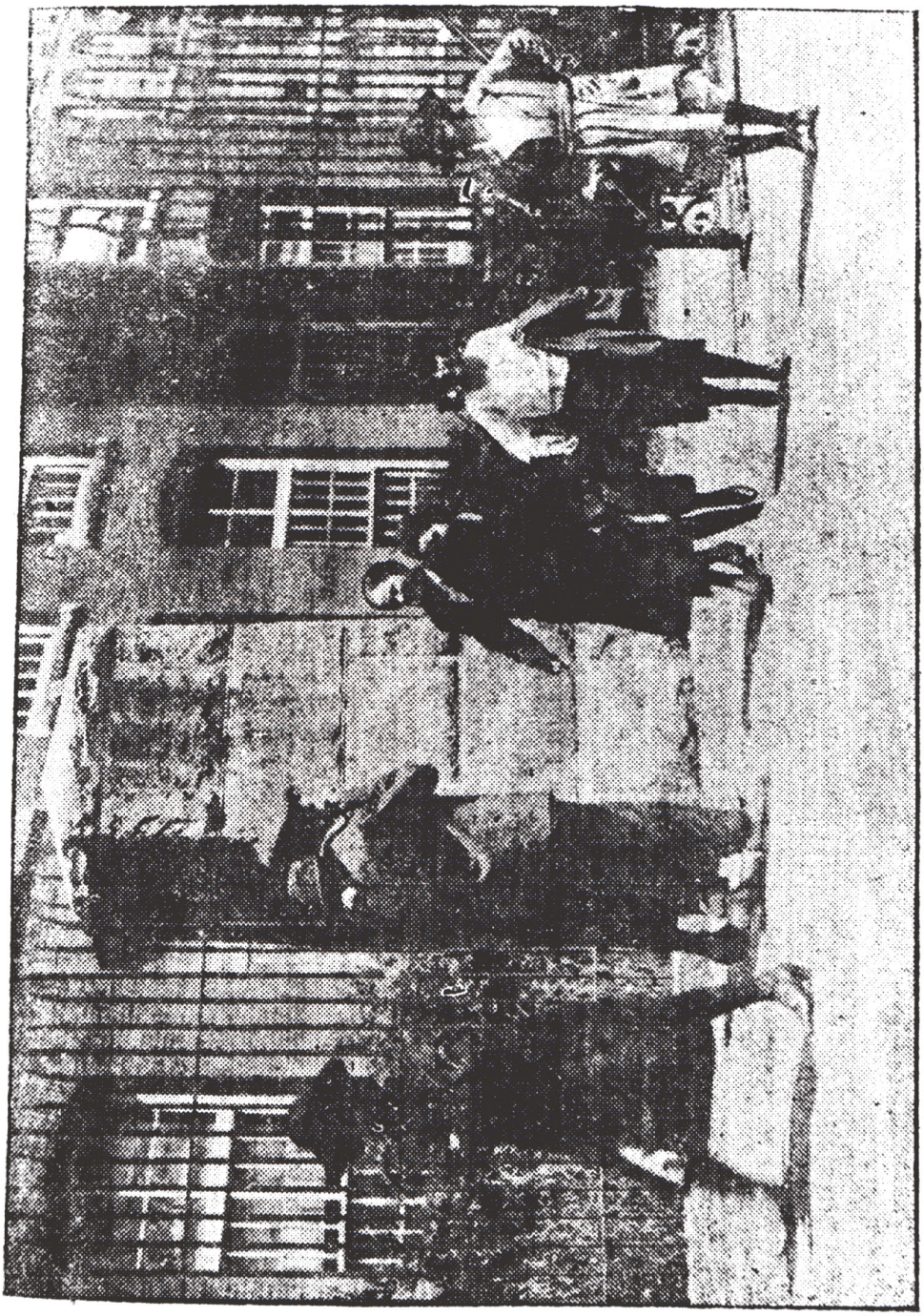
Some of the fair mill workers who, while not on picket duty, watched those reporting for work go in and out of the Coolidge mill.



—Union and Leader Art Department.

The watch on the mill gates. Two pickets and policeman on guard over a Coolidge mill gate at the noon hour.

Noon Hour Scenes Near Gates of Coolidge Mill

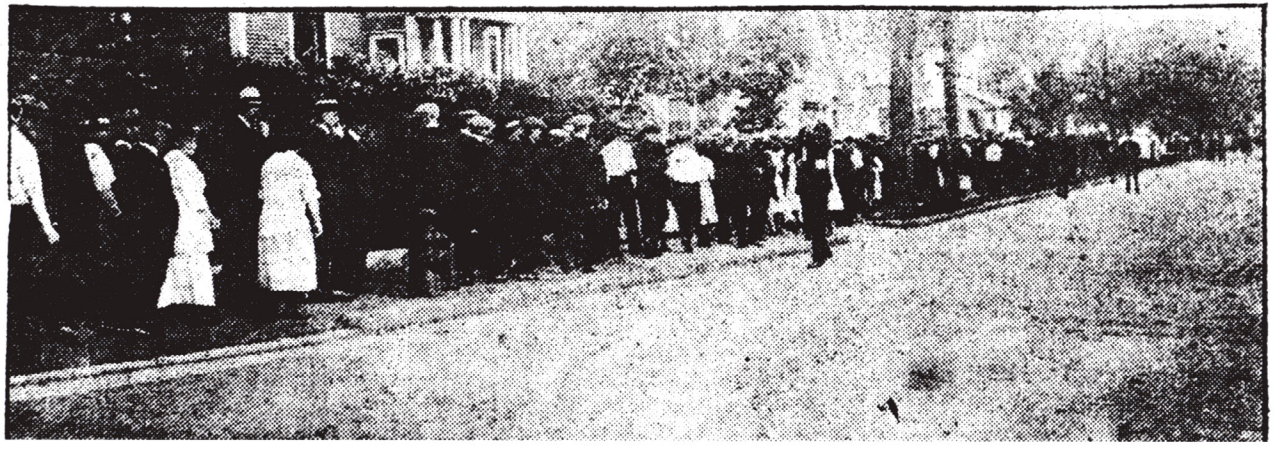


Handful of girl operatives passing the official strike pickets at the gate.

STIRRING INCIDENTS AT COOLIDGE GATES

STRIKING TEXTILE WORKERS OF MANCHESTER, N. H., PREFER HUNGER TO GIVING UP THEIR FIGHT! Not over 80 of the operatives returned to work when the Coolidge section of the Amoskeag Mills was thrown open. Pickets were in evidence at the entrance of the plants. Above is shown a section of the long and strike-weary bread line in front of the strikers' commissary department on Amherst street.

UNION LEADERS' PATROL KEEPS STRIKERS MOVING



Strikers peacefully following Manchester injunction.

—Union and Leader Art Department.

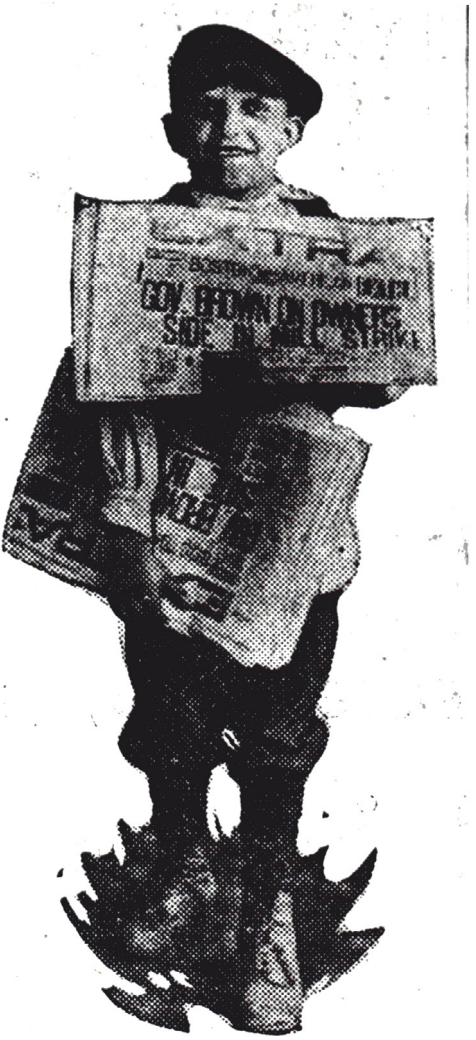
Vice Pres. James Starr directing sidewalk traffic to prevent disorder at opening of Coolidge mill this morning and (above) one of his lieutenants handling big procession, keep everybody in motion.

—Union and Leader Art Department.

Picket with arm band watching over smiling girls at Coolidge mill gate.

Strikers Say Governor of New Hampshire Is Anti-Union

OPPOSING FACTORS IN MILL STRIKE



NEWSBOYS ARE BORN—

Not Made! That's what little Joe Bobola believes. He'd strain a lung any day to sell his favorite newspaper, the Boston American. If you don't think so, walk around Manchester, N. H., any day. He sells it in real "big city" style, too.

DINNER AT AMOSKEAG

WALTER AND DELIA NATELL

A typical sight in Manchester , N. H., where children of the textile mill strikers are seen carrying home the family bread and meat from the well-regulated relief stations. This photograph was taken at the Amherst street commissary.

Mrs Eva Collins

WHY FLOWER DAY IS SUCCESS

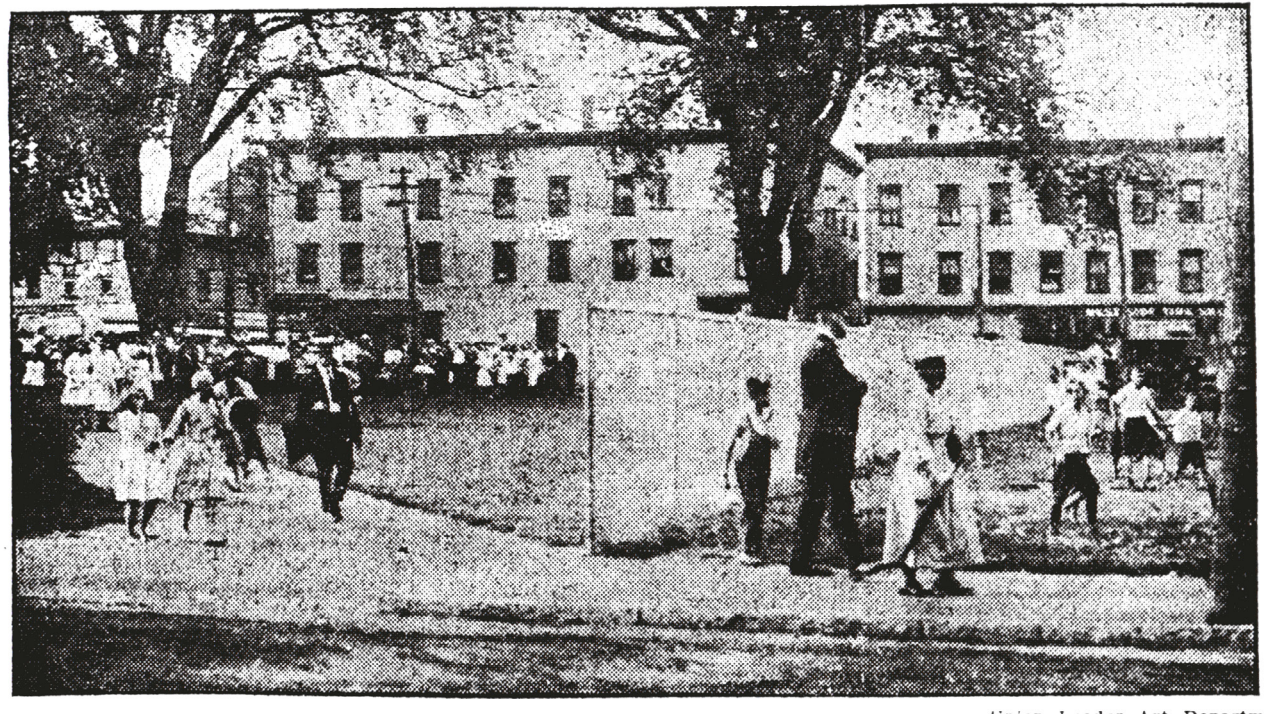
Misses Helen Zedon (left) Bertha Rodman and Stella Kaine selling roses for the textile strike relief fund.

'EATS' FOR AMOSKEAG'S STRIKERS

WHERE THE UNION HELPS IDLE TOILERS

A typical scene at the Amherst street commissary, in Manchester, N. H., which is caring for 1,200 textile strikers and their families. There are two other similar stations in the city. All are under the direction of a General Relief Committee, of which Michael Padden is chairman; Thomas J. Cane, treasurer, and Mrs. Eva Collins secretary. Men, women and young girls, accompanied by small children throng the depots and are supplied with plenty of good, nourishing food, besides doctor's services when needed.

EVENING PARADE AS MILL GATES CLOSE



—Union Leader Art Department.

Officer escorting woman worker near Sweeney park while silent crowds and children look on.

Girl Strikers Do Picket Duty Outside Employment Office of Amoskeag Co.

Picture shows two women strikers picketing the employment office of the Amoskeag Manufacturing company. Judge Branch recently ruled that this is allowable, and the picketing started at noon yesterday.

Getting On Father's Nerves

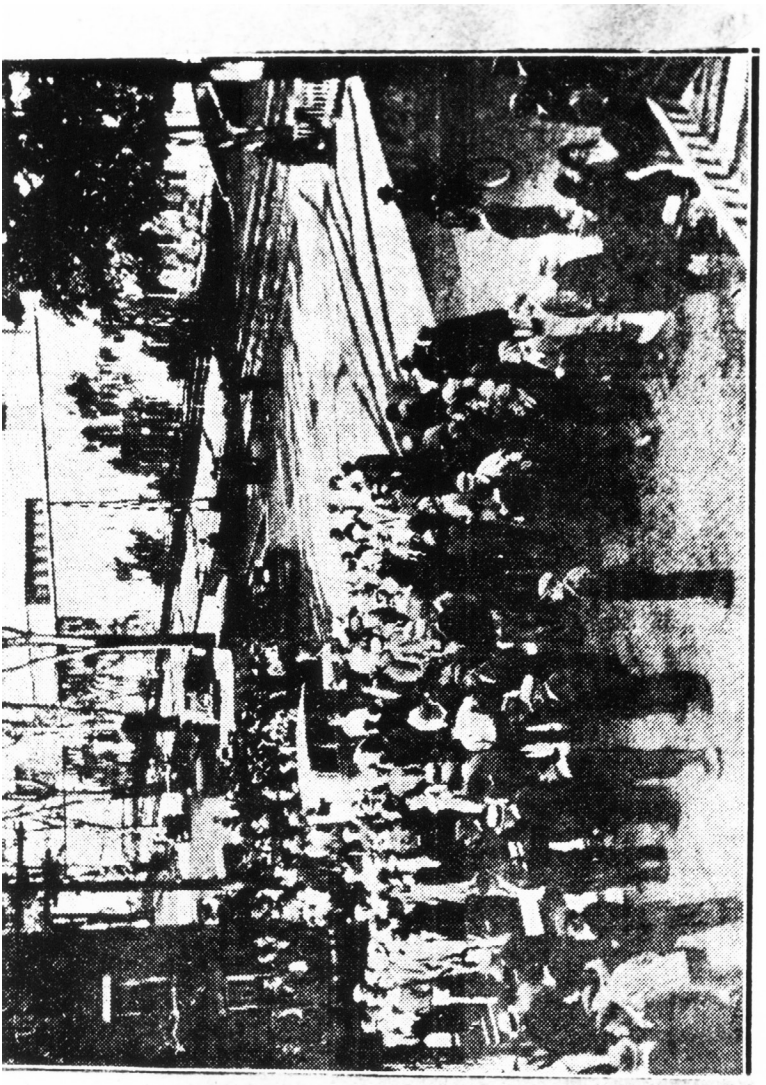
Labor Day Parade of Local Organizations Becomes Demonstration Endorsing Fight of Textile Strikers

Group of textile strike sympathizers in costume, wearing the "eight-hour" placards.

Pictures from Later Strikes

Cops Armed With Clubs

A detail of police officers, each armed with a club, patrolled Canal and Granite streets Wednesday morning, sending away all persons who had no business to be in vicinity. Lieuts. John J. Lynch and Joseph Gorey were in charge of the men. Lieutenant Lynch, left, is shown above with Officer John Sullivan, who were stationed at the main entrance to the Amoskeag Manufacturing company.



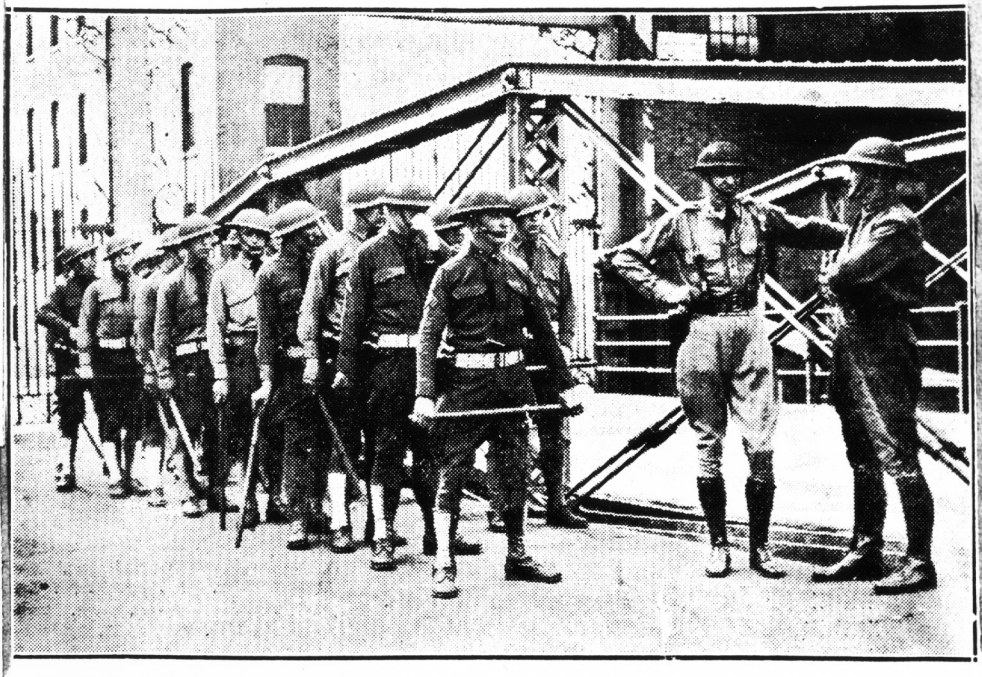
The picture above shows part of the crowd of nearly 300 people which gathered at the main entrance of the Amoskeag company this morning. The men and women strikers were, for the most part, in good humor and they occupied themselves by having a little fun at the expense of a motorcycle officer, who did some kidding on his own hook. The crowd did some booing when ove rseers and employes of the bookkeeping department entered the gates but there was no disorder. The crowd, which started to gather before 6 o'clock, began to disperse at 8 o'clock when the City Hall meeting was announced.

Vigilant Cops Find Crowds Good-Natured

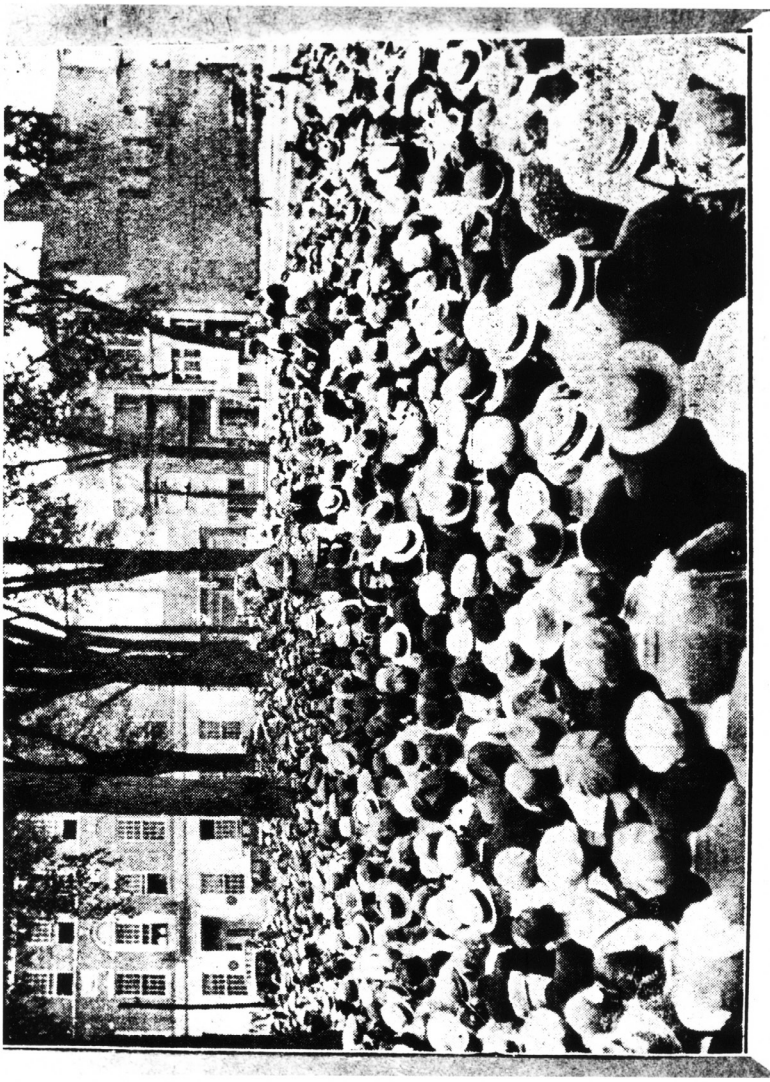
Striking employes of the Amoskeag Manufacturing company congregated at the mill gates yesterday afternoon. Four automobiles loaded with police officers arrived almost simultaneously and warned the strikers against [illegible]istration. The workers, as this picture discloses, were in a cheerful frame of mind and obeyed the police [illegible] to the letter. There was some good natured bantering between the crowd of former workers and the

National guardsmen resorted to tear gas bombs and local police officers wielded sticks freely in last night's encounter with mill strikers on the empty lot off the State armory on Pleasant street. The photo above shows one of the strikers looking along the ground for rocks, while others are depicted with rocks in their hands and looking for targets.

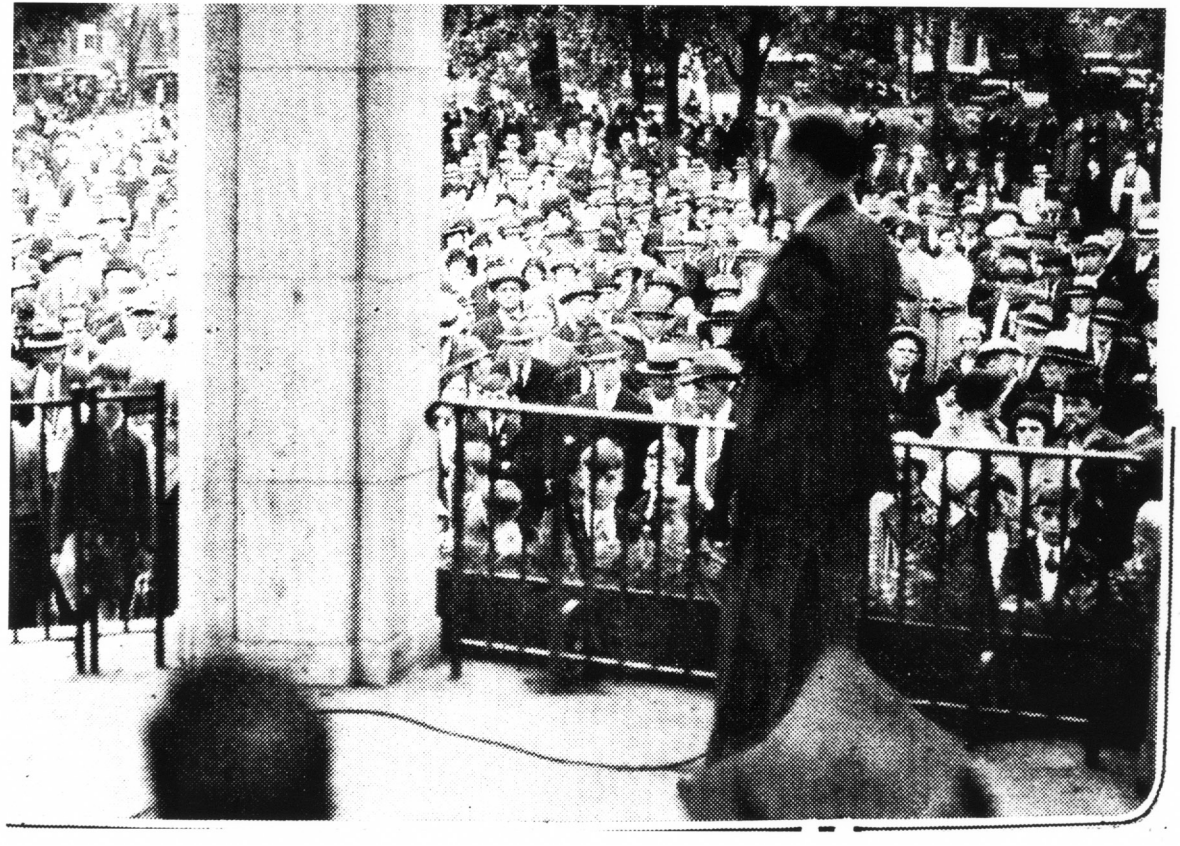
Await Demobilization Orders



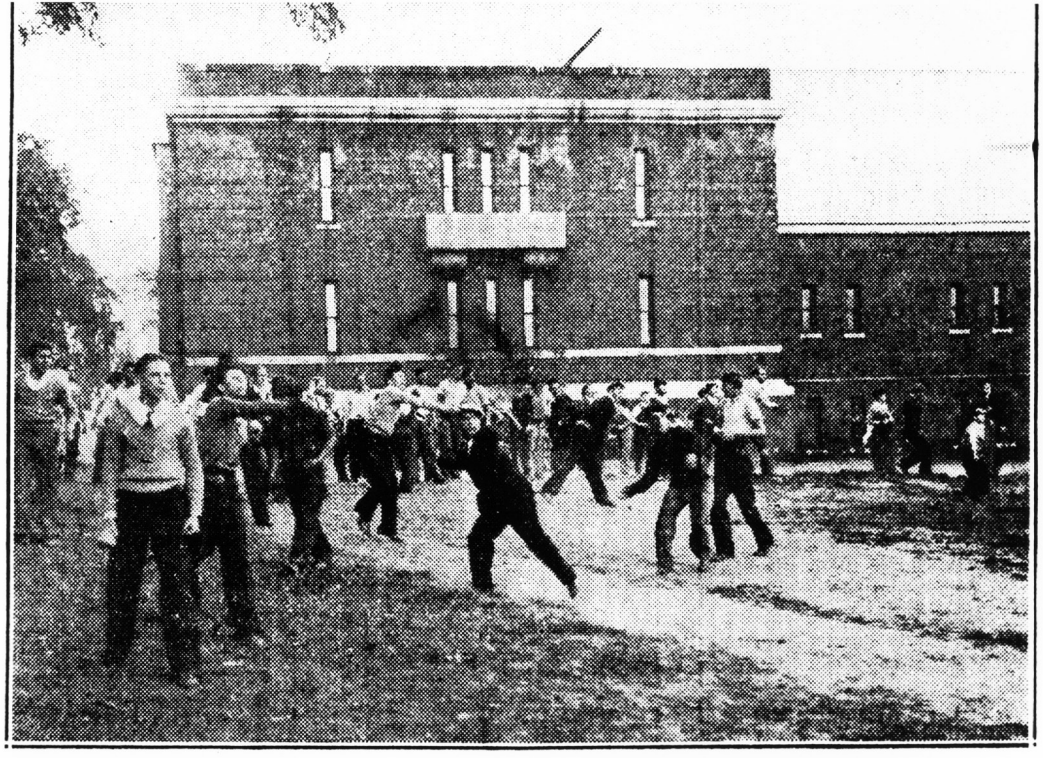
Colonel Rexford (at the extreme right) is shown giving instructions to a detail of national guardsmen before they went on duty outside of the mill gates just before the demonstration that resulted in the use of tear bombs to quell the disorder. The guardsmen were recalled from their posts yesterday morning and spent the day in their temporary barracks in the old Stark mill. Tonight, unless some unexpected disorder occurs, they will be ordered to return home by the governor.



Organizer Horace A. Riviere of the United Textile Workers of America, standing on the platform, admonishes 1,200 striking textile operatives to give thoughtful consideration to Bishop Peterson's proposal to end the strike before taking a vote on acceptance or rejection. The meeting was held yesterday afternoon in Victory Park and another will be held this afternoon. A cheer went up from the crowd upon the announcement that a new proposal was being made by the Amoskeag management through Bishop Peterson.

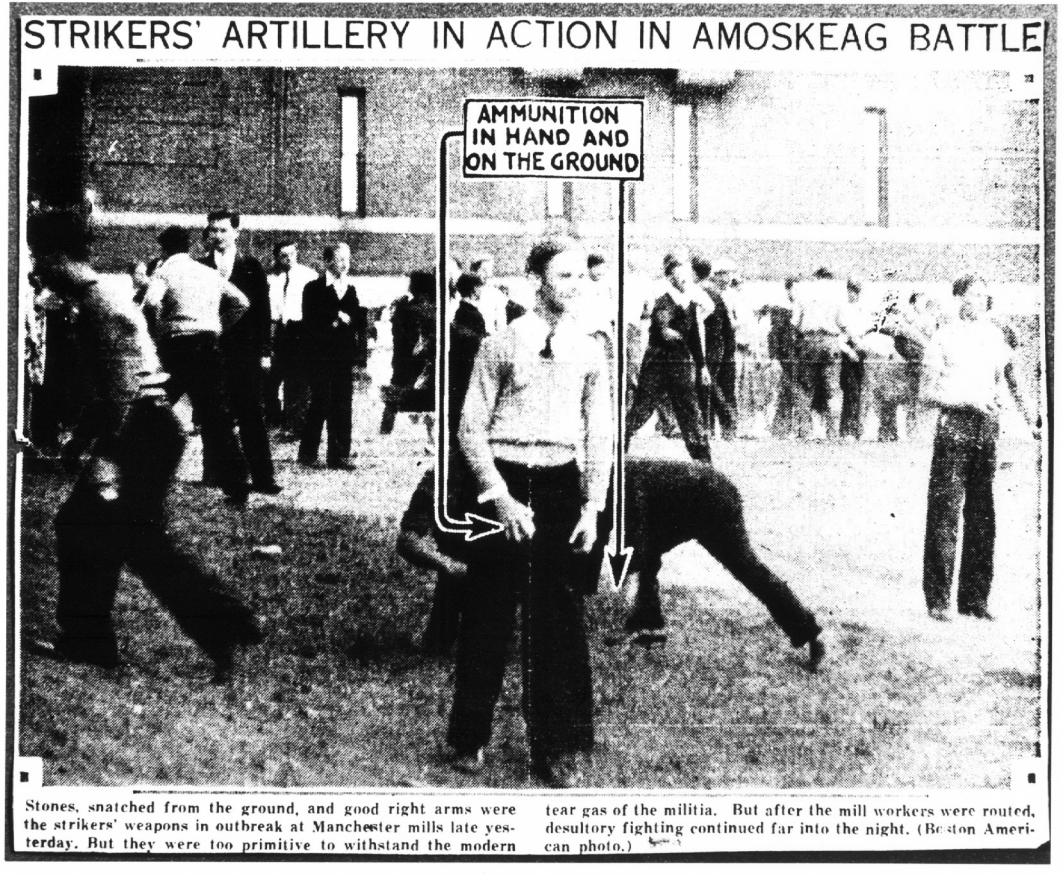


Textile workers in Salem yesterday were urged not to go back to work when it became known that mill owners would refuse to take some of the strikers back. At left is the mass meeting

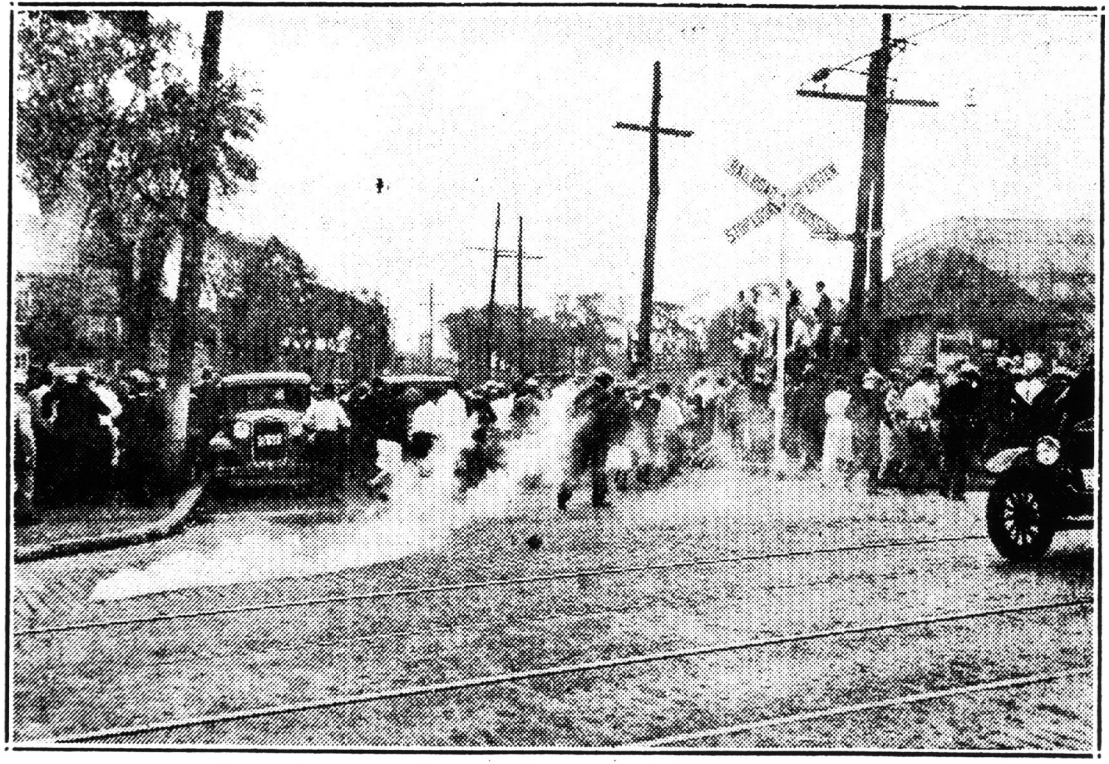


HURLING STONES IN REPRISAL FOR GAS BOMBS AT GUARDSMEN

The photo shows a large group of strikers near the Amoskeag Mills at Manchester, N. H., bombarding the guardsmen, who chased them away with a barrage of tear gas, with stones and brickbats. The action photo was taken in the heat of the encounter. (Photo by Robert Thomson, Post staff photographer.)

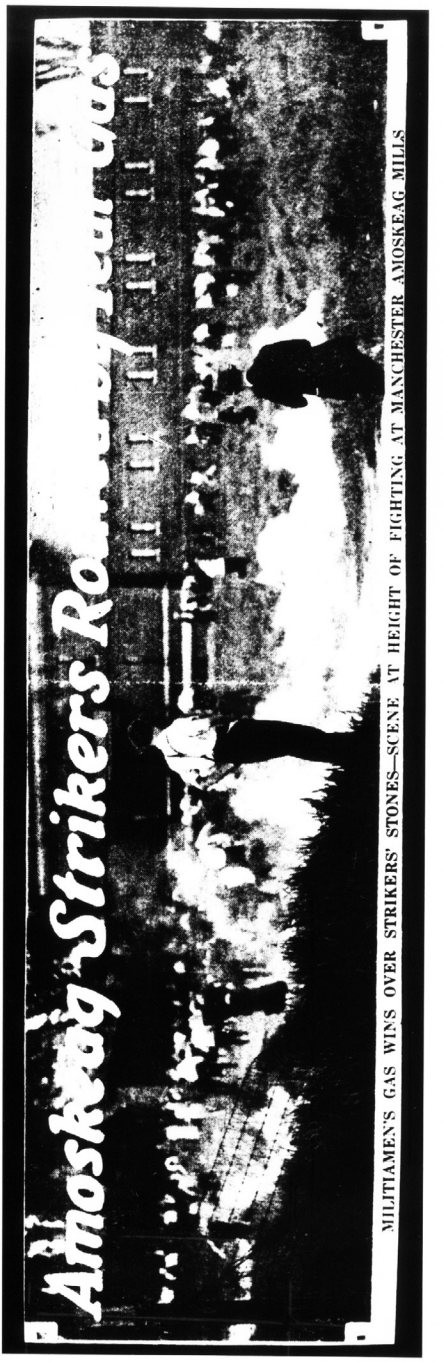


Stones, snatched from the ground, and good right arms were the strikers' weapons in outbreak at Manchester mills late yesterday. But they were too primitive to withstand the modern tear gas of the militia. But after the mill workers were routed, desultory fighting continued far into the night. (Boston American photo.)



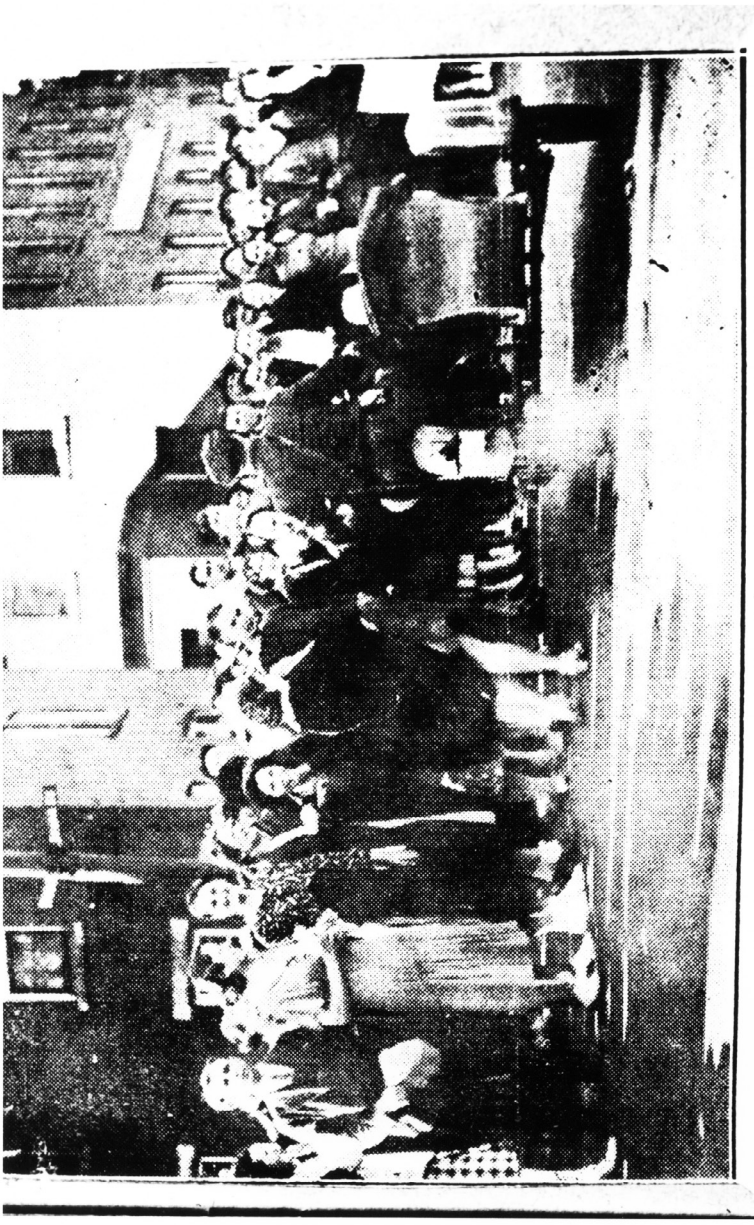
GAS BOMBS BURSTING AS STRIKERS FLEE

The photo shows tear gas bombs hurled by national guardsmen at the Manchester, N. H., strike, to break up a gathering of strikers at the mill gates. Note the strikers turning to flee as the gas bombs burst, spreading the stinging fumes over the street. Photo by Robert Thomson, Post Staff Photogrpher.


Amoskeag Strikers Ro
MILITIAMEN'S GAS WINS OVER STRIKERS' STONES—SCENE AT HEIGHT OF FIGHTING AT MANCHESTER AMOSKEAG MILLS

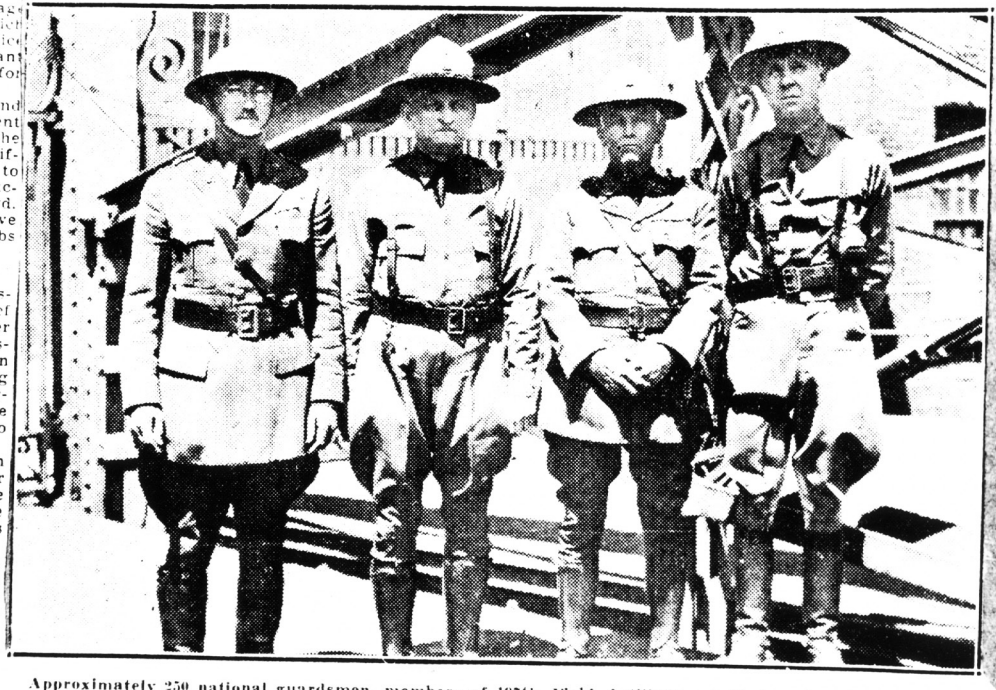
Demonstrators Cause Traffic Tieup

Following the shut down of the Amoskeag mills this forenoon, a group of workers paraded northward o Elm street and westward on Bridge street in an orderly fashion. The impromptu parade, however, resulted in traffic jam. The picture above was snapped as the group crossed Elm street to go west on West Bridge street.



Several hundred people gathered at the main entrance of the Amoskeag company early this morning as overseers and bookkeepers went in to work. However, the crowd, except for a little booing, was in good humor throughout their two-hour stay and they kidded, and were kidded plenty by a motorcycle officer who patrolled the area. The picture above caught the majority of people in a happy frame of mind.

National Guardsmen Quartered in Mills

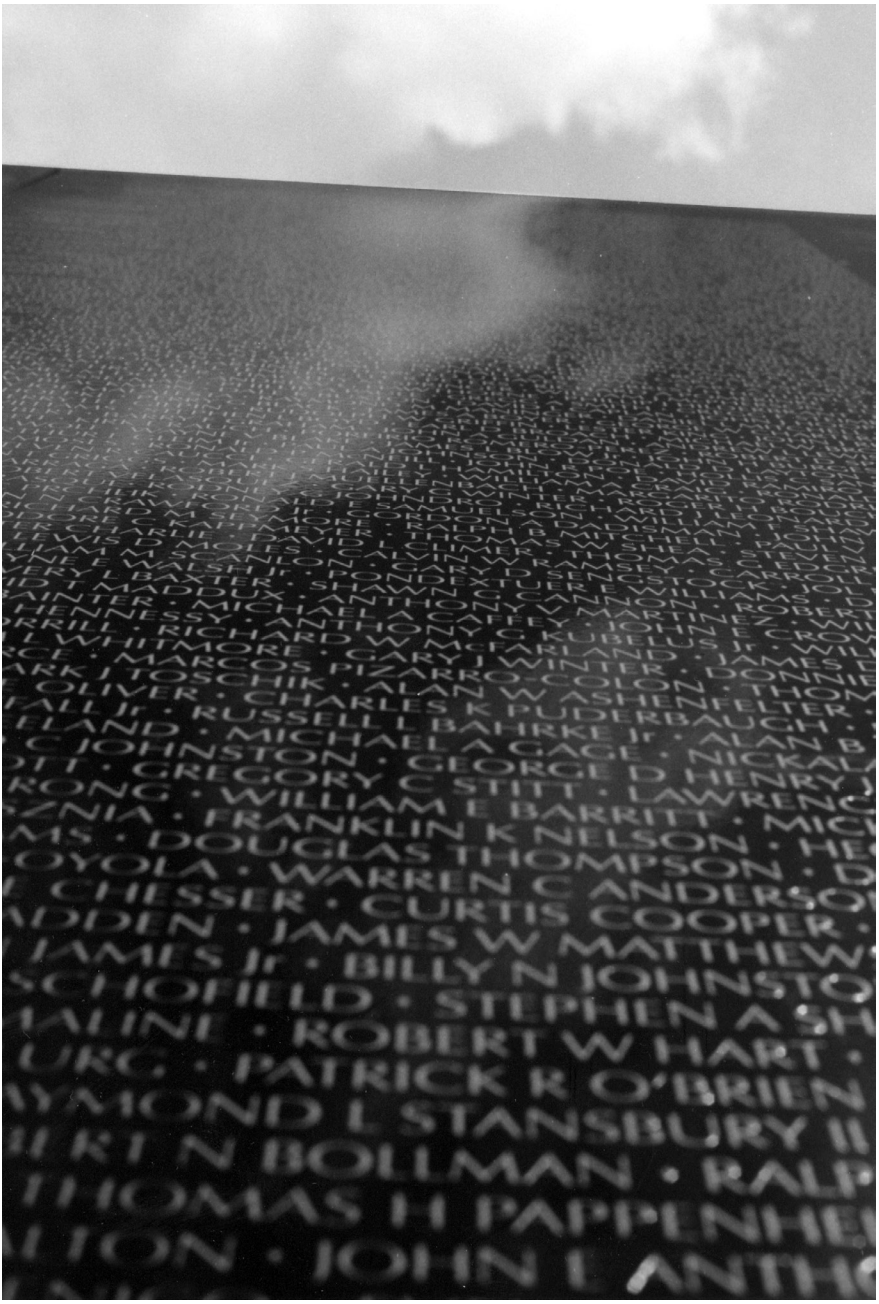


Approximately 250 national guardsmen, members of 197th Field Artillery anti-aircraft, N. H. National Guard, are stationed in this city in connection with the strike. The officers in charge of the men are shown above. Left to right, Col. Clarence E. Rexford, of Concord, commander in charge; Maj. Lloyd Cogswell, of Warner, regimental surgeon; Maj. George R. Bowman, of Laconia, state administrative officer; Capt. Frank P. Wilson, of Concord, regimental adjutant.

As Guardsmen Dispersed Crowds at Mill

Early this forenoon, national guardsmen from Portsmouth, Berlin and Concord, assisted local police in dispersing a large crowd of people which surged at the corner of Stark and Canal streets. The guardsmen and the police succeeded in sending the people back to Elm street. This demonstration, which took place shortly before 8:30 o'clock, was soon followed by another on Elm st[illegible]

The Moving Wall



Photographs by Michael Bettencourt

Here in Boston, July 4 always has the adjective "gala" grafted to it because of the city's tradition of celebrating it with a Boston Pops concert on the spacious Esplanade followed by a dynamite (no pun intended) fireworks display over the Charles River. Several hundred thousand people sardine themselves along the banks of the river and on its arching bridges to catch the foudroyant spectacle and listen to the cannonade rhythms of Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture." Like everyone else, I feel momentarily swaddled in camaraderie, thankful to be a citizen (in its meaning of "member of the city"), unalienated and dazzled.

However, no matter how innovative the pyrotechnicians, no matter how many fizgigs and whiz-bangs and tri-colored star clusters they lob upwards, the celebration can never match the July 4 I spent in Concord, NH, in 1990 covering the visit to the state of The Moving Wall, a mobile version of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C. Throughout that day and throughout that night, and for several days before and after, in solemn parade or solitary vigil, thousands of people came to pay their respects. While the Boston skies rattled with drummed-up patriotism, the air in Concord shimmered with the hues of quiet pain and still-smoldering confusion. Here is an account of that time.

* * * * *

Gary Gordon, former president of the Central New Hampshire Chapter 41 of Vietnam Veterans of America, took a deep sigh and slowly let it out, his face wreathed in a grey beard, on his head his ever-present baseball cap with the Vietnam Veterans patch sewn on it. "Getting the Moving Wall to New Hampshire was something that, if we'd known how hard it was going to be, we probably wouldn't have done it." He paused, then spoke again. "But it was good that we did it. The Wall did what we wanted it to do: educate people, open their eyes, get them to remember what things were like. It was definitely a successful venture."

Successful indeed. Thanks to John Devitt, the driving force behind turning the idea of The Moving Wall into a migratory reality, The Moving Wall, which came to the campus of the New Hampshire Technical Institute in Concord from June 30 to July 6, 1990, drew between 50,000 and 60,000 visitors - 6 percent of the state's population. Devitt began work on it in 1983 as a way for people on the west coast who couldn't get to Washington to see the national memorial.

Work on getting the Wall to New Hampshire began in July 1988 as a kind of off-hand suggestion by one of the vets in the chapter. Gordon and others began to track it down, and with the help of a local radio station employee, they finally contacted Devitt late in July. At their next meeting the chapter members considered the information Devitt sent Gordon, and while everyone signed on to the idea of sponsoring a visit to New Hampshire, they also needed about $6000 to pay for the Wall's transportation, Devitt's expenses and mileage, and security.

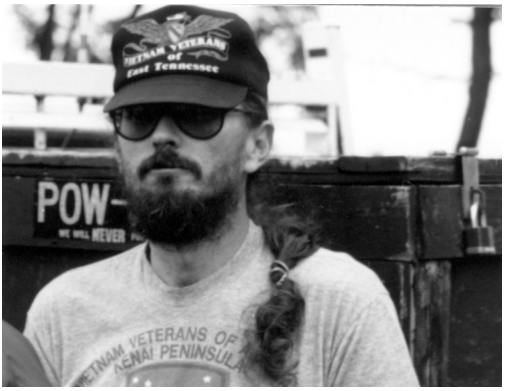
"We started a fundraising drive," Gordon recalled, "without knowing a thing about fundraising." The radio station began airing public service announcements as well as sending the PSAs to other major stations in the state. Gordon began doing interviews on radio talk shows, which so impressed the executive director of the New Hampshire Association of Broadcasters and the publisher of the Manchester Union Leader that they guaranteed to make up any difference Gordon needed to get the $6000. They would also provide free publicity (which eventually totaled about $30,000 in value).

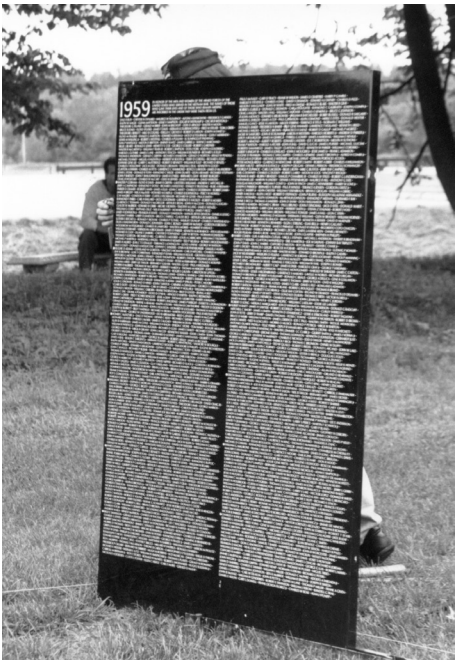
Eventually, with cans distributed around the Concord area bringing in almost $4000 in pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters, and the occasional dollar bill, and other contributions, such as the $300 given by the president of the bank that set up the chapter's account, they raised the $6000. Gordon tells the story of how one woman, living on welfare, could only afford to send in a postage stamp but said that she wanted to be able to contribute something.

By sheer luck they were able to contract for the Wall to be in New Hampshire over the July 4 holiday. On June 29, 1990, the Wall arrived.

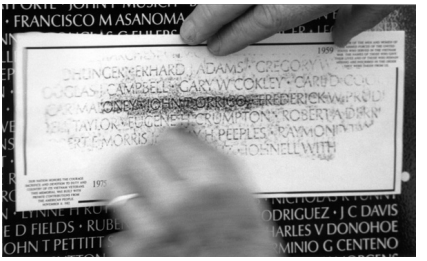
* * * * *

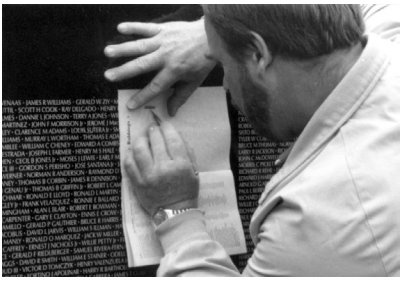
People have already begun to assemble, a day early, as the truck carrying the Wall pulls onto the grassy display area and the assembled vets from Chapter 41 greet its arrival. As the truck driver gets out of his cab, a thick braid of hair roped over his shoulder, "Vietnam Veteran of East Tennessee" embroidered across the brim of his hat, fellow

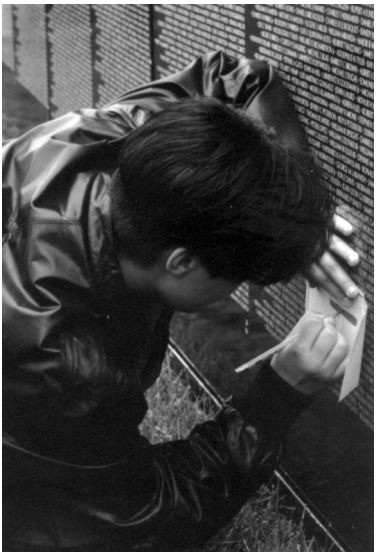



1959

vets embrace him. Panel after panel slides out of the wooden crates, gets set and bolted into place. The men laugh, sweat, banter, curse: they easily orbit each other, all differences and wounds for the moment set aside. Camaraderie of memory, companionship of pain.



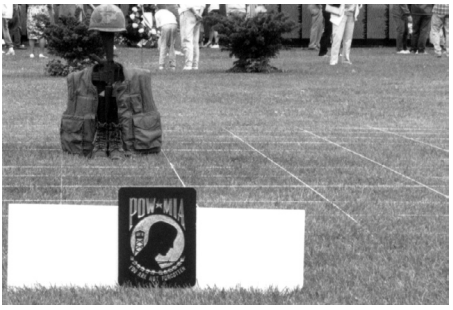




Even before the two long wings spread their long muster, people drift up to see, to discover, to ease into. The journalists arrive to make their records. Volunteers with directories circulate location numbers, and people start taking their stencils. Bit by bit, like some one-part-in-a-billion scent, the Wall marks the air. People's lungs fill with it, and they must come to this spot to breathe.

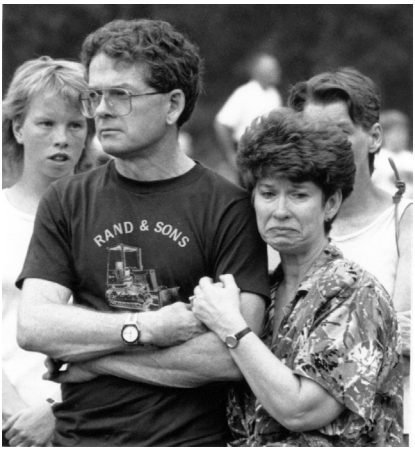
The next day, the official day of arrivals, formal ceremonies begin at 10 a.m. with the usual gaggle of politicians; the Gold Star mothers in the front row; the presentation of the colors - all the correct protocol. But at 6 PM, away from the official rostrum and assembled folding chairs, embraced by the black arms of the Wall, a voice begins reading the names of the New Hampshire dead, 226 of them, and the real opening begins.

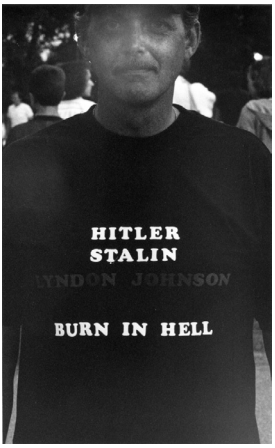
Laid out on the ground in front of the microphone is a grid of string; at each corner of each square a volunteer will plant a flag for each name. In the middle of the square is a rifle stuck barrel-first in the ground; a flak jacket hangs from the rifle, a pair of boots at its hem, a helmet balanced on the stock. As the voice goes through the letters - Abbott, Terry Michael; Guild, Eliot Franklin - people



hang their heads or turn away or wait with old pain on their faces. Kilton, Stanley Roy Jr.; Perrault, David B. - the steady stream of people carrying the flags, then putting them into the ground, then marching away to get another flag, matches the elegiac rhythms of the unfurling syllables. Towle, Gary Chester; Wiley, Alden Bertram - everyone breathes slowly and carefully on this hallowed ground.

Then one vet walks up to the microphone, holds a cassette player up to it, and turns it on. The lone keen of Taps spans the dusk. Hands snap to brows in salutes; hands cup hearts; time stops. Each note edges the twilight air with its brass sadness, and for the duration of the music everyone is in community, their



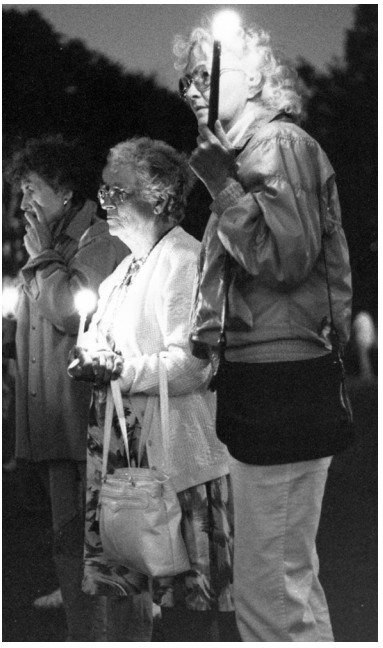


private losses linked and shared. It is a moment of grief and promise, void and redemption. “Thank you, New Hampshire,” a voice shouts into the microphone. At night, candles will burn between the rows of flags, their flames dancing the stripes and stars against the darkness.

* * * * *

After a while the pointing, the etching, the amended explanations for children become the ordinary folkways of this bounded geography, with stories full of acid and irony - and accidental joy. David Moorhead, at Tet. Landed in January. Shot in February, eight bullets, burned with phosphorous. All this explained by his wife as he stares at a panel of names. He speaks. “I don’t remember anything. I was looking for names, to jog my memory.” He pauses. “When I got back, people would throw shit on me, call me names. I didn’t do anything wrong. I didn’t do anything wrong!” His wife walks away a step, then turns back. “I didn’t kill any babies. I wish I could remember.”

Yet two men looking for each other’s name literally bump into one another as they traverse the panels, unaware that the other was alive and in New Hampshire. Men who had been only voices on the radio to platoon commanders suddenly take shape and heft. Two men serving on the same battleship no more than a hundred feet from each other take twenty years to learn they live just a town apart.



What brought you here? “I lost my fiancé.... We didn’t have the catharsis of victory; it was a different war.” What brought you here? “My heart.” What brought you here? “To remember.” What brought you here tonight? “I am looking for a friend of my parents.... I am sick to my stomach.” What brought you here? “I don’t know why I’m here and they’re not. A matter of luck, a game of

inches." A little girl, pointing to her brother rolling around in the grass, shouts to her father, "He said that all those flags will turn into flowers." He laughs loudly.

At night dew settles on the aluminum panels in a grey sheen, and here and there it's wiped away by a handprint, stark black against the mist - a second record of touch and touched. The people at midnight number a dozen, maybe two, sometimes in pairs, often alone. What brings you here tonight? "During the day it's for a lot of people, bringing their kids, talking, looking on. But at night it's really a memorial. You can come here and pay your respects, be private with your grief." What brings you here tonight? "After 23 years, someone finally said "Welcome home.'" What brings you here tonight? "I don't want to see any more memorials."

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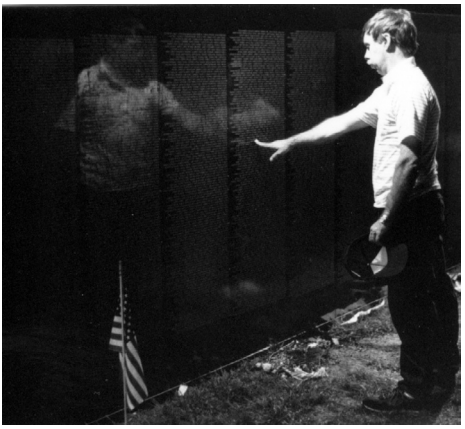
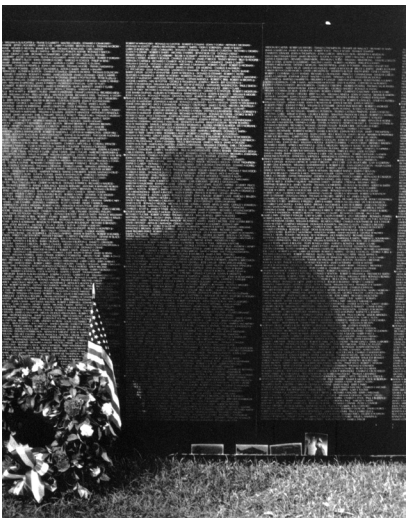




Two AM: the air lapped with dew, the moon long descended; only a few stars litter the sky. July 4th. I sit with three men under a large green Army tent; a fourth dozes on a cot in the corner. We speak of nothing in particular, the mosquitoes and hot coffee cups in our hands keeping us in a semblance of awake. Outside the thrown ambit of yellow light another tent humps against the darkness, where other men rest or sit alone, their thin silhouettes etched against the residual light. They are all keeping a vigil, they have all been keeping a vigil for five days now, keeping a watch over the Wall.

A single man stands in the soft glow of the floodlights. Time has moved to 2:15. Dressed in fatigues and combat boots, bare headed, he moves slowly along the black plane ghosted with a frost of names. Candles set along the base of the Wall earlier in the evening gutter; their chancy flicker falls on bouquets, photographs, hand-scrawled notes, poems, wreaths. He ghosts in and out of the islands of light, the number of names he passes increasing with each step. At the mid-point, where 1959 meets 1975, he stops. His hand reaches out, brushes against a name, tracing its length one way, back the other. He stiffens his body tall and his right hand leaps up in a salute. He snaps the salute with a brisk, almost savage, grace, then turns and walks away into the darkness.

The man next to me doesn't say anything, just looks down into his coffee and stares.

* * * * *

The final ceremonies. All day people have been reading the names of the MIA's, an eight-hour roll call. Finally, the last name from Wyoming is read; the sun rips the day's blue into dusk. Long, thin, white candles appear in people's hands, and these exclamations of light punctuate the coming darkness. A few more speeches, the names of New Hampshire's MIA's, a song from a vet, and finally Taps one last time. The filled air thrums and embraces.

Then all the members of Chapter 41 gather together, and, shielding their candles, the dozen and a half of them march to the point where 1959 meets 1975. Holding the candles aloft they shout on a count of three, "Welcome home." Then they embrace in the way men do, with large slaps on the back and a quick, tourniquet squeeze of the arms. The people around them, still holding candles, laugh and embrace, and from somewhere begins applause that ripples like wind through ripe wheat. The Wall is open all night again, and still the people come.

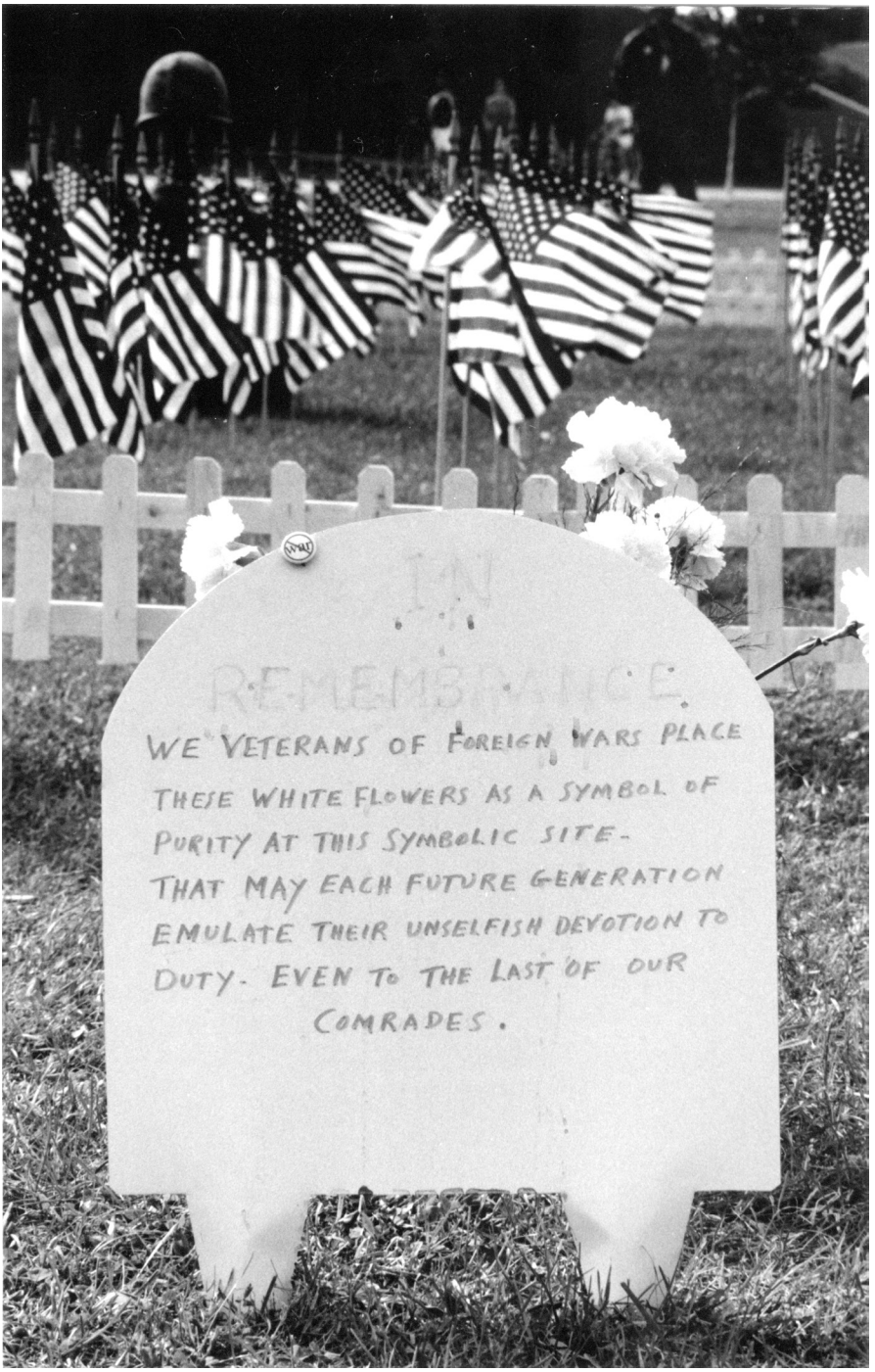
* * * * *

Seven AM: the truck is pulled up and the panels get re-slotted in their crates, then the track and spikes. Several do a final garbage check. Then a quick goodbye to the driver and the truck pulls away. The men look at one another, shake hands, go to their cars and vans and motorcycles. The day promises abundant sunshine.

* * * * *

It's difficult to describe in words what the Wall meant, what it did to and for people, but here's one fact that at least indicates the Wall's power: People left behind over 800 artifacts - letters, shirts, pictures, flags, medals - enough to cover twenty-six 8-foot long cafeteria tables. In the end, the Wall is nothing more and nothing less than an epic narrative of agony and remorse, failure and guilt, but also of incredible courage and tenderness displayed in a time and place that guaranteed to kill off decency. And each person who witnesses the Wall, whose face is reflected back from its black enameled panels ghosted with names, extends the narrative and keeps it alive so that we can never forget and never again have cause to build another war memorial.

The Wall is now gone. Gordon says the chapter will take a break before tackling anything else, but its next big project will be to put its scholarship program on a solid financial footing. He also says there's talk about bringing the Wall back, but for now he's content that people have seen it and have had their memories refreshed. "The learning was there," he says with a smile, "especially for the children."


IN
REMEMBRANCE
WE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS PLACE
THESE WHITE FLOWERS AS A SYMBOL OF
PURITY AT THIS SYMBOLIC SITE-
THAT MAY EACH FUTURE GENERATION
EMULATE THEIR UNSELFISH DEVOTION TO
DUTY- EVEN TO THE LAST OF OUR
COMRADES.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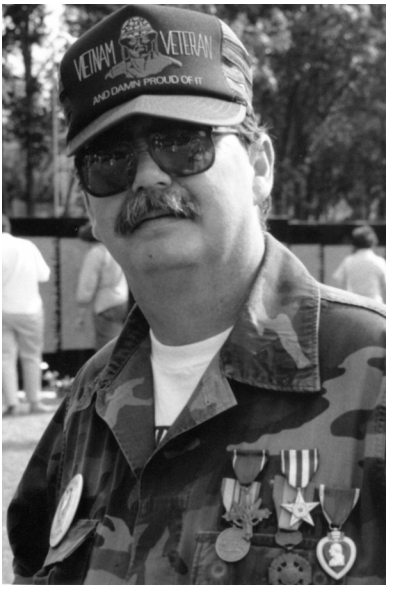
VIETNAM VETERAN
AND DAMN PROUD OF IT


VETERANS FOR
PEACE


YOU ARE NOT FORGOTTEN

Afterthoughts

What are we to make of Vietnam, ended now for two decades? Many vets still see it as the pivotal (and some the most damnable) moment of their lives, while other vets have found a place for it and gone on. Some people want to make sure that it persists in our national memory as an inoculation against ever again invading another country, while others see the "Vietnam syndrome" as a shorthand for a national and moral weakness that hinders a realistic foreign policy. Movie after movie has glorified the "grunts" and attempted to win the war for them, but none, except perhaps Stanley Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket,* has examined the validity or coherence of the attitudes and policies that mired those grunts in Vietnam.

In these and a thousand other ways, Vietnam haunts us - but why? What is it about this war that will not leave us alone? Even though it was billed as a war to stop communism, Vietnam eventually became another American civil war, and the dread and havoc generated by our first civil war came virulently back to life during our second. Reaction to the war revealed the fault lines in a society that declared itself democratic and free but where elected leaders lied, corporations gouged, equality and justice got betrayed daily, and poverty gave the lie to economic opportunity. Under the enzymatic pressure of the war, we had to face and judge the quality and completeness of our commitment to democracy, and that effort splintered us because it showed how much we didn't have in common.

That fractured portrait of a nation at odds with its own ideals still haunts us because we're still at those same odds even after twenty years of counting the dead and recounting why things didn't work. "Vietnam" is cognate with loss, of human lives, of ideals, of chances, of purpose, and the roster of 50,000 names is the indissoluble reminder of those losses.

And yet...there comes a time to either let the wound resolve into poison or make the effort to heal. Each of the names on the wall, and the names of the Vietnamese and Cambodians and Laotians we'll never know, is a call to do what we need to do to make good on the promises we've made to ourselves about freedom and prosperity, about justice and happiness. If we don't do that work of political redemption, if we don't make the words these people died for flesh on the bones of each citizen, then the word "Vietnam" will always remind us of what we are not now.

The lesson of Vietnam is that we need finally to become the United States, not a landscape of corporations and political shills, but a country that makes freedom and justice common miracles.

* * * * *

Excerpts from people's comments and artifacts left at the Wall

"He was like a son to me. We would sit in the car and talk. He came home once and he was safe. But he went back and he was killed on his 21st birthday."

"I'm doing okay at not doing okay."

"And ya know the sad thing - we didn't get nothin' out of it."

"Flower petals scattered to the winds."

"Shine on, you crazy diamond....Come on you rover, you seer of visions, come on you painter, you piper, you prisoner, and shine!"

"...a time for remembering the names in the light."

"In the silence of the Wall I have felt healing in the remembrance."

"So your names may be carved on this wall, but you will be permanently carved in our hearts and minds."

About Block & Tackle Productions

After more than a decade of projects together, Michael Bettencourt and Elfin Frederick Vogel joined forces to form Block & Tackle Productions. In addition to producing Michael's plays with Elfin directing, B&T Productions also looks to collaborate with other playwrights and directors and explore different media for dramatic narrative, such as live-streaming theatrical productions, recording radio-play podcasts, and creating short films.

Whichever project B&T Productions pursues, it will create theatre narratives focused on our present times and where every part of the production - design (set, lighting, sound, media), performance, script, the brand of beer sold in the lobby, and the pre-show music - relates to and nourishes every other part. As often as possible, B&T Productions will do this in collaboration or conjunction with like-minded theatre-makers.

Elfin Frederick Vogel (Producer/Director) - Elfin has directed over thirty productions in New York City and regional theatres, from classical plays (among others, *Othello*, *As You Like It*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Measure for Measure*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*) to 20th-century plays (*Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *The Real Thing*, *Exit the King*) and new plays, among them *Only the Dead Know Brooklyn*, *Excerpts from the Lost Letters of Hester Prynne*, *No Great Loss*, *Four Plays*, *The Sin Eater* (all by Michael Bettencourt), and *Moral and Political Lessons on "Wyoming"* and *Reckless Abandon* (by Vincent Sessa).

Michael Bettencourt (Producer/Writer) - Michael is an award-winning playwright and screenwriter. As always, special thanks to María Beatriz. All his work can be seen at www.m-bettencourt.com

Block & Tackle PRODUCTIONS

www.blockandtackleproductions.com