

Evangelical Paternalism and Divided Workers: The Nonunion Era at John Morrell and Company in Ottumwa, 1877–1917

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THE JOHN MORRELL AND COMPANY meatpacking plant in Ottumwa, Iowa, was a center of militant unionism for forty years. A hotbed of the CIO's United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) from the mid-1930s to 1973, Ottumwa was a community in which militant unionism revolutionized workplace relations at the Morrell plant, the city's dominant blue-collar employer, and transformed community life and politics. This aggressive union tradition emerged, however, out of an older nonunion heritage that did not anticipate workers' later militance. Until the World War I era, unionism was absent at Morrell-Ottumwa except for a brief span from 1901 to 1904.¹

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1. Wilson J. Warren, "The Welfare Capitalism of John Morrell and Company, 1922–1937," *Annals of Iowa* 47 (1984), 485–512; idem, "The 'Peoples' Century' in Iowa: Coalition-Building among Farm and Labor Organizations, 1945–1950," *ibid.* 49 (1988), 371–93; idem, "The Heyday of the CIO in Iowa: Ottumwa's Meatpacking Workers, 1937–1954," *ibid.* 51 (1992), 363–89; and idem, "When 'Ottumwa Went to the Dogs': The Erosion of Morrell-Ottumwa's Militant Unionism, 1954–1973," *ibid.* 54 (1995), 217–43.

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This virtual lack of unionism among turn-of-the-century Morrell-Ottumwa workers is puzzling given developments in Ottumwa and elsewhere during this period. The Knights of Labor, America's first widespread industrial union movement, gained support throughout the Midwest during the 1880s. Local assemblies also proliferated in Iowa, including several assemblies, primarily consisting of coal miners, founded in the south-central part of the state from the late 1870s to the 1890s. Ottumwa's Knights of Labor Local Assembly No. 7126, in existence from 1886 to 1893, enrolled three hundred mostly coal-mining members in 1888. In the same year, Ottumwa members of the railroad brotherhoods were discharged in the great rail strike. Although the depression of the 1890s "obliterated the midwestern remnants of the [already declining] Knights of Labor," Morrell's workers certainly knew of various union movements.²

Several factors explain the lack of packinghouse unionism at Ottumwa during this era. Some are peculiar to the Morrell plant. Perhaps the most important consideration was the role of Thomas Dove Foster. Plant manager and company president from the plant's founding in 1877 until his death in 1915, Foster presided over his employees with a paternalistic hand. His efforts discouraged the unionization of Morrell-Ottumwa's workers. Several other developments, shared by other packing plants during the same period, reinforced nonunionism. Workers were divided between those who worked year-round and those who did not; the bulk of the plant's workers during the pre-World War I years were seasonal. Differences in skill and ethnicity also fragmented workers. And the ineffectiveness of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America (AFL) in recruiting workers in meatpacking plants outside of the large midwestern cities also contributed to the plant's non-union standing.

2. Daniel Nelson, *Farm and Factory: Workers in the Midwest, 1880-1990* (Bloomington, IN, 1995), 39-46, quote from p. 45; Ralph Scharnau, "The Knights of Labor in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 50 (1991), 861-91; Shelton Stromquist, *A Generation of Boomers: The Pattern of Railroad Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana, IL, 1987), 223; and Jonathan Garlock, *Guide to the Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor* (Westport, CT, 1982), 112-29, Appendix D.

BURIED IN A SIDE COLUMN in the middle of the November 13, 1877, issue of the *Ottumwa Daily Courier* was a brief announcement: "The pork house commenced operations, this afternoon." Obscurity thus characterized the start of the plant that was to be Ottumwa's economic mainstay for the next century and one of the most prominent meatpacking plants in the Midwest. The company was founded in Bradford, England, in 1827 by a wool comber turned entrepreneur named George Morrell. His son John, for whom the company was named, became president in 1842. After establishing a meatpacking plant in Castlecomer, Ireland, the company moved its headquarters to Liverpool in 1860. Morrell opened its first North American packing plant in London, Ontario, in 1868. The company opened a plant in Chicago in 1871, and three years later moved the headquarters of its American branch there.³

In 1874 Morrell officials decided to find a new location for their hog slaughtering operations. By that time Iowa had already been a major corn-hog producer for three decades. Because meatpacking in the Civil War and Reconstruction eras was strictly seasonal—without mechanical refrigeration pork could only be packed safely once freezing temperatures generated lake or river ice in late fall—the state's first packing houses were located in towns along the Mississippi and Des Moines Rivers. Ottumwa had been Iowa's major interior packing center since the 1860s. As was true in most midwestern packing centers then, merchant-wholesalers dominated the city's meatpacking industry. According to historian Margaret Walsh, merchant-wholesalers sold a variety of agricultural commodities, but they would set aside part of their warehouse space during the winter months to accommodate meatpacking operations. The Jack D. Ladd and Mitchell plant, run by the so-named merchant-wholesalers, reached its peak production in 1862–63, but then struggled in the postwar years. When Thomas Dove Foster, John Morrell's nephew, was sent out from Chicago to look for a new plant

3. *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, 13 November 1877; Lawrence Oakley Cheever, *The House of Morrell* (Cedar Rapids, 1948), chaps. 1–4. See also *The Fruits of 100 Years* (Ottumwa, 1927) for an anecdotal, company-sponsored perspective on Morrell's origins.

location, he found the Ladd facility defunct but suitable for initial production. Ottumwa's location on major railroad lines, the ice-cutting potential of the Des Moines River, and the city's location in what would soon be the top hog-producing state in the United States—Iowa surpassed Illinois and Ohio by 1880—clinched Foster's decision to recommend the city for Morrell's new pork packing plant, one specializing in packing and not part of a broader wholesale-merchant operation.⁴

Ottumwa was just over three decades old when Morrell launched its packing business there in November 1877. Since being founded in the 1840s by six developers of the Appanoose Rapids Company, the town had reached a population of nearly nine thousand. Situated in Iowa's coal country and already an important railroad nexus, Ottumwa was also a market center in southeast Iowa. Although the city had its share of business leaders, including George Ballingall, another capitalist who began as merchant-wholesale packer in the Civil War era, Thomas Dove Foster quickly assumed top billing among the city's business elite.⁵

Born on November 25, 1847, Foster was the grandson of George Morrell, and son of George's daughter, Mary, and William Foster, a longtime business associate of George's. "T. D.," as he was usually referred to, spent much of his adolescence in Castlecomer, Ireland, where he learned the pork packing busi-

4. Cheever, *The House of Morrell*, 53–54, 71–72; John C. Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt: A Geographical History of Middle-Western Agriculture* (Bloomington, IN, 1994), 101–3; Margaret Walsh, "From Pork Merchant to Meat Packer: The Midwestern Meat Industry in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Agricultural History* 56 (1982), 127–37; idem, "The Spatial Evolution of the Mid-western Pork Industry, 1835–75," *Journal of Historical Geography* 4 (1978), 1–22; and H. H. McCarty and C. W. Thompson, *Meat Packing in Iowa*, Iowa Studies in Business, vol. 12 (Iowa City, 1933), 30. McCarty and Thompson note that "Ottumwa was not the first interior packing point [in Iowa], but it was the first to rise to a position of major importance." For further insight on the seasonality of the packing industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894–1922* (Urbana, IL, 1987), 28–29.

5. Mildred Throne, "A Population Study of an Iowa County," *Iowa Journal of History* 57 (1959), 308; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States*, vol. 1, *Population* (Washington, DC, 1883), 449; Stromquist, *A Generation of Boomers*, 158–61, 181.

ness as both a laborer and hog buyer. A valued employee before his twentieth birthday, T. D. was made manager and chief representative of Morrell's American branch in 1871. According to company lore, Foster's strict Presbyterian background and training in the family business singled him out in John Morrell's eyes.⁶

Many old Morrell hands accompanied Foster to Ottumwa when the packing plant opened. Among them was a small group of hog butchers and T. D. Foster's cousin, R. N. Morrell, an office manager from the Chicago plant. The hog butchers included Alex Crosby, Fred Bullock, Robert Williams, John Cassiday, John Van Hewesling, and Peter Liddy. Bullock, who had worked at Morrell's London, Ontario, plant and would later become the Ottumwa plant superintendent, was born in England. Williams was born in Wales, Cassiday in Ireland, and Van Hewesling in Germany. Starting a trend that continued through much of the nonunion era, Morrell relied on foreigners, especially English, for its skilled and managerial positions. Although foreigners also dominated the "butcher aristocracy" in other midwestern meatpacking plants, they were often Germans and Irish, as they were in Chicago.⁷

Through at least 1880 Morrell used both the old Ladd plant building and a new building constructed on the east edge of the city in 1878. During the winter peak of slaughtering in 1880, Morrell employed some 265 men. The core, year-round work force appears to have been just less than half that figure. Thirty percent of the work force in 1880 was foreign-born, compared to 15 percent of Ottumwa's total population. Sixty-five percent of the workers lived in Ward One, where the plant itself was also situated, compared to 30 percent of the city's total population. Many Morrell workers boarded in company-owned housing located in Hayne's Addition of Ward One, a neighborhood just west of the plant. Most notable about the workers was the division in nativity between the core of foreign-born, mostly English,

6. Cheever, *House of Morrell*, 11, 16, 45-46.

7. *Ibid.*, 82; 1880 U.S. Manuscript Census. Peter Liddy was listed in the census with an "unknown" birthplace, and Alex Crosby was not listed. On Chicago's butcher aristocracy, see Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 38-44.

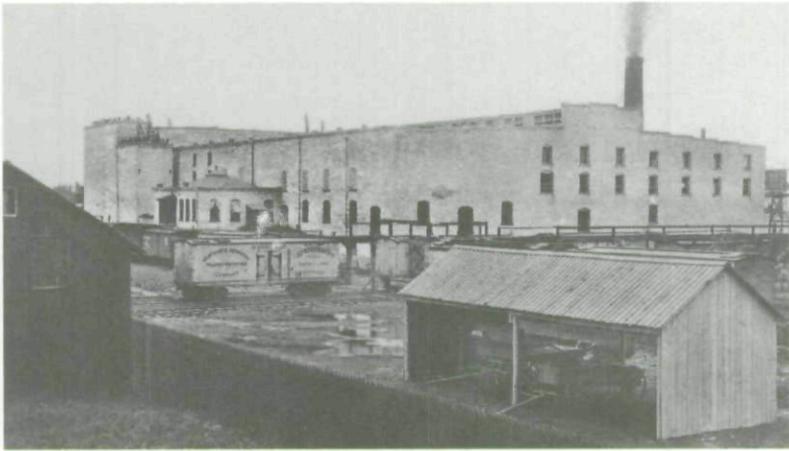


The first killing gang at Ottumwa's Morrell plant pose in 1878. Photo taken from Lawrence Oakley Cheever, The House of Morrell (Cedar Rapids, 1948).

skilled men and the predominately native-born unskilled work force.⁸

Morrell rapidly expanded and modernized its Ottumwa plant in the 1880s and 1890s. Although total employment figures are misleading because meatpacking in this era relied heavily on seasonal labor, the plant employed about five hundred at peak production in 1889 and upwards of 750 during the early 1890s. Morrell's managers modernized pork processing operations by introducing steam-powered continuous chain and overhead rail movement of disassembled animal parts. Aiding the moderniza-

8. *Tenth Census, Population, 507*. The native born were largely descendants of the so-called upland South "island" groups described by cultural geographer John Hudson. "Upland southerners" originated in five island areas: the Scioto and Miami Valleys of Ohio, Bluegrass of Kentucky, Nashville Basin of Tennessee, and Pennroyal Plateau along and north of the Kentucky-Tennessee border. Yankees were not influential in the nineteenth-century settlement of the Corn Belt. These upland southerners were not "mountaineers from the Appalachians. They were, instead, farmers from the best agricultural lands of the Ridge and Valley and Piedmont." Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*, 3, 10, 63, 111 (quotation). My information on Morrell-Ottumwa's 1880 workers is drawn from the 117 employees included in the manuscript census for that year.



The John Morrell and Company plant in Ottumwa expanded and modernized in the 1880s and 1890s. In 1889 it appeared as shown in this photograph courtesy of Michael W. Lemberger.

tion of the plant was the discovery of deep underground reservoirs of water in 1887. Artesian wells were immediately dug to tap this free and pure water source.⁹

It was just such modernization and mechanization in meatpacking that had first sparked workers in Chicago and Kansas City to pursue unionization; skilled knife men wanted to protect their trade from incursions by lesser skilled people. The Knights of Labor organized in both cities, especially among cattle butchers. Although the Knights often organized unskilled workers, in meatpacking they formed assemblies in both cities consisting primarily of cattle butchers. This strategy left the Knights vulnerable, because unskilled workers could learn knife work quickly and then be used to replace skilled workers during strikes. Indeed, packers were able to smash a strike in

9. *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, articles from 1889 and 1891 issues in John Morrell and Company clipping file, Ottumwa Public Library, and 18 May 1887; *Annual Trade Edition of the Daily and Weekly Ottumwa Courier*, February 1893, p. 10. Ralph Ransom, an engineer at the plant beginning in the 1920s, stressed how crucial the Artesian wells were to plant operations even during his time there. Ralph Ransom, interview with author, Ottumwa, 14 August 1981.

Chicago in 1886 by replacing skilled workers with unskilled strikebreakers.¹⁰

During the 1880s and 1890s, Ottumwa's packing workers did not attempt to unionize partly because the Morrell plant lacked a core of skilled workers opposed to management's modernization plans. Pork packing did not require as much skill as beef packing, so workers were not as threatened by mechanization. Because of the predominance of pork packing in the state as a whole between 1881 and 1887, there was only one strike during that period in all the food preparation trades in Iowa. Still, the Knights of Labor was able to organize five assemblies in other industries in Ottumwa between 1881 and 1884: one for black coal miners, one for women cigarmakers, and three others for mixed constituencies, two of which were primarily coal miners. Moreover, in the 1880s Ottumwa's coal miners, printers and publishing compositors, cigarmakers, and railroad engineers and firemen all went out on strike at various times.¹¹

Instead of pursuing union affiliation, Morrell's most highly skilled workers—those also most likely to want and be able to organize effectively—maintained close company ties. The original hog butchers, handpicked company men with long ties to Morrell and T. D. Foster, typically moved up quickly into supervisory roles. For example, Fred Bullock, one of the hog butchers who arrived in Ottumwa with Foster in the 1870s, became a foreman in the 1890s and plant superintendent by 1900. Like 13 percent of the other butchers and supervisory personnel, Bullock was also English-born and Protestant, traits important to Foster. In contrast, English Protestants made up only 5 percent of the unskilled ranks. When a mutual benefit association was founded

10. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 122–27; and David Brody, *The Butcher Workmen: A Study of Unionization* (Cambridge, MA, 1964), 15.

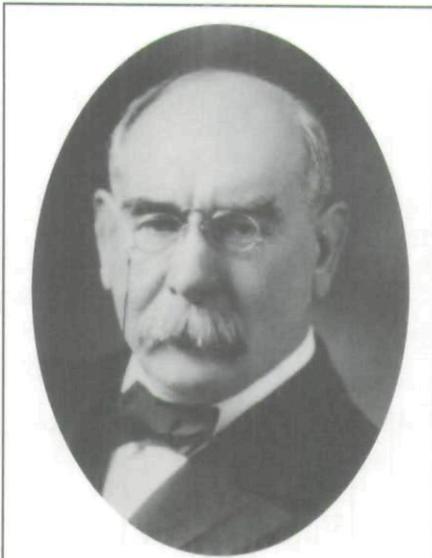
11. *Journal of United Labor* 1 (15 February 1881), 95; *ibid.* (15 April 1881); *ibid.* 3 (June 1882), 246; *ibid.* 3 (October 1882), 320–22; *ibid.* 4 (October 1883), 579. My thanks to Merle Davis for these references. See also Garlock, *Guide to the Local Assemblies of the Knights of Labor*; U.S. Commissioner of Labor, *Third Annual Report, 1887, Strikes and Lockouts* (Washington, DC, 1888); U.S. Commissioner of Labor, *Tenth Annual Report, 1894, Strikes and Lockouts* (Washington, DC, 1896); State of Iowa, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Third Biennial Report, 1888–89, "Strikes and Lockouts in Iowa"* (Des Moines, 1889).

in 1893 to provide disability payments to sick or injured workers, it appealed to the upper echelon of skilled packinghouse workers, not to those who were seasonally employed or to the unskilled majority of workers who could not afford the regular voluntary payroll deductions that funded the benefits. All three founders and early officers of the Packing House Mutual Aid Association were hog butchers, one was also born in England, and one was a Presbyterian. Of the eighty "enthusiastic" charter members, nearly all were butchers or other skilled workers.¹²

THE PACKING HOUSE MUTUAL AID ASSOCIATION was just one of the means Thomas Dove Foster used to cultivate paternalistic labor relations in Ottumwa from the 1880s until his death in 1915. Like many industrialists of the Gilded Age, Foster wanted to promote a cooperative relationship between workers and management. He saw himself as a friend to his employees and prided himself on how all of his workers recognized him by his red hair.¹³ Given Foster's role as a prominent member of Ottumwa's elite, the relatively small size of the Morrell plant for much of this period, and his reformist and welfarist concerns, Foster's paternalism resembles the "familiar style" of paternalism that Philip Scranton has identified in nineteenth-century American textile mill towns. Mill owners there occupied a patriarchal role: they knew their workers by name, "pressed their souls toward church or chapel," and attempted

12. Cheever, *House of Morrell*, 115-16; 1885 State of Iowa Manuscript Census; and 1895 State of Iowa Manuscript Census. The 1895 census identifies religious affiliations. The total number of butchers and skilled and supervisory personnel identified in the 1895 state census is 90 (26.7 percent) of 337 total Morrell employees. The 13 percent noted includes employees born in Britain or Canada with English ancestry. The main Protestant affiliations are Methodist and Presbyterian.

13. The information on Foster's red hair is from *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, 29 July 1910. Comparing Gilded Age industrialists' paternalism is problematic, but Foster's benevolence differed in character from that of, for instance, George Francis Johnson of Endicott Johnson. Johnson, according to Gerald Zahavi, wanted a "direct relationship" with his factory workers based, in part, on a rediscovery of the socialistic values of his youth. See Zahavi, *Workers, Managers, and Welfare Capitalism: The Shoemakers and Tanners of Endicott Johnson, 1890-1950* (Urbana, IL, 1988), 13-16.



*Thomas Dove Foster, 1847–1915.
Portrait courtesy Special Collec-
tions, University of Iowa Libraries.*

to preserve "customary social forms." Although workers were treated as children, they could benefit from the welfare features of the system "so long as neither party betrayed the other by departing from the script."¹⁴

An admirer and follower of Dwight Moody, a leading evangelist at that time, Foster formulated programs that expressed his strong evangelical commitments. Employees hoping to move into managerial positions often joined either the East End Presbyterian Church, Foster's church built largely with his financial support and located in the packing neighborhood until 1903, the First Presbyterian Church near the central business district, or one of the city's five Methodist churches. In 1895 about a

14. Philip Scranton, "Varieties of Paternalism: Industrial Structures and the Social Relations of Production in American Textiles," *American Quarterly* 36 (1984), 235–57. Also useful for understanding the coercive nature of Gilded Age industrialists' paternalism is Paul L. Krause, "Patronage and Philanthropy in Industrial America: Andrew Carnegie and the Free Library in Braddock, Pa.," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 71 (1988), 127–45.

third of Morrell's butchers and skilled or supervisory employees were Presbyterians or Methodists.¹⁵

More than simply rewarding employees who were similarly motivated, Foster's evangelical paternalism pervaded the plant's labor relations from the 1880s until World War I, reflecting his interests in his employees' "moral and spiritual welfare." Foster, like other paternalistic employers of the period, wanted to "recast the worker in a middle-class mold: uplifting him, bettering him, and making his family life more wholesome." Foster's paternalism was largely shaped by his leadership in the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Ottumwa and by the dominant concerns of that organization in the late nineteenth century. Started in London in 1844 and transplanted to the United States in 1851, the YMCA espoused a nondenominational evangelical Protestant mission centered on a fourfold program of spiritual, social, mental, and physical development of young men. Dwight Moody began his career in Chicago's YMCA movement. During the late nineteenth century, businessmen compelled by a sense of social responsibility dominated the movement, and local branches typically depended on businesses for financial support. The YMCA's most successful formal relationship with industry was its association with railroads, though even among railroad workers the YMCA typically gained strong support only in the aftermath of strikes.¹⁶

15. On Moody's prominence, see Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 92-95. Of 90 butchers and skilled or supervisory employees identified in the 1895 state census, 32 (36 percent) were Presbyterian or Methodist. The next two largest groups were 17 Catholics (19 percent) and 11 with no religious affiliation (12 percent). On the other hand, 72 (29 percent) of the 249 workers identified as laborers or unskilled were Presbyterian or Methodist. An almost equal proportion (27 percent) were Catholic. Another 10 percent were Baptist and 9 percent Lutheran. My list of evangelical Protestant churches comes from McCoy's 1899-1900 Ottumwa City Directory. One of the Methodist churches was an African Methodist Episcopal church, though there is no evidence that African Americans benefited directly from their religious affiliations.

16. R. Ames Montgomery, *Thomas D. Foster: A Biography* (Cedar Rapids, 1930); Sanford Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions, and the Transformation of Work in American Industry, 1900-1945* (New York, 1985), 49-58; George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York, 1980), 32-37; C. Howard Hopkins, *History*

In Ottumwa T. D. Foster represented the business community's interest in the YMCA. In 1892 he donated five thousand dollars for the construction of the city's first YMCA building situated not coincidentally in the packinghouse district. For the next two decades, Foster diligently pursued what he saw as the YMCA's true work: the spiritual conversion of young men, especially those employed at his plant. Ottumwa's YMCA, as part of a growing trend among YMCAs nationwide, sponsored a variety of athletic leagues, industrial training classes, religious instruction, and factory shop hygiene talks. These activities allegedly built character by, as historian Clifford Putney put it, "monitoring the habits of young men for the purpose of keeping them home-tied and heaven-bound." As president of the YMCA in Ottumwa in 1896, Foster noted the rapid increase in the number of people using the Y's recreational and bathing facilities, but he expressed disappointment in the drop-off in conversions and Bible class attendance from the previous year. He called for "impressed earnestness and effort" toward achieving the YMCA's primary goal: spiritual conversions to his evangelical brand of Christianity. Moreover, beginning in the 1890s, Foster also sponsored Sunday services conducted by the East End Presbyterian Church's pastor in a tent outside the packing plant during warm weather and in the plant cafeteria during cold weather.¹⁷

The annual company picnic, Foster's first paternalistic program for Morrell workers, though not formally associated with the YMCA, nonetheless suggests how the undergirding philosophy of that organization informed Foster's evangelism. Started in 1886, company picnics, for Foster, fulfilled a charitable social role that was fundamental to his paternalistic outlook. Held that

of the Y.M.C.A. in North America (New York, 1951), 5, 15, 45-46, 106, 109, 179-80, 187-88, 227, and 234; and Stromquist, *A Generation of Boomers*, 247-48. On Presbyterianism's connection to the YMCA movement, see Kenneth McDonald, "The Presbyterian Church and the Social Gospel in California, 1890-1910," *American Presbyterian* 72 (1994), 241-52.

17. Clifford Putney, "Character Building in the YMCA, 1880-1930," *Mid-America* 73 (1991), 49-70 (quote from p. 52); "Annual Reports, YMCA Work," box 43, John Morrell and Company Records, Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City; *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 9 September 1896, 28 September 1901, and 26 October 1901.

first year at the fairgrounds in the nearby town of Agency, the picnic featured food and entertainment for workers and their families provided by the company. In addition, Morrell paid each worker's regular wages for that day, a policy he would continue through his death in 1915. Six hundred men, women, and children attended the first picnic. The *Agency Tribune* reported that T. D. Foster "was the ring leader of the affair and was busy the entire day looking after the comfort and pleasure of the employes [sic]."¹⁸

The contrast between Foster's public paternal remarks and his private concerns regarding his involvement with Ottumwa and the Morrell plant suggests the coercion lurking in his evangelism. In his 1897 speech at the annual Morrell picnic, after being introduced as a man who "takes the highest interest in the welfare of his men," Foster pontificated, "The life of a good man is like a stone wall; the stones represent the work and the mortar the days of recreation. A wall without mortar is a poor wall, and a pile of mortar without stones is of no account at all. Tis so with life, we must have work and lots of it, but in between times we must have days of recreation, like this occasion." Yet in 1893, when contemplating a move to Memphis, Foster showed disgust for Ottumwans' failure to recognize all that he had done for them. Establishing a new plant in Memphis, he suggested, would help the company in Ottumwa, "as Ottumwa people have a kind of idea that we are coming and that it is Ottumwa that is doing it and not John Morrell and Company and we shall never stand where we should in their eyes until they see we can do as well or better somewhere else. The people of these interior points are growing insulting." Although Foster resented Ottumwans' failure to appreciate his good works, a disastrous fire in that same year forced him to reconsider relocating. Instead he rebuilt and actually expanded the Ottumwa plant, where he continued to reward employees who participated in YMCA activities and evangelical Protestantism.¹⁹

18. *Agency Tribune*, n.d. [1886], included in John Morrell and Company clipping file, Ottumwa Public Library.

19. *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 13 August 1897; Cheever, *House of Morrell*, 106, 108-11, 145-46.

THE NUMBER OF MORRELL EMPLOYEES who were able to benefit from T. D. Foster's evangelical Christian paternalism declined after the turn of the century. The plant's growth and divisions among workers rendered Foster's paternalism less successful. By 1900, when meatpacking was Iowa's leading industry in total product value, second in total capital invested, and fourth in total manufacturing employment, Ottumwa had passed Cedar Rapids as the state's leading packing center, although Sioux City would soon begin to outpace Ottumwa. The Morrell plant also clearly dominated Ottumwa's industrial sector by then: 40 percent of all manufacturing workers in the city worked there. While the core work force numbered between five and six hundred, during heavy hog runs the number employed jumped to as many as 1,300. During the week of July 13–20, 1901, for instance, 20,600 hogs were killed. Yet just three weeks later, only 4,489 hogs were slaughtered. A large, floating work force was needed to cope with such fluctuations in demand for hogs. Workers with butchering skills used down times in Ottumwa to ply their trades in other midwestern meatpacking towns. In 1901 the *Ottumwa Daily Democrat* noted that Andrew Streeby, recently employed in a St. Joseph packing house, was back at Morrell's kill and cut. According to the paper, Streeby was "another 'prodigal'" like other "truants" who had recently returned from St. Joseph.²⁰

As the plant expanded following the fire in 1893, the most basic division among Morrell employees at the turn of the century was in terms of day-to-day employment. Detailed wage data from an 1899 employee time book reveal further divisions. For the week ending February 25, 658 employees earned from \$28.75 per week (or \$4.80 per day—employees worked six days per week) by Frederick Bullock and William H. O'Malley, an Irish Catholic hog butcher turned foreman, and \$23.00 per week

20. Cheever, *House of Morrell*, 120–21; State of Iowa, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Ninth Biennial Report*, 1899–1900 (Des Moines, 1901), 76–87, 464–67, 104–5; *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 20 July, 10 August, and 28 December 1901. At the turn of the century, the next largest industrial employers in Ottumwa were coal mining and cigar manufacturing. *Ottumwa Morning Democrat*, 31 March 1903, reported that 361 people were engaged in making cigars, although the number employed in that industry also seems to have fluctuated seasonally.

(\$3.83 per day) by Alexander R. Brown, a Scottish-born Presbyterian hog butcher turned foreman, down to 50 cents per day by twenty-six workers. More specifically, aside from the three highly paid supervisors, the remaining 655 employees earned between 50 cents and \$3.75 per day. Twelve (2 percent) earned between \$3.00 and \$3.75; 88 (13 percent) made between \$2.00 and \$2.99; 336 (51 percent) made between \$1.00 and \$1.99; and 219 (33 percent) made less than \$1.00 per day. Of the twelve highly paid workers, seven of the nine who indicated a religious affiliation in the 1895 census were Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, or "Christian"; four were foreign-born (Dutch, Swedish, and English); and all were either foremen, butchers, or skilled members of the hog kill department.²¹

In many respects, the data on the general work force in 1900 suggest a continuation of trends already noticeable in 1880. Women continued to be notably absent from the Morrell work force; none were employed at the plant until 1905, when they assumed positions as labelers and sausage makers. Nearly one-half of Morrell's workers continued to live in Ward One, where the boundaries had changed somewhat but not extensively since 1880; another one-quarter lived in Ward Two, north of and adjacent to Ward One. In the same year, one-third of Ottumwa's total population lived in those two wards. Unlike 1880, about 10 percent of Morrell workers (and 12 percent of the city's total population) now lived in Ward Five, located southwest of the plant across the Des Moines River. While the number of first- and second-generation workers at the plant had declined from two-thirds to two-fifths between 1880 and 1900, the plant's workers were still more often of foreign extraction than was true of the city as a whole (30 percent). Among first- and second-generation foreigners at the plant, 38 percent were Irish, 24 percent were Swedes, 16 percent were Germans, and 11 percent were English, with most of the foreigners, especially the English, disproportionately represented in the plant's supervisory ranks.

21. Employee Time Book, 1899, box 24, Morrell Records; 1895 Iowa Manuscript Census, and 1900 U.S. Manuscript Census. The data on the twelve highly paid workers combines information on religious affiliation from the 1895 Iowa Census (available on nine of the twelve) with place of birth and occupational information from the 1900 U.S. Census (available on all twelve).



By 1900, Ottumwa was Iowa's leading packing center, and the Morrell plant dominated Ottumwa's economy. The plant and its environs are shown about 1900 in this photograph courtesy of Michael W. Lemberger.

Twelve (80 percent) of the fifteen foremen identified in the manuscript census were first- or second-generation foreigners compared to 49 percent of the butchers and 36 percent of the laborers. In addition, of the 337 Morrell employees designated in the 1895 Iowa census, 61 (18 percent) were Presbyterians compared to just 5 percent of Wapello County's population as a whole in 1915. This hints perhaps at Foster's influence, especially among the highly skilled and managerial workers or those who aspired to those ranks.²²

One of the most striking changes in the Morrell work force between 1880 and 1900 was in its racial composition. In 1880

22. General work force data for Morrell employees in 1900 was compiled on 1,131 workers who were employed at the plant between February 1899 and June 1900. This compilation includes names and data from the February 1899 time book, the 1899-1900 Ottumwa city directory, and the 1900 census data which was collected in June, notably a down time normally in the packing business cycle. On the introduction of women workers at Morrell, the Iowa Bureau of Labor Statistics Biennial Reports for the early 1900s indicate no female employees in Wapello County pork and beef packing until 1905. See *Twelfth Biennial Report*, 252. For statistics for Ottumwa's total population, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census*, vol. 2, part 2, *Population* (Washington, DC, 1902). For a detailed breakdown of Wapello County residents' church affiliations, see *Census of Iowa for 1915*, 731-32. Another factor that may have underscored workers' reluctance to unionize in the next few years was the high percentage of married employees; 65 percent of the work force had spouses.

there were no African Americans employed at the plant. In 1900, 13 percent of the workers were classified in the census as blacks or mulattos, compared to just 3 percent of Ottumwa's total population. Between the 1880s and World War I, coal companies, situated primarily in the south-central part of the state, were among the largest employers of African Americans living in Iowa. Ottumwa was located near Buxton, one of the largest black coal-mining communities during this period, with 2,700 blacks among its 5,000 residents in 1905. Indeed, some of Ottumwa's black workers appear to have moved back and forth between Ottumwa and Buxton, working in the mines during the summer and in the packing plant in the fall and winter.²³

Perhaps the most interesting facet of Buxton's history was the apparently amiable relationship between blacks and whites. Although blacks' residences in Ottumwa were dispersed throughout the city, they, unlike blacks in Buxton, were nevertheless subject to discrimination. As John Hudson notes, native-born descendants of upland southerners, unlike Yankee descendants, were not known for their strong sympathies for blacks. A vague yet ominous reference in the *Ottumwa Daily Democrat* in 1901 noted that "Deputy Sheriff George Slavin has been busy serving notices on colored population at the packing plant." *The Morning Democrat* of April 1, 1903, reported that a race riot had broken out the day before on South College Street near the packing plant and involved several hundred people and the city police.²⁴

The skill, religious, ethnic, and racial divisions among workers made the prospect of unionizing a substantial part of Morrell's work force a daunting task. Beginning in 1897, a new

23. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Twelfth Census*, vol. 2, part 2, *Population*; 1900 Iowa Manuscript Census data; Dorothy Schwieder, Joseph Hraba, and Elmer Schwieder, *Buxton: Work and Racial Equality in a Coal Mining Community* (Ames, 1987), 40. Schwieder et al note that while most Iowa coal mines shut down between April and October, the Consolidated Coal Company's mines near Buxton stayed open. When work slacked off, however, instead of laying off miners they usually used a reduced work schedule. See *Buxton*, 72-73, 83.

24. Hudson, *Making the Corn Belt*, 125; Schwieder et al, *Buxton*, 180-82, 205; *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 14 December 1901; *Ottumwa Morning Democrat*, 1 April 1903. The *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 28 September 1901, noted that Joe Williams of the hog killing department had been "rusticating" during the summer at Buxton but had now returned to work at Morrell.

union representing both retail and packinghouse butchers, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America (AMCBW), part of the decade-old American Federation of Labor (AFL), was formed in Cincinnati. The Amalgamated grew very slowly until Michael Donnelly, a South Omaha sheep butcher, was elected president of the Amalgamated in December 1898. Donnelly was successful in gaining recruits, and set his sights on the biggest potential union prize in the United States: Chicago's stockyard and packinghouse district. Although the butchers initially left the unskilled to fend for themselves, Donnelly pushed the butchers to approach the unskilled, since division of labor had eroded much of the butchering trades' special status. Although the Amalgamated locals did not become full-fledged industrial unions, by 1903 they had formed a Packing Trades Council that allowed joint action. Unionization in Chicago found support from the full gamut of ethnic groups represented in the packinghouses, and coincided with a larger union movement that swept industrial Chicago during those years. Packinghouse workers fought for more regular employment and retention during slack times as well as higher wage levels. They used "control" strikes, and were helped by the generally prosperous economic times of the 1900-1904 period that made packers willing to bargain with union departmental committees. By the summer of 1904, however, packers were no longer willing to tolerate the informal bargaining with union committees that had gone on since 1902, and an industry-wide strike ensued in July. Although the union membership was highly disciplined initially, packers were able to import strikebreakers, undermining workers' collective efforts. The Amalgamated halted the strike on September 5.²⁵

Although the AMCBW organized meatpacking workers in many places outside Chicago, its most successful midwestern organizing efforts were in Omaha, East St. Louis, Kansas City, St. Joseph, and Sioux City. Chicago had 29 meatpacking locals, Omaha and East St. Louis had 12 each, Kansas City had 10, St. Joseph had 6, and Sioux City had 2, for a total of 71 (47 percent)

25. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, chaps. 4-5; Brody, *The Butcher Workmen*, chap. 3.

of the 150 meatpacking locals organized along departmental lines in January 1904. Outside Sioux City, there were only three other meatpacking locals established in Iowa.²⁶ Chicago's predominance among the meatpacking locals was not accidental for Donnelly and the AMCBW. For them, Chicago was the key to successful unionization throughout the industry. Since most of the major packers' largest plants were in Chicago, this strategy was logical. Although James Barrett's history of the Chicago unionizing effort in 1900–1904 stresses the permeation of unionism among skilled and unskilled workers of all ethnic backgrounds, David Brody's earlier depiction of the period may be more telling in regard to the real focus of the union efforts: creation of uniform wage scales among cattle butchers. While diminished in skill and prestige, cattle butchering still was considered the highest art in meatpacking. In Ottumwa, there was no cattle butchering until 1909.²⁷

Unlike many cities in Iowa that experienced considerable union membership growth between 1900 and 1904, Ottumwa saw the number of unions increase from 23 to 36 but actually lost total members, declining from 1,510 in 1900 to 1,341 in 1904. The Amalgamated reached Ottumwa in 1901, when Morton Walker was elected chair of AMCBW Local No. 144, a local that included both retail butchers and meatpacking workers, though the leadership of the local was dominated by Morrell workers. At its inception, it seems Ottumwa's union, like those in Chicago, attracted workers from the skilled and unskilled ranks of Morrell employees. Walker, a 34-year-old native of Iowa with American-born parents, was a member of the hog killing gang

26. *Butcher Workman*, January 1904, 48–56. Retail butchers were organized into separate meat cutter locals. Outside of Sioux City (Locals No. 363 and 369), the other meatpacking locals in Iowa were located at Cedar Rapids (Local No. 66), Albia (Local No. 263), and Oelwein (Local No. 270). Meat cutter locals in Iowa were located at Clinton (Local No. 170), Des Moines (Local No. 187), Cedar Rapids (Local No. 206), Oskaloosa (Local No. 237), Davenport (Local No. 279), Marshalltown (Local No. 281), Dubuque (Local No. 296), and Keokuk (Local No. 350). Austin, Minnesota, a meatpacking-dominated town comparable to Ottumwa, had no meat cutter or meatpacking locals in January 1904. AMCBW Local No. 144 at Ottumwa, classified with the meat cutters locals, actually included meatpacking workers and retail butchers.

27. See Brody, *The Butcher Workmen*, chap. 3, esp. 46–48.

at Morrell, and earned the relatively high wage of \$3.00 per day in 1899, suggesting that he was a butcher. Charley McDavid, a member of the lard refinery department, a part of the industry not known for skilled workers, was the secretary of Local No. 144 in 1901. Iowa labor statistics for 1901 state that the local enlisted six hundred members, meaning that about one-half of the entire work force would have joined. The following year, however, the state labor statistics report just 30 members for Local No. 144, and for 1903-4 membership is listed at only 9. In the absence of any event that would have caused such a drastic fall-off in membership, it is likely that the figure for 1901 is simply wrong. The paltry number of members, likely just butchers, involved in Local No. 144 in 1904 largely explains the emphatic statement by Daniel Gallagher, local secretary and a butcher himself, regarding Ottumwa's reaction to the Amalgamated's July strike. "There is no possibility of a strike being called in Ottumwa under the present circumstances. . . . We haven't even discussed the matter in our council. It is a matter that does not concern us in the least at the present time. You may say for me as secretary of the council that there will not, under the present circumstances, be a strike participated in by the members of the council in this city." With only a handful of members in Local No. 144, including some who may have been retail butchers, it is no wonder that Gallagher felt this way. Indeed, as the strike raged in Chicago, four thousand Morrell workers and their families took four trains to Keokuk for the annual company picnic, organized by the Packing House Mutual Aid Association.²⁸

28. Brody, *The Butcher Workmen*, 38; Ralph Scharnau, "The Labor Movement in Iowa, 1900-1910," *Journal of the West* 35 (1996), 19-28; *Ottumwa Daily Democrat*, 3 August 1901; State of Iowa, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Ninth Biennial Report, 1899-1900* (Des Moines, 1901), 188-89, 200, 350; idem, *Tenth Biennial Report, 1901-2* (Des Moines, 1903), 230-31; idem, *Eleventh Biennial Report, 1903-4* (Des Moines, 1905), 182, 200; *Ottumwa Evening Democrat*, 19 August 1904. *The Tenth Biennial Report* noted that the average workforce at Morrell in 1902 was 1,115. Carl Thompson, "Labor in the Packing Industry," *Journal of Political Economy* 15 (1907), 98, notes that the Amalgamated did not organize unskilled laborers until 1902, which would seem to further undercut the veracity of the membership figures for Local No. 144 in 1901. Gallagher's quote is from *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, 12 July 1904.

Several factors accounted for Ottumwa workers' quiescence during the 1900–1904 period, some of which may have been similar to those that impeded union efforts in other midwestern packing centers. Divisions among workers in terms of employment, skill, ethnicity, and religion, bolstered by the attraction of Foster's evangelical paternalism to key components of the work force and the failure of the Amalgamated to pursue unionization diligently outside Chicago and a few other major midwestern packing centers, all contributed to Ottumwa workers' lack of unionism. Between 1904 and World War I, moreover, several of these factors continued to undercut any new union developments. The AMCBW itself withered nationwide after the strike, Foster's evangelical paternalism persisted, and workers continued to be divided in various ways.

Following the Amalgamated's defeat in 1904, its membership among packinghouse workers collapsed virtually everywhere, especially in the Midwest. The deep recession of 1908–9 finished off most of the packinghouse locals that had survived the strike. The economic slump and a growing open-shop movement after 1903 likewise gutted many union constituencies across the state of Iowa. In 1903 total state membership peaked at 48,734. By 1909, it had dropped below the 1900 level to just 25,000 members. Between 1907 and 1912, the largest meatpacking companies, especially Swift, Armour, and Morris, contributed to the erosion of union membership among skilled butchers, especially when they began offering financial benefits, such as stock purchasing plans and pensions. Ottumwa's paltry band of AMCBW members marched in the city's Labor Day parade in September 1904, but there is no indication that the Amalgamated, if it continued to limp along, marched in any other Labor Day parade in Ottumwa through the World War I years. Between 1907 and 1909, in fact, the number of trade unions in the city declined from 27 to 14, and total membership dropped from 1,109 to 702. By 1911, there were only nine unions with 503 members left in the city.²⁹

29. Brody, *The Butcher Workmen*, 59–74; Scharnau, "The Labor Movement in Iowa," 21–23; *Ottumwa Evening Democrat*, 5 September 1904; State of Iowa, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Thirteenth Biennial Report, 1906–7* (Des Moines, 1908), 210; idem, *Fourteenth Biennial Report, 1908–9* (Des Moines, 1910), 268; idem, *Fifteenth Biennial Report, 1910–11* (Des Moines, 1912), 264.

In this climate of declining union membership, T. D. Foster continued his evangelical paternalism. As before, he stressed religious activities, company picnics, and YMCA work as evidence of his benevolence and as examples for workers to follow. In 1902, Foster's East End Presbyterian Church hired William Henry Hormel, brother of George A. Hormel, president of the Austin, Minnesota, meatpacking company, as its new pastor. For the next decade Rev. Hormel plied his trade not only at the church but among the packinghouse workers at the plant. In conjunction with the Labor Day celebration in 1906, for instance, Rev. Hormel gave two sermons, "The Wisdom and Power of God for the Solution of Our Problems," and "Loyalty to the Kingdom of Christ, the Only Solution to All of Our Problems," the titles of which both strongly suggested the anti-union potential of such Christianizing.³⁰

Foster used the annual company picnics, which continued to attract several thousand workers and their families through the World War I years, as opportunities to expound his evangelical paternalism. The Packing House Mutual Aid Association, led by Morrell employees with close ties to Foster, selected the sites and activities for the picnics. Speaking before approximately four thousand people in Ottumwa's Caldwell Park in 1907, Foster explained the function of the picnics.

The object of these annual outings are [*sic*] to give the employees a day of recreation, an opportunity to meet each other socially, and grow acquainted, establishing a friendly brotherly basis between them. Also these annual picnics give the employer and employed a much desired opportunity of growing acquainted with each other and establishing a better understanding thereby, bringing them closer together. It is the aim always of the employers to make this one day set aside each year for the men who are employed by John Morrell and Co., as pleasant as is within their power. So on this day the wages of each employe [*sic*] is paid him or her just the same as though the holiday had not been granted.

Where there is friendship and open dealing between employe [*sic*] and employed, there is no excuse or necessity for labor unions.

30. Cheever, *House of Morrell*, 130; Richard Dougherty, *In Quest of Quality: Hormel's First 75 Years* (Austin, MN, 1966), 65-66; *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, 25 August and 16 July 1910 and 27 July 1912.

Where the principles of the sermon on the mount rule in the dealings between the working man and his employer there is no necessity for the intervention of a third party.³¹

Foster's speech exudes confidence in his control over his workers, so much so that the irony of his reference to the Sermon on the Mount was apparently lost on him. The meek would not inherit the earth while in Foster's charge; they could only hope for his continued benevolence. Foster must have also been pleased with the gains in YMCA membership made in Ottumwa between 1904 and 1908, from 638 to 1,065. But then, beginning in 1909, membership at the YMCA declined every year through 1914. Besides, workers seemed to use both the YMCA and company picnics for reasons probably not highly thought of by Foster. The YMCA's athletic leagues drew larger numbers than its religious offerings, and factory health and hygiene talks superseded religious conversions in frequency between 1910 and 1914.³²

Increasingly, after 1900, Foster was willing to admit that workers did not necessarily share his religious and cultural commitments. During testimony taken to determine whether Mayor Thomas J. Phillips should be ousted in 1910 due to reports of public intoxication, Foster noted that he had never seen Phillips drink, even when he appeared as a guest at the Morrell company picnics. Foster, a public supporter of temperance organizations such as the Modern Woodmen of America, a prominent fraternal organization in southeast Iowa, acknowledged that some employees did consume alcohol at company picnics even though he did not allow it. While testifying, Foster also remarked that the Smoky Row neighborhood near the packing plant was much improved since 1907, when gambling and prostitution flourished there. He did not take direct credit for the improvement, but seems to have made the observation more in the way of supporting Phillips's administration.³³

31. *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, 17 July 1907.

32. "YMCA Work," box 43, John Morrell and Company Records. On workers' uses of company paternalism contrary to the desires of their employers, see Curtis Miner, "The 'Deserted Parthenon': Class, Culture and the Carnegie Library of Homestead, 1898-1937," *Pennsylvania History* 57 (1990), 107-35.

33. *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, 26 and 29 July 1910.

Foster's public remarks about Smoky Row and the behavior of his employees and Ottumwa's working people in general suggest that he recognized that his evangelical paternalism was a beacon that some might follow but that few workers could be expected to take readily to heart. More important in terms of labor relations, perhaps, Foster's public remarks about the value of recreation suggest that he did not understand how unskilled workers' seasonal employment at the packing plant crucially affected their ability to embrace either paternalism or unionism. At the 1906 company picnic held in Burlington, that city's mayor noted that Morrell employed about 1,200 "all told" with 500 "dependent" upon its payroll. A timebook kept by a foreman in the beef offal department for two months in 1913 also demonstrates how volatile employment was, particularly for unskilled workers. In that department, employees were paid between \$1.50 and \$3.00 per day. The highest paid workers experienced only two weeks of less than forty hours' work, while the lowest paid workers experienced four weeks of less than forty hours' work in that two-month period. The cuts in total hours worked per week also did not go as deep for the highest paid workers; the average range between lowest and highest number of hours worked per week for them was 32 and for the lowest paid workers was 38.5. Consideration of such statistics, even though they represent a narrow slice of the work force, sheds a different light on Foster's remarks at the 1910 company picnic than he probably intended when he said, "if a man cannot afford to take a week [of vacation], he at least should take a day occasionally." For unskilled Morrell employees, the problem was not overwork, but the lack of work.³⁴

SEVERAL CRUCIAL CHANGES occurred during the World War I era that would ultimately help to make Ottumwa's meat-packing workers more interested in unionism. In 1915 the demographic profile of the Morrell work force still shared similarities to that at the turn of the century. The total number of employees

34. *Ottumwa Daily Courier*, 15 August 1906, 29 July 1910. The timebook kept by Ralph A. Bissell is in the author's possession. His son, another Ralph Bissell, a longtime Morrell employee, graciously allowed me to copy the information.

was about the same, roughly 1,250 at peak; most workers continued to live in Wards One and Two (56 and 14 percent respectively); and 67 percent of the workers were married (up slightly from 1900). The racial composition was more white than in 1900; the percentage of African Americans employed was down to 8 from 13 in 1900. Women, by then in their tenth year of employment at Morrell, constituted about 7 percent of the workers.³⁵

The most telling development since 1900 was the change in workers' nativities. The "new" immigrant surge into the United States in the first two decades of the twentieth century affected Ottumwa only slightly. A handful of Eastern Europeans now resided in the city and worked at the plant, but most of the Morrell plant's foreigners were still primarily Swedes, Irish, English, or Germans as had been true in 1900. More important, unskilled laborers, butchers, and foremen were now most often native born of native-born parents. Even so, foremen still had the most first- and second-generation foreigners in their ranks (47 percent of 46 total, compared to 26 percent for the unskilled laborers; in 1900, 80 percent of the foremen had been foreigners compared to 36 percent of the unskilled laborers.) Combined with the decline in nonwhites, these statistics suggest that before World War I, differences among workers in terms of ethnicity, race, and nativity had narrowed and that Ottumwa's workers were becoming more homogeneous. By the World War I period, unlike in either 1880 or even 1900, unskilled workers' perceptions of "foreignness" would be directed at their supervisors rather than at skilled workers. This homogeneity likely increased workers' receptiveness to union organizing.

Just as crucial to workers' later acceptance of unionism was the death of T. D. Foster on July 20, 1915. With his death came also the demise of the evangelical Christian paternalism that he had espoused during the nonunion era at the Ottumwa plant. In April 1918, following Federal Judge Samuel B. Alschuler's decision to grant meatpacking workers nationwide more guar-

35. The 1915 Morrell-Ottumwa profile is based on data gathered from the State of Iowa Census of that year plus information from the Ottumwa City Directory. The total data base consists of 1,044 workers, 754 of which were from the census.

anteed hours and a higher base wage rate, Morrell-Ottumwa workers organized AMCBW Local 236. The local gained most of its followers after employees learned that their wages were lower than those in other packing plants. Soon after the local's formation, Morrell ended its annual picnic, revoked its Thanksgiving and Christmas bonuses, and terminated its faithful service pension given to a few longtime loyal employees. Between 1918 and October 1921, the union enrolled most of the plant's workers. When the local went out on strike on October 19, 1921, two months ahead of the national AMCBW's strike but sparked by the same issues that would prompt it—reduction in the guaranteed work week and a general wage cut—Local 236 seemed well situated for a long struggle. But intervention by the National Guard beginning in mid-November squelched the strike effort, and Local 236 finally capitulated at the end of December.³⁶

After the local union had been smashed, the company introduced a new brand of paternalism, part of the nationwide welfare capitalism movement. These new programs, however, lacked the benevolence and Christianizing components of Foster's paternalism. After John H. Morrell was president from 1915 to 1921, Foster's sons would hold the presidency of the now separate American branch of John Morrell and Company from 1921 to 1953. During the 1920s, under the guiding hand of Thomas Henry Foster, T. D.'s second-oldest son, company picnics would be reintroduced, but they were not paid holidays and were not forums for hard-selling a benevolent view of employer-employee relations. In fact, none of Foster's four sons was as committed to evangelism as he had been. When Foster's sons implemented welfare capitalist programs in the 1920s, they were not concerned with the moral and spiritual welfare of workers; they were more concerned with gaining pos-

36. On labor union developments in meatpacking during World War I, see Brody, *The Butcher Workmen*, 78–83, 88–102; Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle*, 188–239; and William C. Pratt, "Advancing Packinghouse Unionism in South Omaha, 1917–1920," *Journal of the West* 35 (1996), 42–49. On the 1921 Morrell-Ottumwa strike, see Wilson J. Warren, "Welfare Capitalism and the Workers' Response: A Study of Management-Labor Relations at the John Morrell and Company Meat Packing Plant of Ottumwa, Iowa, 1922–1937" (M.A. essay, University of Iowa, 1983); and idem, "Welfare Capitalism," 501–4.

itive publicity, blocking further union efforts, and reasserting managerial authority. In fact, however, the welfare capitalist practices at the Ottumwa plant would actually engender intense feelings of employee animosity toward their employers in a way not evident during the pre-World War I nonunion era.³⁷

The World War I period also ushered in changes at the plant that would significantly improve the chances for long-term unionization later on. Morrell constructed several new additions to the Ottumwa plant during the 1920s that resulted in a steady increase in the number of people employed there. Between 1921 and 1931, Morrell-Ottumwa's work force nearly doubled from 1,500 to 2,500. Seasonal work force fluctuations, though still a nuisance, would become less severe during the 1920s. The personal evangelical paternalism that T. D. Foster had extended to the prewar core work force of five hundred or so became impractical in a plant employing more than two thousand people.³⁸

By 1920, Morrell-Ottumwa's work force had taken on the composite features, already emerging by 1915, that would characterize it during the New Deal era. Nearly the entire blue-collar component of the labor force was native born, 92 percent of the total. In the five years following the 1915 census, the portion of foreign-born workers at Morrell had declined dramatically from 16 to 8 percent. The most notable surge into the plant during the war came from native-born whites from Iowa, Missouri, and Illinois (accounting for 62, 11, and 6 percent respectively of the total). This farm-to-factory movement reinforced the dominant

37. Beginning on December 31, 1915, John Morrell and Company separated into American and English firms with parallel and interlocking directorates. The English side of the business continued to exert great influence on the American company during and after World War I. English personnel continued to be sent to Ottumwa. In 1919 Morrell was the largest American exporter of meat products to Britain, with 31 million pounds. See Cheever, *House of Morrell*, 171-72. T. D. Foster's oldest son was W. H. T. Foster, manager of the Sioux Falls plant, opened in 1909, from 1913 to 1939. T. H. Foster was the American company's president from 1921 to 1944. George Morrell Foster was president of the American company from 1944 to 1952. And John Morrell Foster was president of the American company from 1952 to 1953. On the welfare capitalist period at the plant, see Warren, "Welfare Capitalism," 504-14.

38. See Cheever, *House of Morrell*, 187, for a description of new construction at the plant during the 1920s.

cultural upland southerner strain that had long existed among the plant's unskilled employees. Even more obvious by 1920 was the division between blue-collar, native-born workers, primarily from Iowa, Missouri, or Illinois, and the foreign (first- and second-generation) white-collar workers. Of the 187 managerial and white-collar workers in the plant in 1920 (including foremen, supervisors, and clerks of various sorts), 79 (42 percent) were foreigners, primarily English, Swedes, or Germans. Resentments stemming from this cultural divide would play an important role in later union-building struggles. Unlike divisions in nativity in the late nineteenth century between skilled and unskilled workers, by the 1920s Morrell's blue-collar employees shared broadly homogeneous cultural backgrounds. The "foreigners" were their supervisors, not their fellow workers.³⁹

When mass industrial unionism emerged in the meatpacking industry in the 1930s, Morrell-Ottumwa workers would eagerly and aggressively participate in the CIO movement. They did so largely because the CIO's message strongly appealed to the majority of the plant's workers who had been excluded from or unaddressed by company paternalism appeals, in either the earlier evangelical form or the later welfare capitalist version. The divisions among workers that had undercut paternalism's appeal, and that had also limited unionism's attraction, were largely eroded. The temporary success of World War I-era unionism would be looked back on as an important transition. Morrell-Ottumwa's work force had changed in ways that made employees ready to pull together against their employer to struggle for workplace changes during the New Deal era.

39. The 1920 Morrell-Ottumwa profile is based on information compiled on the 1,505 employees included in the 1920 U.S. manuscript census. The census takers compiled their information in January, coinciding with the peak packing season.

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