

The Cooperative Coopers

STORM CLOUDS, WIND, AND RAIN made the last Sunday in May 1887 a typical Minneapolis spring day. The Knights of Labor had haplessly planned a parade for this day, and the gathering marchers met with intermittent showers and blustering high winds. The less courageous scurried home, while thousands of others assembled in the industrial district just west of St. Anthony Falls. By late morning an estimated 4,000 were set to march and, according to the *Minneapolis Tribune*, “The spectacle of the uniformed bodies, with numerous bands and hundreds of flags and lodge banners flying, was a grand and imposing

one.” The object of this public fanfare, the laying of the cornerstone for the Northwest’s first Knights of Labor “temple,” drew some 16,000 spectators who converged at the intersection of Eighth Avenue and Fourth Street. A few celebrants even climbed the trees lining the street, eager to watch the dedication of organized labor’s new home in the city.¹

The parade was guided through the city’s downtown streets by Marshall-in-Chief for the Day Chauncy W. Curtis. A barrel maker (or cooper) and one of the city’s most dynamic labor activists, Curtis had helped Minneapolis coopers in their pioneering



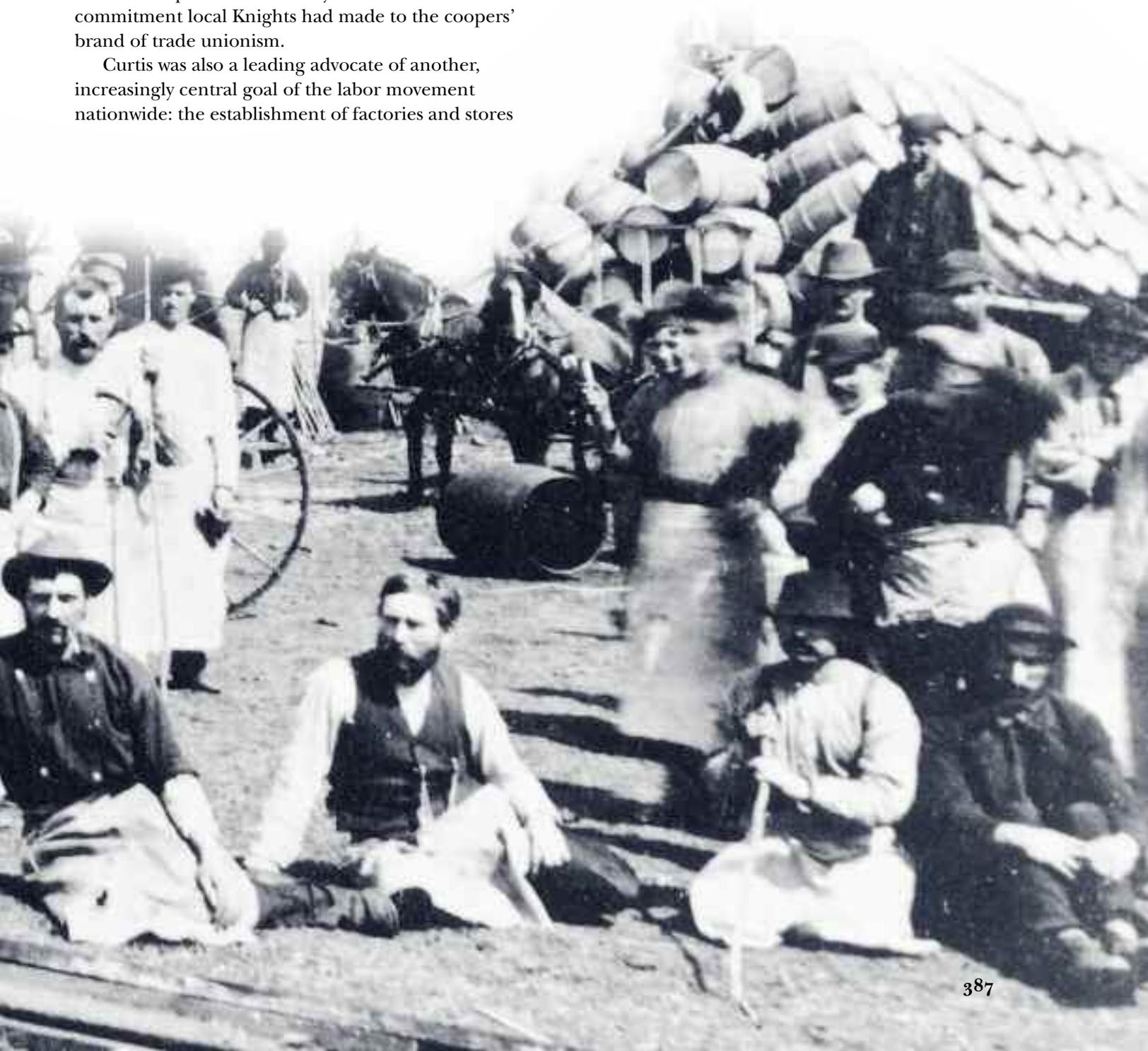
Minneapolis coopers gathered outside their shop with a wagonload of finished barrels, 1880

ers of Minneapolis

Steve Leikin

attempts at trade unionism 15 years earlier. He later served as president of the Workingmen's Union, a political labor-reform association, and in the early 1880s had turned his efforts toward organizing the state's assemblies of the Knights of Labor, a national association dedicated to organizing workers in all trades.² His position in the day's events reflected the commitment local Knights had made to the coopers' brand of trade unionism.

Curtis was also a leading advocate of another, increasingly central goal of the labor movement nationwide: the establishment of factories and stores



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owned and operated by workers themselves, or cooperation. After the Civil War, trade-union and Knights activists found cooperation to be a viable alternative to the competition and inequalities of the capitalist market economy. Many believed, as T. W. Brosnan of Minnesota's Knights of Labor declared in 1887, that the competitive system under which Americans labored was nothing more than industrial slavery, and cooperation should replace it. Curtis himself had been instrumental in establishing four cooperative barrel factories, a cooperative publishing company, and a cooperative store in Minneapolis—all before 1878. By 1887 he and the workers of Minneapolis had established a total of 32 cooperatives of various kinds, including 14 barrel companies.³

Although the barrel cooperatives initially flourished, their success obscured a variety of intractable, long-term problems faced by the coopers: rising costs, falling prices, mechanization, and fierce competition with other organized barrel workers. At the root of their problems was an industry in turmoil, but something far more revealing aggravated relations among the coopers. As time went on, cooperation came to signify different things to different people and created irreconcilable differences among the cooperators. Ultimately, these differences would contribute to the failure of the Knights of Labor and to the coopers' inability to secure a living wage and stable community lives.

WHEN THE FIRST FLOUR MILLS harnessed the energy of the Falls of St. Anthony, Minneapolis was hardly a city. It grew rapidly soon after, expanding from 2,555 residents in 1860 to 13,000 in 1870 and 130,000 by 1885. The surrounding countryside also attracted thousands of new settlers who produced enough wheat to make Minneapolis the largest wheat market and processing center in the United States. In 1886 the city's 26 mills could produce 35,000 barrels of flour a day. The mills, in turn, served as the industrial core of a dynamic new urban center.⁴

The coopers quickly emerged as an essential element within this dynamic economy. The mills needed





thousands of barrels, and the barrel factories eventually needed hundreds of highly skilled workers. This great demand gave coopers considerable leverage in bargaining with their employers and, as with other skilled workers in this period, allowed for successful organizing. In 1868 Minneapolis coopers founded their first trade union and then, in the early 1870s, joined the International Workingmen's Association. They became major players in the labor movement's early years in the city, and they achieved steady work and good pay. Attractive conditions, however, brought in many more coopers than the labor market could absorb. In the early 1870s the "boss" coopers, as the owners of the shops were called, took advantage of this overabundance to reduce wages and enfeeble the union.⁵

It was under these conditions that Chauncy Curtis and a handful of coopers established the first two cooperative shops in Minneapolis. Both were informal businesses, unincorporated and transitory. The first shop survived just a few months in 1868. The second, established in 1870, lasted two years until one member assumed control of the contracts to begin his own factory. Chastened by these experiences, Curtis, Francis L. Bachelder (a participant in the 1870 fiasco), and three other coopers incorporated a new barrel cooperative in 1874. Learning from past mistakes, they composed a set of by-laws that became the foundation of every subsequent cooperative barrel factory in Minneapolis.⁶

Curtis and Bachelder would become uniquely important activists in the local cooperative movement. Curtis, originally from Massachusetts, had made his way to Minnesota in the 1860s. Bachelder, born in Maine, had lived in New York for a time before moving to Minnesota in 1865 or 1866. By 1874 Curtis and Bachelder, 31 and 45 years old, respectively, had families and dependents to support, and they turned to cooperative production in search of the stability that regular employment in barrel making could not supply.⁷

When Curtis, Bachelder, and 14 other member-workers opened the Cooperative Barrel Manufacturing Company in late November 1874, they started modestly. Each member put \$15 down and agreed to pay \$5 weekly toward his share of \$15,000 in capital stock.

Worker moving flour barrels inside the new, technologically advanced Washburn "A" mill, 1875

Renting a building from “the Widow Mayo” on Third Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues South, they opened for business in early December.⁸

The men faced hostile opposition from a variety of sources. Unfriendly “boss” shops attempted to influence the millers and, if they had prevailed, the cooperative would never have signed a single contract. Yet the millers must have soon realized that one small worker-owned business posed no immediate threat to the capitalist order. Indeed, in the 1870s many liberal reformers waxed enthusiastic over the virtues of cooperatives. Editor E. L. Godkin of *The Nation*, for one, believed cooperatives would elicit sympathy for capital from their worker-owners. One of Minneapolis’s leading new millers, Charles A. Pillsbury, thought highly enough of the coopers’ experiment to contract with them to supply one entire mill. He stood by this contract over the years, and the Cooperative Barrel Manufacturing Company flourished.⁹

Outgrowing its original location, the cooperative bought an old cooper shop and two quarter-acre lots at 1029 Sixth Street South. This was a propitious move. Many of the original members bought land and homes in the immediate area and benefited from the growth of the city and increasing land values. By the mid-1880s, the cooperative, now known as the Sixth Street Shop, had as many as 120 working members, possessed its own stave factory in Wisconsin, and held assets worth \$58,000.¹⁰

In order to survive, though, the Sixth Street cooperators first had to make it through the economically depressed 1870s. They apparently did so by deliberately remaining small and expanding slowly, their membership never exceeding a modest 25 men. By 1877 a faction, including Bachelder, apparently grew dissatisfied with the shop’s unwillingness to expand more rapidly. Late in the year five members broke away to form the North Star Barrel Manufacturing Company. The energetic and peripatetic Curtis, who had left Minneapolis sometime earlier, returned and signed up with the new cooperative. The North Star would eventually become one of the largest barrel cooperatives in Minneapolis.¹¹

THE NORTH STAR APPEARED at the beginning of an era of rapid expansion in the milling industry. From 1878 to 1886 nine new cooperative barrel factories opened as flour production in Minneapolis increased

more than sixfold to over six million barrels a year. In the same period the population of the city grew from less than 47,000 to more than 130,000 people. Expansion, instability, and opportunity apparently encouraged the coopers to experiment with cooperative enterprises. By 1886 cooperatives dominated the city’s barrel industry and within a year grossed more than \$1 million and employed 368 journeymen-owners out of the 593 coopers working in Minneapolis. Their remarkable progress convinced many reformers around the country that cooperative industry could provide a meaningful alternative to competitive capitalism.¹²

The barrel makers found cooperative production attractive for other, more important, reasons as well. Until the 1870s they had remained independent craftsmen, unlike those skilled workers whose jobs had been deskilled or become mechanized. Now, however, their work life was in turmoil. John D. Rockefeller had broken the power of the coopers in Ohio when he reduced the craft to several simple machine operations. Though no single flour manufacturer in Minneapolis had the same power as Rockefeller or the inclination to produce his own barrels, boss coopers introduced machinery as early as 1874 and transformed the craft in their city. Cooperative coopers, on the other hand, excluded machinery from their shops for as long as possible.¹³

The coopers of Minneapolis conceived of cooperation as a defense and an extension of their artisanal culture, fusing their workplace independence, pride in craft, and trade-union traditions. When the secretary of the Phoenix Barrel Manufacturing Company listed the reasons for starting that cooperative in 1881, his words neatly summed up the cooperative coopers’ sentiments:

First. Believing that labor creates all dividends and that the cooperative system is the only avenue in business by which profits and dividends are placed in the hands of those to whom they rightly belong.

Second. Because every man entering cooperation on this plan begins a practical business education which it is impossible to attain while working under the journeyman system.

Third. We furnish ourselves nothing but first-class material . . . thereby avoiding the inconvenience placed upon journeymen who are often required to manufacture first-class goods from inferior material. . . .

Fourth. The cooperative system relieves all who embrace it from the tyranny of unscrupulous bosses.¹⁴



One of three pages of coopers' tools from Connecticut company G. W. Bradley's edge-tool catalog, 1876

Central to cooperation's appeal was the independence barrel makers could achieve, either in the exercise of their craft or from their erstwhile bosses. Yet central to the meaning of cooperation was how coopers interpreted this independence. While some developed an expansive, class-oriented definition of cooperation that emphasized the greater good of their community, others adhered to a narrower notion confined to the benefit of one firm at the expense of others. Such differences generated much conflict among Minneapolis

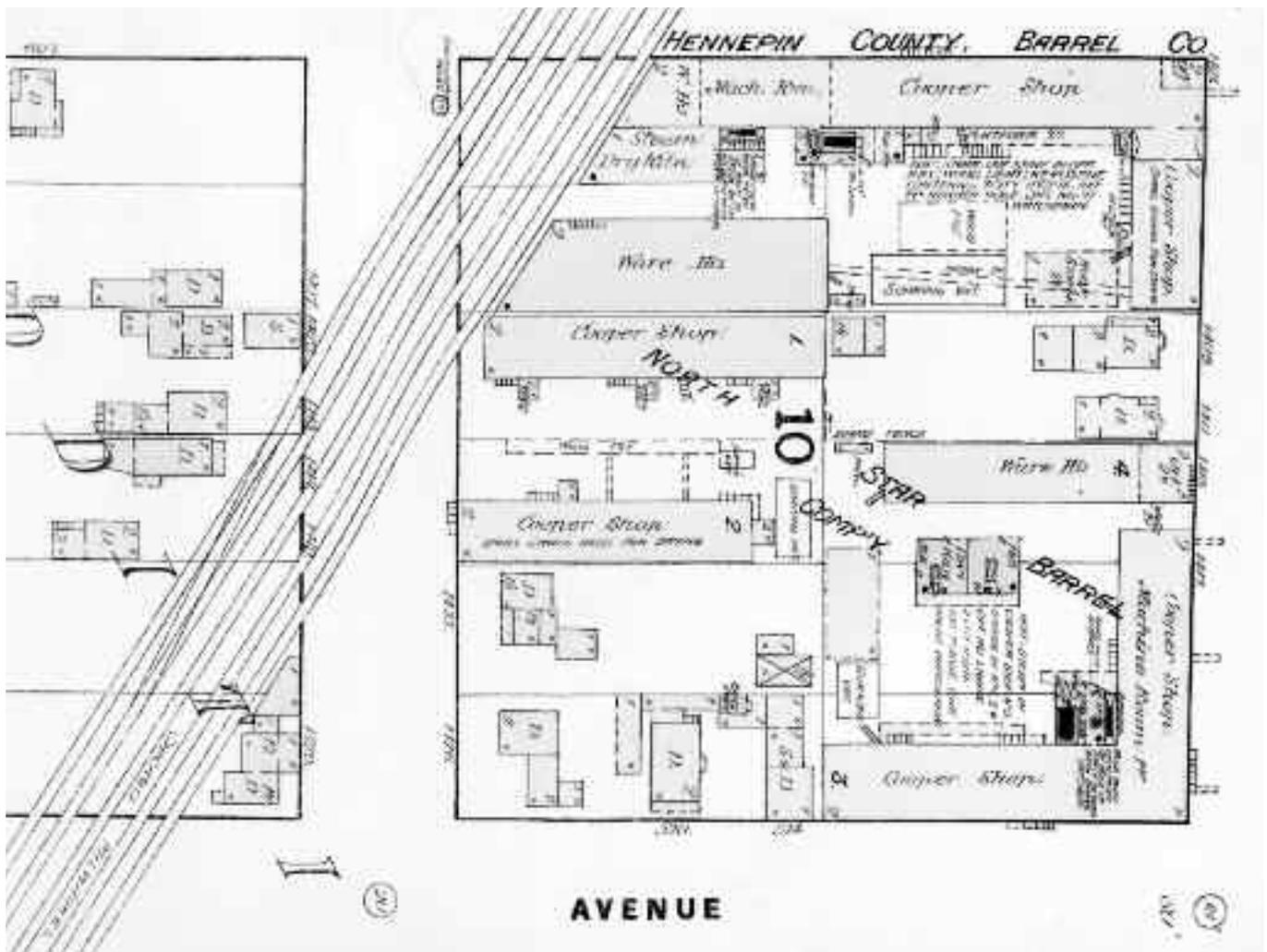
coopers as they struggled over the meaning of cooperation throughout this era.

DESPITE SUCH DIFFERENCES, however, all Minneapolis cooperators seemed to value democratic process. The by-laws that Curtis and Bachelder wrote in 1874 created a rigorously democratic, egalitarian structure where each member purchased an equal share of stock and exercised but one vote. Members worked on a piece-rate system and divided up their profits or losses in proportion to the wages earned by each individual.¹⁵

On the shop floor, democratically adopted rules governed daily operations and regulated behavior to ensure equality and fairness. At the Hennepin County Barrel Company, for example, the rules guaranteed fair distribution of work; no one could hold an extra barrel in his berth if others were waiting for barrels to hoop. In addition, each shareholder had to work his berth. The by-laws strictly prohibited him from contracting out his place. The cooperative existed to provide work for journeymen, and not, at least initially, for individuals to profit from the labor of others.¹⁶

Moreover, the foreman's power in a cooperative shop was severely limited. As inspector of finished barrels, he could theoretically make or break a member, but as the elected president of the company, he answered to his fellow members at each monthly meeting. If he believed a cooper should be fired because of inferior workmanship, he had first to show cause before the board of management and then convince two-thirds of the members at a monthly meeting to approve the dismissal. The cooperative cooper was a respected and respectful king of his berth.

In Minneapolis, coopers created something more than democratically organized individual shops: They created a community of cooperators. The barrel makers initially built their shops on the west side of St. Anthony Falls. The Sixth Street, North Star, Hennepin, and Phoenix shops all functioned within a few blocks of one another along the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad. When west-side land values rose beyond the coopers' means, they opened new shops farther away and on the east side of the falls. In most shops, members prospered enough to build homes around their factories. By 1886 the typical cooperator was married, owned his own home purchased through a cooperative building-and-loan association, and lived near his workshop.¹⁷



Neighboring Hennepin County and North Star barrel companies on Fifth Street near Fourteenth Avenue and close to the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad tracks, detailed in the 1885 Sanborn fire-insurance map. A rich source of information about construction, layout, and usage, the map notes fire hazards and precautions—woodpiles, kilns, stoves, soaking vats, hoses, hydrants, and night watchmen—as well as work and storage space.

The craft community, trade unionism, and cooperative membership elicited considerable loyalty from many of these men. Yearly parades and picnics, baseball games, and dances brought the workers and their families together. The coopers even formed a band that performed at their functions. At least one cooperative established a mutual-insurance program that provided weekly cash payments for members who became too ill to work. At other times the cooperators took up collections to aid sick members.¹⁸

This cohesiveness counteracted the forces of fragmentation characteristic of American working-class life. Germans, Norwegians, Swedes, Irish, and a few Italians, along with a large number of Americans with native-

born parents, worked side-by-side in most of the cooperative shops. Only in the North Star did Germans outnumber the others. In the Phoenix shop, American-born workers formed the dominant group. Though many of the coopers bought their homes through ethnic building-and-loan associations, the cooperative experience seemed to soften the rough edges of ethnic difference. According to a contemporary observer, barrel makers worked well together, and ethnic conflicts occurred only rarely.¹⁹

Factories were but one aspect of cooperative community life. In the summer of 1885 a committee met in the Sixth Street Shop to consider opening a cooperative store. While the meeting drew about 50 coopers,

the committee consisted largely of officers from the barrel cooperatives, including Steward Jensen, treasurer of the Hennepin cooperative; George Clement, soon-to-be secretary of the Sixth Street Shop; and Michael Gill, another officer of long standing in the Sixth Street Shop. These men were aware of the Rochdale cooperative movement in England, and they proposed to open their grocery on Rochdale principles.²⁰

The coopers located their store near their shops in a “neat little brick building” on Seventh Street. Anyone was welcome to join, but the vast majority of members worked in the barrel trade. Original plans called for members to invest \$10 for one share and then purchase a minimum of two more shares in the store. Discovering that this level of investment limited its constituency, the cooperative issued memberships for \$1.25, with not-too-rigorously-enforced 25-cent weekly assessments to follow. The store clearly was not a capital-intensive enterprise but one designed to serve this working-class community’s needs. About 125 individuals joined, and the store flourished.²¹

Officially known as the Minneapolis Cooperative Mercantile Company, the store sold groceries and dry goods for cash only. In the Rochdale tradition, it redistributed profits in proportion to purchases and paid 6 percent dividends on all paid-up shares. In an attempt to increase patronage, the cooperators decided a year later to extend profit sharing to nonmember purchasers. They assisted friends in North Minneapolis to open a store, talked of joining with a cooperative shoe store on Cedar Avenue, and acted as the official agent for the tobacco products of cooperatives in Covington, Kentucky, and Raleigh, North Carolina. They also included in their own founding document a standard clause of the Rochdale constitution that called for the establishment of a “self-supporting home colony” to exemplify the ideals of cooperation.²²

Albert Shaw, the nineteenth-century historian of the Minneapolis cooperators, described the wide net these businesses cast over workers’ lives:

In Minneapolis there are men who are earning their living in a cooperative cooper shop, paying for their home through a cooperative building and loan association, buying their groceries at a cooperative store, and having their washing done in a cooperative laundry. Some of them perchance enjoy the advantages of membership in a cooperative neighborhood improve-

ment association, obtain books and magazines from a cooperative reading club or library association, and so on. Many of them belong to societies and orders which have as their most practical feature a system of cooperative life and accident insurance.²³

THE COOPERATORS HAD DEVISED a network of institutions to achieve steady work, permanence of place, and the preservation of their craft. They also considered transforming something far more elemental: their own habits and behavior. Barrel craftsmen had long-established reputations as boisterous and hard-drinking men. Traditionally groups would nurse a “goose-egg” (half-barrel) of beer in their shops on Saturdays and, surely against the will of the boss coopers, lay waste to the entire workday. When Saturday’s hard drinking



“Coopers’ Chips,” the long-running weekly column of local and national tidbits about the barrel industry from the *Northwestern Miller*, July 8, 1887

inevitably carried through the weekend, they would celebrate Blue Monday, starting work again on Tuesday. Cooperative shops, however, banned alcohol from the workplace and meetings and restricted attendance at stockholders' meetings to the sober and nonsmoking.²⁴

This new discipline would have more than pleased the boss coopers. But the cooperators did not require this only to get more work out of the men. To function, a democratic business needed disciplined and committed members willing to bargain, negotiate, and compromise. As one cooper said, "There are a heap of things to put up with in cooperation."²⁵ Cooperation attempted to produce more responsible and temperate citizens.

Democracy and work, however, were far easier to describe in by-laws than to integrate successfully in the workshop. One particularly difficult issue for any cooperative, the *sine qua non* of any profitable business, was the right to fire worker-members. In Minneapolis's cooperatives, firing occurred only under the most

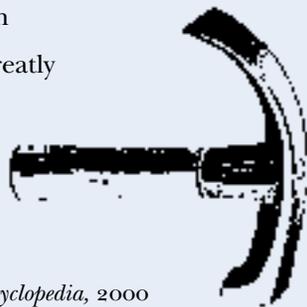
unusual circumstances; indeed, no one seems to have been let go until late 1884 when F. G. Grant, a member of the Union Cooperative Barrel Company, refused to trim one of his barrels as requested by his foreman. He was charged with abusive behavior and violation of shop rules, and 27 of the cooperative's 32 members voted to expel him. With the classic independence, not to say stubbornness, of a skilled artisan, Grant refused to abide by the order. This left the cooperative in a difficult situation. Ultimately, it obtained a temporary restraining order from the county district court to remove Grant forcibly from the shop floor.²⁶

Clearly, in this episode all parties found themselves in unfamiliar territory. Grant argued that he had violated no rules and had completed his assigned work honestly. The shop had no right to reject his already accepted barrel. To discipline Grant, the shop had no other recourse, short of physical expulsion, than to go to court. Though the court decided in favor of the company, it also found the cooperative frustratingly difficult to fathom. It believed that "the power to discharge employes must be vested in some one," and workers had to be dischargeable even if they were also shareholding part-owners of a business. The court argued that one's subordinate status as a worker was more important than one's position as an owner.

The Grant episode exposed the peculiar ambiguities of the cooperative experience. When, under certain circumstances, the interests of the company conflicted with the cooperator's interests as an artisan, the group's democratically expressed wishes could violate the individual cooperator's perceived rights. The unclear nature of a cooperator's status as both a worker and an owner only complicated matters further. These ambiguities boded ill for the industrial solidarity that future conflicts would soon require.

The coopers faced additional and often perplexing difficulties blending democracy into everyday life. One of the most perplexing concerned the nature of community life itself. The cooperative community was very much like a small town, capable of embracing some members with generosity and rejecting others with contempt. While ties of neighborhood, craft, and self-interest reinforced a sense of unity, conflicts could emerge when personalities grated on the sensibilities of the majority. In addition, the cooperators' peculiar combination of independence and group loyalty could exacerbate potential conflicts rather than contain them.

THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR, begun by Philadelphia tailors in 1869, tried to organize industrial workers. Its aims included the 8-hour day, abolition of child and convict labor, equal pay for equal work, elimination of private banks, and cooperative actions. The Knights won important railroad strikes in the mid-1880s, when its membership peaked at more than 700,000, but by 1890 factional disputes, the financial burden of unsuccessful strikes, and the emergence of the American Federation of Labor had greatly reduced its power.



Source: *Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*, 2000

All of this became evident in a deadly confrontation between two barrel makers in 1885.

Custom had it in the Northwestern Barrel Company that when a cooper married he treated his shop mates to cigars. Member Mark Norton married in late November but failed to abide by the custom. Apparently tight-fisted and reserved, he became the object of considerable mischief. When no cigars were forthcoming, August Oys, a 21-year-old German cooper, and a few others engaged in a series of pranks to either draw Norton out or antagonize him. First they hid the contents of his lunch pail. Norton said little and went home for his meal. The following day they placed an effigy of some kind in his berth, which apparently enraged the 35-year-old cooper. He went straight to Oys and accused him of hiding his lunch pail. When Oys denied this, Norton struck him in the face with his fist. Oys, backed up to a wall, grabbed a chime maul (a short hardwood club) and hit Norton twice, once on the arm and then on the back of the head. The latter blow fractured Norton's skull, and by evening he was dead. Oys immediately surrendered himself to the police.²⁷

Rather than rallying to defend the deceased, a charter member of the cooperative, and his ailing widow, the cooperators seemed to sympathize with Oys. They apparently made sure that Oys received proper legal assistance and maintained that the young German had acted in self-defense. Many cooperators attended the trial, and when the jury quickly found Oys not guilty of manslaughter, the verdict was met with loud applause.²⁸

Why did Mark Norton, his "retiring disposition" notwithstanding, fail to elicit his co-workers' sympathy? They surely knew that his first wife had died not long before, leaving him with a four-year-old son, and that his second wife was a disabled, opium-addicted woman who had lost her own family in a fire. These circumstances did not seem to sway his colleagues, however, and his defiance of the shop's cultural expectations alienated him from his co-workers.²⁹

In another environment Norton might have backed down from the confrontation he initiated with Oys. He could have easily left a job in a boss shop and found employment elsewhere. In a cooperative, however, Norton had less mobility. To leave, he would have had to sell his share—certainly a sacrifice and a chore that, at times, could be difficult. He probably would also have resented the idea of having to leave his

Report of August Oys's manslaughter trial and acquittal showing the man and the weapon, *St. Paul Daily Globe*, January 17, 1886

OYS ACQUITTED.
The Jury Pled He Was Not Guilty of Murdering Mark Norton.

In the district court yesterday morning the trial of August Oys for the murder of Mark Norton was resumed before Judge Koon. The cross-examination of Christopher Christopherson was proceeded with, but no new facts in addition to what was brought out in the direct examination were elicited. The witness said that he noticed blood on Oys' mouth after Norton had struck him, and that Norton pushed him back in the corner against the block and then struck him several times before Oys took up the maul.

Dr. J. W. Little testified that at the post-mortem examination he found two marks on the left side of the scalp about an inch and a half above the ear, and one mark in the skull, supposed to have been caused by a blow from some blunt instrument. The doctor testified that he had cut two holes in the skull and performed the operation of trepanning in an endeavor to restore the stricken man to consciousness, but the effort failed and death claimed its victim.

Peter Weiss, who struck Norton up from the floor, testified that he did not speak. All he heard Oys say was that Norton had struck him first. H. F. Jenkins, Nicholas Hennig and Albert Peht, who are coopers at the Northwestern shop, gave testimony corroborating previous statements concerning the affair. Here the state rested.



AUGUST OYS.

the accused, was the first witness. He gave his testimony in a straightforward manner that indicated that he was telling the truth without any attempt at palliation. He was visibly affected, and when he left the stand tears trickled down his cheeks. His story was substantially as follows:

I am 21 years of age, have been here two years; have been a cooper since I was 13 years old; I went to the shop at 7:30 on the morning of the tragedy; shortly afterwards Norton came in very angry looking and came up to me and asked for his dinner pail, and wanted to know why I made a fool of him; I said that others had made a fool of him; he then struck me in the mouth with his fist and I staggered back against the block. I threw up my hands and tried to push him off, but he was stronger than me and got me down and pounded me in the back of the neck until the blood ran out of my mouth. I got scared, thinking he would kill me, and to save my life I caught up a chime maul and struck towards him, and he struck two rapid blows with the maul in a horizontal direction, or nearly so. The maul is a short club of hardwood, and is used in the cooper business. When Norton stopped pounding I stopped striking back. His hat fell on my head and I handed it to him. I put one more hoop on the barrel upon which I was working and then went to the police station and saw myself up. Norton and I had always been friendly, and it took me completely by surprise when I saw he was dead.

Being asked why he struck more than once Oys replied: "I was frightened and excited, and hardly knew what I was doing."

THE PRISONER'S REPUTATION.
Mrs. James Colman, at whose house Oys had lodged for some time, testified that he

was to be ready; here a ing, in on the asked: Oys' mouth was not. Then for the that it to the. whetted by the not, an chance until a here w track l suite, h and sh- lion of adroit - perfect - paper in history of doll- compel as that crossed the No fying; least 2; must a - possible ing to; the ma the re- fight a Judge scolded Mr. W. change road, a Third's point - necessary ing to 1 Mr. "How - the ma In at is not il - strong - been a "This re - franced - side re - even I - usual - press - he did - by with - and of - Judge - cations - Manila - of an - states - back." would - say. - to prove - is not - want it - for the - tion of - \$4 per - \$5 as - next as - room's t - of leave - an excep - There I - ever fill - and is - cover, I - will en - ward of - agree b - In else - the Ma - the es - tration - having - further - that th - restrict - If you - see it.

own barrel shop, a place where his opinion and desires should have meaning. Norton's death suggests that when an individual did not fit comfortably into the community, the peculiar nature of the cooperative could exacerbate conflict. In fact, the coopers' sense of ownership and pugnacious, manly independence, when exercised by an entire cooperative shop, would later have dire consequences for the movement as a whole.

AT THE TIME, THOUGH, the cooperative coopers' successes spurred Knights of Labor interest in cooperative enterprises of all kinds.

Optimism ran high that laborers could remake their work lives on a cooperative basis, with the result that, in local Knight leader T. W. Brosnan's words, "Poverty [will] be abolished and all its attending evils, intemperance, ignorance, prostitution, and all forms of crime."³⁰

The Knights' leadership created an environment conducive to the spread of cooperative enterprises. Between 1868 and 1887 the city's workers established at least 32 cooperatives of various kinds, 24 of them after 1882, and 10 of them during 1886 alone. In 1884, for example, cigar makers opened a cooperative factory and printers organized two print shops. (The coopers opened their Minneapolis Cooperative Mercantile Company the following year.) During 1886 carpenters, laundresses, shirt makers, painters, and musicians all formed cooperatives. Another cooperative store opened in south Minneapolis, the Knights of Labor established a cooperative building association and library, and a dry goods cooperative opened for business as well. About 125 miles north of Minneapolis, the Cooperative Land Association, which had been organized in 1883 by Knights leaders John P. McGaughey, T. W. Brosnan, and John Lamb, bought 253 acres on Bay Lake in Crow Wing County to form an agricultural cooperative. Five families—17 men, women, and children including two coopers, former members of cooperatives—settled there. Within a short time they had planted corn, potatoes, beans, and other vegetables, processed maple sugar, and made operational a small, abandoned saw mill.³¹



John P. McGaughey
of the Knights of Labor

Then, in 1887, leaders of the Knights' District Assembly 79 laid plans for a central cooperative wholesale "depot," which operated briefly in 1888. Ideally, this depot was to channel cooperatively produced goods to farmers and the farmers' produce to industrial cooperators.³² The possibilities for labor reform in Minneapolis appeared almost limitless.

At the forefront of much of this activity was the aging printer and ideological torchbearer for cooperation in the city, James Rankin. In his newspaper, *Minnesota Mirror*; and other writings, he repeatedly cited the coopers' suc-

cesses as evidence that cooperation would yield industrial peace and prosperity as well as personal pride and independence. There was one fundamental problem, however, that Rankin could never solve: The cooperatives were subject to the same competitive pressures of any business and would eventually be forced to act against each other "under the laws of competitive hostility."³³ This very real problem would shortly debilitate the industry.

What had made it possible for the Knights of Labor in Minneapolis to envision and begin to implement an alternative to competition? Workers lived in a separate political and social environment from bosses, and this lack of integration seems to have created space for experimentation. While the coopers participated in politics in the 1870s and 1880s and even elected Bachelder, founder of one of the earliest barrel cooperatives, to the state legislature for two terms, their connections with the machinations of government were otherwise remote. In 1887 even John Lamb, appointed to head the State Bureau of Labor Statistics, advised wage earners to "not ask the state to do for us anything we can do for ourselves." At the same time, the secretary-treasurer of the Knights' statewide District Assembly 79 argued that political reform could only be accomplished through social and industrial change.³⁴ The coopers and the Knights thus turned to cooperative enterprise with great expectations and hope. That hope would translate into an extraordinary plan to reorganize the barrel industry in Minneapolis.

WHILE THE COOPERS' COOPERATIVES had succeeded admirably, they still had to reckon with the unstable nature of the market. Barrel companies in Minneapolis routinely bid to supply individual flour mills with a set number of barrels at a given price. This bidding was intensely competitive; as a result, the boss coopers, as well as cooperative coopers, lowered prices again and again. Wage reductions inevitably followed. This competition intensified after 1874 when the boss shops introduced machinery that increased production and created an oversupply of barrels.³⁵

These pressures set the stage for intensely volatile labor relations in Minneapolis. In 1884 two major labor actions occurred. In the first, a strike, the coopers failed to increase their wages. They then formed two new cooperative shops. The second action occurred after “nearly all” of the city’s coopers had enrolled in the Knights of Labor and established their rather formidable Local Assembly 3363. This near-universal enlistment enabled the coopers to overcome some longstanding divisions between the cooperative and boss-shop coopers and negotiate a strategy to improve wages. They demanded and received from the millers a seven- to eight-cent increase in the price of barrels. A few weeks later the displeased millers pressured the coopers to renegotiate and sign an agreement that reduced the price of handmade barrels by two cents but still guaranteed coopers a more-than-reasonable wage of 16 cents per barrel until May 1, 1885.³⁶

This solidarity between cooperators and journeymen was absolutely necessary for the coopers as a whole to increase their wages. Even so, tensions quickly emerged. The journeymen were wage workers who dealt directly with their bosses to negotiate wages or to strike. The cooperators faced the boss shops not as fellow workers but as business competitors. Yet, to strike successfully, the journeymen needed the cooperators to refrain from taking their bosses’ barrel contracts while the strike progressed. Further complicating the matter, in about 1882 cooperators had begun hiring journeyman and machine operators in their shops, becoming bosses themselves.³⁷

Immediate economic self-interest could readily push the cooperators to take contracts when journeymen were out on strike. Yet the cooperatives also had a long-term incentive to help the journeymen push up costs at boss shops, thus forcing millers to pay higher prices for barrels and increasing all coopers’ incomes.

Alternatively, as Local Assembly 3363 had done, the cooperatives and the boss shops could agree to end competition for contracts and, together, demand higher prices from the millers. Which path the cooperators followed depended upon their assessment of their interests and obligations at any given moment.

So, despite the price agreement of 1884, which seemed to benefit both sets of coopers handsomely, stability in the industry was elusive. Indeed, as early as December 1884 rumors circulated that a few of the boss and cooperative shops had attempted to reduce barrel prices in order to secure sales. This news strained relations and threatened the price agreement.³⁸

From early 1885 until the end of the next year, the coopers rode an erratic market made all the more irregular by increased mechanization, growing exports of wheat, and aberrations in local conditions. Demand for barrels always fluctuated because of the seasonal nature of wheat production and

Ads for machinery and parts that mechanized the coopers’ craft, *Northwestern Miller*, July 8, 1887

The image shows a collage of several advertisements for barrel-making machinery and parts, likely from a 19th-century trade journal. The ads are arranged in a grid-like fashion. At the top left, there is a small ad for 'FIRE!' with some illegible text. To its right is a large ad for 'CHAMBERS' PATENT Barrel Heater' by 'THE ST. LOUIS BARREL HEATER', which includes an illustration of a barrel heater and text describing its benefits for 'TIGHT BARRELS'. Below this is an ad for 'E. & B. HOLMES BARREL MACHINERY' from Buffalo, N.Y., featuring an illustration of a large mechanical press. To the right of that is an ad for 'MILLER, GALE & CO.' from Chicago, advertising 'Cooperage in Cooper Stock'. At the bottom left is an ad for 'SAYLOR' machinery. At the bottom right is a large ad for 'THOMPSON & CAMPBELL' from Philadelphia, Pa., advertising various barrel-making tools and machinery. The ads use a mix of bold fonts, illustrations, and descriptive text to promote their products.

processing. Despite increased demand in April and May 1885, however, the shops failed after May 1 to renew their contract that fixed the price of barrels. Two cooperatives then cut prices by two cents and initiated the usual round of price and wage reductions. Three cooperatives complicated the picture by installing machinery that doubled their capacity to make barrels. Over the next year, two of these cooperatives bought out members, the Cooperative Barrel Company reducing its membership from 120 to 90 and North Star decreasing from 77 to 59. These establishments now began to hire machine operators.³⁹

During July, August, and September 1885, the mills shut down most operations while the local power plant,

Flour bags began replacing barrels in the late 1880s, an ominous sign for coopers. Standard barrels held 196 pounds of flour; bags held half as much. (*Northwestern Miller*, Holiday Number, 1889)



Minneapolis Mill Company, made improvements. The cooper shops, however, continued to make and store some 200,000 barrels in anticipation of mill reopenings in October. But when milling resumed, “Prices melted away,” the *Northwestern Miller* reported, “until there was no bottom at all.”⁴⁰ Attempts to control the price decline came to naught.

The year 1886 saw more of the same. Wages bottomed out at 12.5 cents for handmade barrels. Added to these problems was an ominous long-term decline in demand. A large percentage of the flour produced in the United States in 1886 was packaged in jute sacks for sale to foreign markets. Some domestic flour made its way east in cotton sacks, as well. While the total output of flour that year increased, it required fewer barrels.⁴¹

Worried about the future, some 400 Knights of Labor coopers met in the middle of February to develop a number of strategies to meet this crisis. First, the assembly asked barrel-shop managers—boss and cooperative—to jointly raise wages, but shops with contracts already in effect refused to renege on them. Next, a representative from each shop met with the millers’ association to ask for a voluntary increase in the price paid for barrels. This also came to naught, as did the intriguing offer by the Knights to purchase a large amount of flour in union-made barrels to sell in manufacturing cities in Massachusetts. Finally, in April, the coopers gave up and referred the matter to the board of the Knights District Assembly 79, which managed to hammer out an agreement, set to last for six months, to raise barrel prices in all newly signed contracts. A cooper could now expect to earn 15 cents per handmade barrel.⁴²

By June 1886 the barrel market had deteriorated again, and the price agreement began to fall apart. Then, in October, coopers staged their first strike in two years. The walkout was virtually universal, as journeymen from the east side of the river put down their tools, marched from shop to shop, crossed the Tenth Avenue bridge, and, as the *Minneapolis Tribune* reported, “made the rounds to all the other shops.” By nightfall, “every shop in the city was closed and about 700 coopers had laid down their tools.”⁴³

This unanimity made for a successful strike under less-than-ideal circumstances. Railroad switchmen in Minneapolis had struck their employers at the same time, and without transportation the mills shut down. Yet within two weeks, the six cooperative shops had



River crossings: Tenth Avenue bridge across the Mississippi, with the west-side flour mills at left; the Stone Arch bridge, midground; and the Hennepin Avenue suspension bridge barely visible in the background, 1888.

signed contracts guaranteeing 15 cents per barrel until July 1, 1887, and then gave financial support to the journeymen still out. Within a few days the boss shops signed on, and the strike ended. Any hope, however, that this pact would last longer than previous ones soon evaporated when at least two boss shops attempted to break the agreement, one by locking out its workers and the other by simply reducing wages.⁴⁴

Despite the coopers' unity in this strike, deep divisions were emerging that would ultimately tear the coopers' community apart. In late December 1886, as barrel prices dropped and stock costs rose, all of the shops found the 15-cent-per-barrel wage difficult, if not impossible, to maintain. Some of the cooperatives even assessed their members in order to meet payroll. The boss shops attempted to reduce wages, and the Hardwood Storage and Parr Barrel Companies locked out their workers. The coopers' Local Assembly 3363 at first condemned the boss shops and paid the locked-out workers from its assistance fund and cooperative store. The North Star cooperative was unenthusiastic about providing this assistance, however, and dissension among the coopers mounted.⁴⁵

Faced once again with competition and price reductions—and now resistance from some cooperators—the coopers' assembly in April 1887 met daily and then proposed a new plan, a remarkable leap in what the Knights considered legitimate and feasible. To control the market, they decided to divide the barrel business fairly among the city's various makers.⁴⁶

The Knights of Labor and the barrel makers of Minneapolis—cooperatives and boss shops—formed a pool of barrel factories they called the Coopers Association. They proposed that this organization divide up the work among the various shops, limit the number of coopers employed, regulate the price of barrels and wages according to the market price of stock, and allow the Knights of Labor to oversee implementation of this plan and resolve any disputes.⁴⁷ In giving the Coopers Association and the Knights such power, the agreement went far beyond the single cooperative as a solution to the labor problem.

The millers adamantly opposed this arrangement from its inception. Charles Pillsbury, the erstwhile champion of the cooperators, denied that his firm was responsible for low wages and said that he would willingly pay

“as high a price as any miller in this city and higher prices than are paid in any other milling city in the United States.” He refused, however, “to agree to a request to buy barrels from a consolidated monopoly.” This, he stated frankly, would lead to “untold trouble” between the coopers and the millers. Pillsbury told Brosnan of the Knights that he would spend “every cent he was worth” before buying barrels from the new association.⁴⁸

The millers’ opposition to the monopoly pool surprised no one. What did surprise the coopers was opposition from within their own ranks. The Northwestern cooperative refused to abide by the scheme but eventually relented and joined the pool. The Hennepin also refused to join but took only its “fair” share of contracts. The North Star, however, took advantage of the situation to vastly increase its business. It not only refused to join but, with the apparent approval of pioneer cooperator F. L. Bachelder, contracted directly with Pillsbury to make as many barrels as it could. This action supplanted the Sixth Street Shop from its traditional contract with Pillsbury and generated untold bitterness among the other coopers.⁴⁹

In the end, five cooperative and two boss shops formed the pool, elected officers, and posted a bond to guarantee their fealty. They then bargained with the reluctant millers who would only agree to pay 38 cents per handmade barrel, a price that provided a wage of 15 cents per barrel. The agreement would last for one year. The coopers wanted more flexible control over the price of barrels, but they could get nothing better from the millers at this time.

Meanwhile, opposition among the coopers to the North Star cooperative grew intensely bitter. After the North Star refused to support locked-out coopers in May 1887, outraged members of the Coopers Assembly discussed boycotting the shop’s barrels and, in preparation, expelled some 14 North Star members from the Knights. When this coercion failed to temper the North Star’s behavior, the Knights called on all North Star coopers to strike. Only 4 out of 59 members and 9 of 18 hired men walked off the job.⁵⁰

The coopers finally managed to contain the crisis when the Knights held its annual national meeting in Minneapolis in early November 1887. Calling Pillsbury and North Star president H. R. Burroughs before the general executive board, the Knights threatened a boycott of North Star barrels. Though it still refused to



Miller Charles A. Pillsbury, 1883

join the pool, the cooperative agreed to divide its Pillsbury contract with the Sixth Street Shop and to buy out two of the member strikers who had been suspended.⁵¹

While this agreement resolved the immediate crisis, it did not allay the anger many coopers felt. In December the local Knights summoned approximately 40 members of the North Star to appear before a “judge” to answer charges of scabbing. The so-called “scabs” denied violating union principles. They claimed that they were good and loyal members of the Knights. As the North Star’s president explained, “We were doing well financially as a company. We did not feel like jeopardizing our business and taking the rates they [the Coopers Association] proposed to give us.” According to the North Star, if the health of the cooperative was at stake, acting in its own economic interest did not violate any union principles. In what must have been a sign of contempt for the charges, only four of the summoned men appeared at the trial.⁵²

IN THIS ENVIRONMENT of distrust and resentment, the Coopers Association tested its ability to control the barrel market. Over the next six months it tried to distribute the work fairly among the pool members, but this proved difficult and, ultimately, unworkable. Some Knights and coopers attributed the failure of the pool

to the behavior of the nonparticipating shops or the millers' vehement opposition, including attempts to lure barrel manufacturers away with lucrative contracts and threats.⁵³

But the actual reasons for the failure of the pool were far more complicated and have as much to do with the ideology of cooperation as with the power of the opposition. In Minneapolis a minority of cooperators divorced their interests from those of the labor movement and acted with destructive independence. Their behavior exposed the limitations of the cooperative philosophy that guided them. Cooperation offered members of the North Star Barrel Company the opportunity for stability, democratic participation, and, at times, pugnacious independence. They lacked, however, any generally agreed-upon rules that defined their obligations to other cooperative firms. When the North Star coopers chose to define their obligations narrowly, they believed they had not betrayed the principles of cooperation or of trade unionism. They simply had acted as any properly run business should act. Even after the Knights expelled them from the local assembly, they insisted on their innocence and good standing as union members.⁵⁴

A final factor in the pool's demise was the diminishing strength of the labor movement. In early 1887 the coopers' assembly of the Knights of Labor claimed 441 members; by July 1888 there were only 113, and within six months, a mere 28. In this environment of distrust, opposition, and organizational weakness, the Coopers Association could not survive. After July 1, 1888, the selling price of barrels fell from 38 cents to 34 cents and the wage for crafting a handmade barrel to 13 cents. The pool had failed.⁵⁵

THE DEMISE OF THE CITY'S cooperative barrel shops was not so swift. A few continued to function for many years, even though the millers' conversion to using bags reduced the demand for barrels. Though the last shop did not close until 1931, the cooperatives had long before abandoned their affiliations with the labor movement and commitment to labor reform. The mechanization of barrel making played an important role in this development. When the cooperators introduced machinery into their own shops, they challenged the very nature of the craft enterprise. When market pressures convinced them to reduce their memberships, buy out shareholders, and hire nonmembers to run the

Wagonload of barrels negotiating an unpaved Minneapolis street, 1888



machines, they undermined their principal reason for cooperation: the maintenance of a craft tradition.⁵⁶

As the turbulent 1880s came to a close, their other cooperative experiments proved evanescent. In early 1889 the store collapsed. The cooperative colony and depot lasted only a short while. Such failures and ongoing bickering among the coopers surely disillusioned the movement's supporters. However, the single most important cause of the failure of cooperation in Minneapolis was the decline of the Knights of Labor after 1887. Without the Knights' power to bind people together, Minneapolis workers failed to maintain a commitment to a broader cooperative community. The artisanal ethos that inspired the coopers to cooperate now constrained their imaginations. They continued to restrict membership to fully apprenticed craftsmen at a time when they were a dying breed. Rather than admit machine operators as shareholders, the cooperators hired them only as wage laborers. As a consequence, some coopers achieved independence but did so as employers, causing them to lose their cooperative identities.⁵⁷

If Chauncy Curtis and Frances Bachelder had lived to see the century end, they would have looked back with very mixed emotions. For the two men, cooperation was both a success and a failure. Curtis the activist had probably participated in more cooperative experi-

ments than any other worker in Minneapolis, but when the opportunity arose in 1885, he abandoned the problems of cooperatives to become a patrol driver in the police department. When he lost that job in 1887, he did not return to his craft but instead tried his hand at real estate sales.⁵⁸ Bachelder remained a member of the North Star and saw it prosper for many years. In fact, in 1900 it was the most successful cooper shop in the city. By defying the Knights of Labor and staying outside the barrel-makers' pool, however, he and the North Star were partly to blame for the disintegration of cooperation among the coopers.

Yet, for a few years in the 1880s, the cooperative coopers of Minneapolis dominated an entire industry. As craft workers they developed independence, pride, and a trade-union tradition that sustained cooperative activism. As relatively isolated members of an expanding urban environment, they joined a broad-based labor movement and acted to transform their industry. The Knights' power galvanized them and broadened their vision of feasible reform. But the coopers lacked a uniform cooperative vision and, under the pressures of the market, fought with each other. When the labor movement collapsed in the late 1880s, they reverted to a strategy of craft exclusionism. Cooperation then lost its visionary appeal and served only as their last weapon against the unskilled. □



NOTES

1. *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 30, 1887.
This article enlarges upon points the author made in a comparative essay, "The Citizen Producer: The Rise and Fall of Working-Class Cooperatives in the United States," in *Consumers Against Capitalism?: Consumer Cooperation in Europe, North America, and Japan, 1840–1990*, ed. Ellen Furlough and Carl Strikwerda (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).
2. *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 30, 1887. Curtis was an original member of the first local assembly, ca. 1878, and later a state organizer for the Knights; see George B. Engberg, "The Rise of Organized Labor in Minnesota, 1850–1890" (master's thesis, University of Minnesota, 1939), 40, 56. The Knights structure was built of single-trade or "mixed" multi-trade local assemblies grouped geographically into district, trade, and state assemblies, which sent delegates to the national assembly's annual meeting.
3. Knights of Labor, *Record of Proceedings of the Twentieth Regular Meeting of D. A. 79* (St. Paul, July 17, 1887), 8, copy in John P. McGaughey Papers, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) Library, St. Paul; Articles of Incorporation of the Co-Operative Publishing Co., vol. D, p. 314–17, and the Co-Operative Mercantile Assn., vol. E, p. 366–68, both in Secretary of State, Corporation Division, Record of Incorporations (Articles of Incorporation), Minnesota State Archives, MHS, hereinafter called Incorporation Records. For the tally of cooperatives, see Albert Shaw, *Cooperation in the Northwest*, Studies in Historical and Political Science, vol. 6 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1888), 203–30, 244–45, 263–64, 268, 275, 299–300, 302–05.
4. Francis A. Walker, comp., *Statistics of the Population of the United States from the Ninth Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 1: 178; Albert Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, Publications of the American Economic Assn., vol. 1, no. 4 (Baltimore, 1886), 8; Lucile M. Kane, *The Falls of St. Anthony: The Waterfall that Built Minneapolis* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1987), 98–101.
5. Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 13–14; Engberg, "Rise of Organized Labor," 16–17, 28, 40.
6. G. O. Virtue, "The Co-operative Coopers of Minneapolis," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 19 (Aug. 1905): 527–28; Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 11–21. See, for example, "By-Laws of the Hennepin County Barrel Co. with Articles of Incorporation, Co-operative Laws of 1870 & Amendments" (Minneapolis: Book Press of Chas. F. Young & Co., 1886), reprinted in *Pamphlets in American History*, Cooperative Societies, #99.
7. U.S., Manuscript Census, 1870, Hennepin County, microfilm ed., Roll 5, p. 558, MHS; *Daily Globe* (St. Paul), Jan. 1, 1883; *Northwestern Miller*, May 31, 1889. (All *Northwestern Miller* citations are to the weekly column "Coopers' Chips" unless otherwise noted.)
8. *Minnesota Mirror*, Sept. 14, 1883; Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 15, 21.
9. Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 14–15; Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 43; *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Jan. 6, 1889.
10. Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 23–25; Virtue, "Co-operative Coopers," 529; *Minnesota Mirror*, Sept. 14, 1883, Nov. 16, 1883. The coop sold its stove factory in early 1887; *Northwestern Miller*, Feb. 4, 1887.
11. Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 22, 26; "Minneapolis Cooper Shops," *Northwestern Miller, Holiday Number*, 1887.
12. Virtue, "Co-operative Coopers," 527, 529–30; "Coopering in Minneapolis," *Northwestern Miller, Holiday Number*, 1886; Richard T. Ely, *The Labor Movement in America* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1905), 188–89; J. P. McGaughey, "Land as a Basis for Cooperative Labor," *Journal of United Labor*, 1886, p. 1198; "Cooperation," *Journal of United Labor*, 1886, p. 2164; "Some Results of Co-operation," *Journal of United Labor*, May 21, 1887; *Minnesota Mirror*, Aug. 31, 1883, Nov. 9, 1883; *Northwestern Miller*, Dec. 3, 1886; Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 7. All *Journal of United Labor* citations, here and below, are from John Samuel Papers, Box 5, Newspaper Clippings, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.
13. Virtue, "Co-operative Coopers," 537–38; G. O. Virtue, "The End of the Cooperative Coopers," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (May 1932): 541–42; Herbert G. Gutman, "The Labor Policies of the Large Corporation in the Gilded Age: The Case of the Standard Oil Company," in *Power and Culture: Essays on the American Working Class*, ed. Ira Berlin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 213–54; Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 23. For a description of how machines transformed barrel making, see Franklin E. Coyne, *The Development of the Cooperage Industry in the United States, 1620–1940* (Chicago: Lumber Buyers Publishing Co., 1940), 23–26.
14. State of Wisconsin, *Second Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics, 1885–1886* (Madison: Democrat Printing Co., State Printers, 1886), 187–88.
15. Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 18–21.
16. Here and below, "By-Laws of the Hennepin County Barrel Co.," 1–12.
17. Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 26–35; *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 3, 1884; *Minnesota Mirror*, Sept. 21, 1883; State of Minnesota, *First Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the Two Years Ending December 31, 1887–8, 220–21*; *Northwestern Miller*, Oct. 9, 1885, Jan. 13, 1888; "Some Results of Co-operation," *Journal of United Labor*, May 21, 1887.
18. *Northwestern Miller*, July 4, Aug. 22, 29, Nov. 14, Dec. 5—all 1884; July 14, Dec. 25, 1885; Jan. 8, Feb. 26, July 16, 1886; Aug. 5, 1887; July 19, 1889; *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 30, 1887; *Minnesota Mirror*, Nov. 9, 23, 1883.
19. Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 33.
20. Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 69; *Daily Globe*, Aug. 15, 1885; *Northwestern Miller*, July 3, Aug. 14, Sept. 11, Nov. 20—all 1885; Apr. 1, 1887; Jan. 13, 1888. On Gill, see *Minneapolis City Directory, 1876, 143, 1877, 421*.

21. Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 69–71; *Northwestern Miller*, Aug. 14, 28, 1885; May 21, 1886. The address was 1424 Seventh Street So.; *Daily Globe*, Feb. 7, 1886.
22. Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 68–71; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Jan. 13, 1887, in Federal Writers' Project "Annals of Minnesota," microfilm, R[oll] 70, F[rame] 188, MHS; *Daily Globe*, Aug. 15, 1885; *Northwestern Miller*, Jan. 4, 1889.
23. Shaw, *Cooperation in the Northwest*, 249.
24. Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 18, 45; Coyne, *Development of Cooperaage Industry*, 21; *Minnesota Mirror*, Aug. 31, Sept. 14, 1883; "By-Laws of Hennepin County Barrel Co.," 12, 18.
25. Shaw, *Cooperation in the Northwest*, 253.
26. Here and below, *Northwestern Miller*, Oct. 17, 31, 1884.
27. *Northwestern Miller*, Dec. 4, 11, 1885; *Daily Globe*, Jan. 17, 1886.
28. *Northwestern Miller*, Dec. 11, 1885, Jan. 8, 22, 29, 1886; *Daily Globe*, Jan. 17, 1886.
29. *Northwestern Miller*, Dec. 12, 18, 1885; Jan. 15, June 25, 1886.
30. George B. Engberg, "The Knights of Labor in Minnesota," *Minnesota History* 22 (Dec. 1941): 375; Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 103; *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 4, 1886, Apr. 13, 1887; McGaughey, "Land as a Basis," 1198; Knights of Labor, *Record of Proceedings of the Twenty-First Regular Meeting of D. A. 79* (Minneapolis, Jan. 15, 1888), 12, Terence V. Powderly Papers, microfilm ed., Roll 66; *Twentieth Regular Meeting of D. A. 79*, 8.
31. See, for example, articles of incorporation for the Co-operative Printing Co., vol. K, 242, Acme Barrel Co., vol. L, 596, Co-operative Publishing Co., vol. D, 314–17, Cooperative Mercantile Assn., vol. E, 366–68, North Star Barrel Co., vol. F, 62–64, Liberty Barrel Co., vol. D, 624–27, Phoenix Barrel Co., vol. F, 62–64, Northwestern Barrel Co., vol. E, 14–16, Hennepin County Barrel Co., vol. E, 251–56, Painters & Decorators Co-Operative, vol. O, 321–24, Minneapolis Co-Operative Cooperaage Co., vol. M, 335–37, Cooperative Barrel Manufacturing Co., vol. C, 188–89, and Minneapolis Co-Operative Co., vol. T, 404–08, all in Incorporation Records, MHS; *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1886–87, under Cigar Manufacturers, Groceries, Laundries; 1887–88, under Shirt Manufacturers, Printers; 1888–89, under Incorporated Companies. See also *Northwestern Miller*, Dec. 3, 1886.
- On the land association, see *Minnesota Mirror*, Jan. 11, June 6, 1884; Articles of Incorporation, Co-Operative Land Assn., vol K, 255–57, Incorporation Records, MHS; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Apr. 1, 1886, in "Annals," R70, F180, and May 16, 1886, May 1, 3, 1887; *Daily Globe*, Mar. 21, Apr. 11, May 30, Aug. 1—all 1886.
32. *Twentieth Regular Meeting of D. A. 79*, 59–64, 70. See also *Twenty-First Regular Meeting of D. A. 79*, 5–11, 23, and Knights of Labor, *Record of Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Regular Meeting of D.A. 79* (Minneapolis, Jan. 20, 1889), 14–19, both Powderly papers, R66.
33. Ely, *Labor Movement in America*, 188; Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 50. These chroniclers of Minneapolis's cooperatives characterized Rankin as the "father" and "patriarch" of the local movement. See also James S. Rankin, "Hard Times: Their Cause and Cure," reprinted in *Pamphlets in American History*, Socialism, #290, quote, 45–46; *Journal of United Labor*, Apr. 1884, p. 753; *Minnesota Mirror*, Aug. 31, 1883.
34. *Legislative Manual for the State of Minnesota*, 1883, 488, 1885, 538; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Jan. 26, 1885; *St. Paul Daily Globe*, Jan. 1, 1883, p. 4; Engberg, "Rise of Organized Labor," 103–112; *Twentieth Regular Meeting of D. A. 79*, 26.
35. Minnesota, *First Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics*, 222–23, 225; Virtue, "Co-operative Coopers," 537–38.
36. *Minnesota Mirror*, May 2, 9, 16, 1884; *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 3, July 19, 1884; *Northwestern Miller*, July 18, Aug. 1, 15, 29, Sept. 5, 12—all 1884.
37. The Hennepin Cooperative introduced machinery a year or two before the other cooperative shops. See Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 28; Virtue, "Co-operative Coopers," 538.
38. *Northwestern Miller*, Dec. 19, 26, 1884.
39. "Coopering in Minneapolis," *Northwestern Miller*, *Holiday Number*, 1885; Virtue, "Co-operative Coopers," 538–39; Shaw, *Cooperation in a Western City*, 23, 27.
40. "Coopering in Minneapolis," *Northwestern Miller*, *Holiday Number*, 1885; Kane, *Falls of St. Anthony*, 42, 119.
41. *Northwestern Miller*, Feb. 26, 1886; "Coopering in Minneapolis," *Northwestern Miller*, *Holiday Number*, 1886.
42. *Northwestern Miller*, Feb. 26, Mar. 5, 26, Apr. 2, 23, 30—all 1886; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Apr. 30, 1886, in "Annals," R91, F1157.
43. *Northwestern Miller*, June 18, 25, July 2, Aug. 20, Sept. 10, 17, 24, Oct. 1, 8, 15—all 1886; *Minneapolis Tribune*, Sept. 12, 1886, in "Annals," R91, F1190, Oct. 13, 1886 (quote).
44. *Minneapolis Tribune*, Oct. 14, 15, 19, 24, 27, 1886; *Northwestern Miller*, Oct. 22, 29, 1886, Jan. 14, 1887; *Daily Globe*, Oct. 24, 1886; Knights of Labor, *Record of the Proceedings of the Fifth Quarterly Meeting of D. A. 79* (Mankato, MN, Jan. 16, 1887), 17–24, 26, 34–35, Powderly papers, R66.
45. *Fifth Quarterly Meeting of D. A. 79*, 17–24, 26, 34–35; *Northwestern Miller*, Jan. 14, Feb. 4, Aug. 12, 1887; *Twentieth Regular Meeting of D. A. 79*, 36–37, 42–44.
46. *Northwestern Miller*, Apr. 29, 1887.
47. *Northwestern Miller*, June 3, 1887; John F. Cronin, Secretary of D. A. 79, to John Lamb, State Commissioner of Labor Statistics, in Minnesota, *First Biennial Report of Bureau of Labor Statistics*, 225–26.
48. Cronin to Lamb; *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 21, 1887.
49. Here and below, *Northwestern Miller*, Apr. 29, May 6, 20, June 3, 10, 17, July 1, 8—all 1887; *Twentieth Regular Meeting of D. A. 79*, 46–47.
50. *Northwestern Miller*, May 6, 20, July 1, 22, Aug. 12, Oct. 14—all 1887. The North Star remained obstructionist even after W. H. Bailey, a member of the Knights' national executive board and president of the Cannelburg cooperative mine, came to negotiate a solution to the crisis; *Northwestern Miller*, July 15, 22, Aug. 12, 19, 26, Sept. 9, 16—all 1887; *Twenty-First Regular Meeting of D. A. 79*, 30.

51. *Northwestern Miller*, Oct. 21, Nov. 4, 1887; *Twenty-First Regular Meeting of D. A.* 79, 32.

52. *Northwestern Miller*, June 24, Dec. 2, 9, 1887; *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 21, 1887. The ruling of the court judge, a member of the Sixth Street Shop, is not known.

53. William Argus to E. W. Bemis, Aug. 25, 1896, and Sept. 15, 1896, in Edward W. Bemis Records, State Historical Society of Wisconsin; *Northwestern Miller*, June 3, 10, 17, July 8, 15, 22, Aug. 12, 19, 26, Sept. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30—all 1887; Jan. 20, Mar. 2, 1888; *Twentieth Regular Meeting of D. A.* 79, 44, 46-47; *Twenty-First Regular Meeting of D. A.* 79, 29-30, 32.

54. *Northwestern Miller*, Aug. 12, Sept. 16, 1887.

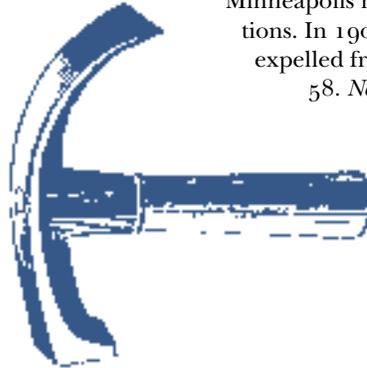
55. *Twentieth Regular Meeting of D. A.* 79, 15; *Twenty-Third Regular Meeting of D. A.* 79, 13; *Northwestern Miller*, Aug. 3, Sept. 14, 28, Oct. 5—all 1888.

56. Virtue, "End of Cooperative Coopers," 541-45.

57. *Northwestern Miller*, Jan. 4, 1889; Virtue, "Co-operative Coopers," 539-40, 544, and "End of Cooperative Coopers," 541-45. I found no mention of the colony after 1887 in Minneapolis newspapers or Knights of Labor publications. In 1903 the shops with wage laborers were expelled from the coopers' trade union.

58. *Northwestern Miller*, Aug. 28, 1885, Apr. 30, 1886, Aug. 19, Oct. 7, 1887.

On Curtis, see *Minneapolis City Directory*, 1884-85, 201, 1888-89, 433.



All images—from newspapers, books, photographs, and manuscripts—are from MHS collections. The Sanborn fire-insurance map is sheet 12 of Minneapolis, 1885, vol. 1-2; the articles of incorporation are from vol. E, p. 255, Secretary of State Incorporation Records, Minnesota State Archives.



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