

2003

"Magic City" class, community, and reform in Roanoke, Virginia, 1882-1912

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**“MAGIC CITY”
CLASS, COMMUNITY, AND REFORM IN ROANOKE, VIRGINIA, 1882-1912**

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by
Paul R. Dotson, Jr.
B. A. Roanoke College, 1990
M. A. Virginia Tech, 1997
December 2003

For Herman, Kathleen, Jack, and Florence

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men" (1925)

Acknowledgements

Gaines Foster shepherded this dissertation from the idea to the reality with the sort of patience, encouragement, and guidance that every graduate student should be so lucky to receive. A thanks here cannot do justice to his efforts, but I offer it anyway with the hope that one day I will find a better method of acknowledging my appreciation. The rest of my committee – Charles Royster, John Rodrigue, Charles Shindo, and Mark Zucker – did what they could to make me see a bigger picture. Whatever shortcomings remain (and I am sure there are plenty), are here despite the efforts of these five scholars.

The goodwill of archivists, institutions, and historians contributed enormously to this project. Elaine Powers, librarian of the Virginia Room in the downtown branch of the Roanoke City Public Library, and Kent Chrisman, chairman of the History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, offered advice and did all they could to make their respective collections accessible. The Virginia Historical Society provided an Andrew W. Mellon Research Fellowship that permitted a two-week sweep through its abundant resources. The Graduate School at Louisiana State University provided a Dissertation Fellowship that permitted a year devoted solely to writing. Crandall Shifflett at Virginia Tech and John Selby at Roanoke College were examples of the kind of historian I would someday like to be, as were Sarah Cotton and Chris Curtis, my colleagues at Virginia Tech.

Although three of my grandparents – Herman and Kathleen Dotson and John Wyatt – did not hang around long enough to see this, I wrote it with them in mind. Herman and Kathleen, who arrived in the “Magic City” not long after my story here ends, made me want to get that story right. Jack, who covered more ground in one lifetime than most could hope for in ten, made me realize I could tell it. My parents, Paul and Carol Dotson, encouraged me along on this journey and inspired me to do something that would hopefully make them proud. This dissertation, while required for the PhD, perhaps also partially fulfills at least a few of the requirements of being a

good son. The rest of my family – Brett and Kathy Dotson, Neil, Liza and Hayden Conner, and Florence Wyatt – put up with my endless stories about Roanoke and even acted interested.

Luckily for me, the shadow fell on an assortment of comrades and co-conspirators. Giving them credit here is futile, but at least they will know that I tried. Jim Burtch in Roanoke and Court Carney in Baton Rouge could not be or have been better friends. The members of the history department poker club – Court, Ben Cloyd, Matt Reonas, and John Sacher (emeritus) – always knew who the sucker at the table was but never let on. Although I am much poorer as a result, I know I am a little wiser too. (Ben also beat me at tennis and golf more times than should be legally permissible.) Heather Morrison was smart enough to know that there was more to graduate school than academics. Chris Leahy kept the nights interesting in the early years. More than anyone else, Leslie Lightfoot made me want to finish this dissertation. Other good friends – Sabrene Blevins, Christine Hastings, and Steve Sellers – helped me out along the way. The debts I have incurred will be repaid in full.

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Abstract

The “Magic City” of Roanoke, Virginia, the fastest growing urban area in the South from 1880 to 1890, exemplified everything that New South boosters claimed to have wanted. The prototypical New South city, Roanoke emerged as an extreme version of all that was supposed to remedy the South’s post-Civil War economic stagnation. The city’s promise, however, revealed the empty promise of the New South. Despite intensive demographic and industrial growth, by the early twentieth century, Roanoke failed to evolve into the dynamic and modern city prophesied by New South visionaries. Its abysmal conditions, racial turmoil, class conflicts, and superficial “reforms” made it much more village than city, far more dystopia than utopia. “Magic City” examines that history from 1882 to 1912 using the lenses of class, community, and reform as points of departure. It analyzes Roanoke’s rapid growth in the 1880s and traces the consequences of that intensive development through 1912, the year local “reform” reached its climax.

Roanoke’s emergence in 1882 as the headquarters for two northern-owned railroads was largely the result of native businessmen who adhered blindly to the New South creed. They cultivated a business-friendly ethos that put economic development ahead of all other causes, envisioned industrial expansion as a panacea for social ills and infrastructure troubles, and channeled municipal capital into investment schemes instead of solutions to the rapidly growing city’s numerous other needs. The consequences were widespread societal and institutional malfunctioning that climaxed in a cataclysmic lynch riot. When that revolt and the city’s decrepit appearance threatened to stall additional development, local elites “reformed” Roanoke in ways that made investors less anxious. Those modifications, however, were largely superficial and failed to resolve the municipality’s systematic and deeply embedded problems. Roanoke’s early history is primarily the story of sorting out the myriad tensions and ambiguities inherent in attempting to create a modern industrialized city on the one hand, and fomenting municipal and

civic order on the other. Examining that story hopefully offers a more complete understanding of how urban development in the New South actually operated.

Introduction

From 1880 to 1890, no city in the South grew faster than Roanoke, Virginia. Only a tiny village known as Big Lick in 1882, Roanoke rose in eight years to become Virginia's fifth largest city as well as the fourth fastest growing urban area in the nation.¹ By 1900, it was the state's third biggest city, behind only Richmond and Norfolk, and home to the largest locomotive manufacturing plant in the South. Located in a valley of the Appalachian Mountains in the southwestern portion of the state, Roanoke owed its phenomenal growth to a small cadre of local merchants and businessmen who convinced Philadelphia capitalists to choose the hamlet of Big Lick as the corporate headquarters and shops of their Shenandoah Valley and Norfolk & Western railroads. Shortly thereafter, thousands of skilled workers from the North moved to Roanoke to labor in its new railroad shops and iron furnaces. Scores of rural migrants from Southwest and Central Virginia, enticed by the prospect of urban employment and pushed by dwindling opportunities in the surrounding mountains and countryside, arrived as well. Later in the 1880s, New South boosters proclaimed Roanoke the "Magic City" and described it as "teeming with wealth, culture, industry, energy, and vim." Its destiny, they promised, was "to be that of one of the largest manufacturing and industrial centers of the South."² In 1890, a correspondent sent south by the New York *Herald* confirmed their assessments. In Roanoke, he reported, "dazzling bewildered excitement is everywhere."³

The rapid urbanization and industrialization of Roanoke is but a small chapter of the story of modernization in the late nineteenth-century South. Elsewhere in the region older towns experienced similar growth and a few other new cities also seemingly rose from nowhere.

¹ Lawrence H. Larsen, *The Rise of the Urban South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 155, 157.

² *Manufacturers' Record*, 15 December 1888.

³ *The (New York) Herald*, 15 June 1890.

Scholars tend to point to these urban places as locations where a different kind of South was coming into existence – one marked by industrial labor, northern capital, rapid transportation, mass culture, modern communication, class stratification, cash exchange, and racial segregation. In *The Origins of the New South*, C. Vann Woodward suggests that what was new in the South from the 1880s through the early 1900s was the displacement of the region’s old political and economic leaders by a new generation of urban entrepreneurs, businessmen, and boosters. Also new to the region, he claims, was a growing dependence on a “colonial” and “exploitive” industrial economy under the control of northern investors as well as a racial caste system that disfranchised and subjugated black residents.⁴ Many of these processes, Woodward points out, either originated or came into sharpest focus in the South’s urban spaces. In *New Men, New Cities, New South*, Don Doyle argues that cities “were the central forces in making the modern South” and “the major source of change within the region.”⁵ Taking Doyle’s assertion even further, Edward Ayers contends in *The Promise of the New South* that “much that was new about the New South” began in its burgeoning and “raw” cities in the late nineteenth century.⁶ Indeed, as Paul Gaston observes in his *New South Creed*, much of the inflated rhetoric of a New South existing rested on unique examples of growth and industrialization occurring in a region where the vast majority of the population continued to live in rural areas and to depend on a stagnant agricultural economy.⁷

⁴ C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1951), 111-141, 152-174, 300-320, 322-359.

⁵ Don Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1990), xi.

⁶ Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University, 1992), 80.

⁷ Paul Gaston, *New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1976), 189-245.

Historians of the New South often point to Roanoke as an example of the phenomenal change occurring in some parts of the region. Woodward and Ayers place Roanoke alongside Birmingham, Alabama – another “Magic City” – and suggest that each was a New South “boomtown.” Because theirs are panoramic analyses of the region, neither Woodward nor Ayers devote much effort to explaining the processes of rapid growth and industrialization in these places. Other scholars who have analyzed New South cities or industries focus either broadly on the entire South, look exclusively at older cities, or investigate company towns and mill villages.⁸ When historians have paid attention to new cities in the late nineteenth-century South, they have almost uniformly concentrated on Birmingham and its steel industry.⁹ When explaining modernization in Appalachia, historians have also concentrated almost exclusively on the region’s extractive industries or on its older towns, ignoring cities on the periphery like Roanoke, where manufacturing was the main source of employment.¹⁰ Historians who have focused on

⁸ For a sample of urban New South historiography that focuses on the entire region, see Lawrence Larsen, *The Urban South: A History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990); Blaine Brownwell and David Goldfield, eds., *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1977); for a sample of work that focuses on older cities, see Don Doyle, *Nashville in the New South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1985); Joy L. Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress, 1880-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1969); Eugene Watts, *Social Bases of City Politics: Atlanta, 1865-1903* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978); Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath, Jr., eds., *Towards a New South? Studies in Post-Civil War Southern Communities* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982); James Russell, *Atlanta, 1847-1890: City Building in the Old South and New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1988); for a sample of the work on company towns or mill villages, see Crandall Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1991); Douglas Flamming, *Creating the Modern South: Millhands and Managers in Dalton, Georgia, 1884-1984* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1992); David Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1982); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et al., *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1987).

⁹ For a sample of the extensive work on Birmingham, see bibliographies in Carl V. Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham, 1871-1921* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1977); Henry M. McKiven, Jr., *Iron and Steel: Class, Race, and Community in Birmingham, Alabama, 1875-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995).

¹⁰ For a sample of this trend, see Eller, *Miners* as well as Shifflett, *Coal Towns*; Ronald Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change*

Roanoke usually do so in ways that seek to disconnect it from the region or downplay industry there. Ronald Eller, for example, portrays Roanoke in the 1880s and 1890s as the “booming” industrial base of operations for an “assault” by northeastern capitalists on the nearby mountains.¹¹ That the city was in Appalachia or that natives were responsible for much of its development is less important to Eller than the fact that a few wealthy Philadelphians owned Norfolk & Western.¹² Scholars of urban Virginia have also overlooked the “Magic City.”¹³ As a result, the work that exists on Roanoke is almost exclusively within larger studies of the entire state. In *Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925*, for example, Allen W. Moger devotes four pages to an examination of the city’s rapid rise and early political climate.¹⁴ Other state historians

in West Virginia, 1880-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998); David Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coalfields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1981); Michael J. McDonald and William B. Wheeler, *Knoxville, Tennessee: Continuity and Change in an Appalachian City* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1983).

¹¹ Ronald Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1982.), 70.

¹² For Roanoke being in Appalachia, see Ann DeWitt Watts, “Cities and Their Place in Southern Appalachia,” *Appalachian Journal* 8 (Winter 1981): 106-08.

¹³ For examples, see Michael Chesson, *Richmond After the War* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1981); William D. Henderson, *Gilded Age City: Politics, Life and Labor in Petersburg, Virginia, 1874-1889* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1980); Christopher Silver, *Twentieth-Century Richmond: Planning, Politics, and Race* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1984).

¹⁴ Allen W. Moger, *Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), 134-137.

have likewise devoted a few pages here and there to Roanoke's early history.¹⁵ As a consequence, surprisingly little work exists on Roanoke.¹⁶

The lack of scholarly attention not only leaves Roanoke almost entirely out of the canon of New South urban historiography, it neglects one of the cities contemporary boosters heralded as a unique example of the New South. This study seeks to illuminate that past using the lenses of class, community, and reform as points of departure. It is primarily a social and cultural history, which attempts to interpret life in the town from the perspective of a broad cross-section of residents. To better understand the countless unintended consequences of Roanoke's development

¹⁵ For examples, see Virginius Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion, A History from 1607 to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 1971); James Tice More, *Two Paths to the New South: The Virginia Debt Controversy, 1870-1883* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974). According to longtime Library of Virginia historian and archivist Brent Tarter, the lack of more comprehensive work on Roanoke makes the municipality one of the urban areas of the state in need of analysis. See his "The New Virginia Bookshelf," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 104 (Winter 1996): 91, 94, 99.

¹⁶ Although three monographs on the city exist, each suffers from a variety of deficiencies. Raymond Barnes' encyclopedic narrative, *A History of the City of Roanoke* (Radford, VA: Commonwealth Press, 1968), is an antiquarian compilation of yearly "facts" gleaned from newspapers, which suffers from a constant focus on "great men" as well as from overt racism. The Works Progress Administration's *Roanoke: Story of County and City* (Roanoke: Roanoke City School Board, 1942) is valuable as a reference guide but is also essentially a celebratory compilation of information. Claire White's *Roanoke 1740-1982* (Roanoke: Roanoke Valley Historical Society, 1982) is far better at analysis but so narrowly focused it covers the city's entire history in little over one hundred pages. Scholars who have paid attention to Roanoke have focused almost solely on its 1893 riot. Ann Field Alexander's "Like an Evil Wind: The Roanoke Riot of 1893 and the Lynching of Thomas Smith" (*Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 100 [April 1992]: 171-204), does much to place the riot within the context of mob action and lynching elsewhere in the New South as well as to show the long-term ramifications of the melee. Gordon B. McKinney, in "Industrialization and Violence in Appalachia in the 1890s" (in *An Appalachian Symposium: Essays Written in Honor of Cratis D. Williams*, ed. J. W. Williamson [Bonne, NC: Appalachian State University Press, 1977]), focuses on the ways that the modernization process itself was a contributor to the riot. Finally, John A. Waits' thesis, "Roanoke's Tragedy: The Lynch Riot of 1893" (MA thesis, University of Virginia, 1972), documents the riot's chronology and participants. Others have focused on brief episodes in the city's past or on some of its unique institutions. For example, Elizabeth Coleman, in "The Night Ride That Made Roanoke" (*Virginia Cavalcade* 4 [Summer 1954]: 9-13), describes the series of events that led Norfolk & Western to select Big Lick as its new corporate headquarters. Although there is much analysis available on the career of John Nolen, only Debra L. Alderson's "John Nolen, City Planner: The Roanoke Plans, 1907, 1928" (MA thesis, Department of Architecture, University of Virginia, 1992), interprets his attempts to remodel Roanoke. Beyond these few works, however, little analysis of early Roanoke exists.

and the sea of uncertainties churning beneath its New South veneer of progress, this work views the city as an ongoing process rather than a static entity. It begins in the 1870s, when industrialization in Appalachian Virginia set in motion the processes that resulted in the rise of Roanoke, continues through city-building efforts in the 1880s and 1890s, and ends in 1912, the year civic “reform” reached its climax. Mainly, this study is an investigation of modernization processes in a southern “boomtown”; a place coming to grips with the chaos and disorder attendant to all such “instant cities”; a place rife with myriad societal and cultural transformations and tensions, class and racial cleavages and coalescences, fantastic booms and crushing busts, bloody riots and genteel reforms; a place fraught with uncertainties, ambiguities, and confusion on the one hand and a blind devotion to a vision that increased industrialization would serve as a panacea for all the city’s civic and social ills on the other. In short, a town born in a business deal and built on cow pastures that attempted to realize the grandiose prophecies of New South boosters.

These processes had their origins in successful efforts of Big Lick’s merchants and professionals to lure the Shenandoah Valley Railroad to their hamlet. Natives, albeit with a helping hand from their northern benefactors, were primarily responsible for the intense industrial and demographic development that followed. They were also the residents who reaped the most significant economic rewards in the land booms and manufacturing investments that followed. Unlike other natives trapped in industrializing Appalachia’s colonial economy, these men not only courted and welcomed northern industries, they also shepherded them into place, served on their boards of directors, and mitigated conflicts between them and the municipality’s inhabitants or elected officials. Having nearly abolished corporate taxes and guaranteed all new enterprises an accommodating and obsequious government in order to get manufacturers to locate in Roanoke, they also strapped the place with a chaotic growth pattern, company town ethos, chronically under-funded government, and wild-west “boomtown” appearance. During the initial period of haphazard growth, the city’s infrastructure failed to keep pace with the influx of new

residents, its public services proved wholly inadequate, its mud streets produced bogs that made travel difficult, and its slums, stagnant streams, and open sewers produced frequent outbreaks of cholera, typhoid, and smallpox. The severe institutional malfunctioning that followed resonated most clearly in the growth of a rowdy saloon and brothel district that occasionally exploded in brief periods of near anarchy and in the deep social conflicts that emerged between lower-class natives and skilled northern newcomers. For while the arrival of the railroad generated massive development, most of it occurred well to the east of the original settlement of Big Lick, in a place natives dubbed “new town,” a semi-private “corporate city” where the paternalistic hand of the railroad ameliorated Roanoke’s frontier conditions with macadamized streets, drainage improvements, running water, a private police force, and gas lighting.

After the dust of the city’s initial industrialization process cleared, natives for a time became even more suspicious of their northern neighbors to the east, especially since most of the newcomers were Republicans who, with the support of local African Americans, threatened the hegemony of indigenous Democrats. Very quickly, however, most white residents, no matter what their geographic origins or political affiliations, found common ground in pushing the municipality to fund modest infrastructure improvements. The city’s African Americans, who never received anything close to a fair share of public funding, fought the appropriations and in the process alienated their Republican allies. Democratic natives and Republican newcomers eventually coalesced around a number of law-and-order issues – primarily in a crusade against black “dives” and dance halls or in quests to hunt down African American men suspected of capital crimes. Whites united behind efforts to fill in gaps in public services by staffing volunteer fire brigades and militias or by contributing to charities or the campaign for a public hospital. While these efforts bridged many of the initial cleavages between the city’s natives and newcomers, they also created a deeper gulf between them and the town’s black residents.

The natives most responsible for the rapid industrialization of Roanoke quickly became its wealthiest and most powerful citizens. They worked hand-in-glove with the city’s new

corporate parents, instigated additional development, and eventually started their own companies. These initial business boosters were also the primary players in the “land boom” that swept Southwest Virginia and Roanoke in the late 1880s, men responsible for millions of dollars worth of investments in local property by northern and European investors. Though the town’s dismal conditions never came close to matching its boosters’ propaganda, business promoters adhered steadfastly to a creed that put further industrialization above all else. Indeed, they were responsible for a city government that handed out tax breaks, free land, and capital investments to outside corporations at the expense of infrastructure improvements and adequate public services.

The society that emerged in the “Magic City” was deeply divided by class and race. White migrants from the countryside and working-class residents from the North existed in one world, middle- and upper-class natives and newcomers in another, and black residents in yet one more. Most of the town’s white working classes lived in company-owned housing, frequented the city’s dozens of thriving saloons, brothels, and gambling dens, and patronized its “low brow” culture of street carnivals, traveling museums, and bawdy theaters. Roanoke’s native and newcomer elites did all they could to separate themselves from this under-class world; they formed exclusive dance societies, organized patrician clubs, held ornate fetes in their Queen Anne or Italianesque mansions, and patronized performances in venues with décor, entertainment, and admission prices that clearly demarcated them as elite space. The town’s African Americans, a third of all residents, lived in a world of exclusion, almost entirely outside white society. They resided in a completely separate section of the city, in what had originally been the white town of Gainsborough, where they created a thriving culture of dance halls, “eating houses,” and saloons that white inhabitants rarely saw. Roanoke’s three distinct sub-cultures, although for the most part completely divided, occasionally came together in ways that helped foster a civic identity. They cheered on local baseball teams, patronized circuses and fairs, and participated in citywide celebrations, all of which created bonds between them as well as the sense that they were “Roanokers.”

In the early 1890s, however, additional fissures opened among the city's white residents. They divided over moral reformers' attempts to end working-class residents' access to alcohol and over elected officials' and business leaders' efforts to rein in their frontier style of justice. A catastrophic economic recession and Roanoke's continuing primitive conditions made those tensions worse, and in 1893, after authorities refused to hand over an African American accused of assault to a white mob, the turmoil ignited one of the worst lynch riots in Virginia's history. By the time it ended, eight white residents had been killed by the local militia, the black man in their custody had been lynched and then burned in front of thousands of cheering whites, the city's mayor had fled for his life, and the reputation of the "Magic City" was in shambles. The revolt by the city's under-classes, unlike lynchings elsewhere in the South, not only terrorized Roanoke's black residents, it loudly rebuked white officials' attempt to impose order. In the aftermath, business boosters and local authorities responded with calls for increased law enforcement, prompt punishment of rioters, and a public relations campaign that touted the city as moral, progressive, and business friendly. In the end, their efforts removed lynching from the assortment of extralegal punishments available to under-class whites, erased much of the riot's public memory, and at least partially rehabilitated the city's reputation.

Having mitigated the damage from the 1893 revolt, Roanoke's boosters next shepherded the city through the decade-long national recession that followed, an economic downturn that threw hundreds of laborers out of work, drove the Norfolk & Western into bankruptcy, and financially destroyed some of the city's most successful natives. During the crisis, a second generation of promoters emerged who had fewer overt ties to the N&W and championed a bold plan to lure another railroad to town to lessen the damage done by the economic downturn. The N&W, while crucial to Roanoke's development, ceased by the mid-1890s to be a critical component of boosters' business schemes. Indeed, by then, its monopoly on local rail access had become anathema to them. When the recession finally ended, indigenous enterprises, such as the Virginia Brewing Company and the Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company, rose to

prominence and offered striking counterexamples to notions that Roanoke was solely a “railroad town.” The men behind new corporations boosted their home like never before in the early 1900s, using its Board of Trade or Chamber of Commerce as promotional machines to draw in dozens of heavy industries and diversify the local economy. They based much of their campaign on highlighting Roanoke’s business friendly ethos, which promised tax exemptions, free land, and governmental assistance. One of their major selling points, especially to northern businessmen, was the city’s abundant and tractable labor force. For while most local workers belonged to a union, they rarely walked-out or struck, and they usually acquiesced to the demands of their bosses. Company paternalism, high wages, corporate welfare, a stridently pro-business local government, and the isolation of Southwest Virginia all contributed to workers’ submissiveness.

When Roanoke’s politically active black population, village-like conditions, and debauched reputation all threatened to forestall additional development, business leaders and elected officials implemented “reforms” to remedy the situation. They eagerly disfranchised, segregated, and marginalized African American residents, banned the “poor man’s cow” from roaming city streets, passed pure milk and food ordinances, and hired a health inspector to regulate the sanitary behavior of the city’s working classes and blacks. At the same time, the town’s ministers and their followers waged a war against the town’s flourishing saloons and brothels. Later, elite women joined the fray and pushed for more stringent health inspections, better educational facilities, public parks and libraries, proper playgrounds, city beautification, urban planning, and censorship of working-class entertainment. In the end, “reforms” wrought changes that transformed Roanoke into something resembling a modern city.

Roanoke, praised as the beacon of New South progress and held up as a model for southern society, was the New South creed incarnate. It was open for business, built for commerce, populated by boosters, and ripe for exploitation. A different kind of New South emerged there that had little in common with older southern towns and cities: a South with no antebellum past, no historical encumbrances to impede development, no “croaking” by anti-

progress conservatives. It had a geographically diverse population, an abundance of skilled manufacturing jobs, an active and comparatively powerful Republican Party, and local industries under the control by Yankee capitalists. Roanoke, a southern town with more smokestacks than steeples, was not only unlike other cities in southwestern Virginia, it was unlike all cities in the state. Again and again visitors compared Roanoke to mill villages of the North. It was, however, unlike those orderly and well-managed towns as well: it was a chaotic boomtown, unable to adequately handle its massive demographic growth; a wild-west frontier outpost with a rough and tumble ethos; a city grown out of cow fields with board sidewalks over mud streets and a population hell bent on turning a fast buck. It was, as regional and local boosters had promised, *the New South*.

Chapter One

From Big Lick to Boomtown, 1874-1883

Roanoke, formerly 'Big Lick,' has had a big stroke of luck finding herself a railroad terminus or intersection. Her property values are going up with wonderful rapidity, and from all accounts she is 'booming' like a western city.

Richmond State (November 1882)¹

From 1882 to 1890, no city in the South grew faster than Roanoke, Virginia. Only a village of 669 residents called Big Lick in 1880, it was by the end of that decade Virginia's fifth largest city as well as the fourth fastest growing urban area in the nation.² Located in a valley of the Appalachian Mountains in the southwestern portion of the state, the town owed its phenomenal growth to a small group of local businessmen who convinced a Philadelphia investment company to select their home as the junction, headquarters, and machine shops for its two railroads. Rapid industrialization followed, and over the next few years, thousands of highly-skilled northern laborers arrived along with scores of new residents from the surrounding mountains and countryside.

The intensive growth that followed initially turned Roanoke into a "boomtown," with all the haphazard development, infrastructure problems, and social disorders common to such places. Homes went up in what had recently been cow pastures or wheat fields, and a downtown of false fronted stores and saloons emerged amidst bottomland bogs. The town had illogically arranged mud streets, creeks for sewers, no running water or gas lighting, no systematic method of drainage, inadequate schools, and an understaffed police force. Many of its natives resented the hordes of outsiders pouring in and were suspicious of the company that had taken over a portion of their town. Roanoke's newcomers, by contrast, found the abysmal conditions and parochial

¹ *Richmond State*, quoted in *The Roanoke Leader*, 23 Nov 1882.

² Lawrence H. Larsen, *The Rise of the Urban South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 155, 157.

atmosphere of their new home bewildering. Much of the history of early Roanoke is the story of residents dealing with these and other problems, and of how they began to forge a community out of their town's diverse and often hostile factions.

Many of the natives responsible for luring the railroad to town moved to the area that became Roanoke in the 1860s and 1870s, before Big Lick existed. Their settlement began as a colony of Gainsborough, a village about a mile to the north. Both communities developed as crossroads – Gainsborough along two wagon paths, Big Lick at the junction of two railroads – and both emerged on the same lowland plateau in a valley in the Blue Ridge Mountains, not far from two ancient saline marshes. Before whites settled in the region in the mid-eighteenth century, herds of buffalo and deer came to lick crystallized salt around the edges of these bogs. Known as “Long Lick” and “Great Lick,” the two marshes were actually basins of slowly moving spring water that eventually emptied into a creek that fed the Roanoke River. The first white homesteaders near the licks arrived in the late 1750s and built “Spotts’s Mill” along “Lick Run,” the creek flowing into the Long Lick bog. Located then in sprawling Botetourt County near the junction of the “Great Road” (a north / south route from Philadelphia to Yadkin) and the “Carolina Road” (an east / west route to the Cumberland Gap), Spotts’s Mill went on to serve as a trading post for farmers scattered about the valley floor as well as the location for a tavern serving waves of settlers traveling along the nearby wagon paths.³

Around 1800, the Spotts family sold its mill and the surrounding land to John and Cornelius Pate, and thereafter the area near the licks was known as “Pate’s” or “Pate’s Mill

³F. B. Kegley, *Virginia Frontier: The Beginnings of the Southwest, The Roanoke of Colonial Days, 1740-1783* (Roanoke: Southwest Virginia Historical Society, 1938), 179; George S. Jack, *History of Roanoke County* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1912), 12; Robert D. Stoner, *A Seed-Bed of the Republic: Early Botetourt* (Roanoke: Roanoke Valley Historical Society, 1962), 145, 152.

The “Great Road,” also known as “Indian Road” and the “Great Wagon Road,” follows the roadbed of present day U. S. Route 460. The “Carolina Road,” known variously as “Traders Path” or “Neeley’s Road,” follows the roadbed of present day U. S. Route 220.

Store.”⁴ Samuel G. Adams, a Richmond businessman, believed the crossroads could be developed, and in 1801, he purchased five-hundred acres northeast of “Pate’s” and laid out lots for the future town of “New Antwerp.” Although Adams eventually sold all the lots to investors and made promises to drain the marshes nearby, no development followed.⁵ By 1834, when Captain William Rowland purchased Pate’s Mill and the surrounding sixty-eight acres, “New Antwerp” continued to exist in deed books only. Nevertheless, Rowland and Major Kemp Gaines laid out 120 town lots for “Gainsborough” on the Great Road to the north of the mill. The partners sold about thirty lots to families and businessmen, and the following year, the tiny community that moved in successfully petitioned the state for township status.⁶ Although officially recognized as Gainsborough, locals and outsiders alike continued to call the place “Pate’s,” “Great Lick,” or “Big Lick.”

The Virginia General Assembly carved Roanoke County out of Botetourt County a few years later, and for at least a moment the centrally located Gainsborough was in the running for county seat.⁷ Local leaders, however, selected Salem, an older and significantly larger town eight miles to the west on the Great Road.⁸ Gainsborough expanded only slightly in the ensuing decades, and by the early 1850s, it was home to about a hundred residents, three churches, a

⁴ Kegley, *Virginia Frontier*, 524-25; William McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, and Roanoke City, Salem, and Roanoke City, Va., and Representative Citizens* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Co., 1902), 149-50.

⁵ Kegley, *Virginia Frontier*, 524.

⁶ Town of Gainsborough, 1834-1874 Map, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library (cited hereafter as VR-RCPL); McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, and Roanoke City*, 149-50; Erin Baratta, “Gainsboro Neighborhood, 1890-1940,” *The Journal of the History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia* 14, no. 1 (1999): 49; Raymond P. Barnes, *A History of Roanoke* (Radford, VA: Commonwealth Press, 1968), 21-23; Clare White, *Roanoke 1740-1982* (Roanoke: Roanoke Valley Historical Society, 1982), 35.

⁷ McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, and Roanoke City*, 151.

⁸ Deedie Kagey, *When Past is Prologue: A History of Roanoke County, Salem, and Roanoke City* (Roanoke: Roanoke County Sesquicentennial Committee, 1988), 106, 111-112.

blacksmith shop, a tavern, and a couple dry goods stores. Any real chance for additional development disappeared a couple of years later when the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad built its tracks through Roanoke County roughly a mile south of the community. Concerned more with building the cheapest roadbed possible than with passing through the various hamlets and villages in its path, the railroad positioned its tracks along the licks and built “Big Lick Depot” in the midst of corn and wheat fields next to a dirt road leading west into Franklin County.

The first train arrived in the fall of 1852, and at least a few of the numerous Gainsborough residents who came over to see the wood-fired engine and three cars pass by understood the magnitude of the event and relocated their businesses closer to the depot.⁹ Additional hotels joined “Trout House,” a well-known inn on the road to Franklin County, just to the south of the tracks, and several general merchandise stores moved over as well. Other commercial development, mainly the warehousing or production of plug and smoking tobacco, followed, and by the eve of the Civil War residents were referring to the area around the depot as “Big Lick.”¹⁰ Gainsborough, also sometimes known as “Big Lick,” adopted the sobriquet “Old Lick.”¹¹ Like farmers elsewhere along the line, those in neighboring counties had moved swiftly into tobacco and other cash crops soon after the railroad arrived, and many of them used Big Lick Depot, which was easily accessible via Franklin County Road, as a place to sell their harvests and stock-up on supplies.¹²

⁹ “The First Train Into Big Lick,” TMs, (1927), History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke (hereafter cited as HMHSWV); Recollections of Henry S. Trout, in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 24 April 1913.

¹⁰ Recollections of Henry S. Trout, in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 28 April 1913.

¹¹ McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, and Roanoke City*, 150.

¹² For agricultural impact of the railroad in the Highlands, see Kenneth W. Noe, *Southwest Virginia's Railroad: Modernization and the Sectional Crisis* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), chapter 2; for impact on Big Lick Depot, see Thomas Bruce, *Southwest Virginia and Shenandoah Valley* (Richmond: J. L. Hill, 1891), 133; McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, and Roanoke City*, 151-152.

The interruption of train service during the Civil War stagnated the hamlet's growth, and in April 1865, after destroying warehouses along with nearby tracks and bridges, Union General George Stoneman's troops burned the village's depot.¹³ Economic recovery did not come quickly, according to one visitor, who reported that in 1868 "Big Lick" was "a simple railroad station," a few scattered businesses, and "perhaps four houses."¹⁴ The town's population, however, had grown back to around one hundred residents by 1870, when Callowhill Turner opened a general merchandise store and tobacco warehouse in the village. The "great big swamp" east of the station, he recalled, continued to menace locals with its mysterious miasmas and mosquito-borne diseases, and although some men hunted around the bogs, most residents considered them dangerous, since livestock that wandered into the marshes occasionally sank into the mud and disappeared below the water.¹⁵

By 1874, the community had grown large enough to petition the Legislature for township status; State Delegate Henry S. Trout, son of John Trout, the owner of Trout House, presented the bill, and in February, the General Assembly created the Town of Big Lick.¹⁶ The new charter appointed Henry's father acting mayor and created boundaries a half-mile out from the depot, making Big Lick a half-mile square with the train station at its center. A spurt of development followed, and by 1876, the town had Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist and Episcopal churches, seven general merchandise stores, five tobacco factories, three tobacco warehouses, a wagon and plow factory, a harness factory, two blacksmith shops, a flour mill, two photography shops, and

¹³ Recollections of Callowhill Turner, in E. P. Tompkins, "Medical Annals of Roanoke," 2, TMs (1922), VR-RCPL; Recollections of Henry S. Trout, in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 28 April 1913.

¹⁴ Anna Clayton Logan, "Recollections of my Life," TMs (July 1917), Virginia Historical Society, Richmond (cited hereafter as VHS).

¹⁵ "Recollections of Callowhill Turner," in E. P. Tompkins, "Medical Annals of Roanoke," 2-3.

¹⁶ Charter of the Town of Big Lick, Approved by Virginia General Assembly, 28 Feb 1874, reprinted in Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 71-72.

three saloons.¹⁷ In the late 1870s, the village purchased Ferdinand Rorer's wooden storehouse on the newly completed road to Salem and turned it into a town hall, courthouse, and occasional theatre known as "Rorer Hall." The first census of the place in 1880 counted 335 black and mulatto inhabitants along with 334 white residents and reported that most locals had jobs in one of the town's tobacco factories. Blacks or mulattos employed elsewhere tended to earn a living as farm laborers or domestic servants; whites tended to work as clerks, merchants, or tobacco salesman.¹⁸

The link to the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad that created Big Lick transformed the town again in the 1880s, this time turning the village into Roanoke, a booming industrial city. Before it did, however, the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad would change ownership and another line, this one backed by northern capitalists looking to exploit the region's mineral wealth, would arrive. The process began in June 1870, five months after "Redeemers" gained control of the state and Virginia rejoined the Union, when the newly elected legislature authorized the consolidation of the Old Dominion's three major railways. Joined together in November of that year, the Norfolk & Petersburg, Southside, and Virginia & Tennessee became the Atlantic, Mississippi & Ohio Railroad (AM&O) under the direction of former Confederate General William Mahone. Although Mahone won praise as a competent manager of the AM&O, the 1873 economic recession caused the line to default on loans, and in 1875, courts placed the railroad in reorganization receivership.¹⁹

The recession also halted construction of a the Shenandoah Valley Railroad (SVRR), a line being built along the Shenandoah River from Hagerstown, Maryland, to central Virginia, and

¹⁷ McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, and Roanoke City*, 152.

¹⁸ United States Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of 1880, Schedule of Population, Town of Big Lick, County of Roanoke, State of Virginia.

¹⁹ E. F. Pat Striplin, *The Norfolk & Western: A History* (Forest, VA: Norfolk & Western Historical Society, 1997), 10-30.

funded by a group of Philadelphia investors. While the AM&O depended on passengers and agriculture for business, the SVRR proposed to derive the bulk of its profits by transporting Southwest Virginia's coal and ore. The road was originally supposed to make an east / west link with the Virginia & Tennessee Railroad in Roanoke County, but in 1872, the company dropped that proposed terminus and selected a closer and significantly cheaper link with the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad at Waynesboro, Virginia. Having barely begun surveying routes and started construction by 1873, the ensuing financial panic halted significant progress on the line. By 1879, it consisted of only forty-two miles of track between Shepherdstown, Maryland, and the Shenandoah River.²⁰ Enoch W. Clark & Company, a private Philadelphia banking house and rival of the firm that owned the SVRR, purchased the struggling railroad in June of that year. The Clark company appointed junior associate and Philadelphia native Frederick J. Kimball head of the construction firm responsible for completing the line, and with the renewed financial support, tracks for the road again began moving north from Waynesboro and south from Hagerstown. Like its previous owners, the Clark firm anticipated using the road to haul coal, iron ore, and lime.²¹ Indeed, in its new prospectus for the line, it claimed the SVRR would become "The great mineral railroad of Virginia." Not long after the purchase, the company decided that it needed a terminus further south or west of Waynesboro, and by 1881, its agents had surveyed several possible routes into Southwest Virginia and western North Carolina.²²

Mahone's AM&O remained in receivership, and although it was turning a profit hauling cotton, cattle, tobacco, lumber, and grain, it went up for auction in Richmond in February 1881.

²⁰ "Minute Book Shenandoah Valley Railroad, 1870-1881," 1-87, Shenandoah Valley Railroad Records, Norfolk & Western Railway Archives, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg (cited hereafter as N&WRA); see also, Joseph T. Lambie, *From Mine to Market: The History of Coal Transportation on the Norfolk and Western Railway* (New York: New York University Press, 1954), 9-14; Striplin, *Norfolk & Western*, 32.

²¹ Lambie, *From Mine to Market*, 12-14; Striplin, *Norfolk & Western*, 32.

²² Quote and route information from *Description of the Shenandoah Valley Railroad* (Philadelphia, 1881), 23, reprinted in Lambie, *From Mine to Market*, 13-14.

Clarence H. Clark, president of Enoch W. Clark & Company, had attempted to buy the line a year earlier by purchasing its bonds from English investors, and at the sale, he ran the bids up to \$14,000,000 before closing the deal. The purchase put the AM&O in the Clark company fold, giving the firm an east / west trunk road through Virginia as well as an obvious junction line for its Shenandoah Valley Railroad. Clark changed the name of the AM&O to the Norfolk & Western (N&W), and a few weeks later, he and the other directors of the SVRR appointed a “Committee on Construction” to find a terminus for that line with the N&W somewhere in the vicinity of Bonsack, Virginia. Although the firm appointed its railroad engineer, Frederick Kimball, president of the SVRR and vice president of the N&W, and created a board of directors for the N&W that overlapped the board of the SVRR, the Clark Company maintained each of its lines as distinct corporations. The N&W’s new managers expected it to continue hauling agricultural products, but proposed adding spur routes from the road into Southwest Virginia’s coal beds as a way to boost business.²³

The general location of the coal that Clark & Company anticipated hauling had been widely known for over a century, and from the 1840s onward, natives and outsiders alike knew the only hindrance to harvesting the minerals was gathering enough capital to construct a rail line into the Highlands. William Mahone’s *Richmond Whig* had advocated development of the region since the early 1870s, and in the years that the SVRR project had stalled, the coal belt had received even more attention. Indeed, a large audience was reading about the area’s potential in former Confederate Major Jedediah Hotchkiss’s journal *The Virginias: A Mining, Scientific, and Industrial Journal Devoted to the Development of Virginia and West Virginia*, and in Charles R. Boyd’s *Resources of South-West Virginia, Showing the Mineral Deposits of Iron, Coal, Zinc,*

²³ Information on the purchase and plans are from E. B. Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1912), 146; Lambie, *From Mine to Market*, 6-7; “Minute Book Shenandoah Valley Railroad, 1870-1881,” 244-94, Shenandoah Valley Railroad Records, N&WRA; management, ownership, and spur routes into coalfields is from *The New-York Times*, 3 May 1881.

Copper, and Lead. Boyd, a civil and mining engineer from Wytheville, Virginia, believed his work would “show up our resources in a proper manner; thus bringing in many men of capital to willingly help us not only bear our burdens, but create new facilities for making money.”²⁴

Frederick Kimball, who had already read mineral surveys commissioned by the former owners of the SVRR, purchased a hundred copies of Boyd’s book.²⁵ Access to the coalfields, he realized, would not only provide the coke necessary to fire iron furnaces in Virginia, it would also give the N&W and SVRR a cheap source of fuel as well as a valuable cargo to ship North. In May 1881, Kimball, well known for his “hands on” management style, went to the region with his wife and two Clark & Company associates to find a rail route into the Highlands. The group rode horses into the backcountry of Tazewell County, Virginia, and after stumbling across a twelve-foot wide outcropping of coal on Flat Top Mountain, they approved Mrs. Kimball’s suggestion to name the deposit “Pocahontas” in honor of that Powhatan princess.²⁶ Back in Philadelphia, the Clark firm moved quickly to monopolize access to the seam: it bought up all existing railroad charters into the area, purchased mineral rights for a hundred-thousand acres along the belt, and helped organize the Southwest Virginia Improvement Company to lease the mining rights exclusively to operators who agreed to use its railroads. By August 1881, the N&W

²⁴ For early nineteenth-century through 1870s exploration of the coalfields, see Robert H. Smith, *General William Mahone, Frederick J. Kimball and Others: A Short History of The Norfolk & Western Railway* (New York: The Newcomen Society in North America, 1949), 23; Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western*, 147-48; Lambie, *From Mine to Market*, chapter 2; Ronald Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), chapter 2; Harold W. Mann, “Economic Development in Southwest Virginia,” *Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society* 11, no. 2 (1982), 75. For quote, see Charles R. Boyd, *Resources of South-West Virginia, Showing the Mineral Deposits of Iron, Coal, Zinc, Copper, and Lead* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1881), 1.

²⁵ Lambie, *From Mine to Market*, 27.

²⁶ Smith, *Short History of The Norfolk & Western*, 23; Striplin, *Norfolk & Western*, 43. The twelve-foot wide Flat Top / Pocahontas seam ran for six miles before dividing into two five-foot seams for the next eight miles, bringing the total “Pocahontas” deposit to around six to ten thousand tons per acre, and making it one of the largest coalfields in the United States. See Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western*, 148.

had begun construction on a seventy-five mile spur line from Radford, Virginia, to Pocahontas, Virginia, a company town being built by the Improvement Company as its base of operations in the coalfields.²⁷

News of the proposed SVRR junction with the N&W in the vicinity of Bonsack spread to the Highlands not long after Clark & Company purchased the AM&O, and towns that stood any chance of getting the junction initiated campaigns to lure the railroad. Salem, which had already been selected as a junction for the rival “Valley Railroad,” sent a delegation that included the president of Roanoke College to meet with SVRR officials in Luray. Later, the town also convinced U. S. Senator William Mahone to petition the line for a terminus at Salem.²⁸ Lynchburg, already home to the AM&O’s offices and machine shops as well as a junction with the Midland Railroad, also sent a prestigious delegation to confer with the officials.²⁹ Big Lick, by contrast, assumed it had no real chance to get the junction until a survey team for the railroad came to town. Residents “grew very much interested” after that, according to State Delegate Henry Trout, and although the town lacked the budget of its larger rivals, it immediately instigated a modest campaign to make a case for the place.³⁰

In late February 1881, Big Lick’s business owners and councilmen gathered at Rorer Hall to discuss a strategy for attracting the railroad. The village, the group concurred, had numerous “inducements” that could make it the choice: it was located in the midst of an agricultural bonanza, it had rivers and creeks to supply waterpower for mills, it was “a manufacturing town of

²⁷ Smith, *Short History of The Norfolk & Western*, 23-24; Striplin, *Norfolk & Western*, 44-46; Lambie, *Mine to Market*, 30-36; Bruce, *Southwest Virginia*, 136-37; Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western*, 146-47.

²⁸ Norwood Middleton, *Salem: A Virginia Chronicle* (Salem: Salem Historical Society, 1986), 124-27.

²⁹ Elizabeth Dabney Coleman, “The Night Ride That Made Roanoke,” *Virginia Cavalcade* 4 (Summer 1954): 10.

³⁰ Quote from Recollections of Henry S. Trout, in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 1 May 1913.

no small magnitude,” and there were some mineral deposits nearby. Although the citizens present expressed interest in doing what they could to get the line’s attention, Peyton L. Terry, a wealthy tobacco merchant and dry goods store owner, told those gathered that he was afraid townspeople “were not sufficiently aroused to the importance of doing whatever necessary at once.”³¹ Members of the town’s council seconded Terry’s concern, and before the meeting ended, they appointed a committee of eight local leaders to draft a formal address to Frederick Kimball “setting forth the advantages Big Lick offers as a terminus.” The completed “memorial,” mailed to Kimball in March, focused on the village’s potential importance as a shipping center for tobacco and grain. With “a quick road to Northern markets,” the committee explained, the town would continue its “prosperous course,” and for that reason, its residents were “fully alive to the great benefits which would accrue to the town from this being chosen as the point.” If the line picked Big Lick, the memorial concluded, the village would provide a lot for a depot as well as help secure right-of-ways into town.³²

In mid-March another team of surveyors, this one headed by Colonel Upton Boyce, chief of the SVRR’s Committee on Construction, came to town to inspect possible routes.³³ Big Lick’s town council interpreted Boyce’s appearance as a sign that the village was clearly in the running, and soon after he departed, it dispatched a delegate to Philadelphia to meet with SVRR officials.³⁴ The railroad, nevertheless, continued to survey numerous other possible routes, and in order to determine the potential cost of the various terminuses under consideration, it hired local right-of-

³¹ *Big Lick Weekly News*, 2 March 1881, in Shenandoah Valley Railroad Scrapbook no. 3, N&WRA (cited hereafter as SVRRS no.).

³² Committee appointment is in Big Lick Town Council Minutes, 23 Feb 1881, Clerk’s Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building; quote is from *Big Lick Weekly News*, 12 March 1881, in SVRRS no. 3, N&WRA.

³³ Boyce’s visit recounted in *The Salem Register*, 18 March 1881, in SVRRS no. 3, N&WRA.

³⁴ Big Lick Town Council Minutes, 22 March 1881, Clerk’s Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building.

way agents to secure options on possible roadbeds. One of those employed was John C. Moomaw, a farmer and canning factory operator from neighboring Botetourt County. Though hired to explore several different routes, Moomaw wanted railroad access for his “Cloverdale Brand” of canned peaches, corn, and tomatoes, and therefore was especially interested in pathways through the hamlet of Cloverdale into Salem.³⁵ His scheme, however, had problems: the original plan for a link at Bonsack was about seven and a half miles shorter and thus tens of thousands of dollars cheaper; the SVRR was considering junctions at existing N&W depots in Big Lick, Buford’s (present-day Montvale) and Ironville (present-day Villamont); and when Moomaw and Clark & Company agents visited Salem they encountered problems securing right-of-ways into town.³⁶ Having already sold the rights for a roadbed to the Valley Railroad, Salem residents were apparently less inclined to offer expensive incentives or cheap land to get a junction with the SVRR.³⁷ Indeed, one resident recalled that “the Mayor and town council went hunting to avoid meeting the railroad men.”³⁸

Big Lick merchant Peyton Terry happened to be in Salem when the negotiations there fell apart. The news, he informed other businessmen at a meeting the next night, meant they had a

³⁵ Coleman, “The Night Ride That Made Roanoke,” 10; Big Lick resident and future Roanoke City Mayor W. K. Andrews remembered that Moomaw was working to secure right-of-ways into Salem. See “Member of First City Council of Roanoke Tells of Early Problems,” unidentified newspaper clipping, (3 Aug 1926), vertical files, HMHSWV; for specifics about Moomaw’s business operations, see stationery of his 4 March and 6 March 1882 letters to Frederick J. Kimball in the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Records, HMHSWV.

³⁶ W. K. Andrews remembered Moomaw’s rebuff in “Member of First City Council of Roanoke Tells of Early Problems.”

³⁷ Coleman, “The Night Ride That Made Roanoke,” 9-10. Unfortunately for Salem, the Valley Railroad only made it to Lexington before the 1883 recession ended future construction.

³⁸ Anna Clayton Logan, “Recollections of My Life,” 56, TMs (July 1917), VHS. Local legend continues to corroborate this rebuff; nevertheless, it is unlikely that Salem’s elected officials acted quite so cavalierly, knowing that hundreds of thousands of dollars of development were on the line. For perpetuation of this story, see Writers’ Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Virginia, *Roanoke: Story of County and City* (Roanoke: Roanoke City School Board, 1942), 139; Kagey, *When Past is Prologue*, 271.

window of opportunity to push even harder for the junction.³⁹ There is some debate about what happened next, but it is likely that John Moomaw, on his way back to Lexington to confer with the Committee on Construction, advised the businessmen gathered that a \$10,000 “cash bonus” to secure right-of-ways from Cloverdale to Big Lick and tax incentives would make the town attractive. On a deadline to meet with the railroad officials the next morning, Moomaw left but agreed to wait at a halfway point in Botetourt County for a decision from Big Lick. In the course of the next few hours, business owners pledged subscriptions for the entire amount and likely convinced the municipal government to grant the railroad an acre of land and tax exclusion. Moomaw delivered their offer, and although the railroad did not immediately make public its intentions, in early April 1881, it moved its entire survey team to Big Lick. Townspeople assumed their village was to be the terminus, but did not know for sure until Frederick Kimball made the decision official in May.⁴⁰

Soon after Kimball approved Big Lick as the junction, he and other Clark & Company executives came to investigate the site. The “Big Lick Brass Band” serenaded the delegation when it arrived, and at a meeting in Rorer Hall later, the railroad officials gave a series of rousing speeches, delighting the hundreds of residents who turned out to learn about their apparent good fortune. Colonel Upton L. Boyce, vice president of the SVRR, predicted that in three years Big

³⁹ For Terry’s presence and the resulting actions, see Roanoke Police Pension Fund Association, *History of the Roanoke Police Department* (Roanoke: Union Printing, 1916), 68.

⁴⁰ Written accounts of why the railroad chose Big Lick vary on sequence, in details, and in what the town pledged. Nevertheless, it is possible to piece together at least a semblance of the event from: Recollections of Henry S. Trout, in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 1 May 1913; Coleman, “The Night Ride That Made Roanoke,” 9-13; Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western*, 93-94; McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, and Roanoke City*, 155; PPFA, *History of the Roanoke Police*, 68-69; Striplin, *Norfolk & Western*, 40-41; Lambie, *From Mine to Market*, 15-16; for the entire survey team being relocated to Big Lick, see *Big Lick Weekly News*, 2, 23 April 1881, in SVRRS no. 3, N&WRA; for payment of Big Lick’s ten thousand dollar donation, see John C. Moomaw, Cloverdale, VA, to Frederick J. Kimball, President Shenandoah Valley Railroad, Philadelphia, PA, 22 Nov 1881, Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Records, HMHSWV; for Kimball’s endorsement of the selection, see “Minute Book Shenandoah Valley Railroad, 1870-1881,” 298, Shenandoah Valley Railroad Records, N&WRA.

Lick would boast a population of over five thousand residents.⁴¹ The village, nevertheless, could hardly have impressed the Philadelphians. At the time, according to one resident, Big Lick was “set down in the midst of wheat and corn fields and meadow lands and wood lands that came to the edge of town.” The village’s dirt and mud streets were haphazardly laid out, and beyond a few dry goods stores, tobacco factories, and hotels, the place consisted of only a drugstore, blacksmith shop, and saloon operated by “a colored man.”⁴²

Over the next few days, the railroad officials toured the area to inspect suitable sites for a hotel, depot, and machine shops. Residents expected them to pick spots in town and were surprised when Kimball, dressed in his usual “dandy” attire of checkered suit and scarf with jeweled stickpin, investigated only cow pastures and wheat fields to the east of the village.⁴³ The company offered Henry Trout \$20,000 for a portion of his farm about a half-mile to the northeast of Big Lick, and shortly after they closed the deal, Trout learned that the railroad planned to locate some of its facilities there. When local merchants found out, he recalled, they sent him to “see Mr. Kimball and ask him not to put the hotel and depot down there, as we were afraid it would draw trade off of Franklin Road.”⁴⁴ Big Lick’s town council concurred and offered a

⁴¹ Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western*, 94.

⁴² Town description from William C. Campbell, “Fortieth Anniversary Sermon,” in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 4 July 1921, clipping in William Creighton Campbell Papers, HMHSWV (cited hereafter as Campbell Papers); William C. Campbell, “Historical Roanoke,” TMS, Campbell Papers.

⁴³ Born in Philadelphia in March 1844, Kimball worked as a “rodman” in the engineering department of the Pennsylvania Railroad from 1862 to 1866. He then worked for English railroad corporations in the U. K. for the next two years. Returning to the U. S., Kimball worked for various railroads until 1881, when he was appointed president of the SVRR and vice president of the N&W. In June 1883, he was named president of the N&W, and in 1895, he was the court appointed receiver for the company. From 1896 until 1902, Kimball was chairman of the board for the N&W, and from 1902 until he died in July 1903, Kimball served again as president of that line. Biographical information from Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of Norfolk & Western*, 142.

⁴⁴ For purchase of Trout’s land, see *Virginia Free Press*, 11 June 1881, in SVRRS no. 4, N&WRA; for quote, see Recollections of Henry S. Trout, in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 1 May 1913.

suitable lot or \$500 if the line would put its depot near the existing N&W station.⁴⁵ Both pleas failed, and over the next year, this decision and others combined to permanently alter future patterns of growth for the town. For while Big Lick's "cash bonus" and tax incentives had solidified the deal, it was the thousands of acres of inexpensive farmland surrounding the town that won the junction. Indeed, the Philadelphians selected Big Lick because it *was* a tiny village; the firm had no plans to develop the hamlet, but simply intended to use it as a temporary base of operations until its industries and company town went up nearby.

Shortly after the Clark & Company executives left, locals voted to change their town's peculiar name to "Kimball." "This has been done," John C. Moomaw informed their honoree, "to give evidence of the high esteem and appreciation you enjoy in the heart of these people on account of the improvements you are projecting in their midst . . . and to show that our people hold no unkind feelings toward the people of the North."⁴⁶ Frederick Kimball responded to the honor in early July, informing townspeople that while he would "always remember this act of courtesy on their part," he preferred the name "Roanoke," the appellation of the county and nearby river.⁴⁷ Locals, the *Big Lick Weekly News* observed, had expected Kimball to show just such "delicacy and good taste" in declining their original choice. They believed "Roanoke" was

⁴⁵ Big Lick Town Council Minutes, 29 June 1881, Clerk's Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building.

⁴⁶ For name change vote, see Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western*, 94; *Virginia Free Press*, 30 July 1881, in HMHSWV; quote is from J. C. Moomaw, Cloverdale, VA, to Frederick J. Kimball, Philadelphia, PA, 28 June 1881, reprinted in Lambie, *From Mine to Market*, 16.

According to Kagey, *When Past is Prologue*, 6-7, there is considerable confusion over the meaning and genealogy of the English word "Roanoke." Its origins, however, are likely from the Powhatan world "rawrenoc" or "rawrenoke," meaning polished shell money, or from what was originally called "Roanoak" Island, home of the Lost Colony.

⁴⁷ *Big Lick Weekly News*, 9 July 1881, in SVRRS no. 4, N&WRA.

“decidedly the prettier name for a town,” and shortly afterwards approved it as the legal name for their village.⁴⁸

Local leaders drafted a town charter for “Roanoke” that they believed would facilitate additional development. It exempted capital invested in manufacturing enterprises from municipal taxation for the following ten years, limited property taxes to less than 1 percent of assessed value, and expanded the town’s boundaries almost two and a half square miles, which absorbed the Town of Gainsborough along with land east of Big Lick recently purchased or optioned by the Clark firm. Although locals and outsiders alike began calling Big Lick “Roanoke” that summer, it was not until February 1882 that the Virginia General Assembly approved the new charter and made that name official. “After the town is regularly laid off,” the Big Lick correspondent of *The Salem Register* explained, “all enterprising men are invited to come and settle in our Embryo City of Roanoke.”⁴⁹ Although little development occurred that summer, another newspaper was already predicting that “in two years this place will be as large as Lynchburg.”⁵⁰

While residents waited for the SVRR construction teams to finish tracks into Roanoke, Enoch W. Clark & Company organized the additional corporations it would need to transform the place into the base of operations for the Shenandoah Valley and Norfolk & Western Railroads. In July 1881, the firm created “The Roanoke Land & Improvement Company” (RL&IC) as its real estate and development subsidiary, and a couple months later, it organized the Roanoke Machine Works (RMW) to manufacture and repair railroad cars and locomotives. The company appointed Peyton Terry, the merchant most responsible for brokering the junction deal, to the boards of

⁴⁸ *Big Lick Weekly News*, 16 July 1881, in SVRRS no. 4, N&WRA.

⁴⁹ *The Salem Register*, 22 July 1881, in SVRRS no. 4, N&WRA.

⁵⁰ *Virginia Free Press*, 30 July 1881, in HMHSWV.

directors of both new corporations, and it offered Henry Trout, the town's popular state delegate, the presidency of a newly organized local bank.⁵¹ The RL&IC also paid Trout another \$50,000 for the remainder of his farm, making him immediately one of Roanoke's wealthiest residents.⁵²

James R. Schick, a civil engineer hired by the Improvement Company, came to town in August 1881 to lay out the property. Schick positioned workers' housing mainly to the northeast of Big Lick – adjoining the tract set aside for the Roanoke Machine Works – and he named new streets throughout the prospective development for former Virginia Governors. In the fall, the RL&IC gave reporters a preview of Schick's plats. "The town," a writer for the *Big Lick Weekly News* explained, "extends from Tinker creek on the east to Commerce street on the West, and from the village of Gainsborough on the north to Brook avenue . . . on the south."⁵³ By then, the RL&IC had already signed the first of hundreds of contracts for construction of cottages along the new roads. Its initial agreement called for completion by the end of 1881 of three duplexes at \$1,300 each and five "single homes" at \$700 each. Similar contracts followed, including one for twenty "single homes" at \$1,100 each.⁵⁴ The company's town went up in former pastures or fields, and while this made the land relatively easy to develop, the stark landscape was so

⁵¹ Terry's appointments are available in Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Directors' Report, in *Roanoke Saturday News*, 25 March 1882, in SVRRS no. 4, N&WRA; and *The Roanoke Machine Works – Agreement of Corporation and Certificate of Incorporation*, 2, Roanoke Machine Works Records, printed materials folder, N&WRA; Trout's appointment by Frederick Kimball to the presidency of Roanoke's First National Bank is recounted in Recollections of Henry S. Trout in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 1 May 1913.

⁵² Henry Trout inherited the land from his father John Trout. First 100 acres of sale for \$20,000 noted in *Virginia Free Press*, 11 June 1881, in SVRRS no. 4, N&WRA; details of other 399 acres purchased are from First Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 6 December 1882, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Dec 1882.

⁵³ *Big Lick Weekly News*, 6 Aug; 24 Sept 1881, in SVRRS no. 4, N&WRA. Streets named for former governors include: Henry, Jefferson, Nelson, Jameson, Harrison, Randolph, Lee, Tazewell, Campbell, Gilmer, Patton, Rutherford, Gregory, Wise, Wells, and Walker.

⁵⁴ See various 1881 Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Housing Contracts, Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Records, HMHSWV; see also, Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Directors' Report, in *Roanoke Saturday News*, 25 March 1882, in SVRRS no. 4, N&WRA.

aesthetically displeasing that it hired a landscape designer to plant close to one thousand “shade trees” using “American Beech, Deciduous Cypress, Norway Maple, Sugar Maple, a few Weeping Willows near water, European Larch, [and] Purple Beech.” On the “bare hills” where the railroad’s hotel was to go up, the designer put in “artistic landscape gardening” to provide the necessary “shading and ornamenting.”⁵⁵

In early 1882, the RL&IC moved to bolster its holdings in the eastern part of Roanoke. Assuming correctly that land near the proposed railroad shops would “be valuable in the future as locations for furnaces and manufacturing establishments,” it hired former right-of-way agent John C. Moomaw to broker a deal on forty-three acres nearby.⁵⁶ The owner, Moomaw found out, was willing to sell about 80 percent of the tract for \$150 per acre. The remaining 20 percent scattered throughout the property made the deal unattractive, and although Moomaw pleaded with the owner, he finally had to inform his Philadelphia bosses that “at present I cannot get his consent to let it go.”⁵⁷ The report baffled Frederick Kimball, and in the days that followed, he ordered his chief engineer to make a deal on another tract nearby. The reply from Roanoke, however, brought more bad news: all other suitable land belonged to a widow, and although it “could be secured in time,” she had turned down all offers, making a court order condemning her land necessary for the company to get it.⁵⁸ Although the firm contemplated this heavy-handed tactic, Moomaw eventually pushed through a deal on the original plot, and the company backed off.

⁵⁵ H. L. Moore, Roanoke, VA, to C. D. Armond, Esq., “Sec & Treas RL&Ico,” no 37 & 39 S. 3rd Street, Philadelphia, PA, 7 Oct 1881, Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Records, HMHSWV.

⁵⁶ First Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 6 December 1882, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Dec 1882.

⁵⁷ J. C. Moomaw, Cloverdale, VA to F. J. Kimball, 37 South 3rd St., Philadelphia, PA, 6 March 1882, and enclosures, Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Records, HMHSWV.

⁵⁸ Frank Maddock, “Division Engineer, Roanoke Improvement Division, Shenandoah Valley Railroad Company,” Roanoke, VA, to F. J. Kimball, “President, SVRRC,” 9 March 1882, Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Records, HMHSWV.

Elsewhere in town, the RL&IC secured space for railroad offices next to its proposed hotel and depot by purchasing tobacco factories owned by Peyton Terry and other local merchants.⁵⁹ The firm tore down all the warehouses but did little economic damage because they had been in decline ever since a rival railroad completed a branch line into Franklin County's tobacco fields. Though there were abundant springs in Big Lick, residents relied on wells and cisterns for their water supply. Engineers for the RL&IC pushed immediately for a more modern system, and following their advice, the company purchased Elijah McClanahan's spring and mill at the base of "Mill Mountain" along with his surrounding one-hundred and forty-three acres for \$35,000. Believing Peyton Terry's six-hundred and fifty acre farm southeast of the old depot would be good for "suburban residences," the company then spent \$125,000 on that property, getting Terry's "Elmwood" estate and Mill Mountain – the peak above McClanahan Mill – as part of the deal.⁶⁰ Terry had paid only \$800 for the entire tract five years earlier, and like the handful of other locals who sold what was once inexpensive farmland to the Improvement Company, he was suddenly rich beyond his wildest expectations.⁶¹ When the buying spree ended in December 1881, RL&IC President J. B. Austin reported that the firm had purchased 1,152 acres in and around Roanoke. Reselling the land once it increased in value, he promised stockholders, would soon bring "a handsome return for the capital invested in the enterprise."⁶²

Natives sensed the same possibilities emerging in real estate sales. Indeed, after the SVRR completed its tracks into town in June 1882, land speculation in the older part of town took off. Ferdinand Rorer, owner of a huge tract of farmland in the northwest section of town, laid out

⁵⁹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 14 Sept 1882; First Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 6 December 1882, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Dec 1882.

⁶⁰ Bruce, *Southwest Virginia*, 133; First Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 6 December 1882, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Dec 1882.

⁶¹ See mention of the 1881 Terry sale in *The New-York Times*, 27 Aug 1883.

⁶² First Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 6 December 1882, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Dec 1882.

streets on the property and began advertising “2,500 Town Lots For Sale!”⁶³ Peyton Terry also went into the real estate business, and by early fall had “Twelve newly built, nicely furnished, and well arranged houses, with eight to ten rooms each” for sale along with fifty “choice building lots” near the RL&IC’s newly completed Jefferson Street. “Several of our best citizens have already located there,” he bragged, “and the neighborhood promises to be most agreeable.”⁶⁴ Outsiders jumped in to get a piece of the action as well. William Travers, general counsel for the SVRR, joined three other railroad officials in contemplating a “scheme” to purchase seven acres in town from dry goods merchant James M. Gambill. “I was surprised,” Travers recorded in his diary after a look around, “to find what rapid and intensive advances this place has made since I was here last July.” The settlement, he went on, “has expanded over the hills surrounding the old portion of the town. New Houses have been erected and are occupied as soon as completed & often before. The estimate now is that there is a population of 3500 in the place.” Although initially put off by Gambill’s \$17,000 asking price, the progress he saw convinced him to join the others in purchasing the tract.⁶⁵

The speculation continued, and by the spring of 1883, one local paper had even added a four-page real estate supplement, offering hundreds of properties to interested investors.⁶⁶ Land

⁶³ See ad in *The Roanoke Leader* 14 Sept 1882.

⁶⁴ Ad in *The Roanoke Leader*, 26 Oct 1882.

⁶⁵ William Hicks Travers, Diary Number Five, 23, 24, 25, 30 Oct 1882, William Hicks Travers Papers, VHS; see also, notice of sale in *The Roanoke Leader*, 2 Nov 1882.

Travers was born in Dorchester County, Maryland in 1826 and died in 1899. He grew up in Baltimore, where he attended St. Mary’s College, afterwards becoming a lawyer. From 1856 to 1857, he served as Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates. Travers and his family fled to Charles Town, West Virginia during the Civil War, and eventually settled in that city. In addition to the SVRR, Travers worked for the Cumberland Valley Railroad and the Luray Cave and Hotel Company. Travers visited Roanoke for the first time in early July 1882. His daughter Sallie and her husband William W. Coe, the railroad’s chief construction engineer, along with their seven-year-old son William, had moved to town earlier in the year and were residing temporarily in the Rorer Park Hotel.

⁶⁶ *The Roanoke Leader*, 31 May 1883.

companies opened offices throughout town, and until the 1883 recession caught up with Roanoke, a real estate “boom” was on.⁶⁷ The Reverend William C. Campbell, who had moved to Big Lick in the summer of 1881 to become pastor of its First Presbyterian Church, resented outsiders attempting to make a fast buck in town. Late in 1882, he recalled, was when “strangers began to flock in” and real estate values shot up: “From selling land by the acre they began to sell it by the lot and then by the front foot.” Eventually, he recalled, “profiteers of the worst character” sold lots on a section of Franklin Road renamed “Commerce Street” for \$10 per front foot.⁶⁸ Whatever their morals, land speculators contributed to an astonishing rise in local property assessments, pushing the 1882 total value of \$353,364 up by close to 400 percent by 1884.⁶⁹ Practically nothing, however, was done to increase the value of most of the land. “Speculation in town lots,” one resident observed, “was made without regard for present or prospective improvements; the sole object seeming to be that of buying property, and disposing promptly at an increased price.”⁷⁰

What “improvements” did take place were largely the result of the RL&IC, and they did not come easily. Transforming “a tract of farming land into a busy city,” company president J. B. Austin reported, was made even more difficult “in a district remote from suitable supplies, destitute of skilled labor, and with an aggregated pressure of demand altogether unprecedented in this section of the county.” Nevertheless, in 1882 alone, Austin’s company built one hundred and

⁶⁷ Recollections of Henry S. Trout, in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 8 May 1913.

⁶⁸ William C. Campbell, “Fortieth Anniversary Sermon,” in *Roanoke World News*, 4 July 1921, clipping in Campbell Papers; for Campbell’s own land speculation, see Rev. William C. Campbell, “A Trip to Missouri,” TMs, *ibid*.

Campbell moved to Big Lick in July 1881 from Harper’s Ferry, West Virginia, where for the previous two years he had held his first position as minister after graduating from Hamden-Sydney College and then Union Theological Seminary. For this and other biographical information, see McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, and Roanoke City*, 379.

⁶⁹ McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, and Roanoke City*, 159.

⁷⁰ Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of Norfolk & Western*, 96.

twenty-eight frame and brick dwellings in the Northeast and would have erected sixty-two more had it been able to find enough construction workers.⁷¹ These nearly identical, two-story homes were but the first allotment of rental houses needed for the one thousand laborers that the machine shops would soon employ. The demand for dwellings, Austin told investors, “is constant, even in advance of the incoming mechanics soon to be employed by the Roanoke Machine Works.”⁷² Anticipating at least a few African Americans to be included in that total, the firm hired local builder Julius G. Holmes “to erect eight houses for colored people” at \$350 a piece, specifying that the homes be constructed all “in one row.”⁷³

In what had been Peyton Terry’s hilltop orchard – to the south of his former estate Elmwood – the Improvement Company started construction on a number of massive Queen Anne style homes for high-ranking railroad officials. These “villa residences,” one paper argued, were proof that “our new residents have decided to stay, as they feel assured of the future prosperity of Roanoke.”⁷⁴ Known before the project as “Orchard Hill,” in early 1884, after a colony of executives moved in, locals renamed the spot “Officials’ Hill.” The company also finished seventeen-thousand feet of streets, four-thousand feet of “plank side-walks,” and, to eliminate “a possible cause of unhealthfulness,” it straightened and deepened the channel of Lick Run meandering through its land.⁷⁵ J. B. Austin finalized plans to construct a road up Mill Mountain, and after installing pumps and two miles of piping, the company began offering “its” side of town

⁷¹ First Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 6 December 1882, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Dec 1882.

⁷² First Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 6 December 1882, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Dec 1882.

⁷³ “Proposition and Contract – Julius G. Holmes – To erect 8 houses for colored people,” 10 March 1882, Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Records, HMHSWV.

⁷⁴ *The Roanoke Leader*, 2 Nov 1882.

⁷⁵ First Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 6 December 1882, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Dec 1882.

water from the spring at the base of that peak.⁷⁶ All in all, one local paper observed, the Improvement Company was responsible for “an astonishing metamorphosis.” “The fields where husbandmen toiled and herds grazed,” it explained, “are now broad-graded streets and rows of substantial pretty homes. Hills have been leveled and ravines filled in; bridges and substantial causeways where swamps and streams held sway.”⁷⁷

In the fall of 1882, workers completed the RL&IC’s sixty-nine room “Hotel Roanoke” on a hill overlooking the town. Philadelphia architect George Pearson designed the structure in Queen Anne style with thirty-four rooms, but before it was completed, company officials added a primitive looking annex that doubled capacity.⁷⁸ The Queen Anne design that Pearson used was wildly popular in the late Victorian era, a period when elaborate ornamentation meshed with the gaudy ethos of the “Gilded Age.” Paneled in heavily decorated wood with multiple gables and dozens of gigantic pressed-brick chimneys, the hotel featured hot and cold running water, glass doors opening onto verandas, interior paneling in oiled oak, ash, and cherry, a “large finely furnished bar room,” a “Grand Dining Saloon,” and toilets that emptied into Lick Run.⁷⁹ The new “Union Depot” went up below the hotel, between the tracks of the SVRR and N&W. Built in the same style, the station included a one-hundred seat restaurant “finished in oiled woods and heated by hot air pipes” along with gender specific ticket offices and waiting rooms.⁸⁰ A “one thousand light gas machine” illuminated both new buildings and immediately made east Roanoke the most conspicuous part of town at night.⁸¹

⁷⁶ *The Roanoke Leader*, 16 Nov 1882.

⁷⁷ *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Dec 1882.

⁷⁸ Donlan Piedmont, *Peanut Soup and Spoonbread: An Informal History of Hotel Roanoke* (Roanoke: Virginia Tech Real Estate Foundation, 1994), 16.

⁷⁹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 26 Oct 1882; Piedmont, *Peanut Soup*, 16.

⁸⁰ *The Roanoke Leader*, 2 Nov 1882.

⁸¹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 7, 28 Sept 1882.

The following summer, workers finished the Clark firm's office building next to the Hotel Roanoke, in lots formerly occupied by Big Lick's tobacco industries. Built of pressed brick but in the same Queen Anne design, the structure housed the bureaucracies of the SVRR and N&W in forty-two rooms on its upper floors and had a direct telegraph link to Frederick Kimball's office in Philadelphia. The Improvement Company put its headquarters on the ground floor and rented out other space there to various retail establishments.⁸² On a huge tract to the east of the Hotel Roanoke and railroad offices, contractors also finished the Roanoke Machine Works complex. The project consumed over a million bricks, and included a twenty-stall engine house, blacksmith shop, machine shop, car erecting shop, foundry, freight car shop, planing mill, and storehouse. Pennsylvanian Samuel A. Crozer put his "Crozer Steel & Iron Company" next to the shops, and once in blast its furnaces supplied the works with the ten tons of metal per day it needed to build locomotives and freight cars.⁸³

As local businessmen had feared, all the new development and housing went up east of what had been Big Lick. The hotel, depot, and railroad offices were more than a half mile from Franklin Road, and the machine shops, iron works, and company housing were spread out about a mile away. Although a bottom area covered in woodlands and pastures initially separated what had been Big Lick from "new town," the area developed by the RL&IC, a commercial and retail center eventually emerged between the settlements that linked them together. The RL&IC owned most of the bottomland, and to facilitate growth there, it put in new roads, extended Railroad, Salem, and Campbell Avenues down from Big Lick, and channeled sections of the Long Lick bog running through the tract. Since most new businesses wanted spots convenient to residents in each section, they ignored the old business district on the portion of Franklin Road called

⁸² Don Piedmont, "The Railroad Offices," *Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society* 13, no. 2 (1996): 18-22; *The Roanoke Leader*, 27 Sept 1883; for the telegraph link, see Lambie, *From Mine to Market*, 21.

⁸³ *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Dec 1882; 27 Jan 1883.

Commerce Street and set up shop along the new roads in what was fast becoming downtown Roanoke.

Developing the town's new business district spurred additional growth, and by the time a writer for *The Bulletin of the Bureau of Immigration and Mining Intelligence* arrived in October 1882, there were hundreds of jobs for masons, bricklayers, and house carpenters available along with numerous opportunities for enterprising businessmen. "While a number of mercantile houses have already been started," he reported, "there are still some branches of trade not represented and good openings awaiting skill, knowledge, and capital."⁸⁴ A commercial and retail boom followed; in 1882 alone, local merchants increased from 15 to 83, lawyers from 0 to 9, hucksters from 1 to 32, and hotels and boarding houses from 2 to 57.⁸⁵ By the end 1883, grocery stores had risen from 1 to 23, 8 physicians had joined the 4 already practicing, residents had founded 4 more churches, and workers had completed 415 new homes along with 618 new buildings.⁸⁶

News of the growing opportunity in Roanoke drew in hundreds of entrepreneurs hoping to turn a profit in the new "boomtown." Fredericksburg mining engineer John H. Dunstan and Captain Samuel S. Brooke, the thirty-eight-year-old editor of the Fredericksburg *Daily Star*, founded The Roanoke Steam Printing Company to publish their newspaper, *The Roanoke Leader*. Brooke, a Virginia Military Institute graduate, Civil War veteran, and University of Virginia trained lawyer, put the paper's offices on Railroad Avenue and turned out the first run of fifteen-thousand free copies in early September 1882. Four other new commercial enterprises started business in the new downtown district that September as well: Teaford & Company Furniture opened a store between Jefferson and Commerce Streets; Woolford Hardware opened on Railroad Avenue; Gravitt's Book & Music Store moved to Railroad Avenue from Fredericksburg; and

⁸⁴ *The Bulletin of the Bureau of Immigration and Mining Intelligence*, Oct 1882.

⁸⁵ *The Roanoke Leader*, 4 Jan 1883.

⁸⁶ Second Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 5 December 1883, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 17 Jan 1883.

Willis Home Furnishing Goods, offering prices on glassware and furniture “as low as can be offered South of New York,” arrived as well. Mining engineers and real estate firms put offices nearby, as did attorneys, insurance agents, druggists, and even a vocal and instrumental music instructor.⁸⁷

E. H. Stewart & Co. Furniture was typical of the sixty-eight new merchants in town. In the spring of 1883, Erasmus Stewart found a spot for his business on Salem Avenue west of Jefferson Street, and by May, he and his sister Geraldine had relocated there from Culpeper County, Virginia. Geraldine was astonished. The town, she told kinfolk, “is beautifully located & the busiest place you ever saw. I couldn’t tell you how many buildings are going up now; it is not more than two or three years old and has between four & five thousand inhabitants.” She and her brother lodged over the store, she explained, but hoped to move “higher up in town” since their current quarters bordered the Long Lick bog and were “not considered healthy till this part of town in drained.” In the distance, Geraldine reported, she could see “a very handsome & large Hotel on a high hill just out of town.”⁸⁸ Erasmus began advertising the following month, letting locals know that he had an “\$8,000 stock of furniture, carpets, oil cloths, mattings, curtains, wallpaper, chromos, oil paintings, [and] steel engravings,” for sale “as low as any house in the state.”⁸⁹ His was the only “first class” store of its kind in town, Geraldine reported, and it would, she predicted, “prove to be the very thing for him from present prospects; he hasn’t opened a third of his stock & has sold a good many things.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ For all above, see ads in *The Roanoke Leader*, 14 Sept 1882.

⁸⁸ Geraldine (I. Stewart), Roanoke, to “Aunt,” (Mrs. F. C. Norman), Culpeper County, Virginia, 15 May (1883), Norman-Lewis Family Papers, microfilm, Manuscripts Department, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville (cited hereafter as Norman-Lewis Family Papers).

⁸⁹ See ad in *The Roanoke Leader*, 14 June 1883.

⁹⁰ Geraldine (I. Stewart), Roanoke, to “Aunt,” (Mrs. F. C. Norman), Culpeper County, Virginia, 15 May (1883), Norman-Lewis Family Papers.

Saloonkeepers also flocked to Roanoke. In 1880, the town had only two taverns and no billiard parlors or “ten-pin alleys”; by the start of 1883, there were nineteen barrooms, seven pool halls, and four bowling alleys in Roanoke. Town council approved 31 liquor licenses in 1881 and an astonishing 346 the following year, and over the same period sales of distilled spirits rose by 731 percent.⁹¹ Many of the new establishments responsible for the growth in liquor receipts opened downtown along Railroad Avenue. The Morning Star Saloon, featuring “all kinds of mixed drinks prepared by skillful bartenders,” started operations there in the fall of 1882, and the following spring, the “Great Liquor Establishment of David Lawson” began dispensing drinks a little further up the street. Lawson’s place claimed to have “the largest stock of Bottled Liquors of any house south of Baltimore” along with an attached saloon that “is justly regarded as the Fashionable Resort for gentlemen who take their ‘Smiles’ in Roanoke.”⁹²

Many of the single men arriving in town congregated in its numerous saloons, and perhaps predictably, townspeople began to witness frequent episodes of alcohol-induced rowdiness. No night was now safe, the *Roanoke Saturday Review* warned, noting that on Monday evening three SVRR employees, “fired with enthusiasm, bad whiskey, and contempt of law, turned themselves loose on Railroad avenue.” The men kicked over a stove in the Relay House, tossed rocks through the windows of “Barry’s bar room,” burst into Gravatt’s Bookstore and “used the most vulgar profanity and threatened to kick the window in,” before assaulting several customers in Kimball House. Captured by police and thrown in jail, the trio “made the night hideous with yells and oaths” before two of the men escaped, releasing three black prisoners on

The 1888 city directory lists the siblings as living together on the corner of Jefferson Street and Day Avenue and has E. H. Stewart & Co. in business on Salem Avenue. See *Haddock & Baily’s Roanoke Va. City Directory 1888* (Richmond: Haddock & Baily, 1888), 113, 138.

⁹¹ Statistics derived from data published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 4 Jan 1883.

⁹² See ads in *The Roanoke Leader*, 26 Oct 1882, 31 May 1883. One of the new bowling alley’s opened next to the Morning Star the following month, see *The Roanoke Leader*, 16 Nov 1882.

their way out. The third “brawler,” William McCaym – “too drunk to escape” – was arraigned before the Mayor in the morning and fined \$10.⁹³

Roanoke’s new railroad industries required hundreds of highly trained skilled-laborers, most of whom had to be imported from the North since Virginia and the South lacked such workers. The promise of high wages, company housing, and opportunity for rapid advancement enticed scores of northern-born industrial workers to migrate to Roanoke in 1882, and by the end of 1883, over a thousand newcomers had found jobs in the town’s burgeoning manufacturing enterprises. Crozer Furnace employed 125, the Machine Works hired 690, and the SVRR signed on 262. Those employed were almost exclusively skilled laborers or clerical workers, and since the shops and railroad went out of their way to find family men, slightly over 45 percent of them were married.⁹⁴ Overall, at least 2,120 new residents arrived in Roanoke between 1881 and 1883. Almost all the newcomers were white and most were male. The town’s 338 “new” black residents were mainly inhabitants of Gainsborough who had been absorbed into the new municipality, and although Big Lick had been nearly evenly divided by race, Roanoke was nearly 76 percent white.⁹⁵

The largest group of black residents lived northwest of the tracks, in what had been Gainsborough or “Old Lick” but was now a section of Roanoke known as “Bunker Hill.” Most blacks living south of the tracks had homes along one of the town’s older roads west of Commerce Street, and only approximately 8 percent lived in housing developed by the RL&IC.

⁹³ *Roanoke Saturday Review*, 16 Dec 1882.

⁹⁴ Second Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 5 December 1883, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 17 Jan 1883; see also First Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 6 December 1882, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Dec 1882.

⁹⁵ Town Council of Roanoke, “Census of the Town of Roanoke, December 1883,” vols. 1 and 2, VR-RCPL. Volume 1 contains 1,715 names on 86 pages; volume 2 has 1,074 names on 54 pages.

Nearly 41 percent of whites, by contrast, lived in homes built by that firm. The largest concentrations of shop workers had houses on Gilmer or Patton Avenues in the Northeast, or in the Southeast on lower Railroad Avenue, in a cheap row-style housing project called “Brick Row.” The rest of the town’s white residents lived along older streets or on extensions of Salem and Campbell Avenues. Along with Commerce Street, these roads also tended to be home to those working in service or retail related businesses. Occupational shifts from the changing economic focus of the town benefited black residents the least. Indeed, the closure of local tobacco factories ended black access to semi-skilled jobs, eliminating employment for roughly 30 percent of African American females and 60 percent of African American males. By 1883, consequently, almost all employed black women worked as domestic servants and close to 90 percent of employed black males worked as unskilled manual laborers. White men, by contrast, benefited the most from new industries, with employment for them in skilled labor more than doubling. Whites also maintained their dominance of retail and commercial establishments (see Table 1, next page).⁹⁶

Those moving to Roanoke from rural areas encountered numerous difficulties adjusting to life in an urban setting. Newly arrived farmers, for example, saw nothing wrong with letting livestock roam or with disposing of waste by simply throwing it outside. Roanoke’s government attempted early on to end these and other practices, but as residents poured in, it found itself fighting a losing battle to turn Roanoke into something resembling a modern city. The town had no sewers, and although most residents used box privies, some newcomers dumped their waste into streams or yards. In the spring of 1882, after receiving numerous complaints, council passed a law requiring all residents to use box privies. The ordinance stipulated that the boxes be emptied beyond town limits at least twice a month but provided no municipal resources for this

⁹⁶ Town Council of Roanoke, “Census of the Town of Roanoke, December 1883,” vols. 1 and 2, VR-RCPL.

Table 1

Occupation by race, gender and skill, 1880 to 1883.

Race / Gender	Occupation Listed %	Unskilled Manual Laborer %	Semiskilled Manual Laborer %	Skilled Manual Laborer %	Non-manual Professional %	Non-manual Commercial %	Number Listed
	1880 (1883)	1880 (1883)	1880 (1883)	1880 (1883)	1880 (1883)	1880 (1883)	1880 (1883)
Black or Mulatto Female	42.28 (25.94)	68.91 (100.00)	31.08 (00.00)	00.00 (00.00)	00.00 (00.00)	00.00 (00.00)	74 (89)
Black or Mulatto Male	68.12 (33.03)	25.86 (87.96)	63.20 (02.77)	06.60 (05.55)	00.94 (00.92)	03.77 (02.77)	106 (108)
White Female	04.37 (01.29)	57.14 (36.36)	00.00 (18.18)	28.57 (09.09)	14.28 (00.00)	00.00 (36.36)	7 (7)
White Male	67.24 (39.42)	05.12 (04.31)	18.80 (09.03)	20.51 (47.02)	10.25 (08.21)	44.44 (31.41)	117 (487)

Sources: United States Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of 1880, Schedule of Population, Town of Big Lick, County of Roanoke, State of Virginia; Town Council of Roanoke, "Census of the Town of Roanoke, December 1883," vols. 1 and 2, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Library. Occupation categories derived in part from Stephen Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 90-94. Non-manual commercial category includes railroad management as well as railroad and retail clerks. "Black," "Mulatto," and "White" categories listed on 1880 census. Only "Black" or "White" listed on 1883 census.

unpleasant chore.⁹⁷ In the fall, it also prohibited “owners of hogs from allowing them to run at large” and ordered all residents to place waste in barrels monitored by the town scavenger, imposing a fine of \$5 to \$10 on anyone caught dumping “soap-suds, slops, paper, straw, melon or rinds, or refuse matter in any form” on any land within town limits.⁹⁸

In the spring of 1883, *The Roanoke Leader* reported that most new residents from the countryside continued to do as they pleased. Many had strung up barbed wire fences around their homes to keep livestock out and most, the paper complained, “are accustomed to throw the accumulations of both chamber and kitchen into their yards, while others dig holes in their yards and there deposit filth that causes stench that is offensive to the olfactories of the neighborhood and inimical to health.” The paper’s editor, S. S. Brooke, lectured the newcomers about the inappropriateness of barbed wire fences and encouraged council to levy stiff penalties to “force them to have regard for the health of their neighbors, if they have none for their own.”⁹⁹

In the eastern section of the city, the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company used paternalism to push its residents to improve their section of town. The firm, “desirous of adding to the beauty and attractiveness of the city,” began offering monetary premiums to tenants with the “neatest & best laid out garden,” largest and best bloom, and healthiest fruit or ornamental trees, shrubs, and vines.¹⁰⁰ The company also stepped in to supply amenities or services Roanoke’s under-funded municipal government was unable to provide. On a hill to the southeast of the Machine Works, for example, the firm laid out “Woodland Park” as a picnic and recreation space for workers and their families, and in the fall of 1883, Clarence Clark, a member of

⁹⁷ Roanoke Town Council Minutes, 18 May 1882, Clerk’s Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building.

⁹⁸ Hog ordinance reprinted in *The Roanoke Leader*, 19 Oct 1882; refuse ordinance in Roanoke Town Council Minutes, 2 Sept 1882, Clerk’s Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building.

⁹⁹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 4 Jan, 21 May 1883.

¹⁰⁰ Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, Premium Announcement of 14 April 1883, Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Records, HMHSWV.

RL&IC's board of directors, donated "a very unique and novel school house" for shop workers' children.¹⁰¹ Since many of those living in the company's cottages were Catholic, the firm also did what it could to facilitate their access to adequate worship facilities. It provided an SVRR passenger car as a space for the town's first Mass, and in the fall of 1882, the firm donated a commanding hill behind the Hotel Roanoke for construction of a church. The Machine Works contributed a bell forged in its foundry to the project, and after construction ended, local Catholics christened their new brick chapel "Saint Andrew's."¹⁰²

At least some RL&IC residents, nevertheless, resented the firm's monopoly on workers' housing or believed their rents of between \$15 and \$22 per month were excessive. In early 1883, for instance, a Machine Works employee published a letter in the *Roanoke Saturday Review* accusing the company of extortion for charging his family rent that in five years would cover the cost of constructing their home.¹⁰³ In a sympathetic editorial that followed, the *Review* claimed that few men who earned a living by "daily toil" in the shops could afford the "exorbitant rents" of the RL&IC. The firm cared nothing about its white tenants, the paper complained, and had further alienated townspeople by building "Red Row," a cheap, frame, African American housing complex that was "one of the filthiest holes we ever saw." "This harlots' den," the *Review* observed, "is one of the blessings bestowed upon Roanoke by the Land and Improvement company."¹⁰⁴

Although the RL&IC funded sanitary improvements for its development, most of Roanoke existed amidst bogs, cesspools, and polluted streams. As a consequence, there were

¹⁰¹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 27 Sept 1883.

¹⁰² Information on early Catholics in Roanoke is from Margaret M. Maier, "Father Lynch, Founder," 2-3, 6, TMs (April 1941), in Emma B. Lynch Papers, VHS; notice of Roanoke Land & Improvement Company lot donation is in *The Roanoke Leader*, 2 Nov 1882.

¹⁰³ *Roanoke Saturday Review*, 27 Jan 1883, in SVRRS no. 6, N&WRA.

¹⁰⁴ *Roanoke Saturday Review*, 24 Feb 1883, in SVRRS no. 6, N&WRA.

widespread rumors that the town was rife with typhoid, scarlet fever, smallpox, and a fictitious malady known as “Big Lick Fever.” Symptoms of the Big Lick contagion, a University of Virginia physician claimed in the 1850s, were the “sudden onset of considerable malaise, aching, chills, fever and prostration.” A spate of recent hearsay, given credence in regional newspapers, led readers to believe that the mythical fever had erupted again among those living near the licks.¹⁰⁵ Gossip about real ailments was worse. In January 1883, for example, newspapers throughout the state reported erroneously that smallpox was devastating Roanoke. Hoping to put an end to the story, newly appointed Mayor Lucian Cocke issued a press notice for “the information of parties who are unacquainted with the facts and may be influenced by rumors.” Doctors, he certified, had vaccinated all residents and there had been no smallpox in town.¹⁰⁶ Scores of locals, nevertheless, temporarily left Roanoke to escape possible infection. By spring, exaggerated reports of sickness again made the rounds. This time it was scarlet fever. Although there were a couple “imported” cases, according to *The Leader*, “Every paper in the state has it that a malignant form of that disease prevails here.”¹⁰⁷

Later that spring, dozens of cases of smallpox did appear, and Roanokers had to deal with another wave of negative publicity. A local physician traced the outbreak to a celebration to mark the lighting of the Crozer Furnace. Afterwards several attendees caught the contagion and died, as did a servant who washed the clothing of one of the deceased. An enclave of black residents on Church Avenue came down with smallpox later in the week, and shortly afterwards towns nearby

¹⁰⁵ Warren Moorman, “Roanoke Valley Medicine,” *Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society* 9, no. 1 (1973-74): 27; for “Big Lick Fever,” Moorman cites Otis F. Vance, M. D., “Sketches of the Endemic Diseases of the Roanoke Valley of Virginia and North Carolina,” *Virginia Medical-Surgical Journal*, Jan 1855; see also, “Recollections of J. B. Ruddell,” in *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 9 June 1911; for emergence of “Lick Fever” in the 1880s, see letter to editor in *The Roanoke Leader*, 10 May 1883.

¹⁰⁶ *The Roanoke Leader*, 18 January 1883.

¹⁰⁷ *The Roanoke Leader*, 3 May 1883.

banned Roanoke residents.¹⁰⁸ William Campbell, pastor of the town's First Presbyterian Church, sent his wife Anna and infant son to her parents home in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, to escape the contagion. Back in Roanoke, he reported, doctors had quarantined the infected but found other cases among blacks in Gainsborough.¹⁰⁹ "The negroes," Campbell reported, "are very much excited and do not want to go to the hospital. It seems that all who go there die."¹¹⁰ The *Richmond State* listed upward of thirty cases of smallpox in Roanoke, and according to *The Leader*, there were "similar paragraphs in nearly every paper in the State." "Our contemporaries," S. S. Brooke complained, "exhibit a wonderful faculty for hearing anything that can injure Roanoke." Brooke's paper dismissed reports running elsewhere, informing a statewide audience that the few cases of smallpox in town "were colored." No whites had been sick, so there was no reason to be alarmed.¹¹¹ Hoping to quell additional cases, local authorities torched the "shacks" of those infected.¹¹²

No new cases appeared, and William Campbell wrote Anna, begging her to return. "Roanoke is healthy now & there are lots of babies," he declared. From the paragraphs that followed, however, she learned that her husband had just officiated at an infant's funeral: "It was the child of Hess the saloon keeper. Only 6 weeks old and died of whooping cough. It was a dismal funeral. Only 5 or 6 were present. No lady except for the mother and daughter." Clearly shaken by the experience, Campbell admitted that he believed the town had changed for the

¹⁰⁸ Tompkins, "Medical Annals of Roanoke," 8-9.

¹⁰⁹ For nearby towns banning Roanokers, see WPA., *Roanoke*, 135; William C. Campbell, Roanoke, VA, to Anna Campbell, Harper's Ferry, WVA, 23 May 1883, Campbell Papers.

¹¹⁰ William C. Campbell, Roanoke, VA, to Anna Campbell, Harper's Ferry, WVA, 18 June 1883, Campbell Papers.

¹¹¹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 14 June 1883.

¹¹² Tompkins, "Medical Annals of Roanoke," 9; William C. Campbell, Roanoke, VA, to Anna Campbell, Harper's Ferry, WVA, 18 June 1883, Campbell Papers.

worse over the past two years. Roanoke, he complained, “is a hard place – one may die here and but few people know or care anything about it.” This was all very different from the neighborliness he had witnessed in Big Lick, and in Campbell’s mind, a stunning rise in immorality was to blame. Having accompanied the grieving Hesses to their quarters above the family business, the Reverend got a first-hand look at the problem: “The saloon Hess keeps is a horribly vile place. No wonder they are so dismal and forlorn.”¹¹³

Many locals blamed the periodic outbreaks of smallpox on newly arrived blacks, and some, like Campbell, bemoaned the emergence of saloons. Others, however, were made anxious by the arrival of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company and hundreds of northern workers. *The Roanoke Saturday News*, owned and edited by longtime resident Rush U. Derr, helped foster localism by publishing inflammatory rumors and attacking natives he believed had become pawns of the Clark company. In May 1882, for example, his paper reported that “Upon unquestionable authority we are informed that employees of the Shenandoah Valley railway openly boast that the officials of that company and of the Roanoke Land and Improvement company are abiding their time and holding their views in abeyance, as it were, ‘waiting until the works get in full operation and the Yankee boys will run the town.’” This scheme, Derr pointed out, was a matter of tremendous concern to “those who were born on this soil and whose inherent right would thus be wrested from them.” Indeed, according to him, he and numerous other natives were of the opinion that “whoever comes here with the secret or avowed purpose of ‘running the town’ will find this an almost tropically warm climate and very unpleasant place to live.”¹¹⁴

¹¹³ William C. Campbell, Roanoke, VA, to Anna Campbell, Harper’s Ferry, WVA, 25 June 1883, Campbell Papers.

¹¹⁴ *Roanoke Saturday Evening News*, 20 May 1882, in SVRRS no. 5, N&WRA. The *Roanoke Saturday Evening News* began as *The Big Lick News* in 1877. The Democratic weekly changed its name again in 1882, to the *Roanoke Saturday Review*, and it continued operations until 1885, when a fire destroyed its headquarters and it never reopened. See, Lester J. Cappon, *Virginia Newspapers, 1821-1935: A Bibliography with Historical Introduction and Notes*, Guide to Virginia Historical Materials Part I (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co. for the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences at the University of Virginia, 1936), 196-97; I. M. Warren,

Shenandoah Valley Railroad officials and Roanoke's business community were both alarmed by what they read. Dozens of local leaders denounced Derr and the *News* in angry letters to his paper. Using "birth right" as the sole criterion for political power, one businessman observed, would put "one or two white men and two or three Negroes" in charge of the town. The majority of natives, he insisted, welcomed "law-abiding" newcomers and would do all they could to guarantee them equal political rights.¹¹⁵ Peyton Terry, editor and owner of the newly founded *Roanoke Commercial Advertiser*, also condemned the story as "ill judged, intemperate, and uncalled for." Thus far, Terry pointed out, Roanoke's "Northern friends" had "spent much money, started large enterprises, built many homes, . . . in fact, have started our village on the high road towards being a large and important town."¹¹⁶

Eventually the emerging sectionalism between natives and newcomers bled into municipal concerns. Roanoke's population continued to increase every day but conditions in the locally managed part of town remained abysmal. Long Lick marsh began near Commerce Street and paralleled Salem Avenue into the bottom area, and there were various other bogs scattered about. After a storm, one resident recalled, "Commerce street was a mud wallow" and the other avenues "were like walking in a ploughed field after a heavy rain."¹¹⁷ Moreover, Lick Run and other creeks flowing through the western part of town served as open sewers. In the fall of 1882, the RL&IC hired Randolph Herring, a sanitary engineer from New York City, to survey the entire town and draw plans to fix the problems. Herring concluded that the marshes and creeks posed a serious health threat and recommended filling the bogs with six to eight feet of rock as well as channeling and covering Lick Run. He and several RL&IC officials met with the town council to

History of Newspapers Published in 23 Counties of Southwest Virginia (Roanoke: Works Progress Administration, 1937), 8.

¹¹⁵ *Roanoke Saturday News*, 3 June 1882, in SVRRS no. 5, N&WRA.

¹¹⁶ *Roanoke Commercial Advertiser*, June 1882, in SVRRS no. 5, N&WRA.

¹¹⁷ William C. Campbell, "The First Circus in Roanoke," TMs, Campbell Papers.

go over the plan but received few assurances that Roanoke would implement any part of it. The reception clearly upset the Improvement Company's chief engineer, and immediately afterwards he resigned his voluntary position as Roanoke's "Town Engineer."¹¹⁸ In the months that followed, the RL&IC carried out all the recommendations on its property, spending close to \$3,000 on terra cotta piping, draining and filling three acres of Long Lick, and clearing a channel for Lick Run.¹¹⁹

The town's council may have resented advice from outside experts or been hesitant to consider such "extravagant" improvements, but in the end, Roanoke was simply unable to afford Herring's costly recommendations. Although in June 1882 the town had approved \$2,500 worth of bonds to better support the municipality, council would not have access to the funds until July 1883.¹²⁰ In the meantime, financial support came solely from residential and commercial property taxes of fifty cents per hundred dollars of assessed value.¹²¹ Council did what it could, spending the little revenue it collected on far more basic and inexpensive improvements. Unable to afford gas lighting or proper drainage, it approved funding for additional lampposts and kerosene lanterns along with plank sidewalks and stone curbing.¹²² The new lamps, one resident reported, even made Church Avenue look "quite citified."¹²³ Crossing the street, however, was a different matter – residents continued to use stepping-stones to avoid losing shoes in the mud.

¹¹⁸ *The Roanoke Leader*, 21 Sept 1882.

¹¹⁹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 16 Nov 1882; Second Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 5 December 1883, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 17 Jan 1883.

¹²⁰ Roanoke Town Council Minutes, 7 June 1882, Clerk's Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building; for not carrying out Herring's plan, see *The Roanoke Leader*, 5 Oct, 16 Nov 1882.

¹²¹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Sept 1882.

¹²² *The Roanoke Leader*, 21 Sept, 19 Oct 1882; 11 Jan 1883.

¹²³ William C. Campbell, Roanoke, VA, to Miss Anna G. Child, Winchester, VA, 16 March 1882, Campbell Papers.

Council's moderate improvements stunned S. S. Brooke, the Fredericksburg journalist who had moved to town only a few months earlier to edit *The Roanoke Leader*. The town's officials, he complained, were "a few narrow minds, wedded to old ways of doing things." Whether it was "ignoring the practical results of scientific investigation, or charged with local prejudices and jealousies," the council was responsible for a "perverse and narrow policy" which left "that stinking sewer" Lick Run un-drained.¹²⁴ Rush Derr, who had by then changed the name of his paper to the *Roanoke Saturday Review*, praised council for following the "voice of the people" over "interested parties." "Mr. Herring's report," Derr observed, "has not been acted upon simply because Mr. Herring was employed by and working in the interests of the Land and Improvement Company, and the council is not."¹²⁵ Derr's efforts "to draw lines and make distinctions," Brooke retorted, were "worse than useless" since the interests of the town and the company were "identical and invisible." Brooke bemoaned the "sectional feeling and animosity" emerging between the "old town" in the west and "new town" in the east, noting that some in the west opposed allocating municipal funds for the east.¹²⁶

The RL&IC did little to assuage the "sectional feeling" and even fueled further indignation by repeatedly referring to east Roanoke as "our town."¹²⁷ Justifiably or not, some natives held the company responsible for the abysmal conditions in the west, or at the very least were jealous of the improvements they saw going on in the east. Indeed, in the midst of the debate

¹²⁴ *The Roanoke Leader*, 16 Nov 1882. *The Leader* began operations in Sept 1882. In 1886, Brooke left as editor to become clerk of the local Hustings Court, and in 1887 the paper ceased operations. See, Cappon, *Virginia Newspapers, 1821-1935*, 196-97; Warren, *History of Newspapers Published in 23 Counties of Southwest Virginia*, 8.

¹²⁵ *Roanoke Saturday Review*, 11 Nov 1882, in SVRRS no. 6, N&WRA.

¹²⁶ *The Roanoke Leader*, 16 Nov 1882.

¹²⁷ See for example, references to "our town" in First Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 6 December 1882, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Dec 1882; and Second Annual Report of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, 5 December 1883, published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 17 Jan 1883.

over the Herring plan, *The Leader* reported that a gang of local “miscreants” had used the cover of night to pull up or break dozens of ornamental trees recently planted by the RL&IC.¹²⁸ Other residents circulated rumors that the Improvement Company owned Brooke’s newspaper, and while not going quite that far, the *Roanoke Saturday Review* accused him of being a major RL&IC stockholder. Brooke dismissed the accusations and pleaded again for unity in the effort to solve Roanoke’s drainage problems so “that we may enter another summer proof against malarial or atmospheric detriment to public health.”¹²⁹ Derr, nevertheless, continued to belittle Brooke as well as assail Herring and his fellow “prophylactic professors” as con artists “suffering from diarrhea of words and constipation of ideas.”¹³⁰

The municipal government ignored Brooke as well, and eventually he used its failure to act as justification to call for a new city charter and government. Noting that such a change would have to wait until the next session of the legislature, he demanded the current council’s “immediate and especial attention to the swamp lying in the very center of the city, the neglected condition of which is a disgrace to our municipal authorities.”¹³¹ Although Brooke backed away from criticism in the months that followed, residents continued to voice their concern about council’s inaction. An anonymous Yankee newcomer, for example, savaged local leaders in the town’s papers for streets “ankle deep in mud” and for failing to implement Herring’s plan. “MUD” wondered why the SVRR had picked the town over Salem, “where the residents were considered to be head and shoulders in advance of Big Lick,” and suggested sending local leaders to “some go ahead place for a week or two to see how other Councils run towns and cities.”¹³²

¹²⁸ *The Roanoke Leader*, 30 Nov 1882.

¹²⁹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 23 Nov 1882

¹³⁰ *Roanoke Saturday Review*, 16 Dec 1882, in SVRRS no. 6, N&WRA.

¹³¹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 11 Jan 1883.

¹³² *The Roanoke Leader*, 5 April 1883.

The sectional debate erupted again in early 1883, when the Improvement Company moved to secure a charter on the entire town's water supply. Many locals were weary of granting outsiders such a monopoly, and numerous residents demanded that council find funds for a municipal reservoir. When the scheduled vote on the two options arrived, Henry Trout – a councilman and RL&IC executive – had the decision postponed so that other representatives of the company could do some additional lobbying. The approval of such a delay, Rush Derr explained in the *Roanoke Saturday Review*, was proof that local politicians were “obeying the beck and call of the Improvement company” as well as a sure sign that the firm was already “running the town.”¹³³ Council met again in a secret session a few weeks later and, after intensive lobbying by the RL&IC, it granted the firm a water franchise. Council barred observers from the debate, according to the *Review*, “in order to hurry the Land company's scheme through before the people found out what it was.” The franchise, Derr argued, was not only “shameful” and “disgraceful” but set residents up for extortion by “grasping corporations.”¹³⁴

Continuing critiques from the *Review* infuriated local business leaders, and at least a few of them did what they could to silence the paper. Henry Trout, for example, stormed into Derr's office, cancelled his subscription, and threatened “a system of persecution” against his paper by the RL&IC. A few days later, Peyton Terry, a member of the RL&IC's board of directors, withdrew his investment in the *Review* and cancelled his numerous advertising contracts. Derr, however, refused to back down, branded both men traitors, and vowed to continue “fighting for the people's rights.” “Some rich people,” he explained, “seem to think that their wealth should protect them from hearing unpleasant truths, but it will not with us.”¹³⁵ Such talk was nonsense, according to S. S. Brooke, who accused the *Review* of clinging to “old Virginia foggyism” and

¹³³ *Roanoke Saturday Review*, 27 Jan 1883, in SVRRS no. 6, N&WRA.

¹³⁴ *Roanoke Saturday Review*, 10 Feb 1883, in SVRRS no. 6, N&WRA.

¹³⁵ *Roanoke Saturday Review*, 10 Feb 1883, in SVRRS no. 6, N&WRA.

misrepresenting local opinion. Letters to the *Leader* backed council as well: the truth, one writer complained, was that “We all owe our new found success to these new comers, and we do from our hearts, welcome them among us.”¹³⁶

Roanoke’s emergence as an industrial center and subsequent “boomtown” attracted the notice of numerous journalists and writers. Many of them, especially New South boosters, were astonished by what they saw. “Had an old Virginian fallen asleep in ‘Big Lick’ last year to wake up to Roanoke today,” *The Industrial South* exclaimed in September 1882, “he would have been as much bewildered as Rip Van Winkle was when he awoke in the Kaatskills.” Twelve hundred “engineers of all grades, and of all industries” had already arrived, the journal explained, and had turned Big Lick into a “bustling cosmopolitan town.”¹³⁷ A *Richmond State* correspondent who visited was impressed enough to predict that Roanoke would soon become “the Atlanta of Virginia.”¹³⁸ A reporter for the *Richmond Dispatch* was bewildered: “On every hand – on hillside and in dell, where last year the lowing herds found ample pasturage – now stand comfortable houses, broad streets, plank walks, and square after square of compact buildings, affording pleasant homes for upwards of three thousand persons who have collected here within less than a year.”¹³⁹ A correspondent for the *East Tennessean* filed a similar story. “Gangs of negroes,” he wrote, “are at work in different portions of the town cutting out new streets and avenues.” Land values had appreciated several hundred percent and the “hum of machinery is heard on every side.” What was a year ago “a howling wilderness,” was now “a busy thriving city.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ *The Roanoke Leader*, 1 March 1883, in SVRRS no. 6, N&WRA.

¹³⁷ *The Industrial South*, 10 Sept 1882.

¹³⁸ *Richmond State*, quoted in *The Roanoke Leader*, 23 Nov 1882.

¹³⁹ *Richmond Dispatch*, 15 Nov 1882, in SVRRS no. 6, N&WRA.

¹⁴⁰ *East Tennessean*, 30 Nov 1882.

The New York Times claimed that Roanoke's industries were perfectly positioned to exploit the state's coal deposits and return Virginia "to something like its old position in the Union." The town, its correspondent reported, "has been built up by the Shenandoah Valley Road as a kind of Altoona or machine shop village. It has also attracted other manufacturers and mining companies until the town lots have risen in the last few years in the proportion of ten to one."¹⁴¹ In dispatches to the *Hartford Courant*, local-color writer Charles Dudley Warner described the city as "a vast real estate, railway, and mineral speculation." From the summit of Mill Mountain, he told readers back in New England, the town appeared to be rising from nowhere: "The noise of hammer and hauling filled the air; streets of temporary wooden shops and dwellings, drinking shops and 'hotels' with false board fronts hiding the upper half stories, and big letter signs, after the manner of the West, isolated dwellings on every hill and knoll, everywhere the debris of building and ditching and road-making."¹⁴² Travel writer Thomas J. Clayton followed Warner, arriving in town as the guest of the superintendent of the Crozer Iron and Steel plant a few months later. Clayton came to hunt quail in the mountains nearby but took time for a tour, afterwards reporting that the Iron Works, which he believed resembled a plant in Chester, Pennsylvania, was the town's "greatest industrial establishment." The place was altogether a "thriving town" of roughly six-thousand residents. "I prophesy for Roanoke," he concluded, "a successful future."¹⁴³

Earnest Ingersol came to Roanoke while researching a guide about railroad excursions in the Shenandoah Valley. The town seemed out of place amidst the pastoral landscape around it, he

¹⁴¹ *The New-York Times*, 27 Aug 1883.

¹⁴² Warner's letters to the *Hartford Courant* quoted in *The Virginias*, July 1883; and reprinted in *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Jan 1891. Warner, co-author with Mark Twain of *The Gilded Age*, is widely credited with initiating the literary "discovery" of Appalachia in the 1880s and 1890s. See Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 39-43.

¹⁴³ Thomas J. Clayton, *Rambles and Reflections: From Biscay to the Black Sea and from Aetna to the North Cape with Glimpses of Asia, Africa, America and the Islands of the Sea* (Chester, PA: Press of the Delaware County Republican, 1893), 320-21.

informed would-be visitors, noting that from a distance “Roanoke blazes up ahead like an illumination; red-mouthed furnace-chimneys lift like giant torches above the plain; the roar of machinery, the whistle of engines, the ceaseless hum of labor and of life in the very heat of a quiet, mountain-locked valley.”¹⁴⁴ The city, he explained, “is a town of lively business appearance” with a population of “seven or eight thousand and more coming.”¹⁴⁵ The presence of hundreds of northern “executive officers and their families,” Ingersol pointed out, gave the place a patina of sophistication and “a society of more intelligence and social experience than is usually observed in so new a town.”¹⁴⁶ At the Roanoke Machine Works, he went on, tourists could view “every part of the locomotive or car, from the wheels to the last ornament . . . made and fitted,” and at the Crozer Steel and Iron Company they could “witness the thrilling spectacle of drawing the molten iron from the furnace into the molds.”¹⁴⁷ Other places that “catch the eye of the traveler, and surprise him,” Ingersol explained, were the new depot, railway offices, and “the splendid hotel crowning the hill,” which “has nothing to approach it between Philadelphia and Florida.”¹⁴⁸

Other visitors, mainly from the northern press corps, focused on the ways that outsiders were responsible for the city’s progress or on Roanoke’s similarities to raw and rowdy “boomtowns” of the West. The *Philadelphia Press*, for example, suggested that the Yankee capitalists owned the town. E. W. Clark & Company, the paper explained, had “quickened energies and stimulated enterprises which would have lain dormant until the crack of doom.” The

¹⁴⁴ Earnest Ingersol, *To the Shenandoah and Beyond: A Chronicle of a Leisurely Journey Through the Uplands of Virginia and Tennessee, Sketching their Scenery, Noting their Legends, Portraying Social and Material Progress, and Explaining Routes of Travel* (New York: Leve & Alden Printing Company, 1885), 59-60.

¹⁴⁵ Ingersol, *To the Shenandoah and Beyond*, 61.

¹⁴⁶ Ingersol, *To the Shenandoah and Beyond*, 63.

¹⁴⁷ Ingersol, *To the Shenandoah and Beyond*, 64.

¹⁴⁸ Ingersol, *To the Shenandoah and Beyond*, 67.

firm's work, according to the *Press*, had transformed a "rustic and rusty huddle of houses" in the wilderness of Southwest Virginia into a "suburb of Philadelphia."¹⁴⁹ Roanoke's numerous similarities to western gold towns were noted quickly by a reporter for the *Philadelphia Ledger*: "The town with its wooden side-walks stretching over farm land and mass of incomplete homes, with hammer, trowel and saw hastily at work, rivals any mining settlement of mushroom growth the far West can show." Although his story acknowledged that "people are pouring in, many of them the thrift class of iron workers from Great Britain," he ridiculed the town's natives who "never dreamed of any enterprise beyond doing what their fathers did" and gave credit to E. W. Clark & Company for the "creation" of Roanoke.¹⁵⁰ A correspondent for the *Baltimore Sun* went further, suggesting "Roanoke may be considered the property of the Roanoke Land and Improvement Company, from the overshadowing influence of that concern and its leadership in local enterprises, though the railroad company studiously preserves its control in this and all auxiliary concerns." At night, the *Sun* reported, "with the red-light beacons of the bar rooms all ablaze over the plank sidewalks, and the music of the violin and banjo coming through the open doors and windows, the town suggests a mining camp or a mushroom city of Colorado."¹⁵¹

A writer from the Pennsylvania-based *American Volunteer* also found the place "a true type western town, grown up almost in a night, you might say." Salem Avenue, with its dozens of "irregularly built" businesses, was the town's main street, the correspondent reported, adding that the entire road had "a good-sized stream of water" running across it. What was more appalling, the place had taxes enough to support only one school while "the saloons, which exist at every step, are well patronized."¹⁵² Even an anonymous "Old Virginian" depicted Roanoke as "a queer

¹⁴⁹ *The Philadelphia Press*, 11 Aug 1882, in SVRRS no. 5, N&WRA.

¹⁵⁰ *Philadelphia Ledger*, quoted in *The Roanoke Leader*, 14 June 1883.

¹⁵¹ *Baltimore Sun*, quoted in *The Roanoke Leader*, 21 June 1883.

¹⁵² *American Volunteer*, 31 Oct 1883.

place” that “might be likened to a great gypsy camp, with roughly constructed homes for tents.” If this was progress, he went on, then the Old Dominion was in trouble: “The people looked like they had just got there and did not know whether to stay or not. The ungraded and treeless streets looked like a settlement of sappers and miners upset by an earthquake.”¹⁵³

The constant stream of ridicule and portrayal of Roanoke as a company town or western boomtown tempered the wildly exaggerated reports of a New South emerging there and created anxiety among locals. When the town’s subsequent growth did not measure up to boosters’ predictions, many residents interpreted it as a sign that the boom had gone bust. As a result, widespread gossip surfaced about the looming collapse of land values, the railroad relocating, or the Improvement Company and Machine Works going bankrupt. “The air is rife with rumors of impending destruction,” S. S. Brooke explained, “and every occurrence, connected even with the progress of events here, is distorted, magnified and greedily sent out.” The town was doing well, he argued, so “the cranks had as well cease their croaking.”¹⁵⁴

Reporters’ repeated focus on the similarities between Roanoke and “mushroom cities” of the West were far from an exaggeration. Most “instant cities” in Colorado or California lacked the small base of natives that were present in Roanoke but experienced the same period of intensive demographic growth coupled with haphazard structural development. Moreover, they also had the same abundance of cheaply built, frame vernacular structures, similar wooden sidewalks aligning mud or dirt streets, lack of systematic sanitation, and numerous businesses houses using false-fronts to camouflage their meager size or crude construction. Since a gold or silver vein could dry up at any moment, their residents, like Roanoke’s inhabitants, were less likely to gamble on expensive brick buildings. They were also not overly concerned about municipal services because their long-term residency was questionable. In this “camp phase” of

¹⁵³ Letter to *Richmond Dispatch*, reprinted in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 June 1883.

¹⁵⁴ *The Roanoke Leader*, 31 May 1883.

development, land companies, saloons, gambling houses and brothels usually outnumbered dry-goods stores, churches, restaurants, or schools, and most inhabitants adopted a get rich quick mentality along with a somewhat disorderly “frontier ethos.”¹⁵⁵

Although Roanoke was also often mistaken for a company town, the city was clearly not entirely developed, owned, or managed by the Clark firm. Natives owned the area around what had been Big Lick Depot as well as much of the western city, and the municipality had an independent government structure as well as numerous industries and businesses not connected to Clark & Company. The resemblance to a company town, nevertheless, was striking. The RL&IC controlled almost all of eastern Roanoke, where most workers lived in company-owned cottages, and its paternalism was responsible for Woodland Park, the local Catholic Church, a “public” schoolhouse, and numerous beautification crusades in the Northeast. It owned the city’s water supply, developed nearly all of the property that was emerging as the central downtown district, and dominated holdings in local property and housing. The Roanoke Machine Works, the SVRR, and the N&W were by far the municipality’s largest employers, and the Clark firm was also a silent partner in several other local enterprises. Moreover, Clark & Company architecture – the Hotel Roanoke, the SVRR Offices, the Union Depot, the massive shops, yards, and roundhouses – entirely dominated the local landscape. None of this, however, made Roanoke a company town. Instead, the city most closely resembled what one scholar has categorized as a “corporate town”; places where multiple enterprises and an independent government exist in a municipality originally planned and managed entirely by a single industry. Roanoke, by this standard, had

¹⁵⁵ For similar appearance and community ethos in “camp phase” of development, see C. Eric Stoehr, *Bonanza Victorian: Architecture and Society in Colorado Mining Towns* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), 10-17, 61; for additional commentary on those factors as well as for most boomtowns becoming ghost towns, see Gunther Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 5-6, 142-151; Gary W. Malamud, *Boomtown Communities*, Environmental Design Series, Volume 5 (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1984), 9-22, 42-50.

more in common with Manchester, New Hampshire, and Lowell, Lawrence, and Holyoke, Massachusetts, than with other Virginia cities.¹⁵⁶

None of those northern metropolises, however, experienced anything close to the sort of intensive demographic that occurred in Roanoke. Indeed, its population increased at least 416 percent from 1880 to 1883, another 579 percent from 1883 to 1890, and an additional 143 percent from 1890 to 1892, for a combined 3,472 percent increase in twelve years.¹⁵⁷ The rate of growth per year was around 290 percent, which far exceeds the contemporary 15 percent standard of increase used to define “boomtowns.” According to urban scholars, cities with rates in excess of 15 percent often suffer from “boomtown syndrome,” a municipal malady characterized by the sort of “severe institutional malfunctioning” common in early Roanoke: municipal income shortfalls, strain on existing infrastructure, lack of adequate public services, sanitation problems, housing shortages, unattractive cityscape, excessive barren spaces, breakdown of informal social controls (caused by influx of “strangers”), and increased incidences of alcoholism, rowdiness, crime, and vice. Moreover, Roanoke’s longtime residents also reacted to the “boom” along the three distinct phases described in modern “boomtown” analyses: they were initially enthusiastic about the expected economic bonanza, they quickly became uncertain about the public services required of a city, and they were bewildered by revenue shortfalls.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ For the “corporate town” analogy and characteristics of a “company town,” see John S. Garner, *The Model Company Town: Urban Design through Private Enterprise in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), 5-7, 9, 14-16, 62-68, 77-84.

¹⁵⁷ Data derived from United States Bureau of the Census, 1880 Schedule of Population, Town of Big Lick, County of Roanoke, State of Virginia; Town Council of Roanoke, “Census of the Town of Roanoke, December 1883,” vols. 1 and 2, VR-RCPL; United States Bureau of the Census, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, Part 1* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1895), 389; 1892 statistics compiled from data in *Sholes’ Directory of the City of Roanoke, November 1st, 1892*, reprinted in *The Roanoke Times*, 20 Oct 1892.

¹⁵⁸ Information on boomtowns and the boomtown syndrome is from Malamud, *Boomtown Communities*, xi, 1-5.

One of the main consequences of the syndrome in modern “boomtowns” is the occurrence of the same variety of “value conflicts” between natives and newcomers seen in early Roanoke. For example, many of the city’s new residents, like their contemporary counterparts, also tended to arrive from established urban areas and expected public services (schools, parks, paved roads, etc.) locals had not been providing. Newcomers in Roanoke also usually resided in rental housing and paid no property taxes, and as a result, their requests likewise tended to generate resentment from natives. Moreover, since the long-term status of the town was unclear, bonds were risky and locals were hesitant to invest “their” municipal funds in “extravagant” improvements that could easily become unnecessary. Since new citizens and long-time residents usually also had differing social, political, economic, and religious values, they likewise tended to “feel alienated and weary of each other’s intentions.” Many of Roanoke’s new residents similarly interpreted the place as only a temporary home, and as a result, they developed little identification with it or its inhabitants.¹⁵⁹ “Instant cities,” one urban historian has suggested, did not always turn out “instant citizens.” It was only those that did that emerged as metropolises; the others became ghost towns.¹⁶⁰

By December 1883, on the eve of officially becoming a city, Roanoke was clearly a far different place than it had been just three years earlier. Newcomers now outnumbered Big Lick natives by nearly three to one, industrial labor had supplanted tobacco manufacturing as the main source of employment, commercial and retail development had shifted east, and a paternalistic corporation managed the eastern part of the city. Local blacks, a majority in 1880, were now a distinct minority relegated to the margins of unskilled manual labor. They joined a rural segment of newcomers in run-down neighborhoods in the west and on “Bunker Hill” while skilled workers

¹⁵⁹ Malamud, *Boomtown Communities*, xi, 1-5.

¹⁶⁰ Barth, *Instant Cities*, 132.

from the North moved into new housing on company property in the east. The small cadre of local businessmen that lured the railroad to Big Lick made substantial profits when the company purchased their property, and they benefited the most from swift increases in demand for their products or services. Moreover, the railroad rewarded a few men at the top of the local economic and political ladder with bank presidencies and appointments to its industries' boards of directors. In the process, it cultivated strong and lasting alliances with the group of natives that could best insulate it from less sympathetic residents or disgruntled employees. Finally, numerous retail and commercial enterprises had opened in Roanoke's new downtown district, as had dozens of working-class saloons. Along Railroad Avenue a boisterous and rowdy element was becoming apparent; in the years to come, more bars and eventually brothels would move in, making the street a thriving center of debauchery before it was targeted for destruction by white "reformers" and local clergy.

The first signs of sectionalism, fueled by the local press, the RL&IC, and the municipal government, emerged between "old town" and "new town" in 1882. Most "old town" residents had initially welcomed the railroad and its employees, but much of their good will turned to alienation when the company did little to improve their side of town and its employees, who paid few taxes on their rental homes, demanded public services. Many also resented the RL&IC monopoly on Roanoke's water supply, or at least questioned the independence of their elected representatives. Most "new town" residents, by contrast, had relocated from established urban areas and found the primitive conditions, lack of public services, and parochial atmosphere they encountered in Roanoke bewildering. The periodic episodes of sectionalism that erupted between each settlement horrified the town's native elites, and it was mainly through their efforts as local emissaries of the company that the tensions were, for a time, kept in check. The sectionalism did not dissipate. Indeed, it grew worse during the remainder of the decade, when Roanoke's blacks teamed with northern-born Republicans in "new town" to threaten the hegemony of local Democrats.

Both of the settlements that became Roanoke experienced the sort of intensive demographic and structural growth common in gold or silver “boomtowns.” It was primarily the older settlement and downtown area, however, that suffered the concomitant infrastructure shortfalls and social disorders typically found in “instant cities.” For while Roanoke’s tax exemption proved a bonanza for northern capitalists and a boon for local businessmen, it saddled the town with chronic revenue shortfalls that prevented even modest road and sewer improvements or adequate public services. The consequences were readily apparent; most of the original settlement and much of the haphazardly laid-out business district had dirt or mud streets, plank sidewalks, kerosene lamps, cisterns and wells for water, and privies or creeks for sewers. “New town,” by contrast, benefited from urban planning, running water, sewers, and macadamized streets. By the end of 1883, Roanoke was just beginning to grapple with its revenue shortfalls and infrastructure problems, and its residents were just setting the initial stage for building a community out of their town’s diverse and often hostile factions.

Chapter Two

Municipal and Civic Reform, 1882-1893

The resentments and suspicions between Roanoke's "old town" residents and "new town" inhabitants grew worse in the 1880s, when the city's blacks teamed with northern Republicans and threatened the hegemony of local Democrats. Indeed, on the state and national level, adherents of the two parties waged a heated battle. On the municipal level, however, where political debate tended to revolve around infrastructure and spending issues, all whites found common ground in advocating improvements to their home. The city's black inhabitants, in contrast, rarely saw infrastructure allocations spent in their neighborhoods and justifiably opposed funding modernization elsewhere in town. The issue divided white and black Republicans, who, while agreeing on state and national politics, found themselves at odds over municipal modernization on the local level, where most white voters, no matter what their political affiliation, tended to evaluate the performance of elected officials based solely on their ability to fund and manage improvements. Black voters, who for a time saw white Republicans as their allies, quickly learned that in city politics, they were on their own.

The public crusade to turn Roanoke into something resembling a modern industrial city moved on other fronts as well. Local boosters and politicians, aware that the town had a reputation for being crime ridden and debauched, eventually sought ways to curb behavior that middle and upper-class whites deemed immoral, which led to a crusade against African American "dives" in the city's saloon district. This process brought whites together in another common cause, but led to deeper fragmentation of the community along racial lines. Elsewhere in town, numerous brothels opened for business in working-class neighborhoods in the Southeast. Although popular with young men working in the industries nearby, women in the neighborhood joined local clergy in a reform campaign to drive the bordellos out of the area. When brothels continued to open there, city officials respond to the problem by evicting bordello inhabitants in

the Southeast and limiting prostitution to Roanoke's de facto "red light district" in the mostly African American Northwest.

Residents tired of complaining to elected officials about the city's lack of municipal services resorted to arranging some of them themselves. Some organized militias to augment the town's chronically under-funded and tiny police force, others formed fire brigades to protect their home from conflagration, and still others raised funds for a public hospital to provide health care for citizens in need. These various improvement crusades not only fulfilled longstanding municipal needs, they also functioned in ways that helped the white community coalesce around even more common causes. Unfortunately, the more common ground that whites in town found, the more Roanoke's blacks were pushed to the margins of the community.

White newcomers from the North and blacks from the countryside poured into Roanoke in the 1880s and turned what had been a bastion of support for "Conservatives" and "Bourbon" Democrats into hotly contested political terrain. Not long after winning the rail junction, native and southern white Democrats faced a Readjuster / Republican coalition of local blacks and northern newcomers. Former Confederate General William Mahone's Readjuster Party actively solicited African American votes, and in the early 1880s, blacks cast about two-thirds of all ballots for the party. White support came mainly from Republicans, and by 1882, there were enough new GOP supporters in Roanoke to join its "solid phalanx" of black balloters to elect Readjuster John S. Wise to Congress that year.¹ The outcome stunned local Democrats and generated even more resentment toward the northern newcomers arriving in town.

¹ Election results from *The Roanoke Leader* 9 Nov 1882; description of black support in Roanoke for Wise from *Richmond Dispatch* 11 Nov 1882, quoted in *The Roanoke Leader* 23 Nov 1882; early history of the Readjusters and strength of the party in the Highlands from Alan W. Moger, *Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), 5-39; and Virginius Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and Co., 1971), 375-92; information on black support for the Readjusters from Jane Daily, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North

In statewide elections the following fall, the Readjusters lost the city in a landslide. The flip back to the Democrats had several causes but was mainly the result of hundreds of new whites from the countryside pouring into Roanoke, the lack of issues left for Readjusters to solve – they had already adjusted the state’s pre-Civil War debt, eliminated poll taxes, funded public schools, abolished the whipping post, and increased corporate taxes – and the result of Democrats’ calls for white unity in the aftermath of the Danville Race Riot. In Danville, where black Readjusters and white Republicans had gained control of government, white Democrats had accused the “mongrelized” city council of inspiring a dramatic rise in “haughty” behavior among local blacks. The situation, Democrats argued, had disgraced whites as well as threatened Anglo-Saxon superiority. To remedy the problem, Danville’s Democrats staged a coup and initiated a pogrom against the town’s African Americans. Ironically enough, in the aftermath of what came to be called the Danville Race Riot, Readjusters lost support among poor and working-class whites. The party suffered catastrophic defeat everywhere in the state and in Roanoke, where white outrage caused voters who had been sympathetic to the Readjuster movement to turn away. As a result, the party garnered votes almost exclusively from black residents and pulled in only about 38 percent of ballots cast.²

The city’s northern-born Republicans, most of whom initially sided with the Readjusters, resided almost entirely in the Northeast’s Third Ward. Many of them came together in the later months of James G. Blaine’s 1884 Presidential campaign to publish or support *The Roanoke Telegram*, the town’s first GOP newspaper. The Third Ward voted a straight Republican ticket in that contest, but Wards One and Two swayed the city to Grover Cleveland, and after the election, *The Telegram* shut down. The overwhelming majority of newspapers published in Roanoke were

Carolina Press, 2000), 50-69; and James T. Moore, “Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia, 1879-1883,” *Journal of Southern History* 41 (May 1975), 169-71.

² Percentage of black voters and election results from *The Roanoke Leader*, 8 Nov 1883; information about effects of the Danville Riot from Daily, *Before Jim Crow*, 103-130; see also Moore, “Black Militancy in Readjuster Virginia,” 184-86.

stridently Democratic. The *Roanoke Saturday Review* and *The Roanoke Leader* were two of the first, and when they folded, the *Roanoke Daily Times*, *The (Roanoke) Evening Telegram*, *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, and *Cosmocrat* carried on in their stead. The Republicans countered with the *Roanoke Weekly Sun*, and in 1891, John H. Davis began publishing the *Roanoke Press*, a black GOP paper.³ Black voters, scattered among all three wards, almost always favored the party of Lincoln. Indeed, according to a letter to *The Leader* from African American schoolteacher Zachariah Hunt, local blacks believed the Republican Party “was the voice of God” and that Democrats stood for “Human slavery, oppression, ignorance.”⁴

In July 1885, city Democrats, “never in better trim,” gathered at the Planter’s Warehouse downtown to endorse former Confederate cavalry officer Fitzhugh Lee – the grandson of “Light Horse Harry” and nephew of Robert E. Lee – as their party’s candidate for governor.⁵ The state’s Republican Party, which absorbed the Readjuster Party after the 1883 elections, picked former Readjuster Congressman John S. Wise to be his opponent. Roanoke’s Democrats elected S. S. Brooke, editor of *The Roanoke Leader*, secretary of the local party, and not long afterward, he began filling the pages of his newspaper with lengthy diatribes against Wise. His coalition party, Brooke railed, was in fact no party at all but rather “the spawn of political prostitution” whose only hope was to attract “insatiate spoils seekers, ballot box stuffers, political renegades and

³ For presidential vote, see *The Roanoke Leader*, 6 Nov 1884; for information on the various newspapers, see Lester J. Cappon, *Virginia Newspapers, 1821-1935: A Bibliography with Historical Introduction and Notes* Guide to Virginia Historical Materials Part I (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co. for the Institute for Research in the Social Sciences at the University of Virginia, 1936), 195-98; and I. M. Warren, *History of Newspapers Published in 23 Counties of Southwest Virginia* (Roanoke: Works Progress Administration), 8-17. There are no known copies of *The Roanoke Telegram* or John Davis’ *Press*. The three extant copies of *The Roanoke Weekly Sun* are in the Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library, Roanoke.

⁴ *The Roanoke Leader*, 29 Nov 1884.

⁵ *The Roanoke Leader*, 11 July 1885.

shameless demagogues.”⁶ Nevertheless, when Wise came to town in September, a racially mixed crowd of over five hundred turned out to hear him speak.⁷

Democrats staged a massive rally for Fitz Lee the next month, sending a column of two hundred and fifty men on horseback to escort him and Jubal Early on a parade down Salem Avenue. Lee spoke at the baseball grounds that night under fireworks and in front of three thousand fanatical followers: “It was such a speech,” S. S. Brooke boasted, “as a true patriot, solicitous only for harmony, good feelings and just laws, should have made.”⁸ Although local Democrats predicted another landslide victory, on Election Day, Lee and his party polled only about 10 percent better than Wise and the Republicans. The Third Ward voted a straight Republican ticket, the heavily black Second Ward cast over 46 percent of its ballots for Wise, and it is entirely possible that the GOP would have done even better if poll workers had not turned away dozens of African Americans who attempted to cast votes. Local Democrats controlled the election apparatus, and there were widespread charges of fraud by both sides in the aftermath of the vote.⁹

Unlike most other white Virginians, Roanokers of all political affiliations tended to support the Republican-initiated federal tariff on imports because it protected local industries. The Norfolk & Western Railroad backed the tariff as well, but on the state level provided

⁶ *The Roanoke Leader*, 22 Aug 1885.

⁷ *The Roanoke Leader*, 26 Sept 1885; for Wise’s campaign for Governor, see Curtis Carroll Davis, “Very Well Rounded Republican: The Several Lives of John S. Wise,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 71, no. 4 (Oct 1963), 472-78.

⁸ *The Roanoke Leader*, 3 Oct 1885.

⁹ For election results and turning away black voters, see *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Nov 1885.

Wise even lost in black majority counties. Democrats gained control of the Virginia’s election apparatus in 1884 by passing the Anderson-McCormick Election Law, which placed election boards under the control of the Democratic controlled General Assembly. For more on this, see Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion*, 393-94; for accusation of fraud, see Moger, *Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd*, 59-61; and Daily, *Before Jim Crow*, 156.

financial support for Virginia's conservative "Bourbon" Democrats because they opposed regulating railroads and were soft on corporate taxes. Attempts by President Cleveland to reduce tariffs gave the GOP and its candidate for governor – Ex-U. S. Senator William Mahone, head of the state's Republican Party – a hot issue for the 1889 race. Philip McKinney, the Democratic nominee, countered Mahone by focusing on threats to Anglo-Saxon control of the Old Dominion by "mongrelized" Republicans.¹⁰ Moreover, Mahone had by then alienated many party operatives with his dictator-like control of the organization. David F. Houston, head of Roanoke's Crozier Iron Works and chairman of the Virginia Republican Executive Committee, had been elected to the state senate in 1887, but soon afterwards, joined John S. Wise in bolting the "Boss Mahone" machine to form a splinter faction of the Republican Party.¹¹ Local party worker William A. Pattie, who lost appointment as Roanoke's postmaster in an ugly GOP patronage battle, also turned against the "old despot," and like most anti-Mahone Republicans, he chose to "go a 'fishin'" on election day rather than vote against the Bourbons.¹² Mahone lost in a landslide statewide and by 20 percent locally in one of the Virginia's most vicious and controversial elections. The city's "white people," the *Roanoke Daily Times* boasted afterwards, were ecstatic "over the downfall of 'Mahoneism' and in the triumph of the Anglo-Saxon race." The town's "colored men," it noted, "as a rule seemed disgusted with the result."¹³

¹⁰ For Southwest Virginians favoring the protective tariff, see Allen W. Moger, "Industrial and Urban Progress in Virginia from 1880 to 1900," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 66 (July 1958), 333; information on Mahone, the N&W, and the 1889 campaign are from Moger, *Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd*, 62-68, 98-99, 112-121; and Dabney, *Virginia: The New Dominion*, 396-99; travel writer Thomas Clayton noticed this unique dynamic at play in Roanoke during the fall 1883 political season. See his *Rambles and Reflections: From Biscay to the Black Sea and from Aetna to the North Cape with Glimpses of Africa, America and the Island of the Sea* (Chester, PA: Press of the Delaware County Republican, 1893), 321.

¹¹ William C. Sproul, *David F. Houston* (Philadelphia: Press of A. H. Strickler & Co., 1890), 11.

¹² William A. Pattie, Roanoke City, to Dr. G. R. Gilmer, "Near Richmond," 9 Sept 1889, George Kooglar Gilmer Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond (cited hereafter as VHS).

¹³ Vote total is in *Roanoke Daily Times*, 8 Nov 1889; quote is from *ibid.*, 7 Nov 1889.

Although Roanoke was politically fractured over state and national politics, its municipal political campaigns eventually served as a means to unite much of the white community around the common cause of modernizing their home. Roanoke shed its status as a town in January 1884, but became a city only after misleading the Virginia Legislature with a wildly inaccurate population report. The town's internal census, conducted in December 1883 explicitly to prove that Roanoke had the 5,000 residents required by the state for city designation, listed a population of only 2,789 inhabitants. Local officials, anxious for city status, passed on a figure of just over 5,000 residents to the General Assembly anyway. That had been the contingency plan all along, according to local printer Edward Stone, who remembered that "it was rumored that it might be necessary to 'stuff the ballot box' to secure the required population."¹⁴ A new "city" charter, approved by residents and delivered to the legislature by delegate Henry S. Trout, left in place the fifteen-year tax exemption for manufacturers as well as the existing governmental system of a mayor and council of twelve members elected every two years from three wards. It, however, did expand the ability of officials to deal with persistent financial, structural, and sanitary problems. Most important, it legalized an extremely large bonded debt, more than doubled property taxes, and specified that municipal income and bond monies be used to rectify street and drainage

¹⁴ Town Council of Roanoke, "Census of the Town of Roanoke, December 1883," vols. 1 and 2, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library; Edward L. Stone, "Through Fifty Eventful Years," *Stone's Impressions* 3, new series, no 4 (July, Aug, Sept, 1933), 1, in author's collection. According to A. E. Dick Howard, in *Commentaries on the Constitution of Virginia*, vol. 2 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974), 793-97, the Virginia legislature did not formalize the distinction between towns and cities until 1887, when it defined cities as having a population over 5,000. (Elaine Powers at the Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library, and Sarah Huggins at the Library of Virginia, pointed out Howard's argument.) All contemporary and secondary sources, however, suggest that Roanoke's Town Council believed they needed 5,000 residents to become a city. See, for example, Raymond P. Barnes, *A History of Roanoke* (Radford, VA: Commonwealth Press, 1968), 132; Claire White, *Roanoke: 1740-1982* (Roanoke: Roanoke Valley Historical Society, 1982), 71.

problems as well as to build new schools, a market house, and a new jail to replace the log shack that had served entirely inadequately as a prison since 1882.¹⁵

The city's current mayor and council, whose terms did not expire until July 1884, had already spent \$30,000 from previous bond allotments along with \$6,000 in municipal income on macadamizing several streets and channeling Lick Run creek. They had depleted the city treasury in the process, but drainage problems in the western part of town remained. Lick Run, though now walled, served as an open sewer. In the spring of 1884, the municipal government approved a bond initiative specifically to address infrastructure problems and called on property owners – the only residents eligible to vote on funding initiatives – to endorse it. Local papers, concerned that the city's current government was incompetent, advised voters to turn down the appropriation, and in April, 72 percent of them rejected the bond. S. S. Brooke, editor of *The Roanoke Leader*, had campaigned against the appropriation and heralded the decision. The current government, he complained, was incapable of “remedying our present filthy condition – a condition that has come upon us by almost criminal neglect of our authorities to enforce plain, needful and most apparent sanitary regulations.”¹⁶

In the spring 1884 municipal elections that followed, John H. Dunstan, a mining engineer and co-owner of *The Leader*, ran for mayor against incumbent Lucian H. Cocke, a longtime local lawyer and son of the president of Hollins College. Dunstan, who had moved to town two years earlier from Fredericksburg, claimed in campaign advertisements that his newspaper had “probably done as much, if not more, than any other in bringing before the world at large the advantages and benefits of this place.” He promised as mayor to advocate “all measures

¹⁵ For debate about new charter, see *The Roanoke Leader*, 6, 27, Dec 1883; draft of actual charter published in *ibid.*, 14 Feb 1884. The old jail was renowned for its utter inability to actually hold prisoners, and in the two years it served as the Town's place of incarceration, roughly a hundred inmates found ways to escape. For examples, see *The Roanoke Leader*, 6, 20 Dec 1884; 4 April 1885.

¹⁶ *The Roanoke Leader*, 3 April 1884.

appertaining to the public interest” and disputed widespread rumors that he was “connected” to the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, insisting that his only association with that firm was a close friendship with its president, J. B. Austin.¹⁷ Although the vote was very close, that May residents selected Dunstan along with ten new council members. The hundreds of northern workers who had clustered in the Northeast’s Third Ward sent David F. Houston, superintendent of the Crozier Iron Works, and three other Republicans to council. Wards One and Two in the older sections of town elected one independent, one Republican, and six Democrats. The lone African American candidate for office – John H. Davis, who ran for council on the GOP ticket from the Second Ward – received only about 6 percent of the vote.¹⁸

The new government took control in July 1884, and in his first address to council, Mayor Dunstan pushed an aggressive agenda of improvements and economic development. Not only did the town require a new jail and a market house, he argued, it had to replace Rorer’s warehouse with a real City Hall, needed a firehouse, and had to have two new schools – one for workers’ children in the east and the other for African American students in the north. Dunstan also believed that the city needed to diversify its industries. “To assist such schemes,” he explained, “I would advise that besides the present freedom from taxation until 1897, the council offer any parties starting a manufacturing enterprise different from any now operation here, a bonus of a free site.”¹⁹ Council approved the initiative, and the offer of free land and no taxes did much to lure a variety of new manufacturers to town.

¹⁷ See ad in *The Roanoke Leader*, 3 April 1884.

¹⁸ *The Roanoke Leader*, 29 May 1884; see also Writers’ Program of the Works Progress Administration in the State of Virginia, *Roanoke: Story of County and City* (Roanoke: Roanoke City School Board, 1942), 135.

¹⁹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 3 July 1884.

Later that year, after Dunstan sold his interests in *The Leader*, he and the council passed the city's first comprehensive set of general ordinances.²⁰ He and the councilmen behind the regulations believed they could remedy myriad municipal concerns by expanding the government's ability to regulate a wide spectrum of behavior. Most of the laws therefore addressed "problems" created by black residents or white migrants from the countryside, inhabitants who had refused to conform to the etiquettes of life in an urban setting. The regulations, for example, banned bathing in streams, damaging trees, firing guns, creating "noise," putting "filth" in creeks, laboring or drinking on Sunday, storing hay inside homes, and tying livestock to lampposts. They outlawed vagrancy and authorized police to assign anyone without visible means of support to the chain gang. The laws also created the city's first zoning regulations by prohibiting new wooden structures in the downtown district.²¹ The ordinances created a board of health with the power to send "infected persons" to the pest house, the ability to prohibit the sale of food or other articles it considered "injurious," and the authority to order that standing water be drained. The code gave the board's three physicians the power to levy fines on residents with "cellars, yards, privies and other places which may be alleged to be offensive, or likely to become so."²² The mayor's good friend S. S. Brooke, a longtime advocate of just such reform, offered guidance to the doctors on the board by pointing out parts of town where residents created "an abomination to the eye and nose" by dumping "slops" into their yards. The resulting odors, he argued, "ought to warn every healthful person of the malarial influence breeding there, to break out eventually in fevers and diphtheria."²³

²⁰ For Dunstan selling his interest in the paper on 27 Oct 1884, see *The Roanoke Leader*, 6 Nov 1884.

²¹ City of Roanoke, Virginia, *General Ordinances of the City of Roanoke, Together with other Ordinances and Contracts Affecting the Rights and Interests of the City of Roanoke* (Roanoke: Bell Printing, 1884), 56-57, 70-71.

²² City of Roanoke, *General Ordinances*, 51-52.

²³ *The Roanoke Leader*, 24 July 1884.

Lack of sewers, primitive drainage, and stagnant marshes all bred disease, and as the population increased, deaths from pathogens skyrocketed. By 1885, the city's death rate of over thirty-one persons per thousand had even far surpassed the rate for New York City.²⁴ "A good many deaths" that year, according to one resident, had come from widespread outbreaks of "diphthery" and "colry."²⁵ Dr. George S. Luck, head of the board of health, attempted to remedy the situation by insisting that residents use disinfectants regularly and "exercise unusual diligence in maintaining their premises in a cleanly condition."²⁶ Sickness from disease, however, continued unabated, as did persistent rumors about dangerous health conditions in Roanoke. Local writer Thomas Bruce, like other residents, resented the published reports of sickness and death in town. "Some people," he protested, "are disposed to cavil as to Roanoke's health, but we who have lived and resided here enjoy the same health as other people." Yes, people died there, Bruce explained, "but not in greater numbers than elsewhere, and considering the number of excavations going on for new buildings in the city, we wonder that, without a proper sewerage system, it should be so healthy."²⁷ The board of health did what it could, issuing fines for unclean premises and immunizing locals against smallpox, but ongoing sewer problems hindered its efforts.

Dunstan and the new council attempted to remedy this problem while also addressing the city's infrastructure needs. The municipality was broke, so local leaders passed a bond initiative allocating \$25,000 for a new courthouse and jail, \$12,000 to channel and cover Lick Run,

²⁴ For Roanoke's rate of 31.2 deaths per thousand, see statistics published in *The Roanoke Leader*, 11 July 1885; for New York's 1885 rate of 25 deaths per thousand, see Carl L. Erhardt and Joyce E. Berlin, eds., *Mortality and Morbidity in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 2.

²⁵ Julia F. (Harris) Via to "Mother," Nancy F. Harris, 13 Oct 1885, Harris Family Papers, VHS.

²⁶ *The Roanoke Leader*, 17 April 1886.

²⁷ Thomas Bruce, *Southwest Virginia and Shenandoah Valley* (Richmond: J. L. Hill, 1891), 147.

\$10,000 for a market house, \$8,500 for new schools, and \$4,500 for a poorhouse.²⁸ Although citizens showed they had more confidence in the new government by overwhelmingly endorsing these bonds, debate on how exactly to spend the money soon developed.²⁹ Among the first to criticize plans for the bonds was businessman D. C. Moomaw, who argued in a letter to the editor that council's intention to continue using Lick Run as a primitive sewer was misguided and shortsighted. The complete allocation, he suggested, should go toward the construction of a modern sewer system and to macadamize the "impassable bogs" that the city used for roads.³⁰ Furniture storeowner and newly elected councilman E. H. Stewart seconded Moomaw's opinion, arguing at a meeting of officials that the city should implement sanitary engineer Randolph Herring's 1882 drainage and sewer plan. Council agreed, and that winter it approved a vote on combining all the bonds into a single fund to construct sewers and improve roads.³¹ The proposal, however, failed to garner the necessary two-thirds vote, leaving council no choice but to fund the original plan.³²

Even that, however, proved problematic. The 1883 nationwide recession drove away investors, and as a result, the city had been able to sell only \$16,000 worth of bonds. Work on some of the improvement projects had gone on anyway with funds diverted from municipal taxes and fees, but Roanoke had incurred a \$9,000 deficit in the process. As a result, Mayor Dunstan recommended an end to all street and drainage work except for that conducted by the chain gang, a reduction in the already tiny police force, and the elimination of the city solicitor position held

²⁸ *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Aug 1884.

²⁹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 28 Aug 1884. Nearly eighty-four percent of voters approved the bonds.

³⁰ See D. C. Moomaw letter in *The Roanoke Leader*, 4 Sept 1884.

³¹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Feb 1885.

³² *The Roanoke Leader*, 11, 25 April 1885.

by Ex-Mayor Cocke.³³ S. S. Brooke, ignoring problems caused by the depression, blamed E. W. Clark & Company for the shortfall, informing readers that “certain Philadelphia parties” had agreed to purchase the entire allotment of bonds but had failed to carry through on their promise.³⁴ The mayor, stung by the recession himself and no doubt increasingly disillusioned with his new home, resigned five months later and went to work for a land company in Calera, Alabama.³⁵

In the first few years of its existence, Roanoke’s municipal government was nearly evenly split between Democrats and Republicans. In the spring of 1885, however, the GOP lost three of its five seats. The bond funding debacle and continuing accusations of mismanagement or malfeasance hurt all incumbents but was especially devastating to local Republicans, since it gave Democrats a temporary wedge issue in the Third Ward. Moreover, before the vote, GOP leaders outraged local blacks by ignoring their request that John H. Davis be nominated for council in the Second Ward. Afterward the town’s African Americans bolted the party and placed S. A. Ricks on the ballot as their black Republican nominee for city constable. Ricks, who garnered no support from white Republicans, lost decisively in the heavily white and mostly GOP Third Ward and polled significantly below all Republican candidates in Wards One and Two. “The Republicans,” S. S. Brooke boasted after the split, “have lost the only opportunity that will ever be afforded them to control municipal affairs.”³⁶ The following spring, an anti-liquor party ousted two Democrats in the Second Ward and the Republicans lost another seat in the third. Blacks, increasingly at odds with the city’s Republican leadership, ran schoolteacher Zachariah

³³ *The Roanoke Leader*, 4 July 1885.

³⁴ *The Roanoke Leader*, 9 May 1885.

³⁵ *The Roanoke Leader*, 6 Dec 1885. Dunstan eventually ended-up in South Carolina before returning to Roanoke in 1892. For notice of his return, see *The Roanoke Times*, 15 April 1892.

³⁶ Election results and quote are in *The Roanoke Leader*, 30 May 1885.

Hunt for constable but endorsed Democrats in the other citywide races. Hunt polled only 1 percent of the vote, and the Democrats easily defeated the other Republican nominees. Democrat William Carr, who had moved from West Virginia in 1883 to take a job in the Machine Shops, won the mayor's race.³⁷

Although the city eventually found funds to carry out all the initial infrastructure work approved in 1884, sanitation, drainage and road problems went largely unaddressed until the end of the decade. The board of health's campaign against unsanitary practices was finally having an effect by then, its head physician reported, since most citizens devoted "more attention to the cleanliness of their own premises than formerly." As a result, he boasted, the city was "never cleaner than now."³⁸ The campaign against unsanitary homes and yards, however, did not stop. The day after this announcement the board had twelve black residents arrested for "neglecting to keep their premises clean."³⁹ Elsewhere in town, other sanitation problems emerged. At the new Market House, for instance, farmers had begun camping-out in their Conestoga wagons, and as a result, the *Roanoke Daily Times* reported, "wherever these wagons have stood, there is left piles of garbage, and there it lies nearly everyday, festering in the sun and breeding disease."⁴⁰ The limited number of stalls in and around the market building forced hucksters to park their horses and carts along nearby streets, and the lack of systematic sanitation or restroom facilities meant that animal manure and wagon "slops" mixed with spoiled meat and rotten produce in and around Market Square. Authorities were well aware of the "fever-breeding odors" caused by the farmers, the paper reported, but had done nothing to regulate the place.⁴¹ An anonymous "Sufferer" also

³⁷ Election results are in *The Roanoke Leader* 29 May 1886; blacks endorsing Democrats in available in *ibid.*, 15 May 1886.

³⁸ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 27 Aug 1890.

³⁹ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 28 Aug 1890.

⁴⁰ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 29 June 1890.

⁴¹ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 1 Aug 1890.

blamed elected officials for the situation, relaying in a letter to the editor that the lane in front of the market house was “as bad if not worse than any swamp, and the stench can now be compared to a glue or guano factory.”⁴²

Chronic street and drainage problems continued to plague city fathers as well. Freeholders approved bonds for modest sewer improvements in 1888 and for three bridges over railroad tracks in early 1890, but allotted no funds for street work. Moreover, in 1890 the town annexed land surrounding the city that nearly doubled its size, added even more roads to maintain, and pushed the town’s population over sixteen thousand. Funds for upgrading streets and building sewers did not exist, but residents and the press nevertheless insisted that authorities do something. Railroad Avenue, the first street visible from the depot, had yet to be macadamized, and after even a light rain, it turned to mud. The situation, one entrepreneur reasoned, was bad for business since any capitalist passing through the city was “not likely to be favorably impressed.”⁴³ In the spring of 1890, a hundred and fifty residents, concerned about miasmas from a “marshy bottom” along Commerce Street, signed a petition demanding that officials do something. The *Roanoke Daily Times* endorsed their request and pointed out the danger posed by a “chain of mud-puddles” on Salem Avenue: “Every time it rains they are refilled and stand festering in the sun with the winds blowing their fetid breath up and down the city.”⁴⁴ By summer, the paper argued, the streets of Roanoke were “in worse condition than those of any city in the country.”⁴⁵ The roads looked dreadful, threatened the health of the municipality, and even endangered those walking downtown, since horses and wagons speeding along them

⁴² *Roanoke Daily Times*, 2 Aug 1890.

⁴³ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 19 Nov 1889.

⁴⁴ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 11, 18 May 1890.

⁴⁵ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 5 July 1890.

inevitably splashed “helpless pedestrians” on nearby sidewalks with mud and stagnant water.⁴⁶

Even worse, residents in “thickly populated” areas continued to drain kitchen or bath water and “slops” onto nearby roads, rendering streets in some parts of town little more than cesspools.⁴⁷

Officials and the board of health did what they could, ordering the chain gang to fill potholes and cover the streets with lime, but lacked the funds to make permanent improvements. The situation grew worse in the winter of 1890, when nearly three feet of snow from a blizzard began to melt. Overloaded coal wagons cut deep ruts in the town’s flooded roads and eventually the situation grew so bad that residents placed stakes around especially large mud holes to warn buggy drivers. “Most of the streets,” *The Times* reported, “look more like liquid lakes of mud than thoroughfares of a city.” Residents had “besieged” the city engineer with complaints, and all over town, the paper explained, “ladies fill the air with railings against the street committee and City Council.”⁴⁸ Other municipal problems came to a head as well; the new courthouse was far too small and the new jail, which was literally falling apart, had been plagued by an utter inability to contain prisoners.⁴⁹ Council took the blame for these problems too, and in February 1891, after weeks of heated criticism, it approved seven bond issues totaling \$360,000 to address the city’s various needs. If endorsed by freeholders in early March, streets and sewers would get a \$300,000 upgrade, the Northeast would get a new firehouse, the city would get a fire alarm system, the courthouse would get an addition, Roanoke would have a new jail and its first official map, and public school students would get additional space.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 30 July 1890.

⁴⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 Nov 1890.

⁴⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Jan 1891.

⁴⁹ Information on the 1888 jail is from *The Roanoke Times*, 9 July; 20 Nov 1890.

⁵⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 5 Feb 1891.

In the weeks leading up to vote, debate raged over the appropriateness of approving the bonds. The town's press endorsed all the issues, but many residents were far less enthusiastic. The city's African Americans, about 30 percent of the population, opposed the courthouse addition, new fire station, and sewers on the grounds that they were unnecessary or were improvements that benefited white neighborhoods exclusively. Previous bond allocations, while providing a schoolhouse, had not gone to Gainsborough. As a result, black ministers and political leaders organized mass meetings to rally voters against further allocations unless council guaranteed them a "proportionate share."⁵¹ Some city fathers ignored their request; others reacted with hostility. A Third Ward councilman, for example, blasted the notion of blacks "combining" against the appropriation and turning it into "a regular race issue," while another predicted the bond vote would be carried explicitly because "the negroes have expressed themselves against it."⁵² After reading about their reactions, Richard R. Jones, pastor of the city's black First Baptist Church, told those gathered at another rally that the time had come to demonstrate African American disapproval by demanding improvements to black neighborhoods and rejecting the bonds.⁵³ Black voters, however, made up only about 25 percent of the electorate and posed no real threat unless a significant number of whites joined them.⁵⁴

Roanoke's white voters, by contrast, pushed for postponing the bond vote until after citizens elected a new council or the current council appointed an independent "advisory board"

⁵¹ For local press endorsing issues, see *The Roanoke Times*, 3 March 1891; for first meeting at High Street Baptist led by P. W. Oliver, Rev. R. R. Jones, W. W. Brown, Rev. D. W. Harth, John H. Davis, T. T. Henry, and Roanoke's only black lawyer, A. J. Oliver, see *ibid.*, 21 Feb 1891.

⁵² See council's reaction in *The Roanoke Times*, 25 Feb 1891.

⁵³ For second meeting at A. M. E. Church, see *The Roanoke Times*, 3 March 1891.

⁵⁴ White registration surged when voters from the two new wards signed up, and although black voters in the third ward increased to nearly forty-five percent of that district's total, African American registration overall fell five percent from 1890 to 1892. The white total for the same period increased twenty percent, giving whites a three to one majority overall. See voter registration statistics published in *The Roanoke Times*, 28 Oct 1890; 12 May 1892.

to oversee funding for projects. When officials refused to delay the vote and claimed that the city charter did not permit an advisory board, numerous business leaders spoke out against endorsing the bonds. The president of the Roanoke Real Estate Exchange, for instance, blasted the decision and accused the street committee of misappropriating previous funds. Peyton Terry, the city's most successful native businessman, argued that thousands of dollars had already ““been largely wasted”” by the current municipal government. And Tipton T. Fishburne, president of Roanoke's National Exchange Bank, suggested that an influential member of the street committee had used past allocations to improve streets only in his ward.⁵⁵ In the vote that followed, however, the town's volunteer firemen crowded the polls to encourage voters to endorse the firehouse appropriation along with the other bonds, and few property holders dared ignore them. Black voters' attempt to kill the appropriations fell flat, and most of the issues passed with at least 80 percent of the vote.⁵⁶ The approval, one paper reflected later, ushered in an “era of extensive improvements” and showed the rest of the state that Roanoke “had ceased to be a large country town.”⁵⁷ In the municipal elections that followed two months later, all the candidates who had spoken out against the advisory board lost their seats.⁵⁸

The city adopted another new charter in early 1892 that carved two new wards out of the 1890 annexations and created a board of public works to oversee improvement projects. It also abolished its board of police commissioners – created in 1884 to manage the department – returning complete control of the force to the mayor. Work on installing sewers started that spring, as did grading, macadamizing, and bricking central roads and systematizing the town's

⁵⁵ See council's reaction to the advisory board in *The Roanoke Times*, 25 Feb 1891; for business leaders opinions, see *ibid.*, 3 March 1891.

⁵⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 18 March 1891.

⁵⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 Aug 1892.

⁵⁸ See election results in *The Roanoke Times*, 30 May 1891; councilmen Woodward, McCahan, and Scott had all spoken against the board in *ibid.*, 25 Feb 1891.

jumbled and confusing street names.⁵⁹ The board of health's campaign against unclean premises continued as well, and in the summer of 1892, council authorized the systematic inspection of all homes in "certain districts." Those found "unsanitary" had twelve hours to fix the problem or face arrest. The campaign worked, according to most physicians, who by fall deemed the sanitary condition of the city "better at present than it has been at any time."⁶⁰

In the municipal elections stipulated by the new charter, voters had to fill all government positions and elect an entirely new council. Republicans, energized by the state GOP convention held in Roanoke a few weeks earlier, nominated a solid Republican ticket for the Third Ward and put up a candidate for mayor for the first time. Local party leaders had reached out to black voters in the days before the statewide caucus, appointing a mixed delegation to the convention that included some of the city's most influential African Americans.⁶¹ Democrats, by contrast, were widely accused of "machine" politics after party bosses handpicked all the nominees for office. Indeed, *The Roanoke Times* blasted the maneuver and called on voters to "pulverize the machine out of recognition" by electing two independent candidates for council from the Second Ward instead of men "who are Democrats 'for revenue only.'"⁶²

In a reversal of its usual partisan stance, *The Times* also suggested that voters ignore political affiliations and elect a council based solely on its ability to manage the city and implement the remainder of the improvement bonds. The paper accused Roanoke's "Tammany-aping politicians" of already spending over \$100,000 worth of the recently approved bonds on a variety of projects that had done little to improve the city. It also accused them of mismanaging

⁵⁹ *The Roanoke Times* 18, 26 May; 9, 15 June 1892.

⁶⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 2 July; 17 Sept 1892.

⁶¹ See appointments of Charles Bright, John Davis, A. J. Oliver as delegates in *The Roanoke Times*, 30 April 1892; for coverage of the Republican Convention, see *ibid.*, 5, 6 May 1892.

⁶² *The Roanoke Times*, 25 May 1892.

the police force in the wake of revelations that numerous officers had been found asleep or drunk on duty and others had been charged with assault or embezzlement.⁶³ Republican officials speaking at the “Young Men’s Republican League, Colored” concurred with the paper and told the two-hundred and fifty in attendance that the Democratic machine was out of control.⁶⁴ In the election, Henry S. Trout, the Democrats’ nominee for mayor, pulled in 61 percent of the vote, and although Democratic incumbents nominated by the “machine” beat the two independent candidates, most of the party’s fifteen councilmen were new to elected office. Republicans carried all races in the Third Ward as well as one council seat in the 30 percent black Fifth Ward.⁶⁵ It was not exactly the victory *The Times* asked for but was nonetheless a “clean sweep” of most incumbents by candidates pledged to reform the “un-business-like methods” of the former council.⁶⁶

Trout and the new council took the reins in July, and in one of his first actions as mayor, Trout called the entire police force into City Hall and made them pledge to follow his revised behavior guidelines, which banned sleeping, drinking, and consorting with prostitutes while on duty.⁶⁷ He and council also made management of bond spending more transparent, offering residents semi-annual updates on funds spent and improvements carried out. By fall, the new jail and firehouse were going up, work on the addition to the courthouse was under way, bridges approved in 1890 were open over Randolph, Park, and Henry Streets, nearly eight miles of streets had been macadamized or covered in vitrified brick, contractors were finishing drains for the

⁶³ *The Roanoke Times*, 25, 26 May 1892; the “policemen who do not police” is a reference to stories carried in *ibid.*, on 30 Oct 1890; 3 Oct 1891; 23 April, 18, 24 May 1892; “Tammany-aping” quote is from the 26 May 1892 edition of *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 26 May 1892.

⁶⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 27 May 1892.

⁶⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 30 May 1892.

⁶⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 2 July 1892.

sewer, and two new schools had gone up.⁶⁸ These improvements finally solved most of the city's chronic infrastructure needs. The cost of the projects and the lack of tax revenue from local industries, however, saddled the city with a massive municipal debt. Funding the improvements, nevertheless, showed that natives and newcomers alike were prepared to accept the permanence of their home and were willing to work together to make it a decent place to live.

Solving the "Magic City's" myriad street, sewer, and drainage problems was only one component of municipal reform in the 1880s and early 1890s. By the time residents approved the funds necessary to enact infrastructure improvements, rowdiness, drunkenness and petty crime in Roanoke had all increased. Indeed, in the 1880s and early 1890s, the city developed a reputation as particularly lascivious, crime ridden and violent. Robbery, theft, and assault all rose dramatically, as did prostitution. "Roanoke in its morals," Presbyterian minister William Campbell observed, "for a time sadly deteriorated." He blamed the decline on the rise of dozens of "barrooms with their baneful influence" and on the influx of a large and "dangerous" population "inclined to do as they pleased in a new place."⁶⁹ By the early 1890s, clergy and residents alike sensed a wave of lawlessness emerging around them. White citizens blamed much of the lawbreaking on newly arrived blacks, and in conjunction with elected officials, they began grappling with ways to restore civic and racial "order" by disciplining real and perceived lawbreakers in their midst.

Much of the racial tension that appeared at the end of the decade had roots in an unsolved murder from six years earlier. The crime occurred on election eve in 1884, when persons unknown but assumed to be black killed Lizzie Wilson, a fourteen-year-old white girl. According

⁶⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 Aug; 30 Oct 1892.

⁶⁹ William C. Campbell, "1885 Anniversary Sermon," Heritage Room, First Presbyterian Church, Roanoke, reprinted in Brenda McDaniel, "Dr. Campbell's Big Lick," *The Roanoker* (Sept 1981): 79; barroom portion of quote is from William C. Campbell, Roanoke, to Editor of *The Central* (location unknown), 12 March 1886, Campbell Papers.

to her younger sister, the duo had been walking to their home in the Northeast after dark when two men abducted Lizzie. Her screams and a hysterical account of the kidnapping from her sister threw the entire Northeast into a panic. Neighbors scoured the woodlands surrounding their working-class neighborhood but found Lizzie not far from where she had been abducted. Her throat had been slashed ear to ear and her clothing had been torn into tatters. As news of the murder and suspected rape spread, hundreds of residents descended into the neighborhood to search for suspects. Had any been found, *The Roanoke Leader* surmised, “in all probability they would have been lynched immediately under the excitement of the moment.” Citywide, the Wilson murder generated loud calls for summary justice. Indeed, newspaper accounts that played up the girl’s working-class origins, six siblings and impoverished parents, rendered the killing all the more heartbreaking. Looking to better their life in the “Magic City,” the Wilsons had migrated to town in 1883 and rented a room in the Brick Row housing complex in the Southeast. Mr. Wilson worked in one of the nearby industries, his wife and children labored in odd jobs or in factories, and by 1884, the family had saved enough money to rent a Roanoke Land & Improvement Company home on Madison Avenue in the Northeast. Not long after making the move, Lizzie Wilson lay dead, “savaged” and killed by what most whites assumed were two black “beasts.”⁷⁰

Over the next couple of days, council put up a reward for information and hired three Pinkerton Detectives to work the case. White business leaders and clergy organized a “Citizens’

⁷⁰ Information on the murder is from William C. Campbell, “Roanoke’s Tragedies. Part of its earlier History. The death of a young Girl. The Terror that filled the city. Thaxton Wreck. The Great Riot. Nine men killed and Thirty wounded in a moment. The Lynching. A terrible lesson. Tragic death of one of the City’s best Citizens.” 1-2, TMs, Campbell Papers; Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 146; quote is from *The Roanoke Leader*, 6 November 1884; information on the Wilson’s is from Town Council of Roanoke, “Census of the Town of Roanoke, December 1883,” vol. 2, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library.

Committee” to assist with the investigation and add to the reward.⁷¹ In the meantime, William Campbell and the Wilson family buried Lizzie in a plot at the city cemetery donated by council. In the days after the murder, Campbell recalled, most residents were “completely terrorized” and “afraid to leave their homes after dark.”⁷² Rumors about the identity of Wilson’s killers were rampant, but in the weeks that followed, police made no arrests. S. S. Brooke, editor of *The Leader*, encouraged responsible white men to have shotguns and pistols at their disposal and to be fully aware of the numerous tramps and “suspicious persons prowling around our city.” The town’s women, he went on, were “very much frightened” and in need of vigilant protection.⁷³ The city was “wrapped in gloom” for weeks, according to another resident, and as frustrations and fears mounted, dozens of men joined posses to conduct extralegal investigations.⁷⁴ Police exonerated everyone they brought in, and in one case, the “Citizens’ Committee” even published a notice chastising the vigilantes for “arresting” an innocent man, noting afterwards that “his reputation has been sullied, his business injured and a great wrong done him.”⁷⁵

Over the next several months, and much to the horror of white residents, investigators failed to pin the crime on anyone. In the spring, however, police in Salem reported that Wilson Steptoe and Lewis Watkins, two black men charged there with attempted rape, had bragged about killing Wilson during their assault.⁷⁶ Roanoke investigators immediately charged the men with murder. In the subsequent hearing, however, the jury hung along racial lines, with seven white

⁷¹ Council noted the six-hundred dollars it spent on the detectives in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Feb 1885; information about the reward and citizens’ group is from *The Roanoke Leader*, 6, 13 Nov 1884.

⁷² Campbell, “Roanoke’s Tragedies,” 1; Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 146.

⁷³ *The Roanoke Leader*, 20 Nov 1884.

⁷⁴ Quote is from Bruce, *Southwest Virginia*, 138; information about the posses is from Campbell, “Roanoke’s Tragedies,” 2; *The Roanoke Leader*, 13 Nov 1884.

⁷⁵ *The Roanoke Leader*, 20 Dec 1884.

⁷⁶ *The Roanoke Leader*, 25 April, 9 May 1885.

votes for guilty and five blacks votes for not guilty. “Popular indignation was so fully aroused by the verdict,” one journalist reported afterwards, “that serious apprehension was entertained that the prisoners would not be allowed to live to have a second trial.” Indeed, the situation grew so tense that the presiding judge had the men rushed by train to Wythville in order to prevent a riot.⁷⁷ When authorities brought Steptoe and Watkins back to Roanoke for their retrial, mobs of white men gathered outside the jail and talked openly, according to one reporter, “that the prisoners may be lynched at any moment.” That night, a crowd of about two hundred black residents surrounded the prison to protect the men and refused to leave until authorities convinced them that the prisoners were safe.⁷⁸ Having given up on any hope of an impartial jury from the city, the presiding judge had jurors selected from Roanoke County, but when they also deadlocked by race, he dismissed the case.⁷⁹

White resentment over the outcome of the trial generated racial hostility as well as a growing mistrust of local authorities’ ability to protect citizens and punish lawbreakers. Although crime in the city was hardly confined to one area, most middle and upper-class whites joined the press in focusing their ire on the saloon district along Railroad Avenue; police had made numerous arrests for gambling, drunkenness, fighting, and discharging handguns in the area, and by the mid 1880s, muggings and robberies there were commonplace.⁸⁰ By 1888, most bars in Roanoke were located in the district or nearby, and by 1890, there were at least fifteen saloons

⁷⁷ *The Wythville Enterprise*, quoted in *The Roanoke Leader*, 21 Nov 1885.

⁷⁸ Quote and black protection from *The Lynchburg Advance*, reprinted in *The Roanoke Leader*, 13 Feb 1886.

⁷⁹ Information about the jury is from *The Roanoke Leader*, 2 Jan; 13 Feb 1886; information about the outcome of the trial is from Campbell, “Roanoke’s Tragedies,” 2; Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 146.

⁸⁰ Stories about crime in the district appear regularly throughout the early and mid-1880s; for early examples, see *The Roanoke Leader*, 21 Dec 1882; 6, 27 March; 21 Aug 1884.

lining the south side of Railroad Avenue between Henry and Holiday Streets.⁸¹ Few owners segregated their establishments, so the area attracted a diverse clientele of mainly poor and working-class blacks and whites. African Americans, nevertheless, tended to frequent black-owned bars and “snack shacks” along a portion of the district between Jefferson and Henry Streets that authorities dubbed “hell’s half acre.”⁸²

Newspaper accounts of mayhem and violence on Railroad Avenue appeared in a steady stream throughout the 1880s and reached a crescendo in 1890. That February, for example, police found a well-dressed visitor unconscious in an alley behind one of the saloons. Swindlers had drugged and robbed him, a tactic used frequently on out-of-towners who wandered into the area. “This part of the city,” one paper warned, “is becoming very obnoxious to all respectable citizens and a person carries his life in his hands who ventures there in the night time.”⁸³ A few days later, at a black owned establishment called Charlie Morton’s, an intoxicated “notorious negro” hurled an oil lamp at a female bartender setting her clothing on fire and sending her into a “frenzy” before she extinguished the flames in a mud-hole outside.⁸⁴ The next month, three men attacked a patron exiting a bar, broke his jaw and robbed him, and in early summer, a group of “colored boys” bashed a drunken Crozier Furnace employee in the head with rocks.⁸⁵ A few weeks later, a drunken white man in Wilmeth’s Barroom stabbed a black patron in the heart, and in early fall, a group of thugs waylaid and robbed a businessman from Pennsylvania.⁸⁶ In October, police

⁸¹ See listings in *Haddock & Baily’s Roanoke City Directory 1888* (Richmond: Haddock & Baily, 1888), 145-46; and *Haddock’s Roanoke Va. City Directory 1890* (Richmond: T. M. Haddock, 1890), 256-57.

⁸² See black owned bars and snack houses, along with “hell’s half acre” appellation, in *The Roanoke Times*, 23 Dec 1890.

⁸³ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 1 Feb 1890.

⁸⁴ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 4 Feb 1890.

⁸⁵ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 19 April; 11 July 1890.

⁸⁶ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 22 July; 25 Sept 1890.

reported that men renting rooms above the bars regularly urinated out windows into the street, and later that month, “negroes using brass knucks liberally,” battered a policeman who ventured into an African American saloon.⁸⁷ Most “idle and dissolute negroes” in the district, a paper later reported, carried pistols, razors, or other concealed weapons, and few were hesitant about using them on local police.⁸⁸

Although middle and upper-class whites and authorities were critical of Railroad Avenue, a serious campaign against crime in the district did not get under way until December 1890, after black men stood accused of brutally assaulting and robbing Thomas Massie, a sixty-year-old real estate agent. Massie, according to police, had been walking in the “West End” – far from Railroad Avenue – when attacked. Although it had been dark and Massie did not get a good look at his attackers, police immediately charged two black restaurant owners from “hell’s half acre” with the crime. John Redd and Rufus Williamson, the men in custody, had paid Massie their rent only hours before he was assaulted, which to the city’s incompetent police, was proof enough of their culpability in the matter. That such an attack could occur in a “respectable” part of town stunned white residents, and the following day the mayor and a citizens’ council placed a substantial reward for information about the crime. “It is evident,” *The Roanoke Times* reported, “that there is a lawless element gathering here from other points which has got to be stamped out with a heavy foot.”⁸⁹

Numerous witnesses supported alibis offered by Redd and Williamson at their preliminary hearing, but when Massie died of cerebral hemorrhage, prosecutors charged the pair with murder. Roanoke’s Chief of Police informed the press that duo were guilty, and as news of Massie’s death spread, crowds of white men began gathering downtown, where, according to a

⁸⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 2, 30 Oct 1890.

⁸⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 9 Dec 1890.

⁸⁹ Information about the Massie murder is from William C. Campbell, “Roanoke’s Tragedies,” 5; *The Roanoke Times*, 23, 24 Dec 1890 (quote from 24 Dec).

reporter on the scene, “there were many strong threats of lynching.”⁹⁰ *The Roanoke Times* reminded residents that Lizzie Wilson’s killers “had gone unchanged” and reported that as a result most citizens now favored “a summary dealing out of justice at the hands of the people” by “invoking lynch law.”⁹¹ Blacks in the community, the paper observed, “are much excited and worked up in the matter, and almost as a whole believe that Redd and Williamson are innocent.” African American ministers certainly did, the story noted, but most, like the pastor of High Street Baptist, who told his congregation ““the law is in the hands of those whose hands they are in, and we can do nothing but pray that they may get justice,”” expected the worst.⁹²

In the days that followed, the city bristled with racial animosity and authorities placed the “Roanoke Light Infantry” militia on alert for a lynching attempt or rescue effort.⁹³ From his cell, Rufus Williamson pleaded with whites to stay calm and not to assume he was guilty ““until I am given a chance to prove I am innocent.””⁹⁴ Police and prosecutors found no evidence linking either of the men to the murder, eventually dropped all charges, and finally tried to prove that a mulatto vagrant already in custody for an unrelated offense had murdered Massie. Edward Daniel, alias William Hazelwood, whose three sisters were Railroad Avenue prostitutes, had shoveled snow for Massie, was in the “West End” begging for money in the days leading up to the attack, and had supposedly bragged about the murder to a cellmate in the Roanoke Jail.⁹⁵ In

⁹⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 24, 27 Dec 1890 (quote from 27 Dec).

⁹¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 28 Dec 1890.

⁹² *The Roanoke Times*, 30 Dec 1890.

⁹³ *The Roanoke Times*, 30 Dec 1890.

⁹⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 1 Jan 1891.

⁹⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 14 Jan; 13, 14 Feb 1891.

the subsequent trial, nevertheless, authorities failed to come up with enough other evidence to convict him.⁹⁶

In the aftermath of the Massie murder, white residents and the press called for action. The city, William Campbell warned his congregation, was “in the midst of a carnival of crime” and authorities had done little to remedy the danger.⁹⁷ Black “resorts” on Railroad Avenue were “infested with desperadoes,” one paper observed, noting that local sentiment had finally been “roused to a determination that those dens of iniquity shall be destroyed and their denizens either brought to justice or driven back to the places whence they came.”⁹⁸ A few days later, police conducted early morning raids on African American saloons in “hell’s half acre” and arrested over a dozen black bar owners. *The Roanoke Times* praised the roundup as “the first chapter in the good work” and insisted that the mayor, chief of police, and “People of Roanoke” all agreed: “The negro dives on Railroad avenue must go!” Everyone was aware, the paper continued, that these saloons were “infested with the vilest of human beings” or with “breeders of disease,” and respectable residents wanted the places “annihilated.” A reporter covering the story concurred, explaining that once authorities kicked in the door of Charlie Morton’s “den” and went inside they found the place so “unspeakably filthy and pestilential” that many of them “could almost see the grim form of disease rising from the place, and with his skeleton-like fingers spreading the black mantle of disease over the city.”⁹⁹ The mayor fined all those arrested and ordered three suspicious women caught in the roundup to leave town.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Campbell, “Roanoke’s Tragedies,” 5.

⁹⁷ William C. Campbell, “1891 Sermon,” Heritage Room, First Presbyterian Church, Roanoke, reprinted in Brenda McDaniel, “Dr. Campbell’s Big Lick,” *The Roanoker* (Sept 1981): 78.

⁹⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Jan 1891.

⁹⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 24 Jan 1891.

¹⁰⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 25 Jan 1891.

Crime on Railroad Avenue, however, proceeded unabated. Indeed, only weeks later *The Times* complained about a “notorious gang of thugs” and “cut-throats” who had been assaulting and robbing whites in “hell’s half acre.” The group preyed on intoxicated white men and had just attacked an N&W brakeman who had been “carousing about” the avenue before being “seized by the hustlers and hurried back into an alley where he was knocked in the head” and relieved of \$40.¹⁰¹ Another white man, “so drunk that he hardly knew where he was,” remembered a “crowd of negroes gathering around him” before he passed-out behind Morton’s saloon and woke up missing \$20.¹⁰² A few weeks later, a Machine Works blacksmith was stumbling down Railroad Avenue when a gang of black toughs in front of Murray King’s “dive” attacked him, stabbed him, and robbed him.¹⁰³ Similar assaults and robberies continued in spite of other periodic roundups, and by 1893, Roanoke’s clergy were citing saloons in the district as one of the main reasons voters should endorse a local option initiative.

A growth in prostitution in Roanoke paralleled the rise in crime on Railroad Avenue, and by the end of the decade, there were dozens of brothels in operation in poor and working-class white neighborhoods in the Southeast and in black sections of Gainsborough. Arrests for “keeping a house of ill repute,” “trolling the streets at an unseemly hour,” or being “disreputable” all increased toward the end of the decade. Most of those taken into custody faced only a small fine, and police rarely arrested prostitutes conducting business near the city’s saloons or in black neighborhoods.¹⁰⁴ Those who moved into bordellos in white neighborhoods, however,

¹⁰¹ See examples in *The Roanoke Times*, 12, 14, 21, 25 February 1891 (quotes from 12, 25 Feb).

¹⁰² *The Roanoke Times*, 10 March 1891.

¹⁰³ *The Roanoke Times*, 21 April 1891.

¹⁰⁴ Information on brothel operators and prostitutes is from *Roanoke Daily Times*, 14 Nov; 5, 8, 10, 12 Dec 1889; 23 Jan; 2 Feb; 6 June 1890; *The Roanoke Times*, 25 Sept; 1 Oct; 12, 28 Nov; 23 Dec 1890; 29 Jan 1891.

encountered residents nearby who demanded their removal or attempted to drive the women away on their own.

The campaign against the brothels began in earnest in December 1889, after residents in the Southeast petitioned Mayor William Carr to shut down seven “houses of prostitution” operating on Holiday Street. Carr, a dour Presbyterian and member of William Campbell’s congregation, served notice to landlords renting the properties that they had a week to eject the occupants or face charges of “keeping a house of ill repute.” Real estate agent J. R. Hockaday, owner of several of the houses in question, resented the implication and confronted Carr on Salem Avenue before slapping him in the face. The mayor fought back, bashing his cane over Hockaday’s head, and the two men rolled onto the sidewalk before bystanders broke up the fight. Other landlords quickly complied with Carr’s order and evicted the accused women.¹⁰⁵

In early 1890, a mob of Southeast citizens, upset about “immorality” and “determined to make their indignation felt,” smashed windows in a section of Brick Row being used by prostitutes.¹⁰⁶ In the months that followed, according to the chief of police, mothers in the neighborhood insisted that he close more brothels and “lodged complaint after complaint that

Most brothels in town were race specific, with white or black females running houses inhabited exclusively by white or black prostitutes, but in at least a few cases, white “landladies” managed all black or “octoroon” “bagnios” in Gainsborough. The bordellos recruited “inmates,” according to one reporter, by preying on females traveling aboard trains alone or by offering single women new to the city a free place to stay. See story of Estelle King’s “Narrow Escape from Ruin” in *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Nov 1890.

Although Roanoke papers published the names of women arrested for prostitution, they seldom bothered to include details about them unless they could do so as a warning. When women working in bordellos killed themselves, for instance, local papers usually put a sensationalistic account of the event on their front page. After an “inmate of a disreputable house” named Nellie Hendricks shot herself in the head, for example, *The Roanoke Times* reported that she was from Campbell County, Virginia, and had been married and living in Jacksonville, Florida, before deserting her husband and moving to the Alum Springs in Bedford County, Virginia, where “she began to sink lower in the scale of humanity” and ended up in a Roanoke brothel. See *The Roanoke Times*, 7 Feb 1893.

¹⁰⁵ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 10, 11, 12 Dec 1889.

¹⁰⁶ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 14 Jan 1890.

their sons were being ruined in them.”¹⁰⁷ The women kept up their campaign; when authorities failed to meet their demands, they continued to act on their own. In July 1892, for instance, a rock and brick-throwing mob staged a “midnight attack” on a bordello being run by Nora Heath. “Respectable families,” the attackers reported in a letter to the paper, had been subjected almost daily to “disgraceful scenes” in their neighborhood; even mothers and children returning from Sunday school had seen “lewd women and their lovers” frolicking in Nora Heath’s front yard. Responsible citizens had finally chosen to act, they explained, “for the protection of God, home, respectable women and helpless children.”¹⁰⁸ The day after the attack, over a hundred Southeast residents gathered in a mass meeting and signed a petition asking newly elected Mayor Henry S. Trout to evict Heath and her “prostitute companions” along with the “inmates” of several other houses on Holiday Street, Edgewood Street, and Fifth Avenue. All the residences mentioned, the petitioners claimed, were “houses of ill-fame and as such are contaminating and prostituting not only our present generation, but the generation to come.”¹⁰⁹

Trout immediately ordered inhabitants of the homes to move and instigated an investigation of their landlords. The mayor, *The Roanoke Times* surmised, “has commenced a war against the disorderly houses situated in the southeastern portion of the city.”¹¹⁰ The evictions continued and Trout eventually even began jailing those who refused to relocate.¹¹¹ Although local clergy railed against the city’s “social evil,” the prostitution “problem,” as officials interpreted it, existed only because bordellos were operating in a white neighborhood. To remedy this, they simply evicted brothel operators in the Southeast and left similar houses near

¹⁰⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 13 Nov 1890.

¹⁰⁸ See letter from “Many Citizens” in *The Roanoke Times*, 6 July 1892.

¹⁰⁹ See story in *The Roanoke Times*, 6 July 1892.

¹¹⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 July 1892.

¹¹¹ See, for example, *The Roanoke Times*, 13 Sept; 3 Nov 1892.

Gainsborough unmolested. Bordello managers and prostitutes got the message, and by 1893, city authorities had confined most local brothels to black sections of town. In the process, they created an unofficial “red light district” in the Northwest.¹¹² During the remainder of the decade, arrests for “keeping houses of ill repute” declined significantly, and it was not until the early 1900s, after ministers began a crusade against the Northwest’s unofficial brothel district, that politicians again had to confront the issue.¹¹³

Although the municipal government found ways to restore at least a semblance of law and order and to fund improvement projects, its chronic lack of income meant that it could support only the barest of public services. As a result, residents instigated civic reforms to fill in the gaps. The police force was woefully undermanned, so residents concerned with the rise of a rowdy saloon district and continuing influx of strangers organized militias to augment it. In the early 1880s, local politician Henry Trout and dozens of other prominent businessmen established the “Kimball Rifles” – named to honor of the man “who has done so much to promote the prosperity of Roanoke” – and theirs was but the first of numerous units organized throughout the decade.¹¹⁴ Indeed, when civil unrest loomed, Roanoke’s municipal government had several militias available to respond.

¹¹² The process began in early 1892, when the chief of police ordered five bordello operators in “Pot Liquor Flats,” an especially impoverished area of the Southeast, to move and suggested that they relocate to “Bunker Hill” in Gainsborough. See *The Roanoke Times*, 24 May 1892. “Pot Liquor Flats” mentioned in the *Times* story was, according to Raymond Barnes, the section of the southeast east of Campbell Avenue, north of Tazewell Avenue, and mainly on Randolph and Holiday Streets. “Pot Liquor” according to Barnes, was the juice left in a pot after boiling meat or vegetables and was a pejorative intended to indicate that those who survived on such juice were especially poor. See his *History of Roanoke*, 176-77.

¹¹³ Decline based on disappearance of newspaper stories from roughly 1893 to the early 1900s.

¹¹⁴ *Roanoke Saturday News*, 10 June 1882; quote from *Roanoke Commercial Advertiser*, June 1882, both in Shenandoah Valley Railroad Scrapbook no. 5, Norfolk & Western Railway Archives, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg.

Residents also moved to provide fire protection for their largely wooden city. Without a fire brigade, S. S. Brooke pointed out, all inhabitants risked a “destroyed city, ruined businesses and homeless population.” Ambivalence over the danger, he argued, was not “in keeping with the business-like spirit evinced in every other direction by the people of Roanoke.”¹¹⁵ The Machine Works and Hotel Roanoke already had volunteer hose companies, and not long after Brooke’s harangue, other men organized the “Vigilant Fire Company” to protect downtown. The municipal government purchased a used, horse-drawn “pumper” for the Vigilants and rented fire hydrants owned by the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company. The fire brigade used a storehouse for its station until the spring of 1886, when it moved into quarters in the new Market House. The relocation, however, proved problematic, as congestion around the building and muddy streets nearby regularly impeded its wagons. Freeholders eventually approved bonds for a new firehouse, and in 1888, the Vigilants moved into a two-story brick building on Jefferson Street and Kirk Avenue. In west Roanoke, residents organized the “Junior Fire Company,” and in the east, shop and railroad workers put together the “Union Fire Company.”¹¹⁶ The city provided some financial assistance for those units as well, but the brigades operated mainly on membership dues and on money raised at “Fire Laddy Fairs” organized by local women.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ *The Roanoke Leader*, 27 Dec 1883.

¹¹⁶ All the information about the volunteer fire brigades comes from, William L. Schilling, “Roanoke City Fire Department History, 1882-1983,” 1-3, TMs (1983), Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library; Warren L. Moorman, “Roanoke’s First Fire Station,” *Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society* 11, no 2 (1982): 32-37; and *The Roanoke Times*, 20 Feb 1893.

¹¹⁷ In the early 1890s, for example, a “board of lady managers” supervised a two-week fair at the firehouse of “Friendship Fire Company” in the northeast. The women decorated the station, sold food and drinks, and chaperoned dancing. The Roanoke Machine Works Orchestra provided the music, nearly two-hundred women turned up every night to dance with firemen decked out in red dress uniforms, and when it was over, the women had raised over a thousand dollars for the Company. Details about the fair are available in *The Roanoke Times*, 19, 24 April; 4 May 1892.

Creating volunteer fire brigades to protect the city from conflagration, while an important municipal reform, was but one of the ways residents responded to the city's needs. They also funded the construction of a city hospital after physicians on Roanoke's Board of Health deemed such a facility a necessary adjunct of modernization. The need was especially acute in Roanoke, they argued, because local industries churned out waves of horrifically injured workers who had no decent place to receive professional care or to recuperate. As a result, one doctor recalled, those injured "were frequently operated on in oil houses or other premises of the railroad company, or on a pile of crossties." The need for a hospital, he observed, was "keenly felt" because most of those injured in industrial accidents were "young for the most part, and away from actual homes, living largely in boarding homes."¹¹⁸ They had no family to care for them or to help with expenses, and as a result, they often had to rely on the kindness of strangers or recuperate in a bed at the poorhouse.

Industrial accidents began as soon as Roanoke's industries started operations, and by 1890, they had reached appalling levels. Early that year, for example, a railcar crushed the foot of a fourteen-year old working at the Machine Works, another employee caught his hand in a milling machine and had it "literally chopped to pieces, no part of it being left except the thumb," an SVRR worker was hit by a train in the rail yard and "cut entirely in two," while another railroad worker was crushed to death unloading lumber. In the spring, an exploding steam hammer killed a shop worker, another employee was smashed between two railcars and lost an arm, and the assistant yardmaster misjudged his jump onto a passing locomotive and lost a leg. In the summer, a yard worker died after being "horribly mangled" under a passing train, an N&W brakeman died after having his "head broken" by a railcar, a Crozier Furnace worker "met with a horrible death" after being struck by a train and "entangled in the machinery," while another N&W employee fell under a passing locomotive and had his legs "crushed to jelly" and intestines

¹¹⁸ E. P. Tompkins, "Medical Annals of Roanoke," 8-11, TMs (1922), Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library (first quote from pages 8-9; second quote from page 11).

“torn out.” In the fall, an N&W brakeman was “killed instantly” after being caught between two railcars, an SVRR hostler was hit by a locomotive and killed, and an N&W switchman lost a leg after getting it caught between two railcars.¹¹⁹

Roanoke’s pedestrians fared only slightly better. There were few bridges over the town’s seven rows of railroad tracks and neither railway used crossing guards to warn residents about approaching locomotives. Worse, since the Union Depot was between the rails of both lines, inhabitants and visitors alike had to cross numerous sets of tracks to reach the station. Horrific stories about trains running over pedestrians appeared regularly. In February 1890, for example, *The Daily Times* reported that Sarah Hogan was crossing the tracks near the depot when an SVRR locomotive ran into her: “She was struck by the tender and hung on tenaciously to an iron bar, but the wheel caught her foot and compelled her to let go her hold, crushing her left leg from the knee down.” She “cried piteously for help” from under the locomotive, the paper explained, “but her position was such that the engine had to move again, during which her cries were terrible to hear.” Bystanders carried Hogan home, where she died shortly after doctors declared her injuries untreatable.¹²⁰ In the spring, residents found a mangled furnace worker on the rails: “The head, both arms and both legs severed from the body and the sight was a horrible one.”¹²¹ In June, Joseph Kelly, an SVRR clerk, tripped on the tracks in front of a locomotive and lost both legs, and in October, a train hit a black resident at the Commerce Street crossing. Police found him, a reporter explained, “with his head severed from the body and mashed almost to a jelly.”¹²²

¹¹⁹ See *Roanoke Daily Times*, 14, 18 Jan; 2 15 March; 10 April; 6, 12 May; 29 June; 1, 22, 29 Aug 1890; *The Roanoke Times*, 7, 31 Oct; 18 Nov 1890 (first quote from 18 Jan; second quote from 2 March; third quote from 29 June; fourth quote from 22 Aug; fifth quote from 1 Aug; sixth quote from 29 Aug; last quote from 7 Oct).

¹²⁰ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 27 Feb 1890.

¹²¹ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 16 April 1890.

¹²² *Roanoke Daily Times*, 15 June 1890; *The Roanoke Times*, 4, 5 Oct 1890. Ironically, that fall the drama “After Dark” announced its arrival in town with ads featuring a train bearing down on a pedestrian who had fallen on the tracks. “The Great Railroad Scene” was, the ad

The horrendous injuries to workers and pedestrians alike eventually led female church groups to get involved in local health care issues. In the late 1880s, the various members of the multi-denominational “Circles of Kings Daughters” opened a six-bed “Home for the Sick” as a place for the injured to convalesce. Their Home did not have operating facilities and, according to physicians, was “totally inadequate as to capacity.”¹²³ As a result, not long after it began operations, Tipton T. Fishburn, the president of Roanoke’s National Exchange Bank, organized the Roanoke Hospital Association to begin a fundraising campaign for municipal medical facilities. In early 1890, the Association asked freeholders for bond money to augment their fundraising. Property holders, however, rejected the plea.¹²⁴ The vote disappointed local editors, and many of them bemoaned the slow pace of the campaign. *The Roanoke Daily Herald*, like the other papers, called on women to get more involved: “If our gentle ladies could only witness the scenes of suffering which come so frequently under the notice of surgeons and reporters; could see the maimed wrecks of humanity moaning and writhing in mortal agony; . . . the hospital fund would be doubly made up within twenty four hours.”¹²⁵ The appeal worked, and afterwards several female benevolent societies added the hospital campaign to their other fundraising drives.

promised, all part of “The Funniest Act in Existence.” See ad announcing upcoming play in *Roanoke Daily Times*, 28 Aug 1890.

¹²³ Tompkins, “Medical Annals of Roanoke,” 11-12 (quote is from page 12); Dr. Warren Moorman, “Roanoke Valley Medicine,” *Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society* 9, no. 1 (1973-74): 32. The King’s Daughters kept their Home for the Sick open by holding charity entertainments. In early 1893, for example, they presented a “series of living charades” and raised four hundred dollars, and in May that year, they staged an elaborate “Columbian Bazaar” that netted another three hundred and fifty dollars. See *The Roanoke Times*, 4, 7 Feb; 14, 24 May 1893.

¹²⁴ Bond vote published in *The Roanoke Times*, 19 Feb 1890.

¹²⁵ *Roanoke Daily Herald*, 28 June 1890.

By summer, Fishburn and the other business leaders in the Hospital Association had raised half of the \$25,000 needed to complete the structure.¹²⁶

In the fall of 1890, the organization redoubled its appeal for donations so that “strangers within our gates stricken by sickness, the toiling artisan, or the humble laborer, the victims of accident, or whomsoever overtaken by those of ills of life” would have a facility in which they could be professionally cared for.¹²⁷ Roanoke’s papers continued to strongly encourage contributions and began publishing lists of those who gave to the cause. It took two more years, however, to raise the additional funds. By then, the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company and Roanoke Machine Works had donated a lot for the facility near Crystal Springs. Shortly after contractors had completed the exterior of the building, however, another nationwide recession crippled the ability of citizens to fulfill their subscription commitments and construction ground to a halt. Freeholders subsequently voted down a \$10,000 bond to finish the structure, and for the following six years, the building remained uncompleted.¹²⁸

In the meantime, council finally moved to protect pedestrians by narrowly passing an ordinance requiring the N&W to install crossing guards and limit the speed of its trains passing through Roanoke. Mayor Trout, citing potential damage to the railroad’s business, vetoed the bill, and in the heated debate that followed, councilmen backing him claimed the ordinance would drive the N&W out of town. Democrats statewide and in Roanoke received financial backing from the railroad, and perhaps not surprisingly, they generally opposed any form of regulations on the industry. James Pattie, a Republican from the Third Ward, blasted Democrats’ attempt to

¹²⁶ For Roanoke Hospital Association and donations, see *Roanoke Daily Times*, 21 Aug 1890.

¹²⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 5 Oct 1890.

¹²⁸ Tompkins, “Medical Annals of Roanoke,” 12-13; Moorman, “Roanoke Valley Medicine,” 32-33; *The Roanoke Times*, 31 May; 30 June 1893.

deny residents the protection they required, but he and the four other GOP councilmen lacked the votes to keep the issue from being buried in a Democratic-controlled railroad committee.¹²⁹

Roanoke looked more like a city than an evanescent “boomtown” by the early 1890s. The municipal government had finally solved chronic sewer, street, and drainage problems, and the board of health had curbed some of the sanitary troubles that had plagued the town in its early years. A real city hall had replaced Ferdinand Rorer’s storehouse, a market building had gone up downtown, and residents had instigated the town’s first civic reforms to fill voids in municipal services. They had established militias, organized fire brigades, and done what they could to fund a hospital. Over thirteen-thousand newcomers arrived during the 1880s, and by the end of the decade, Roanoke was Virginia’s fifth largest city. The common adjuncts of urbanization arrived as well, with assault, robbery, murder, and vice becoming commonplace by the middle of the decade. By then, the concept of Roanoke being divided into “old town” and “new town” had been replaced by resentment between whites and blacks or between the forces of “morality” and those deemed “immoral.”

Much of Roanoke’s white community found common ground in modernizing their home, adding civic institutions, quashing “immorality,” and demanding that blacks be punished for real or imagined crimes. These processes opened the door to reconciliation between natives and newcomers but contributed to a growing resentment between the city’s blacks and whites. Although politics generated some of the racial animosity, in the 1880s, northern-born Republicans had formed a coalition with native blacks to elect GOP candidates to local office. Occasionally these groups disagreed, but more often than not, they worked together to elect Republicans. In the rest of urban Virginia, African Americans stood largely alone as representatives of the GOP and experienced far less success. Funding municipal modernization,

¹²⁹ See *The Roanoke Times*, 7, 9 June 1893; for railroad support for Democrats and opposition to regulation, see Moger, *Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd*, 95-121.

however, destroyed much of the city's Republican coalition since almost all whites, regardless of political affiliation, agreed on the necessity of neighborhood firehouses, sewers, and street improvements. The town's black residents, by contrast, saw no need to fund modernization unless they received some of the benefits and opposed most of the projects entirely.

Racial tensions also surfaced as the result of growing beliefs that African Americans were largely responsible for a fantastic increase in crime. Two sensational murders divided the community by race, nearly led to civil unrest, and fomented white demands for a crackdown on crime in the black section of Railroad Avenue. The events created a bristling animosity between whites and blacks that showed no signs of dissipating by the early 1890s. Moreover, because local authorities failed to provide the "justice" expected, white residents began to lose faith in the judicial process. In the years that followed, the increasing racial antipathy would combine with the lack of confidence to contribute to white residents extracting "justice" on their own.

Chapter Three

Business and Boosterism, 1882-1892

No great enterprise, at its inception, or in its early life ever escaped the sneers, the slanderous utterances, or the woeful anticipations of petty men. In the building up of our City, we have been met, at times, with base calumny and direful prophecy. Like the proud athlete, conscious of his power, taunted by some boastful weakling, Roanoke, smiling at her defamers, walks steadily forward to take her place among the industrial centers of the earth.

Roanoke Booster Speech (circa 1890)¹

In the 1880s, during some residents' quest to improve and "moralize" their home, the City of Roanoke became a symbol of the sort of development that was possible in what boosters were calling the New South. Roanoke's "rags to riches" story, replete with impoverished origins, local initiative, and northern dollars, became a saga of progress that most spokesmen for the region referred to repeatedly. Northern papers likewise heralded the "Magic City" as an example of what was feasible when Yankee entrepreneurs used their acumen to liberate valuable minerals and natural resources that locals had ignored for centuries. Under northern tutelage, they explained, natives had not only awakened to the possibilities offered by outsiders, they had even begun to participate in the harvest themselves, either by creating their own industries, speculating in land, or advertising the region to mesmerized financiers. In the Virginia Highlands and in Roanoke, a *New York Times* correspondent observed in 1887, "there is manifested now a spirit which calls for little more than constant pursuit to add materially to the strength, the influence, and the distinction of what is named 'the new South.'"²

The Norfolk & Western Railroad was largely responsible for the transformation, having opened the entire region up for industrialization by providing cheap access to iron and coal. The

¹ Roanoke Booster Speech, TMs circa 1890, author unidentified, Jordan-Stabler Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

² *The New-York Times*, 21 Jan 1887.

railroad lured thousands of investors into the mountains of the Old Dominion, and throughout the 1880s, mines, furnaces and rolling mills sprang up along its tracks. Northerners and Europeans invested millions of dollars in these enterprises and speculated heavily in Highland and Roanoke property. These outside groups, however, did not develop the region alone; natives campaigned heavily for investments, courted financiers, and eventually began their own manufacturing enterprises. The role of insiders, especially in Roanoke, was every bit as crucial to industrialization as Yankee dollars.

Roanoke, as the only large city in Southwest Virginia, served as the headquarters for the region's extractive industries and as the epicenter of the coal, iron, and land "booms" that swept the area in the 1880s and early 1890s. Its residents successfully courted new manufacturers and convinced thousands of speculators to invest in local land schemes. Although the economic "boom" ushered in a new wave of manufacturing enterprises and for a time bolstered natives' bank accounts, the vast majority of the real estate speculations resulted in little actual development. Moreover, the "boom" did not solve Roanoke's chronic infrastructure problems. New industries not only received free land, but also paid no taxes, leaving the municipality with few of the funds necessary to address local needs. Mud streets and primitive open sewers greeted visitors until the early 1890s, as did rumors that the town was particularly unhealthy and rife with disease. Optimists, undaunted, still billed their home as the "Magic City," a metropolis that had risen up in cow pastures to take its place in the vanguard of the New South.

Before the economic boom hit Roanoke, the town and its industries had to deal with the impact of the 1883 national recession. Since opening in 1882, employees at the city's massive machine works had turned out eight coal hoppers or boxcars per day, completed nine new locomotives, and repaired hundreds of old engines and railcars. Orders declined in the fall of 1884, however, and the company reduced wages by 10 percent, cut hours from ten to nine per day, and ended Saturday work. The firm managed to continue full employment until winter, when

the ongoing recession forced it to lay off hundreds of workers.³ Other Clark Company subsidiaries had problems as well. In early 1885, the Shenandoah Valley Railroad defaulted on its loan interest, taxes, payrolls, and bills. A local judge put the line in a receivership, but in December, the mortgage company holding its notes filed suit for liquidation of the road's assets. The Norfolk & Western Railroad, the majority owner of the Shenandoah Valley Railroad, fought a legal battle for the next four years to regain control, and in 1890, it purchased the company for \$4,500,000.⁴

Roanokers, one resident commented, were not accustomed to the "marvelous prosperity" they had witnessed before the recession, and as a result, most of them "had thought doubtless that the boom had come to stay."⁵ The depression hit the city's initial land speculators especially hard. "The bottom dropped out of everything in Roanoke," Reverend William Campbell recalled, "and there were neither rents nor sale of property."⁶ Ferdinand Rorer, like most developers, lost everything. He closed his offices and left town, as did Roanoke's first mayor, Marshall Waid, who left in 1885, broke, disgusted, and in search of opportunity elsewhere.⁷ Many of the laid-off shop workers packed up their families and left town amid widespread rumors that the Machine

³ Information on production is from *The Roanoke Leader*, 3 July; 7 Aug 1884; details of wage cut available in *ibid.*, 4 Sept 1884; information about the hour cuts is in Altoona, PA *Tribune*, quoted in *The Roanoke Leader*, 30 Oct 1884; for layoffs, see Mayor John Dunstan's address to city council in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Feb 1885.

⁴ *The Fidelity Insurance, Trust and Safe Deposit Company, VS. The Shenandoah Valley Railroad Company* (Np: Privately printed, 1886), 1-18; E. F. Pat Striplin, *The Norfolk & Western: A History* (Forest, VA: Norfolk & Western Historical Society, 1997), 51. William Hicks Travers was the SVRR's counsel for the court case.

⁵ See D. C. Moomaw letter to editor of *The Roanoke Leader*, 29 Nov 1884.

⁶ William C. Campbell, "A Trip to Missouri," 1, TMs, William Creighton Campbell Papers, History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia.

⁷ The information on Rorer and Waid is from Raymond P. Barnes, *A History of Roanoke* (Radford, VA: Commonwealth Press, 1968), 148-49.

Works would eventually close for good.⁸ In late 1885, however, the plant signed a contract with the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad for five-hundred freight cars, albeit at a price far below what the Machine Works normally charged. Iron for the carriages and wheels came from the Crozer furnaces next-door; wood for the flooring came from thousands of White Oak trees harvested on the surrounding mountains. Not long afterwards, the Norfolk & Western Railroad (N&W) put in an order for twelve heavy locomotives, and in the weeks that followed, most shop employees returned to work.⁹

Newspapers in the region suggested the rehabilitation of the Machine Works was a clear sign that “the Magic City of the Southwest . . . has again recovered its usual business vim and enterprise.”¹⁰ By the time Shenandoah Valley Railroad lawyer William Travers visited in the fall of 1886, business in Roanoke had recovered from the recession. Its industries paid over \$100,000 a month to employees, and most of the money, Travers explained, “is of course distributed in Roanoke.” As a result, he reported, the town’s stores were “bright and their owners cheery.”¹¹ The Machine Works continued its recovery, and by the end of the decade, its workers had constructed forty-seven locomotives along with hundreds of freight cars and coal hoppers.¹² Monthly pay at the Works surpassed \$65,000 in 1890, and a couple years later, E. W. Clark &

⁸ See Mayor John Dunstan’s address to city council in *The Roanoke Leader*, 7 Feb 1885; Thomas Bruce, *Southwest Virginia and Shenandoah Valley* (Richmond: J. L. Hill, 1891), 138.

⁹ Information on both contracts is from *The Roanoke Leader*, 2 Jan 1886; Bruce, *Southwest Virginia*, 138; and Victor S. Clark, *History of Manufacturers in the United States, 1860-1914* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1928), 339-40.

¹⁰ *The Virginian*, 6 Dec 1885, in Shenandoah Valley Railroad Scrapbook no. 4, Norfolk & Western Railway Archives, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg.

¹¹ William Hicks Travers, Diary Number Eight, 11 Oct 1886, William Hicks Travers Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

¹² For locomotive and car construction in the 1880s, see *Roanoke Daily Times*, 19 Aug 1890.

Company more than doubled the size of the plant and its workforce.¹³ The Clark firm also put an addition on its Shenandoah Avenue railroad office that more than doubled its size and it added a thirty-six room wing to the Hotel Roanoke. “We intend,” N&W President Frederick Kimball explained, “to make the hotel one of the finest in every way in the South.”¹⁴

Although its sister company the Shenandoah Valley Railroad went bust, the Norfolk & Western emerged from the recession largely unscathed. It increased the tonnage it transported out of the Pocahontas coal seam every year in the 1880s, and by the early 1890s, the railroad was moving close to three million tons of coal over the line. During the same period, the N&W purchased more than 300 locomotives, more than 5,000 freight cars, and more than 8,000 coal hoppers. It also horizontally integrated, absorbing other railroads in Southwest Virginia and in Ohio and more than tripling its miles of track. In the early 1890s, the line sold over two million passenger tickets, and its gross earnings, which had continued upward throughout the 1880s, passed \$10,000,000 for the first time.¹⁵

Much of the railroad’s growth resulted from its efforts to generate additional industries along its tracks. To do this, it published a variety of booster guides, instigated town development, and brought in scores of outside investors to tour the region. In 1889, the railroad published its *Reference Book . . . Outlining the Condition of Progress in Mining, Manufacturers and Agriculture and the Undeveloped Resources of those Portions of the State of Virginia Traversed by its Line*.¹⁶ The guide circulated widely in the North and abroad and contributed to the growth

¹³ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 18 May 1890; *The Roanoke Times*, 9 Dec 1892.

¹⁴ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 11 Jan 1890.

¹⁵ Information about the N&W is from E. B. Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western Railway Company* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1912), 146-47, 150-51, 163-64; Striplin, *The Norfolk & Western*, 62.

¹⁶ Norfolk & Western Railroad Company, *Reference Book of the Norfolk & Western Railroad Co. Outlining the Condition of Progress in Mining, Manufacturers and Agriculture and the Undeveloped Resources of those Portions of the State of Virginia Traversed by its Line* (New York: Giles, [1889]).

of iron furnaces in the Highlands. Indeed, one consequence of the rapid development of iron mills along the tracks of the N&W was an increase in production that moved Virginia from seventeenth in the nation in overall iron output in 1880 to sixth in 1890.¹⁷ The N&W also built twenty-five hotels at its depots in Southwest Virginia as lodging facilities for a wide array of speculators and tourists, at least some of whom invested in the region's coal mines and iron plants.¹⁸ Throughout the decade, the line invited scores of northern and European capitalists to tour the Virginia Highlands and Roanoke. High-ranking E. W. Clark & Company executives escorted the more eminent visitors, but no matter what their stature, native entrepreneurs solicited their assistance. In one typical tour, for example, Clarence Clark and Frederick Kimball escorted several dozen wealthy businessmen from New York, Philadelphia, and London on a stroll around town. The group, which had over \$200,000,000 of capital at its disposal, arrived on a chartered N&W train, lodged at the Hotel Roanoke, and met with dozens of local business leaders before departing for the coal fields.¹⁹

These Yankee financiers and others, enticed by the prospects of inexpensive and unlimited access to the South's lumber, coal, and ore, were the men primarily responsible for funding temporary extractive industries near the region's natural resources. They also invested in manufacturing and management facilities on their periphery, in places like Roanoke and Birmingham. The "industrial invasion" of the 1880s and 1890s, while responsible for moderate urban growth, left much of the South that had been "touched by capital" with a colonial economy in which it exchanged raw materials generated in low paying extractive industries for expensive finished goods manufactured in northern cities. While employment opportunities in mines, forests, and cotton mills did rise, the economic status of the average southerner changed very

¹⁷ Clark, *History of Manufacturers*, 212.

¹⁸ See interview with Charles G. Eddy in *The New-York Times*, 20 Sept 1890.

¹⁹ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 7 May 1890. For additional examples, see *The Roanoke Leader*, 31 May 1883; *Roanoke Daily Times*, 23 Nov; 4 Dec 1889.

little from 1880 to 1900.²⁰ The middle-class boosters and town elite responsible for the “industrial invasion,” by contrast, profited from industrialization and urbanization. Whether they were “new men” disconnected from the nexus of antebellum power or remnants of the old plantation gentry, they were the men who served as native agents and managers for northern corporations. Most also owned the general stores, distribution warehouses, construction firms, and commercial or retail establishments that benefited most directly from the concomitants of modernization: transportation improvements, decline in self-sufficiency, growth of corporate power, emergence of a wage-earning population, and rise in consumerism.²¹

Those living in villages and towns along the N&W’s tracks understood that Southwest Virginia’s mineral wealth and natural resources combined with access to the railroad were attractive inducements for industries. Throughout the 1880s, local boosters and town councils published hundreds of surveys and information pamphlets that catalogued the advantages of the Highlands for a northern and European audience. Most of them linked Appalachian Virginia to modernization taking place elsewhere in the South and predicted that “miracle cities” like Roanoke would soon dot the landscape. They mimicked New South editors and spokesmen in arguing that industrialization and exploitation of the South’s abundant natural resources were the keys to moving that impoverished region to a position of economic dominance within the United States. Outside ingenuity and investment meshed with southern autonomy, according to boosters, was the quickest means of accomplishing this feat. Like New South promoters elsewhere, they

²⁰ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 111-41; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of a New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 103-131; Gaston, *New South Creed*, 189-204.

²¹ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 152-60; Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1990), xi-xiii, 87-95; Douglas Flamming, *Creating the Modern South: Millhands and Managers in Dalton, Georgia, 1884-1984* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 36-51; David Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 13-26.

couched their appeal in the rhetoric of sectional reconciliation, racial harmony, economic and social order based on industry and science, and social Darwinism. Mountain boosters, however, also cast their plea in a vocabulary of benevolence that tied industrialization to the social uplift of a “strange land and peculiar people.” Their efforts, and the fantastic increase in demand for iron and coal, led to a massive economic boom in the region that for a time at least seemed to offer the genuine promise of a New South.²²

Although modernization offered many Southwest Virginia residents a way to transcend limited opportunities, some scholars insist that the process reduced once independent mountaineers to wage slaves in mines or mills, adrift in a colonial economy that left the region impoverished throughout the twentieth century.²³ Such a colonial model, however, breaks down entirely in cities like Roanoke, where natives sought outside capital, reaped substantial financial rewards and managed local industries, and where industrialization fomented civic progress, albeit at a slower rate than northern cities. Profits from the industrialization of Appalachia flowed not only to the Northeast, but also into towns like Roanoke on the periphery of the region’s coalfields or timberlands. Many historians, nevertheless, downplay the significance of industrial-related

²² For Southwest Virginia boosterism, see guides cited in Lester J. Cappon, *Bibliography of Virginia History Since 1865* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1930), 193- 257; for description of New South rhetoric, see Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 47-114; for results of industrial boom in Appalachia, see Ronald Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 41-59; Crandall Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 3-21; Henry D. Shapiro, *Appalachia on our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness, 1870-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 157-85; for results of boom in Virginia, see Allen W. Moger, *Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), 124-37.

²³ For the colonialist and exploitive model, see Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*; John Gaventa, *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), 258-60; Helen M. Lewis and Edward Kniper, “The Colonialism Model: The Appalachian Case,” in Helen Lewis, Linda Johnson, and Donald Atkins, eds., *Colonialism in Modern America: The Appalachian Case* (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1978), 22-23. For a counter argument, see Shifflett, *Coal Towns*, 3-12, chapter 1.

urbanization, arguing that places like Birmingham and Roanoke were simply the base of operations for hegemonic northern industrialists. As a result, they tend to deny the role natives played in developing Appalachia's cities and towns, favoring instead a model that portrays the power dynamic between insiders and outsiders as one-sided and primarily in the hands of non-natives. Ronald Eller, for example, argues, "Almost overnight, the quiet valley town of Big Lick became the booming industrial town of Roanoke, as the N&W planners used that community as the headquarters for their assault on the nearby mountains." Eller denies natives' agency in the process, suggesting instead that Big Lick and Roanoke residents acquiesced to powerful northern industries and received few benefits for surrendering their village to industrial development.²⁴

Contrary to the colonial economy model, Roanoke's middle-class businessmen were the main force behind luring the N&W and SVRR to Big Lick as well as the main group responsible for the numerous additional Yankee investments that followed later in the decade. Although the N&W clearly made such development possible, natives were largely responsible for bringing in the new industries. Northern capital had many friends in the city, the *Roanoke Daily Times* explained, noting that "while we honor the memories of those who fought and died for the Confederacy, . . . we have our faces toward the future and desire to reap all the advantages of a fully restored union."²⁵ The town's middle classes, one resident observed, had a "peculiar patriotic spirit" that made them natural boosters: "To anyone dwelling here the material advancement of the best interest of the place is the first consideration." As a result, if an industry showed interest in Roanoke, citizens asked no questions other than how they could make a "liberal subscription" and have "every impetus given to forward the undertaking."²⁶ Roanoke's

²⁴ Eller, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, 45-85 (quote is from page 70); For Roanoke being part of "Appalachia," see Ann DeWitt Watts, "Cities and Their Place in Southern Appalachia," *Appalachian Journal* 8, no. 2 (Winter 1981), 106, 108.

²⁵ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 10 Jan 1890.

²⁶ Bruce, *Southwest Virginia*, 141.

“open for business” ethos resulted in a tax code that offered fifteen-year tax exemptions to new manufacturing facilities, free land for new industries, and hefty municipal stock subscriptions to worthy enterprises.

The northern press, which had branded Roanoke a ramshackle “boomtown” in the early 1880s, changed course once widespread industrialization began, and by the middle of the decade, Yankee reporters touted the city as an example of the area’s unlimited potential. The *Manufacturers’ Record* of Baltimore became one of the region’s biggest boosters, with *The New York Times* not far behind.²⁷ It was mainly locals, the *Record* pointed out, who had ushered in the intensive industrial and demographic growth and made Roanoke “The Magic City,” a place “teeming with wealth, culture, industry, energy, and vim.” Its destiny, the journal promised, was “to be that of one of the largest manufacturing and industrial centers of the South.”²⁸ In 1887, a *Times* correspondent on a tour of the region stopped in Roanoke and declared it “perhaps the most remarkable exemplification of the possibilities in this Virginia district.” Only five years earlier, he explained, the city was an “insignificant way-station” with a population that “had never a hint of what the bustle of trade or genuine industry was like. A whole dollar was a curiosity; a man who worked every day a phenomenon.” Now, the place resembled a New England manufacturing town and its population was “busy, ambitious, pushing.”²⁹ Dozens of other correspondents followed, including reporters working for *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, the Boston *Globe*, Philadelphia *Ledger*, Worcester *Telegram*, *New England Farmer*, and Baltimore *Morning Herald*.³⁰

²⁷ Allen Wesley Moger, “The Rebuilding of the Old Dominion: A Study in Economic, Social, and Political Transition from 1880 to 1902” (Ph. D. diss., Columbia University, 1940), 31-32.

²⁸ *Manufacturers’ Record*, 22 December 1888.

²⁹ *The New-York Times*, 21 Jan 1887.

³⁰ See notices of arrival in *Roanoke Daily Times*, 10, 12, 25 Jan; 14 May 1890.

Although scores of Roanoke businessmen were responsible for the city's industrial boom, Big Lick natives Henry Shaver Trout and Peyton Leftwich Terry were the principal natives behind the development. Trout and Terry were not only dedicated and noteworthy boosters, they also managed several of the city's most important businesses and played instrumental roles in convincing dozens of northern industries to move to Roanoke. Henry Trout grew up in Big Lick, where he helped his father John manage the family farm and their Franklin Road inn, the Trout House. John Trout owned over twenty slaves in the 1850s, and in 1861, his nineteen-year-old son Henry withdrew from classes at Roanoke College to enlist in the Twenty-Eighth Virginia Infantry. Peyton Terry moved to Big Lick from Campbell County, Virginia in 1851, when he was just fifteen. Terry found work as a store clerk and became a merchant himself before he married Henry Trout's sister and enlisted in the Twenty-Eighth Virginia too. Trout and Terry both served in Pickett's Division, both fought at Gettysburg, and both were eventually captured and sent to Federal prisoner of war camps before returning to Big Lick. After the war, Trout went back to managing his father's farm; Terry returned to P. L. Terry & Company, his general store on Franklin Road. By 1868, Terry had done well enough to purchase the Elmwood estate, a Greek revival mansion and six-hundred and twenty-five acres south of Big Lick Depot. In 1874, the village's residents elected Trout as a state delegate and put Terry on the first town council. The brothers-in-law started a cattle business later in the decade, and by the early 1880s, both had also opened tobacco warehouses.

Trout and Terry held tightly to an unyielding and sanguine belief that an industrial city could rise in what had been their wheat fields and cow pastures. They were heavily involved in courting the SVRR, and both profited from the decision of the line to put its junction in Big Lick. In 1882, the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company bought close to 500 acres from Trout for \$71,000, and after Frederick Kimball helped organize the First National Bank of Roanoke, he selected Trout as its president and put Terry on its board of directors. In 1881, Terry helped secure options on McClanahan Mill and Spring for the E. W. Clark & Company, and in 1882, the

Improvement Company bought his Elmwood estate for \$125,000. The Clark Company also put him on the board of directors of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company (RL&IC) and Roanoke Machine Works, and it appointed him president of the Roanoke Stockyards Company. In the spring of 1882, residents elected Trout to Roanoke's first Town Council, and later in the year, they selected him as their representative in the Virginia Senate.

In 1883, the two men joined Frederick Kimball in organizing the Roanoke Association for the Exhibition of Livestock. Later in the year, Terry founded the Roanoke Trust, Loan & Safe Deposit Company and moved the business into the ground floor rooms of the railroad office building. By 1886, the Clark firm had appointed Trout to the board of directors of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company as well. It also made him a director of its Pocahontas Coal Company. Trout and Terry had helped organize the Roanoke & Southern Railroad that same year, and in 1888, Trout became president of the line. Both men were active in St. Marc's Lutheran Church, and eventually both helped found the Peoples Perpetual Loan & Building Association, the West End Land Company, the Crystal Springs Land Company, and the William Watts Camp of Confederate Veterans. By 1890, Terry was president of both the Roanoke Development Company and the Times Publishing Company, owner of *The Roanoke Times*, as well as vice president of former Governor Fitz Lee's Iron Belt Building & Loan Association.³¹

Like boosters elsewhere in the South, Trout and Terry had as much to gain as anybody in attracting business and securing a prosperous future for their community. They were the most significant local emissaries for the Clark Company, and although they received a significant boost from that firm, they afterwards acted largely on their own to develop other indigenous

³¹ Biographical information on Trout and Terry is from: Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western*, 168-71; William McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, Roanoke City, Va., and Representative Citizens* (Chicago: Biographical Pub. Co., 1902), 383-84; *The Roanoke Leader*, 24 July 1886; W. P. A., *Roanoke: Story of County and City*, 85, 132, 135; Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 19, 73, 75, 89, 92, 96, 98-99, 100, 103, 112, 125-26, 130, 163-64, 170, 186, 207, 212-13, 231-32, 235, 322; Claire White, *Roanoke 1740-1982* (Roanoke: Roanoke Valley Historical Society, 53, 58, 63, 65, 75.

corporations, land companies, railroads, and investment houses. Trout and Terry were hardly the “new men” popularized in New South rhetoric, but they were close, and like most business leaders in up-and-coming southern cities, they had risen, albeit with assistance, from somewhat humble backgrounds to become the most well respected and wealthy men in town. Their booster spirit, optimism, and determination to reinvest capital at their disposal, and the similar ethos found in the seemingly united front of local business leaders, mirrors the boosterism and civic patriotism of places like Atlanta and Nashville, where a relatively new elite faced little opposition from an entrenched class of wealthy old timers opposed to industrialization and rapid urbanization. In long-established southern cities, like Mobile or Charleston, men like Trout and Terry would have faced tougher odds in rising beyond their original station, but in Roanoke, a town with no concretely established social caste and little real collective past to remember, they and dozens of men like them quickly emerged in the vanguard of the city’s new bourgeoisie.³²

Throughout the 1880s, Trout, Terry, and other local boosters convinced dozens of outside investors to open industries in Roanoke. The West End Iron Works and Roanoke Iron Company started operations, as did the American Bridge Works, the Roanoke Rolling Mills, the Roanoke Spike Works, the Roanoke Mining Company, the Midland Iron Company, the West End Brick and Tile Works, the Virginia Brewing Company, the Old Dominion Phonograph Company, the Roanoke Black Marble Company, and the Adams Brothers & Payne Brick Company. All told, *The Roanoke Times* reported, there had been over \$9,000,000 invested in manufacturing concerns and buildings. The city’s growth had been “so rapid,” the paper boasted, “that, notwithstanding the great influx of people, its population is not yet in proportion to the manufacturing.”³³ The *Baltimore Sun* concurred, insisting that Roanoke had become “the Birmingham of the Old Dominion” and stood at the forefront of “the race of progress upon which the South has

³² Don Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 19, 87-95, 136-153, 268.

³³ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Oct 1890; for Midland Iron Company, see *ibid.*, 19 Nov 1890.

entered.”³⁴ None of the development would have occurred, however, had it not been for native boosters.

Industrial jobs in Roanoke lured thousands of skilled laborers and their families from the North. Jobs in the city’s iron furnaces and machine shops required scores of highly trained laborers, most of whom had to be imported from Pennsylvania or Maryland since Virginia had very few skilled workers. Employment for native whites was readily available, albeit in less skill-oriented positions. That opportunity, nevertheless, brought in thousands of new residents from the surrounding countryside and mountains. Rural life in the late nineteenth century, especially in Appalachia, offered little prospect for advancement, and, as several scholars have pointed out, wage labor positions in the region’s emerging mining camps, towns, and industrial cities quickly became attractive alternatives to the poverty, isolation, and misery of the farm.³⁵ Employment for African Americans, while also readily available, was limited almost entirely to unskilled manual labor or to jobs so filthy and difficult that whites classified them as “nigger work.” Roanoke’s employment paradigm mirrored that in Birmingham, Alabama, a city that also seemingly sprang up from nowhere and completely lacked a skilled labor force.³⁶

Migration to the “Magic City” mirrored urbanization patterns throughout Virginia, where the population of cities more than doubled from 1870 to 1900. No urban area in the state, however, grew faster than Roanoke, which jumped from Virginia’s fifth largest city the first time its population was enumerated in 1890, to third largest in 1900.³⁷ Although in 1890 boosters

³⁴ *Baltimore Sun*, quoted in *Roanoke Daily Times*, 27 Nov 1889.

³⁵ Shifflett, *Coal Towns*, 3-12, chapter 1; see also, John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 218.

³⁶ Gordon B. McKinney, “The Blair Committee Investigation of 1883: Industrialization in the Appalachian Mountains,” *Appalachian Journal: A Regional Studies Review* 26, no. 2 (Winter 1999), 158-59.

³⁷ United States Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, I* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), 36; John L. Androit, ed., *Population Abstract of the United States* (McClean, VA: Androit Associates, 1980), 854-55.

estimated that Roanoke's population had grown to at least 20,000, the census that year placed the actual populace at 16,159. The figure, which represented a 579 percent increase from 1883 and a 3,472 percent rise from 1880, was nevertheless so disappointing that the *Roanoke Daily Times* declared it "nonsense" and demanded a recount.³⁸ Sixty-eight percent of 13,370 new residents who arrived from 1883 to 1890 were white, and even though 4,256 new black citizens arrived as well, whites still comprised about 70 percent of the city's population. There were over six inhabitants for every house in 1890, and although by 1892 carpenters had built 578 more dwellings, 7,069 more newcomers had arrived, pushing the average number of inhabitants per home to over seven.³⁹

The Roanoke Development Company, a firm co-owned by E. W. Clark & Company President Clarence Clark, fellow Philadelphian Arthur Deniston, Peyton Terry, and other local investors was responsible for about five hundred of the new residents. In 1891, the Development Company lured the Norwich Lock Factory, Duval Engine Works, Roanoke Iron Mills, and Bridgewater Carriage Company to its thirteen-hundred acre tract west of the city. The industries built dozens of rows of identical cottages for their employees, and eventually the Development Company put a steel bridge over the river to induce investment in its holdings to the south of the mill village. The firm had lofty expectations for the neighborhood and zoned it "in order to avoid the erection of buildings which might prove out of character with the surroundings."⁴⁰ Lots sold

³⁸ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 19 July 1890.

³⁹ Data compiled from United States Bureau of the Census, U. S. Census of 1880, Schedule of Population, Town of Big Lick, County of Roanoke, State of Virginia; Town Council of Roanoke, "Census of the Town of Roanoke, December 1883," vol. 1 and 2, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library; U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Report on Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890, Part 1* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1895), 389, 483; *Sholes' Directory of the City of Roanoke, November 1st, 1892*, data reprinted in *The Roanoke Times*, 20 Oct 1892.

⁴⁰ Quote and information on the Development Company are from *The Roanoke Times*, 12 Sept 1891; see also *ibid.*, 25 Nov 1892. The Norwich Company had relocated from Connecticut and was at the time the only lock manufacturing plant in the South.

briskly, and although papers predicted a “new city” would soon emerge and “knock at the doors of the corporation of Roanoke and ask admission,” few other investors built anything.⁴¹

Native entrepreneurs did not rely exclusively on outside capital to create businesses in town, and throughout the decade, hundreds of them started indigenous enterprises. Peyton Terry helped found one of the first in late 1883, when he and the co-owner of *The Roanoke Leader*, John Dunstan, bought a utility franchise and founded the Roanoke Gas Company.⁴² Council promptly approved funds for sixteen gas lamps at key intersections, but as one paper complained, they served mainly as “beacon lights to steer by” since one lamp came into view “about the time the other disappears in the rear.”⁴³ The 1883 recession slowed the extension of gas mains and eliminated funding for more lamps. Indeed, when Shenandoah Valley Railroad lawyer William Travers arrived one night in the spring of 1887, he found downtown Roanoke so poorly lit that he made his way through the darkness only by dragging an umbrella along the sidewalk for guidance.⁴⁴ By the end of the decade, the Roanoke Water Works, a firm owned by Clarence Clark, Frederick Kimball and other Clark & Company associates, had absorbed the struggling Roanoke Gas Company, a circumstance that once again put all the town’s utilities in the hands of Philadelphians.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Quote is from *The Roanoke Times*, 14 Nov 1891. The notion of the development as a parallel city continues to exist to some extent. Known as the “Grandin” area today, the eclectic neighborhood bills itself as the “Georgetown of Roanoke” and boasts its own art-house theater, vegetarian grocery store, coffee shops, bookstores, bars, and restaurants.

⁴² Information on the gas and water companies comes from *The Roanoke Leader*, 21 May 1883; Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, Second Annual Report, reprinted in *ibid.*, 17 Jan 1884. The RL&IC already operated a small gas plant to light the hotel, depot, and railroad offices but had no plans to offer the service to the rest of town.

⁴³ *The Roanoke Leader*, 15 Nov 1883.

⁴⁴ William Hicks Travers, Diary Number Nine, 22 April 1887, William Hicks Travers Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

⁴⁵ Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western Railway Company*, 121-22; Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 163. A *New-York Times* correspondent thought

Other natives fared somewhat better. Local entrepreneur Ferdinand Rorer, for instance, founded the Rorer Iron Company, bought the mineral rights to a deposit of ore on the west ridge of Mill Mountain, and constructed a narrow gauge railroad that linked the mines to the N&W.⁴⁶ Ex-Mayor Lucian Cocke, by contrast, attempted to profit from the city's muddy and poorly lighted streets by developing a mule car railway. He and other associates organized the Roanoke Street Railway Company in 1887; by the following year, their "hay burner" railroad operated on Jefferson and Commerce Streets as well as on Campbell and Church Avenues. The company added extensions branching out from Salem Avenue, and for a five-cent fare, residents and visitors alike could avoid the mud by taking a mule wagon to destinations throughout downtown. Tracks for the system rested on crossties that periodically sank, however, and as a result, cars occasionally bounced off and overturned in the street. This flaw and the unpredictability of the mules pulling the cars hurt business and eventually led the firm to modernize its tracks and install electric powered cars. The new line began operations in the summer of 1892 and had, according to *The Roanoke Times*, finally given Roanoke "that looked for, longed for, much to be desired adjunct to all enterprising cities – an electric railway." In the years that followed, the firm expanded its streetcar lines into the suburbs as well as into Salem and Vinton.⁴⁷

Elsewhere in town, entrepreneurs contemplated far grander moneymaking schemes. The most significant of them began in early 1886, when John C. Moomaw, Crozer Furnace manager

the water monopoly was dangerous, observing that it was possible "Roanoke will find herself paying dearly for the mistake." See 21 Jan 1887 edition.

⁴⁶ Raymond P. Barnes, "Roanoke Valley's Early Iron Mines," *Journal of the Roanoke Historical Society* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1967), 25-26.

⁴⁷ For details about the mule railway and "hay burner" quote, see Recollections of Henry S. Trout in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 8 May 1913; see also, W. P. A., *Roanoke: Story of County and City*, 194-95; for problems and improvements, see *The Roanoke Times*, 15 June; 15 July 1892 (quote is from 15 June); for eventually expansion of the line, see all above plus Roanoke Street Railway schedule dated 10 Sept 1894, J. Ambler Johnston Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; for absorbing the electric company and becoming The Roanoke Street Railway and Electric Company, see Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western Railway Company*, 113-14.

David Houston, Henry Trout, Peyton Terry, and other native investors organized the Roanoke & Southern Railroad Company. The firm, which had a North Carolina counterpart, planned to construct a 122-mile line from Roanoke to Winston-Salem, North Carolina, that would essentially complete the second half of the route originally proposed for the Clark firm's Shenandoah Valley Railroad (SVRR). The city's editors applauded the idea, predicting the completed railroad would double the size of Roanoke and usher in the same kind of boom that accompanied the arrival of the SVRR. Local property owners, the only residents eligible to vote on civic financial issues, had previously rejected several small bonds for infrastructure improvements, but in April 1886, they almost unanimously approved issuing \$100,000 in bonds to buy Roanoke & Southern stock.⁴⁸

In the years that followed, however, the railroad struggled to find other investors and construction of the line stalled. In 1889, local business leaders proposed issuing bonds to cover another \$100,000 stock subscription. The road, one merchant explained, was crucial for Roanoke since it "would add millions to the wealth of the city" by opening up a southern trade.⁴⁹ The press urged freeholders to endorse the subscription, warning that Salem residents would "gladly give all and more than Roanoke is asked to subscribe" and had even come up with a new name for the line: "The Salem & Southern."⁵⁰ Roanoke's property owners voted 540 to 11 to authorize the purchase but on the same ballot rejected far smaller bonds for a hospital and police headquarters.⁵¹ Later in the year, Henry Trout, Peyton Terry, and other business leaders provided the final incentive for the line by purchasing its \$75,000 right-of-way into the city. Construction ended in early 1892, and shortly after the first Roanoke & Southern train pulled into town, the

⁴⁸ Information on the early history of the Roanoke & Southern comes from *The Roanoke Leader*, 6 Feb; 3, 24, April 1886; freeholder vote on purchasing stock is in *ibid.*, 29 April 1886.

⁴⁹ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 22 Nov 1889; see also, *ibid.*, 11 Dec 1889; 9 Jan 1890.

⁵⁰ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 11 Jan 1890.

⁵¹ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 19 Feb 1890. The vote on bonds for the hospital was 312 to 178, two-percent below the sixty-six percent required. The vote on bonds for the police building was 120 to 333.

firm's stockholders voted unanimously to lease the line to the N&W for following 999 years. The hastily arranged lease prevented the N&W's main rival, the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad, from buying the Roanoke & Southern and ending the N&W's monopoly on rail access to Southwest Virginia. Four years later, the N&W bought the Roanoke & Southern and turned the line into its "Winston-Salem Division." The lease and buyout, while profitable to a handful of Roanoke residents, maintained N&W's monopoly on local freight and passenger service, a circumstance many inhabitants found unsettling, especially since municipal funds had fomented completion of the Roanoke & Southern.⁵²

Old South critic and New South booster Hinton Helper, covering Southwest Virginia for the *New York Sun*, witnessed firsthand the booster spirit and business acumen of Roanoke's residents. He afterwards compared the city to Atlanta. "The people here do not sit down and await the action of Providence," he observed, "they help themselves." Roanoke, according to Helper, antebellum author of *The Impending Crisis*, represented what had become possible after Virginians shed their addiction to the backward and corrupting institution of slavery.⁵³ Indeed, he was so impressed, that after finishing his work for the *Sun*, Helper moved to Roanoke from Louisville and convinced Henry Trout, Peyton Terry and several other business leaders to organize a Commercial Club to "advertise to the outside world the diversified and splendid advantages offered by this city as a place for investment."⁵⁴

⁵² N&W lease is from *The Roanoke Times*, 17 March 1892, in Norfolk & Western Scrapbook no. 16, Norfolk & Western Railway Archives, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Tech; Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western*, 97, 151-52; reason for lease is from Joseph T. Lambie, *From Mine to Market: The History of Coal Transportation on the Norfolk & Western Railway* (New York: New York University Press, 1954), 44.

⁵³ Quoted in *Roanoke Daily Times*, 5 Jan 1890.

⁵⁴ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 27 May 1890. Trout and Terry were charter members and on the Board of Directors, as were: Joseph Sands, James Simmons, E. H. Stewart, James Gambill, and Dr. J. A. Gale.

The Roanoke Commercial Club recruited eighty other members in the months that followed, and in September 1890, it moved into posh quarters on the second floor of the Exchange Building downtown. The Club made Helper, who had established a similar association in Louisville, its secretary and only paid employee, and by the next month, he had dozens of inquiries from northern industrialists to show members.⁵⁵ Out-of-town businessmen flocked to the Club's quarters and potential investors arrived as well, but after serving only a couple months, Helper cited health problems, resigned, and left town.⁵⁶ His abrupt departure stunned members, as did the front-page story that followed a week later offering a graphic account of his scandalous affair with a New York socialite. Mrs. Helper, stranded in Roanoke with only \$5, published letters detailing the tryst and charged her husband with desertion before fleeing to relatives in Savannah. The story, picked up by the national press shortly after it broke, created a "sensation" in town and had a decidedly chilling effect on the Commercial Club.⁵⁷ The organization's president resigned and went on an extended tour of Cuba and Mexico, members stopped paying dues, and even with the addition of billiard tables, the group's quarters went largely unused until the Club finally closed.⁵⁸

Before Helper departed, the Club hired a New York publishing firm to produce *The City of Roanoke, Virginia: Containing an Outline of its Environment, Resources, Development,*

⁵⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 28 Sept 1890. Helper, the paper pointed out, was "thoroughly familiar with the manner in which such a club should be conducted."

⁵⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Oct 1890.

⁵⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 20 Nov 1890. Helper was apparently in good enough health to make several land deals in Petersburg in the days after he resigned. Additional details about the "scandal" are available in *The Roanoke Times*, 22, 29 Nov 1890. Helper, the (in)famous author of *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It* (1857), eventually returned to work on his scheme to link Canada, the United States, and South America with a railroad before ending up utterly impoverished and mentally unstable. He committed suicide in a Washington D. C. boarding house in 1909. See, Hugh C. Bailey, *Hinton Rowen Helper: Abolitionist-Racist* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1965), 174-96.

⁵⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 2, 3 Dec 1890. Eventually the Roanoke Real Estate Exchange took over the lease on the Club's rooms.

Prospects and Substantial Inducements to Capital in the Year 1890. The pamphlet touted the town's "evidence of progressive conditions" to northern and European investors by highlighting the "vast repositories of ores and coals" available nearby and by providing an array of business statistics and illustrations that detailed the city's central connection to "The Industrial Invasion" taking place. In merely seven years, the brochure boasted, Roanoke had risen up from "cow-pastures" and "vacant lots" to claim the title of "'Standard Bearer of Virginia Progress.'" And its rapid rise had just begun; investors still had an opportunity to get aboard: "There is much yet to do. Every hotel is full of inquirers with money to invest; with people who want to learn how and where to locate and become a part of this wide-awake population." Existing industries and businesses paid out \$5,000,000 a year to workers, and although new enterprises were flocking to town, land for factories was available at reasonable prices. Even apparent drawbacks became, in the pamphlet, selling points: the "natural drainage" via "rapid streamlets" was "one of the city's most advantageous attributes" because it removed "the dangers of pollution which lurk in so many populous places"; streets "yet to be perfected" and numerous "vacant spaces" afforded opportunity to mold the town to an investor's liking.⁵⁹

Early the following year, a local real estate firm followed up with *A Synopsis of Roanoke and Her Wonderful Prosperity*, a similar but occasionally more fanciful account of opportunity that awaited Yankee financiers. The city, the guide pointed out, was located "in the center of the finest coal, iron, timber and agricultural region of the world" and offered cheap access to these resources as well as inexpensive labor, abundant land, and unheard-of rail power. The New South, the pamphlet observed, was "a new land, progressive and cosmopolitan" and welcomed

⁵⁹ Frank H. Taylor, *The City of Roanoke, Virginia: Containing an Outline of its Environment, Resources, Development, Prospects and Substantial Inducements to Capital in the Year 1890* (New York City: The Giles Company, 1890), 1-47. (First quote page 28; second and third quotes page 3; fourth, fifth, and sixth quotes page 12; seventh quote pages 12, 14; eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh quotes page 9; twelfth and thirteenth quotes page 14.) The Club mailed out 350 copies of the pamphlet in October 1890 alone. See *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Oct 1890. This was apparently Roanoke's first booster guide.

northern investment to unlock “the vastness of her minerals, sleeping in her valleys or glistening on her mountain tops.” The booklet pointed to Roanoke’s humble origins and rapid growth as de facto proof of future progress, warning readers “unacquainted with the marvelous development of Roanoke” that much of the information offered was “startling as fiction.” Indeed, only a few pages into the text the reader had to digest this fact: “There has not been a single failure in real estate investments in Roanoke – unparalleled in the history of the world.” Noting that the development of the town “reads more like a Utopian myth than the true history it is,” the booklet offered statistics showing that in just eight years real estate values had tripled, \$10,000,000 had been invested in local businesses, and the city’s population had increased 5,000 percent.⁶⁰

Peyton Terry added *Roanoke, Virginia in 1891: Its Investment Opportunities. Its Manufacturing Advantages. Its Transportation Services . . . etc.*, to the local booster canon later in the year.⁶¹ Other businessmen mounted a newspaper campaign to solicit outside capital.

Roanoke’s phenomenal growth, they boasted in one full-page ad, made it “The Magic City of the New South.” No place had risen faster or offered better opportunities to “people desiring to better their material condition; to capital and men of small means and skilled labor; to manufacturers desiring more ground room and superior facilities.”⁶² Boosters also began publishing *The Iron*

⁶⁰ F. P. Smith, *A Synopsis of Roanoke and Her Wonderful Prosperity* (Roanoke: W. M. Yeager & Co., Real Estate Brokers, 1891), 1-50. (First quote page 23; second quote page 4; third and fourth quotes page 5; fifth quote page 8; sixth quote page 22). Using humble origins and amazing growth to sell the future was a common booster tactic. See Stuart Seely Sprague, “The Great Appalachian Iron and Coal Town Boom of 1889-1893,” *Appalachian Journal* 4, numbers 3 and 4, (Spring / Summer 1977), 218.

⁶¹ Terry & Pope, *Roanoke, Virginia in 1891: Its Investment Opportunities. Its Manufacturing Advantages. Its Transportation Services . . .* (Roanoke: Hammond Printing Works, 1891).

⁶² See full-page ad in *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Jan 1891; for Roanoke being commonly known by the appellation, see Bruce, *Southwest Virginia*, 132.

Throughout the South, boosters created memorable epithets for their town to aid in selling the place to investors. Birmingham, Alabama and Middlesborough, Kentucky also frequently used “Magic City.” Locals continued to bill Roanoke as the “Magic City” well into the twentieth century. The city dubbed athletic teams from its Jefferson High School “The Magicians,” and today “Magic City” continues to appear in the names of a few local businesses.

Belt, a monthly journal devoted to manufacturing, railroad, and real estate opportunities in Roanoke and Southwest Virginia.⁶³

The various industrial developments prompted a building spurt unlike any the city had previously experienced: warehouses and commercial enterprises filled up vacant lots downtown, hundreds of houses went up in nearby neighborhoods, and, overlooking the town on the summit of Mill Mountain, the Roanoke Gas & Water Company built an observatory and tourist resort known as the Rockledge Inn. On the Commerce Street lot where the Trout House once stood, investors constructed the Ponce de Leon, a six-story, 120-room hotel named in recognition of the fresh-water spring bubbling up in its basement. It was the tallest building in town until 1892, when work ended on the Terry Building, a seven-story Italianesque office complex. Peyton Terry financed the stone and pressed-brick structure and it housed his Roanoke Trust, Loan and Safe Deposit Company along with Henry Trout's First National Bank and offices for lawyers and land companies.

Local businessmen, like the emerging business leaders in new towns elsewhere in the South, linked further progress for the town to the maintenance of its business-friendly ethos and booster spirit. They pushed for municipal incentives like tax breaks and land bonuses, they advocated modernization of their hometown, and they sought ways to generate a Victorian social order that would both attract additional investors and knock the rawness off Roanoke's overwhelmingly rural population. Eventually they followed other emerging southern business

For current examples, see phonebook listings for Magic City Ford, Magic City Sprinkler, Magic City Supply, and Magic City Video. The "Magic City" nickname all but disappeared in booster literature after 1949, when the city's promoters dubbed their home the "Star City of the South" in conjunction with the electrification of a gigantic neon star on the summit of Mill Mountain. The name "Big Lick" also survives in contemporary business names; see, for instance, phonebook listings for Big Lick Golf & Driving Range, Big Lick Boarding Kennel, and The Big Lick, an ice cream parlor.

⁶³ For *The Iron Belt*, see Cappon, *Virginia Newspapers*, 196; Warren, *History of Newspapers*, 14, as well as the only two extant copies of the journal known to be in existence (February and April 1892), housed in the Virginia Room of the Roanoke City Public Library.

leaders and boosters in constructing a self-conscious class: they built Queen Anne mansions on the outskirts of town, joined elite fraternal orders, patronized the Opera House, and formed exclusive business, social or civic organizations.⁶⁴ Henry Trout and Peyton Terry, while the most prominent, were only two of the hundreds of native boosters who courted outside investments, began their own enterprises, amassed fortunes, and turned Roanoke into the “Magic City.”

The same native businessmen who triggered industrial development in the 1880s were in the vanguard of local real estate speculation. Indeed, Roanoke’s “land booms” were essentially a concomitant of the city’s manufacturing developments. The original burst of real estate speculation in the early 1880s died out during the 1883 recession, but by the middle of the decade, a second “mini boom” was on. The Roanoke Land & Improvement Company was primarily responsible for the recovery. It encouraged speculation in city lots, suggesting that the “rapid development of the town” rendered it a “particularly desirable point” for investment.⁶⁵ The firm placed hundreds of residential and commercial tracts on the market, and since it had purchased the land at bargain rates, its mark-up in almost every case exceeded by at least ten times the original price.⁶⁶ To induce sales, the Company sold alternate lots at bargain prices as long as the buyer agreed to build on the property immediately and thus increase the value of plots nearby.⁶⁷ The tactic worked well. Indeed, elsewhere in town, the price of real estate skyrocketed. In 1885, for example, one resident sold a tract for \$11,000 that he had purchased four years

⁶⁴ Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 189-225; Flaming, *Creating the Modern South*, 36-51; Carlton, *Mill and Town*, 8-13.

⁶⁵ See RL&IC ad in *The Roanoke Leader*, 9 Oct 1884.

⁶⁶ For lot costs and sale prices, see “Unsold Lots – Land Agents Value of Property at Roanoke, April 15, 1884,” 1-17, Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Records, History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia.

⁶⁷ Strategy recounted in *The New-York Times*, 21 Jan 1887.

earlier for only \$150.⁶⁸ Around 1886, however, land values went into a temporary downward spiral, leaving residents with heavy property investments once again in financial ruin. “In no place,” the Reverend William Campbell moralized, “is the transitoriness of earthly things better exemplified.” The boom had brought some residents wealth, he observed, but to others, “by stimulating their desire for speculation, it has brought disaster.”⁶⁹

The real estate bust, however, lasted only until 1888, when the largest speculation frenzy in Roanoke’s history began. The period, the city’s first historian recalled twenty years later, “marked the beginning of a condition of affairs when land companies were organized almost daily, large tracts laid off into town lots, store-houses and dwellings erected in all parts of the city, with speculation in real estate the dominant feature of all business transactions.”⁷⁰ Real estate companies “sprang up during the boom like mushrooms,” according to Henry Trout, and although most of them were simply “get rich quick schemes,” investors lined up to pour money into them. “The spirit of speculation was rampant,” Trout recalled, “and frenzied finance became the order of the day.” Indeed, once the “frenzy” began, many residents even sold their businesses to invest solely in Roanoke real estate.⁷¹ They had reason to, a correspondent from *The New York Times* reported, citing the example of native real-estate agent James Simmons, “who, though scarcely 25 years of age yet, has made a fortune out of land in Roanoke within a year or two.”⁷² “Rawrenoke,” was the Indian word for valuable shells, the *Manufacturers’ Record* explained,

⁶⁸ Price increase is from Reverend William C. Campbell’s, “1885 Anniversary Sermon,” Heritage Room, First Presbyterian Church, Roanoke, reprinted in Brenda McDaniel, “Dr. Campbell’s Big Lick,” *The Roanoker* (Sept 1981): 78.

⁶⁹ William C. Campbell, Roanoke, to Editor of *The Central* (location unknown), 12 March 1886, William Creighton Campbell Papers.

⁷⁰ Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western*, 96.

⁷¹ Recollections of Henry S. Trout in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 8 May 1913.

⁷² *The New-York Times*, 21 Jan 1887.

noting “It has certainly developed into ‘precious money,’ and its industries, its situation, its railroad facilities, all tend to make it a veritable goldmine to the fortunate property holder.”⁷³

“Land booms” hit other towns in Southwest Virginia and Appalachia too, and northern investors flocked to the area to pour millions of dollars into artificially inflated and often ultimately worthless property.⁷⁴ In the nearby Town of Salem, land boosters teamed up with Clarence Clark and other northern investors to organize the Salem Improvement Company. The firm dubbed Salem “The Switzerland of the South,” advertised the town as “An Ideal Location for a Large City,” promised manufacturers free land, and in December 1889, sold 245 lots to speculators for \$105,000.⁷⁵ Pulaski, Ivanhoe, Richlands, Wythville, Lexington, and other towns along the N&W advertised themselves widely as future industrial cities as well. According to one speculator, even the aged James River Canal town of Buchanan “decided to wake up and proclaim its existence” as an ideal spot for a metropolis. When a train was due in town, he wryly observed, real estate agents crowded the depot and “had their surveys waiting to receive the suckers and sell them town lots.”⁷⁶

Elsewhere along the tracks, land companies sold speculators property in villages with no manufacturing infrastructure or even in wholly imaginary “paper cities” that never developed. On thirteen thousand acres bordering the hamlet of Buena Vista, for example, the Buena Vista Company, owned partially by E. W. Clark & Company President Clarence Clark, built a hotel,

⁷³ *Manufacturers’ Record*, 22 Dec 1888.

⁷⁴ Gordon Blair, “Memories of the Land Boom in the Western Part of Virginia,” 1-8, Ms (July 1958), Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; Moger, “The Rebuilding of the Old Dominion,” 34-42; Sprague, “The Great Appalachian Iron and Coal Town Boom,” 216-222; Stuart Seely Sprague, “Investing in Appalachia: The Virginia Valley Boom of 1889-1893,” *Virginia Cavalcade* (Winter 1975), 134-43.

⁷⁵ *The Salem Times-Register*, 26 Nov 1889 “Supplement Edition”; *ibid.*, 13 Dec 1889, both in Norfolk & Western Scrapbook no. 10, Norfolk & Western Railway Archives, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg.

⁷⁶ Blair, “Memories of the Land Boom,” 4.

strung up thousands of light bulbs over fields plotted out as neighborhoods, and sold lots on the empty promise that the “city” was destined to become a manufacturing mecca.⁷⁷ It was the only place in Virginia, one visitor recalled, “where you could hunt bull frogs by electric light.”⁷⁸ The most over-hyped and flagrantly under-realized promotion, however, occurred in Rockbridge County, where Ex-Governor Fitzhugh Lee headed a land company that convinced hundreds of investors – including the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough – that a tiny settlement called Glasgow was fated to be the most important industrial town in Virginia.⁷⁹

Real estate booms, a New South editor in Kentucky complained, were comprised primarily of “brandy, printers ink and midnight, and are as fatal to the community to which they are applied as a dynamite shell.”⁸⁰ Roanoke residents uniformly discounted such warnings, according to one citizen, who suggested that by 1890 so many inhabitants had an “interest” in a land company that “every man is more or less on the order of a land agent.”⁸¹ He hardly exaggerated; between 1888 and 1890, one hundred and thirty-two land companies opened for business in Roanoke and offered stock to investors.⁸² In 1890, after voters approved bonds for the Roanoke & Southern Railway, the frenzy shifted into overdrive with real estate agencies all over town listing hundreds of lots and tracts for sale in local, regional, and national newspapers.⁸³ “As a field for investment,” one local land company boasted, “you can not find a better place in the

⁷⁷ Moger, “The Rebuilding of the Old Dominion,” 38-40.

⁷⁸ Blair, “Memories of the Land Boom,” 2.

⁷⁹ Moger, “The Rebuilding of the Old Dominion,” 40-41; Sprague, “The Great Appalachian Iron and Coal Town Boom,” 220.

⁸⁰ Henry Watterson of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, quoted in *Roanoke Daily Times*, 3 May 1890.

⁸¹ Bruce, *Southwest Virginia*, 140.

⁸² McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, Roanoke City, Va.*, 158.

⁸³ Moger, “The Rebuilding of the Old Dominion,” 31-32, 38.

South or North.”⁸⁴ Indeed, a rival firm even suggested that “Every investor in Roanoke real estate has made money,” while other agencies guaranteed a “handsome fortune” and “invariable large profits” for money ventured on land in the “Great Industrial and Commercial Center of the New South.”⁸⁵ Those “who would dare dispute the statement that Roanoke is the best field for investment in the South or anywhere else,” another company argued, should be “Lynched!”⁸⁶

Most speculators in Roanoke land simply held their property and waited for it to increase in value. As a result, natives profited heavily from sales but saw little actual growth occur. All the companies bought land fairly cheaply, plotted it into neighborhoods, “reserved” free tracts for industries, erected one or two substantial buildings, marked the property up 50 to 100 percent, and used promotional propaganda to convince speculators that manufacturing establishments and workers were on the horizon. The companies worked hand-in-glove with the local press, which published “puffs” in special real-estate issues that embellished the city’s progress, overestimated its population, and inflated future prospects in order to generate buzz for an impending land auction.⁸⁷ Some of the land schemes were outright swindles; others were simply creative in their sales tactics and overly optimistic. The one common denominator, however, was that native businessmen and town boosters were in almost every case the main force behind the ventures. For example, former Big Lick tobacco manufacturer Samuel W. Jamison created the Belmont Land Company; S. S. Brooke of *The Roanoke Leader* organized The Magic City Land Company; furniture store owner E. H. Stewart started the Oak Ridge Land Company; local lawyer Robert H. Woodrum headed the Mountain View Land Company; and several of Roanoke’s Jewish

⁸⁴ See Gray & Boswell ad in *Roanoke Daily Times*, 22 Feb 1890.

⁸⁵ For first quote, see James S. Simmons & Co. ad in *Roanoke Daily Times*, 20 Feb 1890; for other quotes, see ads in *ibid.*, 20 April; 21 March 1890.

⁸⁶ See Dyer & Wingfield ad in *Roanoke Daily Times*, 21 March 1890.

⁸⁷ This sales tactic was repeated throughout the region. See Moger, “The Rebuilding of the Old Dominion,” 38; Sprague, “The Great Appalachian Iron and Coal Town Boom,” 219-21.

businessmen organized the Phoenix Land Company. Other residents put together the Melrose, Hyde Park, Fairview, River View, Virginia, Jefferson, and Creston Land Companies.⁸⁸

Peyton Terry, Henry Trout, local real estate speculator S. W. Jamison, and Crozier Furnace president David F. Houston organized one of Roanoke's largest development companies in the summer of 1888, when they purchased a tract fifteen blocks west of downtown and formed the West End Land Company to market the property. The firm advertised its development as an elite suburb and zoned it exclusively for "good, handsome dwellings." Lots sold briskly, and by 1890, several "tasteful and expensive" Italianesque and Queen Anne mansions, "all embodying those agreeable details of outer shape and interior finish which are now the delight of the modern-home architect," had gone up.⁸⁹ Terry, Trout and other "leading citizens" were also responsible for the Crystal Springs Land Company. That firm purchased close to a thousand acres below Mill Mountain, laid out lots, constructed streets, and built a bridge over the river for extensions of Jefferson Avenue and the streetcar line. The development, one paper commented, offered further proof that the town was "stretching out in every direction." In the years ahead, it predicted, "South Roanoke will show a remarkable transformation."⁹⁰ The firm sold hundreds of lots, but little actual building occurred. The same thing happened in the Southeast, after longtime Big Lick

⁸⁸ Information on the various land companies comes from Recollections of Henry S. Trout in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 8 May 1913; Bruce, *Southwest Virginia*, 140. Numerous Roanoke neighborhoods today bear the name of these and other long forgotten land firms.

⁸⁹ Information on the West End is from *Roanoke Daily Times*, 21 March; 3 May 1890; *The Roanoke Times*, 14 June 1892; "Reminiscences of Martha Tinsley Taylor," in Sydney Taylor Alexander, *Elmwood of Roanoke* (Washington, DC: By the author, 1958), 15; quote is from Taylor, *The City of Roanoke, Virginia*, 11.

In the 1920s, "South Roanoke," an upper-class suburb below Mill Mountain, began to supplant the West End as the city's most preferred elite neighborhood. Over the next eighty years, homes in the West End deteriorated; today, the Italianesque and Queen Anne mansions still standing are surrounded by low-income housing, overgrown lots, and ramshackle convenience stores. By the 1970s, landlords had subdivided most of the mansions, turning what was once the city's most elite housing into run-down apartments.

⁹⁰ Information about the company and quotes are from *Roanoke Daily Times*, 21 March 1890.

businessman Mortimer M. Rogers and former Shenandoah Valley Railroad executive James S. Simmons organized the Buena Vista Land Company. They set aside two hundred acres for “manufacturing and business purposes” and laid out the rest of the property for the future homes of workers. The company brochure and map guaranteed those who purchased stock in the venture that they were “virtually investing in the future of the Magic City of the South.”⁹¹ Tracts sold briskly, but no industries moved in and few houses went up.

Passage of bonds to fund the Roanoke & Southern Railroad boosted land sales throughout town, according to the *Roanoke Daily Times*, which reported in February 1890 that “purchasers are coming in from all parts of the country.” Locals were offering “bargains” in the papers, on hand bills, and in person, and “once it is known that a visitor is here for the purpose of prospecting,” the paper observed, “he is certain to receive every attention at the hands of gentlemen in the real estate business.”⁹² There were still hundreds of speculators wandering about town looking to broker deals the following month, when a *Times* correspondent described Roanoke as “filled with strangers.” “The hotels,” he reported, “are crowded to their utmost capacity and hundreds of thousands of dollars are changing hands daily.”⁹³

The Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, which in 1882 promised its stockholders they would see a handsome return on their investment, used the boom to divest itself of almost all its property and residential holdings. In the summer and fall of 1890, for instance, it sold twenty-nine rental homes in the Northeast to a speculator from Maryland, a block of lots one street away to investors from Massachusetts, most of its residential property on Railroad Avenue to local

⁹¹ Information on the company comes from “1890 Buena Vista Land Company Map and Brochure,” Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library.

⁹² *Roanoke Daily Times*, 21 Feb 1890.

⁹³ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 4 March 1890.

businessmen, and eighty-four acres of in the Southwest to the Pleasant Valley Land Company.⁹⁴

Although the Improvement Company had given its “Woodland Park” in the Southeast to the municipal government in the early 1880s, when the city failed to fence the property as it had agreed to do, the firm put that tract on the market as well. Former Big Lick tobacco manufacturer Samuel W. Jamison bought the property soon after it went on the market in the summer of 1890. Not long afterwards, his Woodland Park Land Company erected a fifteen-foot-tall granite column on the summit of the tract to advertise the development. Named the “Kimball Tower,” in honor of N&W president Frederick Kimball, the monument was essentially a glorified “for sale” sign. In addition to installing the tower, S. W. Jamison advertised the tract in the several northern papers as one-hundred and fifty lots for sale “only three and a half blocks from the business center of Roanoke, the great industrial and commercial center of Southwest Virginia.” When the park went up for auction on October 17, 1890, chartered trains from Baltimore, Norfolk, Hagerstown, and Washington D. C. brought in hundreds of potential investors. In the sale that ensued, the company sold enough lots to more than triple its initial \$60,000 outlay.⁹⁵

The failure of city officials to retain the park infuriated working-class residents, most of whom had formerly used it as a spot for dances, picnics, or walks, and who assumed correctly that the municipality, which had no other public parks, was more interested in industrial development than the health and welfare of its residents. “It was reserved for a park,” the editor of *The Roanoke Herald* fumed, “and offered free to the City Council, who, for motives of mistaken economy, regarding the expense of development as too great, refused the offer of a

⁹⁴ “Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Sales Book June 1889 – May 1906,” 58, 44, 53, 84, Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Records, Norfolk & Western Railway Archives, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Tech.

⁹⁵ Details about the Woodland Park sale and “Kimball Tower” are available in “Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Sales Book June 1889 – May 1906,” 62; *The Roanoke Times*, 16, 17, 18 Oct 1890; Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 213-14; and Carolyn Hale Bruce, *Roanoke: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk: Donning Co.1976) 74. The “Kimball Tower” was later misleadingly inscribed as “Erected 1893 by P. L. Terry, F. J. Kimball, S. W. Jamison, & Jos. H. Sands as an Industrial Monument to Mark the Progress of the City of Roanoke. Chartered 1882.”

property which is today worth a prince's ransom."⁹⁶ In the years that followed, however, no actual development of the property occurred. Indeed, in 1901, when one lot owner attempted to put the first house in the tract, Roanoke's City Engineer rejected his building permit on the basis that the municipality still owned the property. "About the only tangible object, as it now appears," a reporter sardonically observed, "is the lonely monument erected on the summit of Woodland Park."⁹⁷

The land boom reached its height during the Woodland sale but hundreds of properties continued to change hands every week until late December 1890, when a freak blizzard halted sales for several days. The three feet of snow dumped by the storm destroyed the Machine Works' blacksmith shop as well as scores of other buildings in town. Hundreds of roofs collapsed, and those that caved in onto woodstoves ignited fires that burned several houses down. The melting snow flooded streets and cellars, and according to most reports, when it finally disappeared the city looked as though it had been shelled and sacked by an invading army. According to several residents, the storm's psychological impact led to widespread reassessment of property values and investments. In the weeks that followed, Henry Trout observed, "our people seemed to have awakened to the fact that the days of inflated values such as they had been going through had passed."⁹⁸ The state real-estate convention, scheduled long before the snow,

⁹⁶ *The Roanoke Herald*, 16 Oct 1890, in Norfolk & Western Scrapbook no. 12, Norfolk & Western Railway Archives, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg.

⁹⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 5 May 1901. In the end, the city gave up its claim to the land, and eventually the park became a residential neighborhood. Roanoke moved the development's long-hidden "Kimball Tower" to Elmwood Park in 1982.

⁹⁸ For the land boom in Roanoke reaching its height in the fall of 1890, see Blair, "Memories of the Land Boom in the Western Part of Virginia," 7-8; and see number of transactions per month and total value of sales in 1890 in *The Roanoke Times*, 1 Jan 1891; for the December blizzard, see *The Roanoke Times*, 24 Dec 1890; for the storm's effect on speculation and Trout's quote, see Recollections of Henry S. Trout in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 12 May 1913, as well as Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western*, 97. The blizzard also chilled local investments in "boomtowns" nearby; see Sprague, "Investing in Appalachia," 142.

opened in Roanoke the following month, and although there may have been signs of disillusionment from native investors, hundreds of out-of-town agents were still eager to get in on the action. “Everywhere within this thriving city are monuments to your energy and wisdom,” the president of the convention informed local delegates, “and throughout the commonwealth your brethren glorying in your achievements, wonder at the magic of the magicians who built so wisely and so well this magic city.”⁹⁹

The spell they cast, however, was largely an illusion. For while land sales in 1890 topped all previous years, with over \$17,000,000 worth of real estate changing hands, sales the next year leveled off, and in 1892 began a free fall that lasted the remainder of the decade. The Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, which had used a hundred pages of its sales book to log transactions in 1889 and 1890, needed only twenty-five additional pages to list sales from 1891 to 1901. Property assessments, which had risen over 300 percent from 1889 to 1890, also lost ground in the ensuing years. Indeed, by 1900, real estate appraisals had fallen below what they had been in 1890.¹⁰⁰ Although many residents got out of the market after the big snow, others lost heavily when the boom fizzled out in 1892. By then, Henry Trout observed, grass and weeds had covered up the streets laid out by the land companies and those with stock in the ventures were “left only with a ‘certificate’ which would not make good wall paper.”¹⁰¹ News of the boom’s collapse in Roanoke chilled investments elsewhere in Southwest Virginia, and by the time the 1893 recession hit, land values in the region had already bottomed out. Later in the decade, after

⁹⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Jan 1891.

¹⁰⁰ For real estate assessments, see McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, Roanoke City, Va.*, 159; for additional evidence of the overall decline in sales, see “Roanoke Land & Improvement Company Sales Book June 1889 – May 1906,” 1-125. The first hundred pages of the sales book represent transactions in 1889 and 1890, while the following twenty-five pages cover all sales for the ensuing ten years.

¹⁰¹ See Recollections of Henry S. Trout in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 8, 12 May 1913 (quote is from 12 May edition); see also Gordon Blair, “Memories of the Land Boom in the Western Part of Virginia,” 8.

manufacturers found a cheaper source of iron elsewhere, Highland property lost even more value.¹⁰²

The experience of those who invested in the Janette Land Company was typical. Many of them bought Janette stock soon after a Richmond businessman and W. P. Dupuy, a Roanoke speculator, organized the firm in the spring of 1890. The company made a down payment on a tract in Southwest Roanoke shortly afterwards and then promptly sold over \$100,000 worth of the property. Those who owned stock in the venture, its president boasted, would soon see “handsome profits upon their investments.”¹⁰³ Business in 1891 did not go as planned, and the following year, the firm notified stockholders that the company was over \$50,000 in debt. “The effects of the many ‘Land Booms’ and their disastrous consequences has been felt in Roanoke city,” the company president explained, noting that the market for land was so abysmal that the firm did not deem it worthwhile to foreclose on \$70,000 in delinquent mortgages. Stockholders, he forecast, “may have to wait some time before they can realize on their investment, yet the chances are that they will eventually secure all of their input with a handsome profit.” Over the next few years, however, the market continued to deteriorate. In 1899, W. P. Dupuy, secretary-treasurer of the firm, called in another 10 percent of stockholders’ subscriptions, explaining that the company also owed over \$7,000 in unpaid taxes and loan interest. The city was preparing to foreclose on its holdings, Dupuy reported, and mortgage payments “are practically uncollectible at this time.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Sprague, “Investing in Appalachia,” 142.

¹⁰³ Information on the company is from “1890 Janette Land Company Stock Certificate,” in Richard Singleton Paulett Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; quote is from “Report of the President of the Janette Land Company,” 26 May 1891, in Alfred J. Morrison Papers, Library of Virginia, Richmond (hereafter cited as Morrison Papers).

¹⁰⁴ Information and 1892 quote are from “Report of the President of the Janette Land Company,” 24 May 1892, Morrison Papers; the 1899 stock call and quote are from “Call in Stock by the Secretary of the Janette Land Company,” 25 July 1899, Morrison Papers.

Richmond businessman Alfred J. Morrison bought two shares of Janette stock in 1890, and over the next thirteen years, he willingly paid 60 percent on his subscription without receiving a single dividend. By 1904, Morrison had had enough and sought legal advice about recouping his investment. The Roanoke lawyer he contacted, however, advised him that a lawsuit would have no merit since the firm “was just one of those cases where the company did not pan out as expected” and the land in question had “decreased in value owing to the collapse of the boom.”¹⁰⁵ Secretary Dupuy died later that year, and the executive who replaced him found the firm’s records in utter disarray. “The company’s receipts,” he informed Morrison and other stockholders, “have not been preserved with any ordinary degree of care.” Bills going back to 1893 were unpaid, and land books, deeds, and corporate papers were missing. The company, he explained, had determined from court records that it still owned some property and was resolved to sell it, clear its debts, and offer whatever was left as the first return to stockholders.¹⁰⁶

Throughout the 1880s and early 1890s, Roanoke’s industries thrived and expanded, natives welcomed and solicited additional enterprises, new manufacturing concerns opened for business, and dozens of homegrown industries started operations. Although outside investors funded much of the industrial development, natives’ booster ethos and entrepreneurial acumen was equally responsible for the growth. Locals drafted the city’s business-friendly tax code and compelled the municipality to purchase hundreds of thousands of dollars of stock in local enterprises. Residents owned most of Roanoke’s real estate agencies and convinced outside speculators to invest millions of dollars in property in and around town. Although most of the

¹⁰⁵ Morrison’s stock coupon receipts are in the receipts file of his Papers at the Library of Virginia; quote is from John M. Hart, “Hart & Hart Attorneys at Law,” Terry Building, Roanoke, to Alfred J. Morrison, Esquire, Long Island, NY, 9 Aug 1904, Morrison Papers; see also, Richard A. Irving, 31 Nassau St., New York City, to Alfred Morrison, Esquire, 120 West 49th Street, New York City, 28 May 1904, Morrison Papers.

¹⁰⁶ Quote and information from “Report of the Secretary of the Janette Land Company,” 25 May 1905, Morrison Papers.

land deals did not result in much actual development, natives reaped huge profits marketing lots to eager Yankee capitalists. Moreover, almost all the land plotted, speculated, and left fallow after the boom became industrial sites or neighborhoods in the early twentieth century.

Roanoke's emergence as the "Magic City" brought accolades from the New South press, which cited the town, along with Atlanta and Birmingham, as an example of modernization taking place in the region. Northern journalists continually compared Roanoke, with its heavy industries and distinctly working-class neighborhoods, to a New England mill town, out of place amongst the mountain hamlets and solitary farms dotting the Highland landscape. By 1890, Roanoke had indeed grown into a town unlike any other in the Old Dominion. It had emerged seemingly from nowhere to become the fourth fastest-growing city in the United States as well as Virginia's fifth largest urban area. It had little in common with places like Richmond, Lynchburg, Petersburg or Danville, which primarily manufactured and distributed tobacco or cotton, or with Norfolk and Newport News, where indigenous laborers built ships or worked in the port trade. In Roanoke, skilled northern workers staffed much of the city's railroad, manufacturing, iron, and machine shop industries, and agriculture played no significant role in the town's development. Although in Roanoke the output of industrial labor was the main source of income, Virginia's top two commercial products up until 1900 were tobacco and gristmill products. Richmond had a small locomotive factory (the only other in operation in the South), but the Roanoke Machine Works was almost solely responsible for railroad-related manufacturing becoming the fifth most profitable industry in the state by the turn of the century.¹⁰⁷

The industrialization of Roanoke, which by 1890 had catapulted the town into the forefront of New South cities, would not have been possible without the guidance of insiders like Henry Trout and Peyton Terry. Northern capital, while essential to the city's industrial growth,

¹⁰⁷ For statistics on growth of Roanoke compared to entire U. S. and Virginia, see Lawrence H. Larsen, *The Rise of the Urban South* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1985), 155, 157; for comparison to production elsewhere in Virginia, see statistics in Moger, "Industrial and Urban Progress in Virginia," 311-23.

would likely have gone elsewhere had Roanoke's businessmen not skillfully courted it. Indeed, it took a combination of inside business acumen and outside capital to create the "Magic City." Had either element been absent, Roanoke would likely never have existed or quickly faded away. In 1893, nearly three years after native real-estate speculator S. W. Jamison erected the "Kimball Tower" to advertise his Woodland Park land scheme, he had the stark, largely abandoned granite column misleadingly inscribed as "an Industrial Monument to Mark the Progress of the City of Roanoke." In clear recognition that natives and newcomers had made such "progress" possible, Jamison listed himself, Big Lick entrepreneur Peyton Terry, and the N&W's Fredrick Kimball and Joseph Sands as the men responsible for such progress.

Chapter Four

Life, Work, and Culture in the Magic City, 1882-1892

Many Roanoke residents, despite their differing geographical backgrounds and political affiliations, came together in the 1880s and 1890s to boost the city in ways that attracted new industries, encouraged investment in land, and turned their home into what New South pundits had labeled the “Magic City.” The community as a whole, however, remained deeply fragmented by race and class. The thousands of new residents who arrived in the 1880s added to these divisions and created a city with several clearly demarcated communities and cultures. Indeed, class and race subdivided the Roanoke community between its white working classes, its white middle and upper classes, and its African American residents. Gender, of course, informed each of these groups and added yet another dimension to all three. None of the communities or cultures operated in a vacuum; each interacted with the other in positive or negative ways and contributed to the overall ethos of the city. Moreover, specific events or celebrations prompted these disparate communities to coalesce. Although class and racial divisions did not simply dissolve during these brief mergers, they did at least temporarily fade enough to generate a sense of municipal identity amongst the entire community.

By 1890, about nine thousand new white residents had arrived in Roanoke, and of the city’s sixteen thousand total residents, 70 percent were white. Many of the white newcomers who moved to town in the 1880s and 1890s came to find work as skilled or semi-skilled laborers. There were at least four thousand white males in town of employable age, and by 1891, local industries employed nearly three thousand of them. Sixteen hundred worked for the Roanoke Machine Works, steel and iron furnaces employed about five hundred, rolling mills, bridge works and a carriage factory provided positions for around seven hundred, and at least five hundred labored for the railroad. Another six hundred white males held skilled construction positions as

carpenters, painters, or bricklayers. The city's skilled and trade-oriented workers stood atop the local labor pay scale. Machinists in the shops, for example, earned between \$2.50 and \$6 per day, construction workers earned from \$2 to \$4 for the same day's work, and railroad workers made between \$30 to \$40 per month. Common or unskilled laborers, by contrast, could at the best only hope to take home \$1 for a day's toil.¹

The lack of an indigenous trained labor force meant that most of the city's skilled laborers and their families arrived from the north or from overseas. Indeed, as William Campbell, pastor of Roanoke's First Presbyterian Church, observed: "Roanoke is a strange place. Its rapid growth has made it one of the most cosmopolitan of cities. People have floated in from every direction."² The massive number of northern newcomers, according to Malcolm W. Bryan, a railroad and land company executive, made Roanoke "more of a Yankee town than any other in the state."³ Most of the city's northern-born industrial workers and their families lived in rental housing in the Northeast owned by the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company (RL&IC). Many of their homes were identical two-story frame dwellings built on small lots, and dozens of them arrived via train in prefabricated form and went up in rapid succession along streets built by the firm. By 1890, the company had put up at least a thousand dwellings around the machine shops, furnaces, and rail yard. It also opened at least one general store in the working-class neighborhood behind the Hotel Roanoke. Many of the northern transplants joined Saint Andrews, the town's only Catholic Church. In the early 1890s, its congregation replaced their original brick

¹ United States Bureau of the Census, *Report on the United States at the Eleventh Census 1890, Part 1* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1895), 389, 483, 823; employment statistics and pay from F. P. Smith, *A Synopsis of Roanoke and her Wonderful Prosperity* (Roanoke: W. M. Yager & Co., 1891), 12, 28; railroad worker pay is from "N. & W. Accounting Department Personal Records No. 1 Feb 1874 to December 1901," Norfolk & Western Railway Archives, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg.

² William C. Campbell, Roanoke, to Editor, *Central*, 12 March 1886, William Creighton Campbell Papers, History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke (cited hereafter as Campbell Papers).

³ Malcolm W. Bryan, Roanoke, to C. M. Zink, Roanoke, 10 Aug 1895, Malcolm W. Bryan Papers, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library (cited hereafter as Bryan Papers).

sanctuary with a four-hundred-seat wooden tabernacle. The church added a private school in 1889 and an orphanage in early 1893.⁴

Thousands of other white laborers arrived from rural areas nearby. Most of them found homes or rooms in the Southwest, and many of them filled semi-skilled or non-skilled trades before getting the training needed to join the skilled labor force. Hundreds moved into housing built by the Roanoke Development Company around the Norwich Lock Works. Julia Via, a widow from Albemarle County, moved her family to town in early 1893, and one of her sons immediately landed a job at the lock factory. By April, Via had purchased a house nearby and taken in six boarders to help pay the \$17 per month mortgage. To further bolster the family income, her youngest son planned to join his brother at the lock works once the school year ended. The contrast between the family farm and Roanoke stunned Via. “You can see more here in one day,” she explained to her sister back in Albemarle County, “than you can there in a year.” The city’s electric streetcar line, which passed in front of their home, fascinated her: “They are crammed and packed full and they go a-flying thru for the big Factory in sight of our house.”⁵ While Roanoke had many advantages over the surrounding counties and country towns, not all who relocated there were impressed. One new resident, for example, complained in an anonymous letter to his pastor that although he had left his farm, moved his family to Roanoke, and attempted to make an “honest living,” he had found it impossible because of “the narrow hearted people of this place.” The experience, he explained, had left him entirely disillusioned:

I must say with all candor that the people of Roanoke City are the most narrow minded selfish meanest people that it has been my lot to be cast with. As soon as they get the last cent out of your pocket they think they will ever get then they are ready to let them go to the Devil or any where. But for the suffering of women & children the author of this note

⁴ Margaret Mary Myer, “Father Lynch Founder,” 3-8, TMs (1941), Emma B. Lynch Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

⁵ Julia F. (Harris) Via, Roanoke, to “Sister,” Susan M. (Harris) Ward, Albemarle County, Virginia, 10 April 1893, Harris Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

would like to see the City of Roanoke burned to the ground the land ploughed up & planted in corn.⁶

Many of the men employed in local industries frequented the town's numerous working-class saloons when their shifts ended. Like late nineteenth-century workers throughout the nation, the city's laborers claimed barrooms as their territory and as space exclusively for white male camaraderie, reciprocity, and escape from the industrial capitalist environment in which they spent their days. The town's upper classes shunned saloons, preferring instead to drink in their homes or in private social clubs. Although barroom culture stood outside the values of the Victorian world in which it existed, it was an alternative culture, not an oppositional one, like unions or political activism.⁷ By 1892, there were fifty-six bars open for business in Roanoke; the vast majority were little more than shotgun shacks with two-story false fronts located on or near Railroad Avenue.⁸ Most, like the White Elephant Saloon on Nelson Street, catered to laboring men by providing "beer from wood" at "five cents a schooner" along with complimentary food.⁹ Other barrooms offered recreation or attractions. The Rustic, for example, provided pool or billiard tables, while Poteet's & Company on First Avenue had a bowling alley, and the Arcadia Saloon on Railroad Avenue had a cage with two large owls hanging from its entrance.¹⁰

Clandestine gambling dens in the back rooms of some of the bars or on the second floors of downtown businesses did brisk business as well. Access to the establishments, according to a

⁶ "From a Son of Old Virginia," Roanoke, to William C. Campbell, Roanoke, 3 May 1884, Campbell Papers.

⁷ For an explanation of the role of the late nineteenth-century saloon, see Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), chapter two; Henry M. McKiven, Jr., *Iron and Steel: Class, Race, and Community in Birmingham, Alabama, 1875-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), chapter four.

⁸ See statistics published in *The Roanoke Times*, 6 May 1893.

⁹ See ad in *Roanoke Daily Times*, 20 April 1890.

¹⁰ See ads in *The Roanoke Leader*, 11 July 1885; *Roanoke Daily Times*, 11 May 1890; *The Roanoke Times*, 8 April 1892.

reporter given a tour of two of the city's most popular poker establishments, required an elaborate "countersign" by patrons. The operators protected those two houses so well, he explained, that "any effort on the part of the police to dislodge them has so far proven futile."¹¹ Although most of the community tolerated orderly gaming houses, a visit by revivalist Sam Jones in the spring of 1892 prompted a temporary crusade against the establishments. Roanoke was "infested with gamblers," one opponent observed, noting that churchgoers "would be surprised at the number of dens in operation here." With Sam Jones's backing, he went on, the time had finally come to stamp out "these gambling hells."¹² Local authorities, however, were far less enthusiastic and did little to stop the operations.

Workers and their families had a variety of inexpensive forms of entertainment available as well. Before it sold Woodland Park, the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company built a pavilion on one of its hills and organized popular Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday night dances. The Roanoke Machine Works Band, organized in 1883 by Canadians employed by the railroad shops, provided the melodies.¹³ The company tightly managed each dance and promised patrons that "good order will be kept."¹⁴ The sale of the park in 1890, according to *The (Roanoke) Daily Bee*, created a "great misfortune" for the town's laboring classes since it left them with no suitable outdoor recreation space. Parks, much like saloons, served as an outlet for defusing social tensions, and the city's lack of such areas was a concern to business leaders in town. Although *The Daily Bee* pointed this out and begged city officials to fund a new park to "afford some

¹¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 March 1891.

¹² *The Roanoke Times*, 17 April 1892.

¹³ *The Roanoke Leader*, 17 May 1883; additional information on the band is from *The Roanoke Times*, 17 Nov 1892.

¹⁴ *The Roanoke Leader*, 24 July 1884.

pleasure to the thousands of tied-down men and women,” municipal officials allocated no money for the project.¹⁵

Elsewhere in town, workers and their families found other ways to amuse themselves. A roller skating rink opened downtown in late 1885 and immediately began drawing in hundreds of patrons per night.¹⁶ Strolling along Salem Avenue and Jefferson Street on weekend evenings also emerged as a common pastime. On a summer night in 1890, according to one reporter, six hundred persons passed by him in five minutes. “Saturday night,” he explained, “is not loafing time for people who work all week. The crowds on the streets do not loiter along, but move with a speed that would make dizzy the visitors from slower going communities.”¹⁷ On weekends, according to another correspondent, vacant lots along Salem Avenue were “infested” with “fakirs” and quack medicine salesmen: “here has congregated a collection of traveling museums, fakers, merry-go rounds and other schemes to beguile the pennies from the pockets of the man who does not know any better.” For a nickel, he explained, passersby could even place bets on a mechanical horse race.¹⁸ Those looking for outdoor activities took walks along paths beside the river, visited the water company’s reservoir, or hiked to the summit of Mill Mountain.

At least some of those who migrated to Roanoke found no work and resorted to begging to survive. The city’s position as the junction of two major railroads made it easily accessible not only for those riding in passenger coaches, but also for hundreds of unemployed homeless men and their families who stole rides into town inside boxcars or empty coal hoppers. Stealing rides into Roanoke was not only illegal, but also dangerous. Accounts of stowaways slipping from hiding spots and being crushed under the wheels of locomotives appeared frequently, and most local reporters showed little sympathy for the unlucky. In one typical story, a writer for the

¹⁵ *The (Roanoke) Daily Bee*, 6 July 1892; for the role of parks in defusing class tensions, see Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, chapter five.

¹⁶ *The Roanoke Leader*, 2 Jan 1886.

¹⁷ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 31 Aug 1890.

¹⁸ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 27 May 1890.

Roanoke Times explained that a “negro tramp,” who had been run over and killed after he lost his grip on a coal hopper, had died “by his own folly by beating his way on the train.”¹⁹ Other segments of the city’s itinerant population arrived on foot or horseback from the surrounding countryside. Whether drawn to Roanoke by the prospect of employment or attracted by its potential as a spot for begging or hustling, most of the town’s homeless lived together in camps on the outskirts of the city. In the spring of 1890, for instance, police discovered an encampment of twenty men, women, and children, living in the meadow beside Crozer Furnace. This was not unusual, according to the *Roanoke Daily Times*, which explained that “For a long time the grove opposite the furnace has been the camping place for all the wandering tribes of gypsies that pass this way, and there is a band of nomads nearly always there.”²⁰

Residents showed little sympathy for vagrants in their midst. Indeed, in the summer of 1890 passersby left a black drifter who was too ill to move lying beside the road for several days before local authorities finally carted him off to the Alms House.²¹ Although most of the “tramps” passing through the city were harmless, others resorted to aggressive tactics to solicit money or food. In the fall of 1890, for example, a large “gang of toughs” living in the woods around east Roanoke stopped passing carriages by grabbing their horses by the bridle to beg for contributions.²² Police eventually drove that group away, but others quickly took their place. In early 1891, for instance, residents living near the Roanoke Stockyards complained that dozens of “tramps” had been so “boisterous” and had been making such “violent threats” when denied charity that the entire neighborhood was afraid to go out after dark. The vagrants, according to one reporter, had a camp nearby and on cold nights slept amongst the livestock inside the stables. Moreover, he explained, “They utilize the cow heads thrown from slaughter houses near Tinker

¹⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Nov 1890.

²⁰ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 18 May 1890.

²¹ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 11 July 1890.

²² *The Roanoke Times*, 26 Oct 1890.

Creek by roasting them for food.”²³ Other transients escaped the cold by sleeping near piles of warm slag beside furnaces. The warmth, however, was potentially hazardous since those sleeping nearby occasionally had hot slag dumped on top of them.²⁴

Another portion of Roanoke’s white residents formed its upper class. The city’s elite whites came from two distinct groups: one composed of longtime, indigenous families like the Trout’s or Terry’s, and the other consisting of northerners connected to the Clark Company or other industries. In spite of political and religious differences, native and newcomer elites meshed easily into a single, unified class. Indeed, the only real difference between them was that each lived in a different section of the city. Roanoke’s native upper classes tended to reside in the Southwest or in the West End, while its Yankee executives and professionals had Queen Anne mansions in the Southeast or on Orchard Hill. Most of the newcomers arrived from Philadelphia or other northeastern cities and all of them transplanted an urbane culture to their unrefined new home. Their presence left a distinctive imprint on the city’s elite society by prompting it to move much more quickly into long-established northeastern forms of bourgeois culture.

Some of the northern transplants lived at the Hotel Roanoke and did not build homes until much later in the decade. Malcolm W. Bryan, a Shenandoah Valley Railroad executive and superintendent of its real estate and development subsidiary, The Virginia Company, moved to the hotel from Philadelphia in the spring of 1883. Bryan had a room there for the next two years, and after he married his Philadelphia fiancée, Ann DeHaven, the couple moved into a two-room suite. Before DeHaven arrived, Bryan attempted to prepare his privileged bride-to-be for their lodgings, complaining in one missive that the carpets were “abominable” and the ceiling was in

²³ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 March 1891.

²⁴ See story about slag dumped on “colored tramp” in *The Roanoke Times*, 31 Oct 1893.

such wretched condition that he had demanded the hotel replace it.²⁵ Life at the hotel, he cautioned, was extremely public and fraught with potential for discomfiture: “Remember love, we mustn’t do any billing or cooing before people. Hotels are gossip shops.” On the positive side, Bryan explained, Roanoke, even in its primitive stages, was much safer than most of Philadelphia. He never bothered to lock his door, he told DeHaven, because “in this part of the world there are no thieves, housebreakers or tramps.”²⁶ Once the couple moved in, they resided in the hotel until workers finished their Queen Anne mansion “Oak Hurst” near Orchard Hill in the Southwest.

Although the children of Roanoke’s working classes and blacks had limited educational options, wealthy parents could choose from a variety of private educational institutions in the city. Mrs. Gilmer’s Finishing School for Young Ladies, which began classes in the fall of 1886, had over seventy students by the early 1890s.²⁷ That same year, the National Business College opened, as did the Alleghany Institute, a private boys’ school operated by the Valley Baptist Association. The Institute used the former Rorer Park Hotel and its six acres of grounds on upper Campbell Avenue as its campus, and local lawyer Lucian Cocke served as president of its board of trustees.²⁸ Roanoke College, in nearby Salem, and Hollins Institute, a college for females in Roanoke County, provided close higher educational facilities for the sons and daughters of local

²⁵ Background on Bryan is from Malcolm W. Bryan III, “The Early Days at Hotel Roanoke,” 1-5, TMs, Bryan Papers; undated Raymond Barnes article on Bryan in *The Roanoke Times*, in Bryan Papers; and Town Council of Roanoke, “Census of Town of Roanoke, December 1883,” vol. 2, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library, which lists Bryan along with railroad executives W. W. Coe and Joseph Sands as residing at the Hotel Roanoke; Malcolm W. Bryan, Hotel Roanoke, to Ann DeHaven, Philadelphia, 16 Sept 1885, quoted in Bryan III, “Early Days at Hotel,” 2.

²⁶ Malcolm W. Bryan, Hotel Roanoke, to Ann DeHaven, Philadelphia, (Fall 1885), quoted in Bryan III, “Early Days at Hotel,” 2.

²⁷ *The Roanoke Leader*, 29 May; 17 July 1886; Writers’ Program of the Works Progress Administration in the State of Virginia, *Roanoke: Story of County and City* (Roanoke: Roanoke City School Board, 1942), 262.

²⁸ WPA, *Roanoke: Story of County and City*, 263-65; Raymond P. Barnes, *A History of Roanoke* (Radford, VA: Commonwealth Press, 1968), 159.

elites. Moreover, in early 1893 the president of the Wesleyan Female Institute in Staunton, Virginia, picked Roanoke as the location for the Virginia College for Young Ladies. The institution, which purchased ten acres in South Roanoke for its campus, was, according to *The Roanoke Times*, the “crowning ornament” for the city as well as a facility that would make the town “a far more desirable place of residence.” By summer, the college had finished a four-floor pavilion of classrooms, chapel, and forty-five dorm rooms, and it had hired twenty-five faculty members.²⁹ The school recruited over a hundred boarding students as well as numerous day scholars and, according to its president, planned to offer a “progressive” educational experience so that each student would get “a course of study best fitted to her natural tendencies and future vocation.”³⁰ Indeed, that fall its academic offerings included Reading, Geography, English, History, Astronomy, Chemistry, Greek, Latin, and French, as well as “finishing” courses like Speech Elocution, Moral Philosophy, Harmony, Guitar, and Calisthenics.³¹ The college’s 1893-94 session, according to a local railroad official, was “a most phenomenal success.” The school, he reported, was “full to its utmost capacity” and had a student body that included “the nicest girls in Roanoke,” all of whom “go out in the electric car every morning.”³²

The city’s elite classes found a variety of ways to entertain themselves while simultaneously differentiating their status from other residents. They ignored working-class forms of entertainment, such as saloons, bowling allies, street fairs, and skating rinks, preferring instead to confine themselves to a select group of exclusive events, societies, and organizations. Although upper classes held private social functions in their homes, it was not until the summer of 1883 that the town’s “most prominent and best known citizens” staged what *The Roanoke Leader*

²⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 20 Feb 1893.

³⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 4 June 1893.

³¹ See courses listed on Virginia College for Young Ladies, Official Report Card of Miss Bessie Linkous, Oct 1893, Linkous Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

³² Malcolm W. Bryan, Roanoke, to C. D. Epes, Crewe, Virginia, 13 March 1894, Bryan Papers.

described as “the first social entertainment ever given in Roanoke” – a dance at the Rorer Park Hotel with music provided by the Red Sulfur Springs Quadrille.³³ Another “hop,” “gotten up by a committee of gentlemen,” followed a couple weeks later with music by the newly formed Roanoke Machine Works Band. The waltzing, one attendee boasted, “was kept up in a lively manner until nearly 1 o’clock a.m.”³⁴

Until later in the decade, the town’s single males outnumbered its females. For upper-class white men, most of whom arrived from Philadelphia or other northern cities to work for the Clark Company, an acute lack of eligible elite females compounded the overall gender differential. In December 1883, fifteen of them attempted to remedy the problem by creating the Roanoke German Club, a dancing society that “imported” single, upper-class females from other cities. The bachelors supplied their dates’ railroad tickets and rooms at the Hotel Roanoke and held their elaborate dinners and formal dances in the hotel’s ballroom. The first affair, according to *The Leader*, was the “most brilliant and ‘recherché’ society event that has yet occurred in our city.” The dance was chaperoned by the wives of three railroad officials and featured melodies supplied by the Roanoke Machine Works “Orchestra,” which, the paper observed, “we are glad to say, has improved very much in their dance music.”³⁵

The club’s membership expanded throughout the decade, and its monthly gatherings at the Hotel Roanoke always received prominent and extensive coverage from the local press. In a typical example from the fall of 1889, the *Roanoke Daily Times* put its account on the front page under the headline: “A Gay and Gallant Assemblage; Beautiful and Elaborate Costumes; Music and Feasting Contribute to Pleasures of Occasion.” The paper praised the genteel residents who were responsible for such a sophisticated affair and described in detail the guests, the decorations,

³³ *The Roanoke Leader*, 2 Aug 1883.

³⁴ *The Roanoke Leader*, 16 Aug 1883.

³⁵ Origins of society are from Roanoke German Club, *Roanoke German Club Golden Anniversary Ball 1884-1934* (Roanoke: Privately printed, 1934), in archives of History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke; *The Roanoke Leader*, 27 Dec 1883.

menu, dances, and toasts.³⁶ As the balls grew more exceedingly decorous, they began to feature orchestras from Richmond, “favors” from New York, and refreshments from Philadelphia. Dinners were often served at tables decorated with pyramids of fruit and consisted of multiple courses featuring oysters, iced bouillon, fried smelt, tongue galantine, diamond back Maryland terrapin, quail, lobster, and champagne. The society required each participant to arrange dance partners in advance using a special card printed for the affair, and it limited dancing to polkas, gavottes, and waltzes. The spectrum of women who attended the gatherings grew more cosmopolitan as well, and by the late 1880s, it was commonplace for several of the females to have arrived from New York or Philadelphia. They were often accompanied by their own chaperones, and before departing the following afternoon, they were treated to a “morning German” and urbane luncheon.³⁷

“Active” membership in the club was limited to sixty-five bachelors, strictly circumscribed to genteel, young professionals or white-collar workers “of good moral and social standing,” and open only to those whom the association approved via a unanimous vote. The club’s rules prohibited invitations to non-member males and stipulated that even members had to present their special invitation to get in. Their doorman barred latecomers as well as those not in “full dress attire.” The society banned bachelors from the second floor of the hotel, preventing even the hint of impropriety with their dates lodging upstairs. A “floor manager” supervised dance cards and prevented members from “stealing in” (i.e., cutting in) by stopping the music until the offender returned to his seat. The association made “stags” sit out half the dances, and it fined or expelled anyone guilty of violating the rules. In 1891, forty-six of the club’s sixty-three active members had listings in the city directory. Of these, there were twelve railroad clerks, eight lawyers, six bank clerks or cashiers, four real estate agents, four druggists, two contractors, two managers, two draftsmen, a railroad executive, an architect, an engineer, an insurance agent, and

³⁶ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 9 Nov 1889.

³⁷ Roanoke German Club, *Roanoke German Club Golden Anniversary Ball*.

a banker. Twenty-eight of the bachelors lived in the Southwest, eight in the Hotel Roanoke, three in other hotels, six in the Southeast, and one in the West End. None resided in the Northeast, the city's working-class district. The sixty "contributing" (i.e., married) members were among the city's most elite businessmen, and included Peyton Terry, Henry Trout, S. S. Brooke, Lucian Cocke, and several Norfolk & Western executives.³⁸

Although the German Club's members and their dates or wives were among the city's most elite, genteel, and upright residents, in early 1893, local ministers held a conference to debate the morality of the group. After listening to testimony from William Campbell and other pastors, including one who maintained that "the german originated in the slums and of the bawdy houses of France," and another who claimed it was "the origin of degeneracy," those gathered unanimously approved a statement calling for the disbandment of the club. They afterwards published their opinion in local papers, explaining that: "Whereas the dance known as the german cultivates immodesty and tends to produce immorality, therefore it be resolved that as ministers of the gospel we will do all in our power to induce the people under our instruction to desist from this hurtful amusement."³⁹ The appeal, however, had no apparent affect on the German Club, which only four days later held its monthly dance. The affair, according to one paper, was "The Event of the Season" where "Mirth and music reigned supreme." Roanoke's "society circles" turned out in droves and, the paper explained, "beautiful women and their gallant knights entered into the spirit of the occasion and enjoyed themselves to the utmost."⁴⁰

William C. Noland, chairman of the German Club's executive committee, was a typical "active" member of the club whose experiences offer a glimpse of upper-class life as well as a

³⁸ Occupation and addresses of active members derived from cross-listing names in Roanoke German Club, *Constitution and By-Laws of the Friday German Club of Roanoke, Virginia* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co, 1892), 17-18, with *Williams' City Directory of Roanoke, Virginia, 1891-1892* (Binghamton, NY: J. E. Williams, 1891); rules are from *Constitution and By-Laws*, 3-18 (first quote is from 3; second is from 15).

³⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 31 Jan 1893.

⁴⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 4 Feb 1893.

rare, firsthand appraisal of the city's "society circles." Noland, who grew up in Hanover County, Virginia, and earned an architecture degree, worked for firms in New York City and Philadelphia before moving to Roanoke to start his own architecture business.⁴¹ The early 1890s real estate and business boom in Roanoke, coupled with its overall lack of architects, made the city an attractive choice, and Noland assumed correctly that it was the perfect place to launch his career. He arrived in January 1891 and quickly secured long-term lodging at the Hotel Roanoke as well as a room for his business and ad space in local papers. The downtown office in the Commercial Bank Building, he told his mother, was "right in the middle of things," and staying at the hotel made good business sense, he explained, because it was "the headquarters for the northern fellows with money."⁴²

Within a week, Noland had used his Philadelphia connections to arrange a visit with Clark Company executive Frederick Kimball, who gave him a letter of recommendation to present to Joseph Sands, the general manager of the Norfolk & Western. Roanoke's land boom was in full swing, Noland told his mother, and he was attempting to "gradually learn which way the town is likely to build" before soliciting real estate firms for business.⁴³ The contact with Kimball paid off a few days afterwards, when W. W. Coe, an N&W executive, hired the young architect to design and supervise a small addition to his home on Orchard Hill. The job and the city's boom ethos were enough to make the decision to relocate look like a good one. "Oh!" he

⁴¹ See letters of recommendation in Notice of Eligibility – Special Examination, U. S. Civil Service Commission, Washington, D. C., 10 Dec 1888, in letters to William Churchill Noland, Noland Family Papers, Manuscripts Division, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville (cited hereafter as Noland Family Papers).

⁴² William C. Noland, Hotel Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 7 Jan 1891, William Churchill Noland Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond (cited hereafter as William C. Noland Papers).

⁴³ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 12 Jan 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

exclaimed in the next letter, “This is a great town.”⁴⁴ Noland was already convinced that there were “lots of chances for making 3 or 4 dollars for one” in real estate and was trying desperately to come up with sufficient funds for a substantial investment in a land company.⁴⁵

During the next month, however, Noland landed no new clients. He nevertheless hired a “muddy-footed white boy” to sweep his office and maintain its coal fired stove.⁴⁶ There were some good prospects on the horizon, he informed his mother, and a few of them would assuredly “be ripe before long.”⁴⁷ In the meantime, Noland continued to make contacts around town. One new acquaintance invited him to a “very good” supper party at the hotel that included “wild duck, done to a turn & terrapin etc. & washed down with 2 quarts of Mum’s extra dry.” He also helped found “a club of engineers and architects.”⁴⁸ Although over the following month he again failed to find any clients and had to lay off his office boy, Noland entered a design for the new Roanoke Hospital and felt good about his chances for getting the contract. In the meantime, he told his mother, he was running out of money, had yet to receive payment for work on the Coe house, and needed a loan.⁴⁹

Noland formulated his entry for the hospital job from seventeen pages of notes taken during extensive interviews with local doctors. The plans he drew up included their suggestions about hallways, laundry rooms, “water closets,” heating, and even where to store patients

⁴⁴ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 18 Jan 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁴⁵ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 25 Jan 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁴⁶ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 15 Feb 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁴⁷ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 1 March 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁴⁸ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 8 March 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁴⁹ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 5 April 1891, William C. Noland Papers; William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 12 April 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

clothing. The hospital, one physician had explained, was only going to have patients “that get well or die in a reasonably short period of time” and would therefore not need a separate dining room for each ward.” It would, however, have to have a segregated “colored dining room” as well as a separate ward for all black patients. The committee of doctors and businessmen behind the Roanoke Hospital Association was impressed with Noland’s design and voted to take a chance on the untested architect.⁵⁰ Moreover, he also won the superintendent job on a new Episcopal church and the Roanoke Development Company hired him to draw plans for the Norwich Lock Works factory.⁵¹

Socially, things for a time looked to be picking up for Noland as well. He helped build a tennis court behind the hotel using chicken wire for the net, and he and a group of men had begun playing regularly. Even more importantly, he informed his mother, “some regular society girls” had checked in: “Two Misses Pechins of Cleveland who have been nearly everywhere. So there are enough to make a crowd.”⁵² A month later, however, Noland sadly confessed that he had been far more socially active in Philadelphia and had “hardly any friends here to write about.” “Roanoke,” he explained, “is unsatisfactory to me socially, so far, but I hope to become better informed as to the lay of the social land and then find congenial spots here and there.” On the other hand, single women in his new home had very few elite bachelors from which to choose, creating a dramatic contrast between “the social advantages of a place like this and an old wealthy town like Philadelphia.” Noland, too conceited to appreciate the two most recent gatherings he had attended, told his mother that he felt nothing but disdain for his fellow guests and hosts:

⁵⁰ Roanoke Hospital Memoranda Book, Memoranda Books of William C. Noland, Noland Family Papers; see also ad for Noland that lists the Roanoke Hospital as one of his buildings in *Sholes’ Directory of the City of Roanoke, November 1, 1892* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1892), inside front cover.

⁵¹ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 10 May 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁵² William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 19 April 1891, William C. Noland Papers; William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 21 June 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

I found the ladies surrounded by many young men who don't suit my taste. The ladies are, I dare say, as smart and so forth naturally as any; but the conversations, which were naturally general were not interesting and the assemblages were so cosmopolitan that I felt not at all honored in being invited. I hope I am not a snob; but I have been knocking about and met enough people to know that I prefer those who have inherited enough good blood and been brought up among enough well bred and highly honorable ladies and gentlemen to make them exclusive in their acquaintances and certainly in their intimate friends.⁵³

By summer, the collapse of Roanoke's real estate boom had diminished Noland's business and had even led to some clients, including the Norwich Lock Works, not paying "with the promptness" that he expected. The one prospect at hand, he told his mother, was the "colored pastor of the negro church" who had inquired about a design for a new sanctuary. The job would bring in some needed funds, he explained, especially since he required African American clients "to be more prompt in paying me than the whites."⁵⁴ The Federal Government planned to build a new post office in Roanoke, and Noland, who had passed the Civil Service architecture exam a few years earlier and worked as chief assistant on the Philadelphia City Hall project, believed his chances for the job were decent. The only problem, he explained, was that there was another young architect in town who was a staunch Republican, and with patronage in the hands of the Harrison administration, party affiliation could make the difference.⁵⁵

By then, the summer social season was in full swing, and Noland, like most other elite residents, frequented springs in the area to escape the heat and dust of the city.⁵⁶ Indeed, after a

⁵³ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 31 May 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁵⁴ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 7 June 1891, William C. Noland Papers; for Norwich Company not paying, see William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 29 June 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁵⁵ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 5 July 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁵⁶ Roanoke was in the center of the "springs region" of Virginia. Each catered to an upper-class clientele and offered lodging, food, and entertainment in addition to baths in the

visit to Blue Ridge Springs, he told his mother that most upper-class residents “stay there in the summer and come to Roanoke every day.”⁵⁷ Earlier that year, Noland moved to a boarding house and quickly become friends with John Payne, a fellow boarder and bachelor. The two young men traveled the circuit of local springs, often renting rooms at each one for several days. That August both were invited to a “morning German” at Alleghany Springs, but only Payne had accepted. The idea of “dancing in the high noon of an August day,” Noland informed his mother, was far too decadent and unseemly for him.⁵⁸ Noland instead arrived at the springs a few days later to visit the Howards, family friends from Richmond. Their daughter Annie, he explained, was flirtatious and beautiful, and had been his date at several Germans there. Annie was among dozens of eligible women staying at the springs for the summer. Indeed, there were so many that Noland asked his mother to send his younger brother Frank for a visit so he could “look the field over and we can see what can be done.”⁵⁹

In the fall, Noland and Payne entered a tennis tournament in Salem, and, he reported, they were going to a “big German” the night before. Noland, who wanted to leave early and get some rest, had not intended to take a date but had asked “a Miss Harrison of New York” if she had an engagement, “supposing, of course, that she had,” and found himself with “a very sweet partner and perhaps a good dancer; but I’ll feel worse on Tuesday than I should like at the tournament.”⁶⁰ The German lasted until four in the morning, and Noland left for Salem only a few

spring water. See, Thomas Bruce, *Southwest Virginia and Shenandoah Valley* (Richmond: J.L. Hill Pub. Co., 1891), 135.

⁵⁷ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 5 July 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁵⁸ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 10 Aug 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁵⁹ William C. Noland, Alleghany Springs, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 16 Aug 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁶⁰ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 6 Sept 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

hours later. “We arrived,” he told his mother, “just in time for me to change my clothes and get a good licking at tennis.”⁶¹

Although most local businesses had suffered from the collapse of the land boom, according to Noland there had still been “great additions and improvements in the town” since he had arrived ten months earlier. He nevertheless was still having trouble finding a steady stream of clients and had to admit to his family that “I am only managing to make buckle and tongue meet; but that is something.”⁶² He contacted local Democrats concerning the post office commission, and although they and U. S. Senator Edward Daniel wrote letters in his favor, the contract went to his competition. On the bright side, the Roanoke Development Company gave him a job that December to draw plans for a combination company store and boarding house near the Norwich Lock Works “to be built of wood & be as cheap as possible.”⁶³ Moreover, early the following year, after Noland partnered with Horace de Saussure to create Noland & de Saussure Architects, the backers of the city’s new Academy of Music hired the firm to design their venue.⁶⁴ Despite these successes, however, Noland relocated to Richmond to become partner in another firm. During his Richmond career, he went on to design numerous prestigious projects, including the Jefferson Davis Memorial on Monument Avenue, the Eastern State Mental Hospital, Mary Baldwin College’s McGlun Hall, and Richmond’s St. James Episcopal Church.⁶⁵

As Noland’s example illustrates, Roanoke’s elite residents socialized in a variety of ways, but always within the circumscribed limits of Victorian decorum and usually entirely within the

⁶¹ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 13 Sept 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁶² William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 25 Oct 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁶³ William C. Noland, Roanoke, to Mrs. Mary E. Noland, Hanover County, Virginia, 6 Dec 1891, William C. Noland Papers.

⁶⁴ See architecture credit given in *The Roanoke Times*, 8 Oct 1892.

⁶⁵ See assorted articles and photos in William Churchill Noland, Newsclippings and Printed Material File, Noland Family Papers.

relatively small cadre of local upper classes. Like successful businessmen and their families in places like Atlanta or Nashville, the city's upper classes created or patronized institutions that certified and advertised their status. Participation in the New South's "social circles" required more than money; it was essential to live in the right neighborhood, belong to the correct clubs, associations, and charity organizations, fraternize with only fellow elites, and attend only the most refined entertainments. Roanoke's upper classes, although from two geographically distinct backgrounds, were no different, and in the 1880s and 1890s, they subtly created their own exclusive world away from the city's working classes and blacks. They lived in Queen Anne or Italianesque mansions in specific neighborhoods, formed select social organizations, belonged to professional societies, attended only private educational institutions, established or belonged to numerous charities, and patronized only "high brow" culture.⁶⁶

One of the most obvious ways that the city's elites differentiated themselves and celebrated their class was by staging elaborate and exclusive parties on the grounds and inside their mansions. The city's press, always on the lookout for ways to prove that Roanoke was not a raw and unsophisticated "hick town," gave the affairs prominent and detailed coverage. *The Roanoke Leader*, for example, put an account of "an early English tea" hosted by Mrs. and Miss Terry at their Elmwood estate on its front page. Candles illuminated the grounds, its reporter observed, a choir provided melodies, and the one hundred guests, "all attired in handsome party costumes," experienced "an evening of rare enjoyment, and one never to be forgotten by anyone present."⁶⁷ At another society event – a "drive whilst" party held in a "spacious mansion" on Mountain Avenue – a correspondent from the *Roanoke Daily Times* reported that an Italian band stationed on the landing of the stairway greeted the dozens of couples who attended. "Among the

⁶⁶ For an analysis of upper classes in New South cities, see Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), chapter eight; Steve Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies and Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta, 1880-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 1-11.

⁶⁷ *The Roanoke Leader*, 17 July 1886.

numerous handsome entertainments given in our social circles during the season just closing,” he explained, “this one will be remembered always.”⁶⁸ Other members of the upper class staged fêtes that were even more creative. Ferdinand Rorer, for instance, held a “boating party” on the Roanoke River. Rorer had six boats built for the occasion and hired the Machine Works Band to play on the banks of the stream. The multi-colored boats, according to *The Leader*, “glided over the bright, clear waters, freighted with happy couples, whose joyous laugh mingled with the notes of music, presenting a scene that was indeed fairy tale like.”⁶⁹ Another group of wealthy locals held a jousting tournament and ball. “Knights” taking part in the affair paraded down Salem Avenue to the baseball grounds where M. C. Thomas, “Knight of Roanoke,” won the competition. Afterwards the “knights” and their “ladies,” decked out in medieval costumes, dined on a midnight feast at the Hotel Roanoke and danced until two in the morning.⁷⁰

Many of Roanoke’s elites made “expeditions” to McAfee’s Knob, an outcropping of boulders at the summit of a nearby mountain. The spot, unlike Mill Mountain above the city, was far enough away to prevent easy access by the less wealthy, which made it the ideal location for elaborate picnics and camping trips. The journey to the top, even on horseback, however, was sometimes too much for the city’s “delicate” ladies to endure. On one Fourth of July expedition, for example, nine of the fourteen women on the trip dropped out and missed the “scene of beauty and grandeur” that the others witnessed “spread out beneath them.”⁷¹ Although access to Mill Mountain was open to all in town, in 1891 the Roanoke Gas & Water Company, which had acquired the property from its sister firm, the RL&IC, moved to turn it into the exclusive domain of elites. That summer, it hired a local contractor to build a \$10,000 hotel and \$2,000 observatory

⁶⁸ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 12 Feb 1892.

⁶⁹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 4 Sept 1884.

⁷⁰ *The Roanoke Leader*, 10 Oct 1885.

⁷¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 July 1892.

on the summit of the peak, nine hundred feet above the city.⁷² When completed, the Rockledge Inn featured broad verandas, stone fireplaces, a rustic dinning area, tennis and croquet courts, a four-story observation tower, and a private coach that ran from the depot to the top of Mill Mountain. At the formal opening in May 1892, the first group of guests included Clark Company executives Frederick Kimball and Clarence Clark as well as local luminaries Henry Trout, Peyton Terry, Lucian Cocke, and Doctor Joseph Gale. The Inn was impressive, and local papers were quick to predict that during the upcoming summer “the city will flee to the mountain for relief.”⁷³ The hotel, with its “magnificent view and delicious cool breezes” did indeed quickly become a popular “dinner and dancing resort,” albeit one with an exclusively elite clientele.⁷⁴

Although the city’s upper classes could choose from a variety of traveling entertainers performing in venues around town, until the early 1890s, when a group of local businessmen funded the Academy of Music, Roanoke’s theaters lacked the “high brow” performances and ornate aesthetic that clearly set them apart as elite space. Initially, Rorer Hall – Roanoke’s first seat of government – served as the town’s only entertainment venue and featured acts like Signor Bosco the “famous wizard,” or “Night in Wonderland,” a traveling stereopticon exhibition. General admission for each show was only thirty-five cents, and even “reserved seats” cost just fifty cents, which allowed a wide spectrum of residents to attend.⁷⁵ In the spring of 1886, the city rented out the upper floor of its new Market House to a theater manager who named it the “Opera House.” The venue rarely offered entertainment befitting its pompous title. Indeed, more often

⁷² Contract between Roanoke Gas & Water Co. and F. D. Booth to Build Mill Mtn Observatory, 25 Aug 1891, History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke; Contract between Roanoke Gas & Water Co. and F. D. Booth to Build Mill Mtn Tavern, 25 Aug 1891, History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke.

⁷³ *The Roanoke Times*, 4 May 1892.

⁷⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 1 June 1892.

⁷⁵ See ads in *The Roanoke Leader*, 4 Jan; 3 May 1883.

than not, it was the site for shows such as “Sun’s New Phantasma and Refined Novelty Company,” which featured the “black arts” along with a “miniature carnival.”⁷⁶

The first floor of the Opera House was a farmers’ market and butcher shop, and by day, the streets around Market House were crowded with wagons offering produce. Most of the vendors left behind rotting fruit and vegetables, and their teams of horses littered the area with manure. The venue itself was relatively unadorned and indecorous and had undifferentiated seating that placed different classes and races in close proximity. The city’s blacks could rarely afford to attend shows, but did so in enough numbers to raise concerns among the town’s whites. While the city’s upper classes patronized the Opera House, they eventually sought ways to create a more refined and segregated space in a more dignified setting. In late 1890, a group of “the most prominent men in Roanoke” organized a joint stock company to fund construction of a \$95,000 Academy of Music on Salem Avenue, several blocks away from the congested and filthy Market Square.⁷⁷ When completed, the venue had eight “private boxes” for wealthy patrons as well as a small “second gallery” for blacks that could only be entered from the rear and had no access to any other part of the building. It had capacity for fifteen hundred patrons, featured electric lighting, marble floors, an interior designed by Monsieur Horace de Saussure – “a French artist of celebrity” – and a dome rising eighty feet above the street. Performances at the Academy consisted primarily of operas, classical music, and sophisticated plays. It also served as the venue for dozens of noted speakers, including Thomas Nelson Page, whose spring 1892 reading from Marse Chan and interpretation of “the old-time Virginia plantation negro” delighted a packed house of the “leading people of Roanoke.”⁷⁸ Patrons who chose not to use their own carriages to

⁷⁶ See Sun’s ad in *Roanoke Daily Times*, 6 Nov 1889.

⁷⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 3 Dec 1890; 15 Feb 1891; 8 Oct 1892.

⁷⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 April 1892.

get to the Academy had complete access to the city's electric streetcar system since the company reserved all its cars exclusively for the Academy on performance nights.⁷⁹

The original Opera House, taken entirely out of the market for sophisticated entertainment, turned exclusively to "low brow" fare and featured "popular prices" for hundreds of vaudeville and burlesque acts. At one such event in the fall of 1892, for instance, a newspaper correspondent reported that immodest dancers had performed to a sold out house: "Miss Mattie Lockette the young and talented soubrette, made a great hit with her electric dance, as did Miss Lidia Payne in her tambourine dance. Miss Virgie Arnold in the whirlwind dance also won much applause."⁸⁰ Burlesque, while wildly popular with the city's working classes, raised concerns amongst local ministers and conservative elites, who saw the entertainment as immoral. Municipal authorities, however, did little to restrain or end the shows.⁸¹

Local elites formed dozens of exclusive societies and organizations in the 1880s. Indeed, by the early the next decade, most upper-class residents had joined at least one club or fraternal order, and many belonged to several. Although Roanoke, *The Times* observed, was a "humming, hustling city" with an exceedingly busy population, "the incessant business tensions can not be forever kept up." As a result, the paper explained, "there are to be found in Roanoke many social and intellectual organizations whose aims and purposes are to engage in short hours of pleasure and profit which does not detract from the business qualifications of their members, but only enables them to work better when returning to their routine duties."⁸² The city had a Confederate Veterans Association as well as a chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic, four Masonic Lodges, a Knights of Honor, Pythias, and Mystic Chain, a Royal Arcanum Society, a chapter of

⁷⁹ Roanoke Street Railway 1894 Schedule, J. Ambler Johnston Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

⁸⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Nov 1892.

⁸¹ For an analysis of the popularity and effects of vaudeville and burlesque in the South, see Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies and Hellfire*, 63-76.

⁸² *The Roanoke Times*, 12 Dec 1890.

the Patriotic Sons of America, and several of other fraternal groups and secret societies. Indeed, by the mid-1890s, there were nineteen upper-class male organizations in the city with roughly fifteen-hundred members.⁸³ Other organizations, like the West End Social Club, served solely as dinner party vehicles, while still others, like the Shakespearean Literary Society, the Rorer Park Literary Society, St. Andrews Society, and Clover Club, offered an opportunity for “the most literary, intellectual and accomplished people in Roanoke” to gather and discuss sophisticated prose.⁸⁴ The Caecilian Musical Society, a two-hundred-member chorus directed by Lucian Cocke, a noted local lawyer, performed frequently at the Academy of Music, and sought to enlighten the city’s less refined rural neighbors by offering reduced admission prices for its “friends in the country.”⁸⁵

In the spring of 1892, dozens of elite young men in town organized the Roanoke Athletic Club.⁸⁶ The group constructed a gymnasium for its members, and in the fall, it fielded a football team, albeit with players who averaged only a hundred and forty-five pounds and were mostly over thirty years old. That Thanksgiving, the Athletic Club played a team from Bluefield in front of five hundred supporters, including many upper-class ladies and young women. “In the matter of sports, one paper observed, “Roanoke is not behind other progressive cities and celebrated Thanksgiving after the most approved fashion.” The game ended in a zero to zero tie, and afterwards members of the club entertained the Bluefield team at an elaborate dinner and ball at the Hotel Roanoke.⁸⁷ That same fall, the club introduced “Basket Ball,” a game it believed “resembles football.”⁸⁸

⁸³ James E. Porter, *1895 Roster of Secret Societies of Roanoke, Virginia* (Roanoke: Hammond Printing Works, 1895), 129.

⁸⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 12 Dec 1890.

⁸⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Nov 1892.

⁸⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 9 April 1892.

⁸⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 25 Nov 1892.

⁸⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Nov 1892.

Other elite residents organized professional associations that offered social benefits as well as certification of credentials. A move towards professionalization swept the entire nation around the turn of the century, and Roanoke was no exception. In 1889, for instance, physicians in town organized the Roanoke Medical Society. The organization allowed only “ethical” doctors to join and blacklisted “physicians” it deemed improperly trained or incompetent.⁸⁹ In an effort to systematize prices, the group also established minimum rates for all medical services. The move, however, enraged the city’s working classes. Indeed, the day after doctors published the new pay scale, hundreds of laborers attended a mass meeting to protest fees that they considered “exorbitant and beyond the reach of the average workingman.” They also all agreed to patronize only physicians who were not members of the Medical Society, which meant that many of them turned exclusively to Dr. H. A. Sims, a “Master Workman” in the local chapter of the Knights of Labor.⁹⁰ Although the controversy eventually led to the downfall of the organization, in the spring of 1891, most of its former members established the Roanoke Valley Medical Association.⁹¹ The group evaluated the “character” of all local doctors and barred members from any contact with those it deemed “irregular” or “not in good professional standing.”⁹² It also again established standard minimum fees for services, setting, for example, a \$5 minimum charge for amputation of fingers and toes and a \$10 minimum on hands and feet.⁹³

The city’s elite women, like educated women throughout the country, moved into church-related and charity organizations with vigor around the turn of the century. In the 1880s and

⁸⁹ E. P. Tompkins, “Medical Annals of Roanoke,” 10, TMs (1922), Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library.

⁹⁰ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 23 Feb 1890; Tompkins, “Medical Annals,” 8.

⁹¹ Tompkins, “Medical Annals,” 10; “Minutes and Proceedings of the Roanoke Valley Medical Association, Organized in Roanoke, Va. at the Office of Dr. Gordon Simmons, June 10, 1891,” Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library, Roanoke (cited hereafter as RVMA Minutes).

⁹² RVMA Minutes, 31, 33.

⁹³ RVMA Minutes, 17.

1890s, most local houses of worship had “Ladies Aid Societies” responsible for church-related fundraising activities and many had female organized “Missionary Societies” in charge of soliciting donations for religious fieldwork.⁹⁴ Upper-class women from a variety of the city’s churches also organized the “Ladies Union Benevolent Society” in the summer of 1884 in order to “aid the afflicted poor of our community.”⁹⁵ That year, the group held several “lawn parties” and other fundraisers to get the money and supplies it needed to help “worthy persons in our midst.”⁹⁶ Later in the decade, the group established a Home for the Sick, and it played a major role in soliciting funds the Roanoke Hospital Association.

In early 1893, members of the Ladies Union Benevolent Society (LUBS) teamed with the Circle of Charity of the King’s Daughters (CCKD) to distribute aid to “the suffering poor” during an extended cold spell.⁹⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, which reported that the harsh conditions had “suspended all outside work and hundreds are out of work who depend on mild weather for a living,” donated its building as the group’s drop-off point for food and fuel. The aid, the women explained, was intended only for the “worthy poor,” which meant just those who had lost their jobs or been laid off due to the cold weather.⁹⁸ Although most of the “deserving poor” resided in east Roanoke’s working-class neighborhoods, finding the correct destitute families, according to the ladies, was difficult because the “worthy poor are cautious even in their indigence.” Indeed, according to Miss Josephine Woltz of the CCKD, while there were scores of hard-working families living in “absolute destitution” and not requesting aid, there had been numerous calls for

⁹⁴ For examples, see History Committee, First Baptist Church, *An Adventure in Faith: A History of the First Baptist Church of Roanoke, Virginia, 1875-1955* (Roanoke: First Baptist Church of Roanoke, 1955), 135-38; Eugenia M. Keen and Gladys D. Hughes, *History of Christ Episcopal Church, Roanoke, Virginia* (Roanoke: Christ Episcopal Church of Roanoke, 1961), 7, 33-34; Margaret Mary Maier, “Father Lynch Founder,” 7-8, TMs (April 1941), Emma B. Lynch Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

⁹⁵ *The Roanoke Leader*, 17 July 1884.

⁹⁶ *The Roanoke Leader*, 18 Sept 1884.

⁹⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 14 Jan 1893.

⁹⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 20, 21 Jan 1893 (first quote is 21 Jan; second is 20 Jan).

assistance made by “mothers who are burdened by indolent husbands.” A representative of the LUBS concurred, but conceded that “When there are cases of old age and little children to be provided for, we cannot refuse our aid, even if the head of the family is unworthy.”⁹⁹

Many of those rejected for aid turned to illegal means for survival. Some raided N&W coal hoppers for fuel, while others resorted to tearing up wooden boardwalks or fencing.¹⁰⁰ Donations flooded into *The Roanoke Times*, and within a few days, local ministers convinced Mayor Henry Trout to use the city’s resources to systematize distribution of the aid. Trout appointed Miss Josephine Woltz, who had “been at the front of all charitable efforts in Roanoke for ten years,” to head the effort. Although city officials made businessmen responsible for soliciting future donations, women from the LUBS and CCKD, working under the leadership of Woltz, investigated requests for aid and made the determination of whether it was legitimate. According to reporters, there were numerous “charity fakirs” to contend with, including two “warmly clad and buxom” black females who tried to fake a claim of illness as well as another woman, known widely as “a premium fakir,” who had “worked three separate half ton orders of coal within thirty-six hours.”¹⁰¹

By the end of the month, members of the LUBS and CCKD had done all they could to distribute aid and alleviate the “sufferings of the poverty stricken.” The ladies, according to *The Times*, had done fine work but had been grossly imposed upon by local blacks: “Many able bodied negroes have applied for help, and through sick tales obtained provisions, clothing and fuel. Some of this class are very hard to please, and desire such delicacies as cheese, canned goods and tea, saying that they can’t eat common rations.” Whites too, the paper went on, were not above faking hardship and many, it explained, “seem to think that the gates of an

⁹⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Jan 1893.

¹⁰⁰ See examples in *The Roanoke Times*, 22, 26 Jan 1893.

¹⁰¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 22, 24 Jan 1893 (quote is from 22 Jan).

inexhaustible bounty have been opened up and they are free to take to their heart's content."¹⁰²

The abuse by "unworthy people," according to Woltz, had turned the campaign into such a "farce" and "perfect nuisance" that the ladies aid societies had decided to end their involvement. Moreover, Woltz explained, she believed that most residents could "get work if they desire it."¹⁰³ Overall, the LUBS and CCKD assisted 156 white families and 129 African American households. According to Woltz, however, the statistics were an inaccurate representation of the "worthy poor of this city." Indeed, she explained, the extreme weather and high demand had prevented the women from investigating all the applicants, and in her estimation, only about half of those who received aid actually deserved it.¹⁰⁴

By 1890, roughly 30 percent of Roanoke's sixteen thousand residents were black. Over four thousand African Americans had arrived since 1883, and in 1890, there were four hundred and ten black residences in the city, almost all of which were in the Northeast or Northwest. Most of the town's African Americans lived on the outskirts of the city, to the north of RL&IC's neighborhoods, either in what had been the Town of Gainsborough or in the Northwest city, along Rutherford and Harrison Avenues or around Tenth Avenue in a neighborhood known as "Peach and Honey." Others resided in the Northeast, to the north of Madison Avenue, in a neighborhood called "Possum Trot." Some black housing also existed south of the RL&IC neighborhood in the Northwest, along sections of Henry Street, High Street, and Centre Avenue. Almost no African Americans lived in the Southwest or downtown. Although the city's blacks lived in no distinct single neighborhood, no matter where they resided, they generally lived in clusters along entire blocks with no white housing in between. This phenomenon mirrored patterns of African American housing throughout the urban South, as did the fact that black

¹⁰² *The Roanoke Times*, 27 Jan 1893.

¹⁰³ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Jan 1893.

¹⁰⁴ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 10 Feb 1893.

homes in Roanoke were generally inferior to those of whites, black neighborhoods were usually the last to receive public services like running water, gas lighting, or paved streets, and black residences were located in areas deemed uninhabitable by whites because of their distance from downtown or because they were in low-lying areas or close to polluted streams. Like many of the city's formerly rural whites, most local African Americans augmented their diet with produce from backyard vegetable gardens. Many had chicken coops and owned milk cows as well.¹⁰⁵

The vast majority of the town's two thousand black males of employable age held unskilled or day labor positions and earned less than a dollar for a day's work. Like urban blacks throughout the South, many of Roanoke's African American males performed what whites deemed "nigger work" – jobs so unpleasant or difficult that whites refused to do them. A few hundred, for example, worked in local industries performing tasks believed to be too dangerous or dirty for whites. Black females in town found employment as domestic servants or as "washer women," adding a crucial second source of income to their households. Whatever their employment, however, almost all the city's African Americans lived at or below the subsistence level. Wage labor in a city, even at this level, was nonetheless a vast improvement for blacks throughout the South who fled the horrid economic and social world of sharecropping.¹⁰⁶

Moreover, a few dozen local African Americans started successful, black-oriented enterprises. In

¹⁰⁵ Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census 1890*, 389, 483, 823; *Haddock's Roanoke Va. City Directory 1890* (Richmond: T. M. Haddock, 1890), 270-333; Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 188, 263; Erin Baratta, "Gainsboro Neighborhood, 1890-1940," *The Journal of the History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia* 14, no. 1 (1999): 40; Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 98-124; George R. Heller, *A Narrative for the Proposed Historic Gainsboro Preservation District* (Roanoke: Privately printed, 1991), 17.

Most of what had been the black enclave of Gainsborough in the 1880s and 1890s was destroyed in the 1950s and 1960s, when a branch of Interstate 81 was constructed into Roanoke and an interchange went up in the heart of the neighborhood. Indeed, the only remnant remaining from the original Gainsborough is a partially destroyed African American cemetery next to the interchange. By the turn of the century, "Gainsboro" (the shortened name for the neighborhood) had moved south to an area northwest of the Hotel Roanoke that had originally been inhabited by white working classes.

¹⁰⁶ Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census 1890*, 823; Smith, *A Synopsis of Roanoke*, 12; Rabinowitz, *Race Relations*, 61-71; McKiven, Jr., *Iron and Steel*, chapter three.

1888, for example, in the business section of Gainsborough, along Peach Road (between modern-day Madison and Orange Avenues), African Americans operated four grocery and dry goods stores, a butcher shop, and a couple of barbershops. Elsewhere in town, blacks owned four “eating houses” and a saloon.¹⁰⁷ By 1890, two black grocery stores had opened closer to downtown – one on First Street Northwest and the other on Railroad Avenue – and two more African American saloons had begun operations – one on Third Avenue Southeast and the other on Railroad Avenue. In addition, by then blacks owned two boarding houses, a blacksmith shop, and eleven barbershops. The city’s black business, like those elsewhere in the urban South, served an almost exclusively African American clientele.¹⁰⁸

Roanoke’s newspapers, like most of the southern press at the time, only felt obliged to give the city’s black residents coverage when they were involved in disturbances or charged with crimes. Although it admitted the city needed African American workers for the time being, the *Roanoke Daily Times* echoed the racist sentiments of the white population by suggesting that once a “better class of settlers” arrived to replace them, the city’s blacks should return to Africa.¹⁰⁹ The *Daily Times* and its successor, *The Roanoke Times*, like papers throughout the region, each had a running court column and both used it to consistently mock, ridicule, and deride local African Americans. Typically headlined as “The Misery Mill” or “Monkey Court,” the stories often included testimony of defendants reported in exaggerated, racist dialect, insulting or animalistic descriptions of their appearance and behavior, and boastful accounts of the harsh penalties or fines imposed.¹¹⁰ Most blacks arrested stood accused of petty crimes such as theft,

¹⁰⁷ *Haddock & Baily’s Roanoke Va. City Directory 1888* (Richmond: Haddock & Baily Publishers and Compilers, 1888), 132, 138-39, 146; Heller, *Proposed Historic Gainsboro Preservation District*, 17.

¹⁰⁸ *Haddock’s Roanoke Va. City Directory 1890*, 247-57; Rabinowitz, *Race Relations*, 78-82.

¹⁰⁹ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 10 Jan 1890.

¹¹⁰ See similar column in *Atlanta Constitution* as described in Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies and Hellfire*, 37.

burglary, drunkenness, or vagrancy, and almost all of them not sent immediately to jail ended up there anyway when they were unable to pay the fines imposed. Almost all the “offenders” afterwards worked off their time or fines on the chain gang.

Authorities arrested numerous black residents for trespassing on railroad property, and starting in 1890, they took them into custody for “loitering” at the Union Depot. Norfolk & Western banned non ticket holders from the station that spring, after the *Roanoke Daily Times* complained that a “gang of negroes” were making it a “lounging place” and had “long been a nuisance, as it is almost impossible to make one’s way through them, and they never think of stepping aside.”¹¹¹ As numerous scholars have pointed out, black assertiveness at depots or on sidewalks or in other urban spaces threatened white’s conceptions about their racial supremacy and prompted the passage of “Jim Crow” segregation laws in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Indeed, as one historian has observed, it was new cities that lacked established patterns of black exclusion that were the first to pass segregation laws.¹¹² In Roanoke, the depot law marked the beginning of attempts by whites to exclude blacks from spaces they deemed theirs. Police, not surprisingly, selectively enforced the new rule based on race and arrested only African Americans for trespassing at the station. The railroad also at least informally segregated its passenger cars by allowing blacks to purchase only third-class tickets. Those who challenged the policy not only faced arrest, they risked incurring the wrath of white passengers. In the winter of 1889, for example, Gus Bolling, a local black, entered the first-class car of the Shenandoah Valley Railroad and sat down beside a single white woman. “Some gentlemen standing near,” the *Daily Times* reported, “ordered the darkey to get up and leave the car, which he in the most insolent manner refused to do.” As a result, the “gentlemen” smashed a bottle over Bolling’s head

¹¹¹ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 10 May 1890.

¹¹² Jane Daily, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), chapters 3 and 4.

and tossed him onto the tracks.¹¹³ Black resistance to legal or de facto segregation, while rare in Roanoke, was usually met with arrest or violence.

Roanoke's racist press, not surprisingly, rarely offered accounts of black entertainment or society that did not focus on its detrimental effects on the city. Although the reporting was biased, it at least documented the city's black amusements and entertainments. Like Roanoke's white working classes, the city's African American laborers tended to congregate in barrooms at the end of the day. Charlie Morton's bar and "snack shack" and Murray King's saloon, both located on Railroad Avenue in what police dubbed "hell's half acre," were two of the most popular black bars in town. Police repeatedly raided Morton's place, and according to them, it was little more than a gambling den and bordello.¹¹⁴ In the fall of 1890, in its ongoing crusade to degrade local African Americans, *The Roanoke Times* sent a correspondent on a tour of the city's "colored dives" in "hell's half acre." It was a journey, *The Times* reporter explained, that had taken him into an area "more unfrequented by the average citizen" than anywhere in town. He had first inspected two "shanties" serving as boarding and "eating houses," and afterwards made his way into Huddleston's saloon, where about fifty black patrons were enjoying drinks at the bar. For ten cents, he found out, customers could enter the improvised dance hall in the back room. The "hall," a ten by twenty foot room, was packed, and those dancing were "drunk or getting so and perspiring freely." "The orchestra," he explained, "consisted of a lone Negro, who thrummed a twine on a dyspeptic banjo." Another black-owned saloon nearby, he discovered, operated inside "a little tent about 6 feet square."¹¹⁵

Police reports and newspaper accounts also reveal a thriving African American saloon and dance hall district in Gainsborough. The "Red Row" or "Red House," a long, red, frame apartment-like complex on Ninth Avenue Northeast, was apparently the most popular site for

¹¹³ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 27 Dec 1889.

¹¹⁴ See raid on Morton's saloon reported in *The Roanoke Times*, 18 Oct 1892.

¹¹⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 9 Nov 1890.

dances and drinking in the 1880s and 1890s. Police raided it dozens of times, and according to the department's official history, the Red Row was "for years, the habitation of crooks of the worst stamp."¹¹⁶ Although residents held hundreds of fêtes there without incident, only the occasional fight or shooting made the local papers. In one typical story, the *Roanoke Daily Times* reported that in the fall of 1889 an argument over a woman at a Red Row dance had resulted in gunfire and attempted murder. Three policemen and the mayor arrived at the "low dive" immediately afterwards and arrested several patrons before confiscating a concealed dirk from one of the female attendees.¹¹⁷ "Bob Jeffries Place," a saloon and snack shack on Peach Road Northwest was another popular saloon and snack shack in Gainsborough. It was also the site of numerous dancing parties, but according to the Roanoke Police, was "one of the worst resorts in the city" where "practically every crime known to man was committed . . . at one time or another."¹¹⁸

Although local authorities for the most part ignored white gamblers and gaming houses, they consistently raided African American gambling dens and arrested blacks for betting on cards or dice. In the fall of 1890, for instance, police broke up several ongoing games. *The Roanoke Times*, sensing another opportunity to deride the city's black residents, gave the raids prominent coverage. The first arrests, the paper reported, came after authorities stormed a poker game in the Bunker Hill section of Gainsborough. Although many of the players escaped by jumping out windows, police rounded up eleven others and seized dice, cards, and chips.¹¹⁹ A few days later, another officer broke up "a gang of negro boot-blacks playing dice" in a vacant lot.¹²⁰ The following month, the paper reported, police uncovered a crap game and "gallantly arrested the

¹¹⁶ Police Pension Fund Association, *History of the Roanoke Police Department* (Roanoke: Union Printing, 1916), 173.

¹¹⁷ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 12, 13, 14, 16 Nov 1889.

¹¹⁸ PPFA., *Roanoke Police Department*, 174-75.

¹¹⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 Oct 1890.

¹²⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Oct 1890.

‘bones’ used by the darkies and the stakes, amounting to 35 cents.”¹²¹ Two days later, they raided an ongoing dice game held inside a stable and captured several members of “the Bunker Hill select crap-shooting socials.”¹²²

Although whites in town and Roanoke’s press rarely acknowledged them, there were dozens of black professionals in the city. Their occupations mirrored those of educated blacks elsewhere in the South, and like them, they tended to serve an almost exclusively African American clientele. Most of the town’s black elite were lawyers, businessmen, doctors, teachers, undertakers, and ministers, and all of them assumed crucial leadership positions within the black community.¹²³ Andrew Jackson Oliver, the city’s first African American attorney, opened a practice in 1890. Oliver, a minister in the Methodist Church, was born in Blacksburg, Virginia, and earned a law degree in Ohio before moving to Roanoke in 1889. He and his wife Susan, a graduate of Hampton Institute and teacher at the Third Ward “colored school,” lived on First Street Northwest. Oliver’s office, in the white business section of downtown, also housed his real estate and development firm, the Roanoke Building & Land Company.¹²⁴ In 1891, Doctor Robert J. Boland opened the first black medical practice in the city. In addition, Boland published the *Roanoke Weekly Press, Colored*, the town’s only African American newspaper. Isaac Burrell, another black physician, started a medical practice in Gainsborough in 1893, and in 1897, he opened Roanoke’s first African American pharmacy. Burrell’s wife Margaret, a graduate of Hampton Institute, also taught at the Third Ward school.¹²⁵ Lucy Addison, a graduate of the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia, moved to town in 1887 to teach at the black school in

¹²¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 18 Nov 1890.

¹²² *The Roanoke Times*, 20 Nov 1890.

¹²³ Rabinowitz, *Race Relations*, 78-96.

¹²⁴ Biographical information on Oliver is from Reginald Shareef, *The Roanoke Valley’s African American Heritage: A Pictorial History* (Virginia Beach: Donning Company, 1996), 63; Baratta, “Gainsboro Neighborhood,” 43; *Haddock’s Roanoke Va. City Directory 1890*, 165, 310.

¹²⁵ Information on Boland and Burrell is from Shareef, *Roanoke Valley’s African American Heritage*, 41; Baratta, “Gainsboro Neighborhood,” 43.

Gainsborough and later became its assistant principal. Addison, who devoted the following forty years to teaching the city's black children, also served as superintendent of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church Sunday School.¹²⁶

Although the children of working-class residents had few educational options beyond the city's poorly funded public schools, black residents, like African Americans throughout the South, had even fewer choices and far less financial support. During the 1880s, Roanoke built five public schools for whites but only one for blacks.¹²⁷ Moreover, there was a huge disparity in teacher salary, with white women earning \$1,300 a year and black women getting only \$210.¹²⁸ The circumstances infuriated the city's African American professionals, and in the summer of 1892, they organized an education committee to petition Roanoke's school board for "more and better school facilities."¹²⁹ Whatever the effect of the appeal, by the end of the year, the city had funded completion of a new "colored" school on Gregory Avenue Southeast.¹³⁰

Roanoke's entire black community coalesced around a variety of indigenous institutions. Their six churches, of course, were the most prominent establishments as well as the backbone of political and social groups.¹³¹ All of them were in Gainsborough or in the Northeast, and most of them had originally been white sanctuaries before African American congregations purchased them in the early 1880s, after whites moved south and built new places to worship downtown. St. Paul United Methodist, Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal, High Street Baptist, Greater Mt.

¹²⁶ Shareef, *Roanoke Valley's African American Heritage*, 13-14; Baratta, "Gainsboro Neighborhood," 43. In 1929, two years after Addison retired, the city named its new black high school in her honor. The school was the first public building in Roanoke named after one of its own citizens.

¹²⁷ WPA, *Roanoke: Story of County and City*, 282-83, 285; Rabinowitz, *Race Relations*, 181.

¹²⁸ *The Roanoke Leader*, 17 July 1886.

¹²⁹ *The (Roanoke) Daily Bee*, 6 July 1892, in archives of Virginia State Library, Richmond.

¹³⁰ WPA, *Roanoke: Story of County and City*, 285.

¹³¹ Rabinowitz, *Race Relations*, 225.

Zion Baptist, and First Baptist all built or purchased sanctuaries in the 1880s. At the time, the city's black Presbyterians held services in the basement of the all white First Presbyterian Church or in a black schoolhouse. In 1898, under the guidance of its pastor, Lylburn Liggins Downing, the congregation raised enough money to built its own place of worship on Fifth Avenue Northeast. Richard R. Jones, minister of the city's First Baptist Church, was the city's most prominent black activist and a frequent voice of dissent in local papers. Jones's congregation held services in a home in the Northeast until the late 1880s, when it funded the purchase of what had been the all white St. John's Episcopal with funds raised from a series of successful neighborhood festivals.¹³²

The city's black residents took part in a wide array of other cultural and community organizations. Few, however, received coverage in the press or notice by white residents. When they did, it was generally because African Americans had successfully mimicked acceptable white institutions. In 1886, for example, *The Roanoke Leader* reported that blacks had organized the Roanoke Brass Band and held a parade through downtown streets. The music was so impressive and the overall display so good that even the normally racist *Leader* informed readers that the group deserved "the encouragement of our citizens."¹³³ In early 1891, another paper applauded a group of sixty-five black men who organized a military company and petitioned for inclusion in the state militia. The organization's officers were part of Roanoke's small cadre of elite African Americans, and the company met in Davis Hall, a de facto community center established by John H. Davis, the city's most successful black businessman.¹³⁴ Blacks used the hall for a variety of purposes, including political gatherings. In 1892, for instance, four hundred

¹³² Information on the city's black churches is from *Haddock's Roanoke Va. City Directory 1890*; Heller, *Proposed Historic Gainsboro Preservation District*, 12-14; Shareef, *Roanoke Valley's African American Heritage*, 74-75, 81-89; Baratta, "Gainsboro Neighborhood," 44-45; information on the festivals held by First Baptist is from *The Roanoke Leader*, 2 Jan 1886.

¹³³ *The Roanoke Leader*, 2 Jan 1886.

¹³⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Feb 1891.

members of the “Harrison Republican Colored Club” held dozens of meetings there. The group, headed by John Davis, helped register six hundred and forty new black voters, and that fall, it invited the city’s Democratic leaders to debate the upcoming election. Democrats, according to a local paper, were surprised and disappointed at the “heavy negro registration” and “most positively refused” the invitation, “giving as their reason that they would not discuss politics before a colored mass meeting with anyone.”¹³⁵ Harrison won in the heavily African American Third Ward and came close in the Fifth but lost decisively in the other three wards. *The Roanoke Times*, nevertheless, dismissed the high black turnout as little more than manipulation by corrupt white Republicans. “The negroes,” it complained afterwards, “were very thoroughly voted.”¹³⁶

Roanoke’s African American community usually participated in citywide celebrations, albeit often in a segregated fashion. Their own festivals rarely received notice from whites, but in early 1893, local papers sent several reporters to cover a valley-wide Emancipation Proclamation anniversary celebration. The Roanoke Emancipation Club joined its Salem counterpart in planning and staging the daylong event. The clubs held a parade in Salem nearly a mile in length that featured the Roanoke Brass Band, dozens of mounted riders and carriages, and hundreds of marchers carrying banners and flags. Daniel B. Williams, professor of elocution and oratory at Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute in Petersburg, addressed an overflowing crowd at Salem’s Town Hall afterwards. His speech, a recitation of themes made popular by Booker T. Washington, won praise from *The Roanoke Times* and other newspapers for telling the audience that “white men of the South are the negroes’ best friend” and that the only hope for African Americans was to educate themselves, learn a trade, and stay out of trouble. John Davis, “the colored capitalist of Roanoke,” and several other businessmen and professionals from the city joined Williams onstage. The entire event, according to *The Times*, “was a credible one to the colored folks, and passed off without disorder.” Afterwards, Roanoke’s Emancipation Club,

¹³⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 14, 30 Oct 1892.

¹³⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 9 Nov 1892.

under the guidance of lawyer A. J. Oliver, business leader Davis, and other black professionals, helped Williams publish the speech in booklet form.¹³⁷

Although much of the Roanoke community purposefully divided itself by class or segregated itself by race, numerous occasions brought the community together within a specific event or celebration. Baseball games, for example, drew in crowds composed of working classes and elites, men and women, as well as whites and blacks, albeit often in class and gender specific seating and with blacks limited to standing around the outfield fence. The matches, whether amateur or professional, were not only an outlet from daily toil and a way to defuse tensions, but an important part of an ongoing process that forged a sense of community out of the city's disparate elements. Whether cognizant of it or not, those attending the games came together in a common cause that afterwards translated into municipal pride and civic identity.¹³⁸ The Roanoke Athletic Association organized the first official game held in the city in May of 1883, when its nine defeated a team from Salem in a field near the Rorer Park Hotel.¹³⁹ In April, other local men organized the "Rough and Ready Baseball Club" and claimed to be prepared to "receive challenges from any club in the state."¹⁴⁰

Local blacks formed their own team in the summer of 1883 as well. The "Roanoke Slippers" used the baseball grounds and drew in a large crowds, albeit exclusively African American in composition. Racial mores limited black teams throughout the South exclusively to

¹³⁷ See coverage of the event in *The Roanoke Times*, 3 Jan 1893, as well as description in Daniel B. Williams, *Emancipation Address: Our Duties and How to Discharge Them, Delivered in the Town Hall of Salem, Va., January 2, 1893, Under the Auspices of the Emancipation Club of Salem, which was joined by the Emancipation Club of Roanoke, Va.* (Np: By the author, 1893), 7-10 (quote about Davis is from 7).

¹³⁸ See, for example, Robert H. Gudmestad, "Baseball, The Lost Cause, and the New South in Richmond, Virginia, 1883-1890," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 106, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 267-300.

¹³⁹ *The Roanoke Leader*, 17 May 1883.

¹⁴⁰ *The Roanoke Leader*, 19 April 1883.

African Americans opponents, preventing teams like the Slippers from challenging local whites to a game. Indeed, according to one scholar, that a white team would compete with a black nine was at the time “unthinkable.”¹⁴¹ In a typical match that summer, the Slippers paraded to the grounds with hundreds of fans behind the Roanoke Brass Band to face the “Lonejacks,” an all-black team from Lynchburg. Unfortunately, the team’s enthusiasm did not translate into victory on the field, and it lost thirty-nine to three.¹⁴²

In the summer of 1883, following the success of the town’s amateur teams, prominent businessmen organized the Roanoke Baseball Association to field “The Roanokes,” the city’s first “professional” team. The organization improved the local diamond across from Rorer Park, built grandstands, and brought in a few paid players to join local men on the team. In a typical game that summer, The Roanokes defeated “The Lexingtons” before a crowd of over six hundred spectators that included “a great many ladies” as well as numerous African Americans lining the fence.¹⁴³ The Roanokes, a member of the state circuit of baseball clubs, hosted dozens of teams from surrounding cities and towns. The club, according to *The Roanoke Leader*, maintained the reputation of the city, and its fans, steadfast in their support, were responsible for a dramatic increase in civic pride.¹⁴⁴ The team, nevertheless, suffered the fate of many other early clubs throughout the nation and faded away due to poor management, haphazard play, and an inconsistent roster of opponents.¹⁴⁵ Other local professional teams followed and appeared for a season or two before fading away as well.

In the spring of 1890, the city’s leading businessmen pooled their money and revived the Roanokes once again. This time, the organization vowed to run the club as a regular business

¹⁴¹ Gudmestad, “Baseball, The Lost Cause, and the New South in Richmond,” 297.

¹⁴² *The Roanoke Leader*, 30 Aug 1883.

¹⁴³ *The Roanoke Leader*, 16 Aug 1883; background information on the Roanoke Baseball Association is from *The Roanoke Leader*, 17 July 1886.

¹⁴⁴ *The Roanoke Leader*, 15 May 1884.

¹⁴⁵ Gudmestad, “Baseball, The Lost Cause, and the New South in Richmond,” 298.

venture and it hired three of the best pros available to team up with local talent.¹⁴⁶ A couple weeks later, another local group organized the “Virginias,” and for a time the city could boast two professional teams. The Virginias, however, had trouble obtaining decent players, and in their second game, in what one paper called a “comedy of errors from beginning to end,” the team lost decidedly to a nine from Roanoke College that scored twenty-five runs.¹⁴⁷ Both clubs played at Riverside Park, which had bleachers for over a thousand fans.¹⁴⁸ When the Roanokes played the Virginias in an early game that spring, hundreds of spectators showed up to check out the prospects for the upcoming season. The Roanokes scored nineteen runs and trounced their opponents, leading one paper to observe its players were “getting in good shape and handled themselves with some of their old time vigor”¹⁴⁹

Local support for both professional clubs was strong. Indeed, the sport was so popular that the *Daily Times* boasted that there was “as much enthusiasm about baseball in Roanoke as will be found in any city in the land.”¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the city’s baseball aficionados did not limit themselves to being spectators; they also formed club teams connected to their trade or profession. In the 1880s, for example, Norfolk & Western workers battled Shenandoah Valley Railroad employees, Machine Works blacksmiths played the company’s boilermakers, and local lawyers challenged the city’s printers to a game. Dozens of residents played in amateur games every weekend during the spring and summer, and fan support for these matches was often just as strong as for the city’s pros. Indeed, in June of 1887, Shenandoah Valley Railroad lawyer William

¹⁴⁶ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 2, 4 May 1890.

¹⁴⁷ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 18 May 1890.

¹⁴⁸ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 21 June 1890.

¹⁴⁹ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 11 May 1890.

¹⁵⁰ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 18 May 1890.

Travers arrived to find the entire community “quite excited over a match game of baseball” between “two organizations representing the rival hotels – hotel Roanoke and the City hotel.”¹⁵¹

Much like baseball, circuses and fairs brought out thousands of residents and drew in hordes from the surrounding counties. Entertainment on such a grand scale was a rarity in Southwest Virginia, and as the hub for a circuit of such shows, Roanoke quickly became a destination of choice for rural residents looking for distraction. John Robinson’s Circus, which arrived for a series of shows in the summer of 1884, was one of the first to test the waters in the city. Robinson drummed up excitement for the event by staging a “grand street pageant” featuring three bands – one of which was entirely female – “a minstrel troupe of genuine darkies who sang comic songs, handsome vans, band wagons, and cages, a beautiful team of ponies, and many other novel attractions.” Residents crowded into the big top for the next few days, and according to the Reverend William Campbell, the “whole countryside emptied itself to come to town and see the show” and arrived “in spring wagons and wagons without springs and in buggies and on horseback and on foot.”¹⁵²

The problem, local officials quickly learned, was that the crowds of visitors were usually unruly and often violent. When Barnum & Bailey’s “Greatest Show on Earth” came to town, for example, the mayor deputized ten extra policemen to handle the mob that was sure to arrive. Although the *Daily Times* did its part to drum up excitement for the show, it also warned residents that “there will be thousands of strangers here to attend the ‘greatest show on earth,’ and no doubt whiskey will be imbibed freely and broken noses and bloody countenances will be the order of the day.”¹⁵³ Moreover, hordes of circus followers also poured into town to take

¹⁵¹ William Hicks Travers, Diary Number Nine, 3 June 1887, in William Hicks Travers Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

¹⁵² Coverage of the circus, which appears to have been the first one held in the city, is from *The Roanoke Leader*, 21 Aug 1884; Campbell’s observations are from William C. Campbell, “The First Circus in Roanoke,” TMs, Campbell Papers.

¹⁵³ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 20 May 1890.

advantage of the crowds. When Forepaugh's Aggregation came to town, for instance, dozens of con artists offering rigged shell and card games as well as prostitutes and common street swindlers showed up as well. Eight thousand patrons packed the tent for the actual show, which featured a re-enactment of Custer's Last Stand with two Sioux from the massacre, and afterwards hundreds of them visited the "fakirs" lining each side of the street nearby before police raided the area.¹⁵⁴

Visitors to Roanoke from the surrounding countryside, in town for amusement or shopping, encountered trappings of modernity in the city that often baffled them. The town, while hardly representative of a sophisticated metropolis in the 1880s and early 1890s, was nevertheless the closest thing to an urban setting that many Southwest Virginians had ever seen. Residents and the local press, proud of their apparent urbanity, found the confusion of their "country cousins" an endless source of entertainment. Indeed, stories about the mishaps of rural visitors dotted the pages of the city's papers throughout the period. In a typical example, the *Daily Times* reported that a "country man who lives back into the mountains" had gone into a local tobacco shop, purchased a cigar, and attempted to ignite it on an electric light bulb, much to the amusement of clerks and bystanders.¹⁵⁵ In another account, the paper explained that a "hayseed" couple from a "rural district" had ridden downtown in their beat-up wagon only to be stunned by a passing bicyclist and horrified by a test of the fire alarm. Crowds around them burst into laughter, and in much apparent discomfort and confusion, the couple fled the scene.¹⁵⁶

Those living in counties around Roanoke viewed the city as an oasis of urbanity in a desert of isolated farms, small towns, and country stores. Many families traveled a day or two for a shopping spree or for the opportunity to engage in amusements that were unheard of elsewhere in that part of the state. Anna Brown, living in rural Tazewell County with her new husband,

¹⁵⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Oct 1890.

¹⁵⁵ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 13 Nov 1889.

¹⁵⁶ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 23 July 1890.

came to town occasionally on her way to visit her family in Salem. Roanoke's wide array of shops fascinated her, as did its social scene and nightlife. Tazewell County, she informed her father, had no stores carrying fancy goods and little opportunity for social interaction. When she did finally host a dinner party, Brown told her family, she had resorted to cups and saucers purchased locally that were "not pretty at all" and explained that she wished she "had have gotten them in Roanoke."¹⁵⁷

Brown hoped to convince her husband to move to the city, and in letters to her father and sister inquired frequently about store goods available there. "When you go to Roanoke," she told them in one dispatch, "go to Davis & see what is the price of them little babe bonnets & tell me and I will send money to get one."¹⁵⁸ Although attracted to the dizzying array of products available, Brown knew the city had a promiscuous element uncommon among the farms and villages of Tazewell County. Indeed, after a friend returned from Roanoke with a fancy watch she obviously could not have purchased herself, Brown told her father that she believed "some of them Roanoke men gave it to her" and that "If she was a nice girl she would not get so many presents."¹⁵⁹ Brown sought out information on Roanoke from family friends and visitors, and on one occasion talked for hours to a male acquaintance who planned to open a business in the city. It was an exhilarating chat, she told her family, and one that she "certainly enjoyed."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Anna (Crickenberger) Brown, Riverside, Tazewell County, Virginia, to "Pa and Sister," Levi Crickenberger and Mollie Crickenberger, Salem, Virginia, 26 Nov 1888, Crickenberger Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, (cited hereafter as Crickenberger Family Papers).

¹⁵⁸ Anna (Crickenberger) Brown, Riverside, Tazewell County, Virginia, to "Pa and Sister," Levi Crickenberger and Mollie Crickenberger, Salem, Virginia, (7) March (1889), Crickenberger Family Papers.

¹⁵⁹ Anna (Crickenberger) Brown, Riverside, Tazewell County, Virginia, to "Pa and Sister," Levi Crickenberger and Mollie Crickenberger, Salem, Virginia, 2 Feb (1889), Crickenberger Family Papers.

¹⁶⁰ Anna (Crickenberger) Brown, Riverside, Tazewell County, Virginia, to "Pa and Sister," Levi Crickenberger and Mollie Crickenberger, Salem, Virginia, 19 April (1889), Crickenberger Family Papers.

In addition to circuses and shopping trips, thousands of rural residents visited Roanoke for its annual fair. The extremely popular event began in early 1883, when Henry Trout, Peyton Terry, and other business leaders teamed with Frederick Kimball to organize the “Roanoke Association for the Exhibition and Sale of Live Stock from Virginia and other States.”¹⁶¹ The organization, which sought to provide information or instruction and “not pander to the public taste for amusement and fun,” bought its own fairgrounds, constructed pens, exhibition areas, a half-mile racetrack around a man-made lake, and grandstands, and it put up several thousand dollars in prize money for a livestock show and several horse races. At the fair that October, over ten thousand spectators turned out during its three-day run. Many of the attendees came from nearby counties and towns. “Nearly every fellow” at Roanoke College went, according to Donnie Caffery, a freshman there. He had been unable to go, he told his family in Louisiana, because he had no money and as a result “was so lonely I didn’t know what to do.”¹⁶² The “Roanoke Stakes” and “Kimball Stakes,” one-mile horse races that offered \$1,000 each in prize money, proved the most popular events, but livestock exhibitions and athletic events also drew large crowds.

“So flattering has been the success attending this splendid exhibition,” *The Roanoke Leader* boasted afterwards, that the owners had already added more events for the following fall.¹⁶³ A correspondent for the Pennsylvania-based *American Volunteer*, who happened to be in town that October, reported that the exhibition was “the finest we have ever seen” and predicted

¹⁶¹ See encouragement in *The Roanoke Leader*, 26 Oct 1882; founding of association and membership is from “Minute Book A, The Roanoke Association for the Exhibition and Sale of Live Stock from Virginia and other States,” 15 May; 22 Oct 1883, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library, Roanoke (cited hereafter as “Minute Book A, Roanoke Fair Association”).

¹⁶² Donnie Caffery, Roanoke College, Salem, Virginia, to Donelson Caffery, Franklin Louisiana, 10 Oct 1883, Caffery Family Papers, Louisiana State University, Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Baton Rouge. (The date on this typed version of this Caffery’s handwritten letter is incorrect. The actual date on the original is likely either 16 or 19 Oct, not 10 Oct as misread by the typist. The fair occurred between Oct 16 and 19.)

¹⁶³ *The Roanoke Leader*, 18 Oct 1883.

that it could not fail to prove beneficial to the city.¹⁶⁴ J. B. Austin, President of the Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, wholeheartedly concurred and told stockholders that the fair had been “the most complete and satisfactory of the kind ever seen in the State of Virginia.”¹⁶⁵

Unbeknownst to the public or press, however, the spectacular turnout had not been enough to allow the association to break even. Indeed, when its board of directors met later that month, its treasurer reported that the organization was \$5,000 in debt.¹⁶⁶

The association covered the deficit with bank loans and carried on with plans for the 1884 exhibition. However, it did decide to raise admission prices and do away with all complimentary tickets. Moreover, at the urging of Henry Trout, the organization asked city council for a referendum on a \$1,500 donation to the group as well as public funding for policing the fair.¹⁶⁷ That fall, after multiple parades through downtown, including a “grand cavalcade of livestock” headed by the Roanoke Machine Works Band, massive crowds again packed the fairgrounds. The event that year, according to the local paper, had surpassed the previous version and had been “the best display of stock ever seen in Virginia.”¹⁶⁸ Again, however, the association lost money. Indeed, after using all the funds from the gate to cover expenses, it still needed close to \$2,000 more in order to pay premium guarantees to thirty winning entrants. The winners went unpaid, and overall, the association’s treasurer reported, the organization was now \$7,000 in debt. The debacle confounded Kimball, Trout, and Terry as well as the other members of the board, and at a meeting the following spring, they voted to suspend the fair in 1885 in order to reorganize and refinance the association.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ *American Volunteer*, 31 Oct 1883, quoted in *The Roanoke Leader*, 8 Nov 1883.

¹⁶⁵ Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, Second Annual Report, November 1882 – November 1883, reprinted in *The Roanoke Leader*, 17 Jan 1884.

¹⁶⁶ “Minute Book A, Roanoke Fair Association,” 22 Oct 1883.

¹⁶⁷ “Minute Book A, Roanoke Fair Association,” 8 July; 18 Sept 1884.

¹⁶⁸ *The Roanoke Leader*, 9 Oct 1884.

¹⁶⁹ “Minute Book A, Roanoke Fair Association,” 6 Nov 1884; 29 May 1885.

In early 1886, after the organization debated continuing the suspension, Roanoke's City Council donated \$1,000 in municipal funds and pledged additional civic support for the fair. The vote, however, did not please working-class residents of the Southeast because city officials had repeatedly denied them funds for a pedestrian bridge over the nearby railroad tracks. Indeed, according to one angry shop worker, the vote risked the lives and limbs "of a class of citizens who are in the employ of a corporation that adds more to the material prosperity of our city than all other industries combined" in order "to encourage that taste for fine stock and fast horses to amuse the people."¹⁷⁰ The resentment, however, did not stop the association, with the city's help, from staging the fair that October. From a participation standpoint, the event was once again a wild success. Moreover, it lasted four days instead of three and in addition to a continuation of livestock exhibitions and horse races, featured exhibits showing off the New South's latest mechanical, agricultural, horticultural and domestic innovations.¹⁷¹ The fair turned a profit that year, and in the years that followed, it continued to prosper.

Much like the agricultural fair, holiday celebrations offered opportunities for all residents, regardless of class or race, to take part in a festivity that involved the entire community. The Fourth of July was just such an occasion, and throughout the 1880s and 1890s, residents turned out en masse to take part in the celebration. The event grew larger and more elaborate every year, and at each celebration, rowdiness and unruliness increased. On the Fourth in 1883, for instance, *The Roanoke Leader* proudly reported that the Machine Works Band had entertained a sedate crowd downtown before a fireworks display. "No disturbance of any kind occurred, and no drinking to excess was indulged in."¹⁷² In the years that followed, all-day picnics, baseball games, greased pig chases, and dancing until midnight accompanied the celebration, but the

¹⁷⁰ "Minute Book A, Roanoke Fair Association," 19 March 1886; *The Roanoke Leader*, 20 March 1886.

¹⁷¹ "Minute Book A, Roanoke Fair Association," 6 May; 28 Sept; 15 Oct 1886; for the new exhibits, see *The Roanoke Leader*, 29 May 1886.

¹⁷² *The Roanoke Leader*, 5 July 1883.

mostly white crowds continued to be well behaved. By 1890, however, papers reported that widespread drunkenness and fighting were common. According to the *Daily Times*, that Fourth was especially chaotic: a stray bottle rocket ignited a two-hundred-pound box of fireworks in the Vigilant Firehouse tower, nearly killing two firemen; intoxicated mobs fired “skyrockets” at one another; “street fakirs” set up games of chance on every corner, local blacks “turned out in such numbers as to threaten a watermelon famine,” and along with the other brawls, a “very impudent negro” fought with a fireman on Railroad Avenue in front of hundreds of screaming bystanders.¹⁷³

The increasing rowdiness of the Fourth and the boisterous behavior by rural visitors concerned city leaders, but did not prevent them from planning the largest celebration in Roanoke’s history to mark its ten-year anniversary. Big Lick became Roanoke on February 3, 1882, but that decennial date passed largely without notice. Later that spring, however, members of the town’s Commercial Association saw the potential a ten-year anniversary celebration could have as an advertising gimmick for Roanoke. Ex-Mayor John Dunstan, a member of the association and advocate of the scheme, told those gathered at a special meeting that such a celebration “would not only tend to foster a spirit of patriotism amongst our citizens but would advertise us and show the world what enterprise and vim has done in ten years.” The organization afterwards appointed Henry Trout, Peyton Terry, and other civic leaders to a decennial committee charged with securing municipal support.¹⁷⁴ News of the potential anniversary celebration created a stir among the city’s businessmen, nearly all of whom assumed the event would be an advertising bonanza for Roanoke. Indeed, local capitalists interviewed by *The Times* predicted that the celebration would more than pay for itself, widen the town’s “already national reputation,” and “bring to us a most desirable class of people, who seeing our progress, would aid

¹⁷³ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 5 July 1890.

¹⁷⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 April 1892.

in spreading abroad the history of Roanoke's advancement."¹⁷⁵ *The Iron Belt*, a regional booster journal based in the city, argued that the decennial would "attract the favorable notice of thousands." It was therefore imperative, its editor explained, that residents understand that making the celebration a success was "work in which every citizen is interested; let no one shirk his duty."¹⁷⁶

Although the city offered its support, the Commercial Association assumed sole responsibility for planning the celebration. The group picked the eighteenth of June, the anniversary of the completion of the Shenandoah Valley Railroad's tracks into town, as the date for the decennial. By early June, most of the planning for the affair was complete, but in an address to several thousand residents, land agent James S. Simmons, chairman of the celebration, explained that the group had only been able to raise \$1,000 of the \$9,000 it needed to cover expenses. "Our reputation is at stake," Henry Trout told the crowd, and donations were crucial. "Every man, woman and child in Roanoke," *The Times* observed, "ought to feel that he or she has a personal interest in this affair and give something."¹⁷⁷ The association's ads for the event belied its financial difficulties and promised that "the most stupendous celebration of the kind that has ever been held in the state" would take place in the "Magic City of the South."¹⁷⁸ Local merchants hoping to capitalize on the hype offered "decennial souvenir spoons" and "decennial whiskey" that had been distilled in 1882.¹⁷⁹

In the weeks that followed, residents and business leaders donated more than enough of the funds needed, and on the morning of the eighteenth, the celebration got under way with thousands of spectators lining the streets downtown to watch a two-mile-long parade of floats

¹⁷⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 20 April 1892.

¹⁷⁶ *The Iron Belt* 3, no. 4 (April 1892).

¹⁷⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 1 June 1892.

¹⁷⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 9 June 1892.

¹⁷⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 14 June 1892. The spoons did not sell out and were still being offered for sale in September. See *The Roanoke Times*, 7 Sept 1892.

“portraying the growth and progress of Roanoke.” Local businesses sponsored most of the displays. The Cold Storage Company’s float, for example, featured blocks of ice cooling down a butchered hog, while the Hammond Printing Works showed off a working printing press, Fishburne Brothers Tobacco had black workers packing bags with its “Yellow Leaf” brand, and the Pocahontas Coal Company displayed the largest lump of bituminous coal ever mined.¹⁸⁰ All eleven hundred Roanoke Machine Works employees, “their uniforms being a buff cap and blouse, black belt and pantaloons,” followed the floats, as did three hundred bicyclists and representatives from all fifty of the city’s lodges and secret societies. A “sham battle” between cadets from the Virginia Military Institute and Virginia Polytechnic Institute followed the parade, as did two professional baseball games. That night, spectators packed downtown streets to watch several thousand pounds of fireworks explode overhead.¹⁸¹ Although the crowd numbered close to fifteen thousand, according to *The Times*, there had been “little, if any drunkenness or disorderly conduct.” Overall, the paper went on, the decennial had been “the greatest affair of its kind ever seen in Virginia.” However, it explained, the celebration would not be “complete” until the city landed a permanent industry because of its efforts.¹⁸²

Members of the Commercial Association were thrilled with the turnout by potential investors. Furniture storeowner E. H. Stewart, for example, believed the event had distinguished the city from other “so-called boom towns in Southwest Virginia” that had collapsed. “That Roanoke is on solid, substantial footing no one who saw our trades display can doubt,” he told a reporter, “and the effect of the celebration will be to take it out of the list of towns whose future is doubtful and place it in the front rank of the solid, substantial, progressive cities of the South.”¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 June 1892; Recollections of Henry S. Trout, in *The (Roanoke) World News*, 12 May 1913.

¹⁸¹ Roanoke Decennial Committee, *A Souvenir of the Decennial Celebration of Roanoke, Virginia* (Roanoke: Hammond Printing Works, 1892), 1-13 (quote is from 13).

¹⁸² *The Roanoke Times*, 19 June 1892

¹⁸³ *The Roanoke Times*, 21 June 1892.

Stewart and other members the association voted to use funds left over from the celebration to publish a commemorative pamphlet to further publicize the city's tremendous potential for investors. Beyond a superficial description of the decennial and reprinted accounts of the event published in out of town papers, the brochure mirrored other Roanoke booster guides in its effort to illustrate the fantastic growth of the town with a detailed listing of business statistics. Indeed, it even included the increase in Western Union telegraphs per year –which rose from two hundred in 1882 to thirty thousand in 1892 – as evidence of progress. It also bragged about the entrepreneurial spirit of residents, notifying those unfamiliar with the “Magic City” that it had “been developed by the magic of hard work, untiring energy, business shrewdness, and determination, and that is the only sort of magic that amounts to anything in these latter days.” Roanoke's prosperity, the guide explained, had “been laid on solid foundation, and there need be no fear that it will share the fate of some of the boom towns in the South which have sprung up in a night only to disappear as quickly as they arose.”¹⁸⁴

In the 1880s and 1890s, Roanoke's residents divided themselves by race and class into three distinct communities and cultures. The city's white working classes, the largest of the three, coalesced in a variety of ways. Frequenting saloons and gambling dens generated solidarity, as did living in company housing in the Northeast or in boarding homes in the Southwest. Most laborers and their families patronized distinctly working-class forms of entertainment, amusing themselves at dances sponsored by the RL&IC, attending “low brow” shows at the Opera House, socializing downtown on Friday or Saturday nights, or spending time playing carnival games or watching side-show exhibitions in vacant lots.

Roanoke's elite white residents, like its working classes, emerged from groups with differing geographic origins. Although the two groups also lived in different neighborhoods and

¹⁸⁴ Roanoke Decennial Committee, *A Souvenir of the Decennial Celebration*, 1-32 (first quote is from 9; second is from 8).

often had dissimilar religious and political affiliations, they coalesced around a variety of cultural institutions that turned them into a unified class. Their children attended the same private schools, they joined the same clubs, fraternal orders, secret societies, and professional organizations, they frequented the same parties, visited the same springs and resorts, and they eventually created a venue in which they could patronize exclusively “high brow” entertainment. Elite women carved out their own distinct world as well, creating church-related societies and charities that advertised their upper-class and morally “superior” status by placing them in positions in which they judged the “worth” of those seeking assistance.

Roanoke’s black residents, while composed of differing classes, comprised essentially a distinct and cohesive community. African Americans in the city lived in clusters along the same streets, the vast majority worked similar unskilled or day labor jobs, and most patronized the same all-black saloons and dance halls. The town’s African American business owners and professionals assumed leadership roles within the black community, providing guidance on issues ranging from politics to education. No matter what their status, Roanoke’s press continually derided and ridiculed the city’s blacks. Moreover, when it did not single them out for committing crimes or creating disturbances, it ignored them entirely. Indeed, that a thriving black culture and community existed would have come as a surprise to white residents. Churches, of course, served as the main community-building institution as well as the backbone for a variety of African American organizations, all of which served to foment solidarity between local blacks. Community festivals and celebrations, while for the most part ignored by whites, likewise helped foster an overall sense of community.

Although residents purposely divided themselves by class and race, they frequently lowered these barriers enough to participate in activities that generated an overall sense of community. Baseball, circuses and fairs, the Fourth of July, and the decennial celebration brought all residents together in activities that created a general sense of community. Although geographic origins and political affiliation had originally divided the white community, by the early 1890s

these differences had faded. Participation in community-wide events and celebrations, while not solely responsible, played a major role in the deterioration of these barriers. Black residents, while kept on the margins of baseball games and limited almost entirely to spectator status during citywide celebrations, nonetheless participated in ways that placed them squarely within the larger community. Overall, in the 1880s and early 1890s, Roanokers not only carved out a variety of distinct cultures, they also created a sense of municipal identity and civic pride that had not been present in the city's early existence.

Chapter Five

Class, Race, and Reform in the Magic City, 1892-1904

It was the twentieth of September, when the moon shown from on high, in the Magic City of Roanoke, nine innocent men did die. They were shot down by the militia, that was stationed at the jail. It was the awfulest outrage that ever did prevail.

Lyrics from the 1893 ballad, "The Roanoke Riot"

In the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, Roanoke's white community, which at first fractured into factions of natives and newcomers, divided itself more overtly by class. The city's workers and their families, along with migrants from the countryside, comprised one distinct class; the city's business leaders, professionals and their families another. Although these two groups had a symbiotic relationship and occasionally came together behind a common cause or during a celebration, they otherwise rarely associated with one another. The cleavage between them grew more severe in the 1890s, when the town's new professional and middle classes attempted to impose "reforms" on the city's lower-class whites that they hoped would rationalize Roanoke's unruly and disordered "boomtown" ethos. They primarily sought to end workers' access to alcohol and prevent the city's lower classes from exacting frontier-style "justice" on black inhabitants. The city's working classes were the principal patrons of Roanoke's numerous saloons, and the attempt by middle and upper-class reformers to restrict their access to alcohol generated fierce resistance and bitter resentment. The city's white workers and immigrants from the countryside, most of whom understood "justice" in terms of personal vengeance, also reacted with anger and disbelief when local authorities repeatedly failed to hold black inhabitants accountable for supposed crimes. As a result, they increasingly resorted to extralegal "justice" against African Americans who challenged professional and middle-class control of the judicial process. Elected officials and business leaders, the men most concerned about the maintenance of Roanoke's progressive image, eventually resisted the underclass challenge. Their stand, implemented under the banner of law and order and done to protect a

black prisoner accused of assaulting a white woman, plunged the city into anarchy after lower and working-class residents reacted by rioting. In the ensuing violence, the city's militia shot and killed eight white inhabitants before the mob lynched the African American being held.

In the aftermath of the riot, Roanoke's officials and business leaders mounted a campaign to rehabilitate the city's tarnished image and prevent any recurrence of challenges to their authority. The mob violence also prompted moves by Virginia's elected representatives to attempt to end "lynch law." These local and state reforms, enacted immediately following the riot, ended extralegal executions in the Magic City and almost curtailed lynching statewide. The reforms, however, did little to change the outcome for blacks charged with capital crimes against whites. Indeed, African Americans accused of violence against whites could expect little more than show trials that had the appearance of due process but lacked even the remotest potential for fairness. Moreover, while those "convicted" were professionally hanged beyond the purview of the public instead of lynched by bloodthirsty mobs, their executions had many of the same characteristics of lynching festivals.

The city's black residents, most of whom worked as domestics or day laborers, resided almost exclusively in the old Town of Gainsborough or in other impoverished neighborhoods northwest of downtown. Because Roanoke had numerous white Republican residents, the city's blacks were able to cling to at least some political power until 1902, when Virginia's new constitution disenfranchised most of them. Although local Republican officeholders made some concessions that benefited African American inhabitants, such as school funding, blacks never received a fair share of city services or equal treatment in civic institutions. To be black in Roanoke in the 1890s and early 1900s meant being entirely at the mercy of unpredictable forces under the control of racist whites. Any challenge to unfair treatment or crime against whites could easily be met not just with a severe rebuke, but also with physical violence or death.

The interplay of class, race, and reform in Roanoke in the 1890s and early 1900s had part of its genesis in the dramatic intensification of tensions between white and black residents. White antipathy for African Americans, while constant in the 1880s, grew more severe in the 1890s. The black population, especially the number of single males within it, increased, putting whites into more frequent contact with African American strangers, at least some of whom refused to conform to contemporary white notions of appropriate black subservience. Black migrants to Roanoke from 1883 to 1890 exceeded whites by almost 200 percent, and by 1892, the percentage of black residents in the population stood at roughly 30 percent of the city's twenty-three thousand inhabitants.¹ By then, lone African American males looking for a better life than tenant farming provided had begun to congregate in cities across the South. In Roanoke, as elsewhere in the region, the specter of unknown black men wandering about town unsettled and threatened many white men. To them, African American males "on the loose" were a manifestation of their worst fears about black men as chronic criminals and as potential rapists of white women.²

As the city's population grew and its economy boomed, traditional boundaries of decorum and space between the races became more blurry and amorphous and occasionally broke down altogether with streets, sidewalks, depots, and public spaces turning increasingly into contested terrain.³ In an effort to keep black males "in check," local authorities throughout the

¹ Town Council of Roanoke, "Census of the Town of Roanoke, December 1883," vol. 1 and vol. 2, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library; United States Bureau of the Census, *Report on the United States of the Eleventh Census: 1890, Part 1* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1895), 483; statistics from *Sholes 1892 Roanoke City Directory* reprinted in *The Roanoke Times*, 20 Oct 1892.

² For the same situation elsewhere in the South, see Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black and White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 58-59, 111-14; Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 261-62; Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 22-30, 46-57.

³ This was common in most Southern cities at the time according to Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 262.

region arrested them far more often than white men, and they almost always imposed a far more severe penalty.⁴ In Roanoke, black men were much more likely than white males to be arrested for “disorderly conduct,” “vagrancy,” or “trespassing on N&W property.” African American men comprised only about a quarter of the city’s male population but accounted for slightly over half of all arrests.⁵ The emergence of supposedly disease-ridden and corrupt “negro dives” along Railroad Avenue added to white anxiety and fear, as did the constant stream of newspaper accounts about African American dissipation, immorality, corruption, “barbarism,” and “savagery.” Moreover, some whites resented the few black residents who had managed to establish successful businesses, while others, mainly rural white newcomers, chafed at competing for day labor jobs against African Americans.

One symptom of the growing fear and racism was an increase in incidents for which white residents demanded extralegal justice. For, as one scholar of the practice has noted, lynching served not simply as an attack on one person, but as an assault on the entire black community.⁶ Such extralegal “justice” sent a clear message to all African American residents, marking them as outside the community as well as beyond the bounds of due process and basic rights of citizenship. In the early 1880s, when African American males stood accused of murdering Lizzie Wilson, and again in the late 1880s, when police charged black men with killing Thomas Massie, whites in the community banded together in vigilante gangs to seek extralegal retribution. In both cases, mobs bent on lynching the men arrested for the murders gathered around the jail, and each time authorities thwarted riots only by removing the accused to nearby cities. Demands for “lynch justice” appeared again after hung juries or insufficient

⁴ Rabinowitz, *Race Relations*, 43-44.

⁵ City of Roanoke, *Department Reports of the City of Roanoke for the Year Ending June 30, 1893* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1893), 24-26; based on statistics reprinted in *The Roanoke Times*, 20 Oct 1892, the black male population of Roanoke that year was roughly 3,447.

⁶ Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 186-87.

evidence led to acquittals in both cases. In the aftermath, a despondent white community doubted their government's ability to met out justice. Under these conditions, vigilantism was not just possible but probable, especially in cases involving supposed violence against white women by black males. The first significant outcry for vigilantism after those murders occurred in late 1891, when Jeff Dooley, a black male living in the Bunker Hill section of the city, accidentally killed a white policeman attempting to arrest him. In that case, authorities thwarted an inflamed lynch mob only by secreting Dooley out of town.⁷ The murder and lack of immediate "retribution" further fomented white animosity towards blacks and increased suspicion of local authorities.

Early the following year, after a black male supposedly attempted to rape a twelve-year-old white girl, Roanoke's newspapers and white residents howled for swift extralegal justice. "Little Alice Perry" and Jinnie Critzer, her neighbor, were returning home from a visit downtown and had just crossed the Jefferson Street Bridge, *The Roanoke Times* reported, when a black male walking in front of them turned around, threw Alice to the ground, stuffed clothing in her mouth, and "attempted to outrage her." Jinnie alerted the girl's relatives, and before the "burly black assailant could accomplish his purpose," sounds of them approaching frightened him away. Alice provided a detailed description of the man, but according to the *Times*, "the police did not seem to appreciate the gravity of the situation and made no effort to investigate the matter." For the paper's editors, the conduct of city police was not surprising, since in their opinion the force was "so badly handled and organized" that it was "incapable of properly guarding the lives and property of citizens, or of following up criminals." Relatives of the girls, armed with shotguns and pistols, searched in vain for the man Alice described as medium in height, very dark, and wearing a gray suit and rubber boots. Perry's mother, a widowed English immigrant, operated a boarding house near the Adams Brothers & Payne brickyard, located along the southern bank of the Roanoke River, just outside the city limits. That the assault happened where it did did not

⁷ Raymond P. Barnes, *A History of Roanoke* (Radford, VA: Commonwealth Press, 1968), 244.

shock the *Times*. Its editors explained that the area was filled with “dirty negro shanties,” “crowded with a mean-looking set of negroes,” and was an especially “dangerous place to raise up children.”⁸

As news of the attempted assault and lax reaction by police spread, other vigilante groups joined in the hunt for Perry’s assailant. The chief of police, furious that officers had not informed him of the attack, promised residents that the department would do all it could to capture the man responsible. Local papers, while claiming that all black males wearing rubber boots were being “shadowed,” explained that authorities were positive that Allen Stevens was the man they were looking for. Stevens had reportedly stolen a pair of rubber boots earlier in the week and had an “unsavory reputation.”⁹ In nearby Salem, the *Times-Register* reported that Roanoke men were hot on the trail of “another devil at large.”¹⁰ Over the next three days, city police and local posses failed to locate Stevens, but a neighbor of the Perrys encountered a man wearing rubber boots matching the description of the accused assailant and hired him to chop wood while he went for help. William Lavender, an unemployed bootblack, was hard at work on a pile of wood when Alice Perry’s relatives arrived and forced him at gunpoint to her mother’s boarding house. There, Alice and Jinnie identified him as the man who attacked her. Why Lavender would return to the scene of his supposed crime in the midst of a hysterical manhunt is unclear, as is the sudden replacement of Allen Stevens as the prime suspect. Lavender was an easy target for white fury; he had moved to the city five years earlier and spent close to two years on the local chain gang for offenses ranging from vagrancy and disorderly conduct to theft and assault on the chief of police.

⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 10 Feb 1892. The Perry family had been in Roanoke since at least December 1883, when the town’s internal census listed them as living at the intersection of the Lynchburg Turnpike and Water Street.

⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 11 Feb 1892.

¹⁰ *The Salem Times-Register*, 12 Feb 1892.

The mayor had ordered him to leave town on several occasions, but Lavender stayed in the city, usually lodging in saloons or eating houses along Railroad Avenue.¹¹

After the girls identified Lavender, police returned him to the Roanoke City Jail, where a mob gathered outside demanding his immediate lynching. The mob's outrage was legitimate, according to a "professional man" in the crowd around the jail, since "justice in Roanoke could hardly be trusted" and "had failed in too many instances to apprehend and punish crime." Though authorities worried about their ability to protect Lavender, the chief of police insisted that they keep him in the city, lest it reflect poorly on their capability to maintain law and order. Later that evening, however, after the mob grew larger and more boisterous, the chief grew worried and had Lavender secretly taken from the jail to a house belonging to a member of his force. The mob soon learned of Lavender's removal, and by midnight, its members had located his hiding spot and easily overpowered the three policemen guarding him. The kidnappers took Lavender to the north bank of the Roanoke River, where they put a noose around his neck and demanded he confess. Though he initially denied everything, after being pulled up by the neck a few times, he admitted to being drunk and accidentally knocking Alice Perry down. With his fate now sealed, Lavender begged for a final prayer from a man in the crowd whom he recognized. After consenting to a quick blessing, several of the men pulled him up again and left him twisting and kicking in the air until he died. The mob dispersed shortly thereafter, according to a *Times* reporter who had accompanied the men. He added, with evident approval, that "there was not a drunken or boisterous man in the party."¹²

The *Times's* editors endorsed the lynching as well, proclaiming in oversized type on their front page: "Judge Lynch! Little Alice Perry Has Been Avenged." In an editorial condoning

¹¹ Identification is from *The Roanoke Times*, 12 Feb 1892; Lavender's police record is from *The Roanoke Times*, 13 Feb 1892; according to *The Roanoke Times*, 24 Jan 1891, when police raided "negro dives" along Railroad Avenue, they found Lavender sleeping near a stove in Wilmeth's barroom.

¹² *The Roanoke Times*, 12 Feb 1892.

“lynch law,” they explained that “when the people come to believe that the machinery which they have erected for carrying out of justice has lost its power to right wrongs, they erect new machinery.”¹³ Moreover, the actions of the mob fit the definition of a “good” lynching: there had been only a brief and non-violent confrontation between whites, Lavender admitted his “guilt,” and his sober and responsible killers had successfully hung him and then dispersed. By early the following day, thousands of residents had turned out on a bitter cold February morning to view the “weird, strange scene” of Lavender dangling “frozen stiff and stark” on a rope below a massive oak tree. So many spectators cut off pieces of the rope for souvenirs that by mid-morning his body had fallen down. At the funeral home in town where Lavender’s body was taken, a local photographer “secured a likeness of the man as he lay on the board with the big hangman’s knot encircling his neck.” Later the photographer sold copies of the grisly photo as a memento of the event. The general feeling in town, the *Times* explained, was “that a good thing had been done” and the “dignity of the people maintained.”¹⁴ A subsequent grand jury investigation failed to indict anyone. The only people who admitted being present – two newspaper reporters – claimed that handkerchiefs concealed mob members’ identities. Overall, the jury complained, “they never found a lot of witnesses who knew less.”¹⁵

In the aftermath of the Lavender lynching and the failure to hold anyone accountable for the crime, the city’s press and white residents called for “lynch justice” even more frequently. Only days after Lavender’s extralegal hanging, Jeff Dooley returned to town to stand trial for the murder of a Roanoke policeman. Crowds again gathered outside the jail and demanded he be summarily executed. The mayor, however, called out extra police as well as the Roanoke Light Infantry to protect the prisoner. The trial lasted only two days, and after the jury returned a

¹³ *The Roanoke Times*, 12 Feb 1892.

¹⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 13 Feb 1892.

¹⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 Feb 1892.

verdict of murder in the first degree, the judge sentenced Dooley to be hanged in Roanoke in early April. Local papers praised the decision, but noted that the recent lynching had stirred up citizens to the point that they would have settled for nothing less. Indeed, the editors of the *Times* boasted that “lynching has its place” and claimed that citizens would hereafter swiftly administer “justice” any time local officials failed to.¹⁶ Dooley, however, disappointed those excited about his impending hanging by dying in jail before his execution date.¹⁷

Only weeks after Dooley’s sentence, papers notified the public of another “candidate for the rope” – an African American teenager accused of raping a black child. Since the victim was African American, the press reported that few white residents believed it was their duty to mete out retribution, but encouraged “respectable” blacks in the community to act responsibly and lynch the “lecherous scoundrel.” Before they could, however, authorities removed the young man to Lynchburg.¹⁸ A week later, the *Times* reported that there was “another candidate for Judge Lynch” – Richard Fraling, a white man arrested after being accused of molesting a four-year-old white girl. Although the city’s mayor called out the local militia to protect the prisoner, before they arrived, a hysterical mob stormed the jail and dragged Fraling out into the street. The mob’s leaders, however, could not decide if they should lynch a white man, and after some debate, they turned Fraling back over to the police. Authorities then immediately shipped him off to Lynchburg to await trial.¹⁹

Roanoke’s papers not only endorsed local lynchings but also fanned the flames of race hatred by printing a constant stream of sensationalized accounts of extralegal executions of black Virginians on their front pages alongside editorials forecasting a coming “race war.” Local editors

¹⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 16, 17, 18, Feb 1892 (quote is from 18 Feb).

¹⁷ Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 249.

¹⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 12 March 1892.

¹⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 20, 24 March 1892. After a jury found Fraling (later spelled Frailen) not guilty, authorities secreted him away to Bedford County before discharging him.

and reporters demeaned and dehumanized African Americans whenever they could, and they generally praised lynchings as a necessary evil. In early 1893, after a mob hung five blacks in the coalfields of Richland, Virginia, the *Times* called the men responsible “orderly and brave” and noted with satisfaction that “no disturbance of any kind occurred” because the crowd “worked quietly and with determination, giving each of the negroes time to confess.”²⁰ Local papers viewed the “orderly” Richland hangings like Lavender’s murder, as “good” lynchings. The distinction made the tidy and systematic variety of extralegal killings acceptable to the South’s middle and upper classes but marked lynchings that were marred by violence between whites, where guilt was in question, where the mob was boisterous or drunken, or where the killers botched a hanging, as totally unacceptable. In Roanoke, the *Times*’s editors observed, many white residents favored extralegal means of punishment because they believed “that a greater injustice and danger menace the community in the law’s delay than in the lynching itself.”²¹

In the spring of 1893, after a mob in the Southwest town of Marion, Virginia, lynched a black “brute” accused of committing “a fiendish outrage” on the local sheriff’s wife, men involved in the hanging presented the *Times*’s editors with a piece of the rope.²² The only means of stopping “Judge Lynch,” the paper argued afterwards, would be the passage of laws that allowed for the immediate trial and execution of “beasts.”²³ After yet another lynching in the region that summer, the editors of the *Times* noted that “when a certain class of crimes are inevitably visited by speedy death at the hands of the community without waiting for the tardy and uncertain wheels of justice, sure it is that the law is at fault and not the people.”²⁴

²⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 3 Feb 1893.

²¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 4 Feb 1893.

²² *The Roanoke Times*, 13 May 1893.

²³ *The Roanoke Times*, 14 May 1893.

²⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 7, 17 June; 9 July 1893 (quote is from 9 July).

White residents' growing racism and predilection for lynching intensified in the prolonged and catastrophic economic recession that hit the United States in 1893. The depression struck Roanoke especially hard, throwing the Norfolk & Western Railroad into a reorganization receivership, driving the Norwich Lock Works out of business, forcing layoffs at the Roanoke Machine Works, and causing four of the town's seven banks to fail.²⁵ The economic downturn was so pervasive that one bank repossessed a local Episcopal Church to satisfy its delinquent mortgage payments and had it sold at auction under order of the sheriff.²⁶ By the fall of 1893, the depression had grown so severe that Mayor Henry Trout ordered a special session of council to get permission to suspend all municipal improvements. Few residents had been able to pay their property taxes, he reported, and as a result, the city treasury was empty.²⁷ Although up until 1893 Roanoke faced a severe housing shortage, by early 1894, over five hundred homes stood vacant.²⁸ The railroad and machine shops cut wages and hours and laid off hundreds of employees. Many of the idle shop and railroad workers packed up their families and left town; those who stayed struggled to make ends meet. Unskilled laborers from the countryside faced even worse economic circumstances, and those who did not leave subsisted on odd jobs and occasionally even charity.

In industrialized parts of Appalachia like Roanoke, the recession increased tensions between workers and the city's new professional and middle classes, who were blamed for the

²⁵ Information on the effects of the 1893 recession is from E. B. Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western Railway Company* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg., 1912), 153-55; E. F. Pat Striplin, *The Norfolk & Western: A History* (Forest, VA: Norfolk & Western Historical Society, 1997), 62-64; account of Roanoke Machine Works Relief Association in *The Roanoke Times*, 28 Nov 1893; description of bank failures by James P. Woods in "Personal Biographical Sketches and Reminiscences of James Pleasant Woods," reprinted in Roy H. Hippert, Jr., "Col. James P. Woods, Lawyer, Congressman," *Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society* 11, no. 1 (1982): 32.

²⁶ Eugenia M. Keen and Gladys D. Hughes, *History of Christ Episcopal Church, Roanoke, Virginia* (Roanoke: Christ Episcopal, 1961), 9.

²⁷ Roanoke City Council Minutes, 12 Oct 1891, Clerk's Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building.

²⁸ Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 275, 278.

shocking collapse of the town's boom. The depression, with its seemingly mysterious origins and painful consequences, left the city's working classes and rural immigrants confused, distraught, and united in their resentment of the Magic City's professional and middle-class inhabitants. The efforts of Roanoke's bourgeois residents, officials, and bosses to impose discipline and order on the community added to these resentments and fostered a growing sense of class solidarity among all white workers. A major cause of the growing class tension appeared in the fall of 1893, when residents became embroiled in a heated "local option" campaign to decide whether the town would ban the sale of alcohol. The vote did not break down entirely along racial or class lines, but a significant segment of the city's registered African Americans joined hundreds of middle and upper-class whites in supporting prohibition, while the town's white working classes and formerly rural residents were far more likely to oppose restrictions on the sale of alcohol.²⁹

William Campbell, "an active leader in every moral reform" and pastor of First Presbyterian Church, led the local prohibition campaign but got a significant boost in support from a weeklong crusade by the famous revivalist Sam Jones.³⁰ Roanoke's reputation for debauchery was widespread by the time Jones came to town in the spring of 1892, and papers in the region predicted that during his visit, Jones, who was "never so happy as when fighting the devil," would "find enough of his Satanic Majesty in the Magic City to make the contest

²⁹ Although Gordon McKinney does not discuss the prohibition campaign as a factor, he makes a similar argument in his "Industrialization and Violence in Appalachia in the 1890s," in J. W. Williamson, ed., *An Appalachian Symposium: Essays Written in Honor of Cratis D. Williams* (Boone, NC: Appalachian State University Press, 1977), 134-39. According to Joel Williamson, in the South, the depression also created confusion and anxiety among white men, who unable to wholly fulfill their role as family providers, turned to protecting their wives and daughters from imagined black rapists. See his *Crucible of Race*, 115-17.

³⁰ Quote is from William McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, Roanoke City, Va., and Representative Citizens* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Company, 1902), 380; Campbell helped organize various temperance groups in the late 1880s. By 1891, he and his congregation had already begun pushing for local option vote. For his involvement in temperance or prohibition activities, see *Roanoke Daily Times*, 6 Dec 1889; Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 229.

interesting.”³¹ When Jones arrived, determined to do what he could to “run the whiskey out,” five thousand residents attended his first sermons and heard a lengthy diatribe against the town’s sixty-five saloons, which, according to Jones, represented over \$300,000 in capital “invested for the damnation of young men.” “Don’t you see,” he questioned residents, “how the Devil’s got the town?”³² The following day Jones toured the city, and that night told an overflow crowd that from what he had seen of Railroad Avenue “its name ought to be changed to the drunkard’s highway to hell.”³³ He blasted local authorities for not doing more to suppress gambling dens, whorehouses, and public drunkenness and held them primarily responsible for “ruining the best boys of your town.”³⁴ In his last sermon, Jones read a letter to him from the wife of a Roanoke Machine Shop worker who claimed to be the voice of hundreds of other wives. Saloon keepers on Railroad and Salem Avenues, she complained, “rob the wives and children of the necessities of life” by doing all in their power to “get the workingmen’s money.” If it were up to him, Jones declared, he would use a cowhide whip on the neglectful husbands and run the barkeepers out of town.³⁵

In the wake of Jones’s visit, middle and upper-class women in the city organized five chapters of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and over two hundred of their husbands and sons joined a local Prohibition Club. The groups immediately began a campaign to get the names of one-third of registered voters on a petition for a local option vote. Although they failed that fall, the organizations kept up their campaign.³⁶ William Campbell, a longtime advocate of just such a measure, assumed a leadership position in the effort and used his Presbyterian

³¹ Winston (NC) *Sentinel*, quoted in *The Roanoke Times*, 30 April 1892.

³² *The Roanoke Times*, 5 May 1892.

³³ *The Roanoke Times*, 6 May 1892.

³⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 10 May 1892.

³⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 11 May 1892.

³⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 15 May; 7, 14 June 1892.

newspaper *Words and Works* to advocate prohibition. In a typical essay in Campbell's "temperance column," he recounted the sad fate of two drunken Machine Shop workers. The first came into town on payday to buy bread and meat for his family but "got into a saloon on Salem avenue, and soon got so full he could scarcely walk." He spent all his pay on beer and returned home to his hungry family empty handed. The other drank a bottle of whiskey, passed out in a mud puddle, and drowned. Neither tragedy, he noted, "has materially lessened the number of saloons."³⁷ By 1893, however, interest in restricting alcohol sales had increased, and Campbell led a successful campaign by the WCTU and Prohibition Club to prevent the licensing of a bar in one of the city's working-class neighborhoods.³⁸ In the spring of 1893, he and the prohibition organizations established in each of Roanoke's five wards a "Temperance Club" to gather signatures in favor of a local option vote. By July, the clubs had enough signatures, and after verifying their petitions, a city judge scheduled the election for early September. Only twenty-one of the over eleven hundred names on the clubs' petitions came from residents of the Northeast, the city's main working-class neighborhood, an obvious sign that there would be a fierce battle over the issue.³⁹

The fight began in earnest in August 1893, a month before the vote, when organizations representing each side of the issue started staging massive rallies and marches to build support. At the end of the month, a few hundred black voters turned out for an anti-local option rally in Gainsborough's Davis Hall. White politicians, who had organized the event and were its principal speakers, reminded the African Americans present that they had supported funding for a new

³⁷ *Words and Works*, 22 Oct 1892, in William Creighton Campbell Papers, History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke (hereafter cited as Campbell Papers).

³⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 31 Jan; 1 Feb 1893.

³⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 30 June; 19, 30 July 1893.

schoolhouse for blacks.⁴⁰ African American preachers and businessmen countered with a rally at the old Opera House that also drew a large crowd. William Campbell joined Richard R. Jones and D. W. Harth, the city's most prominent African American ministers, in encouraging those in attendance to cast votes that would save their race from dissipation and extinction. On the evening before the local option vote, the "wets" marched to the Academy of Music to stage their last and biggest rally. The speakers included several of the city's most successful business leaders, most of whom argued that a ban on alcohol would destroy the local economy and discourage workers from settling in Roanoke. The question, Judge William G. Robertson asserted, was "not whether we are to be intemperate or not, but shall the majority say to the minority, you shall not drink liquor." He urged the audience "to be men and not be influenced by the pulpit against your own interests." "Never," the *Times* summed up the campaign, "has a conflict been more vigorously waged."⁴¹

The "wets" won in three of the city's five wards but lost the election by one hundred and thirty-nine votes. The "drys" won impressively in Roanoke's largely white and predominantly middle and upper-class First Ward. The "wets" easily carried the working-class wards in the Northeast and Southeast but received only 51 percent of the nearly one thousand votes cast in the mostly black Third Ward. Though the issue was settled, the *Times* observed that it had engendered "a large amount of enmity and strife" that showed no signs of dissipating.⁴² In the days after the contest, anti-prohibitionists accused the prohibitionists of fraud, hired a team of lawyers, and filed a suit contesting the election.⁴³ The lawsuit, according to William Campbell and other local option supporters, was a bald attempt to "defy the will of the majority."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 1 Sept 1893.

⁴¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 5, 5 "Extra Edition," Sept 1893.

⁴² *The Roanoke Times*, 5 "Extra Edition," Sept 1893; 10 March 1894.

⁴³ *The Roanoke Times*, 7, 8 Sept 1893. The "wets" lost in the local Hustings Court in February 1894, but in March won an appeal in Circuit Court based on the argument that not

The city's working classes and recent immigrants from the countryside, the primary patrons of Roanoke's numerous saloons, were despondent about the outcome of the election, which would ban alcohol sales in the city the following May. To them, drinking in bars among fellow workingmen was a cherished liberty and integral part of their social life. To some of the city's middle and upper classes, however, saloons and drunkenness represented a threat to law and order, production, and family life. In their view, prohibition would recast working-class recreation in ways that conformed to a modern, bourgeois, value system.⁴⁵ While there was no clear target for their fury, the city's white workers and formerly rural residents held the WCTU, clergy, reform-minded middle and upper classes, and government officials responsible for ending their access to saloons. Since numerous press accounts focused on the fact that African Americans had organized local option clubs and held rallies in support of prohibition, they held blacks responsible as well. The looming enactment of prohibition exacerbated lower-class residents' mistrust of local authorities and only added to the tensions between them and black residents.

In town, lower-class whites' growing antipathy towards African American residents continued to erupt in periodic episodes of violence that increased in intensity throughout 1893. That June, for instance, the *Roanoke Daily Record* reported that a black male named Royal Moore had "attempted to monopolize more of the sidewalk than belongs, by custom or good breeding, to any one man" and bumped into a white pedestrian "who resented the encounter by drawing a gun upon the aforesaid Senegambian." C. W. Allen did not shoot Moore, the paper explained, "and many people think he ought to have been imprisoned for neglecting to perform

enough previously registered voters had signed the local option petition. See *The Roanoke Times*, 1, 13, 14, 15 Feb; 10 March 1894.

⁴⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Sept 1893.

⁴⁵ Roy Rosenzweig presents an argument for this point in his *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 93-102.

his bounded duty.”⁴⁶ Such sidewalk confrontations grew increasingly frequent and were generally the result of African Americans asserting their humanity and equality in the face of an emerging racially hierarchized society that sought to make them sub-human and deny them equal access to public space.⁴⁷ In Roanoke’s racially charged public spaces, confrontations between blacks and whites always had the potential for violence, and by the fall of 1893, with white anxiety, fear, and animosity towards African Americans at its peak, any transgression by a black resident could easily have erupted in an outbreak of white hysteria and violence against members of the race.

The spark that ignited renewed calls for “lynch justice” came two weeks after the prohibition vote, when a black male allegedly attacked Sallie A. Bishop, a middle-aged white woman. Mrs. Bishop and her twelve-year-old son had come to town Wednesday morning, September 20, 1893, from neighboring Botetourt County to sell produce on Market Square. Not long after arriving, Bishop stumbled into a nearby grocery store in a daze and bleeding from several large gashes on her head. About thirty minutes earlier, she explained to the throng of men who quickly surrounded her, a black man had offered her sixty cents for some grapes on the condition that she go with him to deliver the fruit to a “Miss Hicks” on Salem Avenue, not far from Market Square. Bishop followed the man into the basement of the building given as the address, where he drew a straight razor and demanded money. After she handed over \$2 or \$3, he beat her unconscious with a brick and fled the scene. The man, she told those gathered around her, was in his early twenties, “tolerably black,” and wearing a faded gray frock coat, gray pants, and a “large, black slouch hat.” Word of the assault spread quickly, as did rumors that a black

⁴⁶ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 24 June 1893, in Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library. Police fined Moore \$2.50 for “disorderly conduct.”

⁴⁷ Jane Daily, *Before Jim Crow: The Politics of Race in Postemancipation Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 98-111. According to Daily, “Broad questions of racial domination and subordination were frequently distilled in public interactions on the streets of the urban South, and negotiation over rules of common courtesy became a principal venue for the ongoing contest between blacks determined to assert their identity as civic actors and whites intent on denying blacks that power.” (106) See also Rabinowitz, *Race Relations*, 182-97, 333-39.

“brute” had murdered or raped Bishop. Within minutes, patrons poured out of saloons and local businesses to look for the culprit, and dozens of farmers at the Market unhitched their teams and rode bareback through the city searching for him.⁴⁸

William Edwards, a black teenager who had joined in the hunt, witnessed someone matching Bishop’s description jump aboard an outbound train under the Randolph Street Bridge, a couple of blocks from the Market. Edwards hopped aboard as well and pulled the man off. As the suspect fled toward woods in the Southeast near Belmont Boulevard and Tazewell Avenue, a posse nearby joined the chase. William G. Baldwin, chief detective of the Norfolk & Western Railroad, rode into the lead and first overtook the man. Baldwin drew his revolver, ordered him onto the back of his horse, and proceeded back to town through dozens of men throwing rocks and demanding that the suspect be immediately turned over to them. Baldwin took the suspect to Conway’s Saloon, where doctors were treating Bishop, and forced his way through the enraged men gathered outside. Over shouts of “lynch him” or “hang him,” Bishop tentatively explained that the man resembled her attacker and asked to see his hat, which she identified as the one worn by the person who robbed her. The detective, gun drawn, rushed the suspect back to his horse and headed for the jail. An immense and hysterical mob followed close behind.⁴⁹

Baldwin beat the crowd to the jail and turned the man over to authorities, who lodged him in a cell on the second floor. Within minutes, according to a reporter on the scene, the municipal building was “surrounded by over a thousand men clamoring for revenge and blood.”

⁴⁸ Accounts of Bishop’s assault are available in *Roanoke Daily Record*, 20 Sept 1893, in Norfolk & Western Scrapbook No. 18, Norfolk & Western Railway Archives, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg (cited hereafter as N&WRA); quotes are from *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Sept 1893; for widespread rumors that Bishop had been murdered, see William C. Campbell, “Roanoke’s Tragedies,” TMs, in Campbell Papers.

⁴⁹ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 20 Sept 1893, in N&W Scrapbook No. 18, N&WRA; *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Sept 1893. First quotes from *Times*, second quote from *Daily Record*. In the 1890s, Baldwin, a native of Tazewell County, Virginia, teamed with Thomas Felts of Galax, Virginia, to create the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency which later became notorious for its participation in breaking up strikes at Virginia and West Virginia coal fields.

The mob was almost entirely composed of lower and working-class white men, almost all of whom interpreted the attack on Mrs. Bishop as an assault on the whole white community. Mayor Henry Trout and the city's Commonwealth Attorney addressed the increasingly unruly crowd and promised swift justice. Trout, a Big Lick native, former state legislator, well-known bank president, and member of the N&W's board of trustees, was widely admired by residents for his instrumental role in luring the N&W and Roanoke Machine Works to their town. His speech at least temporarily mollified the mob; some of its members melted away. Most stayed to make sure authorities did not attempt to remove the prisoner; others headed off for Botetourt County to gather Bishop's kin and neighbors. The man in custody, Thomas Smith, a married, unemployed former Crozer Iron Furnace worker from nearby Vinton, denied any knowledge of the attack. Beyond the identification of his slouch hat, there was no actual evidence against him. Moreover, why a black male, witnessed by dozens of farmers leading Bishop away from the Market, would rob her, beat her, and then remain nearby for the next half an hour defied logic. Although Smith was probably innocent, the city's press assured readers that he was the culprit. *The Roanoke Times* even falsely claimed that Bishop "immediately knew her assailant and said so."⁵⁰

Protecting Smith from the lynch mob was made far more difficult in Roanoke because the police force charged with safeguarding him was understaffed and inept. The last mayor had removed the department's former chief after he embezzled over \$2,000, and numerous officers had been dismissed for fighting, being drunk or asleep on duty, or after being caught consorting with prostitutes.⁵¹ The city's 1892 charter put the mayor back in charge of the force, and when Henry Trout assumed office that year, he quickly reorganized the entire department. "I desire to

⁵⁰ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 20 Sept 1893, in N&W Scrapbook no. 18, N&WRA (cited hereafter as N&WS no., N&WRA); quotes are from *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Sept 1893.

⁵¹ See new jail description in *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Nov 1892; 3 Jan 1893; for chief being dismissed, see Roanoke City Council Minutes, 12 Oct 1892, Clerk's Office, Roanoke Municipal Building; for problems with the force, see *The Roanoke Times*, 18, 24 May; 10, 15 June; 7, 8 Oct 1892.

have a police force,” the newly elected mayor told the department, “that will be a credit to the city, and I expect to have it.” Trout credited the new chief, John F. Terry, a Civil War veteran and former N&W Yardmaster, with restoring order to the department, and he left him and Sergeant Alexander H. Griffin, a Pennsylvanian and former Machine Shops worker, in their leadership positions. Neither man, however, had any formal police training, nor had either been on the force more than a year.⁵² The sixteen officers in the department lacked formal training as well, and most of them were wholly unprepared for the danger and mayhem they encountered on Roanoke’s streets. They came and went as quickly as they could, according to Sergeant Griffin, who observed that many “started out very bravely as patrolmen in the morning but could hardly lay aside their badge fast enough at night.”⁵³

Throughout the remainder of the day, the mob outside the jail grew in size and became more belligerent. Bottles of whiskey had passed freely between its members all afternoon, and as the men become more and more intoxicated, their demands for “lynch justice” increased in volume. Peering out on the throng of enraged residents, Mayor Trout quickly realized that his police would not be able to withstand an assault on the building. Rather than risk Smith being taken by the mob, he called out the Roanoke Light Infantry, the city’s component of the Virginia Militia. Unlike other local officials in Virginia, who generally acquiesced to the demands of lynch mobs, Trout vowed to protect Smith knowing full well that he risked social ostracism and retribution. His stand was all the more remarkable given state authorities’ silence on the issue and

⁵² The changes in the police force granted by the 1892 charter are noted in Police Pension Fund Association, *History of the Roanoke Police Department* (Roanoke: Union Printing, 1902), 92; Trout’s address is in Roanoke City Council Minutes, 22 July 1892, Clerk’s Office, Roanoke Municipal Building; information on Terry and Griffin is from *The Roanoke Times*, 23 July 1892.

⁵³ For size of force, see *The Roanoke Times*, 8 July 1892; for Griffin’s observation, see PPFA, *Roanoke Police Department*, 96. The force, nevertheless, made close to three thousand arrests in the year after Trout’s request. By the summer of 1893, W. H. Turner, the city’s Police Justice, proclaimed the department “in excellent condition” and declared the “general order” of the town “now better than ever before.” See *Department Reports of the City of Roanoke for the Year Ending June 30, 1893* (Roanoke: Stone Printing and Mfg. Co., 1893), 24-27.

hesitancy to protect potential lynching victims.⁵⁴ According to Jack W. Hancock, a member of the Roanoke Infantry, he and seventeen other infantrymen marched to the municipal building where Trout again pleaded with the crowd to disperse before he ordered the infantry to clear the street in front of the jail. The mob, Hancock reported, laughed at the men and “made fun of us saying we were afraid to shoot.” The militia, although armed with bayonets and rifles, was hardly threatening. A social organization as much as an infantry, its crisply uniformed members, most of them young clerks for the railroad or other businesses, had no experience with actual combat. The infantry nevertheless did drive the mob back from the block in front of the municipal building. Police arrested two men in the crowd who refused to leave, but their detention appears to have only made the mob angrier.⁵⁵

John Bird, captain of the infantry, stationed his men along Campbell Avenue from Commerce to Roanoke Streets and sealed the block off from all but those who had official business in the area. Bird, who had moved to Roanoke from Connecticut a couple years earlier to help operate the Norwich Lock Works, believed the situation was under control even though members of the mob remained nearby, milling about Campbell Avenue beside the Ponce de Leon Hotel. At 7:30 PM, Bird walked to Catagonis Restaurant to check on a take-out order for his troops. According to Hancock, his captain had been gone only about five minutes when, nearly hysterical, he called from Catagonis to report that the mob was rushing up Commerce Street and Campbell Avenue. Bird beat the crowd to the municipal building and ordered his men to take up positions on the front steps and at windows inside. Hancock, stationed on the steps with four other soldiers, saw what he believed to be at least a thousand men running up the street and

⁵⁴ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 166.

⁵⁵ Hancock’s account is from Jack W. Hancock, “Eyewitness Account of the Roanoke Riot of 1893,” 1-2, TMs (ca. 1893)1-2, History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke; see also *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Sept 1893. According to Hancock’s “Clarification Notes,” he wrote his “Eyewitness Account” immediately following the Roanoke Riot of 1893.

“cheering as they came.” Its leaders, according to local papers, were Mrs. Bishop’s oldest son and fifty to a hundred other men from Botetourt County who had just arrived in the city. “It seemed,” Hancock reported, “that they would attempt to rush over us at every moment.”⁵⁶

Thousands of spectators followed the mob to the municipal building and watched the confrontation. E. P. Tompkins, a railroad clerk among them, recalled that he gossiped with friends and never dreamed of danger.⁵⁷ William Campbell, like other ministers, wandered through the crowd, doing what he could to talk its members out of an attempt to lynch the prisoner. Campbell, who like most residents believed Mrs. Bishop was dead, left the scene to hold a special prayer meeting at his church a few blocks away. “We have a murderer in our city,” he told his congregation, “and I fear we shall have a number of others.”⁵⁸ While Campbell preached, the mob closed in around the jail. Henry Trout and Captain Bird, his sword drawn, stood atop of the courthouse steps and ordered the crowd to disperse at once. Bird informed those close enough to hear him that the infantry’s guns were loaded and would be used to protect Smith. “They replied with curses and abuse,” Hancock later recalled, “saying that they were not afraid of us, that we were afraid to shoot, and that they would have the negro.”⁵⁹ By then, the situation had grown so tense that Bird ordered one of his men to wire the governor that the Roanoke Infantry was surrounded by a mob of five thousand and would be “wiped out shortly.”⁶⁰

Around 8:00 PM, according to one reporter, the shouting and screaming mob made a “wild rush” toward the western side of the jail, battering the door there with lumber and

⁵⁶ Hancock, “Eyewitness Account of the Roanoke Riot of 1893,” 3-4; *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Sept 1893; *Roanoke Daily Record*, 21 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁵⁷ E. P. Tompkins, “Medical Annals of Roanoke,” 18, TMs (1922), Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library.

⁵⁸ Campbell, “Roanoke’s Tragedies.”

⁵⁹ Hancock, “Eyewitness Account of the Roanoke Riot of 1893,” 4-5.

⁶⁰ *Report of the Acting Adjutant General of the State of Virginia for the Year 1893* (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1922), 63.

shattering windows on that side with rocks. Bird gave infantrymen stationed at the windows the “ready” command, signaling them to cock their rifles and aim them at the men below.⁶¹ Who fired the shot that immediately followed Bird’s order is unclear. Hancock, stationed out front, maintained that it and four or five others that rang out in rapid succession came from the sidewalk across the street.⁶² A correspondent for *The Roanoke Times* in the crowd concurred, reporting that “in the fever heat of excitement and suspense . . . several imprudent persons in the street opposite the jail, near the Chinese laundry, fired a number of pistol shots.”⁶³ E. P. Tompkins, however, claimed that as soon as the mob started bashing the door there “came a volley of shots from the windows over my head, and men fell right and left in the street.”⁶⁴ The *Daily Record’s* correspondent at the scene agreed and reported there were thousands of other witnesses who saw the militia open fire on the crowd. Whatever the origins of the first shot, after it rang out, the infantry opened fire. Over the next two minutes, it and the mob exchanged about a hundred and fifty shots.⁶⁵

Many of the bullets hit Greene Memorial Church next door, forcing worshipers to seek shelter under their pews.⁶⁶ A couple blocks away, at William Campbell’s prayer vigil, he and his congregation heard the “terrific roar of musketry” and rushed outside to see what had happened. Campbell passed several of the wounded being dragged away and saw thousands of men and women “running in every direction to get out of reach of other shots that might come.”⁶⁷ In the

⁶¹ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 21 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁶² Hancock, “Eyewitness Account of the Roanoke Riot of 1893,” 4-5.

⁶³ *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Sept 1893.

⁶⁴ Tompkins, “Medical Annals,” 18.

⁶⁵ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 21 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁶⁶ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 21 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁶⁷ Campbell, “Roanoke’s Tragedies.”

panic, the mob and crowd of spectators fled down Campbell Avenue or tumbled into piles behind the Ponce de Leon Hotel's railing. "The street before the jail," according to E. P. Tompkins, "looked a shambles, blood in forty places, the street car rails slippery with it."⁶⁸ In the alley beside the jail, the *Daily Times* reported, the ground was "soaked with blood, stones splattered and walls splashed with the same dreadful dye." The melee killed eight men in the crowd, wounded thirty-one others, and left Mayor Trout, the only casualty inside the courthouse, with a bullet lodged in his foot. According to local papers, most of those struck down or wounded had been spectators standing on the outskirts of the mob. S. A. Vick, proprietor of the St. James Hotel, was among the dead, as were three Norfolk & Western employees, a Roanoke County distiller, and George Settles, a popular member of the Roanoke Athletic Club's baseball team. Charlie Moten, the black saloonkeeper, was wounded, as were two African American women who had been watching the mob from across the street. Most of those hit in the volley were horrifically injured. One man had his leg blown off, another lost his foot, and several others had wounds to the groin, stomach, or head. In the chaos of the assault, the militia and mob both fired haphazardly, and according to doctors who treated the injured, pistol shots from the crowd hit at least three spectators in addition to Mayor Trout.⁶⁹

Within a few minutes of the clash, N&W Detective William Baldwin made his way to the courthouse to warn the militia and city officials that members of the mob were breaking into hardware stores downtown to steal rifles and dynamite. According to a *Times* correspondent in the area, "incendiary speeches were being made by a dozen men," all of whom had vowed to mount another attack on the infantry and to lynch Mayor Trout along with Smith. When Judge John W. Woods and local politician J. Allan Watts attempted to dissuade the crowd, men in the

⁶⁸ Tompkins, "Medical Annals," 19; Hancock, "Eyewitness Account of the Roanoke Riot of 1893," 5.

⁶⁹ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 21 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA; *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Sept 1893; Settles' description from *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Sept 1893; bullet descriptions from *The Roanoke Times*, 26 Sept 1893.

mob shouted them down and fired pistols in the air. According to Jack Hancock, shortly after Baldwin's warning, Trout limped into the Ponce de Leon Hotel and Captain Bird ordered the militia to shed their uniforms, go home, and stay inside. Before leaving, Trout instructed the police force to take Smith into hiding. Once the mayor left, however, Chief Terry suggested that they save themselves by turning him over to the mob. Sergeant Griffin and two other officers ignored him, and along with George Gordon, another black prisoner, they took Smith across the Roanoke River, to a hiding spot beyond the southwestern limits of the city.⁷⁰ When the mob returned and found the courthouse empty, according to Tompkins, one of its leaders mounted a table inside "swinging a coil of rope with many oaths calling for volunteers to help hang the mayor."⁷¹ William Campbell once again begged the crowd to disperse but found the men so enraged that "they would not listen to reason or anything else."⁷²

After a search of the courthouse and the Ponce de Leon Hotel failed to turn up the mayor or Smith, the mob followed Mrs. Bishop's son to Trout's house. The mayor had slipped out the back door of the hotel only minutes earlier, after getting treatment on his wounded foot, and remained in hiding among his friends. By the time Bishop's son and the men following him searched Trout's home, they were drunk and "using bad language."⁷³ Having failed to find the mayor or Smith, the mob broke up into several ten to fifteen man squads to ransack the homes of city officials and guard the railroad tracks to prevent either man from escaping by train.⁷⁴ Sometime later that night, George Gordon – the prisoner who helped Smith escape – and Sergeant Griffin returned to the jail. By then, Griffin had had a change of heart and told Chief Terry that

⁷⁰ Hancock, "Eyewitness Account of the Roanoke Riot of 1893," 5; *The Roanoke Times*, 21, 23 Sept 1893.

⁷¹ Tompkins, "Medical Annals," 20.

⁷² Campbell, "Roanoke's Tragedies."

⁷³ *The Roanoke Times*, 24 Sept 1893.

⁷⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Sept 1893.

Smith was “nothing but a damned negro” who deserved to be lynched. Terry agreed, and at around three that morning ordered Smith brought back to the jail. He then informed at least one member of the mob about the plan. As a result, twenty-five armed men, their faces hidden behind handkerchiefs, were waiting in a vacant lot halfway between Commerce and Roanoke Streets when Smith and his escorts appeared. Smith spotted the posse first and took off running but made it only a few dozen yards before being knocked down. The gang ordered Griffin and the other officers to “take a walk” and then headed off into the darkness with Smith.⁷⁵

The men proceeded only a short distance before they stopped beneath an electric light at the corner of Franklin Road and Mountain Avenue. Unlike William Lavender, who in a desperate attempt to save his life admitted being drunk and accidentally knocking Alice Perry down, Smith refused to confess to assaulting Mrs. Bishop, denying his executioners their final prize and leaving them determined to stigmatize his body. They promptly tossed a rope over a hickory tree, strung Smith up, riddled him with bullets, and desecrated and decorated his body in ways that marked him both physically and socially as one who had transgressed the boundaries of allowed behavior. To them, Smith’s supposed assault of a “defenseless” and “respectable” white woman was an attack on their masculine responsibility to protect white women from the black “menace” roaming Roanoke. Moreover, Smith, the former “property” of local officials, was the symbol of middle and upper-class efforts to impose order on the city’s working classes and rural immigrants. His hanging thus served a twofold purpose: it terrorized black residents and rebuked white authorities.

In the morning, the *Times* reported, thousands of residents turned out to view the tree’s “ghastly fruit.” Signs pinned to Smith’s back proclaimed him “Mayor Trout’s Friend” and warned “Do Not Cut Him Down – By Order of Judge Lynch.” Hundreds of those who came to view

⁷⁵ See testimony in *The Roanoke Times*, 26 Nov; 11, 12, 17 Dec 1893 (both quotes are from 17 Dec). George Gordon was later pardoned by the Governor of Virginia for assisting the police in their attempt to hide Smith. See *The Roanoke Times*, 4 Oct 1893.

Smith took bark from the tree, slices of the rope, or pieces of his clothing as souvenirs.⁷⁶ A photo of the scene, sold as a keepsake by Lineback Photography Studio, reveals throngs of smiling men and women as well as several black residents in the immense crowd around Thomas Smith, who hangs, much like a prize buck or bear, as a trophy to be admired. Smith, dressed in a shabby suit and wearing pants with patches over the knees, dangles only a few feet off the ground, his white socks hanging off his feet, his eyes and tongue protruding out of his badly swollen head, and his ears bleeding from spots where hunks had been cut off as souvenirs.⁷⁷ That residents felt not only comfortable but also enthusiastic about posing for cameras next to Smith says a great deal about their self-righteousness and evident pride in his violent demise. The carnival-like atmosphere that followed Smith's extralegal hanging was common in lynchings throughout the South, and much like participants in other "lynch festivals," Roanoke residents sought to prolong their "victory" by further desecrating Smith's body.⁷⁸ The difference, however, was that they wanted to do so in a way that further solidified their disdain for city authorities as well. Indeed, when members of a coroner's jury arrived and had Smith cut down to be taken to the city morgue, the enormous crowd refused to release him and insisted that they were going to lay Smith in state on the mayor's dining room table before burying him in Trout's front yard.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 21 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁷⁷ H. V Lineback Photography Studio, Aftermath of Thomas Smith Lynching, Photograph (21 Sept 1893), History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke. Lineback operated a studio at 23 Salem Avenue and in advertisements boasted "Nothing but first class work turned out." See ad in *Words & Works*, vol. 1, no. 24, Dec 1892, in Campbell Papers.

Commercial photographs and postcards of lynching scenes were both common and readily available in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See James Allen, et al, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000). Such photos, according to Allen, "played as significant a role in the ritual as torture and souvenir grabbing" and facilitated "the endless replay of anguish." See *ibid*, 204-205

⁷⁸ See Leon F. Litwack, "Hellhounds," in Allen, et al, *Without Sanctuary*, 10-11; Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 185-89.

⁷⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Sept 1893.

William Campbell learned of the plan to further demean Mayor Trout from Robert Moorman, an elder in his church, and insisted that Moorman rush him to the scene so that he could prevent it. When Moorman and Campbell arrived, several men had just begun to drag Smith down the street, and there were at least a thousand people cheering them on. Campbell pleaded with them to stop. Their reply, according to him, consisted of “angry words” and fists waved in his face. Several men pushed Moorman down and started dragging Smith away again before Campbell grabbed the rope and told them “they should not drag the body through the streets; that we had already suffered enough.” His stand convinced at least a few men in the mob to back him up, and with their added pleas, the crowd eventually decided to burn Smith on the banks of the Roanoke River instead. The mob followed a wagon bearing his body down Mountain Avenue, to a spot near the narrow gauge railroad bridge, cheering and tearing down fences along the way. Dozens of men gathered brush and tree limbs to build a pyre, doused Smith with several gallons of coal oil, and set him afire. “The flames roared and cracked, leaping high in the air,” according to a reporter at the scene, “while all around stood 4,000 people, men, women, boys and children on foot, in buggies and on horseback, and numbers of them shouting over the pitiful scene.” Hundreds of onlookers fed the flames by tossing braches and twigs into the fire, and by noon, according to another correspondent, all that remained of Smith “was a few ashes and here and there a bone.”⁸⁰

After the fire burned out, the mob turned its fury back to the militia and mayor. Trout, who was still hiding in town, decided to leave after the torrent of threats against him showed no signs of abating. The following evening, accompanied by railroad detective Baldwin, he boarded a special Norfolk & Western coach and engine east of the machine works and rode to Lynchburg. When a reporter visited Trout that evening, he found the mayor in a “highly nervous and

⁸⁰ Campbell, “Roanoke’s Tragedies”; for another description of Campbell’s stand, see McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, Roanoke City*, 378-80; first quote is from *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Sept 1893; second quote is from *Roanoke Daily Record*, 21 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

overwrought condition and laboring under much mental perturbation.” Trout’s thirty-eight caliber pistol was on the hotel room table.⁸¹ Back in Roanoke, R. A. Buckner, president of the city council, had taken over as mayor. In an attempt to restore order, he and a citizens committee headed by Joseph H. Sands, vice president of the N&W, issued a broadside. “It is most desirable,” the flyer proclaimed, “that all excitement should be allayed, exciting speeches or conversation discouraged, and the majesty of the law shall be respected as being competent to deal fully and justly with all persons who may be suspected of sharing illegally in the events of last night.” The committee advised all citizens to go home or back to work and summoned a grand jury to investigate the lynching and riot. Buckner suspended Police Chief Terry and several other officers and appointed dozens of special policemen “whose duty is to urge upon citizens to preserve order and disperse to their homes.” He and the committee also convinced saloonkeepers to close their businesses.⁸²

Later that day, Joseph Sands addressed all N&W and Machine Works employees and asked them to abide by the law and help restore order. Although the workers voted to follow Sands’s advice, they also passed a resolution declaring the militia’s actions unprovoked and demanded a full investigation of the mayor, police force, and infantry. The city’s Masons and Odd Fellows met and pledged to assist municipal authorities as did the William Watts Camp of Confederate Veterans and the local post of the Grand Army of the Republic. The Blue and Gray veterans voted to issue a joint statement backing the citizens committee and condemning the “lawless persons” responsible for tarnishing the reputation of the Magic City.⁸³ The mob,

⁸¹ *The Lynchburg News*, 23 Sept 1893, in N&W Scrapbook No. 18, N&WRA.

⁸² City of Roanoke, “To The People of Roanoke! Sept 21st, 1893,” broadside in Hancock, “Eyewitness Account”; see also *Roanoke Daily Record*, 21 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁸³ Sands’s address and information about the Masons and Odd Fellows is from *Roanoke Daily Record*, 22 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA; reaction of Confederate and Union veterans groups is noted in *The New York World*, 28 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA; their

nevertheless, continued to roam the streets in search of city authorities and militia members. Although most members of the infantry stayed in hiding, Jack Hancock, a bank clerk, reported to work the morning of the lynching and stayed there until friends convinced him to leave. Hancock, like all members of the infantry, received a death threat from the “Headquarters of the Vigilant Committee.” “Sir,” the note read, “prepare yourself to meet your creator – one day longer in Roanoke you will sleep the sleep of the brave. We want your blood – you shot our friends. Yours to administer death, 163 Citizens.” After getting the threat, Hancock recalled, “Nearly all the boys left town or stayed off the streets Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.” He did not leave but did decide to lodge with armed comrades at a boarding house rather than at his home.⁸⁴ Other infantrymen and city officials hid in Salem, which according to the *Richmond Dispatch*, had become a “city of refuge for many of those who have incurred the wrath of the mob.”⁸⁵ According to E. P. Tompkins, an N&W clerk, all of his co-workers in the militia stayed away from the office until the following week, when one by one, they slowly began appearing at their desks again.⁸⁶

The coroner’s jury charged with investigating the shooting and lynching called its first witnesses on September 22, the day after Smith’s hanging. The men who testified failed to concur on who fired the first shot but agreed that Mrs. Bishop’s son and Walter Davis, a seventeen-year-old Roanoke resident, led the assault on the jail and that the most violent and determined members of the mob were fifty to one hundred of Bishop’s neighbors from Botetourt County. Captain Bird of the infantry admitted to giving the order to fire on the crowd, but swore that he

joint statement is available in part in an unidentified newspaper article on the 28 Sept 1893 page of N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁸⁴ “Headquarters of Vigilant Committee,” Roanoke, to Jack Hancock, City, 22 Sept 1893, in Hancock, “Eyewitness Account.”

⁸⁵ *Richmond Dispatch*, 24 Sept 1894, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁸⁶ Tompkins, “Medical Annals,” 20.

did so only after men in the mob fired several shots at him. Several witnesses claimed that Chief Terry attempted to turn Smith over to the mob after the shooting but that Mayor Trout had insisted that the police force continue to protect him. At the conclusion of testimony, the jury found that all the men killed except Smith died as a result of Bird's order, and it forwarded the case to a grand jury to determine the legality of the shooting.⁸⁷

Mayor Trout, who had gone to Richmond the day after arriving in Lynchburg, refused all requests for interviews but told reporters that he hoped to return to Roanoke as soon as possible. Trout's wife, who had been at the World's Fair in Chicago during the riot, joined him in Richmond shortly after he arrived there.⁸⁸ Back in Roanoke, the Citizens' Committee issued a statement to the Southern Press Association urging the mayor to return. "It is our purpose," they claimed, "to demonstrate to the world that the charge we are under mob rule and the course of law cannot be pursued on account of intimidation and threats is false."⁸⁹ Virginia Governor Philip W. McKinney sided with Mayor Trout and the city's infantry. Up to that point McKinney had been hesitant to use the power of the state to suppress lynching in Virginia, but the violence and mayhem in Roanoke convinced him the time had come to do so "and the consequences must rest upon the heads of those who make it necessary."⁹⁰ The riot in Roanoke, he told the state senate, was a "terrible lesson" that should make all Virginians realize the need to "respect the authorities and obey the law."⁹¹

⁸⁷ See coverage of the Coroner's jury in *Roanoke Daily Record*, 22, 23 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA; *The Roanoke Times*, 23, 24, 26, 27 Sept 1893. Both papers also referred to Walter Davis as Will Davis.

⁸⁸ *The Richmond Dispatch*, 24 Sept 1893.

⁸⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 26 Sept 1893.

⁹⁰ Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 168-69; quote is from *Journal of the House of Delegates of the State of Virginia for the Session of 1893-1894* (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1893), 52-54.

⁹¹ *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1893-1894* (Richmond: Superintendent of Public Printing, 1894), 45-46.

Reaction to the lynching and riot appeared in newspapers around the nation and as far away as London.⁹² Most papers, like the *New York Herald*, praised the “heroic example of Mayor Trout” and called the ensuing riot and lynching an outbreak of barbarism that had disgraced Roanoke.⁹³ The *New York Evening Post* likewise condemned the mob as “savages” but claimed “the volley of the Roanoke militia must carry some comfort in the heart of every civilized man in the country.” In Philadelphia, the *Telegraph* praised Trout but noted that he would “be a fortunate creature if he does not hereafter walk the earth a marked and hunted man.”⁹⁴ Most editors cited damage done to the city’s reputation as a progressive and booming business center as the most lamentable outcome of the violence. “Roanoke,” the *New York World* observed, “is at the parting of ways. It is for her people to determine whether the officers of the law or the ring leaders of a mob shall be municipal rulers.”⁹⁵

Most but not all Virginia editors expressed a similar opinion. The conservative *Richmond Dispatch* claimed that there could “be no doubt of the Mayor’s courage” in attempting to maintain law and order, while the black-owned *Richmond Planet* called the lynching yet another example of “southern depravity” and described the burning of Smith as “fiendish.”⁹⁶ The *Lynchburg News* backed the mayor and observed that the sooner residents acknowledged their debt to him for warning them “against the wretchedness they brought upon themselves, the sooner the town will deserve the respect of enlightened people’s opinion everywhere.”⁹⁷ The

⁹² John Anderson Waits II, “Roanoke’s Tragedy: The Lynch Riot of 1893” (MA thesis, University of Virginia, 1972), 53.

⁹³ *New York Herald*, 23 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁹⁴ *Evening Post* and *Telegraph* both reprinted in *The Lynchburg News*, 23 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁹⁵ *New York World*, 23 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁹⁶ *Richmond Dispatch*, 24 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA; *Richmond Planet*, 30 Sept 1893.

⁹⁷ *The Lynchburg News*, 24 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

Petersburg *Index-Appeal*, while likewise praising Trout, claimed that the order by city officials to retreat after the first volley was “worse than cowardly – it was criminal.” “No more glorious opportunity to die with credit in the performance of duty,” the paper explained, “will ever be afforded Mayor Trout.”⁹⁸ The Norfolk *Landmark* blamed the mob for the “disgrace and humiliation of an entire community” and called the lynching a “brutal and cowardly” act that must not only be condemned but also accounted for in a court of law.⁹⁹ Editors at the Richmond *Evening Star*, by contrast, praised the community for exterminating a “fiend” and argued that the actions of city officials and the infantry were “nothing more or less than murder.”¹⁰⁰

Coverage of the riot in out-of-town newspapers shattered the progressive image of the Magic City that Roanoke’s boosters had cultivated and directly threatened continued economic investment from northern capitalists. The press accounts justifiably horrified Roanoke’s business leaders, who reacted to the riot with strong support for municipal authorities and demands for law and order. Roanoke’s papers, longtime supporters of “lynch justice,” did an about face and called for swift punishment of the men responsible for the riot. The *Times* praised Trout and the infantry and declared that the men had no choice but to fire upon the mob. The *Daily Record* likewise informed readers that unless they were “ready to see their hopes of building a metropolis turned to despair, her streets turned to pastures, and her houses the roosting places of birds of night, they will with one accord, sustain the constituted authorities in the maintenance of law and order.”¹⁰¹ In a special edition of *Words & Works*, William Campbell called for “calm counsels” and “earnest prayer” with the hope that men “aroused to fever heat” by the shooting would commit no

⁹⁸ Petersburg *Index-Appeal*, 24 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁹⁹ Norfolk *Landmark*, 26 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

¹⁰⁰ *Evening Post* reprinted in *The Lynchburg News*, 23 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

¹⁰¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Sept 1893; *Roanoke Daily Record*, 22 Sept 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

further bloodshed. Lynch law, he declared, is “the expression and developer of lawless spirit” and so horrid that “no man is safe where it prevails.”¹⁰² The papers also did all they could to shift the blame for the riot onto “country people” from Botetourt County. City editors’ stance against “lawlessness” did do much to quell tensions and bolster public acceptance of the stand against the mob, and when Trout did return, a week after fleeing for his life, a crowd of three hundred residents cheered his arrival at the depot.¹⁰³ According to the *Times*, by then, “the great mass of the people” had begun to sympathize with the infantry and mayor and finally “recognized the fact that the laws of the land are supreme and must be enforced.”¹⁰⁴

Mrs. Bishop, who had been recovering in Roanoke since being attacked, left for her home in Cloverdale the same day Trout returned. Although a week earlier she had only been able to tentatively identify Smith based on his “slouch hat,” when questioned leaving town, Bishop reported that she was absolutely certain he was the man who had beaten her and had “met his just deserts.” She blamed the militia and city authorities for what in her opinion had been a deplorable and unnecessary loss of innocent lives.¹⁰⁵ Roanoke’s papers, while admonishing lawlessness, did so while simultaneously damning Smith as a monstrous brute who deserved to die for his crime. They entirely ignored the lack of any real proof against him. In stories following the riot, they not only embellished the evidence against him, they also turned the assault against Bishop into an attempted rape. It is highly likely, however, that Smith was an innocent man.

Anti-lynching activist Ida Wells claimed that Smith was not guilty of assault and that this fact was “well known in the city before he was killed.” She was not the only contemporary to

¹⁰² *Words and Works*, 23 Sept 1893, in Campbell Papers.

¹⁰³ *The Roanoke Times*, 28 Sept 1893; Waits, “Roanoke’s Tragedy,” 49.

¹⁰⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Sept 1893.

¹⁰⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Sept 1893.

defend his innocence.¹⁰⁶ The *Cleveland Gazette*, like other northern papers, reported only weeks after the riot that the “poor Afro-American lynched, and whose body was riddled with bullets, then burned, is now generally acknowledged to have been innocent of the offense charged.”¹⁰⁷ Although these papers offered no evidence in behalf of their claims, in the years following Smith’s hanging, other, more credible accounts of his innocence appeared that bolstered their contentions. Jack Hancock, who served in the Roanoke Light Infantry during the riot, was told several years later by Roanoke’s then Chief of Police – “a man of high reputation” – that detectives had uncovered information that “the man lynched was not the one guilty of the crime for which he was taken up as a suspect.”¹⁰⁸ Hancock, however, did not reveal what the new “information” was, and he, of course, had a personal interest in Smith’s innocence since killing white men to protect him would then be more justifiable. In 1916, however, the NAACP’s journal *Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*, reported much the same thing, claiming like Hancock that Roanoke’s jailer had “recently revealed the fact that the colored man Smith, who was lynched Sept 21, 1893, for assaulting a woman, was innocent and known to be so by officials a short time afterwards.” According to the *Crisis*, by the time Baldwin captured Smith, another suspect had admitted his guilt and been told by authorities to leave town.¹⁰⁹ If that was indeed the case, then Trout’s stand against the lynch mob makes all the more sense.

With Trout back in town and the tide of public opinion now running against the mob, a semblance of law and order returned to the city. Over a hundred and fifty “special policemen” teamed up with what was left of the local force to maintain the peace, and many of the city’s businesses and fraternal orders pledged to do all they could to assist local authorities. By

¹⁰⁶ Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record. Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynching in the United States, 1892-1893-1894* (Chicago: Donohue & Henneberry, (1895)), 48.

¹⁰⁷ *Cleveland Gazette*, 14 Oct 1893.

¹⁰⁸ “Clarification Notes,” in Hancock, “Eyewitness Account.”

¹⁰⁹ *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* (Oct 1916), 300.

September 30, nine days after the lynching, participants in the riot had even returned twenty-six of the forty-one pistols they had stolen from Evans Hardware.¹¹⁰ The torrent of bad press worried city fathers, but most assumed a looming grand jury investigation would result in punishments against members of the mob so severe that Roanoke's reputation would be at least somewhat rehabilitated. When the jury met for the first time in early October, Judge John Woods made that point clear by informing its members that the eyes of the state and nation were upon them. The lynching and riot, he went on, had been "a withering, blighting curse" and had done so much damage that in his opinion the time would "never come when the city of Roanoke can wipe away the disgrace it has heaped upon her."¹¹¹

During the subsequent hearing, the jury heard over two hundred witnesses before it handed down nineteen indictments on sixteen men for felonies and misdemeanors. Oddly enough, the jury failed to charge Mrs. Bishop's son, the openly acknowledged leader of the mob. The jury proclaimed the action of the mayor and militia lawful, declared some of those killed active participants in the riot, and charged Police Chief Terry and Sergeant Griffin with being accessories to the lynching. Of the fourteen other men indicted, only four stood accused of felonies, and only three of them with lynching Smith. The other felony indictment was against James G. Richardson, a Botetourt County farmer, for threatening to hang the mayor and breaking into Nelson & Myers Hardware store to steal guns and dynamite. The misdemeanor charges handed down were primarily for inciting the riot or burning Smith's body.¹¹²

Immediately following their indictments, Mayor Trout, who earlier in the month had formally sworn in a hundred and fifty property owners to serve as a reserve police force who

¹¹⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 30 Sept 1893.

¹¹¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 3 Oct 1893.

¹¹² *The Roanoke Times*, 24 Oct 1893.

could “prevent or quell riots,” suspended Terry and Griffin.¹¹³ Trout afterwards accepted an invitation from Chicago Mayor Harrison to attend “Mayor’s Day” at that city’s Columbian Exposition but vowed to “return at once should any exigency arise.” Roanoke’s shell-shocked mayor and his wife arrived in the Windy City hoping for respite from troubles back in town but quickly found themselves in the midst of trauma once again when a disgruntled former police officer assassinated Mayor Harrison on the evening of the “Mayor’s Day” celebration.¹¹⁴

The trials of those charged by the grand jury, which began in November, did little to help in the city’s restoration efforts. Edward Page, who had boasted of placing the noose around Smith’s neck to dozens of residents, found witnesses willing to provide an alibi, and the jury cleared him of responsibility in Smith’s death.¹¹⁵ James Richardson, who testified that he had been drinking all day in a Salem Avenue saloon the day of the riot, claimed that he had been too drunk to recall anything about leading the search for Mayor Trout or breaking into a hardware store. Numerous witnesses, however, placed him at the scene and recalled his threatening language against the mayor. The jury found him guilty and the judge sentenced Richardson to thirty days in jail and fined him \$100. The two other rioters found guilty of misdemeanors, S. W. Fuqua, a carpenter, and D. D. Kennedy, an N&W employee, received one-day prison sentences and \$1 fines.¹¹⁶ Such light sentences disappointed the *Times*’s editors, who deemed them “travesties upon justice” and yet “another blow to blacken the eye already badly bruised by those acts of lawlessness.”¹¹⁷ In Petersburg, the *Index-Appeal* went even further, claiming that the “verdict practically licenses lawbreaking” and that the trial was “as palpable a miscarriage of

¹¹³ Roanoke City Council Minutes, 10 Oct 1893, City Clerk’s Office, Roanoke Municipal Building; *The Roanoke Times*, 11 Oct 1893.

¹¹⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 27 Oct 1893.

¹¹⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Nov 1893.

¹¹⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 18, 21, 22, 23 Nov 1893.

¹¹⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 26 Nov 1893.

justice as could have been imagined outside the opera bouffe or farce comedy.”¹¹⁸ The Philadelphia *Public-Ledger*, like other northern papers, predicted that the sentences would serve as “an encouragement for the lawless to take it upon themselves the functions of Judge Lynch at the slightest provocation.”¹¹⁹

To make matters worse, prosecutors found no witnesses willing to testify against Chief Terry or Sergeant Griffin, and as a result, their jury did not even leave its seats before proclaiming them not guilty of being accessories to the lynching.¹²⁰ Despite their acquittals, Mayor Trout refused to reinstate them; he also had them both charged with conduct unbecoming an officer of the law. “I am further of the opinion,” he informed town council, “that the best interests of the City require reorganization of the police force.”¹²¹ At their subsequent hearings in December, Terry and Griffin testified against each other, and this time numerous witnesses claimed that both men had plotted to turn Smith over to the mob. Although they were once again acquitted, Trout fired Terry and demoted Sergeant Griffin to patrolman.¹²² Early the following year, a Roanoke jury found four men, including mob leader Walter Davis, guilty of felonies for rioting and burning Smith’s body. The judge sentenced all of them to a year in jail and imposed \$100 fines. None of the men, however, served any significant time in jail or had to pay their fines. Some of them won subsequent appeals; others, like Walter Davis, received pardons from the

¹¹⁸ Petersburg *Index-Appeal*, 25 Nov 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

¹¹⁹ Philadelphia *Public-Ledger* quoted in *The Roanoke Times*, 26 Nov 1893.

¹²⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 26 Nov 1893.

¹²¹ Roanoke City Council Minutes, 12 Dec 1893, Clerk’s Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building.

¹²² See coverage of trials in *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 11 Dec 1893, in Campbell Papers; *The Roanoke Times*, 12, 17, Dec 1893; for firing and demotion, see *The Roanoke Times*, 13, 19 Dec 1893.

governor.¹²³ Moreover, in early 1894, Virginia's newly elected Governor, Charles T. O'Ferrall, had James Richardson's thirty-day jail sentence for threatening the mayor and robbing a hardware store reduced to just twenty-four hours.¹²⁴

In the aftermath of the trials, Roanoke's business and civic leaders kept up their campaign to restore the city's progressive image. In early 1894, as part of that effort, they mounted a campaign to convince Henry Trout to run for re-election.¹²⁵ Tensions from the lynching and riot still simmered, and it was unlikely that Trout would have had a repeat of the easy victory he claimed two years earlier. Having survived both Picket's Charge and the Roanoke Riot, Trout chose to step out of public life and return to being a small-town banker instead. While most of the community forgave their former mayor for his role in the riot, other officials were not so lucky. Captain John Bird of the Roanoke Light Infantry, for example, found the lingering hostility against him impossible to live with and, by mid-January, had resigned his position and left town.¹²⁶ Roanoke's businessmen and politicians, well aware of the public relations damage done by the lynch riot, did what they could to downplay its significance and conceal its occurrence.¹²⁷ In mid-January 1894, many of them even attended a lecture by civil rights activist Frederick Douglass given at Reverend Richard R. Jones's African Baptist Church. Although Douglass was well known for his belief that lynching was proof that the "enemies of the Negro see that he is making progress and they naturally wish to stop him," according to a *Times* reporter, his

¹²³ See, for example, *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Jan 1893; 8 Feb 1894; for Virginia Governor Charles T. O'Ferrall's pardoning of Walter Davis, see *The Roanoke Daily Times*, 24 May 1895.

¹²⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 3, 11, 13 Feb 1894.

¹²⁵ See petition in *The Roanoke Times*, 27 Jan 1894.

¹²⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Jan 1894.

¹²⁷ There is no mention of the riot in the city's first official history, published twenty years later. Indeed, its only reference to the riot appears in its biographical section in a single sentence detailing Reverend William Campbell's stand against men who wanted to drag "a negro who had been lynched" through the streets. See Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City*, 171-72.

lecture “was chiefly a literary one, and only occasionally did the speaker touch on the question of the day.”¹²⁸

Many of the city’s other white inhabitants, by contrast, attempted to keep memories of the lynch riot alive with scrapbooks, souvenirs, folklore, and photos.¹²⁹ “Haunt tales” circulated widely in town after the hickory tree used to hang Smith died in mid-October. So many residents saw its death as a sign of God’s wrath that the *Times* felt obligated to investigate the matter and inform its reader that street grading along Mountain Avenue was the actual culprit. City workers cut it down later that month, but folk legends that the hanging-tree lived on persisted as late as 2001, when landscapers removed a huge dead ash tree on Franklin Road that many residents believed had been used to hang Smith.¹³⁰ A few weeks after the actual tree had been removed, a suspicious fire gutted the house directly across the street from where it had stood. The *Times*, aware that “silly, hallucinatory stories” about the fire’s genesis were rampant, lectured residents again, informing them “that the ghost of the departed black man had nothing to do with the origin of the fire.”¹³¹ A more likely suspect was Fred Primity, a black man arrested the following month for using coal oil to set fire to the cellar in which Mrs. Bishop had been assaulted.¹³²

¹²⁸ Douglas quote is from Litwack, “Hellhounds,” 29; *The Roanoke Times*, 17 Jan 1894. According to the *Times*, there were “many prominent people in the audience.”

¹²⁹ See, for example, clippings from the riot in a scrapbook in William C. Campbell’s Papers; and in “Valuable Clippings from the Roanoke Riot,” another scrapbook compiled by an unidentified resident, located at the History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia; Lineback’s photo of Smith’s hanging is also available at *ibid.*; such folk preservation of lynchings was common, see Allen, et al, *Without Sanctuary*; and Bruce E. Baker, “North Carolina Lynching Ballads,” in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 219-245.

¹³⁰ For details of the actual tree’s demise and removal, see *The Roanoke Times*, 18, 31 Oct 1893; for persistence of the legend that it lived on, see *The Roanoke Times*, 28 March 2001.

¹³¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 31 Oct 1893.

¹³² *The Roanoke Times*, 14 Nov 1893.

At least one white resident even wrote a popular ballad about the lynch riot. Sung to the melody of the well-known British ballad “Barbara Allen,” the lyrics of the “Roanoke Riot,” also known as the “Roanoke Outrage,” are perhaps the best representation of contemporary public sentiment about what happened:

It was the twentieth of September
when the moon shown from on high
in the Magic City of Roanoke
nine innocent men did die.

They were shot down by the militia
that was stationed at the jail.
It was the awfulist outrage
that ever did prevail.

The captain gave his orders to fire
when he heard the people shout
for he had instructions from the mayor – H. L. Trout.
It was the awfulist outrage
that was ever heard about.

And I think it was foolish
to call out the militia
all because of
a dirty low down nigger

Some were shot through the heart
while many were shot through the head.
After the firing was over,
nine innocent men lay dead.

Many people did many cruel things,
yes, things we call hard
for they wanted to bury the nigger
in the Mayor’s backyard.

But the preacher pleaded with them,
yes, loudly he did shout,
“have some respect for your neighbors here,
if not for Mayor Trout.”

Some suggested they burn him
at the stake
for the awful crime attempted,
Mrs. Bishop’s life to take.

So they built the fire upon him

out of oil and pine,
and all looked on him to see him burn
yes, everyone that could.

That it was outrage in our city,
yes, everyone that could be clear.
Let's all be quiet now
and have no lynching here.

For the nigger is dead
and gone to a different world from this,
but all do know that he did not go
to a world of heavenly bliss.¹³³

Lynching ballads were generally an accurate depiction of a community's interpretation of the event as well as a way to preserve its social memory and add to the "production" of the extralegal hanging by keeping its messages alive.¹³⁴ "The Roanoke Riot" illustrates quite vividly that in the public's opinion city authorities murdered innocent citizens to protect a subhuman criminal. The ballad adds one to the actual number killed in the melee and incorrectly implies that Mayor Trout gave the militia an order to fire. Because eight white men died, the folk song does not celebrate the lynching of Thomas Smith as much as it mourns the loss of good citizens in the process. It also seeks repentance for the many "cruel things" done by the mob and counsels against future extralegal hangings. Traditional lynching ballads served as a way to enshrine lynchers, prolong a "glorious" event, and remind blacks of their subhuman position in society. "The Roanoke Riot," by contrast, is as critical of white authorities as it is about Thomas Smith and it is ambivalent about lynch "justice." The song celebrates the actions by William Campbell that prevented additional "outrages," but in a final blow against the "low down dirty nigger" responsible for the tragedy, it envisions Smith in hell.

¹³³ Lyrics compiled from cross reference of "The Roanoke Riot," ballad lyrics in the collection of Southwest Virginia Tragedy Ballads in the Blue Ridge Institute, Ferrum College, Ferrum, Virginia; and "The Roanoke Outrage," reprinted in *The Roanoke Times*, 1 Jan 1994.

¹³⁴ Baker, "Lynching Ballads," 221.

Thomas Smith was one of nine blacks lynched in Virginia in 1893, and one of one hundred and fifty-three blacks lynched in the South that year. Unlike his fellow Virginia victims, who had all been easily and immediately hung after being accused of rape, murder, or barn burning, Smith stood accused of a comparatively minor offense and had received what protection city officials were able to muster.¹³⁵ Contemporary writers commenting on his lynching and the riot usually pointed to these circumstances as factors that made both events unique. The popular Virginia writer Thomas Nelson Page used the lynch riot to bolster an argument about the frequency with which black men raped white women and to defend the South against charges of lawlessness. Smith, according to Page, was nothing but a “negro ravisher and murderer,” but even as such, had been defended by the “brave and faithful” Mayor Trout “against that most terrible of all assailants – a determined mob.”¹³⁶ Anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells, by contrast, used Smith to illustrate the ways that black men in the South were often “lynched for anything or nothing.”¹³⁷ Smith, according to Wells, who compiled most of her information from the *Chicago Record*, had simply quarreled with Mrs. Bishop about change from a purchase. Afterwards, she contends, Bishop “refused to accuse Smith of assaulting her.”¹³⁸ Wells praised the militia’s “stubborn stand on behalf of law and order” and called Trout’s actions a “splendid endeavor to uphold the law.”¹³⁹ In the end, however, she noted that “for an offense which would not in any civilized community have brought upon him a punishment greater than a fine of a few dollars, this unfortunate Negro was hung, shot, and burned.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ Wells, *A Red Record*, 16-19.

¹³⁶ Thomas Nelson Page, “The Lynching of Negroes – Its Cause and Its Prevention,” *The North American Review* 178 (1904): 33-48.

¹³⁷ Wells, *A Red Record*, 45.

¹³⁸ Wells, *A Red Record*, 46.

¹³⁹ Wells, *A Red Record*, 45, 47.

¹⁴⁰ Wells, *A Red Record*, 48.

Roanoke businessman, board of trade member, and potential 1894 mayoral candidate Nathaniel Burwell Johnson, like most residents, reacted to criticism by Ida Wells with disdain. Like state and local authorities, he resented any potential northern interference in race relations, but after the 1893 riot, he generally opposed lynching because of its potential for civil unrest and negative publicity. Johnson, a devout racist who believed that no African American “had ever emerged from savagery except when brought into contact with its superior,” sought ways to use segregation, paternalism, and Christianity as a means to prevent incidents that could provoke less patient Roanoke residents.¹⁴¹ He abhorred extralegal violence but claimed in a letter to a writer for the *Southern Churchman* that in Roanoke there was no remedy or corrective to “awaken the community to a sense of the wrong that it is doing itself in allowing a continuance of this great evil.”¹⁴² “Miss Wells and her sympathizers,” Johnson explained to the editor of the New York City *Independent*, had added to the town’s racial tensions with “such grossly exaggerated statements” and made it more difficult for Christian men like him to “do something towards the situation.” The “ignorance” of northerners about lynching, he went on, was a major part of the problem. In Roanoke, he claimed, northern-born residents were just as involved in the riot as the “country people” vilified in local papers. “We find those who have least patience with the weaknesses of the Negro,” he explained, “to be those who came from Northern homes, with all their preconceived ideas altogether in favor of their dark brother, but who when they have fully

¹⁴¹ N. B. Johnson, Roanoke, to Rev. Benj Tucker Tanner, Philadelphia, Pa., 29 July 1895, in Nathaniel Burwell Johnson Letterbook, 1894-1895, Nathaniel Burwell Johnson Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond (cited hereafter as Johnson Letterbook).

¹⁴² N. B. Johnson, Roanoke, to C. Breckenridge Wilmer, Lynchburg, Va., 6 Nov 1894, in Nathaniel Burwell Johnson Letterbook; for Johnson’s potential run for mayor, see N. B. Johnson, Roanoke, to T. W. Miller, City, 8 March 1894, in *ibid.*

understood and comprehended his nature, are prepared to, and do go much further in their distrust of him than their former masters.”¹⁴³

Virginia Governor Charles T. O’Ferrall, a conservative Democrat elected only six weeks after the Roanoke riot, vowed to do all he could to prevent a repetition of the mob violence there. O’Ferrall, a lawyer from Harrisonburg and former Confederate officer, believed lynching, like labor unrest and Populism, led to disorder and threatened the maintenance of local and state authority. In his January 1894 inaugural address, he alluded to the Roanoke riot and vowed to maintain law and order, “let it cost what it will in blood or money.” To instill order, O’Ferrall called out the state militia on numerous occasions to protect perspective lynching victims, demanded thorough investigations of extralegal violence, and ordered county, town, and city officials to do whatever was necessary safeguard prisoners being held in their jurisdictions. As a result, lynchings in the state declined from twelve in 1893, to one in 1894, zero in 1895 and 1896, and two in 1897.¹⁴⁴ Such anti-lynching reform had very little to do with racial sympathy for African Americans but was instead the result of a quest to maintain an orderly society in which the power of elected officials and business owners did not come into question. In Virginia at the time, the recession, the rise of the Populist Party, and the Roanoke riot combined to make residents believe that anarchy and revolution were possible. O’Ferrall’s response was thus a conservative reaction to such concerns.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ N. B. Johnson, Roanoke, to N. Ward, Editor *Independent*, New York City, 11 Aug 1894, in Nathaniel Burwell Johnson Letterbook. See also, N. B. Johnson, Roanoke, to N. Editor of *Independent*, New York City, 2 Aug 1894, in *ibid*.

¹⁴⁴ Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 169, 282 (O’Ferrall quote is from 169).

¹⁴⁵ For concerns about order over racial sympathy, see William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 61-70; Dewy W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 231; for the conservative nature of anti-lynching in Virginia, see Raymond H. Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored: An Interpretation of the Progressive Impulse* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), 52-53; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 169-178.

In Roanoke, the stand made by Henry Trout against “lynch law” set a precedent that subsequent mayors adhered to. The city’s one hundred and fifty reserve policemen stood ready to quell potential disorder, and its number of citizen militias increased as well. Trout reorganized the police force once again in the aftermath of the riot, bringing in a more seasoned and experienced chief who demanded professionalism from the squad. The death of eight residents, torrent of bad press, and embarrassment of city leaders and northern business owners all combined to subdue white residents’ predilection for extralegal “justice,” and during the remainder of the 1890s, few, if any, called for “lynch law.” Economic and civic concerns lessened the tensions between whites. Moreover, the main causes of the lynch riot also subsided; the recession ended, the city’s courts did a better job of imposing the type of “justice” residents expected, and saloons stayed open in the wake of anti-prohibitionists’ successful appeal of the local option vote. White antipathy towards African American residents, nevertheless, remained constant.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Historians who have analyzed the Roanoke riot have done so primarily to determine its causes and impact. In the most comprehensive study, Ann Field Alexander argues that the city’s growing black population, incompetent police force, frontier ethos, and economic recession combined to foster the tragic response to the assault on Bishop. In the aftermath, Alexander contends, the violence and mayhem in Roanoke was the main factor behind the state’s dramatic turn toward preventing lynchings. See, Ann Field Alexander, “‘Like an Evil Wind’: The Roanoke Riot of 1893 and the Lynching of Thomas Smith,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* vol. 100, no. 2 (April 1992): 173-206. Gordon B. McKinney, by contrast, claims that workers and formerly rural residents resented the rationalization and discipline efforts of the city’s new professionals and middle classes, and that when the 1893 depression hit Roanoke, its lower classes reacted by blaming business leaders and civic authorities. He argues that such antiauthoritarianism combined with a raw, boomtown atmosphere, large population of former “mountain men who accepted personal revenge as a routine practice,” and atypical number of black residents for Appalachia made the riot almost inevitable. McKinney, however, also contends that such episodes of violence were not endemic to Appalachia, but were typical responses to modernization, industrialization, and loss of personal control. See, McKinney, “Industrialization and Violence in Appalachia,” 131-141 (quote is from 140). W. Fitzhugh Brundage notes similarly that the high incidence of lynching in Southwest Virginia, the region most sparsely populated with African Americans, “reflected the desperation of whites to define the status of blacks in a region where blacks were still uncommon and furious social and economic change was taking place.” Moreover, he points out, mob violence against blacks tended to occur in the region’s few towns and cities, where population growth, industrialization, and modernization were happening most rapidly. According to Brundage, the riot became a “clarion call for strong action against mob violence” and “a catalyst for widespread demands for the suppression of social disorder” throughout the remainder of the 1890s and early twentieth

In the eleven years following the riot of 1893 and the implementation of anti-lynching reforms on the local and state level, Roanoke had no extralegal executions or serious racial disturbances. In early 1904, however, after word spread that an African American male had assaulted, raped, and robbed a white woman named Alice Shields, over a thousand hysterical white men surrounded the city jail and demanded that the “beast” thought to be locked inside be turned over to them. According to *The Roanoke Times*, “the spirit of riot and misrule threatened to rise uppermost.” Mayor Joel Cutchin, in a stand reminiscent of Henry Trout’s, climbed to the top of the courthouse steps and explained that police had made no arrests and then told the mob to “keep their heads and not stain the name of the city by a riot.” Cutchin, a lawyer and former real estate speculator, had lived in Roanoke during the 1893 riot and understood quite well the potential for lawlessness in the city. John Woods, the judge responsible for managing the 1893 lynching and riot indictments, addressed the mob too, but the frenzied crowd shouted him down before someone in the mob threw a beer bottle at his head that smashed into the helmet of a policeman standing nearby. Cutchin and Woods, nonetheless, were able to convince the mob to send a committee through the jail to see for themselves that no one was in custody.¹⁴⁷

The attack on Mrs. Shields, the *Times* explained, had occurred in the heart of downtown, in the Henry Street home of George Shields, a popular businessman with the firm of E. Wile. Mr. Shields had returned home for lunch and found his three-year-old daughter Mildred lying in a pool of blood near the door and his wife Alice locked in a bedroom closet upstairs with her throat cut from ear to ear and bleeding from huge gashes on her head. Shields summoned a team of doctors, and though both women had fractured skulls, they survived. Mrs. Shields, the paper reported, was able with the aid of opiates to explain that she had been attacked in the kitchen

century. See Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 143, 145, 167-90 (quotes are from 143, 169, 172).

¹⁴⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 31 Jan 1904.

earlier that day by a young black male who had beaten her and Mildred with a hatchet, raped her, demanded money, dragged her upstairs, stolen two gold watches and some clothing, and then cut her throat with a straight razor. Though the *Times*'s editors counseled against lynching, they conceded that residents' "frenzied" reaction was a natural response to the news that "a white woman's throat was ripped ear to ear, her person subjugated to infamous ravishment, her infant child fiercely assaulted with a hatchet's edge – all due to the savage nature, uncontrollable brutal lechery, and the strong, merciless black hand of a creature who holds place in American civilization as a fellow citizen of the white man." "The black menace being brought home to them," the paper explained, "many were to be found favoring a lawless remedy, who are in other respects absolutely law-abiding citizens."¹⁴⁸

In the days that followed, police located no suspects. Additional and far more graphic and sensationalized accounts of the assault appeared in local papers, as did reports of widespread rumors that the rapist would have been caught "save for the reason that the hand of racial sympathy had been extended him." In the second rendition of Mrs. Shields's ordeal, the *Times* reported that while her attacker was "engaged in the dastardly act he placed one foot upon the child's throat in order to suppress its cries." After raping Mrs. Shields again, the paper explained, he burned Mildred with a red-hot poker in order to get Shields to tell him where the family's valuables were located, then dragged Shields upstairs and raped her once again before slicing her throat. City officials posted a \$1,000 reward for information about the assailant but continued to receive criticism for not apprehending the man responsible.¹⁴⁹ About a week after the attack, Alice Shields spoke to the press and corrected some points made in previous stories. Her assailant, she explained, had attempted to rape her, "but did not succeed in accomplishing his purpose." Nor had he burned Mildred. Residents and the press, nonetheless, continued to rely on

¹⁴⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 31 Jan 1904.

¹⁴⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 2 Feb 1904.

the earlier, incorrect versions of the attack when recounting the episode. Indeed, shortly after Shields revised the accounts of her assault, several thousand residents signed a petition encouraging the state legislature to pass a law that made protecting rapists punishable by death.¹⁵⁰

Letters damning black residents flooded local papers. In the *Times*, one female reader recounted the Lizzie Wilson and Thomas Massie murders along with the 1893 assault on Sallie Bishop as evidence of a vicious black “menace” in Roanoke that merited the “entire separation of the races.” “Hardly does the death knell sound for one of these ravenous beasts,” she observed, “until our hearts are made to bleed at news of another act more atrocious than the one preceding.”¹⁵¹ “Prudence,” another female resident, suggested that whites post “No Negroes Allowed” signs on their fences and advised white women to carry pistols and use them “freely” on anyone caught trespassing. She also argued in favor of firing black domestic servants because “every negro cook or maid has her male satellites, generally of the most idle, vicious and insolent type.”¹⁵² Other writers, like “A. J. T.,” blamed the education of African Americans as the main cause for black on white rape. The “old timey negro,” he observed, had been replaced with “the ‘Text Book’ gentry of the present, with their false and fatally dangerous ideas of equality, and their criminal, and devilish attempts for its accomplishment.”¹⁵³ These and other letters ratcheted up the already high climate of hysteria.

Most white residents believed local blacks were harboring Shields’s assailant, which further intensified their antipathy toward African Americans. As a result, in the weeks following the assault, there were widespread episodes of threats and violence against blacks. The first occurred only days after the attack, after news spread that Richard R. Jones, pastor of the African

¹⁵⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 5 Feb 1904.

¹⁵¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 4 Feb 1904.

¹⁵² *The Roanoke Times*, 5 Feb 1904.

¹⁵³ *The Roanoke Times*, 13 Feb 1904.

Baptist Church, “had made intemperate and cowardly remarks in connection to the Shields affair.”¹⁵⁴ Jones already had a widespread reputation among white residents as a “trouble maker,” which made him a convenient target for their rage. The Reverend had spoken out publicly against Virginia’s 1902 disfranchisement of blacks, claiming in a letter to the editor of the *Times* that God would avenge the wrong done to African Americans.¹⁵⁵ Jones had also waged a battle against the Roanoke School Board to get white principals appointed to manage the town’s deteriorating black schools. In a letter to the board reprinted in local papers, he vowed that “if something is not don [sic] there will be blood shed in this city before things are settled.” The head of the board responded by calling Jones “ignorant and vicious.” The editors of the *Times* likewise branded him “a stuffed prophet and a bigoted and hopelessly benighted ignoramus.”¹⁵⁶ Even some the town’s black businessmen attacked him “as a menace to the good order of society.”¹⁵⁷

After Jones’s supposed comments about the Shields’s assault, close to twelve hundred white men stormed across the Henry Street Bridge into Gainsborough to lynch him. Before they arrived, a city police officer warned Jones, and he fled. The infuriated crowd searched his church and home, and on their way back to town cursed black residents, tore down fences, and fired pistols into the air.¹⁵⁸ According to James Hurd Davis, an N&W clerk who spoke with men in the mob, rumor had it that Jones “said that no negro did it but that Shields himself did it because of jealousy.” If they caught the Reverend Jones, Davis told his fiancée, “what they will do for him will be plenty.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 4 Feb 1904.

¹⁵⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 3 March 1901.

¹⁵⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 26 May 1901.

¹⁵⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 2 June 1901.

¹⁵⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 4 Feb 1904.

¹⁵⁹ James Hurd Davis, Roanoke, to Annie H. Woods, Ferrum, VA, 3 Feb 1904, Davis Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

Elsewhere in town, other violence against African Americans erupted. A white mob chased Henry Wilburn, a black Machine Shops employee who supposedly endorsed Jones's comments, away from his job. Wilburn afterwards fled for his life. Tom Hale, a member of Jones's congregation, rumored to have made "similar remarks," was "notified that he had better shake the dust of Roanoke from his feet."¹⁶⁰ Red Acres, another African American resident alleged to have made "intemperate remarks relative to the Shields case," dodged a hundred-man lynch mob before fleeing the city.¹⁶¹ On downtown streets, the *Times* reported, throngs of white boys had for several days pummeled black pedestrians with rocks and snowballs.¹⁶² The climate of hysteria even spread to nearby Salem, where a gang of seventy-five white men used wire cables to flog Taylor Fields – "a negro roust-about" – after he reportedly made "an absurd and dastardly statement in regard to the horrible Shields tragedy." "After the lesson was taught," a correspondent observed, "the negro was warned to keep better control of his tongue, and was then freed." In Gainsborough, another mob hunted down a "negress" believed to have made "a very obnoxious remark." Before they could whip her, however, the frantic woman had a seizure and collapsed in a fit of spasms."¹⁶³

Nearly a week after the attack, the case continued to baffle authorities. Mrs. Shields had cleared every suspect arrested in Roanoke or elsewhere in the region, and police had few promising new leads.¹⁶⁴ According to Mayor Cutchin, the unruly mobs of white men roaming the streets and terrorizing local blacks impeded police work. "I appeal to all classes," he declared in an address to residents, "to restrain their wrath and indignation" and "not to force authorities to

¹⁶⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 6 Feb 1904.

¹⁶¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 Feb 1904.

¹⁶² *The Roanoke Times*, 6 Feb 1904.

¹⁶³ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 Feb 1904.

¹⁶⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 Feb 1904.

adopt vigorous measures.”¹⁶⁵ In the wake of Cutchin’s remarks, several fraternal and labor organizations passed resolutions against assembling in the streets and in favor of refraining from “all angry and unnecessary discussions in order that the criminal may be apprehended.”¹⁶⁶ A couple of days after his appeal to white residents, Cutchin published a “Proclamation to Colored People” in which he warned local blacks that “the idea that some of the colored people know the culprit and will not give information has gained strength daily until nearly every white person in the city believes it implicitly.” Police, the mayor pointed out, had protected African American residents “as good citizens,” but the time had come for black inhabitants to prove their worth by telling authorities everything they knew about the crime.¹⁶⁷

On February 13, nearly two weeks after the attack on Mrs. Shields, news reached Roanoke that Detective Al Baldwin of the Baldwin-Felts Agency had apprehended a twenty-four-year-old black male named Henry Williams who had reportedly attempted to sell two of Mr. Shields’s gold watches in the coalfields of West Virginia. Baldwin traced Williams to his mother’s home in Gulliam, West Virginia, where he found Shields’s watches buried in the yard. Williams, according to the detective, admitted robbing the family and attempting to scare Alice Shields by lightly cutting her throat. He denied that he had attempted to rape her or that he had burned her daughter. His original intention of simply stealing some food, he explained, had gone horribly wrong when Mrs. Shields found him in her kitchen. Williams, Baldwin reported, had lived in Roanoke and worked as a brakeman for the N&W until 1894, when he left for Pittsburgh. He had been back in town only one day when he attacked Shields. Aware that lynch mobs were

¹⁶⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 9 Feb 1904.

¹⁶⁶ See notices published in *The Roanoke Times*, 9, 10, 11 Feb 1904 (quote is from the Car Department, Roanoke Machine Works, in 11 Feb).

¹⁶⁷ “Proclamation to Colored People,” published in *The Roanoke Times*, 11 Feb 1904.

already gathering in Roanoke, the detective put Williams on a special N&W train that passed through the city at forty miles per hour on its way to Richmond.¹⁶⁸

Once in prison at the state capital, Williams cheerfully told police interrogators that he had been in the crowd outside the Shields's home after the attack and that he had mixed in with the mob around the jail that night.¹⁶⁹ Williams explained that he had attended school in Roanoke, spent two years in a Baltimore insane asylum, and been imprisoned two years in Philadelphia before becoming a "horse doctor" in rural Pennsylvania. A grand jury in Roanoke indicted him the day after his arrest, and on the following day, police brought him to town to stand trial for "attempted criminal assault" (i.e., attempted rape) and "felonious assault and robbery." Before his arrival, Governor Andrew Jackson Montague sent in eight hundred Virginia infantrymen to guard him.¹⁷⁰ Although the *Times* bemoaned the arrival of so many troops to protect Williams, it also reminded readers about the 1893 riot and lectured them about refraining from behavior that might give the town similar bad public ity.¹⁷¹

Williams's trial the following day lasted barely two hours. His court-appointed lawyers failed to cross-examine any witness and presented no defense of his not guilty plea. Mrs. Shields did not testify, and the jury, which included businessman Malcolm W. Bryan and former Roanoke Infantryman Jack Hancock, took only five minutes to reach a verdict of guilty based solely on the confession reported by Detective Baldwin. The presiding judge then ruled that Williams was to hang until he was "dead, dead, dead," in Roanoke in thirty days, which was the minimum time allowed by state law. In the meantime, he was to be held in the Lynchburg jail. Although residents deeply resented the large show of force, the *Times* reported, all were relieved

¹⁶⁸ *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 13 Feb 1904; *The Roanoke Times*, 13 Feb 1904.

¹⁶⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 14 Feb 1904.

¹⁷⁰ William Larsen, *Montague of Virginia: The Making of a Southern Progressive* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 122.

¹⁷¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Feb 1904.

“that full justice had been meted out to one of the blackest scoundrels who ever polluted the earth with his presence.”¹⁷² In the state capital, however, the black-owned *Richmond Planet* argued correctly that Williams had not actually raped Mrs. Shields and that local newspapers had exaggerated the details of his attack. Moreover, its editor observed, since “hot-headed white hoodlums” in town had repeatedly terrorized innocent black residents and driven a highly respected preacher out of the city, it would be best for African American Roanokers to arm themselves to prevent further terror.¹⁷³

Criticism about the huge show of force for the trial deluged state and local authorities. After learning of the widespread negative reaction, Governor Montague admitted that “the actual number of troops may have been a few too many” but argued that in light of the 1893 riot, he had no choice.¹⁷⁴ Mayor Cutchin complained in local papers that he had done all in his power to limit the infantry to two hundred and fifty men but that Montague had overruled him. “Those who could have done a better job,” he lashed out, “are welcome to it.”¹⁷⁵ Cutchin and the town council, at the behest of anxious and still somewhat hysterical white residents, ordered the police force to compile a list of “suspicious characters” and implement a “war” on black vagrants.¹⁷⁶ “The city authorities,” the *Times* reported, “are determined to rid the city of trifling, worthless negroes.”¹⁷⁷ Over the following weeks, police rounded up dozens of black men on vagrancy charges, and city judges sentenced them to a minimum of six months on the chain gang.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷² *The Roanoke Times*, 17 Feb 1904.

¹⁷³ *Richmond Planet*, excerpts reprinted in *The Roanoke Times*, 17 Feb 1904.

¹⁷⁴ Larsen, *Montague of Virginia*, 122-23.

¹⁷⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 18 Feb 1904.

¹⁷⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 25 Feb 1904.

¹⁷⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 1 March 1904.

¹⁷⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 2, 3 March 1904.

Since Virginia's execution statutes required that the gallows for Williams' hanging be constructed in an area shielded from public view, city officials had it built between the courthouse and jail, behind a hastily constructed wooden fence.¹⁷⁹ Once the scaffold was completed, thousands of curious residents visited it and chipped off bits of wood as souvenirs. The police force, one of its officers reported, had been "besieged" by locals hoping to find a way to witness the execution. Hundreds had also recommended that officials deputize Mr. Shields so that he could spring the trap that would send the "fiend" to his death.¹⁸⁰ Williams arrived in Roanoke on the eve of his execution date along with several hundred members of the state militia. According to a local reporter, Williams, who was likely mentally unbalanced, was "cheerful and composed" about his impending execution and believed that he was "going straight to heaven."¹⁸¹ Williams, who would have been only thirteen at the time, denied widespread rumors that he was the man who assaulted Sallie Bishop in 1893, but admitted killing two other men while living in Pennsylvania. He claimed Will Jeffers, a black man still living in Roanoke, had actually beaten and robbed Bishop. When questioned by reporters, Jeffers, not surprisingly, denied all involvement in the crime.¹⁸²

The following morning, what seemed to reporters to be "the entire population of Roanoke" gathered peacefully in front of the jail to wait for the execution. Hundreds of residents lined rooftops nearby and dozens of men climbed telephone poles and trees in the area to get a look at the proceedings. Once Williams had been hung, authorities opened the fence to let spectators view his body and gather bits of rope and pieces of the black hood over his head.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 18 Feb; 2 March 1904.

¹⁸⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 4, 12, 15 March 1904.

¹⁸¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 18 March 1904.

¹⁸² *The Roanoke Times*, 19 March 1904.

¹⁸³ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 March 1904.

They also allowed M. F. Landes to photograph the “condemned brute” being executed, and afterwards he sold several hundred copies of the pictures.¹⁸⁴ City officials donated Williams’s body to the University of Virginia Medical School, and in one final act of desecration, police shipped him there in a potato barrel labeled “Potatoes a la Coon.” In the judgment of Governor Montague, Roanokers had exhibited “exemplary behavior” at the hanging. Their conduct, he told reporters, was “not only highly gratifying to me, but should be an example to the world.”¹⁸⁵

Reverend Richard R. Jones, who had been hiding in Washington, D. C., since fleeing Roanoke, initiated a letter-writing campaign to arrange his return. In dispatches to Mayor Cutchin, Jones complained that he had received no police protection from the mob and that authorities had charged no one with attempting to lynch him. He pleaded for a guarantee of his safety if he returned. In reply, however, Cutchin claimed to be unaware of anyone responsible for threatening him and advised Jones to return at his own risk. “You will have to do as I do,” he explained, “go in and out among the people, trusting to your worth to protect you from harm.”¹⁸⁶ To white authorities in Roanoke, Jones represented the “wrong” sort of black leader; he was an outspoken activist for his race with a large local audience, repeatedly questioned elected officials’ leadership ability, publicly challenged some of their decisions, and demanded that local blacks receive their fair share of municipal resources. Even Roanoke’s white pastors feared Jones. Indeed, they advised him to stay away from Roanoke and claimed that “his usefulness as a preacher has ended.” The *Washington Post*, nevertheless, reported that Jones had received letters from Mr. Shields and other prominent white residents exonerating him and asking him to return. The preacher, according to the *Post*, had not given a sermon on the day in question, had been one

¹⁸⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 20 March 1904.

¹⁸⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 22 March 1904.

¹⁸⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 6, 7, 28 Feb 1904 (quote is from 28 Feb).

of the first residents to sign the petition making harboring rapists punishable by death, and had condemned Williams in the strongest terms possible.¹⁸⁷

A few days after Williams's execution, a rumor spread that Jones had returned. A mob of masked men burst into his house and ordered his terrified wife to leave town within twelve hours or face the consequences. After Mrs. Jones fled, the black-owned *Richmond Planet* advised her husband to return to Roanoke, make funeral arrangements for himself, purchase a shotgun, and kill a few of the "white hoodlums" who were sure to show up at his house. The city's white residents, the *Planet* observed, were for the most part "uncivilized" and in need of a strong lesson.¹⁸⁸ In nearby Salem, the *Times-Register & Sentinel* reported, local blacks had taken the *Planet*'s advice to heart and purchased forty Winchester rifles and sixteen pistols with which to protect Jones if he returned.¹⁸⁹ In mid-April, Jones resigned as pastor of Roanoke's African Baptist Church. A committee from his former congregation told local papers that they were searching for a "conservative" replacement. The minister, nevertheless, continued his quest to find a way to return. In July, at the advice of Governor Montague and United States Senator John Daniels, he wrote Roanoke's City Council to present his case for receiving the protection he would need to come home. Most importantly, he explained, he had not made the remarks he had been blamed for and would be glad to meet his accusers face to face to prove it. Jones, who had been born a slave and lived in Roanoke for over thirty years, informed the councilmen that he had been forced to sell his home, give up his pastor's position, leave his friends, and been "made to

¹⁸⁷ *Washington Post* 25 Feb 1904, quoted in *The Roanoke Times*, 26 Feb 1904.

¹⁸⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 22 March 1904; *Richmond Planet*, quoted in *The Roanoke Times*, 6 April 1904.

¹⁸⁹ *Salem Times-Register & Sentinel*, quoted in *The Roanoke Times*, 9 April 1904. See also, John D. Long, *South of Main: The History of the Water Street Community of Salem Virginia* (Salem: Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy, 2000), 34. Long questions the validity of the story and downplays its significance if true, arguing that "the benign relations of the Salem community prevailed." See *ibid.* One wonders, however, where such "benign relations" were during the whipping of Taylor Fields by an enraged Salem mob only a couple months earlier.

start life over again” at the age of fifty-five. He listed several dozen prominent white businessmen who would vouch for his integrity and begged city authorities to “heed my cry.” Roanoke officials, however, did nothing to assist his return.¹⁹⁰ “The consensus opinion,” the *Times* observed, “is that Roanoke will manage to get along without Jones and that he is better off in Washington than he would be here.”¹⁹¹

Almost exactly a year after being attacked, Mildred Shields died from wounds to her head. “The little girl,” the *Times* reported, had “suffered torture” from her diseased skull and had never fully recovered from the assault in spite of several operations.¹⁹² The fact that authorities had captured, prosecuted, and executed her supposed killer was no doubt of some comfort to those who learned of Mildred’s sad fate. For whites, “justice” had been exacted, and even though it had come through channels created to maintain Roanoke’s progressive image, most residents were satisfied with the outcome. A few weeks after Mildred Shields’s death, Richard Jones filed a \$50,000 lawsuit in Federal Court against Roanoke City, Mayor Cutchin, and City Sergeant J. A. Manuel for making no effort to disperse the mob or protect him.¹⁹³ Cutchin, in an address to city council, claimed Jones’s “intemperate” remarks had provoked unknown persons to “look for the preacher for purposes unknown to the mayor and chief of police.”¹⁹⁴ Roanoke’s City Solicitor filed a seventeen-point demurrer against Jones’s suit, and when the Reverend was unable to pay a bond to bear the cost of the case should he lose, a judge dismissed his suit.¹⁹⁵ Jones moved to Homestead, Pennsylvania shortly thereafter. The following year he wrote Cutchin a final

¹⁹⁰ R. R. Jones, Washington, D. C., to “The City Council of Roanoke,” Roanoke, 26 July 1904, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library.

¹⁹¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 28 July 1904.

¹⁹² *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Feb 1905.

¹⁹³ *The Roanoke Times*, 3 March 1905.

¹⁹⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 11 March 1905.

¹⁹⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 16, 23 March; 16 Sept 1905; see also Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 395-96.

dispatch, informing the mayor that he was doing well and believed “a Divine hand turned him from Roanoke.”¹⁹⁶ Jones spent the remainder of his life in exile from his longtime home.

The Roanoke riot of 1893 had a dramatic impact on both the city and the state of Virginia. In its wake, both implemented reforms to quell the potential for unrest or mob violence and both enacted measures to prevent lynching. Before the riot, Roanoke authorities, business leaders, and newspaper editors granted “respectable,” sober, and responsible white men the right to destroy black transgressors. In the case of William Lavender, the arrangement worked well for those in power. In the case of Thomas Smith, however, drunken and unruly poor whites demanded the same right. When officials resisted, these men protested by attacking those in power, threatening the very core of elites’ social, political, and economic status. As a result, Smith’s execution took on the trappings of a true “carnival” – rioters turned the world upside down, disrupting the orderly hierarchy that had taken control of him. Afterwards, Roanoke authorities created a reserve police force, reorganized and strengthened the city force, and vowed publicly to do whatever was necessary to protect prisoners from “lawless” residents. The city’s newspapers instigated an editorial campaign against lynching, and its business leaders condemned extralegal violence in the strongest terms possible.

On the state level, Virginia’s governors, who had previously done nothing to prevent lynching, began calling out the state militia to protect prisoners from lynch mobs. They also began holding local authorities accountable for extralegal violence in their jurisdictions. Combined, these efforts reversed the growing wave of lynching sweeping the state. It is perhaps not surprising that the replacement of lynching with state-sanctioned executions occurred at precisely the time Virginians began to fully embrace modern capitalism. Having partially recovered from the economic disaster of the Civil War, Virginia was “open for business” in the

¹⁹⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 28 Dec 1906.

1880s and 1890s. As a result, northern capital and industry flocked to the region, prompting cities like Roanoke seemingly to appear out of nowhere. In the process, however, lynching, urban rioting, and mob violence also emerged, distracting workers, halting production, worrying investors, and threatening property. The state responded with measures designed to prevent future disruptions to its economic and political systems: order replaced disorder; state, municipal, and corporate hegemony replaced underclass challenges to the power structure. Authorities in Virginia cloaked this new arrangement as “progressive” and “humane” reform, selling it to disgruntled whites as part of modernity and to potential northern investors as proof of Virginia’s capitalist transformation.

As the fate of Henry Williams illustrates, however, for African Americans accused of capital offenses against whites the results were hardly all that different. Williams faced a sham trial without legal representation in front of an all-white jury composed of infuriated and biased Roanoke residents before being quickly executed under circumstances so carnivalesque that they almost mimicked a lynching. Residents collected souvenirs and photos of the event in much the same fashion they had after the lynching of Thomas Smith, and while Williams’s body was not burned in front of a cheering crowd, it was shoved into a potato barrel and shipped away to be dissected by “scientists.” In many ways, the contrast between the fates of William Lavender, Thomas Smith, and Henry Williams parallel what Michel Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, as the move by authorities to suppress the threat of lower-class disorder at executions by moving such punishments inside the confines of prisons, outside the view and grasp of unruly mobs.¹⁹⁷ The fissure, while of little real difference to African Americans charged with capital crimes against whites, marks the removal by local and state authorities of previously sanctioned lynching rights for white men.

¹⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995), especially pages 1-104. After explaining this break, Foucault goes on to reveal the ways that the modern prison system evolved into a panopticon machine that punishes the soul by instilling self-regulating behavior in its occupants.

Chapter Six

Business and Boosterism, 1893-1912

General Forrest, in the late unpleasantness, on being asked why he was always successful in battle replied: "Because I always get there first with the greatest number of men." We need more men, and "munitions of war." Glorious victories await the astute generals who will bring these to occupy the field.

Roanoke Board of Trade (1894)

All your life you hear that Paris is something rich and racy, something that makes New York look like Roanoke, Virginia.

H. L. Mencken (1914)

Roanoke's business boosters, editors and elected officials were the first to recognize the dangers lynching and underclass revolt represented to the city. In the aftermath of the cataclysmic 1893 riot, they rushed to mitigate the damage it caused to the city's progressive reputation with calls for swift prosecution of lawbreakers and a public relations campaign touting Roanoke's moral population and business-friendly ethos. Moreover, they successfully sorted out white inhabitants' class roles in administering "justice" to African Americans accused of capital crimes, locking in place mechanisms that forestalled the potential for underclass disorder. During the remainder of the 1890s, the city's businessmen and promoters faced an even more daunting challenge, when the national depression that began in 1893 showed no signs of abating. Dozens of local firms went bankrupt, scores of residents lost their jobs and left town, and the city itself teetered on the edge of ruin. Indeed, in a December 1893 sermon to Roanoke's Junior Order of United Mechanics, William Campbell, longtime pastor of the city's Presbyterian Church, chose as the theme for his address part of Paul's second letter to Timothy, "In the last days, perilous times shall come." There was a "dark and ominous" mood around town, Campbell observed, that was present because "our social order is in a state of transition." The "question" of relations between capital and labor during the depression, according to him, was foremost among the city's

numerous potential difficulties, which Campbell described as “the question of money, the negro problem, immigration, [and] the saloon.” The laborers gathered before him, he observed, had every right to be upset about their current economic plight but need not resort to strikes or violence to improve their situation since they had the power of the vote to offset the strength of capital. Reasonable solutions to their troubles were therefore available “without overturning the social order.”¹

Roanoke’s business leaders could not have agreed with Campbell more. Most did all they could to ease the effects of the recession and thereby forestall any “overturning” of the city’s social order. Some pushed for another railroad, others courted new industries, and hundreds toughed it out until prosperity returned. Although several domestic enterprises never recovered, many of those that survived the recession emerged leaner, meaner, and poised to rise to the pinnacle of the local economy. A couple of those businesses, The Virginia Brewing Company and The Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company, not only endured, but grew into two of Roanoke’s most important indigenous enterprises. Moreover, once the depression ended, the city’s boosters successfully promoted their town to potential outside investors, using its cheap land, docile labor force, and corporate welfare system as incentives. By 1910, their campaign had lured dozens of new manufacturing enterprises, brought in countless new jobs, and fomented a complete recovery from the disastrous economic collapse of the 1890s. For Roanoke’s workers, most of whom belonged to unions but had little collective bargaining power, who worked long and arduous hours for low pay with little hope of significant advancement, the city’s leap into the forefront of the industrialized New South meant only a continuation of backbreaking and dangerous labor, few public services, dirt streets, squalid living conditions, and sending their children off to work in the town’s iron plants, railroad shops, or cotton mill.

¹ Campbell’s sermon to the mechanics, reprinted the following day in *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 11 Dec 1893, clipping in William Creighton Campbell Papers, History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke (cited hereafter as Campbell Papers).

By late 1893, the national recession had grown so severe in Roanoke that its cash-strapped government closed the city's schools and aborted all planned improvements. At the Roanoke Machine Works, orders for new railroad cars and locomotives plummeted, leaving management no choice but to reduce the hours of its remaining employees to four per day. Hundreds of workers laid off by the firm packed up their families and left town.² Dozens of other local businesses failed or remained shuttered. The Roanoke Iron Company, for example, closed down operations at all of its furnaces but eventually proposed putting them in blast again if its former employees would work for reduced wages. The iron puddlers' union rejected the new pay scale, advocating instead that its members resume work at their pre-recession pay rate and only then because most were deep in debt to the iron company's commissary. The firm's owners rejected the proposal, choosing instead to leave the plant idle until better prospects appeared.³ The Norwich Lock Works laid off dozens of employees, cut wages, reduced hours, and still failed to turn a profit. By the fall of 1895, according to Malcolm W. Bryan, a company trustee and land company executive, the firm's numerous creditors were threatening to foreclose. Bryan, whom the company's directors asked to shepherd the firm through the difficulty, complained not long after taking charge that the firm's affairs were "simply abominable."⁴ The Lock Work's Connecticut owners, who had spent \$125,000 on the business and were ready to cut their loses, instructed him to find a buyer. Although advertisements for the plant ran in several trade journals, Bryan reported that there had been "no results – in fact, no inquires." Even worse, the firm's stock was nearly worthless, it had neither capital nor credit, and if it closed, he explained, "I

² Raymond P. Barnes, *A History of Roanoke* (Radford, VA: Commonwealth Press, 1968), 279.

³ *The Roanoke Times*, 15 March 1894.

⁴ M. W. Bryan, Roanoke, to Richard J. Morris, Philadelphia, PA, 9 Nov 1895, in Malcolm W. Bryan Papers, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library (cited hereafter as Bryan Papers).

couldn't get 10,000 for it.”⁵ Bryan's efforts failed but his prediction turned out to be quite prescient: the company closed and stood dormant until 1898, when local businessmen purchased the plant for \$6,500 with the aim of turning into the Roanoke Hardware Company.⁶

The city's population, which had increased by over seven thousand residents from 1890 to 1892, declined by over three thousand from 1893 to 1895, to drop to around twenty thousand inhabitants. Vacant houses dotted the city's landscape, and in some African American sections of the Northeast, entire neighborhoods stood empty.⁷ Many of the city's unemployed workers and their families turned to charity organizations like the Roanoke Machine Works Relief Association, which distributed coal, clothing, and food to laid-off machinists, or the Ladies Union Benevolent Society, which operated a commissary on Salem Avenue for the “worthy poor.” Those receiving aid from the Benevolent Society performed street work in exchange for their fifty cents per day of rations.⁸ Roanoke's elite residents, by contrast, sought ways to sustain their social and cultural organizations in the midst of the economic downturn. The Roanoke Athletic Club, for example, staged a benefit performance of the opera *H. M. S. Pinafore* in order to “raise a sufficient sum of money to liquidate the indebtedness of the club, and thus enable it to establish on firm foundation, a credible Base Ball Team for the coming season.”⁹

⁵ M. W. Bryan, Roanoke, to Richard J. Morris, Philadelphia, PA, 23 Nov 1895, in Bryan Papers.

⁶ R. H. Angell, M. W. Bryan, and S. W. Jamison were the local businessmen who bought the building. They sold it the same year for twenty-five thousand dollars to investors interested in turning the plant into a cotton mill.

⁷ See city directory and US Census data published in *The Roanoke Times*, 20 Oct 1892; *The Roanoke Daily Times*, 19 July 1895.

⁸ For the Machine Works Relief Association, see *The Roanoke Times*, 28 Nov 1893; for the Ladies Union Benevolent Society, see *The Roanoke Times*, 1 Feb; 13, 14, 15 March 1894.

⁹ John M. Payne, Jr., Chairman of Committee, Roanoke Athletic Club, to Miss Edith Browning, care of B. W. Browning, Esq., N&W Railroad, Roanoke, 28 Feb 1894, in History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke.

The recession, chance for possible work or charity in Roanoke, and easy access to the city via a stolen ride in an N&W boxcar served as a magnet for hundreds of unemployed and homeless men and their families from the surrounding countryside. Indeed, by 1895, local papers reported that the town was flooded with “tramps” and “gypsies.” Some of the homeless families lived on the banks of the Roanoke River in makeshift shanties; others invaded abandoned homes or businesses; some lived in mothballed railcars. Many of the men drank crude bootleg whiskey known locally as “Roanoke stagger juice.” According to a pair of “tramps” found sleeping in an N&W boxcar, they “landed in Roanoke because they had nowhere else to go.”¹⁰ Other men, like Charlie Burgess, a laid-off machinist from Baltimore, arrived in Roanoke looking for skilled work. Burgess, who came to town in the fall of 1895, hunted an entire day before finding one dim prospect as a pump operator in a blast furnace. The job would require a seven-day workweek, he complained to his wife, but since it paid \$75 a month, he took it. Roanoke, he lamented, was “not so good a city” as others he had visited in the South. “The sidewalks are board,” he grumbled, “and only 2 or 3 streets are paved.” The only bright spot was steady work and cheap rent.¹¹ When Burgess arrived at work the following morning, however, he found his new position already occupied. “They had changed their mind,” he wrote his wife, “and was going to promote one of the old men instead of hiring a new man – they payed only \$65 per month, 7 days in the week and perhaps 24 hours in the day.” Burgess left town disgusted but admitted he “didn’t care much” because the job was awful and the city a mess.¹²

¹⁰ For examples, see *The Roanoke Daily Times*, 25 April; 6 June; 17 July 1895 (first quote from 6 June; second from 17 July).

¹¹ Charlie Burgess, Roanoke, to “My own dear wife” (Marie Wohlbruck Burgess, Baltimore, MD), 17 Oct 1895, Wohlbruck and Burgess Family Papers, Manuscripts Department, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville (cited hereafter as Wohlbruck and Burgess Family Papers).

¹² Charlie Burgess, Roanoke, to “My own dear wife” (Marie Wohlbruck Burgess, Baltimore, MD), 18 Oct 1895, Wohlbruck and Burgess Family Papers.

The town's business leaders sought outside investment as the best possible remedy to Roanoke's economic decline. Negative publicity from the 1893 lynch riot made their task even more difficult. In October 1893, a month after the riot, Edward L. Stone, the president of Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company and a man who later became one of the city's most important civic boosters, instigated an ad campaign in regional and national papers to rehabilitate Roanoke's business-friendly reputation. His full-page advertisements, which cited the usual booster statistics concerning the city's spectacular population growth and phenomenal economic expansion, claimed that Roanoke was the "gateway" to the iron and coalfields of the southwest and a "marvelous city" with a moral and upstanding population.¹³ Stone and other boosters also pushed hard to bring in a new trunk rail line to alleviate Roanoke's economic turmoil. After the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad showed interest in making a move to compete with the Norfolk & Western, which had a monopoly on rail access in Roanoke, natives' campaign for a new road moved into high gear. The town's businessmen, most of whom thought a new rail line would reduce freight and passenger rates, bring an increase in investments by manufacturers, and boost the local economy, pushed elected officials to offer the railroad at least a \$100,000 in municipal stock subscriptions. Members of Roanoke's Board of Trade lined up behind the scheme, and while they acknowledged their "obligations" to the Norfolk & Western, they told a local reporter that it was high time for the city to leave the "cradle" and "walk alone."¹⁴

Norfolk & Western president Fredrick J. Kimball, in a *Roanoke Times* interview shortly afterwards, not only lambasted the plan but issued a warning that the N&W would have to reconsider any additional investments in Roanoke should the city carry through with such a plan. "If Roanoke can raise \$100,000," he complained, "it had better spend it in making the city

¹³ See reprint of ad in *The Roanoke Times*, 31 Oct 1893.

¹⁴ *The Roanoke Time*, 23 Feb 1893.

attractive rather than building a railroad.”¹⁵ Kimball’s remarks elicited a torrent of criticism from native business boosters. According to the editor of the *Roanoke Daily Record*, the time had past in the history of Roanoke “when the opinions of her citizens and their freedom of action can be dominated by any corporation or body of men, and the sooner Mr. Kimball realizes that fact, and either disclaims the authenticity of the implied threats imputed to him to intimidate our citizens, . . . the sooner the indignation aroused by his reported comments will be lessened.”¹⁶ In *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, another railroad booster summed up the opinion of most businessmen when he proclaimed that “Roanoke does not belong to the Norfolk & Western railroad.” No citizen, he argued, should submit “to monopolies dictating what we shall do.” The editors of the *Evening World* concurred and complained that the \$200,000 the city had contributed to complete the Roanoke & Southern Railroad had been largely wasted since the line had been immediately absorbed by the N&W to forestall any competition.¹⁷ The N&W, while crucial to Roanoke’s development, had by 1893 ceased being a critical component of native boosters’ business schemes. Indeed, by then, the N&W’s monopoly had become an anathema to them.

Kimball’s criticism did nothing to halt the campaign for a new line. Indeed, in November 1893, city boosters chartered the Roanoke Railway Construction Company and proposed raising \$50,000 to build a link to the Baltimore & Ohio or Chesapeake & Ohio railroads at Buchanan, in neighboring Botetourt County. The firm assured potential investors that they would not have to pay for their stock until the rail link was completed and guaranteed that any deal to connect with the new railroads would contain clauses that precluded the N&W from buying the line.¹⁸ City

¹⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 28 Feb 1893, in Norfolk & Western scrapbook no. 17, Norfolk & Western Railway Archives, Special Collections, Newman Library, Virginia Tech (hereafter cited as N&WS no., N&WRA.)

¹⁶ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 1 March 1893, in N&WS no. 17, N&WRA.

¹⁷ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 1 March 1893, in N&WS no. 17, N&WRA.

¹⁸ *Manufacturers’ Record*, 1 Dec 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA; *The Roanoke Times*, 17 Nov 1893.

papers and business leaders pushed the scheme by incessantly encouraging residents to invest, before a golden opportunity to mitigate the effects of the recession dissipated.¹⁹ Not funding a new rail link, the *Daily Record* warned, would mean “the delay of the material progress and prosperity another trunk line of railway will surely bring.”²⁰ Investment, the paper explained, would reduce coal prices and freight rates, increase property values, and “awaken at every step, new hopes and new energy, until our beautiful valley is once more aglow in the sunshine of prosperity and our people again made happy by their own efforts.”²¹ In an appeal aimed at property owners, editors for the *Record* also promised that the new road would “give employment to a large number of our laboring classes, who are now out of employment, and thereby enable them to meet their rents, which they are now unable to do.”²²

Board of Trade member and prominent business booster Nathaniel B. Johnson was one of the driving forces behind the new line. “An additional railroad,” he told a local reporter, “is an absolute essential, not only to the progress of this community, but to maintaining the position to which it has attained, and without wishing to be understood as prophesying a boom, I believe that upon the day on which the work is commenced . . . there will be a new spirit of life taken on by every enterprise and business in Roanoke.”²³ Johnson, a partner in Brown & Johnson Hardware on Jefferson Street, wrote dozens of letters on behalf of the Board of Trade to regional officials to

¹⁹ See, for example, accounts and interviews in *The Roanoke Times*, 2 Dec 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA; *Roanoke Daily Record*, 2 Dec 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

²⁰ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 17 Nov 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

²¹ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 21, 30 Nov 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA (quote is from 30 Nov).

²² *Roanoke Daily Record*, 6 Dec 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

²³ *Roanoke Daily Record*, 6 Dec 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

drum up additional support for the line.²⁴ The N&W's opposition to the deal and simultaneous failure to fully staff its machine shops infuriated Johnson and the other members of the Board of Trade. By August 1894, he had had enough. In a vicious complaint against the N&W sent to Peyton L. Terry, the most powerful native entrepreneur and member of the Roanoke Machine Works' board of directors, Johnson implored him to pressure the line to commit more jobs to Roanoke. President Kimball and the N&W, he observed, had ignored their city's plight for too long and thereby fomented the crusade for an additional line. "While the men formerly employed by the Machine Works were idle," he fumed, "and the interests of many whom all was dependent upon their employment were frustrated, the Norfolk & Western RR Co had built at other points as many as 3,000 freight and coal cars, . . . which had they been built here would have added immeasurably to the prosperity of every interest." Although he acknowledged that without the N&W and Roanoke Machine Works the city would not exist, Johnson told Terry that he and the other men behind the new railway felt that Roanoke "now occupies very much the position of a plant which having been raised to a certain point by the fertilization and irrigation suddenly has those assurances of its growth withdrawn and is left to fend for itself."²⁵

In the months that followed, as the national depression grew more severe and most railroads halted all expansion projects, the deal to forge a new rail connection collapsed. Moreover, Roanoke's own railroad showed signs of serious financial trouble, when in the winter

²⁴ For letters to regional officials about the B&O and C&O, see June and July letters in Nathaniel B. Johnson Letterbook, 1894-1895, in Nathaniel B. Johnson Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond (cited hereafter as Johnson Letterbook).

Johnson was also active in soliciting new manufacturers. In July 1894, for example, he promised a Petersburg tin-can factory owner that Roanoke companies alone would consume one hundred thousand cans per year if the firm relocated to the city. Later in the year, he notified a Pennsylvania mill operator that the town was surrounded by a huge stock of oak and chestnut tress ready to be harvested. Tin-can factory letter is N. B. Johnson, Roanoke, to Simon Seward, Petersburg, VA, 24 July 1894, in Johnson Letterbook; mill letter is N. B. Johnson, Roanoke, to H. M. Gist, Hanover, PA, 18 Sept 1894, in Johnson Letterbook.

²⁵ N. B. Johnson, Roanoke, to Peyton L. Terry, Roanoke, 30 Aug 1894, in Johnson Letterbook.

of 1894, Norfolk & Western officials cut all their employees' salaries from 5 to 15 percent. Vice president and general manager Joseph Sands, in a circular notifying the company's workers of the cuts, explained that while the N&W's management appreciated the "fidelity and zeal" of their employees, the firm had been "forced by circumstances over which it has no control to make the reductions."²⁶ Between 1893 and 1895, passengers had fallen off by 11 percent, tons of coal hauled was down 16 percent, and gross earnings were down by over \$500,000. The line had been unable to pay rental fees on its railcars or interest on its loans in both 1893 and 1894, prompting Fredrick Kimball to journey to Europe to attempt to re-finance the firm's mortgages. His efforts failed, and by early 1895, the N&W was over \$1,000,000 in debt. That February, with few other options available, the company chose to enter a temporary reorganization receivership under the guidance of Kimball and longtime N&W executive Henry Fink. The reorganization effort, however, encountered grave difficulties shortly thereafter, when miners at the Pocahontas coalfields went on a five-month strike and coal shipments declined even further. In a portent of even worse times to come, in early 1896, the N&W's decorous Queen Anne office building in Roanoke burned entirely to the ground. Shortly thereafter, creditors forced a foreclose sale of the Norfolk & Western Railroad's assets. Before the line went up for auction, however, Kimball, Fink, and other former N&W executives formed the Norfolk & Western Railway Company. At the foreclosure sale, their N&W Railway purchased E. W. Clark & Company's N&W Railroad. The new railway named Fink president and appointed Kimball chairman of the board.²⁷

²⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 1 Feb 1894.

²⁷ Information about the demise of the Norfolk & Western Railroad Company is from E. B. Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western Railway Company* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1912), 153-55, 163-64; E. F. Pat Striplin, *The Norfolk & Western: A History* (Forest, VA: Norfolk & Western Historical Society, 1997), 62-64; Don Piedmont, "The Railroad Offices," *Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society* 13, no. 2 (1996): 19; Warren L. Schilling, "Roanoke City Fire Department History, 1882-1983," 4, TMs (1983), Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library.

The effect of the recession on the city's land and development companies was equally devastating. Although many Roanoke real estate firms had gone bust when the town's biggest boom collapsed in the early 1890s, others held on and dozens of new ventures began operations. Indeed, in early 1894, Malcolm Bryan told a business associate that from his office in the Terry Building, "I see in every direction and as far as the eye can reach, land companies."²⁸ Bryan, who was on the board of directors of thirty-seven real estate firms, had saved enough money to weather the storm. Several of his associates, however, were not so fortunate. W. Lawrie Reid, an architect who helped design the massive Terry Building, suffered through twelve months of no clients and by May 1894 was, according to Bryan, completely broke. Bryan, who tried desperately to find a position for Reid in Philadelphia, told a friend living there that the architect had a wife, three children, and parents to support and was in such financial ruin that "I do not know upon what he has existed."²⁹ By 1895, even the city's most heralded land companies were so deep in debt that Bryan warned a fellow real estate investor that he had "no faith in the ultimate realization by any stockholder of anything like our 'intrinsic valuations.'" His stock in the Buena Vista Land Company was by then "worthless." Indeed, according to Bryan, the firm was over \$65,000 in the red and had resorted to selling its \$46,000 glass plant for \$3,500 and its \$192,000 furnace for \$11,000. Peyton Terry's Roanoke Development Company, of which Bryan was vice president, was in even worse shape, with a debt of at least \$175,000 and assets consisting mainly of lands "mortgaged far in excess of their value." Both companies, according to Bryan, "went into everything in 1889 and 1890" and were "reaping the whirlwind now."³⁰

²⁸ Malcolm W. Bryan, Roanoke, to T. W. Neil, Washington and Roanoke Land & Improvement Company, Washington, DC, 12 Jan 1894, reprinted in Malcolm W. Bryan III, "Boom and Bust," 1, TMs (1995), Bryan Papers.

²⁹ Malcolm W. Bryan, Roanoke, to T. Roney Williamson, Esq., Philadelphia, 14 May 1894, reprinted in Bryan III, "Boom and Bust," 5, Bryan Papers.

³⁰ Malcolm W. Bryan, Roanoke, to Hon. W. H. Sims, Washington, DC 19 Oct 1895, Bryan Papers.

In the summer of 1895, the Roanoke Machine Works re-hired some of its former employees and the Crozer Iron Company put its “number two” furnace back into blast. Although only a few hundred men had gone back to work, it was enough to make the *Daily Times* boast that “Roanoke has stemmed the tide of depression and is now on the high road to a successful future.”³¹ The financial disaster, however, was far from over. Rumors were rampant that the new N&W Railway planned to relocate its headquarters rather than rebuild its offices in Roanoke. Several competing cities made moves to get the N&W, but in the end, the line decided to build a new six-story office building on the lot of its former headquarters. Having dodged one potential economic catastrophe, residents immediately faced another. On Monday morning, June 14, 1896, The Roanoke Trust, Loan and Safe Deposit Company failed to open for business. The firm, owned and managed by Peyton L. Terry, had grossly overextended itself in real estate loans and having repossessed much of the land for delinquent mortgages, found itself holding property worth only a fraction of its original cost, that even at rock-bottom prices would not sell. Terry and his son-in-law, S. W. Jamison, secretary-treasurer of the company, declared the firm bankrupt, leaving depositors no choice but to sue the bank to recoup at least a portion of their money. Terry and Jamison lost their personal fortunes in the fiasco, but a grand jury declared them negligent rather than liable for the loss of close to \$1,000,000 in deposits. Terry forfeited his ornate Italianesque office building in the immediate aftermath, and two years later, the man who, along with his brother-in-law, Henry Trout, was responsible for the rise of Roanoke City, died of pernicious anemia, broke, humiliated, and distraught.³²

³¹ *The Roanoke Daily Times*, 28 Aug 1895.

³² For the plight of Terry’s Roanoke Trust, Loan and Safe Deposit Company, see Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 289-90, 301, 322; Claire White, *Roanoke: 1740-1982* (Roanoke: Roanoke Valley Historical Society, 1982), 81-84.

Although some of Roanoke's businesses (and businessmen) went belly-up during the recession, others found a way through the hard times and afterwards thrived. Moreover, dozens of new manufacturers established plants that offered work to thousands of new laborers. Many of the firms received free land from the municipality; all of them benefited from Roanoke's fifteen-year tax exemption for new manufacturers. Most also arrived knowing full well that the city's labor unions, while strong in membership, rarely resorted to strikes or walkouts. The city's business boosters and capitalists appreciated the benefits of a docile and tractable labor force; in promotional literature about the city, they never failed to mention the advantages such workers offered northern or foreign enterprises. Although efforts of the city's laboring population to become a more powerful component of the local business structure gained momentum in the 1890s and early 1900s, their crusade never seriously challenged the power of the city's corporations. From its founding, the City of Roanoke's "open for business" ethos and corporate welfare policies made unionism unappealing to government and business leaders. Most enterprises allowed organized labor to exist within their firms but used a variety of methods to ensure that workers remained obsequious. The near absence of labor disruptions, especially when compared to the almost constant drumbeat of strikes against northern corporations elsewhere during the same period, had numerous sources. Primarily, it was the result of an ardently pro-business government structure, a lack of viable employment nearby, comparatively high wages, and corporate or governmental paternalism and welfare. An abundant pool of available labor, high turnover of residents, and lingering differences between native and newcomer workers were lesser factors, but added to the problems local unions faced.

Unlike most other southern towns and cities, where unions struggled to gain footholds in mills or mines, Roanoke had a vibrant and strong organized labor component. The Knights of Labor (KOL) were the first significant local union, and by the mid-1880s, hundreds of men from the city's industries had become members. Although elsewhere in the country the KOL was active in demanding better wages and hours and in organizing strikes and walkouts, in Roanoke

the union served more as a social organization than an agitation tool. In addition, most of the town's industries worked hand-in-glove with the two local KOL assemblies. In the spring of 1886, for example, the Roanoke Machine Works gave its employees an advance in pay and a day off to attend an elaborate KOL picnic at Coyner Springs in Botetourt County. Its sister company, the Norfolk & Western, provided free passage to the affair for workers and their families. At the springs, the union's members and their guests danced, played baseball and croquet, and held foot races and long-jump contests. Afterwards, local KOL leaders wrote the superintendent of the machine shops to thank him for his "kind consideration" and to let him know that his actions "will ever be held in grateful remembrance by this assembly."³³

In early 1890, skilled workers in the city organized the Roanoke Federation of Labor, an umbrella organization for all local trade unions as well as a subsidiary of the American Federation of Labor. In the fall, after over four thousand printers, painters, plasterers, iron moulders, mechanics, boiler makers, amalgamated steel and iron workers, carpenters, bricklayers, stone masons, joiners, blacksmiths, and brewers had signed on as members, *The Roanoke Times* began publishing a special column for the city's "laboring people."³⁴ By then, the paper observed, the city had become a "working people's town" with laborers "largely the majority" of the population.³⁵ By the end of the year, almost all the city's skilled unions had joined the Roanoke Federation of Labor (RFL). According to the *Times*, the success of the union was largely the result of "a very determined effort on the part of laboring men of Roanoke" as well as a sign that "the growth of labor organizations during 1890 kept pace with everything else in the Magic City."³⁶

³³ *The Roanoke Leader*, 22 May 1886.

³⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 5 Oct 1890.

³⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Oct 1890.

³⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 1 Jan 1891.

The RFL allowed only skilled workers to join and excluded women and blacks entirely. Like skilled laborers in Birmingham, Alabama – the southern city that most closely resembled Roanoke – the town’s trained workingmen guarded access to skilled positions by maintaining the color line in their trade unions.³⁷ The RFL built an assembly hall downtown on Commonwealth Avenue, and although the union originally vowed to stay out of politics, its leaders quickly began pushing members to cast their votes in ways that benefited workingmen. For example, J. L. Curry, vice president of the town’s carpenters union, addressed members before the fall 1890 elections and urged those gathered to take “political action” that would place the city government in the hands of labor. At the same meeting, according to a reporter, the president of the iron moulders union “dwelt upon the political force workingmen possessed” and pushed RFL members to vote to abolish Virginia’s convict labor and apprenticeship systems.³⁸ According to the *Times* labor column, members had also begun discussing currency shortages along with the silver issue. At a meeting in December, the paper explained, one speaker even told those gathered that “the recent movements of the laboring men and farmers indicated a political upheaval, and that the people were getting ready to rule the United States.”³⁹

Although the Roanoke Federation of Labor encouraged members to stay informed on national issues and to become politically involved, it found few reasons in local industries to justify calling for strikes. Indeed, beyond helping elect a small cadre of pro-labor councilmen from the Northeast, the RFL rarely deemed it necessary to call for strikes or boycotts. When it did, however, the city’s corporations paid close attention. In early 1891, for instance, after Blair Construction fired all carpenters who were members of the union, the RFL organized a boycott of

³⁷ For Birmingham unions, see discussion in Henry M. McKiven, Jr., *Iron and Steel: Class, Race, and Community in Birmingham, Alabama, 1875-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), chapter 2.

³⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 27 Nov 1890.

³⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 11 Dec 1890.

Blair building sites as well as all businesses and homes built by the firm.⁴⁰ More often than not, however, the city's manufacturers did little to antagonize workers. Indeed, in 1891 local writer Thomas Bruce claimed that Roanoke's industries had "treated the mechanical and laboring part of the population well, and in return the latter has been peaceful and quiet, making good, faithful, and efficient citizens." According to Bruce, relatively high wages and company homes in east Roanoke, where workmen and their families lived "in comparative ease, enjoying their own firesides and many of the comforts, and not a few of the luxuries, of life," were the main reasons that "disturbances and agitation have been almost unknown on the part of the laboring population."⁴¹

Company paternalism, in the form of housing, baseball teams, beautification contests, decent pay, and prompt recognition of workers' requests, did much to foster the sense of harmony alluded to by Bruce. Other factors, however, also contributed to the lack of antagonism. Unlike other small factory-towns, where outside industrialists frequently clashed with native politicians and needed privately funded militias to protect their interests, in Roanoke, most elected officials were stridently pro-business. Those who were not – the two or three Republicans elected by workers in the Northeast – could not seriously challenge the majority. Moreover, because the city's charter granted only freeholders the right to cast ballots on spending issues, workers living in rental housing had no say in municipal funding for industry, city subscriptions to corporate stock, or spending on civic improvements. The city's native elite and middle classes, although in the minority, held most governmental power and dictated the city's pro-business ethos. Like local industrialists, shopkeepers, and grocers, however, they understood workers' potential power in

⁴⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 25, 26, Feb 1891.

⁴¹ Thomas Bruce, *Southwest Virginia and Shenandoah Valley* (Richmond: J. L. Hill, 1891), 142-43.

the form of boycotts or walkouts and therefore, at least publicly, showed laborers a great deal of respect. Indeed, during labor celebrations, the entire city shut down to commemorate workers.⁴²

The Roanoke Federation of Labor and other unions organized the city's first Labor Day celebration in the summer of 1890. Like working-class barrooms and company neighborhoods, Labor Day built solidarity among the city's workers by strengthening their sense of community.⁴³ The Roanoke Machine Works and most local industries supported the event and shut down operations to allow all their employees to attend.⁴⁴ During the celebration, thousands of workingmen paraded through downtown carrying flags and banners representing their trades. Afterwards they and their families held a massive picnic in Carr's Woods, the meadows and woodlands south of the city. Various union leaders addressed the crowd, and according to one, the day had demonstrated "to every man the power of labor in this city." Baseball, a greased pig chase, and three-legged races followed, as did racial turmoil. The city's unions, like labor organizations throughout the South, excluded black workers, and during the celebration, participants even refused to allow African American spectators. Indeed, chasing away blacks "hanging around the edges of the crowd" eventually became part of the entertainment. "This was fine fun," the *Daily Times* explained, "and the boys continued it for a while." Most African Americans fled the scene, the paper observed, and although one returned and "stood bravely" for a few minutes, "the flying rinds from the hands of nearly 100 boys caused him again to beat a hasty retreat."⁴⁵

⁴² For a discussion of industrialists' lack of power in small factory-towns in the North, see Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Vintage, 1977), chapter 5. Gutman notes a similar respect of workers' power in factory-towns in *ibid.*, page 257. See also, Stephen Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in the Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), chapter 7.

⁴³ McKiven, Jr., *Iron and Steel*, 69-71.

⁴⁴ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 31 Aug 1890.

⁴⁵ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 2 Sept 1890.

Since Roanoke's population was overwhelmingly working class, and most of its residents were either in a union or relatives of a union member, strikes had the possibility of erupting into economic and class warfare, with all workers and their families on one side, and most businesses and businessmen on the other. Any boycott against a local firm by union members thus at least held out the potential of causing significant economic damage. For this reason, when strikes did occur, most local businessmen responded immediately to demands by organized labor or at least reacted in a way that defused tensions until they brokered an agreement. In April 1900, for example, when boilermakers employed by the Roanoke Machine Works threatened to strike for increased wages, the superintendent of motive power gave the men an afternoon off to discuss the matter and provided them with literature that verified the pay they were receiving was already six cents more an hour than boilermakers employed by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad made. The following day, the workers rescinded their threat and returned to the job.⁴⁶ Such capitulations were the rule rather than the exception in Roanoke. Indeed, one local paper boasted a couple years later that disputes between capital and labor, so common elsewhere in the country, were "foreign" in the city because the "greatest harmony and understanding exists between employer and employee in every branch of business."⁴⁷

In the early 1900s, in a sign of workers' growing desire for collective bargaining power, the Roanoke Central Trades and Labor Council replaced the Roanoke Federation of Labor as the umbrella organization for all local unions. The Central Trades and Labor Council (RCT&LC), unlike the Federation of Labor, which had been solely an alliance of the city's skilled, male, trade unions, represented male and female skilled and unskilled workers. The RCT&LC published its own paper, *The Labor Unionist*, and in the spring of 1902, in a signal of the organization's growing significance, it hosted the annual convention of the Virginia State Federation of Labor.

⁴⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 April 1900.

⁴⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 31 Aug 1902.

By then, State Federation of Labor members had elected Roanoke resident M. B. Thompson president of their organization and appointed five other residents to various leadership positions.⁴⁸ The Roanoke Central Trades and Labor Council hosted the convention in its “Labor Home” above the Stag Saloon on Commerce Street, and in examples of the sort of corporate welfare that was common among Roanoke businesses, the Norfolk & Western Railway provided all labor leaders attending the conference reduced fare, while the city’s Virginia Brewing Company donated several kegs of beer.⁴⁹

The RCT&LC took over the city’s annual Labor Day celebration and parade, an event attended by thousands of workers and their families. Roanoke’s mayor and local dignitaries customarily addressed the crowd and praised the various union men in attendance, albeit in a paternalistic and condescending fashion. In September 1901, for example, Mayor J. Randolph Bryan Jr. told the thousands of workers gathered below his platform that local unions could get what they wanted as long as they went about it in “the right way” and refrained from damaging any local businesses. Judge William Gordon Robertson, who followed Bryan at the podium, lectured the audience about the common goals of capital and labor before he suggested that any discord between the classes had disappeared with the dawning of the twentieth century. Both men received hearty applause as well as commendations by the labor leaders who followed them.⁵⁰

In the 1890s and early 1900s, Roanoke was an industrial town known primarily for its railroad-related industries; the city’s other indigenous enterprises, most of which survived the

⁴⁸ Virginia State Federation of Labor, *Virginia State Federation of Labor Directory with Historical Sketches of Richmond, Roanoke, Norfolk and Portsmouth*, ed. W. H. Mullen (Richmond: Frank Baptist Printing Co., 1902), 3-5.

⁴⁹ Information about *The Labor Unionist*, for which there are no known extant copies, is available in *The Roanoke Times*, 7, 25 April 1903; coverage of the VSFL convention is from *The Roanoke Times*, 22, 23 May 1902.

⁵⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 3 Sept 1901. For similar Labor Day celebrations, see *The Roanoke Times*, 24 July 1900, 2 Sept 1902; 8 Sept 1903.

catastrophic 1893 depression in better shape than the N&W, rarely received much outside acclaim or notice. Many of them, however, were as vitally important to the town's economic recovery as the rehabilitation of the N&W and Roanoke Machine Works. Chief among them was The Virginia Brewing Company. Six native entrepreneurs, well aware that the only other brewery in the state was located in Alexandria, some two hundred miles away, chartered the corporation in November 1889. Subscriptions to the brewery's stock went well, and by December, the company had raised \$30,000 in capital. The Virginia Brewing Company (VBC) hired twenty-five-year-old Baltimore brewmeister Louis A. Scholz that same month, after Scholz assured the firm that water from Roanoke's Crystal Spring was perfect for brewing beer.⁵¹

Scholz, a master brewer trained in his home of Freiburg, Germany, arrived in January 1890 to become manager of the VBC. A correspondent for the *Daily Times* spoke with him shortly afterwards at the construction site of the new brewery, just to the south of the Machine Works, and reported that Scholz "expressed himself as very much pleased with the Magic City and said that there were all the requisites here for building up a first-class city."⁵² The wooden brew house, completed on Railroad and Wise Avenues, between Twelfth and Fourteenth Streets, was an impressive, three-story, frame structure that sloped to one story in the back. The facility would employ fifteen men and could produce one hundred and fifty barrels of beer per month, all of which could be stored in vats in its cellar until ready for drinking. The firm constructed a rail connection across its property to the nearby tracks of the N&W and built stables, an ice plant, an office complex, a home for Louis Scholz, and the Wayside Inn, a beer garden to be managed by his brother Henry.⁵³ Although its first batch of ale did not go on sale until later in the summer,

⁵¹ For early information about The Virginia Brewing Company, see *Roanoke Daily Times*, 13, 23 Nov 1889.

⁵² *Roanoke Daily Times*, 9 Jan 1890.

⁵³ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 19 Jan, 12 Feb, 21 June 1890.

that spring the brewery's baseball team brought a sample keg to its match with "The Roanokes" and offered any player who made it to third base a glass of VBC pilsner.⁵⁴

On the morning of August 19, 1890, the company's pilsner lager beer went on sale; by three that afternoon, the city's saloons had purchased the brewery's entire stock of two hundred and fifty kegs. The same day it offered its beer for sale, the firm put its trademark – the winged Virginia Brewing Company globe of "Southern Progress" – on the doors of all local bars. It also ran its first print ad, which boasted: "Virginia Brewing Company's Pure Lager Beer, On Draught From Today On. Brewed From Pure Malt and Hops. Try It!"⁵⁵ Three months later, when a correspondent from *The Roanoke Times* visited the brewery, Louis Scholz reported that the firm was shipping over six thousand bottles of its "Export Beer" out of town a week as well as supplying city saloons with twenty kegs of "Munich Brew" pilsner lager per day. "The company," the *Times* explained, "has two beer wagons and one ice wagon constantly going, and employs thirty-five men in the brewery."⁵⁶

Over the course of the following year, the young brewery opened branch distributorships in Lynchburg and Shenandoah, Virginia; Pocahontas, West Virginia; and Henderson, North Carolina.⁵⁷ By then, demand for the VBC's beers was so overwhelming that the brewery could not fulfill all the orders coming in. Although the success of the VBC had much to do with the fine quality of its beer, it also benefited from a lack of competition and from the ability to sell its products for less than other breweries. The VBC's chief competitor, Robert Portner's Alexandria-based brewery, had to ship its product to Roanoke via boxcar and at a consequently higher price. The Anheuser-Busch Brewing Company of St. Louis also distributed its beer in town at a higher

⁵⁴ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 3 May 1890.

⁵⁵ *Roanoke Daily Times*, 19 Aug 1890.

⁵⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 13 Nov 1890.

⁵⁷ See ad in *The Roanoke Times*, 3 March 1891.

price. In the summer of 1891, however, not long after the Virginia Brewing Company cornered the local market and eroded the regional sales of its outside competitors, Busch's St. Louis executives instructed their Roanoke distributors to drop the price of its kegs from \$9 a barrel to \$4, a price well below the actual cost of production. The move, conducted explicitly to drive the VBC out of business, made Anheuser-Busch by far the cheapest beer in town. Local editors, infuriated by the scheme, rushed to the VBC's defense. The brewery, the *Times* declared, was a crucial "home enterprise" with a payroll of \$8,000 per month that deserved every residents' patronage, even if that meant paying a few cents more for a mug of beer. Anheuser-Busch, according to the paper, was a "foreign enterprise" that could rely on "many millions of capital to destroy the Virginia Brewing Company, an infant industry, built up and owned in great part by Roanoke people."⁵⁸ Roanoke's beer drinkers, either out of loyalty to their hometown brew or because the VBC's pilsner tasted better than Budweiser, stood by the company. The "Beer War," as it was called by locals, lasted eleven months before Anheuser-Busch, aware that patronage of the VBC had not been adversely affected, surrendered and put its kegs back on the market at \$9 a barrel.⁵⁹

Not long after winning the battle with Anheuser-Busch, the VBC's brew house burned to the ground. The company, Louis Scholz informed customers, had enough reserve kegs on hand to last until it could build a new brewery. Insurance covered the firm's losses, and in the end, the fire gave the enterprise the opportunity to construct a much larger brewery.⁶⁰ By the spring of

⁵⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 July 1891.

⁵⁹ See details of "Beer War" and subsequent lawsuit against Anheuser-Busch by its local distributor for losses incurred during the campaign in *The Roanoke Times*, 27 Dec 1893. Such cut-throat tactics were the norm for Adolphus Busch's company, which waged a relentless campaign against local breweries throughout the East in 1892. See Philip Van Munching, *Beer Blast: The Inside Story of the Brewing Industry's Bizarre Battles for Your Money* (New York: Times Books, 1997), 16-18.

⁶⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, "Extra Brewery Fire Edition," 8 March 1892; *The Roanoke Times*, 9 March 1892.

1892, a new, brick, brew house, capable of turning out twenty-five thousand kegs per year, was in operation, and the firm had built a larger ice plant, installed an electric generator, opened a bottling works, and constructed dozens of company homes to rent to its employees.⁶¹ Once the new brewery began operations, its workers, most of whom had watched helplessly when the old brew house burned down, organized the “Alert Fire Company,” the VBC’s private fire brigade.⁶² Shortly after reopening, the brewery introduced its “Famous Bock,” its “1892 Roanoke Decennial Larger,” and its “Wuerzburger Ale,” a Bavarian-styled beer that complemented the VBC’s popular Bohemian-style pilsner lager. The company advertised its “Wuerzburger” as “highly recommended by physicians for its nutritious qualities” and as an excellent “tonic for nursing mothers or convalescents.”⁶³

The firm’s directors elected Louis Scholz president of the company in the mid-1890s, and under his guidance, the VBC continued to expand its facilities and enlarge its distribution territory. By 1898, the brewery complex had grown to include five buildings “fitted up with the best and most modern machinery known to the brewery trade.” The company also had begun production of its “Kola Nerva” along with several other soft drinks.⁶⁴ In the early 1900s, the VBC vertically integrated its operations, opening its own saloons in underserved parts of Southwest Virginia in 1901, and purchasing and consolidating all of Roanoke’s other ice plants into the “Consumers’ Ice Company” in 1904.⁶⁵ The following year, the company added a “crowning

⁶¹ See description of improvements in *Roanoke Daily Record*, 4 Nov 1893, in N&WS no. 18, N&WRA.

⁶² William L. Schilling, “Roanoke City Fire Department History, 1882-1983,” 3.

⁶³ See bock ad in *The Roanoke Times*, 22 April 1892; see decennial ad in *ibid.*, 16 June 1892; see Wuerzburger ad in *ibid.*, 15 July 1892 (quote is from 15 July).

⁶⁴ *Headlight: Special Edition of the Magic City Roanoke, Va., and Scenes Along the Norfolk & Western Railroad* (Chicago: Beard & Collier, 1898), 30, in Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library; see also Stanford Insurance Map of Roanoke, Virginia, 1907, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library.

⁶⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 14 March 1901; *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Dec 1904.

machine” capable of sealing eighty to a hundred bottles a minute and up to eighteen thousand bottles per day. Sales in 1905 topped the three million bottle mark, up from one hundred and fifty thousand bottles only nine years earlier.⁶⁶

Roanoke’s periodic “local option” campaigns unnerved Scholz and the VBC’s directors. To counterbalance the prohibition crusades, the firm advertised its brews as “tonics,” low in alcohol content and even as suitable for mothers and children. In 1902, the firm received a much-sought endorsement from the United States Health Bulletin of New York, which upon analyzing the VBC’s pilsner lager had deemed it a disease preventative, a digestion aid, and an elixir that promoted mental and physical activity. Thereafter the VBC advertised its pilsner as “endorsed by the highest medical authorities” and “pre-eminently a family beverage” that “promotes the cause of true temperance” and “guards the safety of health and home.” The firm’s motto, its ads boasted, was “not how cheap we can brew beer, but how good.”⁶⁷ Indeed, in subsequent ads, the company claimed that its “absolutely pure” pilsner was not only “healthful” and responsible for “stamina,” but also a likely cure for tuberculosis.⁶⁸ To ensure that its message reached the city’s upper classes, the VBC ran a constant stream of ads on programs for the city’s Academy of Music. On one opera program, for example, the brewery informed patrons that “Pure Beer is Pure Food” and argued that “the two most powerful and cultivated nations of Europe, the German and English, are beer drinking nations.”⁶⁹ In keeping with its claims of being the most pure and

⁶⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 April 1905; sales stats from *ibid.*, 2 Jan 1906; see also, Roanoke Chamber of Commerce, *Roanoke: The Magic City of Virginia* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1904), 83, in Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library.

⁶⁷ The US Health Bulletin analysis is from *New York Evening Journal* 5 June 1902, reprinted in *The Roanoke Times*, 13 July 1902; ads and quotes are from *ibid.*, 25 Feb 1903; 24 May, 5 July 1904 (first set of quotes from 5 July; second quote from 24 May).

⁶⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 28 Sept 1905.

⁶⁹ See VBC ad on back cover of “1906-1907 Roanoke Academy of Music Program,” in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, Roanoke Memorabilia Collection, Manuscripts Department, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

wholesome beer on the market, and in countering claims by the Anti-Saloon League that all beer contained “poisons” and “impurities,” the VBC also advertised a \$1,000 reward for anyone who could prove it used corn grits or glucose in its brewery. “Can our competitors make the same statement?” The implication infuriated other beer distributors in town. Robert Portner Brewing Company, which operated a bottling works for its Alexandria brewed “Hofbrau” on Shenandoah Avenue, countered with an ad offering \$5,000 to anyone who could prove its beers contained adjuncts. Moreover, Portner complained that such “unwarranted inferences” gave “aid and comfort to the enemies of the liquor business.”⁷⁰

In 1905, the VBC increased its capital stock to \$250,000, and in 1906, it distributed its beers throughout Virginia, North Carolina, West Virginia, Kentucky, South Carolina, Tennessee, Maryland, and Ohio. Sales increased that spring and summer to nearly two million bottles, and by August the firm had run entirely out of its yearly stock of beer bottles.⁷¹ In 1907, the VBC beat dozens of other entrants in the Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition’s beer competition, taking home the gold medal award for “its perfect brew and purity.”⁷² The firm immediately thereafter added a Jamestown gold medal to its bottle trademarks and advertising. The accolades and endorsements further boosted sales, and equally important, quieted some of the criticism heaped on beer by temperance groups. “There would be far less talk of prohibition,” one local paper contended, “if all breweries conducted their business on the lines followed by the Virginia Brewing Company.”⁷³ By 1912, after the VBC’s directors made Henry Scholz the firm’s secretary-treasurer, the Scholz brothers were in total control of the company. They employed over

⁷⁰ VBC ad is in *The Roanoke Times*, 2 July 1905; Portner ad is in *ibid.*, 12 July 1905; the Anti-Saloon League’s claims are from Stanley Baron, *Brewed In America: A History of Beer and Ale in the United States* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1962), 291-92.

⁷¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 4 Sept 1906.

⁷² *The Roanoke Times*, 13 Nov 1907.

⁷³ *The Industrial Era*, 14 Oct 1910, in History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke.

one hundred men and women in the brewery, supplied the entire city with ice, produced fifty thousand barrels of beer per year, sold nearly five million bottles of beer per year, and managed saloons and distribution warehouses throughout the region. Beer sales had increased over 100 percent since 1904, when the firm sold twenty-five thousand kegs.⁷⁴

The German-born Scholz brothers, whose entrepreneurship quickly garnered the respect and admiration of local business boosters, were active participants in the city's Chamber of Commerce as well as officers and partial owners of the Roanoke Glass Company and the hugely successful Roanoke Fair Association. Their commitment to quality and zeal for expanding their brewery business while fostering economic growth in Roanoke was emblematic of the sort of capitalist success city residents respected. The company's beers, sold with the VBC trademark label of "Southern Progress – Brewed in Roanoke, Virginia," did much to advertise their home as a progressive and up-and-coming New South city to beer drinkers throughout the southeastern United States. Indeed, the VBC logo was New South propaganda and Roanoke boosterism melded into one. The city's promotional organizations and press, not surprisingly, did all they could to feature the VBC in their literature. The firm, they boasted, had been organized by native investors and had, through determined effort, business acumen, and excellence of product, become one of the most successful regional breweries in the South.⁷⁵ Although the Scholz brothers' accomplishment in the brewing business in an area traditionally underserved by breweries was indeed the sort of "southern progress" that New South boosters longed for, their product was outlawed in 1916, after Virginians voted in favor of statewide prohibition and made the manufacture of alcohol illegal. With little hope for a reversal of the new law, the Virginia Brewing Company closed down, sold its brewery equipment as scrap metal, and boarded up its

⁷⁴ Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City*, 136-37.

⁷⁵ See, for example, accounts of the VBC in *Headlight: Special Edition of the Magic City*, 30; RCOC, *Roanoke: The Magic City*, 83; Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City*, 136-37.

brew house. The Scholz brothers continued their ice, bottling, and glass plant operations, and remained active in the Roanoke Fair Association.⁷⁶

The Virginia Brewing Company, while a startling and unique example, was not alone in its rise as an important domestic enterprise. The Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company, originally organized in 1883 as a branch office of the Bell Printing Company of Lynchburg, would grow by 1912 to employ over two hundred workers and be the largest and most modern printing establishment in the South. The firm's owner, Edward Lee Stone, was the archetypal New South businessman, having adopted the most progressive and enlightened methods on his path to success, and having risen from humble origins through sheer determination and a keen sense of business acumen. Stone, who had only an elementary school education, was by the early 1900s one of Roanoke's most well-respected and admired business leaders, an important civic booster, a progressive reformer, a steadfast investor in native enterprises, and a principal and generous patron of the city's high-brow culture, clubs, and organizations. His "first love," The Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company, was by then only one of his numerous corporations,

⁷⁶ According to Stanley Baron, prohibition destroyed over half of all breweries in the United States. The survivors tended to be large corporations that could diversify their assets until they began brewing again rather than small enterprises, like the Virginia Brewing Company, which depended on beer sales for the vast majority of income. See his, *Brewed In America*, 331.

In 1924, a local fruit cannery purchased the VBC brew house to use as a storage facility. Four years later, in 1928, a varnish manufacturer bought the structure. In 1933, when prohibition ended, Louis Scholz revived the Virginia Brewing Company. His brother Henry had died by then, and in the spring of 1936, only months before the new VBC beer – "Scholz Pilsner" – was slated to hit the market, Louis Scholz passed away too. Scholz's heirs sold the VBC shortly afterwards, and from 1936 to 1954, another beer manufacturer operated the plant. In 1954, S. B. Huff, a longtime Roanoke resident and former local policeman, rented the brewery, once again revived the Virginia Brewing Company name, and began production of "Old Virginia" beer. The brewery changed hands again in 1958, with the Mountain Brewing Company of North Carolina taking over operations and brewing its trademark "Dixie" beer. The following year, however, the company closed its Roanoke branch, and in 1964, the owners of the Scholz's 1893 brew house had it torn down to make way for industrial development. The VBC's bottling plant next door survived, and in the early 1980s was being used by a janitor supply company. For the VBC's post-prohibition history, see *The Roanoke Times & World News*, 17 Oct 1982; Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 630, 687, 763. Today, only dilapidated fragments and piles of bricks from the original brewing complex exist. Although local memory of one of Roanoke's most successful non-railroad enterprises has almost entirely disappeared, on the national and international level, VBC memorabilia from its pre-prohibition era is highly collectable and prized.

but was a model for the type of business that local boosters hoped to emulate throughout their city.

Nineteen-year-old Edward L. Stone arrived in Roanoke in 1883, one of the three employees of Lynchburg printer J. P. Bell's branch office in the town. Stone worked as a compositor for Bell, having learned the printing trade beginning at age twelve, when he went to work as a "printer's devil" for the Bedford *Sentinel* in his hometown of Liberty, Virginia, in Bedford County. By 1882, Stone had worked his way up to printer of the Buchanan, Virginia, *Democrat*, and in early 1883, he briefly held the same position for the Lynchburg *News* before joining Bell's company later in the year. The Roanoke shop, located on Commerce Street, printed its first order of five hundred postcards for local entrepreneur Ferdinand Rorer in July 1883. The following month, it completed its initial run of tickets and schedules for the Norfolk & Western and Shenandoah Valley Railroads, its principal commercial clients for the following seventy-five years. Despite some early successes and several lucrative railroad contracts, the Roanoke branch of the Bell Company lost money over the next couple of years. Even worse, in 1885, the branch manager died. Rather than close the shop and cut his losses, however, Bell appointed the twenty-one-year old Stone the new manager.⁷⁷

Under Stone's guidance, the branch began to eke out a profit, and in 1887, Stone convinced Bell to purchase a modern steam-powered press to replace the antiquated one being hand-powered by an African American employee. The new equipment facilitated even more business, but in 1889, fire destroyed the Commerce Street shop. Stone used the fire as an opportunity to talk Bell into enlarging the Roanoke branch and purchasing an even more

⁷⁷ Early history of the Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company is from Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City*, 178; William McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, Roanoke City, Virginia, and Representative Citizens* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Company, 1902), 364-65; Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company, *Stone's Impressions* 1, no. 1 (July 1913): 13-22, in Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library; Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company, *Stone's Impressions* 3, new series, no. 4 (July-Sept, 1933): 1, in author's private collection; Roanoke Century Club, *Eighth Annual Dinner – Century Club – April 17, 1914* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1914), 21-22, in Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library.

elaborate and modern press system. In early 1890, the firm, its new press, and its thirty employees moved into rented rooms on the second and third floors of Gale Building downtown, and within months it was up again and thriving. By then, the company was printing tickets, schedules, letterhead, and booklets for the N&W, which had formerly sent the majority of its print work to Philadelphia, as well as producing a wide array of blank business ledgers and print work for local businesses and residents. Stone, never satisfied with the status quo, was not content with space in the Gale Building, and in late 1890, encouraged Bell to build a new printing shop and invest in even more modern presses. The success of the firm and its young manager's persistence convinced Bell to make the investment, and in 1891, shortly before retiring, he funded a three-story brick shop on north Jefferson Street, beside the N&W office complex and across the street from the Hotel Roanoke.⁷⁸

After Bell retired, Stone moved immediately to find a way to purchase his Roanoke branch. In 1890, Stone had married Minnie Tinsley Fishburn, daughter of longtime Big Lick and Roanoke tobacco manufacturer and merchant James Addison Fishburn, and when the print shop became available, he convinced his new brother-in-law and closet friend, local banker Junius Blair Fishburn, and Albert Stone, his brother, to join him in purchasing the company. The three agreed afterwards that Edward Stone would be president of the firm, Fishburn the vice president, and Albert Stone the secretary-treasurer. In September 1892, the business changed its name to The Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company (SP&MC), and by the following summer, the firm claimed it was "the best equipped printing establishment in the state, none excepted," as well as "the best general job print shop south of Philadelphia." The business, Stone boasted, had "all conveniences for the annihilation of time" at its disposal. Indeed, the company's policy of keeping up with any and all advancements in printing technology had by then made it the most efficient, modern, creative, and cost effective printer in the state. The SP&MC began producing

⁷⁸ SP&MC, *Stone's Impressions* 1, no. 1, 13-22; McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, Roanoke City*, 364-65.

college and university yearbooks in the mid-1890s, and by the early 1900s, the firm had contracts for annuals with dozens of schools throughout the South. It had done well enough by then to purchase Bell's Jefferson Street building, and in 1905, the company had it torn down to make way for a fifty-thousand square foot replacement. One hundred and thirty employees worked in the new plant when it opened in 1907, and by 1912, the firm had over two hundred workers in its payroll.⁷⁹ The company's success made it one of the most important homegrown industries in the city, and made its president, Edward Stone, the envy of local capitalists and boosters. "The rise of the Stone Printing Company," one paper lectured, "furnishes an object lesson that every ambitious young man should note." The firm, it claimed, had perhaps done "more than any single establishment to spread the name and fame of Roanoke."⁸⁰

Stone managed his company as a strict paternalist, rewarding employees by merit rather than seniority and paying them wages far above the average for print shop workers. Starting in early 1893, the firm hosted seasonal banquets for its workers. That year it treated its employees to a meal of oysters, veal, ice cream, cake, fruit, milk, and cocoa at a local restaurant. J. B. Fishburn, vice president of the SP&MC and an ardent teetotaler, rose afterwards and drank a "cold water toast" for the employees.⁸¹ The banquets grew more elaborate in the years that followed, but in 1896, the firm replaced them with annual "outings" to nearby springs or resorts. In August of that year, for example, the company transported its workers by train to Elliston, Virginia, where they participated in singing, running, wrestling, and pie eating contests, fished, played croquet, and

⁷⁹ SP&MC, *Stone's Impressions* 1, no. 1, 13-22; McCauley, *History of Roanoke County, Salem, Roanoke City*, 364-65; Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City*, 178; quotes about the business are from ad in *The Roanoke Times*, 27 Aug 1893; information on new building is from *The Roanoke Times*, 13 April 1905; information about J. B. Fishburn is from, Norma Lugar, "The Life and Times of J. B. Fishburn," *The Roanoker* 5, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 1978): 14-16, 18, 20, 86.

⁸⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 5 July 1902.

⁸¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 5 Jan 1893.

dined on a catered luncheon while listening to the SP&MC band.⁸² Stone was zealously opposed to organized labor but ran his printing company as an “open shop,” allowing union and non-union members as workers but refusing to broker any deal or respond to any demand from union representatives. In the mid-1890s, about fifteen of the firm’s fifty employees belonged to the national typographical union. Stone, who paid nearly all his workers above the union scale and awarded promotions or raises based on merit alone, claimed that organized labor had no right to instruct him how to run his business. Although his paternalism and the company’s high wages did much to prevent labor disturbances or walkouts at his shop, Stone’s strident refusal to acknowledge organized labor’s right to collective bargaining earned him numerous enemies among union organizers. In 1904, for example, Roanoke’s Central Trades and Labor Council, in a move directed specifically against Stone, instructed all union men in the city to make a stand against “organized greed” by refraining from reading any material that did not contain the typographical union label.⁸³

In the fall of 1905, when the national typographical union ordered members not working an eight-hour day to strike, Stone informed his employees that the company would stick by its fifty-four hour work-week and notified any worker wanting to work less to find employment elsewhere.⁸⁴ When the walkout commenced, only six of the SP&MC’s hundred and thirty employees went on strike. The firm’s eleven other union members stayed on the job, and Stone immediately replaced the six who left. When questioned by local papers, Stone informed them that he believed the majority of his employees were “well satisfied with the conditions that exist

⁸² Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company, *First Annual Outing of the Employees of The Stone Printing and Manufacturing Company, of Roanoke, Virginia, Tuesday, August 11th, 1896, at Elliston, Virginia* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1896), in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 274, correspondence folder 1896-1900, Manuscripts Department, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville (cited hereafter as Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers).

⁸³ Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City*, 178; quote from *The Roanoke Times*, Dec 1904.

⁸⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 14 Sept 1905.

in our establishment, and that there is a mutual feeling of confidence and esteem between employee and employer.”⁸⁵ Soon afterwards, the Roanoke Typographical Union expelled the men in Stone’s shop who refused to strike. Overall, however, the union proved no match for Stone, who held steadfast to a fifty-four hour workweek.⁸⁶ In the aftermath, Stone even published a pamphlet that claimed business at his shop had actually increased after the walkout because Roanoke’s capitalists admired his strong stance. The booklet infuriated the leaders of the Central Trades and Labor Council, all of whom blasted Stone and called on good union men to read nothing without the typographical union seal.⁸⁷ Stone’s anti-union stance, which was unique in Roanoke, was only possible because he could depend on steady sales to the Norfolk & Western and other outside corporations. As a result, boycotts of Stone’s printing work by local laborers had little direct impact.

In November 1907, another strike for an eight-hour day, this one by pressroom workers, ended in the same fashion: thirty-six men walked out, Stone fired the men, and his firm quickly replaced them. The strikers manned a picket line for several weeks, but were unable to get the company to speak with them. Stone, a local reporter observed, “absolutely refuses to offer them any proposition whatsoever.”⁸⁸ In a letter to Roanoke’s mayor explaining the firm’s position, Stone claimed that he and the shop’s directors “have never been opposed to the union, but we have objected to having them run our business, unless they acquired it by ownership.”⁸⁹ Although his stand seems coldhearted, Stone, a progressive paternalist, always made his non-arbitration

⁸⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Sept 1905.

⁸⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 17 Sept 1905.

⁸⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 13 Oct 1905.

⁸⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 Nov 1907.

⁸⁹ Quote and rehiring of strikers is from “Guide to the Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers,” 9, Manuscripts Department, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

stance known; he sympathized with his union workers, but never to the point of cutting deals with any of them. If they chose to work for SP&MC, he believed, then their strongest loyalty should be to the firm, not to any labor organization. When the strikers gave up and asked for their jobs back, Stone immediately rehired them. His firm treated its employees fairly and equally, he told a London friend after the 1907 strike, and if its workers walked out, it was not because they were not paid decent wages or subjected to dangerous or harsh working conditions. Their “dissatisfaction,” he explained, had been caused “by the agitators and organizers who are shrewd enough to keep themselves in position, and in order to hold their position must make a show for money received, which is generally more per diem than they earn at their trade.”⁹⁰

By 1910, Stone’s printing shop was one of the largest and best equipped printing businesses in the South. Its profits, which came primarily from work for the N&W, rose steadily, as did its customer base, which by then included universities and colleges across the nation. In addition to railroad work and college annuals, the company developed a broad niche market in the production of high quality, short run publications for private clients and well-established publishers. Indeed, Edward Stone’s obsession with book collecting and printing techniques led his shop to develop production artistry, excellence, and attention to detail, unmatched throughout much of the nation.

Stone’s reputation as an impeccably honest, pragmatic, and gifted capitalist put him in select company and made his political and business opinions well respected and much sought after. In 1896, a group of prominent local Democrats, “believing that the interests of the City of Roanoke demand that the Executive office be filled by a business man,” published a petition encouraging him to run for mayor. Stone considered it but declined after learning that a local

⁹⁰ Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to H. W. E. Storey, London, England, 22 Feb 1908, Edward L Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 354, 1904-1908 Storey Correspondence file.

ordinance forbid municipal business contracts with firms owned by elected officials.⁹¹ Six years later, after voters in the second ward pushed Stone to run for city council and he again declined because of the contract law, he complained in local papers that “under the present Ordinance, the more interest a businessman takes in the welfare of the city by investing his money in enterprises that contribute to the upbuilding of the city, the less chance there is for him to have any voice in the enactment of laws that affect the welfare of the whole city.”⁹² Local officials, however, declined to amend the ordinance, and as a result, Stone refused to make a bid for public office.

Although Stone never held any municipal position, he was throughout his life a gifted and tireless civic and business booster; he invested heavily in dozens of homegrown Roanoke enterprises and constantly fielded requests by entrepreneurs who wanted his financial backing or advice. Stone usually put civic betterment above monetary gain and called most of his investments more “patriotic” than practical.⁹³ In 1902, Stone published *Picturesque Roanoke*, a compilation of booster photos illustrating the city’s vast industries, mansions, public buildings, and places of leisure.⁹⁴ *Picturesque Roanoke*, of course, failed to offer views of the city’s African American slums, substandard working-class housing, dirt and mud streets, child laborers, polluted streams, filthy Market House, dangerous working conditions, and dilapidated schools.

⁹¹ Petition by Democratic Voters, 13 March 1896, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Records, box 274, 1896-1900 Correspondence file.

⁹² Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to “The Voters of the Second Ward,” Roanoke, 3 April 1902, Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 274, 1896-1900 Correspondence file; reprinted in *The Roanoke Times*, 4 April 1902.

⁹³ See Stone’s reference to twenty years of “patriotic” investments in local companies in Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to E. A. Schubert, Vice President, Acme Match Company, Roanoke, 25 Nov 1908, Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 375, 1908-1911 Correspondence file.

⁹⁴ Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company, *Picturesque Roanoke / Being a Series of Reproductions from Photographic Views, Taken in the City of Roanoke, Virginia, and the Vicinity Thereof, Especially for this Work*, 2d ed. (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1902).

In the late 1890s, Stone, along with his brother-in-law J. B. Fishburn and William Cowell Stephenson, a Roanoke-based coal baron, pooled their substantial resources and business acumen to form a venture capital firm called the “Young Men’s Investment Company” (YMIC) with Stone as its president. In one of its first investments, the YMIC bought Peyton L. Terry’s “Terry Building” for about \$70,000, or around a fourth of what it had actually cost to build.⁹⁵ In 1900, Stone and J. B. Fishburn established the Century Banking and Safe Deposit Company with Stone as the bank’s president and Fishburn as a director. When Fishburn later assumed control of his uncle’s National Exchange Bank, he absorbed Century Banking.⁹⁶ By the early 1900s, Stone, who was already president of Stone Printing and Manufacturing Company, had been elected chairman of J. B. Fishburn’s National Exchange Bank, president of the Virginia Bridge & Iron Works, vice president of the Walker Foundry and Machine Company, and a director of the Southwest Virginia Trust Company and *The Roanoke Times*.⁹⁷

In 1904, Stone, backed in part by the Young Men’s Investment Company, purchased the Borderland Coal Company of Mingo County, West Virginia, and Pike County, Kentucky. Stone was Borderland’s chief stockholder, its president, and eventually its chairman of the board. Soon after the takeover, he expanded the company’s land holdings from 1,000 to 3,000 acres and raised its output, which increased from 246 railcars of coal in 1904 to 3,781 only six years later. The company’s town, Borderland, West Virginia, included miners’ housing, several commissaries, a church, and a school. Although in Roanoke, Stone operated his printing firm as an open shop, he and Borderland’s directors vehemently opposed organized labor in their mine. The firm refused to

⁹⁵ White, *Roanoke: 1740-1982*, 84; Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 329.

⁹⁶ Century Club, *Eighth Annual Dinner*, 9-10.

⁹⁷ Information on the Roanoke Cotton Mill is from RCOC, *Roanoke: The Magic City of Virginia*, 40; Stone’s business activity is from Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City*, 178; “A Guide to the Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers,” 2.

employ union members, fired and evicted miners who responded to overtures from organized labor, and hired dozens of spies to keep management abreast of unionization efforts.⁹⁸

Stone and J. B. Fishburn, his best friend and brother-in-law, amassed personal fortunes that permitted a lifestyle totally unlike Roanoke's predominately working-class residents. Beyond compiling a personal library recognized in 1938 when he died as the largest and most valuable private collection in Virginia, Stone's other diversions included membership in dozens of civic, professional, and cultural organizations, including the Roanoke Board of Trade, Roanoke Chamber of Commerce, American Institute of Graphic Arts, United Typotheae of America, Virginia Historical Society, Roanoke German Club, Roanoke Gun Club, and Roanoke Country Club.⁹⁹ In the early 1900s, Stone and J. B. Fishburn took a six-month journey to Hawaii, Siberia, Japan, China, India, Egypt, and Europe. The duo made the voyage, according to Stone, because doctors had informed them that their "systems" had been "very much run down as a result of too close application to business matters." The tour, family physicians had assured the men, would restore their "former robust health."¹⁰⁰ Stone's phenomenal financial, cultural, and societal ascent, made all the more stunning by his modest background and elementary school education, made him the archetypal "new man" of the New South. It was a rise only possible in a city like Roanoke, with no past to encumber entrepreneurs and no solid caste system to prevent their

⁹⁸ During the 1920s, at Stone's behest, Borderland hired a private militia of Baldwin-Felts agents and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars fighting efforts by the United Mine Workers of America to unionize its mines. Due in part to its battle against the UMWA, the Borderland Coal Company went bankrupt in 1934. For information about Stone and Borderland, see Crandall A. Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 119-134; "Guide to the Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers," 2-7.

⁹⁹ "Guide to the Edward L. Stone – Borderland Company Coal Papers," 2, 8; Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City*, 119-20, 178; Roanoke German Club, Roanoke, to Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, 15 Nov 1899, Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 435, 1902-1909 Roanoke file.

¹⁰⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 2 Oct 1903; see also letter from Stone and Fishburn from "the famous famine district, somewhere between Calcutta and Bombay" in *The Roanoke Times*, 5 Feb 1905. In that dispatch, the men reported that they were "in the best of health and spirits."

success. Reflecting back some fifty years after arriving in the Town of Roanoke as a nineteen-year old assistant with Bell Printing, Stone acknowledged that he and his associates were indeed lucky to have been “citizens of a wonderful community in a marvelous age.”¹⁰¹

Native business leaders like Edward Stone and J. B. Fishburn coalesced around a variety of businessmen’s clubs and societies, forming a counterculture to Roanoke’s predominately working-class ethos and environment. Unlike the city’s first generation of business boosters, exemplified by men like Henry S. Trout or Peyton L. Terry who served on the board of directors for the N&W and the Roanoke Machine Works and were tied overtly to the interests of Frederick Kimball and the E. W. Clark Company, the town’s second generation of promoters operated far more independently of the railroad. Moreover, many of them saw the N&W’s monopoly on rail access as an impediment to progress and worked hard to secure a connection to a rival line. In the Roanoke German Club, Roanoke Country Club, Shenandoah Club, and the Century Club, the city’s elite networked and fraternized in ways that encouraged local investment as well as further solidified their hegemony over workers. They also eventually organized themselves into businessmen’s leagues in a fashion very similar to ways local workers organized themselves into unions. The Roanoke Commercial Club (1890-1891), Roanoke Board of Trade (1892-1904), and Roanoke Chamber of Commerce (1904-2003) were hardly unions but they were vehicles through which boosters could amalgamate their local power, pool their financial resources, and entice outside investment. The groups helped pull Roanoke out of its economic doldrums in the 1890s and fostered subsequent industrialization that pushed the city to the forefront of Virginia and New South municipalities.

¹⁰¹ Edward L. Stone, “Through Fifty Eventful Years,” *Stone’s Impressions* 3, new series, no. 4 (July-Sept 1933): 1. Stone died in 1938. Stone Printing & Manufacturing continued business until 1977, when its owners sold the business to another printing firm.

Most of the city's successful businessmen were invited to join elite fraternal orders or exclusive social clubs once they reached a certain plateau of economic worth and social standing. Membership in organizations such as the Roanoke German Club and Shenandoah Club were the barometer of personal cachet in the 1890s, and in the early 1900s, local patricians augmented associations to those organizations with memberships in the Roanoke Country Club or in the more restrictive Roanoke Century Club. The Country Club, organized in 1899 when Roanoke's tennis and golf clubs merged, went up originally in South Roanoke with two tennis courts, a shooting range, a bowling alley, a clubhouse in what had been a residence, and a primitive golf course laid out on property rented from the Crystal Springs Land Company. The club, according to *The Roanoke Times*, had nevertheless "supplied a long felt want" by offering a place "where friends may always be found and a pleasant hour or two spent as the fancy dictates."¹⁰² The following year, when the board of governors of the Roanoke Country Club sought ways to address their organization's deficiencies, they turned to Edward L. Stone. Indeed, H. D. Lafferty, president of the club, sent Stone a special invitation to a board meeting "in order that this subject, which is closely related to the social welfare of our City, may have the benefit of the widest experience available in relation to a matter of the kind." Stone attended the meeting, purchased memberships for his family, and bought several hundred dollars worth of stock.¹⁰³

Other prominent businessmen and their wives also joined, and in 1905, the Country Club purchased fifty-one acres in Roanoke County, about two miles from the city, to use as its new grounds. Three years later, after constructing a clubhouse, golf links, and tennis courts, the

¹⁰² *The Roanoke Times*, 17 Sept 1899.

¹⁰³ H. D. Lafferty, President, Roanoke Country Club, Roanoke, to Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, 23 June 1900, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 398, Roanoke Country Club file; see additional correspondence in *ibid.* for memberships and stock purchases.

organization moved to the new site.¹⁰⁴ In the meantime, members elected Edward Stone to the Club's board of governors and its Bowling Committee. The Club also formalized its rules, noting in its brochure for the 1906-1907 season that no uninvited visitors, guests from Roanoke County, or men under the age of eighteen were allowed, that no cards or other games could be played in the Club House on Sundays, that all donated furniture had to be approved by the Furnishing Committee, "so that harmony may be preserved therein," and that "furniture belonging to the Reception and Dining-room must not be removed to the porches, nor porch furniture to the grove." Although male members governed the Club and all its sports and membership committees, several of their wives and daughters staffed the Club House Committee and were responsible for supervising house servants along with all receptions, meetings, and entertainments.¹⁰⁵

In 1905, Edward Stone, J. B. Fishburn, and the nine other former officers and directors of the Century Banking and Safe Deposit Company formed the Century Club, an association of Roanoke's most elite businessmen, dedicated to "social, intellectual, and other pleasures."¹⁰⁶ Stone served as president throughout most of the Century Club's existence. The original coterie was a who's who of local luminaries and included: Lucian H. Cocke, Roanoke's first mayor and general counsel for the Norfolk & Western Railway; Lucius E. Johnson, president of the N&W; James C. Cassell, former general superintendent of the N&W; William H. Lewis, superintendent of motive power for the N&W; Thompson W. Gordon, president of the Southwest Virginia Trust Company; and Francis A. Hill, president of the Red Jacket and Hull Coal Companies. In the years that followed, the Century Club tapped five new members, each of whom the association deemed

¹⁰⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 23 April 1905; Roanoke Country Club, *Roanoke Country Club* (Roanoke: Privately printed, 1969), 1-2, in Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library.

¹⁰⁵ Roanoke Country Club, *Roanoke Country Club, 1906-07* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1906), in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 398, Roanoke Country Club file.

¹⁰⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 6 April 1905.

essential in “converting the village of Big Lick into the City of Roanoke.” The new members included Joseph A. Gale, chief surgeon of the N&W; Arthur Needles, general manager of the N&W; Nicholas D. Maher, vice president of the N&W; and John B. Newton, general manager and vice president of the Virginia & Southern Railway and the Virginia Iron, Coal, and Coke Company.¹⁰⁷

The Century Club’s annual dinners usually received front-page coverage in local papers. In 1912, for instance, *The (Roanoke) Evening World* reported that after dining on an eleven-course meal in the main dining room of the Hotel Roanoke, which had been decorated with hundreds of American Beauty Roses, Century Club members received gold lapel pins before being surprised by the entry of their wives, who had arranged cello and piano music for dancing.¹⁰⁸ In addition to hosting ornate fêtes, the Club made numerous outings in private N&W railcars to promote Roanoke. After one such a trip – a journey to Cincinnati and Memphis – the club’s members reported that the organization had “resolved itself into a Roanoke Boosting Club as well as a pleasure seeking Century Club and was entertained royally at every stop.”¹⁰⁹

Members of the city’s elite clubs and associations also belonged to the town’s booster organizations. Although prominent N&W executives joined most of the groups, native business leaders were the main force behind the booster clubs. Most had enlisted in the Roanoke Board of Trade when it began operations in the summer of 1892. The Board of Trade, which emerged not long after the collapse of Hinton Helper’s short-lived Commercial Club, quickly filled the role of a vital civic and business promotional organization. The association, which billed itself a “harmonious, organized and united effort” of businessmen, sought ways to publicize the

¹⁰⁷ Century Club, *Eighth Annual Dinner*, 9, 17-25 (quote from page 9).

¹⁰⁸ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 8 April 1912.

¹⁰⁹ Century Club, *Eighth Annual Dinner*, 16.

advantages of the city and bring in additional industries.¹¹⁰ In early 1893, for example, the Board brokered a deal with a South Carolina cloth manufacturer to bring a ten-thousand-spindle cotton mill to Roanoke. “It will not only add greatly to the population of the city,” one of the men behind the project explained, “but will give employment to a class of people who have not heretofore found suitable work.”¹¹¹ After the mill’s executives chartered the corporation, Board of Trade members subscribed \$50,000 in stock.¹¹² Although the mill scheme succumbed to the 1893 nationwide recession and never materialized, the Board’s activity continued.

In the midst of the depression, during the city’s most financially bleak period, members of the Board donated the funds necessary to publish *Roanoke, Virginia 1894: Pluck, Push and Progress Illustrated*, an elaborate guide to the city’s phenomenal rise and abundant business opportunities. Edward Stone’s print shop laid out and published the booklet, and he and a committee from the Board of Trade compiled the text and selected the dozens of photographs accompanying it. *Pluck, Push and Progress*, while acknowledging that a large number of Roanoke’s skilled workers had recently been thrown out of employment and left town, explained that the city was so young that most local enterprises “have run for the most part in grooves given by the forces that started its growth; hence departments of industry are still undeveloped, though facilities for successful operations are abundant.” The guide guaranteed free land to any manufacturing enterprise that located in Roanoke and suggested that a paper mill, tannery, tin can factory, barrel factory, and wool mill were the ventures most likely to succeed in the city. As a further inducement, it bragged that Roanoke had never been “afflicted with strikes and boycotts” because local labor was “abundant, cheap and contented.” “When the whole North and West were

¹¹⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 14 June 1892

¹¹¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 4, 5 Jan 1893 (quote is from 5 Jan).

¹¹² *The Roanoke Times*, 29 March 1893. Although the 1893 mill project never materialized, in 1901, the Roanoke Cotton Mill, an entirely different entity, began operations in the former Norwich Lock Works building.

in the throes of labor troubles,” it explained, “we were quiet and serene.” The pamphlet, written for a northern and possibly immigrant or Catholic population, assured its readers that they while other parts of the former Confederacy might be prejudiced against them, “Roanoke is the most cosmopolitan city in the South; so that any man or family who should be attracted hither can come with the assurance of a hearty welcome, and with the certainty of finding on arrival enough people of their nationality, or section, to form a coterie of friends.”¹¹³

In 1898, the efforts of the city’s business boosters attracted the attention of *Headlight*, a Chicago-based investment and tourism journal, which devoted a special edition to the “Magic City, Roanoke, Va., and Scenes along the Norfolk & Western Railroad.” According to the journal’s correspondent, promoters there were more vehement than any he had encountered elsewhere. The town, he explained to the magazine’s largely northern audience, “is noted beyond all southern cities for the hustling, aggressive character of her business men.” According to him, Roanoke offered so many investment advantages, including a submissive pool of labor from which to select workers, that “She is in very deed the belle of the New South, extending with jewel-bedecked hand, to the some-seeker and the business man in search of wealth and happiness, the richest gems and the most tempting opportunities offered by the lovely southland.”¹¹⁴

In 1901, local wholesalers organized Roanoke Merchants’ and Manufacturers’ Association. It co-existed with the Board of Trade until 1904, when both groups merged into the Roanoke Chamber of Commerce. The new organization, its founders explained, sought ways “to advance by every means the development and growth of the city,” “remove impediments to progress,” and “induce cordiality and friendship among business men.” The Chamber of

¹¹³ Roanoke Board of Trade, *Roanoke, Virginia 1894: Pluck, Push and Progress Illustrated* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1894), 1-17, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 383, Roanoke file (first, second, third and fourth quotes from page 13; fifth quote from page 17).

¹¹⁴ *Headlight: Special Edition of the Magic City*, 2-30 (first quote is from page 2; second quote is from page 3).

Commerce (RCOC) elected Edward Stone as a director, and not long afterward, he oversaw production its first promotional pamphlet, *Roanoke: The Magic City of Virginia* (1904). The booklet, much like its 1894 predecessor, suggested that Roanoke's business friendly ethos, docile labor force, and low cost of living made it an ideal location for manufacturers. "There is no reason," the RCOC argued, "why certain goods could not be made here as well or as cheaply as in the North." Indeed, the organization, which boasted a membership of the city's most influential businessmen and politicians, claimed it was ready to offer potential investors "every assistance which is in our power."¹¹⁵ The RCOC also advertised the advantages of the city in various national trade magazines, including the *Manufacturers' Record* of Baltimore, and in the spring of 1906, the *Record* ran a feature on the wonderful investment advantages available in Roanoke.¹¹⁶

In 1907, the two hundred and fifty members of the RCOC raised \$100,000 to back the Roanoke Industrial Securities Company, a firm designed to assist the establishment of new industries in the city by offering capital to needy corporations at 5 percent interest. That same year, the RCOC elected a committee of representatives to present industrial displays of Roanoke's industries at the 1907 Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition in Norfolk, Virginia. The commission, which included Roanoke's mayor, Edward Stone, and the Virginia Brewing Company's Henry Scholz, distributed forty thousand copies of an RCOC promotional pamphlet designed specifically for the festival and published by Edward Stone.¹¹⁷ *Roanoke, Virginia: Its Location, Climate and Water Supply, Its Manufacturing, Commercial and Educational Advantages and General Desirability as a Place of Residence* (1907), contained typically

¹¹⁵ RCOC, *Roanoke: The Magic City of Virginia*, 1-83 (first quote is from pages 30-31; second quote is from page 13; third quote is from page 11).

¹¹⁶ See account of the article along with advertising information in *The Roanoke Times*, 9 June 1906.

¹¹⁷ Details of the RCOC's Industrial Securities Company and Jamestown campaign are in 9 Jan 1910 address of RCOC President R. H. Angell, reprinted in *The Roanoke Times*, 10 Jan 1908.

abundant economic and cultural data for the potential northern investors along with a lengthy and misleading sermon on the emergence of a New South. Local and regional businessmen in the post Civil War South, the booklet (mis)informed readers, had easily adjusted to the “new conditions” wrought by the conflict, and using “an intense devotion to the exalted ideals of the past” as their guide, had “reared an empire of civic and industrial grandeur upon the ruins that covered her desolate battle-scared soil.” Indeed, according to the guide, Roanoke City was foremost among the copious examples of splendor dotting the landscape of the former Confederacy.¹¹⁸

The RCOC kept up a constant campaign to lure additional manufacturers to the city and issued yet another booster guide in 1910. *Busy Facts for the Busy Man about the Busy “Magic City,” Roanoke, Va., U. S. A.*, inaugurated the organization’s new creed of “Acorn to Oak, Watch Roanoke,” which incorporated an elaborately drawn tree to illustrate the city’s population growth from four hundred residents in 1882 to thirty five thousand residents in 1910.¹¹⁹ By then, the booster campaign by the RCOC had helped reap substantial economic rewards for the city. Between 1900 to 1909, twenty eight new manufacturing industries began operations; industrial employment increased 46 percent, expanding to seven thousand workers; the value of city-made products increased 34 percent; and real estate assessments grew by \$13,000,000, an increase of 117 percent.¹²⁰ The city’s population growth, which had declined during the mid-1890s, rebounded in the early 1900s; from 1890 to 1910, Roanoke moved from Virginia’s fifth largest

¹¹⁸ Roanoke Chamber of Commerce, *Roanoke, Virginia: Its Location, Climate and Water Supply, Its Manufacturing, Commercial and Educational Advantages and General Desirability as a Place of Residence. Issued by the Chamber of Commerce. Compiled and Edited Under the Auspices of the Jamestown Exposition Committee by E. B. Jacobs, Secretary, Chamber of Commerce*, ed. E. B. Jacobs (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1907), 1-32, especially 2-4 (quotes from page 3).

¹¹⁹ Roanoke Chamber of Commerce, *Busy Facts for the Busy Man about the Busy “Magic City,” Roanoke, Va., U. S. A.* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1910), front cover.

¹²⁰ Industrial growth figures from George Raymond Stevens, *An Economic and Social Survey of Roanoke County*, vol. 15, no. 1 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1930), 64; real estate values from Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City*, 111.

city to its third, behind only Richmond and Norfolk.¹²¹ In its 1910 brochure, the RCOC bragged that such phenomenal growth was only possible in Roanoke, a city with abundant and inexpensive factory sites, easy access to inexhaustible raw materials, excellent rail service, low corporate taxes, and “ample cheap labor.”¹²²

Much of the city’s industrial expansion was the result of boosters’ successful campaign to lure the Virginian Railroad to Roanoke. The Virginian, a branch line of the Tidewater Railroad Company, was by far the largest of the numerous new enterprises; from 1905 to 1908, it built a rail connection, a depot, and railroad shops in Roanoke, and in 1909, when the line opened for business, it ended the monopoly on local rail access held by the Norfolk & Western since 1882.¹²³ By 1910, dozens of other new manufacturers had begun operations in Roanoke. The five-thousand-spindle Roanoke Cotton Mill, established in 1901 through a combination of native investors and a New York City financier, employed several hundred women, girls, and boys. The company, which took over the former Norwich Lock Works facility, produced primarily yarn for carpets. It took over cottages constructed by the Norwich Company and built additional company housing near the plant, along the banks of the Roanoke River. Edward Stone and J. B. Fishburn helped organize the firm and contributed a substantial amount of capital to the project. Stone, Fishburn, and the other owners of the mill claimed the plant was a philanthropic investment, organized for the benefit of poor women and impoverished families with children old enough to

¹²¹ John L. Androit, ed., *Population Abstract of the United States* (McClean, VA: Androit Associates, 1980), 854-55. According to the U. S. Census Bureau, Roanoke’s population grew from 669 in 1880; to 16,159 in 1890; to 21,495 in 1900; to 34, 879 in 1910; to 50, 842 in 1920, when Roanoke fell to fourth largest city in Virginia after being supplanted by the shipbuilding town of Portsmouth during World War I. By 1976, the growth of Northern Virginia and the Virginia Beach / Tidewater regions dropped Roanoke to Virginia’s eighth largest city. See *ibid.*

¹²² RCOC, *Busy Facts*, inside front cover.

¹²³ Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 397, 412, 424-25, 449, 455.

work. Fishburn served on the mill's board of directors; Stone served as its secretary-treasurer until 1907, when the plant closed briefly before it changed ownership.¹²⁴

In 1906, three of Lynchburg's leading industrialists opened the Adams, Payne & Gleaves Brick Factory in Roanoke; by 1910, the company employed several hundred men and produced forty thousand brick per day. The Roanoke Bridge Company, incorporated in 1906 by several southern businessmen, employed three hundred and fifty workers and from 1906 to 1912, built over six hundred bridges throughout the South. The Virginia Lumber Company began operations in 1906 with fifty men on its payroll. The Griggs Packing Company, opened in 1906 by Big Lick native Robert B. Griggs, employed fifty men and was by 1910 capable of slaughtering and dressing one hundred hogs per hour. In 1907, a group of Richmond businessmen established the Virginia Metal and Culvert Company; in 1908, another group of investors founded the Roanoke Marble and Granite Works; and in 1911, native businessmen incorporated the Dominion Metal Products and hired several hundred skilled iron and steel workers.¹²⁵

Moreover, industries already in existence expanded throughout the 1890s and early 1900s. By 1910, for example, the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company, which assumed control of the American Bridge Company in 1895, had grown from seventy-five employees to over six hundred and was producing forty-five thousand tons of manufactured products per year. Edward Stone and J. B. Fishburn assisted in the bridge company's 1895 reorganization and afterwards served on its board of directors.¹²⁶ The growth of established firms and arrival of dozens of new manufacturers did not displace the N&W and its Machine Works as Roanoke largest and most

¹²⁴ In 1910, the company reopened as the Roanoke Twine Mill. See, Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 361, 459, 465, 477. Most Cotton Mill owners claimed their investment was philanthropic as well as profit driven. See, Jacquelyn D. Hall, et al, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 30-32.

¹²⁵ RCOC, *Roanoke: The Magic City of Virginia*, 40; Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western*, 122, 124, 131, 134-36.

¹²⁶ Jacobs, *History of Roanoke City and History of the Norfolk & Western*, 112.

significant employer. Indeed, by 1910, the number of residents employed by the railroad increased to over three thousand. The establishment of other industries, however, did much to diversify Roanoke's business infrastructure and was primarily responsible for the spectacular growth of the city. Native business boosters were the main force responsible for the expansion as well as the men who profited the most from the continuing industrialization of Roanoke.

For many of Roanoke's workers, however, the industrial progress brought few rewards. Boys and girls working in the Roanoke Cotton Mill, the Reverend William Campbell observed in 1905, not only labored in dangerous and difficult conditions, they also had no time to attend public school. Campbell, who sought ways to fund an evening school for the children, found thirty-three prospective students working in the mill, including one fifteen-year-old girl who told him, "I would love to go. I have no mother, and have had very little opportunity to get any schooling."¹²⁷ In Roanoke's working-class neighborhoods in the Northeast and Southeast, families crowded into company housing built in the 1880s. Most workers' homes lacked plumbing and electricity and existed in neighborhoods blighted by soot and pollution from nearby industries. "Brick Row," a block of identical, cheap, tenement buildings in the Southeast, for example, was not only esthetically offensive and shoddily constructed, it was filthy and crime ridden as well. The housing project, built in 1883, was home to scores of impoverished white families. Indeed, by 1898, when the property changed hands and the new landlord evicted scores of tenants who had been unable to pay rent, residents in other parts of the city referred to Brick Row as "Poverty Flats."¹²⁸ The overall disparity in living conditions between workers and businessmen is vividly apparent in municipal property assessments, which show that from 1895 to 1905 homes owned by middle and upper-class whites in the Southwest and West End

¹²⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 25, 29 Nov 1905 (quote is from 25 Nov); for dangerous and difficult conditions in cotton mills, see Jacquelyn D. Hall, et al, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*, 80-85.

¹²⁸ Information on Brick Row from Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 114, 176-77, 328.

accounted for about 80 percent of the total value of white residences. Moreover, black housing, which accounted for about 30 percent of all homes in town, comprised just slightly over 2 percent of their total value.¹²⁹

Roanoke's business boosters, always on the lookout for ways to promote or enhance their city, decided in 1909 to form a corporation to construct and operate an incline railroad up the one-thousand-foot face of Mill Mountain. The peak, which remained in Roanoke County until annexed along with "South Roanoke" in 1915, had been considered a valuable civic asset since the founding of the city, and various schemes to build an incline railway up it had been floated since at least 1901.¹³⁰ The Rockledge Inn and Mill Mountain Observatory, opened by the Roanoke Gas & Water Company on the summit in 1892, had done exceedingly well initially but eventually succumbed to a downturn in patronage caused by their difficulty of access and closed in the late 1890s. Walking to the top of Mill Mountain along a precarious zigzag path took over two hours, and the hotel company's horse-drawn carriage was even slower. The inn and observatory both fell into disrepair after shutting down. Indeed, when a party of Virginia College students hiked to the top in the fall of 1902 they found "an old negro woman" living in the hotel and using its former dinning room to cure tobacco leaf she had grown in what had once been the inn's picnic grounds.¹³¹

Edward Stone, J. B. Fishburn, and other members of the Century Club were heavily involved in the incline proposal from the beginning. In November 1909, the twenty-five investors

¹²⁹ See real estate assessments in *The Roanoke Times*, 21 June 1900; 4 Dec 1903; 26 May 1905.

¹³⁰ See details in story titled "A Big Scheme: Plan Afoot to Open the Mill Mountain Hotel" in *The Roanoke Times*, 30 March 1901.

¹³¹ *Virginia College Rattler*, 18 Dec 1902, in History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke. The girls, "after much persuasion," convinced the woman to let them have a picnic inside, after which they took a nap by the inn's fireplace and then hiked back down the "old roadway which twists back and forth up the mountain side."

in Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated met to work out the financial details of the project. Stone put up \$5,000 of the \$15,000 first mortgage, and like most of the other investors, which included the Virginia Brewing Company's Scholz brothers, purchased \$1,000 in stock.¹³² In a letter to Lucius E. Johnson, president of the N&W, Stone explained the boosters' rationale. "Those most interested," he wrote, "think that the proposition will yield at least a fair return on the investment, besides being a splendid advertisement for Roanoke, and quite an attraction for visitors to our city; people who attend conventions, coming on excursions, or anything of the sort."¹³³ Stone convinced Johnson to invest as well, but not before warning that he had gotten involved "more from a patriotic standpoint than anything else," completely aware that his investment "may not pay very handsome dividends."¹³⁴

A. B. Hammond, of Hammond Printing, put up the other \$10,000 of the first mortgage and served as the Incline's president. Stone, who was on the committee charged with finalizing plans for the railroad, recommended the firm that installed the cableway at his Borderland Coal Company "so that we would have the greatest possible feeling of security in its safety design and construction."¹³⁵ The estimated cost of the incline and property for its tracks turned out to be about \$25,000 more than initially expected, and as a result, in early March 1910, the corporation

¹³² Information on initial investors and Stone's commitment is from 1909 and 1910 company records and correspondence in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

¹³³ Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to L. E. Johnson, Pasadena, CA, 12 Nov 1909, Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

¹³⁴ Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to L. E. Johnson, Roanoke, 7 Dec 1909, Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

¹³⁵ For Stone's appointment, see Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated, Stockholders' Minutes, 2 March 1910, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file; for quote and recommendation, see Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to S. A. Cooney, care of John A. Roeblings Sons Co., Trenton, NJ, 3 Jan 1910, Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

increased its bonded indebtedness from \$15,000 to \$40,000.¹³⁶ Construction began shortly thereafter; by summer, workers had installed rails produced by the Roanoke Iron Company up the face of Mill Mountain and the J. G. Brill Company of Philadelphia had built the incline's electric pulley system and cars. Each of the two identical carriages, which simultaneously ascended and descended on parallel tracks, had a sixty-person capacity and took only four minutes to climb up or down the mountain. The cars, according to the incline company, had "every appliance for safety known to mechanical and electrical engineers."¹³⁷

In late July 1910, only two weeks before the incline was scheduled to open for business, Edward Stone informed all the railway's investors that he either wanted to own enough of the company to make it worth his while or sell the bonds and stocks that he already owned. In a letter sent to all stockholders, Stone warned the investors that "I do not see much chance for immediate returns on this speculation" and reiterated the fact that his interest in the business came only "from a patriotic standpoint." He was willing, therefore, to purchase the stock at its par value.¹³⁸ J. H. Marsteller, a local tombstone manufacturer who had invested \$500 in the incline, informed Stone that he "went into it like a good many others did to help get it started regardless of whether it paid anything or not." Although Marsteller believed that in a couple years the railway could "be made a paying investment," he sold Stone all his stock. The Virginia Brewing Company's Scholz

¹³⁶ Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated, Stockholders' Meeting Notice, 3 March 1910, Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

¹³⁷ Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated, *Mill Mountain Incline*, promotional brochure in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file; see also, Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 473.

¹³⁸ See form letters to all Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated stockholders from Edward Stone, dated 30 July 1910, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

brothers, who had invested \$1,000, sold their stock as well.¹³⁹ A dozen or so other stockholders sold out to Stone too.¹⁴⁰

When the incline opened on August 14, 1910, enormous crowds of curious onlookers turned out and over fifteen-hundred patrons paid the railway's twenty five cent fare. The steep ascent straight up the face of Mill Mountain, according to local papers, impressed and fascinated riders. Not everyone, however, felt safe. Norfolk & Western clerk Frank G. Payne, for example, took the incline to the top on August 23 and noted that night in his diary that "it is a nice piece of work but I do not like to ride on it."¹⁴¹ Although initially the incline did a brisk business, its customers were mainly residents of Roanoke or nearby locales. To sustain profits and promote the city, the incline's owners understood that they needed to also draw in a tourist and visitor trade. As a result, not long after opening, they published a promotional brochure to advertise the incline to outsiders. Roanoke, the booklet bragged, was "a progressive and prosperous city" and its mountainside railway was but the latest of the "many successful enterprises" it could boast. Roanoke residents owned the Mill Mountain Incline, the brochure explained, and all of them "went into the enterprise because they hoped it would prove a big advertisement for the City, and contribute to the development of a modern municipality."¹⁴²

The incline company rented and refurbished the dilapidated Rockledge Inn and its overgrown grounds and built a new, much taller observatory to replace the one constructed in

¹³⁹ Louis A. Scholz, President, Virginia Brewing Company, Roanoke, to Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, 24 Aug 1910, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file; Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to Louis A. Scholz, Roanoke, 25 Aug 1910, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

¹⁴⁰ See various correspondence related to the sales in July, Aug, Sept 1910 letters to Stone in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

¹⁴¹ Frank Gravely Payne Diary, 1904-1960, years 1904-1910 excerpted in Neal Payne, "How a Railway Clerk Saw the New Century," *Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society* 11, no. 2 (1982): 46.

¹⁴² Information about opening day and quotes are from MMII, *Mill Mountain Incline*.

1892.¹⁴³ The hotel, which had capacity for only a dozen or so guests, was far too small and primitive to make Mill Mountain the sort of resort that the incline's investors hoped for, and as a result, only months after opening, they sought ways to purchase the entire, one-hundred acre summit of Mill Mountain from its owners, the Roanoke Gas & Water Company, so they could construct a larger and more modern lodge. Edward Stone was the main advocate of the plan. Indeed, only a week after the incline began operations he informed a fellow stockholder of his belief that "to make a success of the proposition a good deal more money has got to be put up in order to put the top of the mountain in attractive shape and to secure or build attractions up there that will make people feel that it is worth while to spend their money to get to the top of the mountain."¹⁴⁴ In October 1910, Stone advised A. B. Hammond, the incline company's president, that the firm needed to move quickly because Roanoke's mayor had already suggested that the city purchase the summit for a municipal park. Even then, Stone informed Hammond, the company could make a tidy profit by immediately buying the land and selling it to the city "at some figure above the purchase price."¹⁴⁵ Fostering civic betterment, at least to Stone, was even more worthwhile if the process yielded a substantial return on investment. In the years that followed, however, neither the incline company nor the city bought the summit.¹⁴⁶

Seasonal changes strictly dictated the incline's business; its peak months were always from the late spring to early fall. Ridership in the winter was nearly non-existent. From August

¹⁴³ Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 473; for purchase of hotel and grounds, see Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated, Annual Statement – 1911, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

¹⁴⁴ Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to J. H. Marsteller, Roanoke, 22 Aug 1910, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

¹⁴⁵ Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to A. B. Hammond, Roanoke, 25 Oct 1910, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file; see also, Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 465.

¹⁴⁶ In 1941, Roanoke City acquired the summit when J. B. Fishburn, who bought the property from Washington & Lee University for fifty thousand dollars, donated the land to the municipality with the stipulation that it be turned into a public park.

through October 1910, for example, the incline sold almost nineteen thousand fares, while in December, it sold only about two hundred. Business did not pick up again until May the following year, when slightly over four thousand patrons paid for a lift up and down the mountain.¹⁴⁷ By then, the incline company had installed new walkways, benches, and swings on the summit, and had mounted a telescope and massive electric “searchlight” in its observatory that could “light up the country for miles around.” It opened a souvenir store on the observatory’s first floor that sold postcards manufactured by Stone’s print shop along with other incline and Mill Mountain memorabilia.¹⁴⁸ With a larger hotel, one local paper observed, the mountain top, with its cool air that “invigorates mind and body,” could easily draw in tourists in the summer months who would otherwise spend their vacations at nearby mineral springs. Moreover, the paper’s editor explained, the view, which “presented to the man of business the prettiest prospect for a great industrial community,” would facilitate manufacturing investments by at least some of the thousands of out-of-town businessmen who made a visit.¹⁴⁹ The panorama from the top offered a view of the entire Roanoke Valley and was indeed astounding. Eleanor Armistead, a nurse from Richmond working temporarily in the city’s Lewis-Gale Hospital, came to the conclusion of most visitors after she rode the incline to the summit in the fall of 1911, informing her fiancé afterwards that the vista was “the most surprisingly beautiful view I have ever seen.”¹⁵⁰

Ridership on the incline, despite the company’s advertising efforts, declined sharply from 1910 to 1912, dropping from 4,433 fares per month in 1910, to 2,605 in 1911, to 1,801 in 1912.

¹⁴⁷ Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated, Statement Showing Income by Months from Incline and Observatory – Aug 14, 1910 to Dec 31, 1911, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

¹⁴⁸ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 2 May 1911; “Views about Mill Mountain and the Incline Railway,” extension postcard (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1910), in the author’s collection.

¹⁴⁹ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 6 May 1911.

¹⁵⁰ Eleanor Bowles Armistead, Lewis-Gale Hospital, Roanoke, to James H. Anderson, Richmond, 10 Oct 1911, in Anderson Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

The plummet, which continued in the following years, reveals quite vividly that the much sought tourist trade never arrived, and that local patrons, after riding the railway once or twice, lost interest. The Rockledge Inn, which was open only from May to October, cost much more to operate than it did in business, and paid admissions to the observatory, which had to be rebuilt after a violent thunderstorm knocked it down in the summer of 1911, declined over 160 percent from 1910 to 1912.¹⁵¹ After paying operating expenses and interest on its mortgages, Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated lost \$875 in 1911.¹⁵² Early the following year, the company's treasurer notified its stockholders that although it had been "impossible, through lack of funds, to meet the interest on the second mortgage bonds," the firm "hoped that the revenues derived from the operation of the property during the coming summer" would make up for it.¹⁵³ Despite slashing operating expenses by over 50 percent, in December 1912, the incline's treasurer reported that the company had lost another \$540 and would be unable to pay bondholders their full interest.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated, Statement Showing Income by Months from Incline and Observatory – Aug 14, 1910 to Dec 31, 1911, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file; Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated, Statement of Earnings – 1912, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file; information about the destruction of the 1910 observatory is from Roanoke Times & World News, *Roanoke: 100 – Centennial Edition*, part one (18 April 1982), 58. The third observatory, which went up immediately after the second was destroyed, lasted on the summit until 1936, when it burned down. Both observatories stood on Mill Mountain's northern end, in the general vicinity of the giant neon star that civic boosters placed on the summit in 1949. See, Carolyn Hale Bruce, *Roanoke: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk and Virginia Beach, VA: The Donning Company, 1976), 115.

¹⁵² Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated, Annual Statement – 1911, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

¹⁵³ H. D. Vickers, Secretary and Treasurer, Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated, Roanoke, to Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, 29 March 1912, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

¹⁵⁴ Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated, Statement of Earnings – 1912, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

After A. B. Hammond, the incline's president and principal financier, died in May 1912, stockholders elected Jack W. Hancock their president. Shortly afterwards, at least a few of the incline's directors floated the idea of placing a giant, electric booster-slogan sign on the top of Mill Mountain as an advertisement of the city and the railway. The Roanoke Chamber of Commerce, after informed of the plan, notified the Roanoke Gas & Water Company that its members had "instantly and unanimously expressed their deep regret at this possible despoliation of one of Roanoke's very best civic assets." The company concurred, and in its response to the Chamber of Commerce explained that Frederick Kimball and Peyton Terry would have been appalled at the idea, and that A. B. Hammond, "who had more to do with building the Incline than any other man," would never have approved such a request being made. "The Incline," the gas and water company observed, "was not built for commercial profit" and as such, needed no gaudy advertising to make money.¹⁵⁵

Edward Stone, who had been appointed to the incline's board of directors in early 1912, received notice from Hancock that fall that a local organization had requested hundreds of free passes from the railway to entertain visitors to its convention.¹⁵⁶ To Stone, who always paid the fare of his printing shop customers and rarely even used his stockholder pass, the appeal, which had been couched in the language of civic advertising, was baffling. In his reply, Stone informed Hancock that "to ask the Mill Mountain Incline (which is hardly paying expenses) to bear the

¹⁵⁵ Correspondence between the Roanoke Chamber of Commerce and the Roanoke Gas & Water Company reprinted in *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 31 May 1912. Ironically, thirty-seven years later, the Roanoke Chamber of Commerce, along with the Roanoke Merchants' Association, spent twenty-five thousand dollars to erect the eight-story neon star that now adorns the summit of Mill Mountain. The star, advertised as the largest manmade star in the world and originally intended as a Christmas decoration, proved so popular that its owners decided to keep its two thousand feet of neon lit year round. The Chamber of Commerce and Merchants' Association, in a move to capitalize on the star's publicity, dubbed Roanoke the "Star City of the South," a moniker that quickly replaced the town's "Magic City" nickname. See White, *Roanoke: 1740-1982*, 110, 113; Bruce, *Roanoke: A Pictorial History*, 170.

¹⁵⁶ Stone's appointment is from H. D. Vickers, Secretary and Treasurer, Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated, Roanoke, to Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, 30 March 1912, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

brunt of this special advertising, is, in my opinion, asking a little too much, and I am not in favor of it.” Moreover, he went on, “I think the people who have put their money into the Mill Mountain Incline did so more from a patriotic standpoint than anything else, and when they have done this, I think they have gone quite far enough, at least until the proposition begins to show up as a money making one.”¹⁵⁷ It never did, and in 1919, Stone and the incline’s other investors voted to sell their \$40,000 railway for \$7,000. In the years that followed, the incline continued to struggle, and in 1929, a few years after workers carved a zigzag road for automobiles up the face of Mill Mountain, the railway closed. The following year the incline company had the system dismantled and sold as scrap.¹⁵⁸

Although boosters’ dreams of creating a tourist mecca on the summit of Mill Mountain never materialized, their campaign to attract new businesses to Roanoke was an astounding success. When the city’s fortunes plummeted and its home industries struggled during the 1893 depression, the town’s business leaders did what they could to mitigate the economic turmoil. Some pushed for a new railroad, others funded promotions by the Board of Trade, and hundreds dug in and weathered the storm. Having not only survived but thrived in the aftermath, many of Roanoke’s boosters moved to capitalize further by widely advertising their homes’ cheap land, inexpensive labor, weak unions, and low corporate taxes. Their campaign, instigated through the

¹⁵⁷ Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to J. W. Hancock, President, Mill Mountain Incline Incorporated, 10 Sept 1912, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 442, Mill Mountain Incline file.

¹⁵⁸ Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 561, 563, 722. The path cut up the side of Mill Mountain by the incline remains visible and has periodically sparked inquiry into reviving the railway. In 1996, for example, a Virginia Tech architecture student designed a tram system along the former incline pathway and pitched the idea to city officials. Although Roanoke City has commissioned several studies, no plan has of yet been seriously debated. In 1964, a citizens’ group converted the abandoned Rockledge Inn into the Mill Mountain Playhouse, a summer theater, and until 1976, when a fire destroyed the Inn, the Mill Mountain Theater was a popular diversion. Today, the mountain is home to the Mill Mountain Zoo and the eight-story Mill Mountain Star (for details, see footnote 155).

Board of Trade or Chamber of Commerce, lured dozens of manufacturers to town and placed Roanoke in the forefront of Virginia's industrialized cities. In addition, domestic enterprises, like the Virginia Brewing Company and Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company, rose to prominence, giving the city an industrial cachet not built entirely by reliance on the Norfolk & Western Railway. To the Magic City's promoters, the promise of a New South, while largely fictional elsewhere in the region, was real.

Not everyone, however, benefited from Roanoke's "open for business" ethos. White workers, the vast majority of all residents, held hardly any collective bargaining power and received only a portion of the wages and benefits they could have gained from successful strikes. Unlike their brethren in the North, Roanoke's laborers remained docile in the 1890s and early 1900s. They could hardly afford not to since the city's government was entirely in the hands of business-friendly officials. Moreover, they were isolated in the mountains of Southwest Virginia and blinded with paternalism, modest pay, and token concessions doled out by local corporations. Indeed, the entire social, cultural, and economic structure of Roanoke, where workers were loudly celebrated but hardly respected, induced apathy among the working classes, who, upon sensing some injustice and walking out, were immediately dealt a largely worthless but symbolically rewarding remedy. Clergy, elected officials, and barons of commerce all walked softly amidst the city's thousands of laborers, promising them "justice" and "reform," but only when it was requested in the correct way and bore no threat of overturning the Magic City's social order.

For the city's non-white laborers, the situation was worse. They had no access to unions, worked on the lowest and most difficult level of labor, and made even lower wages than whites. The coming of new industries, while providing employment, did so only in the form of "nigger work," or jobs that whites deemed too arduous or filthy to hold. The benefits to working-class women were also only slight; the Roanoke Cotton Mill, opened specifically to fill a niche for female employment, offered an alternative to domestic labor, but did so at the cost of long hours, low pay, and child labor. Indeed, when Lewis Hine toured the South in 1911 to photograph boys

and girls working in its fabled industries, he stopped in Roanoke long enough to take a picture of a young girl, decked out in a dress and bonnet, working amongst the spindles of the city's cotton factory. For her, boosters' quest to open the town for business meant difficult and mind-numbing labor, no formal education, and lungs filled with cotton dust. If Roanoke was emblematic of the New South, then for much of its working-class or African American population, it was hardly new, hardly spectacular, and hardly rewarding. Boosters' rhetoric was no match for the cold, hard reality of life in the city for the vast majority of its laboring residents, who continued to barely eke out a living, went without adequate public services, and on whose labor Roanoke moved forward into the forefront of industrialized southern cities.

Chapter Seven

Municipal and Civic Reform, 1900-1912

With all our boasted pride, our prosperity, our invitation to capital – with the record of being the third city in importance in the state, it can be said to our mortification that the cow runs at large and is often seen on the principal business thoroughfares of our city.

The Roanoke Times (16 September 1902)

By scores, dozing market villages came fully into the current of Progress in these years, built themselves a factory, routed cows and pigs from grazing in their streets, began to lay down pavements and car tracks and to dream megalomaniac dreams.

Wilber J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (1941)

Roanoke's business leaders, the men who successfully promoted the city to outside investors and industries, had an almost blind faith in economic development as a panacea for all the town's social "problems" and infrastructure shortfalls. Their faith, however, failed to shape the city in the fashion they expected. As a result, they found themselves living in a town that seemed more Big Lick than Roanoke; more village than metropolis; a "city" with numerous dirt streets, hundreds of free-ranging cattle, a filthy Market House, a polluted and unregulated farmer's market, few enforced health regulations, a typhoid fever death rate far above the national average, overcrowded and dingy schools, no public parks, and no public library. The "disordered" and primitive conditions, which in the minds of businessmen threatened to retard economic development, quickly became an issue that they attempted to remedy. As a first step in that process, local executives and elected officials eagerly endorsed disfranchising black and poor white residents – the main groups opposed to livestock and health restrictions – and supported segregation as the best means of ending white and black conflicts over public space.

Roanoke's business leaders were not the only local groups that sought to impose "order." The town's forces of "morality," appalled by the city's rowdy saloons and thriving bordellos, moved to enact prohibition and close down local brothels, while the wives and daughters of

business leaders moved to ensure pure milk and food, impose strict health codes, modernize public schools, build proper playgrounds, and censor working-class entertainment. Although these three “reform” factions (i.e., businessmen, ministers, middle and upper-class women) occasionally had the same goals, much like “progressive reformers” elsewhere in the nation, they did not always act in concert or agree with one another. The city’s “reformers,” however, were all whites, most of them educated members of the town’s middle and upper classes, businessmen, professionals or their wives, and above all, willing to devote considerable energy to modifying their home in ways that recast it as a “progressive” metropolis. They shared a great deal in common with urban “reformers” throughout the nation – mainly because these paternalistic Roanokers sought to impose their version of “order” on the chaos they perceived all around them.¹

Those being “reformed” – white migrants from the countryside, African Americans, farmers, workers – opposed almost all the efforts in one way or another. Cattle owners formed pro-cow clubs to battle what they interpreted as “class legislation” banning the creatures. The city’s working class, in a rare alliance with local businessmen, resisted attempts to “dry-up” the town. Black inhabitants, largely disfranchised by Virginia’s 1902 constitution, continued to register when they could and resisted efforts to confine them to specific parts of town. All three groups condemned beautification efforts, school appropriations, funding for a library or public parks, prohibition, and moves by municipal authorities they deemed unnecessary. In the end, however, the agents of “reform,” – the Norfolk & Western, local business leaders, elite women, and clergy – proved almost unstoppable. Indeed, by 1912, and due largely to their efforts, the town had shed at least some of its village ethos.

¹ See, for example, Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 111-132, 153-63; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York: Vintage, 1955), 176-85, 216-18, Dewy W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1983), xvi-xviii, 4-34, 158, 275-88; William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), xi-xiii.

Throughout the 1880s, 1890s, and early 1900s, Roanoke's African-American voters favored Republicans and resided mainly in the Northwest city. They held about 25 percent of potential ballots, and on their own, had little real chance of gaining access to political power. Roanoke, however, had thousands of skilled workers from northern cities who also tended to vote for Republicans, most of whom resided in the same wards, albeit in segregated, all white neighborhoods. As a result, black and white voters in the Third and Fifth Wards continually elected Republicans to the city council and consistently gave state and national representatives of the GOP decided victories inside their wards. In the early 1900s, the situation remained much the same. In November 1901, for example, roughly 60 percent of the vote for governor and state delegate in the Third and Fifth Wards went to the Republican candidates. In the First, Second, and Fourth Wards, by contrast, Democrats received upward of 70 percent of ballots cast.² Since Democrats comprised about 60 percent of all the city's voters, the party usually won citywide elections or contests for state or national offices. The balloting, however, was sometimes much closer than the party would have liked. Indeed, on rare occasions, Republicans even won. Because Roanoke had a viable GOP opposition, local Democrats had to wage aggressive and expensive campaigns. In 1898, for example, James P. Woods, the Democratic candidate for mayor, beat his Republican opponent by only twenty-seven votes. According to Woods, "it was a nip-and-tuck race" only because "the negroes were voting and voting the Republican ticket."³ The situation, the editors of *The Roanoke Times* later complained, created "animosities that would not

² *The Roanoke Times*, 6, 7 Nov 1901. Although the local election went to the Democratic candidates, the 1,502 ballots cast for local Republican Robert H. Angell combined with ballots from Roanoke County to give him a majority of votes for the House of Delegates.

³ James Pleasants Woods, "Personal Biographical Sketches and Reminiscences of James Pleasants Woods," TMs (Aug 1943), quoted in Roy H. Hippert, Jr. "Col. James P. Woods, Lawyer, Congressman," *Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society* 11, no. 1 (1982): 33.

otherwise exist” and aided “in destroying that feeling of fellowship and co-operation so necessary to the advancement and progress of our city.”⁴

A chance to eliminate Roanoke’s black Republican vote emerged in early 1900, when the state debated modifying its Reconstruction-era constitution in ways that would disfranchise African Americans and poor whites. Democrats in Roanoke, not surprisingly, did all they could to get the new constitution in place. The editors of the *Times*, like most local Democrats, believed that all progress in Roanoke had occurred as the result of Democratic rule. Republican opposition, they agreed, was simply a hindrance to “further advances.” Moreover, the paper argued, allowing local blacks to vote had actually retarded business growth because northern investors were weary of establishing industries in a place where their fate would be “in the keeping of an illiterate element that knows not how to discharge the rights of suffrage.”⁵ In the balloting that spring, 79 percent of local voters endorsed holding a constitutional convention. Residents of the city’s Third Ward, who elected two Republican councilmen in the same election, cast 60 percent of their ballots against staging the convention. Citywide, however, around four hundred and fifty (white) Republicans sided with Democrats and endorsed drafting a new constitution. Statewide, 56 percent of voters favored holding a convention.⁶

In the vote to elect a delegate to the constitutional conference, Roanoke Republicans ran no candidate, and as a result, the Democrat’s nominee claimed nearly all the ballots cast.⁷ At the convention, delegates drafted a new constitution that restricted the vote to males who served in

⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 10 April 1900.

⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 24 May 1900.

⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 26 May; 7 June 1900; number of Republicans who endorsed the constitution convention is from total ballots cast against the convention (640) subtracted from total ballots cast for the Republican candidate for mayor (1,094); 26 May election results on constitution were incomplete – see 7 June for final count.

⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 24 May 1901; the vote was 1,017 for Democratic delegate, 124 for Independent delegate, and 40 for Socialist-Labor delegate.

the Confederate or United States armies or navies during a time of war, to their sons, to men who had paid at least \$1 in property taxes, to men who could read and explain any portion of the new constitution, and to men unable to read who could explain any portion of the constitution read to them. All those who registered, except former Civil War soldiers, had to pay their poll taxes for the three previous years. These registration options, however, existed only in October 1902 and 1903. In 1904, those attempting to register had to meet all the above criteria plus prepay their poll taxes for the next three years and make a written application to vote, without assistance, in the presence of a registrar.⁸

In October 1902, one local reporter estimated that the new constitution had disfranchised 80 percent of Roanoke's African Americans along with a few hundred poor whites. Overall, he explained, 2,546 whites had registered while only 127 blacks had passed the new qualifications. As a result, the percentage of black voters in the city's fell from around 30 percent to 5 percent.⁹ White Republicans clung to local power in Third Ward, but in the state elections that followed in November, the Democratic candidate for U. S. Congress received 92 percent of ballots cast in Roanoke.¹⁰ Once the 1904 regulations took effect, the city's 111 registered African Americans comprised barely 4 percent of the total electorate.¹¹ In 1905, the local Republican Party even began excluding the city's handful of registered blacks from its conventions. Roanoke's GOP, its white supporters believed, had more to gain by making their party all white than by courting the roughly one hundred black votes still available.¹² Although residents of the Third Ward continued to elect Republican or Socialist-Labor representatives to city council, by the end of the decade,

⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 6 Aug 1902.

⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 2 Oct 1902.

¹⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 5 Nov 1902.

¹¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Jan 1904.

¹² *The Roanoke Times*, 11 Aug 1905.

nominees from all-white Democratic primaries easily won citywide ballots and state elections. Former mayor James Woods, who had barely defeated his Republican challenger in 1898, welcomed the sea change. The new constitution, according to him, was “a very good thing – it gives us a better electorate.”¹³

“Reforming” Roanoke’s electorate by disfranchising its black voters, however, was but the opening salvo in a war to marginalize, denigrate, and separate the city’s African Americans. Starting in the summer of 1900, after Virginia’s “Separate Coach” law went into effect, making different train cars for whites and blacks mandatory, residents and their representatives approved local and state “Jim Crow” legislation with increasing frequency.¹⁴ From what they had seen of it on Norfolk & Western trains, the editors of the *Times* observed, the “Separate Coach” law was a “success and has proved to be a good measure.” The only problem, they complained, was that white men who wanted to smoke were limited to accommodations that were far too cramped.¹⁵ Although at least some white Roanokers objected to similar legislation for city streetcars, their state representatives joined other elected officials in passing a “Jim Crow Streetcar Bill” in 1906. The editors of the *Times*, who believed wholeheartedly that “the negro should remain where he belongs,” rejected the law as “far fetched,” “radical,” and “carrying it too far.” Once the streetcar rules went into effect, however, the paper revised its opinion and admitted that they were a good thing. Local blacks, it reported, offered no complaints, “accepted the order and are obeying it.” Indeed, the only difficulty came from white riders who would not stay in their designated portion of the car.¹⁶

¹³ Woods, “Personal Biographical Sketches and Reminiscences,” 35.

¹⁴ Details of law from *The Roanoke Times*, 6 June 1900.

¹⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 Aug 1900.

¹⁶ See details of streetcar law in *The Roanoke Times*, 14 June 1906; for editors’ opposition, see *ibid.*, 7, 13 March 1902 (first two quotes from 13 March; third quote from 7 March); for enactment of the law in Roanoke and fourth quote, see *ibid.*, 22 June 1906.

Elsewhere in town, most of the city's entertainment venues adopted "Jim Crow" segregation policies as well. The Roanoke Academy of Music, which had been built in 1892 with a special side entrance and balcony for black patrons, continued to host shows for mixed-race audiences. The folly of such separation, however, was frequently evident, especially when black-oriented performers played the Academy to a packed balcony and empty floor seats. In 1903, for example, humorist Robert A. Kelly – "the original coon" – performed his act in front of hundreds of African Americans jammed into the upper gallery while nearly all the seats below them stood vacant.¹⁷ Venues less formally equipped moved to exclude African American patrons entirely. The Electric Parlor, a downtown movie theater, for instance, advertised itself as "for white people only." Mountain Park, a commercial recreation area at the foot of Mill Mountain, excluded African Americans as well. The Park on rare occasions did offer "colored days" for the city's black inhabitants, but in a sign of how deeply racist white residents had become, its management apologized to them in advance and promised that everything would be done "to see that the colored people conduct themselves properly."¹⁸ The Academy of Music eventually turned to similar measures when offering black-oriented fare. When the "Original Dandy Dixie Minstrels" played there in the fall of 1911, for example, the theater explained in its ads that its "entire house" was "reserved for colored people."¹⁹

Negative newspaper coverage of local blacks, which was constant in early Roanoke, grew more severe, more elaborate, and more frequent in the early 1900s, when the city's papers began running special columns dedicated to the derision of African American residents. The *Times*, for example, ran a society column with glowing praise for white residents' cultural sophistication but limited coverage of blacks mainly to its court section, which it titled variously as "African Day in

¹⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 13 Sept 1903.

¹⁸ Electric Parlor ad from *The Roanoke Times*, 19 May 1907; "colored day" and Mountain Park from *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 31 Aug 1911.

¹⁹ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 16 Sept 1911.

Police Court,” “The Reconstruction,” or “At the Misery Mill.” In the court column, the paper satirized, criticized, and lampooned African American residents and their culture. Those “hauled in” were repeatedly described as “dusky,” “sable,” “ebony hues,” “pickaniny,” “coal black,” “very colored,” “congomens,” “negro troublemakers,” or “sambos.” In one report, for instance, the *Times* described those being tried as “big black men from the coal fields, little brown picininnies from railroad avenue, and colored damsels from any old place.” Most tried that day had been arrested for being “disorderly,” “drunk,” “misbehaving,” or “trespassing on N&W property.” “Well here is Kate,” the paper reported in one case, “known to the police as a champion profanity user. Tall, brown and slender, she has doubtless put the charm on many colored youths. But occasionally she goes on a spree and there is trouble.”²⁰ In another issue, the *Times* detailed the fate of Burrell Woods, “a little black, drowsy-orbed pickaniny” who had been arrested for “monkeying with something he hadn’t fallen heir to.” During the same docket, the paper explained,

Julia Hurd, ebony hues, strutted through the distress wicket with the air of a long-tailed peacock when her name was tin horned to the icicle factory. She was glad-ragged to beat the fashion block. Her toilet was constructed of black taffeta skirt, canary waist with black lace trimmings, pink bobbinet sash with flowering ends, picture hat trimmed with blue satin ribbons and covered with several yards of white tulle veil. She carried a string of beads in her ungloved hands. Julia fell under the influence of the green-eyed monster Saturday night. She went down to the dog mouth and did some sailor swearing. She disturbed the Sabbath evening quietude of that vicinity. . . . She was finally captured in an open field and then it was the cooler.²¹

Residential segregation, while always in place in Roanoke, became more formal in the early 1900s. Indeed, “reforming” neighborhoods by driving away blacks living nearby or having authorities crackdown on African American saloons or dance halls near white residential districts became commonplace. The city’s black population, confined to what had originally been the

²⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 28 July 1900.

²¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 26 July 1904.

Town of Gainsborough and to neighborhoods in the Northwest, eventually began to move south, closer to the city's downtown district.²² White residents in the Northwest had long complained of "disorder" emanating from African American neighborhoods nearby. They demanded, for example, that Davis Hall, a black community center serving as a dance hall, be condemned because it was a place of debauchery where "crowds of colored people were wont to congregate." When someone burned the building to the ground in the summer of 1900, one white woman in the neighborhood told a reporter that the fire was "the work of the Lord."²³ When blacks began to move south, whites in the Northwest did all they could to end the "encroachment." In the spring of 1905, for instance, several hundred white homeowners, "who were all eager to do anything that could possibly be done to rid that section of undesirable tenants," held a mass meeting to discuss tactics. African Americans moving into homes nearby, they declared in a petition to city officials, had lowered property values, increased immorality, and taken residences that should belong to "good white people." The *Times*, noting that whites in the Northwest "quite naturally and inevitably . . . don't want negroes as neighbors," called on city council to "unite in holding that beautiful section of our city as 'white man's territory.'"²⁴

In the Southwest, a traditionally all-white neighborhood, residents reacted even more stridently when African Americans settled nearby. In early 1905, after a few dozen black families moved into "shacks" on the edge of the district, whites posted a sign reading: "Notice – All Colored people living on this block are notified to Vacate as Soon as Possible." When questioned by a reporter, black residents complained of having their homes pelted with rocks; many also declared their intention to move.²⁵ A few days later, the *Times* reported, many of the blacks living

²² Erin Baratta, "Gainsboro Neighborhood, 1890-1940," *Journal of the History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia* 14, no. 1 (1999): 40-41.

²³ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 July 1900.

²⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 12 April 1905.

²⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 14 March 1905.

there had found “new nests to lay their troubled noggins” and fled the neighborhood. Whites in the district, according to a correspondent, had told the remaining black families, “if they didn’t get a move on, somebody was going to set the block on fire.”²⁶ Those who still refused, the paper explained a week later, had their homes pelted with “a shower of brick-bats and nigger-head rocks and clods of dirt and other missiles.” After whites again let it be known that they intended to burn the homes of any blacks caught residing in their neighborhood, all but one elderly African American woman packed up their belongings and moved.²⁷

In Roanoke, “reforming” race galvanized all white residents in a crusade that limited black access to the ballot and segregated their entertainment, public services, and housing. Having lived with the political threat of a combination of white and black Republicans in the 1880s and 1890s, white Democrats jumped at the chance in the early 1900s to eliminate the city’s African American vote. To the men imposing the city’s race “reforms,” the segregation and marginalization that followed disfranchisement lessened the potential for conflict between whites and blacks and thus forestalled any chance of a repeat of the city’s catastrophic 1893 riot. Local blacks, outnumbered at least two to one by whites, faced an onslaught from the entire white community that left them little choice but to conform or leave town. While lynching was no longer a real threat, angry white mobs, unsympathetic police, racist editors, unfair courts, and uncaring politicians all were. The physical and psychic toll of institutionalized racism left local blacks virtually powerless and entirely on the margins of the Roanoke community, a “reform” that was precisely what the larger white community demanded. Having “purified” the electorate and removed a potentially dissenting voice from the ballot box, the city’s “reformers” quickly set their sights on other “reforms.” Mainly, they moved to ban cattle and impose strict health codes

²⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 21 March 1905.

²⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 28 March 1905.

on Roanoke's population; later they moved to allocate municipal resources for city beautification and parks.²⁸

Although race “reforms” pitted all whites against all blacks, the city’s white community was deeply fractured over other issues, especially over what to do about the city’s hundreds of free-ranging cattle. Roanoke’s middle and upper-class residents and elected officials, the main faction in favor of banning cows, had worked since the early 1880s to prescribe the behavior of newcomers from the countryside or African American inhabitants. They mainly sought ways to make these citizens conform to living in an urban setting. In 1884, the city’s first set of general ordinances banned bathing in streams, damaging trees, putting up barbed wire fencing, and dumping “slops” into the streets. Other laws followed, including, a ban on hogs and a law prohibiting cows from wandering unattended. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, police impounded cattle found loose and fined their owners \$1 to get the animals back. Most cow owners, nevertheless, continued to let the animals roam freely. The city’s middle and upper-class residents, appalled by their frequent encounters with wandering cows, lodged a constant stream of protests to town officials. In the fall of 1894, for instance, land agent Malcolm W. Bryan notified city authorities that he had returned from church and found a dead cow on the sidewalk in front of his Queen Anne mansion on Orchard Hill. “It being Sunday and warm, and several buzzards in sight,” he explained, “I sent for a team and some men and had the cow removed beyond City limits and buried.” Bryan paid for the removal and issued officials a bill for \$3.²⁹ In the spring and summer of 1895, white residents in the Southwest notified authorities that “marauding cows”

²⁸ For this same dynamic occurring in the rest of the South, see Grantham *Southern Progressivism*, 10-34, 116-25; Link, *Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 70-85, 322; for the same dynamic in Virginia, see Raymond Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored: An Interpretation of the Progressive Impulse* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), 66-151.

²⁹ Malcolm W. Bryan, Roanoke, to Roanoke City Council, 23 Oct 1894, reprinted in Malcolm W. Bryan, III, “Humor – 1890s Variety,” TMs (1995), Malcolm W. Bryan Papers, Virginia Room, Roanoke City Public Library (cited hereafter as VR-RCPL).

had eaten shrubs and flowers in their front yards, “attacked” a child, and made sleep impossible by the constant clanging of their bells during the night. In the aftermath, the city’s police, understaffed and busy enough with human lawbreakers, waged a futile month-long campaign against wandering cows in the district.³⁰ Other short-lived crusades against unattended cattle also had little effect, and since cows watched by their owners or by shepherds were legal, it was common to see herds of cows being driven up and down city streets.³¹ Manure from the animals dotted the city, attracting swarms of flies and the ire of its well-to-do residents.

In the spring of 1902, hundreds of unsupervised cattle, owned mostly by working-class whites living in First, Fourth, and Fifth Wards or by African Americans in the Third Ward, were still roaming the town.³² Indeed, by then, one paper ran a daily tally of cows captured by a special unit of the police force jokingly referred to as the “Bovine United Order for the Protection of Private Grass and Shrubs.”³³ By the fall of 1902, middle and upper-class white residents living in the Southwest and in the even more elite West End, concerned about the danger wandering cows posed to small children and appalled at “the uncleanness of the animals,” instructed Blair Antrim, their city council representative, to get legislation passed prohibiting cattle in the Second Ward. Antrim, a thirty-three-year-old University of Virginia-trained lawyer, petitioned for the law, which would also limit cow ownership elsewhere in the city to two per household. Since he suspected correctly that those opposed to the ordinance would criticize it as class based, he argued in a letter to local papers that his request was not “class legislation,” but based entirely on

³⁰ *The Roanoke Daily Times*, 26 April; 14 May; 21 June; 14 Aug 1895.

³¹ Martha Tinsley Taylor, a resident of Campbell Avenue in the 1890s, recounted seeing “boys drive cows up the Avenues to the suburbs to graze each morning and back home again in the evenings.” See, “Reminiscences of Martha Tinsley Taylor,” in Sydney Taylor Alexander, *Elmwood of Roanoke* (Washington, DC: Privately Printed, 1958), 15.

³² See cattle count by ward published in *The Roanoke Times*, 14 Sept 1902. White residents of the first ward owned 254 cows; white residents of the fourth owned 148 cows; white residents of the fifth owned 188 cows; and black residents of the third owned 31 cows.

³³ *The Roanoke Times*, 12 June 1902.

the desire of his constituents. “Certain it is,” he told a reporter, “that the cow should be excluded from the business section of the city, and certain it is that any district or ward of a town has the right to ask for the vote of council against a nuisance which is being imposed upon them by other sections of the city.” Moreover, he explained, “one of the officials of the N&W railway company has been reported as saying that as long as Roanoke is so provincial as to allow cows to run at large, the present depot is sufficient for all needs.”³⁴

The editors of *Times* wholeheartedly endorsed Antrim’s legislation and argued that no other city the size of Roanoke permitted “a lot of stray cows to roam around at will, endowed with liberties which, if exercised by a citizen of the town, would result in confinement in the city jail.” They additionally claimed that the town’s free-ranging cattle were holding up construction of a more modern N&W depot and that ninety-seven local cases of typhoid were the result of persons “engaged in the dairy business in this city with a whole host of cows running through the town, half starved, eating from piles of manure and anything else that can be found, and the milk of the cows sold to our citizens.”³⁵ In a series of letters to the paper, councilman Antrim argued that the existing ordinance favored only the small fraction of Roanoke property holders who owned cows.³⁶ The situation, the *Times* observed, was “ridiculous.” “With all our boasted pride, our prosperity, our invitation to capital – with the record of being the third city in importance in the state,” its editors griped, “it can be said to our mortification that the cow runs at large and is often seen on the principal business thoroughfares of our city.”³⁷

The endorsement of local newspapers convinced Antrim to withdraw his original district-specific legislation and propose a bill banning wandering cattle citywide. Anyone opposed to the

³⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 10 Sept 1902.

³⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 11 Sept 1902.

³⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 14 Sept 1902.

³⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Sept 1902.

legislation, one Southwest resident argued in a letter to the paper, should “move on and not get in the way of the wheels of progress.”³⁸ Citizens opposed, however, stayed put and quickly organized a counter movement in support of the cow. Only a few days after Antrim introduced his bill, two hundred and fifty pro-cow men staged a rally in support of the city’s “working people” and their cattle. A petition from the group, sent to city council the following day, argued that banning cows would “make it practically impossible” for “working men” to supply their families with milk and butter, “in view of the present cost of living.” The *Times* editors, stunned by the petition, responded by complaining, “We fail to understand this disposition on the part of this class of our citizens, for there is no reason except the most gross inconsideration for the rights of others who own no cow and for the health and good name of our beautiful city, which these people seek to humiliate by putting it on a level with the smelliest country village.”³⁹ Antrim, in his printed response, claimed, “I have heard and read so much of late concerning the ‘poor man’s cow’ and the ‘cow of the widow and orphan,’ that I determined to make a thorough investigation in reference to these claims.” His subsequent research of real estate assessments, he contended, showed clearly that whites who owned cows were typically more well off financially than the average Roanoke resident. Antrim excluded black inhabitants who owned cows from the analysis, he explained, because “to this type of our citizenship a cow is a direct badge of theft.”⁴⁰

In a demonstration against the pro-cow forces, a group of several hundred prominent business leaders met to explain their opposition to wandering cattle. According to a reporter covering the meeting, L. E. Johnson, general manager of the N&W, suggested that Roanoke would “never have a new depot by his sanction as long as they allowed the town cows to commit depredations on all public property.” Edward Stone, president of Stone Printing & Manufacturing

³⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 Sept 1902.

³⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 24 Sept 1902.

⁴⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 28 Sept 1902.

Company, claimed that he had driven cattle as a boy “and would continue until he had driven them out of the city.” Doctor B. C. Keister, a local physician in attendance, certified that dozens of recent cases of typhoid among residents had come from “drinking impure milk from cows that run at large through the city and drink sewage water along the streets and eat garbage.” All the men gathered endorsed a resolution backing the Antrim bill. “We believe,” they explained, “that in a city of nearly thirty thousand people, village customs and village nuisances should be abated, and that the growth of the city should not be retarded by nuisances and filthy streets.”⁴¹

As debate over the cattle issue increased, residents flooded local papers with letters expressing their opinions on the bill. One cow owner, for example, complained that on his \$50 a month factory salary, a family cow was the only means of providing milk and butter for his eleven children. “It might be a good thing,” another reader responded, “to restrict the number of children a man with \$50 per month . . . should maintain.” Moreover, the writer argued, any man who needed a “scavenger cow’s milk” to survive ought to move back to the country: “Don’t try to hold the city back because you can’t go forward. This is a day of improvement and progress, and the cow must go back to the pastures and keep off the streets of the city.”⁴² A “number of lady subscribers” agreed, griping in a subsequent letter that “The eleven children recently alluded to in your columns would be better without any milk than with the milk of a cow fed in so unsanitary a manner.” Doctor T. H. Tonybee Wright, in a correction of Dr. B. C. Keister’s attempt to “delude the public at large with antiquated sophistry,” claimed that typhoid bacteria could not exist in milk drawn in a sanitary fashion.⁴³ Keister, in response, slammed Wright’s accusations as “unprofessional and uncalled for” as well as “unworthy a dignified reply from my pen.”⁴⁴

⁴¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 1 Oct 1902.

⁴² *The Roanoke Times*, 4 Oct 1902.

⁴³ *The Roanoke Times*, 9 Oct 1902.

⁴⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 11 Oct 1902.

In early October 1902, instead of voting on the bill and possibly incurring the wrath of constituents, members of the city council's ordinance committee put the measure on the November election ballot.⁴⁵ Roanoke's anti-cow business leaders staged another rally the following week. The bill, they argued, was in no way an attack on "poor people." The legislation, which permitted family ownership of two cows and allowed owners to herd their cattle along city streets into suburban grazing areas, was according to business boosters, intended to quell the problem of wandering cows and to protect residents from tainted milk and butter. "It is impossible," they insisted, "that cows living upon the refuse of the streets, upon manure piles, and eating other filthy foods, can give pure milk."⁴⁶ In the Fifth Ward, pro-cow forces held a counter rally and attacked the bill as class legislation. A cow's milk, one speaker argued, is not affected by diet.⁴⁷ At another demonstration sponsored by the "Fourth Ward Cow Club," Gustavus W. Crumpecker, a Fifth Ward councilor and vice president of the city council, blasted Antrim and his supporters. Crumpecker, according to a reporter present, argued that:

This was a young city, filled with hard-working people, not a rich man's town. It had in the past its troubles, booms, and building and loan associations. It had a hard struggle and was now trying to build up. It was not a town for people who wished to plant flower beds, to sit and watch them grow, with poodle dogs in their laps. Were Roanoke people to swap the cows of the city for flower beds and poodle dogs? Was the city for the poor people or the corporations, such as the Norfolk and Western and others?⁴⁸

Antrim and anti-cow forces, concerned that men like Crumpecker might galvanize opposition to the ordinance, funded anti-cattle clubs to get the vote out. Their clubs offered carriage rides to the polls, issued campaign literature, and paid for "general election expenses."

⁴⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 8 Oct 1902.

⁴⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 Oct 1902.

⁴⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Oct 1902.

⁴⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 25 Oct 1902. Crumpecker, a fifty-five-year-old native of Franklin County, was, like his nemesis Blair Antrim, a University of Virginia trained lawyer.

Business leaders such as N&W general manager L. E. Johnson, Stone Printing president Edward Stone, and N&W general counsel Lucian Cocke managed the effort, and hundreds of local businessmen and professionals donated a “considerable sum” to the crusade.⁴⁹ The “friends of the cow” also held a courthouse rally to fund get-out-the-vote clubs. It was their fear, a pro-cow spokesman explained, “that the anti-cow element would try unfair tactics at the polls to carry the ordinance.”⁵⁰ On Election Day, the editors of the *Times* claimed the “cow people” had lost support and that passage of the ordinance was certain. Victory, the paper observed, would mean “clean streets, beautiful shrubbery, the removal of unsightly fences, and generally the taking off our swaddling village garb.” Indeed, according to the *Times*, “even the cow owners will be pleased with the new order of things . . . and will thank the anti-cow men for licking them.”⁵¹

In the balloting that followed, however, those opposed to the ordinance won by a single vote, 954 to 953. Sixty-six percent of voters in the city’s predominately white, middle and upper-class First and Second Wards cast ballots in favor of the bill; 63 percent of voters in the mostly working-class Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards cast ballots against it. Disenfranchising most of the city’s black residents and a few hundred of its poor whites, most of whom would have likely voted against the bill, reduced the size of the pro-cow victory by at least several hundred ballots.⁵² In the aftermath, Virginia editors took delight in lampooning the “Magic City’s” cow debacle. In Richmond, *The News* reported that the “cow came under the string a winner in a canter and last night lowed victorious notes and chewed her cud with tranquil happiness; secure in the knowledge that for another year at least she will dominate the Roanoke landscape.”⁵³ In a story

⁴⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Oct 1902.

⁵⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 30 Oct 1902.

⁵¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 4 Nov 1902.

⁵² *The Roanoke Times*, 5 Nov 1902.

⁵³ *The Richmond News*, 5 Nov 1902, quoted in *The Roanoke Times*, 7 Nov 1902; see also *The Richmond Dispatch*, 5 Nov 1902, quoted in *ibid*.

captioned “Depot or Cows,” the editors of the *Newport News Times-Herald* joked that Roanoke “grew up so fast around the cow lot that it has never had the time to drive out its livestock.” The paper also pointed out that N&W president Frederick Kimball had been overheard complaining that a new depot he had planned for Roanoke would “not be put up until cows are kept off the streets.”⁵⁴

At the city council meeting that followed the vote, Blair Antrim demanded a recount and offered substantial proof that three Roanoke County men living just outside the city limits had cast ballots in opposition to the ordinance, meaning his bill had actually passed by a vote of 953 to 951. Fifth Ward councilman Gustavus Crumpecker immediately objected, insisted that “the people were sick and tired of hearing the cow discussed,” and convinced all but Antrim and two other council members to vote in favor of tabling the recount motion.⁵⁵ Although the cow issue appeared settled, nine months later, in August 1903, Antrim reintroduced the bill and secured a majority of council’s votes in favor of making the ordinance a law on January 1, 1904. The nine members who approved the legislation were primarily from the First and Second Wards; the six who voted against it were mainly from the Fourth and Fifth. The five councilmen absent that night were mainly from the Third, Fourth, and Fifth.⁵⁶ The move outraged hundreds of residents, many of whom expressed their wrath in local papers. “Cow,” a cattle owner from the Fourth Ward, for example, claimed that the nine councilmen who approved the ordinance “with shameless hands have struck a blow at the rights and liberties of the citizens of this city.”⁵⁷ Less than a week after the vote, over seven hundred cow owners held a mass meeting in a vacant lot downtown. Fifth Ward councilman Crumpecker, according to a reporter on the scene, told the

⁵⁴ *The Newport News Times-Herald*, quoted in *The Roanoke Times*, 27 Nov 1902; see also *The Norfolk Landmark*, quoted in *ibid*.

⁵⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 12 Nov 1902.

⁵⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 13 Aug 1903.

⁵⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 15 Aug 1903.

crowd that “he believed the people had been taken unfair advantage of, and that the expressed opinion of the people of Roanoke had been trampled upon.” Those gathered unanimously endorsed a resolution condemning the “action of council in the most positive and emphatic terms, and do proclaim that such action is in violation of faith; that it is undemocratic and strikes at the very tap root of civic principles and would, if persisted in, destroy the foundation of all civil government.”⁵⁸

The following day, Roanoke’s mayor, Joel H. Cutchin, vetoed the anti-cow ordinance and suggested holding another election to settle the matter. “Captain” Cutchin, a fifty-seven-year-old Confederate veteran who moved to town in 1889 to work for a land agency, had served on city council before being elected mayor in 1902. He contended that although voters might now endorse the law, they had not during the first vote. “I am unwilling,” he explained, “to sit in judgment as an arbitrator in this matter.”⁵⁹ Blair Antrim, foiled once again in getting his ordinance turned into law, blasted Cutchin in a letter to the *Times*. Putting the ordinance to a popular vote, he argued, had been a grave error that not only engendered much bitterness but also made the city “the butt of ridicule and the subject of satire by the press all over the country.” Another ballot, according to him, might remedy the situation but would again increase local tensions and “further embarrass the situation.”⁶⁰ The day after Cutchin’s veto, a thousand pro-cow residents, furious at Antrim and the other eight councilmen who backed him, gathered on Market Square to demand they immediately resign. According to a *Times* correspondent, Reverend D. P. Chockley, an ardent cow supporter from the Third Ward, told the cheering crowd:

It was in his opinion a poor people’s fight, the issue not being a cow issue but the deeper question of equal rights for all. He denounced such of the wealthy class in the city whom he stated had less interest in the welfare of Roanoke, and less right to make its laws than

⁵⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 18 Aug 1903.

⁵⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 Aug 1903.

⁶⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 20 Aug 1903.

the sons of toil. The citizen must not be measured by the size of his check book or the flowers in her front yard.⁶¹

Antrim, nevertheless, refused to back down. Indeed, at the next meeting of city council he accused Mayor Cutchin of initially backing the ordinance and then vetoing it to position himself for a re-election campaign in the spring of 1904. “Judas Iscariot when he betrayed the Lord,” Antrim lashed out, “had enough self respect to go off and hang himself, whereas the mayor of this city when he vetoed the cow ordinance just went off to Washington.” A subsequent attempt by Antrim to override Cutchin’s veto lost ten votes to six. Three of the nine councilmen who initially approved the measure were absent; one who voted against it was absent; and the five who missed the initial vote on the ordinance all lined up behind Cutchin.⁶² Although again the issue appeared settled, the city’s pro-cow forces afterwards organized the “Independent Order of Freemen” as a political association that would “endeavor to elect men to council who favor the cows running at large in the city streets.”⁶³

The city’s voters, as stipulated in Virginia’s 1902 constitution, elected an entirely new, bi-cameral council in the spring of 1904. They re-elected Joel Cutchin, who defeated pro-cow councilman Gustavus Crumpecker in city’s Democratic primary, and they filled the town’s newly created Common Council and Board of Aldermen with representatives from four redistricted wards. In July 1904, at a meeting of the old council, which remained in control until September, Blair Antrim again introduced his cow ordinance. By then, the N&W had made it formally known that if Roanoke banned cows from its streets, the company would immediately construct a modern, \$100,000 depot to replace the one it built in 1882. As a result, the measure passed twelve votes to eight, effective January 1, 1905. Two of the bill’s former opponents, including one who

⁶¹ *The Roanoke Times*, Aug 20 1903.

⁶² *The Roanoke Times*, 9 Sept 1903.

⁶³ *The Roanoke Times*, 9 Oct 1903.

had just lost his seat in the spring elections, this time endorsed the ordinance. Gustavus Crumpecker, who was annoyed about losing to Cutchin in the primary, skipped that vote along with most council meetings after that.⁶⁴ Although the mayor again strenuously objected to the council's actions, he conceded that in September the new council would also pass the bill, use the same date of effect, and likely override his veto. Rather than leave cow owners in "a continual state of uncertainty as to what will be done," Cutchin let the ordinance stand, according to him, in order to give cattle owners the maximum time possible to decide the fate of their cows. "I am anxious," he explained to a reporter, "that our people should suffer as little from changed conditions as possible."⁶⁵

Buoyed by the victory, the following month, Blair Antrim and his supporters passed "An Ordinance to Create the Office of Inspector of Milk and Food Supplies." The bill outlawed the sale of milk and foodstuffs in Roanoke without a permit granted by a newly appointed dairy and food inspector; made illegal the sale of milk and milk products from cows fed "swill" or "any other substance of an unwholesome nature," and gave authorities the right to impound and destroy "unwholesome" dairy products, meat, fruit, and vegetables and fine any person attempting to sell such products.⁶⁶ Mayor Cutchin, citing the complexity of the ordinance and the "great hardship" it would impose on residents, promptly vetoed the law. "Once more," the editors of the *Times* gripped, "the mayor has seen fit to use his official weapon and for the time being he has struck down one of the most wholesome and beneficial measures exacted by council in years."⁶⁷ At the next council meeting, after Antrim gave a lecture on the "fallacy" of Cutchin's

⁶⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 6 July 1904.

⁶⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 15, 16 July 1904 (quote from 16).

⁶⁶ See reprint of the ordinance in *The Roanoke Times*, 25 Aug 1904.

⁶⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 18 Aug 1904.

statements, the body overrode the mayor's veto. As a result, the milk and food ordinance went into effect sixty-days later.⁶⁸

In the meantime, several hundred members of the "Independent Order of Freeman" held a Market Square rally to chastise the old city council and mayor for banning wandering cattle. The organization hired two prominent local lawyers to file motions against the new law once the incoming Common Council and Board of Aldermen were in place.⁶⁹ At another protest at Market Square a couple weeks later, after council passed the milk and food ordinance, spokesmen for the Order blasted the city's elected officials. Robert Shilling, a working-class resident called to the platform to give an impromptu speech, stated that the cow was the "main spoke in his family," that "laboring people in Roanoke were getting the worst of it," and that if workers "didn't stand up for their rights, they would not be allowed to live." Another speaker claimed that the new milk inspector "would have to be paid by the poor people," that local dairies "were glad to see such an ordinance" since it gave them a monopoly on the town's milk and butter supply, and that it "appeared to him that many of the councilors were elected by the people for the benefit of the corporation." Indeed, according to another spokesman, the local dairy trust had spent \$250 buying enough votes to ensure the councilmen endorsed the milk measure.⁷⁰

Although several dozen wandering cows had been impounded after the cattle ordinance went into effect in January 1905, overall, the *Times* reported, "the cows have made themselves scarce."⁷¹ Members of the city's new Common Council elected from pro-cow districts, nevertheless, introduced several bills to repeal the cow law and overturn the milk and food inspector ordinance. Their motions, however, were promptly buried in committees or tabled, and

⁶⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 20 Aug 1904.

⁶⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Aug 1904.

⁷⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 24 Aug 1904.

⁷¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 March 1905.

eventually they gave up the fight.⁷² Work on the new N&W depot had begun soon after the cow ordinance passed. Indeed, by the time it went into effect in January 1905, the new station, located on the north side of the tracks, below the Hotel Roanoke, was already partially completed and demolition of the original Queen Anne style depot, situated precariously between numerous sets of railroad tracks, was under way. The new station, colonial in design with four massive, limestone columns supporting its portico, ended up costing \$125,000 to complete by the time it opened in June 1905.⁷³

Although the entire white community had backed the “reform” crusade to disenfranchise and marginalize black residents, on the cow issue, it fractured by class. Businessmen, worried about the image wandering cattle presented to outsiders, stood on one side; migrants from the countryside, most of whom used to cattle as a means of supplementing their diet with inexpensive dairy products, stood on the other. On the surface, the fight was a struggle for the aesthetic direction of Roanoke – would the town permit cattle to run at large and look like a “country village,” or would it ban them and embrace the appearance of a modern municipality? Having put up with the “humiliation” of living with wandering cattle since the city’s inception, business leaders and “progressive” politicians chose the latter. Cow owners, most of whom were far less worried about how Roanoke looked, understood the issue solely in class terms. The city’s poor whites, however, were simply no match for the undemocratic forces of modernity and its agents – N&W president Johnson, Edward Stone, and hundreds of white businessmen – and as a result, the cow, having roamed the city’s streets since 1882, was relegated to pastures outside the city.

The city’s forces of “morality” were much more interested in enacting prohibition than disfranchising blacks or banning cattle, and as a result, they stood largely on the sidelines during

⁷² *The Roanoke Times*, 12 Jan 1905.

⁷³ *The Roanoke Times*, 31 March; 30 June 1905.

those “reforms.” To them, Roanoke’s longstanding reputation as a debauched, “wide-open” town, where saloons and brothels outnumbered churches and schools, was a much more significant problem. Local ministers and devout Christians were in the vanguard of the city’s prohibition crusade but it had had widespread support from the wives and daughters of working-class males. The city’s business leaders, the men responsible for disfranchising African Americans and banning the cow, were for the most part opposed to prohibition. Black voters, some of whom helped push local option to a short-lived victory in 1893, lost their right to vote in the fall of 1902, and thus played hardly any role in the 1903 prohibition debate.

William Campbell, longtime pastor of the city’s First Presbyterian Church and veteran of numerous prohibition battles in the 1890s, led the early twentieth-century fight to protect residents from “the baneful influence of the saloon.”⁷⁴ In February 1902, when pastors from ten local churches organized a local affiliate of the Virginia Anti-Saloon League, they quickly appointed Campbell chairman. The Roanoke Anti-Saloon League (RASL), according to Campbell, was part of a burgeoning statewide effort to enact prohibition throughout Virginia. “The temperance forces hereto operating independently,” he argued, “are now crystallizing into one great organization.”⁷⁵ At the time, however, no Virginia cities had enacted prohibition and only fifteen of the state’s one hundred counties had voted themselves “dry” through local option ballots.⁷⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, longtime arbiter of local “progressive reforms,” did not herald the emergence of the RASL, nor did it endorse prohibition. Instead, its editors encouraged “self-control” and “self-possession” as the best means of curbing alcohol abuse.⁷⁷ Membership in the RASL, nevertheless, grew over the following months, and in the of spring 1903, the group scored

⁷⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 3 April 1900.

⁷⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 5 Feb 1902.

⁷⁶ Virginia Anti-Saloon League, *Temperance Handbook of Virginia* (Richmond: Anti-Saloon League of Virginia, 1910), 17.

⁷⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 16 Feb 1902.

its first victory by convincing Roanoke's city council to ban women from local saloons.⁷⁸ At a Pentecostal revival the following month, hundreds of residents turned out to hear a sermon on "The Saloon as God Sees It." "We have declared war against the liquor traffic in the city of Roanoke," one Pentecostal pastor informed them, "and will fight to the bitter end." The citizens present responded with songs, "bursts of applause," and "waving of handkerchiefs." In the aftermath of the rally, the RASL gained even more supporters.⁷⁹

In September 1903, members of the RASL elected local evangelist and public school superintendent Tipton Tinsely Fishburn as chairman of the organization. Fishburn, president of Roanoke's National Exchange Bank and uncle of local business booster J. B. Fishburn, called immediately for a local option campaign. He and the other RASL leaders agreed unanimously to "enlist" local women in the prohibition crusade.⁸⁰ By late November 1903, the RASL had enough signatures to successfully schedule a local option vote for December 31. "It is understood that from now on," the *Times* reported, "a most aggressive campaign will be waged by the dries in the ways of mass meetings in various sections of the city, and from the pulpits."⁸¹ In an address to voters published a few days later, the RASL encouraged voters to consider the "the lives and souls of men and the blood and tears of helpless women and children whom the saloon robs of all that enters into life to make it desirable."⁸²

Those opposed to local prohibition met for the first time only weeks before the vote. According to a *Times* reporter at their rally, the crowd of several hundred citizens, composed

⁷⁸ For membership increases, see *The Roanoke Times*, 11, 21 March 1902; for law against women in saloons, see *ibid.*, 20, 26 May 1903.

⁷⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 14 June 1903.

⁸⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 30 Sept 1903; biographical information on Fishburn is from History Committee, First Baptist Church of Roanoke, *An Adventure in Faith* (Roanoke: First Baptist Church, 1955), 47-50.

⁸¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Nov; 2 Dec 1903 (quote is from 22 Nov).

⁸² *The Roanoke Times*, 6 Dec 1903.

mainly of businessmen, demonstrated quite vividly “how thoroughly the business sentiment has been aroused by the proposed measure.” Moreover, the correspondent observed, the anti-local option supporters came from a wide spectrum of political and civic affiliations, including “cow men and anti-cow men” as well as “citizens who were divided on other questions of more or less importance touching on the city’s welfare.” Those present elected J. Randolph Bryan, the city’s mayor from 1900 to 1902 and its current police justice, president of the Citizens’ Anti-Local Option Club, and appointed dozens of prominent businessmen and politicians, including several city council members, to other leadership posts. Former state senator and current chief counsel of the N&W J. Allen Watts, in an address to the Club, argued that prohibition would be “inimical to the best interests of Roanoke’s growth and prosperity” as well as a disaster for its workers, who would have to “slink into obscure alleyways and live like a hunted being” in order to enjoy a beer after a hard day’s toil.⁸³

At a meeting of the Roanoke Anti-Saloon League that same night, William Campbell led a sparsely attended rally in favor of prohibition. The featured speaker, Theodore Low, an N&W real estate agent, told those gathered to “go to the brothels or the gilded saloon and you will find men, young and old, going to hell.” Money wasted by workingmen on whores and whiskey, he fumed, had practically starved their wives and children. Local minister C. M. Hawkins, who followed Low, suggested that anyone who cast a ballot in favor of the saloon was endorsing insanity, suicide, prostitution, pauperism, widows, and orphans. Before concluding, several pastors in attendance from dry counties in the region rose and volunteered to do what they could to aid the cause of the RASL. Although the small turnout disappointed William Campbell, he promised those who had shown up that before the campaign ended, no building in Roanoke would be large enough to host their meetings.⁸⁴

⁸³ *The Roanoke Times*, 8 Dec 1903.

⁸⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 8 Dec 1903.

A week before the vote, the Citizens' Anti-Local Option Club published its charter and principles in all local papers. The Club, its secretary, local business booster Edward Boyle Jacobs explained, was "wholly composed of business men and citizens of Roanoke who are not directly or indirectly interested in or connected to the Liquor traffic." The question, the group argued, was not one of morality on one side and immorality on the other, but one of pragmatism and temperance. Prohibition, according to the Club, would turn Roanoke's "unusually temperate, industrious, law-abiding people" into criminals, forced to fulfill their desire to drink in "unlicensed secret dives" that promoted "disorder" and intemperance. The law, the organization further argued, was simply unenforceable. Moreover, municipal revenue from taxes on alcohol and saloon licenses would disappear. "We believe," members concluded, "the business interests of city would be injured by a Prohibitory law, and no compensating good accomplished."⁸⁵

Roanoke Anti-Saloon League president Tipton T. Fishburn, in a rejoinder to the Citizens' Anti-Local Option Club statement, demanded proof and facts to support its "outrageous" arguments. "We covet," he told a reporter, "this opportunity to turn all the light possible on the question."⁸⁶ In a written response, published in the pro-prohibition (Roanoke) *Evening News*, the RASL disputed every issue raised by the Anti-Local Option Club. "If we should not have local option because the law is now and then violated," the League asked, "then why have any law that is in some places now and then violated?" By this logic, the RASL argued, citizens should rescind the ban on Sunday alcohol sales since residents occasionally violated it. "Any one with a grain of intelligence," it contended, "knows that this law, though broken, prevents saloon men from turning Sunday into our worst day of drunkenness and disorder as many men while idle would spend the day in debauchery." Finally, the League asserted, profits from local bars did little at all to supplement municipal income, especially when weighted against the cost of policing

⁸⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 20 Dec 1903; in 1904, E. B. Jacobs helped found the Roanoke Chamber of Commerce. He served as its secretary until 1910.

⁸⁶ *The Roanoke Times* 22 Dec 1903.

drunkards, but instead added to the ill-gotten gains of saloonkeepers, brewers, and distillers. In an ironic twist of fate (or by hand of a cynical typesetter), an ad for “pure apple brandy at \$2 per gallon” accompanied the RASL retort.⁸⁷

Thousands of residents turned out for the final rallies held by the Anti-Local Option Club and the RASL. At the “wets’” last convention, held at the prestigious Academy of Music, local judges, business leaders, and politicians encouraged the hundreds of men present to spend Election Day encouraging their fellow citizens to defeat prohibition. The “drys” packed the assembly hall of the municipal building to hear an address by the president of the Virginia Anti-Saloon League, who claimed that “the home, the church, and the school” were “powerful moral forces arrayed against the traffic, and will in the end compass its overthrow.”⁸⁸ On Election Day, women and children affiliated with the RASL paraded in front of polling places with banners reading: “Vote As God Would Have You”; “Vote In The Interest of Women”; “The Saloon Can Not Be Run Without Boys”; and “The Women Stood By the Men For Four Long Years During The War – Will You Stand By Us For Just One Day?” Their efforts and the campaign by the RASL, however, resulted in the worst defeat of prohibition in the city’s history, with only 31 percent of the 2,664 ballots cast favoring a ban on the sale of alcohol.⁸⁹

The power of local businessmen, saloon owners, brewers and distillers, along with the absence of any significant black vote, doomed that prohibition campaign but did not end the fight by the forces of “morality.” The resounding defeat, however, did quiet prohibitionists for the following four years. In the meantime, the RASL brought in state and national Anti-Saloon

⁸⁷ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, clipping dated December in William Creighton Campbell Papers, History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia; although the article provides no date beyond December, its author gives December 31 as the day of the local option election, which means the paper is from December 1903, the only year Roanoke held a prohibition vote on New Year’s Eve.

⁸⁸ Both rallies in *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Dec 1903.

⁸⁹ For official vote of 1,823 opposed to prohibition, 841 in favor of prohibition, see, *The Roanoke Times*, 1 Jan 1905.

League leaders and sought tangential measures to restrain bar business in the city. In the spring of 1906, for example, the League presented city council with a petition signed by four hundred citizens asking that saloons be closed at 10:00 PM rather than midnight, “in the interest of the good morals of the city and the welfare of youth.” Council, however, buried the request in its ordinance committee and failed to vote on the measure.⁹⁰ Although from 1902 to 1908 the RASL accomplished very little, in the state, the Virginia Anti-Saloon League had won a series of local option victories. Indeed, by 1908, “drys” had triumphed in 66 of the state’s 100 counties, 141 of its 162 towns, 9 of its 19 cities, and had eliminated 1,016 of Virginia’s 1,718 saloons as well as 573 of its 641 distilleries. Roanoke County and four of the six counties bordering Roanoke City had all enacted prohibition, as had all towns and cities in Southwest Virginia except Bristol.⁹¹

In the summer of 1908, after numerous statewide prohibition victories, the RASL gathered enough signatures on a petition to get a local option vote scheduled for the end of December. By fall, Virginia Anti-Saloon League members had elected William Campbell as a vice president and the organization had begun to redirect its focus on the Old Dominion’s “wet” cities.⁹² In Roanoke, the RASL, with guidance from the state League, enlisted thousands of women in its crusade. Indeed, before the election, 2,489 female residents signed a petition begging their brothers, sons, husbands and fathers to vote in favor of prohibition. The petition, published in pamphlet form by the League under the title *We Have No Protectors But You*, let local males know that the women who signed it believed that a ballot cast in favor of saloons was “a vote against our homes and the future of our boys.” “Now that the warfare is on against the

⁹⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 11 April 1906; for examples of Anti-Saloon League speakers, see address by president of Virginia ASL and address by national ASL representative in *The Roanoke Times*, 12 July 1905.

⁹¹ VASL, *Temperance Handbook*, 17-19; Allen W. Moger, *Virginia: From Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), 297-305.

⁹² VASL, *Temperance Handbook*, 4; Moger, *Virginia: From Bourbonism to Byrd*, 297-305.

Saloon,” the women complained, “our hearts are stirred, but our hands are tied. We can not vote; we can not protect ourselves.” Illustrations accompanying the text and lists of names showed “drinkers” pouring \$1,200,000 into their “appetite” for “the liquor traffic” of which “Mrs. Roanoke” received \$36,000 in taxes while a scruffy looking bartender pulled away a barrel containing \$1,164,000. Elsewhere on its pages, text that appeared beside a photo of two bright, young lads proclaimed: “Pay Your Taxes With Money And Not With Boys.” Like prohibitionists on the national level, the RASL sought to portray local drinkers not as morally backward but as corrupted by their “appetite” for sensual pleasures. It likewise cast saloonkeepers as unrestrained in their “avarice” for profits from whiskey, portrayed local women as the morally superior victims of alcohol, and cast “our boys” as the price paid for debauchery.⁹³

Roanoke’s saloon owners, sensing the growing danger, responded by brokering a deal with the city’s Business Men’s League – an unofficial branch of the Chamber of Commerce – that placed new restrictions on local bars. According to the executives involved, they opposed prohibition because “prohibitive laws will prove to be impractical and abortive as well as detrimental to the moral and material interests of our city.” Edward L. Stone, president of Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company, brandy and “moonshine” aficionado, and a leader of the Business Men’s League, assisted the liquor dealers in composing the agreement. Stone, like the other businessmen in the group, believed enacting prohibition would spell economic ruin not only by driving local saloons, distilleries and the Virginia Brewing Company out of business, but also by consuming tax dollars to pay for enforcement and making the city a far less attractive place to live. He also sensed real potential for a “dry” victory, complaining to a Kentucky distillery that it

⁹³ Roanoke Anti-Saloon League, *To The Voters of Roanoke / Brothers, Sons, Husbands, Fathers / We Have No Protectors But You* (Roanoke: Union Printing & Mfg. Co., 1908), in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 276, 1908 Anti-Saloon League file, Manuscripts Department, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville; for national prohibitionists’ consistent use of “appetite,” “avarice,” women, and boys in their campaign literature, see Gaines Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2002), 2-5, 79-81.

appeared that “the ‘drought’ might extend to this section.”⁹⁴ The contract Stone and the other businessmen negotiated with the city’s saloon owners, they argued, showed clearly that bar owners understood that “the Retail liquor business should be conducted upon the highest plane of respectability and strict obedience to law and good morals.” The city’s saloonkeepers, the contract proclaimed, had agreed to “take the business out of the mire of politics, eliminate disreputable and disorderly places and persons from the business, and place it upon the highest standard of a legitimate, law-abiding business.” As a result, the two groups agreed that on January 1, 1909, all saloons would pay a \$1,000 annual fee, close at 10:00 PM, prohibit treating, ban credit, have no secret entrances, eliminate “dives and objectionable places, weed out “unfit and objectionable” barkeepers, and prohibit gambling. Having brokered the deal, the businessmen involved pledged to do all in their power to defeat local option and have city council adopt the laws stipulated in their contract.⁹⁵

In the election, however, the prohibitionists increased their 1903 vote by 60 percent and won the local option ballot by a count of 1,335 to 1,045, meaning that in ninety days Roanoke would be a “dry” city. The “wets,” who lost 43 percent of their 1903 votes, immediately filed an injunction against the election results. Before a court ruled on the case, Mayor Joel Cutchin, who had made his anti-prohibition views known before the election, responded to complaints by the “drys” about not strictly enforcing all local ordinances by ordering the Roanoke police to do just

⁹⁴ Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to Small-Grain Distilling, Louisville, KN. 12 Nov 1908, in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 444, 1909-1910 Small Grain Distilling Co. file. Stone wrote to the firm to request proof that their whiskey was really fourteen years old, noting that he “bought some so-called fourteen year old apple brandy up in the mountains a short time ago.” Although Stone thought the brandy was “mighty fine, and perhaps ‘moon-shine,’” because he had heard about “the various ‘stunts’ the folks do to age whiskey,” he was not sure it was actually fourteen years old.

⁹⁵ “Agreement – between the undersigned Liquor dealers of the City of Roanoke, Va., in the one part, and the Business Men’s League of the City of Roanoke of the other part,” in Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 276, 1908 Anti-Saloon League file. Stone’s involvement is evident from his notes and instructions on attached sheets of paper as well as by the inclusion of the contract in his personal files.

that. As a result, the force issued hundreds of citations for breaking sidewalk regulations, awning and sign rules, Sunday closing laws, and anti-prostitution codes. "Mayor Cutchin," N&W clerk Frank G. Payne noted in his diary that January, "has put on the lid and closed the shoe shines, cigar stores &c. for Sunday and will drive out the bad women." On March 30, however, a local judge declared the election void because it had not been properly advertised and because pollsters had accepted illegal ballots as well as disregarded legal votes. In the aftermath, Roanoke's city council adopted several of the measures proposed by saloon owners and Business Men's League, including raising the license fee to \$1,000 per year and ordering all bars to close at 10:00 PM.⁹⁶

In 1908 and 1909, other counties and towns near Roanoke enacted prohibition, and as a result, dozens of displaced bar owners and distillers relocated to the city. The Roanoke Anti-Saloon League, furious about having their apparent victory overturned, petitioned successfully to schedule yet another local option vote for September 1909. By then, however, the "wets," awakened by their defeat in late 1908, redoubled their efforts to get out the vote. On Election Day, the anti-prohibition forces increased their vote 57 percent from ten months earlier. Though the "drys" increased their total vote by 17 percent as well, the "wets" won the ballot 1,644 to 1,575.⁹⁷ After the disappointing defeat, the RASL joined the Virginia Anti-Saloon League (VASL) in focusing solely on enacting statewide prohibition as the ultimate means of "drying up" Roanoke. In 1910, 1911, and 1912, the RASL brought in a bevy of VASL leaders to address residents, and the ardently prohibitionist (Roanoke) *Evening World* did all it could to publicize the Anti-Saloon League's opinions and to denigrate the city's saloon trade. In the fall of 1911, for example, the paper put fiery speeches by the president and vice president of VASL on its front page. Citing statistics offered by him, the paper claimed that 85 percent of criminals in Virginia

⁹⁶ Raymond P. Barnes, *A History of Roanoke* (Radford, VA: Commonwealth Press, 1968), 454-55, 457-58; Frank Gravely Payne Diary, 1904-1960, years 1904-1910 excerpted in Neal Payne, "How a Railway Clerk Saw the New Century," *Journal of the Roanoke Valley Historical Society* 11, no. 2 (1982): 45.

⁹⁷ Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 458, 465.

were “saloon made,” that 47 percent of the state’s paupers were “saloon made,” and that 35 percent of the Old Dominion’s mentally-ill population “were made insane by the saloon.” The cost to taxpayers: \$798,774.⁹⁸

In 1912, the Virginia House of Delegates passed an “Enabling Bill” to put statewide prohibition to a vote. Back in Roanoke, *The Evening World*, already furious that the city’s delegate voted against that bill, argued that state senator John Hart, who represented the city along with Roanoke and Montgomery Counties, had no choice but to endorse the legislation since both counties were “dry” and close to 1,600 Roanoke City residents had voted in favor of prohibition in 1909.⁹⁹ Hart, nevertheless, voted against the bill along with twenty-two of the senate’s other thirty-eight members. Defeat of the “Enabling Act,” the editor of the *World* argued, had only been possible because Hart and his fellow senators had been elected “directly or indirectly by the liquor dealers” and had followed the “dictates of their masters.”¹⁰⁰ The forces behind prohibition lost that battle, but they won the war in early 1914, when Virginians overwhelmingly endorsed a statewide ban on alcohol. As a result, Roanoke, a persistent thorn in the side of the RASL and VASL, went “dry” along with the rest of the state on November 2, 1916.¹⁰¹

Prohibition, like the cow issue, fractured the white community. This time, however, poor whites, working classes, and businessmen coalesced against local option while ministers, the forces of “morality,” and women stood in favor of it. Unlike most “progressive reformers,” Roanoke’s business leaders were more concerned about the ways prohibition might impede

⁹⁸ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 27 Nov 1911.

⁹⁹ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 27 Feb 1912.

¹⁰⁰ Hart’s vote against the bill is from *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 4 March 1912; the defeat of the bill is from Moger, *Virginia: From Bourbonism to Byrd*, 306-307; editorial is from *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 5 March 1912.

¹⁰¹ Moger, *Virginia: From Bourbonism to Byrd*, 308-313; Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 536.

economic development than they were about instilling social controls on residents.¹⁰² As a result, the same pro-cow men who had previously accused the city's business leaders of engaging in class warfare against them, greeted them as allies in the battle to protect the saloon. Indeed, without the support of executives, it is entirely likely that the anti-prohibition movement would have suffered a quick and fatal defeat. Although women joined the prohibitionists in their fight to enact prohibition, they not only lacked the vote, their working-class origins and lack of social prestige severely limited their "political" impact on the issue.

Middle and upper-class women, the wives of the businessmen against prohibition, were largely silent on that issue. While they may have resented the saloon, their husbands were not the principal patrons nor were they the men "wasting" their paychecks on whiskey and beer. To these women, prohibition seemed less important than "protecting" or "tidying" the "home." Like other "progressive" women, they deemed "domestic" issues as within the female sphere of influence and used a definition of "home" that encompassed schools, playgrounds, libraries, pure milk and food, health regulations, city beautification, and eventually censorship. Although like their husbands, Roanoke's female reformers also held tightly to a belief in the New South creed, they believed that "tidying" the city and protecting its children were as vitally as important to economic modernization as investments from outsiders.

Much of their concern stemmed from Roanoke's abysmal appearance, lack of adequate infrastructure, and widespread reputation as disease ridden. Throughout the 1880s, 1890s, and early 1900s, the city's middle and upper-class citizens and newspaper editors had complained loudly about the poor appearance of the city and the various illnesses caused by its improper sanitation. Many of them placed the blame squarely on rural migrants or African Americans who refused to conform to "proper" urban hygienic measures. "There are odors arising in certain parts

¹⁰² Grantham, *Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, 160-76.

of the city,” the *Times* observed, “that show conclusively that outhouses are being neglected.”¹⁰³ Roanoke, the paper’s editors argued, had been blessed with natural beauty in the form of elevation, drainage, mountain air, and fresh water springs, but had, through the neglect of some inhabitants, been rendered unattractive and unhealthy. As a result, they suggested, the city had lost investors along with new residents: “It ‘pays’ to keep a city neat and clean and beautiful – not only from the standpoint of general health but because thereby a most seductive and wholesome advertisement is made to the world of its attractions and advantages.”¹⁰⁴ The “untidiness” and resultant unhealthiness of the town was also embarrassing to middle and upper-class residents. They blamed less sophisticated citizens for much of the mess, but also scored city officials for neglecting to remedy infrastructure difficulties. Most of the town’s streets were poorly macadamized or dirt, its 1892 sewer system was inadequate, and many of its wooden sidewalks were rotten or dilapidated. Concerned citizens, according to the *Times*, had even placed a sign in front of a “swamp” on Campbell Avenue downtown that read “Prepare to meet thy God.” The paper demanded something be done by officials to at least “screen it from the view of visitors.”¹⁰⁵

In July 1903, Mayor Joel Cutchin, having been besieged by a non-stop tide of complaints, called for the formation of a female-led “Civic Improvement League” to “tidy up” the city. “Nearly every progressive city,” he told council that summer, “has one or more civic improvement societies in which the ladies are interested. The object being to beautify their respective cities.”¹⁰⁶ Cutchin had high hopes that such a group would supervise a spectrum of “reforms” he characterized as instigating municipal cleanliness, creating parks, and planting shade trees. Besides being “an agent of beautifying the city,” he claimed that such an organization

¹⁰³ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 Aug 1900.

¹⁰⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 1 March 1904.

¹⁰⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 10 Aug 1905.

¹⁰⁶ See Cutchin’s address to council in Roanoke City Council Minutes, 7 July 1903, Clerk’s Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building.

would also “be an important factor for the increase of healthfulness and decrease of sickness and death among the people.”¹⁰⁷

Two years later, after pleading again for local women to take charge of the issue by forming a “Municipal Betterment League,” Cutchin asked freeholders to approve \$400,000 in bonds to improve sewers, streets and sidewalks. An overwhelming endorsement, he told voters, would “show all the world that Roanoke as a municipality is waking up and putting on city methods.” In the subsequent election, all three issues received a hearty approval.¹⁰⁸ Early the following year, when a female-led civic improvement club failed to appear, several dozen businessmen and professionals met and formed the Civic Betterment League of Roanoke (CBLR). Its goals, the club explained, were to give “patriotic” citizens a means to aid city authorities in “execution of the city’s laws and ordinances,” “to support the forces of good against the forces of evil,” to ensure that municipal funds were spent “wisely,” and “to further the growth of wealth.” It invited white males over twenty-one who endorsed its platform to enlist; most of its members, however, were middle-aged businessmen. Although the organization united many of the city’s prohibition and anti-prohibition leaders, with men such as Theodore Low, William Campbell, and Edward L. Stone all joining, few, if any, pro-cow men supported the group.¹⁰⁹

In a series of letters written under the pseudonym “CIVIC,” an anonymous member of the Civic Betterment League claimed that Roanoke’s mayor and councilmen were too “interested” in political gain or graft to improve the town. He also argued that the CBLR needed an auxiliary of “progressive women” to enlighten the city authorities, all of whom were “cold, practical men without a thought of taste or beauty in their make up.” Indeed, “CIVIC” suggested that because Roanoke lacked an excess of men of wealth and leisure “to look after such things,”

¹⁰⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 22, 23 Sept 1905.

¹⁰⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 30 Nov; 13 Dec 1905 (quote from 30 Nov).

¹⁰⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 22, 24 March 1906.

its beautification crusade had to be led by women.¹¹⁰ At the League's second meeting, several members lambasted elected officials for their failure to carry out infrastructure improvements or properly enforce ordinances and laws. Mayor Cutchin, who attended the session because of his "deep interest in municipal welfare," found himself "in the wrong pew" but sat through much of the criticism before he responded. When he did, according to a reporter present, "it had about the same effect as a bombshell thrown into the midst of the meeting." If the Civic Betterment League was out to get him, he shouted at those gathered, then it should inform him and tender its charges in the courts. He was not an idiot, he yelled, and understood that the "hidden purpose" of the association was to impeach him. Roanoke's residents, he fumed, "would understand the object of the whole movement" and promptly rebuke it.¹¹¹

In the aftermath of Cutchin's charges, the Civic Betterment League of Roanoke lost much of its public support. Many of the city's middle and upper-class women, especially those who had worked to fund a public hospital or staffed charitable organizations, jumped immediately into the fray. When they did, however, they did so at first only in response to child welfare issues, staying clearly inside the spectrum of what they and other "progressive women" considered the female sphere of expertise. In early April 1906, for example, dozens of "public spirited women" interested in the welfare of schoolchildren organized an Educational League. During the same month, most of them also insisted that Roanoke officials hire a milk inspector to enforce its 1904 milk and pure food ordinance.¹¹² Almost all the women calling for these reforms had attended a lecture a couple weeks earlier on the "Physical, Mental, and Moral Hygiene of the School" given by local physician Leigh Buckner. Roanoke's severely overcrowded public schools, which had a student to teacher ratio of fifty-eight to one, were according to Buckner, little more than

¹¹⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 22, 23 March 1906.

¹¹¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 24 March 1906.

¹¹² *The Roanoke Times*, 1 April 1906.

tuberculosis and typhoid fever incubators: they lacked proper ventilation, provided water out of a common bucket, were poorly lighted, and had “mud holes” for playgrounds. The results, Buckner argued, were children with “a lowered vitality, a weakened constitution, a system ready to furnish an excellent culture medium for the myriads of noxious germs that swarm in these unsanitary conditions.”¹¹³

Although the calls for education and milk reforms moved simultaneously along the same track, the Educational League had the earliest success. After women in the League inspected the city’s schools and found a litany of sanitary problems that rendered them a danger, the group circulated a petition to “earnestly demand” that the city council double its \$25,000 school improvement appropriation. Before turning in their petition, Mrs. Lucian Cocke, president of the Educational League, wife of N&W lawyer Lucian Cocke, and mother or step-mother of their six children, advised all members to “lay siege to the husbands, brothers and fathers and urge them to use their influence with members of council.”¹¹⁴ At the League’s next meeting, its leaders asked the wives of councilmen to use their influence to get a larger appropriation passed. They also warned elected officials, most of whom were up for re-election in a couple weeks, that any resistance to proper school funding would not be in their best interest.¹¹⁵ At the council meeting that followed, Mr. Lucian Cocke, at the behest of his wife and the other women in the League, presented their petition to council and told the men that no infrastructure improvements, no matter how pressing, were more important than providing adequate educational facilities for Roanoke’s children.¹¹⁶ In the weeks that followed, Mrs. Cocke and the League’s other officers met privately with city council to lobby for the money. In early May 1906, barely a month after

¹¹³ *The Roanoke Times*, 11 March 1906.

¹¹⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 6 April 1906.

¹¹⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 8 April 1906.

¹¹⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 11 April 1906.

the League began its efforts, Roanoke's elected officials endorsed an additional \$7,000 appropriation to immediately address problems at the city's most overcrowded white school. Moreover, they vowed to do what they could to find additional funding as well.¹¹⁷

Many of the women involved in getting the increase in school spending were also in the vanguard of the city's pure milk and food crusade. At the group's first meeting, several of the women gathered testified about finding "filth" in their milk or about the recurring failure on the part of city authorities to quarantine residents infected with scarlet fever, small pox, and tuberculosis. Mrs. Lucian Cocke, who had been appointed president of that movement as well, presented a paper outlining the urgent need for a city bacteriologist, an effective board of health, and proper removal of garbage to limit the number of flies in the city. All present endorsed Cocke's recommendations and agreed to circulate petitions as part of an official complaint to council. "Our province," Cocke told to them, "is not in municipal authority, but when you come to the province of the home, the health of our husbands and children, we rise up and claim that it is time to talk matters over." Until authorities remedied their concerns, she observed, the city's females had no choice but to publicly push for the reforms; once enacted, Cocke promised city fathers, the women would "disband our mothers' meetings and retire contentedly to our darning and mending again."¹¹⁸ Dr. John Thornton, the group's proxy at council, turned in their petitions and told officials that the town's inordinately high death rate from typhoid fever, which was four times the national average, was proof enough that "there is something radically wrong in the sanitary condition of your city."¹¹⁹

The women had a strong ally in Mayor Joel Cutchin, who although initially opposed to banning the cow or inspecting milk, understood which way the wind was blowing and became an

¹¹⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 12 April; 9, 12, 18 May 1906.

¹¹⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 26 April 1906.

¹¹⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 3, 6 May 1906 (quote from 6 May).

ardent supporter of all sanitary and beautification improvements. At a subsequent council meeting, he loudly endorsed all the pure milk and food petitions.¹²⁰ In mid-May, 1906, not long afterwards, Cutchin proclaimed “A General Clean-Up Day” contest for Roanoke with prizes for the cleanest residences in town.¹²¹ In June, at his behest, the city’s council approved hiring a full-time sanitary policeman to inspect milk, foodstuffs, cattle, privies, yards, and homes. After Cutchin warned council that it would be “open to the charge of an utter disregard of the health of the community” for not replacing a poorly constructed Campbell Avenue sewer that had turned a portion of that downtown into a swamp, they funded that issue as well.¹²² In the fall, while on a visit to Boston, the mayor wrote a series of letters published in Roanoke’s papers advocating the sort of “progressive” sanitary and infrastructure reforms he had witnessed in that metropolis. Roanoke, he observed, needed parks for its boys in order to keep them from seeking “forbidden pleasures in paths that lead downward.” Moreover, it had to do what it could to join in the City Beautiful movement, from paving its dirt streets, to creating public squares, to planting trees, to, in a southern twist on City Beautiful, removing “loafing, swearing, worthless and dangerous negroes.”¹²³

When he returned, Cutchin condemned several local springs determined “contaminated” by his sanitary policeman. He also ordered that twenty-three dairies and their four hundred and forty-four milk cows pass inspection before being allowed to sell their products in the city. His work, nevertheless, drew numerous critics who felt he had not gone far enough. One “civic interested” resident, for example, complained in a letter to the *Times* that many of the cows that passed muster were fed a diet of germ-laden “malt slops” from the Virginia Brewing Company.

¹²⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 9 May 1906.

¹²¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 15 May 1906.

¹²² *The Roanoke Times*, 6, 13, 21 June (quote from 13 June).

¹²³ *The Roanoke Times*, 22, 25, 30 Sept; 4 Oct 1906 (first quote from 25 Sept; second quote from 4 Oct).

“Our mayor,” he fumed, “is as conversant with the above facts as he is with the continued flourishing of negro dives on Railroad avenue between Jefferson and Henry streets, where licentiousness, bestiality and public indecency run riot.”¹²⁴ The constant criticism, however, did little to slow Cutchin’s crusade. In December 1906, in an address before the Roanoke Chamber of Commerce’s first annual banquet, the mayor chastised the businessmen gathered for not taking more interest in civic affairs. “More civic pride must prevail,” he told the boosters, along with “more desire to see Roanoke the most beautiful, most cleanly, most healthy, best governed and best paved city in the land.”¹²⁵

The city’s businessmen may have been too otherwise occupied to devote much time to the civic improvement campaign proposed by Cutchin but many of their wives, most of whom had worked in the school funding and pure milk movements, were eager to become more involved. Indeed, in late November 1906, Mrs. Lucian H. Cocke and several other of the women behind those campaigns met to discuss forming an umbrella organization to address all issues related to “matters pertaining to the good of the children of the city, the condition of the city as to health, and the precautions that are taken to secure immunity from disease.”¹²⁶ A couple weeks later, at the group’s first official meeting, those present endorsed calling their organization the Woman’s Civic Betterment Club of Roanoke (WCBC).¹²⁷ The Club issued a press release claiming that the “object of this organization shall be to gain the co-operation of all loyal and progressive citizens in making the Magic City a city beautiful, to promote health and cleanliness, to advance present conditions, and to point to higher ideals.” The seventy-five initial members elected Mrs. Lucian Cocke president, and in her subsequent acceptance speech, she informed

¹²⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 9, 10 Nov 1906 (quote from 10 Nov).

¹²⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 Dec 1906.

¹²⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Nov 1906.

¹²⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 8 Dec 1906.

them that although their work was urgent, “our aid must necessarily be suggestive rather than active.” She cautioned against addressing problems in “an excited or hysterical manner,” suggesting instead that they use a conservative approach and consider all issues “with the wisdom of womanly women.”¹²⁸ Membership in the Club was open only to females nominated by the original cadre of members, only to women approved by the executive committee, and only to those who then received a favorable vote from members. Non-attendance and failure to pay yearly dues were both grounds for dismissal.¹²⁹

Although the *Times* informed readers that the women in WCBC came “from every ward and section of the city,” almost all its members resided in all white, middle and upper-class neighborhoods of the Southwest or downtown. Indeed, the group’s 1910 roster lists Southwest or downtown addresses for 140 of the 152 women in the Club. Of the remaining twelve, six lived in the Southeast, four in the mostly black Northwest, and three in the predominately working-class Northeast. All but twelve of the members were married; of those who were not, four were the daughters of members. The vast majority of women in the group were Roanoke natives or had at least lived in the city for several years. Many in the latter category had at one time resided in large northern cities and came to Roanoke with their husbands in the 1880s or 1890s. Several, like Mrs. Malcolm Bryan and Mrs. L. E. Johnson, came from northern metropolises like Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago or New York. Others, like Mrs. Edward L. Stone, daughter of Big Lick merchant James Fishburn, and Mrs. T. W. Goodwin, daughter of Peyton Terry, the city’s most successful native businessman, grew up in Roanoke and were the wives of local business leaders. Several members had husbands in the Chamber of Commerce, a few were married to city councilmen, five had husbands in the city’s elite Century Club, and dozens

¹²⁸ The Roanoke Times, 13 Dec 1906.

¹²⁹ Woman’s Civic Betterment Club of Roanoke, *The Year Book of the Woman’s Civic Betterment Club / Roanoke, Virginia 1910* (Roanoke: Hammond Printing Works, 1910), 5, in WCBC file, VR-RCPL.

belonged to the Roanoke Country Club. Like most members, the officers of WCBC resided in the Southwest and were all the wives of prominent business leaders or professionals: president Cocke's husband was general counsel for the N&W; vice president Willie W. Caldwell was married to a lawyer; vice president Mrs. B. C. Keister was married to a physician; vice president Mrs. C. Markley was married to a construction company owner; secretary Mrs. D. E. Spangler was married to the general superintendent of transportation for the N&W; and secretary Mrs. F. R. Hurt was married to the vice president of Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company.¹³⁰

The group's first chief executive, Sarah Johnson Cocke, moved to Roanoke from Atlanta in 1903, shortly after marrying Lucian Cocke, the town's first mayor and the son of Hollins College founder Charles Lewis Cocke. Before arriving in Roanoke, Sarah Johnson had won numerous accolades for volunteer work, progressive activism, and leadership ability. Born Sallie Cobb Johnson only a couple months before the end of the Civil War to a successful Atlanta physician and the sister of Howell Cobb, former governor of Georgia, presiding officer of the Confederate Congress, and a member of Jefferson Davis's inner circle of advisors, Mrs. Cocke spent her youth in a world of opulence. Varina Davis, former first lady of the Confederacy, was one of her mother's longtime acquaintances. New South aficionado Henry Grady, a close family friend, was a frequent dinner guest as well as an inspirational figure to the youthful Miss Johnson. After attending Waverly Seminary in Washington, D. C., Johnson married New York City physician Hugh Hagen. The couple moved back to Atlanta while she was still in her early twenties, and in addition to raising the couple's two boys, the young Mrs. Hagan became a charter member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, a Colonial Dame, a Daughter of the Empire, chairman of the Ways and Means Committee of the Woman's Board for the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, and the first treasurer of the Atlanta Woman's Club. After her husband unexpectedly died, Hagan turned to writing and eventually

¹³⁰ WCBC, *Year Book of the Woman's Civic Betterment Club*, 2, 7-11; husbands' professions from city directories as well as Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*.

published numerous “local-color” stories in *Century Magazine* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. Reviewers compared her early “Mammy Phyliss” yarns to those of Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, and the work attracted enough notice to merit several extensive speaking tours.¹³¹

After marrying Lucian Cocke in the fall of 1903, Sarah Johnson Cocke moved into Mr. Cocke’s Queen Anne mansion “Cockspur” in Southwest Roanoke, where her two sons joined Cocke’s two daughters and two sons from a previous marriage. Her initial impression of the city, she later recalled, was of being “surprised to find such a progressive city, and one so cosmopolitan tucked away in the Valley of Virginia.” “Roanoke,” she observed, “was like the younger sister of Atlanta, or an infant of New York posterity, save that neither Atlanta or New York could boast its setting in the Shenandoah Valley.” Its numerous infrastructure problems, however, were also readily apparent. “The city,” she recalled, “had grown so rapidly that its busy citizens had, to a great extent, overlooked the inadequacies of village conditions to cope with the requirements of city necessities.” Not long after settling in, Mrs. Cocke joined the local D. A. R., organized a Roanoke branch of the Colonial Dames, and began serving as chair of the latter organization. She and her husband, a Democratic Party activist, entertained numerous political luminaries at Cockspur, including United States Senator John Daniels, former U. S. House of Delegates representative Henry St. George Tucker, former Virginia Governor James H. Tyler, and perpetual presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, whose daughter Grace was a student at Hollins College.¹³²

¹³¹ Biographical information on Mrs. Lucian H. Cocke from *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Sept; 31 Oct 1903; 21 Jan 1944 (obituary); Sarah Johnson Cocke, “From Hoopskirts to Airplanes,” 1-98, TMs (1933), VR-RCPL; information on Howell Cobb from William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion Volume I: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 5-6, 479, 523-24. Sarah Johnson Cocke later received national acclaim for her *Bypaths in Dixie* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1911), a collection of “negro folktales.”

¹³² Cocke, “From Hoopskirts to Airplanes,” 99-104 (first two quotes from 99); Mrs. Lucian H. Cocke, “The Woman’s Civic Betterment Club of Roanoke,” *The Virginia Realtor* (Sept 1926): 35 (third quote from 35).

Willie Walker Caldwell, the WCBC's first vice president and eventual long-term president, was, like Sarah Cocke, a recent émigré to Roanoke. She, however, arrived from the rural countryside, having lived in the town of Wytheville with her husband, lawyer Manley Morrison Caldwell, until early 1906. Mr. Caldwell, who like Lucian Cocke had graduated from the University of Virginia's law school, had been a partner in his father-in-law's firm in Wytheville before deciding along with his wife to try their luck in the "Magic City." Mrs. Caldwell, born Willie Walker only months before the Civil War began, was the daughter of Confederate General James A. Walker, last commander of the "Stonewall Brigade" in the Army of Northern Virginia and post-war Republican politician. She graduated from Mary Baldwin Seminary before marrying Manley Caldwell in 1887 and becoming the mother of their three children. Only a month after settling in on King George Avenue in Southwest Roanoke, Mrs. Caldwell joined dozens other concerned mothers to discuss the city's inadequate school facilities, afterwards explaining to a reporter that part of the reason her family had relocated "was that her children might have more advanced school opportunities than the town of Wytheville could afford but that if conditions were as bad as they were painted she was going back to the mountains where her children could at least have air and health." While Mr. Caldwell got involved with the local Republican Party, his wife joined the Roanoke chapter of the D. A. R. and quickly became fast friends with Sarah Cocke.¹³³

Once the WCBC published its aims, local editors and physicians lined up behind the group and advised all Roanokers to do likewise. The goals of the Club, the *Times* proclaimed in a lengthy editorial endorsing it, "belong exclusively to the sphere of femininity" and were "the fundamental principles upon which the true home is constructed."¹³⁴ Local physician L. G.

¹³³ Biographical information on Mrs. M. M. Caldwell from *The Roanoke Times*, 3 March; 5 Oct 1907; 22 March 1946 (obituary); attendance at school funding meeting and quote are from *ibid.*, 8 April 1906.

¹³⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 15 Dec 1906.

Pedigo, in a series of letters to the paper on “Roanoke’s Sanitary Condition,” congratulated the women on their initiative and reminded readers that the city, home to 35,000 residents, had no public library, no public parks, backed up sewers, and an a largely ceremonial board of health. “Altogether,” Pedigo pointed out, “it must be confessed that we are still an overgrown country village, not a well developed city.”¹³⁵ In another move to show its support, in early January 1907, the editors of the *Times* gave the WCBC a column to publicize its goals, announce its achievements, print letters from residents, and offer civic improvement news from around the nation.¹³⁶ Mayor Joel Cutchin also heralded the Club, and over the following five years, he endorsed dozens of their requests and chastised the city’s council for not doing more to implement their ideas.¹³⁷

Although the Club had dozens of aims as well as departments devoted to sanitation, pure milk, pure food, education, art, and music, its library committee was the most active initially. In late January 1907, it held a fundraising gala at the town’s skating rink, which the committee decorated with American flags and Japanese lanterns. The women, according to one reporter, “served a very inviting and delicious menu of substantials in the daintiest manner” and raised “a nice sum.”¹³⁸ In another move, the WCBC inspected the city’s new Randolph Market, a thirty-two-stall facility “built on sanitary and scientific principles” about two blocks east of the existing city market building. The women, who had heaped criticism on Roanoke’s dilapidated Market House and polluted Market Square, were so “favorably impressed” with the new market building that they wholeheartedly endorsed it as a “grand institution for the improvement of market

¹³⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 18 Dec 1906.

¹³⁶ See running column in *The Roanoke Times* beginning 13 Jan 1907 and appearing at least weekly thereafter until 1912.

¹³⁷ For examples, see Cutchin’s speeches to council in Roanoke City Council Minutes, 4 Feb 1907; 9 March 1908; 8 Feb, 10 Aug 1909; 6 June, 7 Nov, 17 Dec 1910.

¹³⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 26, 30 Jan; 3 Feb 1907 (quote from 30 Jan).

conditions.”¹³⁹ In the days after the inspection, members of the Club’s pure food committee distributed fliers to (no doubt awestruck) farmers on the city’s market outlining some “simple practices for cleanliness,” which included keeping their wagons and stalls “clean and tidy,” covering their butter, sausages, and scrapple in oil paper, using attendants who were “clean and tidy,” keeping dogs away, and not “expectorating about the city market in compliance with the city laws prohibiting this vile practice in public places.”¹⁴⁰

The timing of the WCBC’s market campaign, not coincidentally, coincided with fierce debate by elected officials over funding improvements to the Market House or purchasing the new Randolph Street Market. In late February 1907, Mayor Joel Cutchin vetoed a \$35,000 city council appropriation to expand the aging Market House because the “scheme” limited improvements to those outlined by a single inside bidder. Moreover, he argued that no one was certain who actually owned Market Square or the land in it that the expanded facility would cover.¹⁴¹ Council overrode his veto but then debated using the entire appropriation to purchase the Randolph Street Market instead.¹⁴² In the meantime, the owners of the private market placed ads that claimed their facility had “the endorsement of our established sanitary rules by the Women’s [sic] Civic Betterment Club.” The WCBC, despite being an “earnest advocate of a market with cleanly and sanitary surroundings, whether provided by municipal or private enterprise,” promptly disavowed the endorsement since the market matter was a “public policy” issue for city officials to decide.¹⁴³ After months of wrangling and public outcry against abandoning Market Square, council passed another appropriation for the old Market House only to have nearby

¹³⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 26 Jan; 3 Feb; 14 May 1907 (first quote from 14 May; second quote from 3 Feb).

¹⁴⁰ *The Roanoke Times*, 10 Feb 1907.

¹⁴¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 21 Feb 1907.

¹⁴² *The Roanoke Times*, 22 Feb 1907.

¹⁴³ *The Roanoke Times*, 12, 14 May 1907.

property owners file a successful injunction against expansion. The legal battle that ensued lasted another dozen years. In the meantime, the aging Market House continued to deteriorate. Market Square, much to the chagrin of the WCBC, continued to serve as the symbolic heart of the city, a place where farmers and urbanites, blacks and whites, rich and poor, mingled among covered wagons, pull carts, shanties, slaughtered hogs and cows, horse manure, flies, dogs, hawkers, vendors, con artists, screaming children, thieves, drunks, and awestruck visitors. Indeed, residents' devotion to their market doomed the far more modern Randolph Street Market, which saw business decline so severely that it closed a few years later.¹⁴⁴

In keeping with its mantra of offering "suggestions" to city officials only after it had thoroughly investigated a problem, the WCBC in March 1907 brought in J. Horace McFarland, president of the American Civic Improvement Association, to lecture its members and elected officials. Mayor Joel Cutchin, who was up for re-election in the fall, welcomed McFarland to an audience of the town's "most substantial citizens," apologized for the city's "civic conditions" and for the fact that Roanoke had not "grown in beauty with her industrial growth." The president of the N&W, L. E. Johnson, then introduced the speaker, but not before informing the crowd that there was "no reason Roanokers should be ashamed of their city in consideration of the fact that Roanoke has sprung up in a night." McFarland, having toured the city during the day, proclaimed that, "considering the newness of the place, it does very well." Moreover, he suggested that the potential for a beautiful city existed. There were, however, abundant problems. Indeed, from his window in the Ponce de Leon hotel, McFarland had perfect view of a vacant lot containing a "pit of slime and filth" that no real city could tolerate. Afterwards, in an interview with local reporters, he singled out a row of black-owned shanties near the Roanoke & Southern depot as particularly offensive and claimed "he would like to see this unsightly lot of houses burn down." "He further stated," according to one reporter, "that Roanoke is dirty. Her streets are filthy and

¹⁴⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 23 Feb; 21 April; 11 May; 8, 9 Nov; 6, 10 Dec 1907; 11, 25, 26 1908; Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 432-33.

she is in sore need of parks.”¹⁴⁵ The Club paid for several other speakers as well, including a Richmond bacteriologist who critiqued Roanoke’s predilection for typhoid, tuberculosis, and polluted milk as well as its impotent board of health.¹⁴⁶ At each of the lectures, business leaders and elected officials introduced the speakers and sat on the stage with the men; the women in the WCBC who paid for their speeches, by contrast, sat in the audience unacknowledged, entirely in keeping with their goal of “discrete suggestiveness.”

Public opinion about the WCBC, measured by the tone of letters sent to its newspaper column, varied from admiration to outright disdain. Some writers, as a way of “poking fun or even possibly jeering at the pretensions of this most humble band of women,” provided long lists of civic nuisances for them to tackle. Others, having reportedly “heard so much for and in opposition” of the Club, wrote to question its motives and goals. Advice streamed in as well, including a warning not to “get radical or extreme.” Moreover, many of those who wrote in suggested that the WCBC get involved in issues clearly outside the realm of the Victorian era female sphere of responsibility. Many, for instance, begged them to do something about “negro loafers,” “bad boys,” dangerous street crossings, spitting in public, filth in the streets, and the city’s decrepit and inadequate municipal building. The deluge of requests, according to WCBC correspondent, was “entirely foreign to the club’s aims and desires,” which were non-partisan, discrete, and limited to the “suggestive” realm. Indeed, the Club that spring devoted most of its resources to bringing in expert lecturers, supporting its “Woman’s Exchange” by donating cakes and cookies to sell, facilitating the formation a “Mothers and Teachers” organization, staging a

¹⁴⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 March 1907; for WCBC invitation to city councilors to attend McFarland’s lecture, see Roanoke City Council Minutes, 12 Feb 1907, Clerk’s Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building.

¹⁴⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 April 1907.

citywide cleaning day, and publishing numerous lectures on pure milk, playgrounds, and civic beautification.¹⁴⁷

In the spring of 1907, after running the WCBC's column for several months, the *Times* ran a large front-page story titled "What Will Make Greater Roanoke?" It solicited dozens of the city's most influential businessmen for opinions, including bank president J. B. Fishburn, former mayor Henry Trout, Virginia Brewing Company president Louis Scholz, and E. B. Jacobs, secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. Although their recommendations varied to some degree, nearly all the men interviewed suggested that attracting additional manufacturing concerns would be the best panacea for the city's problems. None dwelled on cityscape aesthetics, milk, health, market problems, schools, or the absence of a public library and parks, the chief concerns of the WCBC.¹⁴⁸

A couple weeks later, the WCBC asked five of the men interviewed to serve on an advisory board composed of local executives. Edward L. Stone, whose wife Minnie belonged to the Club, was among those who received an invitation from Willie Caldwell to be part of "a committee of businessmen to consult and assist us in our work." Although Stone initially declined, citing his "love for Roanoke" as responsible for getting him involved in so many civic groups that many in town were under the "impression that I really did not have much else to do." Indeed, Stone joked that his time had been "so fully occupied in various ways that Mrs. Stone has threatened to get a divorce, believing that I would then come see her more oftener." The other men selected, the Virginia Brewing Company's Louis Scholz, L. E. Johnson, president of the N&W, J. Taylor Gleaves, vice president of the Adams, Payne and Gleaves brick factory, and Robert H. Angell, owner of the Central Manufacturing Company and former Republican state

¹⁴⁷ See letters to WCBC in its column in *The Roanoke Times*, 10, 17, Feb; 3, 10, 24, 31, March; 7, 21 April; 12, 21 May; 2 June 1907 (first quotes from 24 March; last quote from 12 May).

¹⁴⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 7 April 1907.

delegate from Roanoke, all agreed to serve. Gleaves, who had moved with his WCBC-member wife to Roanoke from Lynchburg only a year earlier, headed the advisory board but apparently never learned the official name of the Club since he referred to in correspondence over the following year as the “Woman’s Civic Betterment League.”¹⁴⁹

The men in the advisory board, almost all of whom had wives in the WCBC, met about once a month to discuss the Club’s projects and tender their advice. They also served as the male emissaries of the organization, handling contracts, soliciting donations, and working out the details of services provided by experts. The men, Edward Stone admitted, knew very little about civic betterment and even less about playgrounds, schools, parks, and sanitation. As a result, he told the WCBC, they thought it best to “have some experts in one of two lines tell us really what we do need and how we should go about securing it.”¹⁵⁰ Like other female “reform” groups in the South, the WCBC benefited enormously from the backing of local business leaders. Indeed, with male approval, the women not only mediated the risks of public condemnation, in many ways they recreated the “home” by installing “fathers” as the protectors and benefactors of their organization.¹⁵¹ Sarah Cocke, the Club’s first president, completely understood the importance of its advisory board. Indeed, in a speech to the Virginia Federation of Women’s Clubs, she singled

¹⁴⁹ Advisory board information from Willie Walker Caldwell, Chairman Ways & Means Committee, WCBC, Roanoke, to Ed Stone, Roanoke, 10 April 1907, Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 354, 1907-1908 Civic Betterment file; Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to Mrs. M. M. Caldwell, Roanoke, 11 April 1907, *ibid*; the Gleaves move to the city from *The Roanoke Times*, 9 March 1906.

¹⁵⁰ For meetings, see Taylor Gleaves, Chairman, Roanoke, to Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, 3, 12 June; 16 Aug; 3 Oct 1907, Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 354, 1907-1908 Civic Betterment file; quote is from Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to Mrs. M. M. Caldwell, Roanoke, 11 April 1907, *ibid*.

¹⁵¹ Male support of female reform groups is discussed in James L. Leloudis, II, “School Reform in the New South: The Woman’s Association for the Betterment of Public School Houses in North Carolina, 1902-1919,” *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 4 (March 1983): 889.

out the “strength of the business men . . . behind us” as key elements in the success of her organization.¹⁵²

In keeping with Stone’s suggestion, in late April 1907, the WCBC funded a visit and lecture by John Nolen, urban planning expert from Cambridge, Massachusetts, and rising star in the City Beautiful movement who, with the aid of elaborate stereopticon illustrations, illuminated Roanoke’s numerous civic embarrassments.¹⁵³ Although invited by the woman’s Club, Nolen spent the majority of his time in town with its male advisory board, touring the city and offering planning advice to them before his speech, and occupying the stage with them during his lecture.¹⁵⁴ A month later, the advisory board funded preliminary studies by Nolen and two sanitary engineers to get some idea of the improvements needed for the city.¹⁵⁵

In September 1907, the WCBC decided to stage a ten-day “Great Southwestern Virginia Fall Festival” to raise additional funds for the work. The group chose “All for Roanoke” as the theme for the event, which it scheduled for November, and promised that “every cent made will be spent for Roanoke’s betterment.”¹⁵⁶ The Club solicited “patriotic contributions” it could sell at the festival along with donations for use in the seventeen booths “representing the principal nations of the world” it planned to construct.¹⁵⁷ It hired a local businessman to manage the affair

¹⁵² See Cocke’s speech to the Virginia Federation of Women’s Clubs reprinted in *The Roanoke Times*, 20 May 1937.

¹⁵³ *The Roanoke Times*, 30 April 1907.

¹⁵⁴ See details of advisory board’s involvement in Taylor Gleaves, Roanoke, to Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, 27 April 1907, Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 354, 1907-1908 Civic Betterment file.

¹⁵⁵ Taylor Gleaves, Chairman, Roanoke, to Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, 3 June 1907, Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 354, 1907-1908 Civic Betterment file. See also, references to loaning the club money in Taylor Gleaves, Chairman, Roanoke, to Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, 8 Oct; 2, 3, Dec 1907, *ibid*.

¹⁵⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 25 Sept 1907.

¹⁵⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 29 Sept 1907.

and appointed fifty Roanoke executives to co-staff the various planning committees along with an equal number of WCBC members.¹⁵⁸ The project, according to the editors of the *Times*, was a “great opportunity” for the community to give something back to the city. Proceeds, it informed readers, would go towards public parks and fountains and towards more stringent enforcement of health regulations by providing additional funds for the local board of health. It and other local papers jumped at the chance to publicize the event and ran a constant stream of feature stories on their front pages about the upcoming festival.¹⁵⁹ The Club, according to its president Sarah Cocke, had decided to stage the fundraiser not long after elected officials denied them a civic improvement appropriation, at which point the women realized “it was no more expensive to build a beautiful city than it was to permit an ugly one.”¹⁶⁰

After donations for the festival failed to appear in the quantities expected, the WCBC formed a forty-woman “Business Men’s Opportunity Committee” to solicit support. “The ladies,” according to the *Times*, “do not want to appear that they are begging expeditions, but want it to be known that they are engaged in a work in which every man, woman and child is interested – and that every dollar’s worth of goods contributed will bring returns many times in excess of the actual value of the articles given.” Those who aided the group, the Club assured readers, would also benefit from “extensive publicity” since each would receive acknowledgement in *Festival Facts and Fancies*, the event’s in-house newspaper.¹⁶¹ In the weeks leading up to the festival, its planners denied rumors that they were paying local papers for publicity and that they were receiving a salary for their work. After the Methodist Ministers Conference accused the women

¹⁵⁸ *The Roanoke Times*, 26 Sept 1907.

¹⁵⁹ *The Roanoke Times*, 27 Sept 1907; for stream of stories about the Fall Festival, see *ibid.*, 28, 29 Sept; 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 26, 27 Oct; 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 Nov 1907.

¹⁶⁰ Cocke, “Woman’s Civic Betterment Club,” 36.

¹⁶¹ *The Roanoke Times*, 6 Oct 1907.

of planning to include “dancing, vaudeville, or other theatrical performances” at their event, Sarah Cocke promised that the WCBC would “violate no canon of church law or social propriety.”¹⁶² In a last-minute effort to include the city’s working classes in the festival, some of businessmen on its staff convinced the city’s Central Trades and Labor Council to endorse the event and encourage its members to attend.¹⁶³ On orders from N&W president L. E. Johnson, whose wife was a leader in the WCBC, the railroad provided free transportation for all goods donated by firms outside the city.¹⁶⁴

The festival began in mid-November with great fanfare even though the WCBC had to postpone its “Floral Parade” because the flowers it ordered to decorate cars and carriages did not arrive. According to the *Times*, the delay caused “considerable dissatisfaction” among the hundreds of school children scheduled to march in the parade and among the dozens of men who had already readied their vehicles for the procession.¹⁶⁵ On opening night, over a thousand patrons paid the twenty-five cents that it cost to get into the downtown skating rink where the festival was held, and hundreds purchased merchandise or souvenirs from women dressed in the native garb of the Club’s seventeen internationally themed booths. During the opening concert, adversity struck again, when, as the WCBC choir sang the opening verse of “Onward Christian Soldiers,” a fuse blew, the lights went out, and the thousands of visitors nearly panicked before the electricity came back on. Receipts from opening night, nevertheless, totaled over \$500. In an editorial congratulating the Club for getting its festival under way, the *Times* claimed that “what they have done and will accomplish under all the discouragements and vicissitudes, the ‘knocks’

¹⁶² *The Roanoke Times*, 10, 26, 27 Oct 1907 (quote from 27 Oct).

¹⁶³ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 Oct 1907.

¹⁶⁴ See coverage of speech by Sarah Cocke and Willie Caldwell to Virginia Federation of Women’s Clubs reprinted in *The Roanoke Times*, 20 May 1937.

¹⁶⁵ *The Roanoke Times*, 12 Nov 1907.

from sources from which they had a reasonable right to expect assistance and encouragement, is by far greater than any similar accomplishment from a like body of the sterner sex.”¹⁶⁶

The postponed “Floral Parade,” led by the city’s newly re-elected mayor, Joel Cutchin, rolled through the streets the following Friday and received numerous accolades from around the state for its splendor and sophistication. The festival itself attracted thousands of visitors, most of whom bought lunch or dinner, drank lemonade, watched a “living picture” tableau, attended a concert, or heard speeches from civic betterment authorities. The entrance fee, however, priced the festival out of reach for most working-class residents, and although the WCBC published no segregation policy, the women and men staffing the event almost assuredly restricted patronage to whites only. Residents who did pay to get in, mainly the city’s white collar professionals and middle and upper classes, primarily patronized the dozens of elaborately decorated booths that served as the central feature of the festival and offered postcards, foodstuffs, souvenirs, and exotica for sale. Hundreds, for example, stood in line each night to get inside the “Dixie” stall, which featured women in 1861 costumes working in a “thoroughly equipped electric kitchen” baking biscuits below dozens of Confederate flags. Other booths featured “pure food” demonstrations, advice from the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, or displays of historical memorabilia from Asia and Europe.¹⁶⁷ The Club also made money from sales of its *Roanoke Cook Book*, a collection of WCBC recipes compiled by Edward Stone’s sister-in-law and printed by his firm. “Purchasers,” the Club promised readers, “may congratulate themselves on acquiring so much kitchen lore in clear and condensed form.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ *The Roanoke Times*, 13 Nov 1907.

¹⁶⁷ See coverage in *The Roanoke Times*, 13-26 Nov 1907; *Festival Facts and Fancies*, 12-23 Nov 1907, in VR-RCPL.

¹⁶⁸ Woman’s Civic Betterment Club of Roanoke, *The Roanoke Cook Book: Favorite Recipes by Some of Roanoke’s Good Housekeepers*, compiled by Mrs. Albert A. Stone (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1907), 1.

In its *Festival Facts and Fancies*, the WCBC published dozens of stories about civic improvement written by members, elected officials, local ministers, and business leaders. All issues featured a giant toddler dubbed “Roanoke” positioned under mountains followed by the caption: “A lusty infant, lying amid inexhaustible resources. What should be done for it?” In each edition, a different local luminary answered. Mayor Cutchin, the man most responsible for the formation of the WCBC and one of its most ardent supporters, responded by advising residents to elect councilmen who could “see beyond their own particular property holdings, with a due regard for the health, cleanliness, and improvement of the city.”¹⁶⁹ Others offered a broad range of suggestions. Doctor L. G. Pedigo, for instance, recommended intensifying the campaign against “dirty milk” to defeat the “supine indifference” of most residents; members of the local WCTU advised ending access to alcohol based on the ample evidence that it was “brain poison”; Edward Stone called for the systematic re-planning of the entire city over the course of the following twenty-five years and for a move to a commission form of city government; the Virginia Brewing Company’s Louis Scholz favored forming a federation between the WCBC, Chamber of Commerce, and Central Trades and Labor Council to press for municipal improvements; and Reverend William Campbell cautioned against neglecting the moral climate of the city in favor beautification, warning that such a course would led to “impending evil” and a “fateful harvest.”¹⁷⁰

The festival, according to WCBC president Sarah Cocke, netted about \$5,000, almost half of which went immediately towards paying for John Nolen’s city plan and a study by two Baltimore-based sanitary engineers.¹⁷¹ The Club had Edward Stone and its male advisory board

¹⁶⁹ *Festival Facts and Fancies*, 12 Nov 1907.

¹⁷⁰ Pedigo and WCTU opinions from *Festival Facts and Fancies* 14 Nov 1907; Stone from *ibid.*, 15 Nov 1907; Scholz from *ibid.*, 19 Nov 1907; Campbell from *ibid.*, 20 Nov 1907.

¹⁷¹ Speech by Sarah Johnson Cocke, President WCBC, to the Civic Betterment Club of Virginia, TMs (ca. 1908), WCBC file, VR-RCPL.

supervise the funding and compilation of both studies, and it had Stone's printing shop publish Nolen's *Remodeling Roanoke* and the health engineers' *Sanitary Roanoke*. Each elaborately illustrated and lavishly printed book carried a notice denoting that they had been "Presented to the City of Roanoke by The Woman's Civic Better Club."¹⁷² Nolen's plan, which came with an estimated price tag of \$1,000,000, called for widening downtown's principal avenues, relocating all public buildings to a tree-lined central square in the heart of the city, developing a more rational arrangement of city streets and street names, and creating a system of radial greenways and parks extending from downtown to the Roanoke River and Mill Mountain.¹⁷³ *Sanitary Roanoke* offered chapters on general sanitation problems, street cleaning efforts, garbage collection, sewerage difficulties, paving needs, water supply statistics, and fire protection requirements. The book called on the municipality to fund the needed improvements as soon as possible and to create a better funded and more powerful board of health along with "Health Wardens," a "Sanitary Laboratory," and several food and milk inspectors.¹⁷⁴

By publishing the reports and donating them to the city, the WCBC strongly reinforced and coupled its own wants to those of (supposedly) "disinterested" national experts. Nolen's study, which was by far the more radical of the two, fit entirely into the City Beautiful movement sweeping the nation in the early twentieth century, an idiom inspired by the 1893 Columbian Exposition that advocated urban planning to beautify cities in ways that inspired civic loyalty and morality, pulled the culture of American urban areas up to par with their European antecedents, and made inner cities tolerable to upper classes residing in the suburbs. The core premise of the

¹⁷² For Stone and advisory board's supervision, see Edward L. Stone, Roanoke, to Taylor Gleaves, Roanoke, 19, 21 Dec 1907; 20 Jan 1908, Edward L. Stone – Borderland Coal Company Papers, box 354, 1907-1908 Civic Betterment file.

¹⁷³ John Nolen, *Remodeling Roanoke: Report to the Committee on Civic Improvement* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1907), 38.

¹⁷⁴ C. E. Emerson, Jr., and Ezra B. Whitman, *Sanitary Roanoke: Report to the Committee on Civic Improvement* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1907), 5-21

movement was that urban splendor and systematic planning would serve as an effectual social control apparatus by inducing public order, tranquility and decorum.¹⁷⁵ According to Nolen, who quickly became one of America's most noted City Beautiful planners, Roanoke had been blessed with numerous "natural advantages" but had developed so rapidly and in such chaotic fashion that it had in simply gone from a village of 500 to a village of 35,000, or in his words, "from Big Lick to Bigger Lick." As a result, he noted, the Roanoke of 1907 was "plain, common-place and in some localities, distinctly unsightly." The town's streets, he pointed out, were narrow and congested and the city had "no public gardens, parks, parkways, no playgrounds, no attractive school yards, no monuments, no public library, no open plazas or public squares, no wide avenues with well grown trees, no segregated fine residence sections, free from objectionable features, and no public buildings of distinction." Although Nolen admitted that remedying these myriad civic embarrassments would be very expensive, he argued that the city's lack of distinctive buildings made his plan more economically feasible immediately than in the future, since the property, housing, and structures standing in the way would "never be so cheap as today."¹⁷⁶

Nolen came back to Roanoke shortly after the publication of his study, and in an address to leaders of the WCBC and its male advisory board, he suggested that they implement a "thorough and systematic campaign of education" in order to arouse widespread public sympathy for his plan. If carried out, he promised, *Remodeling Roanoke* would transform the town into the "most attractive city in the state if not the entire country."¹⁷⁷ Nolen's plan, which was widely recognized by experts in the field as one of the first comprehensive efforts to mesh City Beautiful

¹⁷⁵ Paul S. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), vii, 251-54; William H. Wilson, *The City Beautiful Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1989), 80-92.

¹⁷⁶ Nolen, *Remodeling Roanoke*, 10-11, 40 (first two quotes 10-11; third quote 40).

¹⁷⁷ *The Roanoke Times*, 18 Jan 1908.

with city planning, received accolades from the American Civic Association and from architects and engineers from London to San Francisco.¹⁷⁸ Later in 1908, the Club's advisory board presented Nolen's plan to Roanoke's mayor and city council. Joel Cutchin, longtime advocate of City Beautiful improvements, pushed immediately for \$800,000 in bonds to begin implementing a few parts of the plan. "Never in the history of Roanoke," he told the city's councilors, "has the future held out to her the same bright prospects of stability and importance as today. Everything urges and beckons us on to greater achievements municipally. No excuses can be given for timidity or lagging."¹⁷⁹

The city's bi-cameral council, however, debated the issue for another year before finally agreeing to put \$530,000 worth of bonds, earmarked specifically for school, street, and sewer improvements, up for a vote by property owners. Nolen's plan, which called for radical changes in the cityscape, would have cost the city at least double that figure. Although the WCBC was disappointed, its members held tightly to a platform that precluded "political" involvement. Indeed, before the bond vote, Sarah Cocke, in a speech to the Civic Betterment Club of Virginia, advised hundreds of progressive-minded women from around the state that they should "have no hand in politics." "Hue strictly to the Civic lines of health, beauty and education," she advised, and "stand on the high ground of home, where motherhood, wifehood, womanhood, shines brightest."¹⁸⁰ Mayor Cutchin, *The Roanoke Times*, the WCBC and its advisory board all passionately encouraged approval of the bonds, and as a result, freeholders endorsed almost all of

¹⁷⁸ For reception of Nolen's Roanoke plans, see letter to WCBC from American Civic Association published in *The Roanoke Times*, 26 Jan 1908; Speech by Sarah Johnson Cocke, President WCBC, to the Civic Betterment Club of Virginia; Cocke, "Woman's Civic Betterment Club," 36.

¹⁷⁹ Roanoke City Council Minutes, 8 Feb; 10 Aug 1909, Clerk's Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building (quote from 10 Aug).

¹⁸⁰ Speech by Sarah Johnson Cocke, President WCBC, to the Civic Betterment Club of Virginia,

them.¹⁸¹ Afterwards, Cutchin called on the city's councilors to put an even larger bond issue up for a vote in order to carry out Nolen's plan. "I believe," he informed them, "the time is now ripe for a consideration of these plans, which have been generously donated to the city by that noble band of women."¹⁸² Over the next few years, however, council failed to act. As a result, according to Sarah Cocke, Nolen's plan was "graciously received and safely deposited in the city's archives."¹⁸³

The WCBC, while discouraged by the failure of elected officials to act on its more radical agenda, kept up its "quiet" campaign for parks and libraries. During the 1908 nationwide recession, it redirected its health and beautification work towards ameliorating conditions for impoverished residents and their children. The Club, for example, collected donations for orphans, hired unemployed artisans to construct a "model schoolyard" based on John Nolen's plans at the Belmont Public School, and held a citywide contest with \$10 prizes for "most improved backyard" and \$5 awards for "most improved front yard." In mid-1908, however, the Club all but disappeared. According to Sarah Cocke, the lull stemmed mainly from demands by members' husbands that they "rest" and from the fact that the organization had solved all of the problems it could.¹⁸⁴ The WCBC remained active, albeit in a far less public way, meeting regularly and continuing to encourage municipal authorities to invest in civic improvements. By May 1910, their work behind the scenes contributed to the city's reorganization its board of health as the Roanoke Health Department, hiring a Richmond physician to serve as the town's

¹⁸¹ Roanoke City Council Minutes, 4 April 1910, Clerk's Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building.

¹⁸² Roanoke City Council Minutes, 6 June 1910, Clerk's Office, Roanoke City Municipal Building.

¹⁸³ Cocke, "Woman's Civic Betterment Club," 36.

¹⁸⁴ *The Roanoke Times*, 19 Dec 1907; Speech by Sarah Johnson Cocke, President WCBC, to the Civic Betterment Club of Virginia; Cocke, "Woman's Civic Betterment Club," 36.

Health Officer, and funding a laboratory and three-man staff of inspectors.¹⁸⁵ The Club also influenced the move by city council in January 1911 to create a pure milk, meat and food ordinance to regulate goods for sale at Market Square. The law required all vendors to petition for a permit, pass inspection by the Health Department, sell only pure foodstuffs, and conform to strict storage and sanitary regulations.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, in February 1911, city authorities fulfilled a longstanding request by the WCBC to create a public park for downtown when they purchased Peyton Terry's seven-acre Elmwood estate. No long thereafter, the city allowed the WCBC to use several rooms in the Elmwood mansion as its headquarters.

By the time the Club moved into its new home in the spring of 1911, Joel Cutchin, one of the WCBC's most ardent supporters and Roanoke's mayor since 1902, had been indicted by a grand jury for misfeasance, malfeasance, gross neglect of duty for failing to close down the Northwest's thriving "red light district" and on suspicion of being a frequent client himself.¹⁸⁷ The women of the WCBC were mortified, not only because of their close association with the mayor, but also because they had invited him to deliver the keynote address to the Virginia Federation of Woman's Clubs convention they were hosting in May. In April, not long after Cutchin's indictment, the Club informed him that "in view of existing circumstances" it had unanimously voted to "release" him from his promised address. The mayor, who had up until then done all he could to help the women, canceled the city's pre-convention "clean-up day" and informed the WCBC that:

¹⁸⁵ City of Roanoke, *Annual Report of the Official Departments of the City of Roanoke for the Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 1910* (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1911), 145-53.

¹⁸⁶ City of Roanoke, *An Ordinance, Approved January 18, 1911, To define the Duties of the Dairy and Food Inspector, and to provide for the Inspection of Milk, Meat and other Food Supplies brought into, or offered for sale in the City of Roanoke, and to prohibit the sale of Adulterated or Impure Milk, Meat and other Food Supplies within the City of Roanoke* (Roanoke: City of Roanoke, 1911), in History Museum and Historical Society of Western Virginia, Roanoke.

¹⁸⁷ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 13 May 1912.

I have worked so hard for the past nine years to create a public sentiment in this city in favor of play grounds, cleanliness and general beautification that I have neglected a great many other things, to my own personal disadvantage, and it is a real relief to be released from further efforts along this line. I have become convinced that one may work and work, make themselves unpopular in certain directions to their own detriment in trying to do something for the future, and with the first blast of ill-wind comes obliteration of the work of years.

With the city a mess and progressive women from around the state scheduled to arrive, the WCBC turned to its allies in the Chamber of Commerce and in the local press to pressure council to order a through citywide cleansing. At its subsequent convention, Judge John W. Woods, one of Cutchin's Democratic rivals, delivered the keynote address. During the meeting, Willie Caldwell, who by then had become president of the WCBC, was elected first vice president of the state association.¹⁸⁸

Throughout the remainder of 1911, the Club added dozens of new members and continued its crusade for better market conditions, a public library, and the establishment of properly supervised playgrounds. The Club's former ally Joel Cutchin, whose trial that spring and summer filled state and local papers with a constant stream of headlines detailing the "sickening" and "nauseating" testimony of prostitutes and witnesses, weathered a firestorm of criticism for not resigning before a jury unanimously found him guilty.¹⁸⁹ Although the WCBC had steered clear of "morality" issues, that November, in the midst of Cutchin's unsuccessful appeal to the Virginia Supreme Court, the Club voted to draft a petition asking city council to maintain a "higher standard of vaudeville and moving pictures."¹⁹⁰ In its subsequent request, however, the

¹⁸⁸ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12 May 1911 (mayor's quote from 8 May; notice of clean up 9 May).

¹⁸⁹ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 15 May – 2 June 1912.

¹⁹⁰ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 18 Nov 1911. In early 1912, Virginia's highest court turned down Joel Cutchin's appeal. Although the verdict forced Roanoke's longtime chief executive to step down, he immediately paid the fee to be listed as a candidate for mayor in the city's upcoming Democratic primary. Cutchin's sensational, yearlong trial, at which numerous prostitutes and witnesses testified about his "immoral" assignations, doomed his chances. Indeed,

group demanded outright censorship on the grounds that the “existing conditions tend to demoralize and weaken the character of our growing youth.” “We ask,” they explained, “that not only immoral vaudeville and coarse jokes be censored, but also pictures giving needlessly criminal exhibition.”¹⁹¹ When council failed to act, the Club enlisted the support of the Chamber of Commerce and together they convinced theater owners it was in their best interest to abide by recommendations made by a jointly staffed board of censorship. The board, according to representatives from each group, sought to “guard the public against ultra-objectionable phases of the stage and screen” by removing sections of film it deemed “off color.”¹⁹²

In the aftermath of Cutchin’s removal, the WCBC successfully pressured the city’s new mayor to appoint a commission to regulate access and manage maintenance at the town’s two public parks. The Club built a “proper” playground at Elmwood Park, where it offered supervised recreation to white children twelve and under.¹⁹³ It also convinced elected officials to implement week-long cleaning campaigns supervised by the health department, collected books for children in outlying counties, staged art shows for local boys and girls at Elmwood, and kept up its

before the vote, local papers, business leaders, members of the WCBC and ministers fervently endorsed Judge John Woods as the only possible choice for mayor. Woods, they claimed, would promptly correct the widespread notion that Roanoke lacked moral standards since he represented the “cleanest and strongest Virginia manhood.” If things did not appear bleak enough for the former mayor, two weeks before the balloting, he suffered a near fatal stomach hemorrhage that kept him off the campaign trail. Cutchin lost the primary but garnered about 40 percent of the vote and even carried two working-class wards. In a card carried in Roanoke’s papers afterwards, the former mayor told his followers that their vote, “in view of the forces arrayed against me was very gratifying and very complimentary.” See *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 3 Jan; 18 April; 6, 21 May 1912 (first quote from 3 Jan; second quote from 21 May). After his impeachment, Cutchin returned to practicing law full time before being elected as a Trial Justice. In 1916, Cutchin ran for mayor again but lost in a close race after receiving about 43 percent of ballots cast. A few months after the defeat, he died of apoplexy. See Barnes, *A History of Roanoke*, 482-85, 528, 532, 544.

¹⁹¹ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 9 Jan 1912.

¹⁹² *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 27 March 1912; see also listing of fifteen WCBC members elected to the board of censorship in *ibid.*, 2 April 1912.

¹⁹³ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 10, 11 May; 8, 9, 24, 27 April; 27, 28 June; 6, 23 July 1912.

petition campaign to fund improvements to the Market House.¹⁹⁴ In 1912, members of the State Federation of Women's Clubs, impressed with the accomplishments of the WCBC, elected Willie Caldwell as their president. In the aftermath, Mrs. Caldwell contributed an article to the progressive journal *The American City* detailing the Roanoke Club's work, which she listed as: new school buildings and additions to old ones; drinking fountains, better sanitary arrangements, libraries, and photo collections in all schools; better care and handling of foodstuffs on the city market; an annual municipal cleaning week; a yearly yard beautification contest; a board of health with a physician as its chief officer; the purchase of public parks; creation of a park commission; a proper and supervised playground; a yearly art show; and a weekly civic betterment column in local papers.¹⁹⁵

In the years that followed, the WCBC also helped establish a juvenile court, a restroom in the Market House for "country women and children," and a Roanoke Parent Teacher Association. Moreover, the city's department of health, which conducted thousands of inspections of food, milk and water, checked the town's typhoid fever death rate, dropping it from 1.2 per 1,000 in 1905 to 0.3 per 1,000 in 1912. After the United States entered World War I, Roanoke's Chamber of Commerce convinced the WCBC to become its "Civics Division," responsible for helping instill patriotism in local children. The Club maintained that role until 1923, when it withdrew from the Chamber of Commerce and became the Woman's Club of Roanoke, a vastly less public organization, devoted primarily to "civic art," domestic education, current events classes, supervised recreation, gardening, and philanthropy.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 5 Feb; 21 March; 8 April; 10 May; 15 July 1912.

¹⁹⁵ *The (Roanoke) Evening World*, 4 May 1912; Mrs. M. M. Caldwell, "Nationwide Work for Civic Betterment," *The American City* 11, no. 6 (June 1912): 841-42.

¹⁹⁶ History of the WCBC from George Raymond Stevens, *An Economic and Social Survey of Roanoke County* vol. 15, no. 1 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1930) 118-19; Iva J. Geary, "The Woman's Club of Roanoke," 1-2, TMs (1936), Federal Writers' Project, District No. 5, Project No. 65-1700, WCBC file, VR-RCPL; drop in typhoid death rate from Roanoke City, *Official Reports of the City of Roanoke, Virginia, with Tables of General and*

“Reform” in early twentieth-century Roanoke, while hardly unique, was in many ways different from “progressivism” on the national, southern, and state levels. Local reforms, for example, mirrored what Robert Wiebe has suggested was a crusade by the nation’s businessmen to ensure political, social, and economic stability in a period of uncertainty and potential chaos. Roanoke’s business leaders, like the men Wiebe describes, sought undemocratic and bureaucratic ways of guaranteeing continued economic modernization by imposing a semblance of “order” on the city’s residents and landscape. The city’s businessmen and their wives, stuck in just the sort of “island community” described by Wiebe, also used reform as a way to connect on the class level, just as they had in their elite clubs, fraternal organizations and patronage of “high brow” culture. They were the group, like their national counterparts, that “daily felt the need for continuity and regularity” in the disordered world around them. Unlike their national counterparts, however, local executives were more worried about keeping the doors of economic development open than enacting anti-corporate legislation or imposing prohibition. Since Roanoke’s business leaders were far more concerned about their “reforms” encouraging economic development than they

Special Statistical Information of the Several Departments for the Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 1905 (Roanoke: Stone Printing & Mfg. Co., 1906), 73; Roanoke City Police Pension Fund Association, *History of the Roanoke Police Department* (Roanoke: Union Printing Co., 1916), 182-84.

In 1997, nearly a hundred years after women in Roanoke organized the WCBC, their grandchildren helped the local Public Broadcasting Station produce a documentary about the group, somewhat misleadingly titled “The Hand that Rocked the Cradle, Pulled the Strings.” The film, which traces the history of WCBC only through its 1907 city plan campaign, includes no mention of the Club’s male advisory board, nor any indication of Mayor Joel Cutchin’s inspiration or support. Moreover, it wrongly implies that all the women involved had relocated from large northern cities, grossly exaggerates Roanoke’s dismal conditions, makes no mention of race or of those being “reformed,” and gives the group credit for far more than it accomplished. Indeed, the documentary leaves the impression that a dozen or so elite women “pulled the strings” that led to a renaissance of the Roanoke community. See “Transcript of ‘The Hand that Rocked the Cradle, Pulled the Strings,’” TMs (1997), WCBC file, VR-RCPL.

were about them bringing social uplift or ameliorating living conditions, their work also fits into Gabriel Kolko's model of "progressive reform" as enacted to rationalize and protect capitalism.¹⁹⁷

Far less apparent in Roanoke are the "reformers" Richard Hofstadter contends were the "old rich" reacting to a "status upheaval" caused by the social and economic dislocation of the period. Moreover, Hofstadter's argument that "progressives" wanted an end to "trusts" and expansion of democracy runs entirely counter to the aims of the city's "reformers," many of whom worked for the monopolistic N&W and supported disenfranchisement of blacks and poor whites. There was no "status upheaval" in Roanoke, mainly because the city entirely lacked a long-established wealthy class. Nor was there any sort of merger between Roanoke's "progressives" and Populists from the countryside, as Hofstadter suggests happened elsewhere.¹⁹⁸

In a southern context, many of Roanoke's "reformers" fit into what Dewy Grantham describes as a movement led by middle and upper-class businessmen interested in economic development, economic diversification, and scientific methods. Like them, local executives sought "a more orderly and cohesive community" through economic modernization and material progress. They also used paternalistic and undemocratic means to accomplish their goals and held steadfast to a belief that the New South creed would solve all "problems." In Roanoke, however, unlike the South Grantham describes, there was no "tradition" to "reconcile" with progress – the city had no antebellum past, and as a result, lacked a cadre of elite anti-progressives. William Link's suggestion that southern progressivism was often paradoxical, usually unpopular, hierarchical, undemocratic, racist, paternalistic, and won only through coercion holds up in

¹⁹⁷ Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, 45-60, 111-32, 153-54; 170 (quote from 153-54); Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 1-10.

¹⁹⁸ Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 135-66.

Roanoke, as does his contention that most “reforms” were fiercely resisted by the men and women being “reformed.”¹⁹⁹

In the context of “progressivism” in Virginia, “reform” in Roanoke fits easily into the spectrum of reactions Raymond Pulley describes as a broad response to disorder and anxiety caused by the state’s post-Civil War business boom, speculation frenzies, and underclass revolts (e.g., the Roanoke Riot of 1893). “Reform” in the Old Dominion, Pulley argues, was therefore reactionary, conservative, anti-modern, and highly undemocratic. Indeed, according to him, the vanguard of Virginia “progressivism” was disenfranchisement. While Roanoke’s “progressives” may not have been quite as reactionary, especially since they lacked an overt connection to what Pulley calls the “Old Virginia mystique,” they welcomed the state’s 1902 constitution and afterwards enacted “reforms” that they likewise hoped would “forestall racial and class conflict and encourage social peace.”²⁰⁰

Early twentieth-century “reform” in Roanoke was led initially by business leaders and later by their wives. At its core, local “reform” was a movement to “cleanse” the town in ways that would ensure continued economic modernization. The movement viewed disenfranchising black and poor white residents as the best means to enact “reform” legislation. Indeed, afterwards business leaders took advantage of the city’s “purified” electorate to pass laws restricting cattle, imposing health standards, and funding municipal appropriations for public schools and parks. Although elsewhere in the nation, businessmen, and especially big businessmen working for monopolistic corporations, were often seen as the enemies of “reform,” in Roanoke they were the main arbiters of its success: when white businessmen sided with lower-class whites, as was the case during the prohibition battles, they won; when they opposed them, as was the case during the cow fight, they lost. Unlike “reform”-minded businessmen in older southern cities, Roanoke’s

¹⁹⁹ Grantham, *Southern Progressivism*, xvi-xviii; 70-75, 275-88; Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism*, xiii, 268-94.

²⁰⁰ Pulley, *Old Virginia Restored*, ix, 18-151 (quote from 151).

“progressive” executives had far fewer conservative “old notables,” opposed to government spending, whom they had to defeat to impose “order.” Indeed, in the city, middle and upper-class natives and newcomers worked hand-in-glove to get the “reforms” they deemed necessary.²⁰¹

After 1906, women in the town’s Civic Betterment Club took over local “reform” and shifted its focus onto education, recreation, beautification, and sanitation. Like female “reformers” elsewhere in the South, the women in the WCBC preferred to work “quietly” behind the scenes and only offer “suggestions” to those in power. Like their southern counterparts, they were also extremely conservative in their outlook – they did not advocate social justice, were not interested in social uplift, and never doubted the absolute suitability of Roanoke’s economic hierarchy or industrial order. They were not seeking change as much as they were looking to simply burnish the society that already existed.²⁰²

The Club’s strongest allies were the husbands of its members, the local industrialists, business leaders, and elected officials who were the arbiters of all successful “reforms” in the city. With their support, the WCBC brought the city parks, better schools, a health department, pure milk and food, and a cleaner cityscape. The Club’s failures, seen primarily in John Nolen’s doomed city plan, in the continuing lack of a public library, and in the chaos of Market Square, occurred mainly because the councilmen in charge of the financially strapped municipality were unwilling to let voters incur the bonded debt necessary. Indeed, in the case of implementing Nolen’s recommendations, Roanoke would have had to double the total debt it had incurred since 1882. Although a public library and new Market House eventually went up in the 1920s, Nolen’s plan, and a revised 1928 version of it, remains safely tucked away in the city’s archives.

²⁰¹ The problem of intransigent old notables is discussed in Samuel M. Kipp III, “Old Notables and Newcomers: The Economic and Political Elite of Greensboro, North Carolina, 1880-1920,” *Journal of Southern History* 43, no. 3 (Aug 1977): 382-84.

²⁰² These issues are explored in Leloudis, “School Reform in the New South,” 905-906.

Conclusions

Roanoke's early history is at its core the story of sorting out the myriad tensions and ambiguities inherent in creating a modern, booming, industrialized city on the one hand, and fomenting municipal and civic order on the other. The more the city thrived economically, the more many of its residents found themselves living amidst conditions they deemed intolerable and pushed in one way or another for "order" in the shape of additional industrialization or civic "reform." Roanoke's elected officials and business leaders, the men most responsible for creating the city, adhered blindly to a faith in the creed of the New South that envisioned manufacturing and industrial expansion as a panacea for social ills and infrastructure troubles. As a result, they cultivated a business-friendly ethos that put development ahead of all other causes. From the beginning, Roanoke was "open for business." Indeed, it was a business. Instead of allocating civic resources to address the city's various needs, business leaders and elected officials channeled crucial municipal capital into investment schemes and devoted most of their civic vigor to luring additional businesses. It was only when racial turmoil or Roanoke's embarrassing appearance threatened to dampen those prospects that these men paid any real attention to bettering their home through social or municipal "reforms."

The processes that gave rise to Roanoke in the early 1880s had their origins in the successful efforts of Big Lick's merchants and professionals to lure the Shenandoah Valley Railroad to their hamlet. The town's natives, albeit with plenty of assistance from northern corporations, played a crucial role in the rapid industrial and demographic development that followed. Unlike their counterparts elsewhere in industrializing Appalachia who were trapped in a colonial economy, these men not only courted and welcomed Yankee industries, they also guided them into place, served on their boards of directors, and mollified conflicts between them and the municipality's inhabitants or elected officials. In doing so, they saddled the town with a disordered growth pattern, company-town ethos, chronically under-funded government, and a

wild-west “boomtown” appearance. The countless societal disorders that followed resonated most clearly in the growth of a rowdy saloon and brothel district that occasionally exploded in brief periods of near anarchy and in the conflicts that emerged between lower-class natives and skilled northern newcomers. For while the arrival of the railroad generated massive development, almost all of it occurred east of the original settlement of Big Lick, in a semi-private “corporate city” where the paternalistic hand of the railroad ameliorated Roanoke’s frontier conditions.

In the aftermath of the city’s initial industrialization, natives for a time became even more suspicious of their northern neighbors to the east, especially since most of the newcomers were Republicans who, with the support of local African Americans, threatened the hegemony of indigenous Democrats. Very rapidly, however, most white residents, no matter what their geographic origins or political affiliations, found a common cause in pushing the municipality to fund modest infrastructure improvements. The city’s African Americans, who never received a fair share of public funding, fought the appropriations and in the process alienated their Republican allies. Democratic natives and Republican newcomers eventually coalesced in crusades against black “dives” and dance halls or in quests to hunt down African American men suspected of capital crimes. They also united behind efforts to fill in gaps in public services by staffing volunteer fire brigades and militias or by contributing to charities or the campaign for a public hospital. While these efforts bridged many of the initial cleavages between the city’s native and newcomer whites, they created a deeper gulf between them and the town’s black residents.

Class and race acutely fractured the community that emerged in the “Magic City.” White migrants from the countryside and working-class residents from the North existed in one world, middle- and upper-class natives and newcomers in another, and black residents in yet one more. Most of the town’s white workers lived in company-owned housing, frequented the city’s saloons, brothels, and gambling dens, and patronized its “low brow” culture. Roanoke’s native and newcomer elites did what they could to create a community entirely separated from the

town's working classes; they formed exclusive dance societies, organized patrician clubs, held ornate galas in their mansions, and patronized "high brow" performances. The town's African Americans, a third of all residents, lived in a world of exclusion, almost entirely outside white society. They resided in a separate section of the city, in what had originally been the white town of Gainsborough, where they created a thriving culture of dance halls, "eating houses," and saloons that white inhabitants rarely saw. Roanoke's three distinct sub-cultures, although for the most part completely divided, occasionally came together in celebrations, festivals, and baseball games that helped foster some sense of civic identity.

Whatever civic cohesiveness these occasions generated, however, gave way to violent conflicts in the early 1890s, when an economic depression, the city's dismal conditions, conflicts over prohibition, and working-class whites' disgust with official justice ignited one of the worst lynch riots in Virginia's history. By the time it ended, the reputation of the "Magic City" was in shambles. The revolt by the city's under classes, unlike lynchings elsewhere in the South, not only terrorized Roanoke's black residents, it loudly rebuked white officials' attempt to impose order. In the aftermath, business boosters and local authorities responded with calls for increased law enforcement, prompt punishment of rioters, and a public relations campaign that touted the city as moral, progressive, and business friendly. In the end, their efforts removed lynching from the assortment of extralegal punishments available to under-class whites, erased much of the riot's public memory, and at least partially rehabilitated the city's reputation.

Having moderated the damage from the 1893 revolt, Roanoke's boosters next guided the city through the decade-long national recession that followed. During the crisis, a new generation of promoters with fewer ties to the N&W emerged and advocated luring another railroad to town to mitigate the damage done by the economic downturn. By then, the N&W and its monopoly on local rail service had ceased to be a vital part of boosters' business schemes. After the recession ended, numerous native industries, such as the Virginia Brewing Company and the Stone Printing & Manufacturing Company, emerged as crucial components of the local economy. These and

other successful local businesses did much to counter notions that Roanoke was simply a “railroad town.” In the early 1900s, the city’s businessmen boosted their home like never before, using Roanoke’s Board of Trade or Chamber of Commerce as promotional machines to draw in dozens of heavy industries and diversify the local economy. They based much of their campaign on highlighting Roanoke’s business-friendly ethos, which promised tax exemptions, free land, and governmental assistance to outside corporations. One of their major selling points, especially to northern businessmen, was the city’s abundant and tractable labor force. For while most local workers belonged to a union, they rarely went on strike and they usually acquiesced to the demands of their bosses. Company paternalism, high wages, corporate welfare, a stridently pro-business local government, and the isolation of Southwest Virginia all contributed to workers’ submissiveness.

When Roanoke’s politically active black population, primitive conditions, and reputation for widespread immorality all threatened to forestall additional development, business leaders and elected officials implemented “reforms” to remedy the situation. They eagerly disfranchised, segregated, and marginalized African American residents, banned the “poor man’s cow” from roaming city streets, passed pure milk and food ordinances, and hired a health inspector to regulate the sanitary behavior of the city’s working classes and blacks. At the same time, ministers and their followers waged a war against the town’s flourishing saloons and brothels. Later, elite women joined the fray and pushed for more stringent health inspections, better educational facilities, public parks and libraries, proper playgrounds, city beautification, urban planning, and censorship of working-class entertainment.

By 1912, Roanoke’s early “reform” movements had reached a highpoint. On one level, the “reforms” had forced the city to shed its village ethos and begin the transition out of its “boomtown” phase. Consequently, in 1912, Roanoke was on its way to becoming a more modern and rationalized metropolis. On another level, however, “reformers” had only been able to modify their home in superficial ways that, while important, left deeper, more systematic problems

unresolved. As a result, even today civic leaders, greenway advocates, and urban planners are working to untangle Roanoke's "boomtown" past in ways that impose order on its landscape and "remodel" the city in the fashion recommended by John Nolen and the Woman's Civic Betterment Club nearly a hundred years ago.

The story of early Roanoke forms part of the larger history of southern urbanization from 1880 to 1900 – a period when the number of urban areas in the region increased from 119 to 320. Most southern cities at the time had much in common with the "Magic City." They too peddled their souls in booster propaganda and backroom deals in the mad scramble for northern capital, offered tax breaks to entice investment, and afterwards suffered from under-funded municipal governments, inadequate public services, poor infrastructures, and high incidences of disease. They too lacked public parks and libraries and had dismal public schools. They likewise served as headquarters for the South's colonial economy and had predominantly rural-oriented populations that had a difficult time adjusting to the facets of modernity they encountered in urban areas.¹

From 1882 to 1900, Roanoke's manufacturing output skyrocketed, and as a result, its percentage of local men engaged in manufacturing jobs far surpassed the norm for southern cities. The rail and industrial developments that gave rise to the city, however, were not unique – they also gave rise to numerous other "instant cities" in the South. Birmingham, Alabama; Chattanooga and Knoxville, Tennessee; Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, Texas, all emerged in the same period from the same sources. Roanoke's population growth of 2,315 percent from 1880

¹ William J. Cooper, Jr. and Thomas E. Terrill, *The American South: A History*, vol. 2 (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1991), 501-504; Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Continuity and Change: Southern Urban Development, 1860-1900," in *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South*, eds. Blaine A. Bromnell and David R. Goldfield (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1977), 110-118; Blaine A. Bromnell and David R. Goldfield, "Southern Urban History," in *ibid.*, 8-10; Lawrence H. Larsen, *The Rise of the Urban South* (Lexington, KN: University of Kentucky Press, 1985), 116-141; David Goldfield, *Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 63-68; C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 139.

to 1890, however, far surpassed all other southern cities. During the same period, for example, the South's older urban areas grew at a pace below the national norm of 56 percent. Birmingham, which grew by 748 percent, Asheville, North Carolina, which grew by 291 percent, and Chattanooga, which grew by 125 percent, were the only southern cities that came anywhere close to matching Roanoke's growth. The South's handful of thriving cities were nevertheless enough for New South boosters to deem them proof that unrivaled economic modernization and demographic development were sure to sweep the entire region. Indeed, as Lawrence Larsen aptly notes, the South's new cities and land booms led the region's "true believers" to assume "the millennium was at hand." Other "Magic cities," Larsen argues, "were expected to grow overnight from small country towns into great regional metropolises." Much to the dismay of New South propagandists, few did. Although the South experienced a dramatic rise in urbanization and manufacturing from 1880 to 1900, the norm for the region was its antebellum port or river cities, all of which were slow to grow and industrialize, and all of which were dependent on agricultural trade or processing for their economic survival. As a result, urbanization and industrialization in the South continued to lag far behind the North. For the region to have climbed out of its economically marginalized position in the nation by the early twentieth century, it needed twenty more "Magic Cities."²

Roanoke, by contrast, exemplified what New South boosters claimed to have wanted. It was the prototypical New South city. Built on the New South creed, it was an extreme version of everything that was supposed to remedy the South's post-Civil War economic stagnation. Roanoke's promise, however, mirrored the empty promise of the New South. As a result, the city was far more dystopia than utopia, much more hick town than metropolis, more exploitive than fair, and more village than city. That Roanoke offered a better way of life for thousands of rural migrants who settled there as well as abundant opportunities for economic gain for anyone

² Larsen, *The Rise of the Urban South*, 143-58 (quote from 143); Rabinowitz, "Continuity and Change: Southern Urban Development, 1860-1900," 105-139.

willing to try their luck does not erase the fact that it failed to come anywhere close to matching what New South visionaries had predicted. Indeed, the city's reality made boosters' rhetoric seem utterly preposterous. The overblown expectations for Roanoke became even more apparent after its rapid industrial and demographic rise to become the "standard bearer for the New South" in the late nineteenth century leveled off and declined throughout the twentieth century. Roanoke's population, which grew from 669 in 1880 to over 50,000 in 1920, thereafter expanded mainly through the annexation of surrounding lands, which over the course of the following sixty years finally pushed the city above the 100,000 mark around 1980. Birmingham, Alabama, by contrast, reached 130,000 residents by 1910. Roanoke, which had been Virginia's third biggest city in 1900, had fallen to its ninth largest by 2000. Much of the decline was the result of America's transition to a post-industrial economy, a world in which heavy manufacturing fell in importance. Ironically, Roanoke's resemblance to northern industrial towns therefore continued in the twentieth century, when it joined them as a southern member of the "rust belt."

The Norfolk & Western Railway and its subsidiaries continued business in Roanoke and exist today as the Norfolk & Southern Railway. The company's machine works, however, ended production of steam-powered locomotives in the late 1950s and today serve mainly as repair shops for the line. As production declined and railroad workers moved out, what had originally been the N&W's company town in the eastern section of the city deteriorated, and in the 1960s, the municipality demolished the remaining 450 cottages and row houses put up by the firm in the 1880s. The black neighborhood of Gainsborough suffered the same fate, albeit ten years earlier. An interstate, a Civic Center, and new manufacturing plants went in on top of both neighborhoods, and as a result, these unique and important early communities have been nearly erased from public memory. Railroad passenger service to the city ended in the 1970s, and the N&W closed its Hotel Roanoke in the early 1990s before donating it to Virginia Tech. The railroad's shops, tracks, former office complex, and new general offices still dominate Roanoke's landscape, but the company ceased being the town's largest employer long ago. In keeping with

its post-industrial economy, Roanoke has turned to railroad-related tourism to fill in gaps left by the transformation of its most important early industry, constructing rail walks from downtown to the city's railroad-themed Transportation Museum, a glass rail bridge / observation deck over the tracks to the refurbished Hotel Roanoke Convention Center, and a gallery for Winston O. Link's railroad photographs in the N&W's 1905 passenger depot. The city today is very much a "railroad town," albeit one that looks to its rail past and not its rail future. Indeed, like the late nineteenth-century western mining towns of Nevada City, California, or Jerome, Arizona, Roanoke today seeks to parlay its boomtown past into a tourist attraction.

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