Spatial and Ethnic Patterns of Real Estate Control Affecting Upward Mobility of Immigrants in a Nineteenth Century Industrial Community

Alfonso

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SPATIAL AND ETHNIC PATTERNS OF REAL ESTATE CONTROL AFFECTING UPWARD MOBILITY OF IMMIGRANTS IN A NINETEENTH CENTURY INDUSTRIAL COMMUNITY

by

Debra S. Alfonso

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of Geography

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
April 1998
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1998
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Debra S. Alfonso
The subject of immigrant success has previously been analyzed in the context of ethnic characteristics, individual heroism, worker solidarity, and advancement of industrialization. Most immigrants start at the bottom of the social-economic ladder. The mechanisms of advancement vary depending on both ethnic values and the constraints of the socioeconomic system. The key variable is normally thought to be advancing occupational status.

The problem addressed is how did recent immigrants to a 19th century steel-town obtain home ownership and advancement in spite of declining industrial wages. Using a GIS system to link and analyze geographic and historical records I was able to show that timing of settlement and property ownership were the key variables in determining immigrant success. This study showed that occupational status had less impact on upward mobility of early ethnic groups than the trajectories chosen by each group for spatial and economic control of property. It also revealed that the internal structure of ethnic communities was much more diverse than originally thought.
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CHAPTER I

POINT OF ENTRY: INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of American industrialization in the 19th century intertwined with a steadily growing stream of immigrants in search of new opportunities, eager for work and a better life than they had left behind. Those arriving on our doorstep were driven here by factors as varied as the regions they represented. Natural phenomena and political crises alike turned Europe upside down as people scrambled to cope with their fast-changing nineteenth-century world. As Bodnar (1985) points out, a variety of complex social-economic factors served to drive and pull people from their homelands. Crop failures, rapidly increasing population within shrinking boundaries, political and religious persecution, and the opportunity to find paying work separate from land obligations, all contributed to widespread immigration and emigration. America played host to vast numbers of European immigrants, nearly one million a year by 1900, as individuals and groups made personal decisions directing their families’ futures.

The poignant picture of these immigrants as the poor, huddled masses yearning to be free, expressed in Emma Lazarus’ 1883 poem inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, does not provide an entirely accurate picture. Seldom did the poorest of the poor actually have the means to escape their circumstances (generally, those most
likely to emigrate were the ones with enough resources to make that choice). Labor contracts frequently offered passage to America, to be repaid out of future wages. The skills and the resources they brought with them varied considerably, as did their cultural traditions. Once they arrived, how well they fared depended on much more than mere personal initiative. The uncertainties that accompanied life as an industrial wage earner made carving out a life in the new world a much different process than living off the land in the old. An investigation by the Immigration Commission (1911) into the occupational background of immigrant steelworkers revealed less than 20% had any previous industrial experience before emigrating. The vast majority came from rural peasant origins. Unfortunately, many immigrants were ill prepared for dealing with the harsh realities of “individuals facing the historical currents of capitalism, industrialization, and urbanization.” Against such a backdrop, “familial and communal solidarity was fostered as much by the marginal nature of life in the industrial working class as it was in premigration worlds” (Bodnar, 1985: 206, 92).

The tremendous growth of the iron and steel industry, with its reputation for high wages, attracted throngs of immigrants from Europe to Western Pennsylvania. The state’s population increased at the rate of 1 million persons per decade from 1880 to 1930. A primary goal for most, beyond daily survival, was the accumulation of enough capital to eventually purchase their own home. But wild fluctuations in the industry, along with anti-labor practices of the steel companies and a host of other factors, undermined the wage-earning capabilities of the ordinary laborer. In many industrial settlements, immigrants had little hope of becoming home owners; such
was the fate of most Woods Run, PA. iron workers described in Bennett's (1977) study comparing their status to iron workers in Johnstown, PA.

My study of one "foreign" section of Johnstown, PA., presented in this thesis shows a different pattern of immigrant adjustment to the realities of America's industrial revolution. This study of the independent borough of Cambria City, from 1860 to 1910, highlights the struggle of two ethnic groups - the German and the Irish - to obtain their part in the "American Dream", a dream eventually fulfilled not through wages but through control of social and economic structures, facilitated and reinforced by property acquisition. In the period from 1840 to 1870, these two nationalities made up the majority of immigration to the United States (as shown in Table 1). By 1870, they jointly constituted 85% of Cambria City's residents. Western European groups, principally British, Welsh, German, and Irish, dominated the flow of immigrants until the 1890's. By then, the second major immigration wave, consisting of people from South, Central and Eastern European countries, had begun. The trickle turned into a tidal wave by 1900 of nearly 1 million per year, that finally slowed only with the advent of World War I and the tightening of immigration laws. Pennsylvania was second only to New York City in the number of immigrants arriving in these decades. Representatives of major steel companies recruited heavily in New York City, Philadelphia and other major ports of entry.

New immigrants congregated in point-of-entry ethnic communities, partly by choice, and partly due to economic constraints. Familiar people, language, and foods all eased the transition to a strange country. Cramped living quarters generally were
Table 1
German and Irish Share of U.S. Immigration, 1841 - 1910

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Total Immigration</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Irish</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Combined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1841-1850</td>
<td>1,713,251</td>
<td>434,626</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>780,719</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851-1860</td>
<td>2,598,214</td>
<td>951,667</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>914,119</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>71.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861-1870</td>
<td>2,314,824</td>
<td>787,468</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>435,778</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871-1880</td>
<td>2,812,191</td>
<td>718,182</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>436,871</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>41.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881-1890</td>
<td>5,246,613</td>
<td>1,452,970</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>655,482</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891-1900</td>
<td>3,687,564</td>
<td>571,572</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>390,179</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901-1910</td>
<td>8,795,386</td>
<td>341,498</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>339,065</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


available for a modest weekly fee. In both traditional planning theory, and popular conception, these ethnic neighborhoods were populated with menial workers, renters or boarders, who occupied the lowest social strata in near slum conditions (Brody, 1960; Johnston, 1971; Morawska, 1985; Rosenzweig, 1983). The key to immigrant success was assumed to be education, assimilation of cultural values - including a strong puritan work ethic - and advancing occupational status (the Horatio Alger “pull-yourself-up-by-your bootstraps” mentality):

The American philosophy stressed that in a society where there is work for all .... anyone who is willing to exert enough effort can
acquire a certain level of material well-being. The Protestant ethic with its emphasis on salvation through individual diligence, virtue, and honest work fitted well with the economic beliefs in the individual’s power to achieve economic success through his own exertion, ambition, honesty, frugality, and a virtuous life. If he failed in the economic struggle, it was his own fault; idleness, bad habits, intemperance, vices, and other human weaknesses were responsible for his condition (Meissner, 1966: 1).

According to this commonly accepted scenario, over time immigrants assimilated into the mainstream, acquired better skills and obtained higher wage jobs, which enabled them to leave the less desirable neighborhoods, actualizing a degree of upward mobility for themselves, or their descendants (Boal, 1976). This persistent perception of immigrant communities, accompanied by a stereotypical focus on labor status, obscures dimensions of internal stratification common to many ethnic neighborhoods. Numerous case studies of different ethnic groups and household types conducted from this perspective have described social mobility in immigrant communities as derivative of labor status. Even Sharon A. Brown’s (1989:156) exhaustive historical study of Cambria Iron Company explicitly restates the same assumptions, contrary to the evidence on falling wages she collected.

This narrow framework could not explain several paradoxes of everyday life among Cambria City residents. How did recent immigrants come to obtain home ownership rates so much higher than anticipated for a working-class community? Nearly half of Cambria’s immigrant households had already achieved the distinction of owning their homes by 1870. Most American households did not fare as well, with a national average of only 30% claiming home ownership. In a community
where over 90% of the labor force was directly or indirectly involved with the iron and steel industry (controlled by a single powerful employer), why was social status and mobility apparently not a direct product of labor status? Given the erratic nature of employment in the industry and the pressure to reduce wages, what was the mechanism that allowed these early immigrants to prosper? These questions led me to look more closely at the complex internal hierarchy of the ethnic community formed near Johnstown, PA. by immigrant laborers for Cambria Iron (Figure 1).

The glaring contradiction between these facts and the narrow paradigm of traditional immigration studies and historical stereotypes was the main impetus for this research. Specifically, the following research questions were focused on:

1. Did a relationship exist between labor status and advancement in the community, and if so, how strong was it. Moreover, how did this relationship change over the study period for different ethnic groups in Cambria City?

2. What differences existed between ethnic groups in terms of property acquisition and its spatial distribution?

3. To what degree did property ownership, or lack thereof, affect a family’s economic standing and prospects for advancement?

4. Is there evidence of differences among ethnic groups in terms of the trajectories chosen and strategies used to obtain upward mobility?

5. What impact did ethnic competition for space have on the physical form of the community?
Cambria City, and Cambria Iron Co. General Orientation Map

Figure 1. Location of the Study Area, Johnstown, Cambria City, and Cambria Iron Company.

Source: ArcView County Boundaries (ESRI); ETAK Maps; author.
6. What did the internal structure of the community reveal that might inform studies of other immigrant neighborhoods?

The context of immigrant advancement in Cambria City, studied in this thesis, is defined to a large extent by Cambria Iron Company, a powerful and active force in both industrial and communal development. Paternalism in 19th century company-controlled industrial towns is a fairly well documented theme in geographic, historical, and sociological studies. According to these studies, paternalistic companies controlled most aspects of the everyday lives of their workers, going far beyond the mere provision of wages. This control was essentially non-monetary, and was exercised through specially designed hiring practices, land allocation policies, and the provision of health care, libraries, and education. "Not only was the Cambria Iron Company one of the largest and most powerful corporations in the country, it was also one of the most paternalistic" (Bennett, 1977:172). In the case of Cambria Iron, control extended to the provision of coal for heating, lumber, wool, the town's water supply, a hospital, access to doctors, and a large company-owned mercantile business. Later, the company controlled telephone and electric service to the area, and even dictated which railroads could, or could not, enter the town. As with many such company towns, Cambria's directors were also prominent local politicians and sat on the boards of all the important banks and community organizations. A revealing illustration of how things worked in Johnstown is contained in the following commentary by Lt. W. H. Jaques (1884):

The workmen are encouraged to build their own houses; upon
application, a lot is assigned by the company, the necessary building materials are furnished, and the price is deducted in small sums from the wages of the applicant until the debt is paid. (quoted in Brown, 1989).

In contrast, the coexistence of functionally autonomous immigrant neighborhoods, largely independent of the company, is a relatively unknown phenomenon. Establishment of an autonomous sphere within workers' communities constituted a dramatic contrast to the paternalistic practices of their employer. The driving force behind the increasing internal complexity of these communities was a combination of ethnic competition for space, and the struggle to be free from company control. These two processes shaped both the physical and economic environment within these neighborhoods. This paper will relate the internal structure of these communities to ethnic strategies for spatial control (of property), reflective of a deliberate response to tight company control over the workers' lives. The dominant ethnic groups developed slightly different strategies. However, the acquisition and use of property or housing was the primary modus operandi. This thesis or proposition is supported by analyses of community demographics, deeds, and tax assessments, which revealed stages of evolution in the use of property and control over land.

The competition for space and property between ethnic groups under the paternalistic umbrella of company control had far-reaching impact on the formation of social opportunity structures during the period of late 19th century industrial restructuring. The following hypotheses were put forth and examined in this paper:
1. Ethnic and social construction of ownership was a primary factor in contributing to the social mobility of the earliest immigrant groups, the German and the Irish, conversely limiting opportunities for later arrivals.

2. Periodic disruptions in earning power, resulting from upheavals in the volatile iron and steel industry, made alternative strategies for economic stability a necessity.

3. Secondary occupational diversification, along with housing and land acquisition, was an important component in spatial patterning and provided a significant base for the community's autonomous development.

These hypotheses, if proved, will suggest a new perspective on immigrant transitioning that is diametrically opposed to traditional assumptions of mobility studies. To test the hypotheses, I examined distinct ethnic strategies in achieving higher prosperity and traced the formation of ethnic neighborhoods related to occupational diversification.

Addressing this topic required a combination of sources and methodologies drawn from several disciplines: history, geography, sociology, and economics being the most relevant. Because the role of property is central to this research, I constructed a spatial-temporal database on property transactions in Cambria City, derived from a variety of historical records, including deeds and tax assessments. A number of statistical and cartographic techniques were used in the process of analyzing the databases compiled for this research.
The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter II presents the context of nineteenth century immigration and industrialization, along with some of the research previously undertaken in this field. It creates the foundation for my research, by clarifying the evolving relationships between the company and its employees, and between the ethnic groups and community formation, over three time periods. Chapter III discusses both the methodology and data resources, emphasizing specific problems encountered in the use of geographically referenced historical data. The fourth chapter presents the results and discussion of the research findings, with special focus on the mechanisms of social mobility for different ethnic groups. From a common entry-point base of immigrant renter, divergent cultural traits shaped the transitions to owner-entrepreneur and/or landlord. As I will show, advancement in community status apparently bore little relationship to labor status throughout the period. Chapter V reinterprets the findings in terms of the original research questions and draws some conclusions with suggestions for further study.

The following section begins with the development of Cambria Iron's industrial power through three distinct phases and then traces how this industrial power translated into "domestic" policies affecting its laborers. This will be followed by an examination of the symbiotic relationship between Cambria Iron and the formation of ethnic neighborhoods housing its workforce.
CHAPTER II

INDUSTRIALIZATION AND COMMUNITY IN 19TH CENTURY COMPANY TOWNS: BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Iron & Steel: The Backbone of American Industry

From the time of colonization to the mid-nineteenth century, America relied heavily on European technology and materials. The tremendous effort, time, and cost, in transporting goods across the ocean fueled American determination to build internal capacity to supply our own needs. In order to efficiently move goods across the fast-growing nation, America desperately needed to create a transportation network. In the early nineteenth century this fueled a short-lived canal building craze. Johnstown, Pennsylvania thrived as a canal town at the western terminus of the Portage Railroad. This railroad demonstrated the feasibility of crossing the Allegheny Mountains with a cargo transport system, albeit by ropes and pulleys. By the 1840s it became clear that railroads provided the best approach for transcontinental shipping. The mountains had presented a tremendous barrier in the movement of goods from the eastern seaboard to the expanding west. The euphoria at crossing this barrier led to dreams of connecting the nation through a transcontinental railroad system. This dream became reality in May of 1869 at Promontary, Utah where the Union Pacific Railroad met and joined with the Central
Pacific Railroad. American railroad companies had entered a fiercely competitive expansion phase.

The emerging railroad system spawned an almost insatiable appetite for iron rails, locomotives, freight and passenger cars, and equipment, which in turn drove the country's westward expansion. From a mere 9,000 miles of railroad track existing in 1850, phenomenal growth pushed the number to well over 200,000 miles of track by the turn of the century. Telegraph lines swept across the nation along with the railroads, making long distance communication possible in minutes rather than weeks. Sheet metal for armored naval vessels; cables for the Brooklyn Bridge; structural steel for Chicago-style skyscrapers; all contributed to the beginnings of heavy industry as America began to flex her manufacturing muscle. The iron and steel industry formed the backbone of the Industrial Revolution in the United States.

Cambria Iron Company in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, dominated the iron and steel industry during the half-century from 1850 to 1900. In terms of sheer output and number of employees, it was one of the largest firms in America. Its technological innovations and labor policies served as blueprints for the emerging American industry. Cambria Iron engineers patented the first three-high rolling mill (speeding up the process by several hours), a steel blooming mill (allowing steel to be rolled rather than hammered), and many other improvements. Cambria was the first firm to hire a full-time chemist to scientifically control the quality and consistency of the iron rails produced. The mighty Pennsylvania Railroad relied on it as one of its principal suppliers of rails. Space was allotted to William Kelly at Cambria's yards
for his experiments with the Bessemer converter. Cambria later rolled the first commercially ordered Bessemer steel rails, and was a leader of the Pneumatic Steel Association which obtained control of the Bessemer patents in the United States. In 1902 Cambria Iron, combined with Carnegie’s Edgar Thomson Steel Works at Braddock, PA., produced 1/3 of the nation’s 2.9 million tons of Bessemer steel rails. The three development phases of Cambria Iron are described in the following sections, along with their differing patterns of production, labor needs, policies, and paternalistic practices.

Cambria Iron Company Development

Phase I: Emergence (1852-1869)

The initial start-up and emergence of Cambria Iron covers the period from 1852 to roughly 1869. This phase differed drastically from those that followed in several key features. First, the start-up costs of iron and steel manufacturing are enormous. Because of this the industry tends to experience long-term locational stability. In the case of Cambria Iron, one million dollars was expended for underwriting start-up costs. Johnstown initially had every resource advantage within easy reach. An 1853 company pamphlet reported:

In no part of the United States are found combined so many advantages for the manufacturing of iron, as at Johnstown... Millions of tons of iron can be made here without going three-quarters of a mile for any portion of the coal, ore, and lime, or for the stone and brick for the furnace building and hearths. (Cambria Iron, 1853)
Secondly, Cambria Iron had a well defined market area and leadership. The Pittsburgh district served as a major transportation and processing point but had not yet begun the manufacture of iron products (Swank, 1910). Thirdly, the company could not operate without recruiting experienced and highly skilled iron masters from Europe, since the American industry was still in its infancy. Thus, the company was entirely dependent on their skill and knowledge for the production of iron. Finally, this phase was affected by the Civil War which created a boom for the iron industry, saving Cambria Iron from its financial distress. The war effort required ordnance, miles of new railroad track, trains, and iron plates for ships. In addition to the industry boom, the Civil War created strong officer loyalties that carried over into the workplace for an extended time, mitigating worker discontent. “Few men who served with...any officer-supervisor...can be found on the list of striking workers” (Bennett, 1977:192). With the young nation on the move westward, construction of a rolling mill plant on the western side of the Alleghenies eliminated the high cost of transporting heavy rail over the mountains and hastened the laying of a rail network.

When George S. King discovered all the raw materials for making iron nearby, he quickly traveled to meet with investors in Philadelphia and Boston. Additional inducement for investing in the firm appeared in the form of a state subsidy for the soon-to-be completed Pennsylvania Railroad line to Pittsburgh. After securing more than a million dollars in start-up funds, he returned to Johnstown and began construction of the Cambria Iron rolling mill in 1852. According to various deed records, he actually began buying up coal and mineral rights to several hundred
acres in the 1840’s. When he set up operations for the Cambria Iron Company, it was a radical departure from the small scale furnace operations previously known in the region. He adopted a large, self-sufficient, plantation approach, intending from the start to control as much of the sources and means of production as possible. An illustration of this is evident in the amount of land purchased prior to the company's incorporation. Twenty-five thousand acres of land were already under Cambria Iron's control -- considerably more than allowed under Pennsylvania law. Mr. King succeeded in lobbying the legislature to amend the law for his benefit, resulting in a statute that allowed unlimited land-holdings, provided they covered more than one county. By 1878, Cambria Iron owned nearly fifty thousand acres in seven counties and had controlling interests in several iron ore mines in Minnesota’s rich Mesabi range, as well as in Great Lakes shipping firms for transporting the ore back to PA. This plantation mentality firmly set the pattern for the future growth of Cambria Iron, and consequently, for its dealings with its employees. The following account highlights the company mentality at this period:

From Cambria Iron’s beginning, the company’s influence reached far beyond mere job opportunities in its rolling mills. Satellite industries and businesses were set up almost immediately to insure that the company had total control over its environment. ... The company extended the self-sufficient model of the early iron furnace plantations into the twentieth century. It controlled not only the sources of raw materials and transportation, but it also had a great deal of influence in the day-to-day life of its employees and in the larger life of the community. Through benevolent services to employees - - housing, church sponsorship, the company store, a library, and hospital - - it attempted a degree of control over the worker’s world beyond the mill walls, and by corporate involvement and that of its managerial
elite in ruling cultural, economic, and political bodies, it directly and indirectly controlled public policy and services (Wallace, 1989:19).

Given an ideal location not far from Pittsburgh with access to the Mississippi River, plus an abundance of raw material, Cambria Iron was poised to get off to a roaring start. But a fire destroyed the mill before it was finished and work had to begin all over. Meanwhile its first customer grew impatient as production was delayed. In order to get started, Cambria Iron had taken a large order for rails that it agreed to produce for much less than their actual cost. As a result, it underwent several reorganizations in the first few years and found itself frequently unable to meet the payroll. The skilled workers the company had gone to so much trouble to recruit threatened to walk away if they were not paid. Things were so bad, the company was nearly forced to shut down. In January of 1855, the company president wrote to the mill superintendent: “...say to all the mechanicks and labouring men about the works...to go on and work with full confidence that they are all going to be paid for their labour.... By the 20th of Feby we expect to receive enough cash to settle up our payroll.” This was followed by another letter in March pleading, “try and keep your puddlers and rail men at work you may assure them in a short time they will get their pay if they make the iron...You must do all that you can to quiet the men and keep them at work” (quoted in Brown, 1989:39). Only by getting the workers to accept scrip payments, in lieu of cash, which were redeemable at local stores, did Cambria manage to keep going. The practice of substituting scrip for wages reappeared many times in the volatile years of Cambria’s growth (The
Philadelphia Record claimed in July, 1891 that employees hardly knew any other method of payment. An enormous company store, supplied by Cambria's own manufacturing divisions and abattoir, soon diverted the laborer's earnings (scrip or cash) back to itself. But the first several years were a recurring saga of financial woes and reorganization. The big money eastern investors finally decided to send their own man to take over management of the company in 1855 and recoup their sizable investment. With dogged determination and effort, Daniel J. Morrell finally turned the company around, changing not only production, but also labor relations and community organization.

Daniel J. Morrell was a shrewd businessman who initially knew little about the manufacture of iron and steel, but he had a firm conviction in the potential profitability of the Cambria Iron venture in spite of the initial odds against it. Many times it was the strength of his personal conviction that persuaded stockholders to continue investing in improvements to the company and support its expansion. In addition to promoting capital investment in the iron works, Mr. Morrell invested heavily in men with the genius and capacity for innovation to advance the industry. During this early phase, Cambria Iron was more than willing to pay premium wages for the best in the industry, knowing the company would benefit from their expertise.

These highly skilled iron masters were accustomed to having control of their work environment, especially since they were responsible for hiring and paying their helpers (Bennett, 1977:40). A major point of friction under Morrell's management resulted from his efforts to remove this control from the skilled workers. It was this
very issue which triggered an 1866 puddlers’ strike against the company (puddlers were responsible for the right mixture of iron ores and other elements to consistently produce high quality iron). Resistance rose against Morrell’s hiring of “green hands”, forcing the puddlers to not only work with them, but also pay them the same wages as their experienced helpers (Bennett, 1977:15). Morrell was able to break this strike organized by the United Sons of Vulcan and simultaneously extinguish the union presence in Johnstown. A list of company rules published a few years after this strike in the Iron Age journal (May 7, 1873) makes the company’s position clear: “The general manager shall have full and complete authority and control in every department of the works ...” The general manager, of course, was Daniel J. Morrell. Cambria was the first major iron works to establish full management control over its labor force. By insisting on total control it was able to extinguish the autonomy of the skilled laborers. Other companies soon followed suit.

**Phase II: Dominance (1870-1889)**

The second phase covers Cambria Iron’s tremendous growth and dominance of the industry in the 1870’s and 1880’s. This period saw the payoff of early investment in quality leadership and highly skilled men. The experimentation of the early years began to produce innovative technological advances that helped advance the entire American industry.

The technological edge combined with America’s fast-paced expansion of its railroad network put Cambria in an enviable position. The decade from 1870 to 1880
saw an increase from 52,900 miles of railroad track to 93,000 miles. This resulted partly from falling prices for American rolled rails, and partly from stiff import duties on British rails, after intense lobbying by the American industry under the influence of Senator Daniel J. Morrell, Cambria's general manager.

From modest beginnings, Cambria Iron quickly became one of the largest employers among American industries of the time, foreshadowing the giant corporations of the twentieth century. Just four years after beginning operations, Cambria already employed 1500 men at the iron works. The largest and most technologically advanced iron producing plant in the country by the 1870's, the Cambria Iron Co. employed more than 5,000 men. Rapid expansion of America’s railroad network required correspondingly huge inputs of labor to meet production demands. Favorable market conditions for the industry led to rapid expansion by Cambria Iron to increase its market share. After 1870, Cambria’s labor force grew exponentially; by 1910, the numbers stood at over 18,000 employees and within just ten years the workforce doubled again to 36,000 men. Throughout the study period, the percentage of Johnstown’s labor force participating in the industry averaged above 90 percent. Johnstown area residents lived on the payroll of a single, powerful employer. As stated by the editor of Cambria County’s 1890 Illustrated Historical Atlas:

Millville lived on the payroll of the Cambria Works, as did the borough of Cambria. Conemaugh lived on the payroll of the Gautier Wire Works owned by the Cambria Company, Woodvale lived on the payroll of the Cambria Company’s flour and woolen mills, and Johnstown in turn lived on them (Caldwell, 1890:42).
The company controlled not only wages and labor relations, but also limited worker mobility through industry-wide “blacklisting” practices, making it difficult for them to obtain employment with other firms. The management of Cambria Iron adamantly opposed union activity in its mills. Early in the history of the company, the first immigrants recruited for work in Cambria’s rolling mill, the Welsh ironmasters, walked out on strike. They were summarily dismissed and blacklisted, forcing them to leave Johnstown. Imported skilled Irishmen then took their place. Workers quickly learned that renting from the company left them vulnerable to disciplinary action when the company threw strikers and their families out on the street. The company clearly articulated its policy in Rule #15 which stated: “Persons living in the company’s houses will...be compelled to leave at once upon ceasing to be employed by the company” (Brown, 1989:377). Even worse, to drive home the point, the company often made an example out of the worst-case family, someone who was an invalid, or a family with several small children, as a demonstration of the lengths they would go to in breaking a strike action.

In 1872, when Irish puddlers went out on strike, they were treated exactly the same by the company. However, this time the dismissals and blacklisting failed to force the Irish out of the community. Apparently, during the period between the Welsh and Irish strikes, the latter had developed a successful defense strategy against company dictates. Workers who owned their housing were not so easily displaced as those who rented from the company. By the time of the 1872 puddlers’ strike, nearly all the Irish (who dominated these positions in the mill), had become homeowners in
Cambria City and other boroughs of Johnstown. This resulted in the dramatic difference in Irish persistence in the community in stark contrast to the earlier Welsh immigrants. However, the heavy-handed policies of the company earned it nothing but contempt:

Take Johnstown as an example...They know when men earn a little home with years of hard work and rigid economy, they will be slow to leave it. Knowing the love of home and the associations connected with it, the Johnstown manager has undertaken to use this sentiment to depress wages to their lowest limits, and to persecute men for their Unionism. Because they have homes they cannot leave, there they are, chained as it were. Their independence is a myth. They are not in a condition to enforce their rights. He keeps them so near poverty that hundreds of them cannot get away (National Labor Tribune, May, 1874).

A future giant in the industry was soon to benefit from Cambria's management policies. Apparently, George Fritz (General Superintendent) and William R. Jones (Assistant to Mr. Fritz) disagreed with Morrell's policy of paying the lowest possible wages:

...after Fritz died in August 1873, Cambria's directors, influenced by Morrell, refused to promote Jones to Fritz's position ... Bill Jones decided to look elsewhere for employment ... he found work at the new Carnegie works at Braddock. Labor problems emerged at Cambria and Daniel Morrell offered his workers a choice: either end the difficulties or lose their jobs. Around 200 workers decided to quit and left Cambria for Braddock to work with the famed Captain Bill Jones. (Brown, 1989:90)

At the height of Cambria's power, even the crafty Andrew Carnegie was eager to pacify and appease, while simultaneously stealing away her best engineers, technicians, and experienced workers, to build his own steel empire.
Armed with experienced workers, the latest in plant design and technology, and a tested Bessemer procedure, Andrew Carnegie set out to undo the Pneumatic Steel Association [who controlled the Bessemer patents].

Andrew Carnegie continued to make short term arrangements with the association for the sake of temporary advantages. He especially wanted to stay friendly with the Cambria Iron Company, a powerful competitor... Carnegie's efforts at achieving a truce with Cambria were largely successful throughout the rest of the 1870's, as they shared orders and divided profits. (Brown, 1989:87-93)

The practice of cooperative rail associations to divide production and control market fluctuations worked moderately well up until the 1890s. By then, Carnegie's privately held firm was strong enough to challenge the Association and deliberately undercut other firms' prices in cut-throat competition.

**Phase III: Competition (1890-1910)**

Cambria Iron's dominance began to slip away as fierce competition from Carnegie and others complicated the industry. Intense competition spurred further advances in technology. Companies wanting to better their positions in the market enticed personnel from Cambria Iron to their firms. "During its heyday, Cambria's engineers were the competent geniuses. Cambria was the school where everyone learned at the hands of the masters who then left to run other plants..." (Brown, 87-93). The migration of her highly skilled engineers and foremen to other firms hurt her badly. Meanwhile, the Cambria managers had become obsessed with the drive to economize and cut production costs. Rigid economizing allowed no room for new experimentation. Ironically, the very company that had led the way in innovative
technology now began to suffer from inertia. A key part of their management strategy required keeping labor costs as low as possible. From their perspective, these moves "were essential to economic survival and achievement" (Brown, 1989:17). The "boom & bust" cycles characteristic of the industry in this time period seemed to validate the harsh labor policies of the company. For example, in 1880 steel rails sold for $85 per ton. Only five years later, that price had fallen to $27 per ton. When prices did rise again, the large pool of unskilled labor available necessitated no corresponding increase in wages. When times were hard, pressure was often put on workers to accept immediate wage reductions, or face indefinite shut-downs. In 1893, wages in the iron and steel industry declined an average of 25 per cent. As Cambria Iron Company's manager, Powell Stackhouse related: "We were looking everywhere to reduce our costs, and labor got its share of it... We got them down low. We had to." (quoted in Brody, 1960:42, from testimony given in U.S. v. U.S.S., IV, 1708.) The pressure on manufacturers to stay competitive in a rapidly changing industry were noted by the Bureau of the Census in its 1890 Census of Manufacturing:

During the last decade competition has been so active in the manufacture of iron and steel, that extraordinary expenditures for remodeling old and adding new machinery and appliances, have been necessary to meet the changing conditions of manufacture...These remarks apply especially to the manufacture of steel rails. Establishments which were equipped with the most efficient machinery in 1880 found it necessary to entirely remodel their mills a few years later, and subsequently to replace these improvements by even more modern and economical methods of manufacture. (GPO, 1892)
The primary reason for this upheaval in the industry was the changeover from iron to steel production. Both the Bessemer and the open-hearth methods of steel production required totally new equipment. One notable characteristic of Bessemer steel production was that it required only semi-skilled and unskilled labor. These laborers were often brought in purposely without prior experience and trained by the management. The vast majority of the workforce now consisted of unskilled laborers of Eastern or Southern European descent. With the great increase in immigration during the latter nineteenth century, the supply of labor consistently exceeded the demand, helping to keep wages at the lowest rate. This corresponded nicely with the manufacturers goal of lowering the labor cost per ton of steel produced, as demonstrated by Cambria Steel’s wage scale shown in Table 2. In the period from 1890 to 1910, the cost of labor in relation to total cost shrank from 22.5 percent to only 16.5 per cent, a drop of one-third (Brody, 1960:17).

The results for the steel industry were spectacular. During the twenty years following 1890 a furnace worker's output tripled while his income rose one-half. A steelworker doubled his productivity while receiving only one-fifth more pay. This was possible only because the labor force could not oppose decisions made by the steelmakers (Brown, 1989:19-20).

Bennett’s study shows the principal effects of this industrial restructuring were:

(1) to reduce the number of workers per ton of metal rolled:
(2) to make some skilled positions obsolete:
(3) to reduce the degree of control which the remaining skilled workers had over the ways in which they performed their jobs:
(4) to create a series of semiskilled jobs in the production of Bessemer steel ingots; and
(5) to allow the managers themselves to train new workers and to direct them in ways determined by management. (1977:39)
Table 2

Cambria Steel Wage Scale, 1880 - 1900

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1885</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1895</th>
<th>1900</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unskilled - Daily Wage Scale of Laborers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer, blast furnace</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinder man, blast furnace</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer, Bessemer</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer, open hearth</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1885</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1895</th>
<th>1900</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skilled Tonnage Rate (per Hundred Tons) Scale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rail Mill Roller</td>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rail Mill Heater</td>
<td>33.00</td>
<td>22.87</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td>22.41</td>
<td>22.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blooming Mill Heater</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bessemer Vesselman</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: compiled from Brown (1989)
The next section focuses more closely on the consequences of these technological and management shifts on labor characteristics which evolved during these years, influencing labor relations, policies and ethnic construction of the industry.

Status of Cambria Iron Employees

Phase I: Power of Autonomous Workers (1852-1869)

The greatest need besides capital in the early days of Cambria Iron was men skilled in iron-making. Great Britain's industry was much more advanced at this point than in America, so the company naturally turned to recruiting experienced iron masters from abroad. Cambria's management recruited its best from Europe. The new company was entirely dependent on their knowledge and skill for the production of iron. Experienced Welsh iron and mine workers made up the dominant group until 1858 when they went out on strike, and consequently were booted out of the company's employ. Skilled Irish workers were hired to replace them, along with a few German and American workers, who together with a few Englishmen, Scotch, and Swedes, made up the sole employees until the mid-1880's.

In this first phase of Cambria Iron Company, the skilled workers possessed tremendous power and autonomy. The immigrants had brought with them the Old European system of apprenticeship. The master hired his own crew and paid their wages out of his share. The skilled workers "hired, trained, directed, and paid" their
own crews, pretty much running the foundries. Under such a system, control of the work, and the workforce, belonged not to managers, but to skilled labor.

Given this tradition of control over work crews and to some extent wages, the Welsh iron masters balked at Morrell's attempts to force them to work with untrained helpers they had not hired. This affront, combined with a 20% wage reduction, was the main impetus behind the strike in 1858 which cost them their positions, and opened the way for the Irish, the Germans, and some Americans to take their place. But, Morrell did not overcome his labor problems by simply hiring replacements. Less than 10 years later, Cambria's 240 puddlers and helpers went out on strike again. At the time, Cambria had plans to install an additional 14 furnaces and hire over 100 more puddlers and helpers (Bennett, 1977). These plans were significantly scaled back after the strike, and management intensified its efforts to gain control and mechanize many processes. Morrell hired a large, specially trained police force to break the strike. Only workers who forswore union affiliation were rehired (Brown, 1989). Prior to the 1866 puddlers strike, the skilled workers had negotiated wage scale agreements with the company based on the price per ton of rails. Just six years after the failed strike, puddlers who merely inquired about wage rates were subject to firing by the company (Bennett, 1977). The previous independence and perceived arrogance of the iron masters was systematically chipped away by Cambria Iron. One of its stated goals was the elimination of the "aristocracy of labor".

When puddlers and rollers hired their own crews, it was common practice to hire relatives and friends. Due to this practice, Cambria was widely known as a
“father-son” operation. Cambria Iron supported this practice in the early years because it lent stability and continuity to the skilled positions upon which it depended so heavily. The prevalence of this practice strengthened family and regional migration chains, bringing even more immigrants into the area. The cumulative effect resulted in homogeneous work crews in terms of ethnic heritage. This practice was especially enforced by the Irish dominance in the mills, effectively withholding advancement opportunities from Germans and other immigrant groups for an extended time.

**Phase II: Management Takes Control (1870-1889)**

While necessary at the early stages of industry development, the apprenticeship arrangement of Master-Helper began to subvert the company interests when the industrial processes became more mechanized. The level of independence and high pay of the master iron-makers put them at odds with managerial goals of efficiency and cost reduction (Brody, 1960). As the industry converted to Bessemer steel, it needed only semi-skilled men whom companies preferred to have trained by managers or foremen, doing away with the old apprenticeship system of iron-making. This effectively transferred control away from the skilled iron masters into the hands of company management. Bodnar’s labor studies have shown that it was precisely at this vulnerable time that the drive to unionize was strongest among the skilled tradesmen. “The introduction of Bessemer converters and open-hearth furnaces had severely reduced the need for skilled workers and increased the demand for low paid,
unskilled laborers throughout America...” (Bodnar, 1985:95). From 1870 to 1880, the percentage of skilled positions in the mill declined from 17% of the workforce to a mere 4% of the total. Only two decades earlier, skilled positions had constituted no less than 25% of the total workforce.

During this phase the economic panic of 1873 set in, severely depressing the market for iron rails. Cambria Iron responded by cutting wages, initially by 10%, then soon after by 21%. It simultaneously refused to lower the rents on company housing. Workers reacted by reviving trade unions that had been disbanded. About 400 coal and iron ore miners reorganized the local branch of the Miners National Association. Puddlers reorganized the Sons of Vulcan local union with 120 members. The rollers and roll hands joined the National Union of Iron and Steel Roll Hands with approximately 170 enrollees (Brown, 1989:175). The company absolutely refused to talk with union representatives. When workers threatened to strike, Morrell responded by shutting down the iron works, throwing everyone out of work. Workers on strike had their credit rescinded at local stores. The locked out workers held a rally several months into the strike attended by close to a 1,000 workers. But, the strike eventually failed for lack of local support. The local paper reflected the dominant nativist view that workers had no right to interfere with operations of the iron works because “their money did not build it” (Johnstown Tribune, June, 1874). Enough “black sheep” workers were found to resume operations and handle the orders on hand, effectively ending union activity in Johnstown for many decades.
The anti-union sentiments of Cambria’s general manager and superintendent, Daniel Morrell, were expressed as early as 1866 in his Annual Report to the President and Directors of Cambria Iron Company where he stated that:

Resort to a ‘Strike’ for the redress of wrongs which the laborer believes to be practiced upon him by his employer is a relic of the lower order of civilization existing among the working classes of Europe, but more especially of Great Britain, who, for want of better knowledge have generally expended their efforts in combinations for the control and advance of wages regardless of the condition of the markets, and with results alike disastrous to themselves and their employers (Brown, 1989: note 121).

It was largely to prevent such future “combinations” of workers that he later instituted a policy of mixing ethnic groups in the mills. As Capt. Bill Jones stated; “My experience has shown that Germans and Irish, Swedes and...young American country boys, judiciously mixed, make the most effective and tractable force” (quoted in Bennett, 1977:177). When the strike and depression of 1873 had ended, the wages for unskilled labor fell to $.75 per day while skilled laborers received only half of their pre-strike wage rates. Morrell put his workers on a 7-day work week and bragged of his model industrial community.

The company offered men their jobs back if they signed a new contract promising not to join a trade union and accepted the company manager’s authority on wages and working conditions. Men could be fined for violations involving dishonesty or drunkenness, quarreling, stealing, damaging company-owned housing, or by engaging in careless or reckless behavior. First offenses meant fines, while second offenses meant immediate eviction from company housing and a public listing of the offender as unemployable (Brown, 1989:176).

Cambria Iron successfully repulsed future attempts to unionize its workers through a combination of intimidation and ethnic fragmentation. Fences and gates were erected
around company property, limiting access to approved workers, and ending the practice of wives bringing lunch to their husbands at work. (This strategy essentially backfired because it freed women’s time to develop additional sources of income, making workers less economically dependent on the company). In addition, Cambria employed over 170 men on its private police force. Morrell saw himself as a progressive industrialist for the many improvements he bestowed on Johnstown. In return for his benevolent paternalism, he demanded nothing less than total control. Outsiders sympathetic to labor often took a different viewpoint. The Iron Molder’s Journal commented on Johnstown conditions that “if there is a town in Europe to compare with it in the actual serfdom of its inhabitants, we have failed to hear of it” (Brown, 1989:178).

Recovery after the 1873 Panic saw a return to rapid expansion in the industry. To keep up with growing demand and retain its technological edge, Cambria Iron was one of the first to hire full-time mechanical engineers and a chemist (Morrell’s son, Thomas, was chief chemist from 1882-1889).

When the mechanical engineers began to change these processes in order to increase production, they knew that the labor saving devices they were creating would not only replace men with machines, but would also convert iron and steel manufacturing from a worker-directed to a management-controlled industry. Many of them received their training at the Cambria Iron works in Johnstown, Pennsylvania (Bennett, 1977:14).

This push towards mechanization undermined the position of skilled heaters, rollers, and roughers. At the same time, it opened up new jobs in the semi-skilled sector,
providing a possible form of advancement for the unskilled laborer, but reducing the opportunities for earning the high wages of a skilled worker.

Certain skill areas remained untouched for an extended time because they proved difficult to change. Rolling tin plate and puddling wrought iron are two examples (Brody, 1969:28). Managers got around the puddling bottleneck by replacing the finished product, wrought iron, with Bessemer steel (Bennett, 1977:25). In 1874, Pennsylvania produced one-half of the nation's pig iron. Cambria Iron employed 72 puddlers and their helpers. But, the shift from iron to steel manufacturing meant a net loss of jobs for puddlers. Ten years later, Cambria only operated four furnaces for puddling iron, an 87% reduction from 1866 levels. Even if these were double furnaces, the most Cambria Iron could have used was 24 puddlers and their helpers. Another blow to the formerly privileged puddlers came with wages tied to production. While mass production increased the tonnage wages of heaters and rollers, the inability to mechanize the puddling process meant a loss of opportunity to benefit from increases in production (Brody, 1969:37).

From the start, Cambria Iron Company actively solicited workers in their native lands, offering to pay their way to America if the individual signed a contract with them. This method was initially valuable for enticing experienced, skilled workers to emigrate. Later, it degenerated into a degraded form of servitude for both skilled and unskilled labor. Shappee (1940:87) asserts that contract labor Slavs were housed in the company tenements known as “Rotten Row”. The abuses of the contract labor system became so flagrant, Congress finally banned it in 1885. Less
formal arrangements were quickly adopted. Steamship agents were often involved, as were prominent representatives of different ethnic groups. One Polish priest in Johnstown was known to be very active in securing laborers from abroad, as noted by Brown (1989). In return, his parish received a percentage of the worker's wages directly from the company. Thus, Cambria Iron Company benefited from a fresh source of laborers, minus the expense of procuring them. The parish received financial support, plus the loyalty of a man indebted to it for his livelihood. The immigrant received a chance to work hard at a dangerous job in a strange country, often for ten to twelve hours a day, six to seven days a week, making barely enough to survive on. Dazed and disoriented, scorned, and separated from the mainstream of American life, the golden promise of America soon dimmed in the face of dreary reality. "For many the adventure became a disaster, the drama a tragedy, the dream a nightmare" (Daniels, 1990:28). Nevertheless, the dream refused to die.

Phase III: Bottom of the Heap (1890-1910)

The mechanization of many industrial processes with the resulting changes in labor requirements strongly impacted the patterns of company control and workers' response. No longer as dependent on skilled labor, the company now required huge quantities of low-skilled laborers. With the local supply being inadequate to the need prior to 1900, Cambria Iron had resorted to massive recruiting of a new class of immigrants. Whenever the company expanded, creating more jobs, it naturally triggered massive inflow to the area's population. As the influx of new workers grew
to keep pace with rapid industrial expansion, the face and structure of the labor force changed dramatically, reflecting the shift in immigration flow from Western to Southeastern Europe. Cambria Iron welcomed this change, believing the new immigrants, who were primarily from peasant origins with little experience in industry, would be more passive and less likely to agitate for unions than their Western European counterparts. At the 1900 benchmark, the flow of workers coming to find work with the company exceeded the need, thereby suppressing wages for everyone. This imbalance had a powerful effect on labor policy and immigrant adaptation.

In the twenty years after the 1880 Census, Cambria City’s working population flipped from consisting of 85% Western Europeans to 70% Eastern Europeans (calculated from the census tabulations described in chapter 4). By 1900, Eastern Europeans made up 83% of Cambria City’s unskilled labor force, while unskilled West Europeans made up a meager 7%. The majority of Western Europeans who remained in Cambria City had moved up to white collar or skilled positions. Western Europeans now made up 40% of all skilled workers (not counting the second generation of immigrants). By the 1910 Census, Western Europeans in Cambria City represented less than 3% of the labor force. Very few of the earlier German and Irish families, or their descendants, had remained in Cambria City. Most had removed to other boroughs around the Johnstown area. Nearly all of Cambria City’s residents were now low-skilled laborers of Southeastern European background without the resources to buy property, forcing them to rent available space from their
predecessors, the German and Irish land-owners.

The shift in focus from recruiting experienced, high-skilled iron masters to the need for masses of inexperienced laborers calls into question a basic assumption of traditional mobility theory. How do workers advance themselves when industrial restructuring eliminates the high paying jobs of skilled labor and replaces them with less skilled, lower paying positions? For Cambria Iron employees, the percentage of jobs available in the higher paying sectors declined significantly over the study period from more than 25% to less than 4% of the total jobs available. This, combined with pressure by the industry to reduce the overall wages of the highest paid employees, meant real wages and opportunities declined for skilled workers. Very few immigrants were able to progress into managerial positions, due to social pressure to reserve those positions strictly for Americans. Small increases were seen in the semi-skilled sector, providing limited opportunities for some of the less skilled workers to move up the occupational ladder (Figure 2).

Another important factor in the relationship between the company and its employees was the tremendous demand for labor. On the one hand, this factor worked in favor of immigrant laborers looking for employment. However, once the processes have been mechanized to the point any worker can stand in place of any other, the company actually benefited from high turnover rates, weakening any efforts to build labor solidarity. Cambria Iron reported a 100% turnover rate in 1900! This coincided with the timing of the massive influx of south-eastern European laborers to work in the mills.
Figure 2. The Changing Composition of Cambria Iron’s Workforce.

As management gained control over the means of production, it also exerted more control over the labor force. Fearing the potential power of a unified workforce derived from a common ethnicity, managers instituted a policy of mixing ethnic groups in their mills. Cambria Iron, as reported by one of its managers, adopted such a policy around 1890 (Brown, 1989). This, together with advancing technological change, destroyed the previous “father-son” system of ethnically uniform work groups. Laborers who spoke different languages were thrown together in the same work crews. For safety, mill signs were posted in several languages but new mill workers were often injured when they could not understand warnings shouted out in a language foreign to them. Iron and steel making remained a hazardous occupation even under the best of conditions. Injured steelworkers had few benefits available to them. Families of workers who were killed on the job received no compensation.
In the meantime the company’s anti-union stance continued, bolstered by its prior success in suppressing union activity in Johnstown. When a national effort to organize iron and steel workers occurred in 1919, the company (then Midvale Steel and Ordnance Company) responded in its usual fashion. Nearly 1,000 loyal employees were deputized and supplied with rifles, while thousands of others were dismissed for union activity. National labor organizer William Z. Foster described Cambria’s response:

Never was a policy of industrial frightfulness more diabolically conceived or more rigorously executed than that of the Cambria Steel Company. ... The plan was to pick out the men economically most helpless; men who were old and crippled, or who had large families dependent upon them, or homes half paid for, and make examples of them to frighten the rest (quoted in Brown, 1989:181).

In September 1919, nearly 12,000 employees went out on strike. Politics, propaganda, and worker fragmentation, plus the importation of thousands of black workers to Johnstown, brought the strike to an end. Steelworkers in Johnstown were not successfully unionized until the mid-1940s.

The technological changes and resulting evolution of labor relations characterized above led to specific patterns of community organization described in the following sections.
Community Formation

Phase I: A Place of Their Own, 1852-1869

Facing a huge influx of immigrant laborers when Cambria Iron's need for laborers exceeded the local supply, Johnstown natives determined to keep Johnstown to themselves. Sensitive to the sentiments of the predominantly American mainstream community, the company routinely directed immigrants to one of several "foreign" settlements around its mills and mines (Figure 3, Immigrant Stereotype). New communities were laid out en masse, adjacent to the mills. These little boroughs, scattered like nodes around Johnstown, were isolated from her by both physical geography and prejudice. Two rivers converge at Johnstown, effectively dividing up the city. The topography of mountain ridges and valleys limits the physical extent of each section and serves to physically hide and isolate one area from another. The impact on settlement patterns is evident through analysis of the location of various ethnic entities around Johnstown (Table 3). The practice of establishing new communities specifically for immigrants negated the displacement effects common to other cities with significant immigrant populations that more closely resemble Burgess's concentric circles in planning theory (Burgess, 1925). Hence, the study of ethnic groups in Cambria City reflects the development of social hierarchy and ethnic competition without the traditional burden of "hand-me-down" space. In Johnstown, the insularity established by conditions of both prejudice and
Figure 3. Immigrant Stereotype and Nativist Hostility.

geography served to encourage and necessitate the establishment of self-contained communities.

Cambria City was one of the earliest of these new towns. With its location on the level flood plain directly across the river from the rolling mill, it made an ideal location for mill workers. The site was originally platted in 50 by 165 foot lots for workers' housing shortly after Cambria Iron's establishment. Many of the company's workers found lodging near the mills. However, Cambria City did not become a distinct political entity until 1861, failing to obtain a separate entry in the United States Census of Population for another nine years (1870). This makes it much more difficult to trace the lives of its earliest inhabitants and their settlement patterns.

Table 3
Cambria Iron Workers Residence and Ethnicity, 1870 - 1880

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Welsh</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>American</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>Irish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambria City:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millville:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnstown:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Compiled from Bennett (1977:341,364).
A few early deeds were purchased directly from George S. King, founder of Cambria Iron, indicating an early interest in developing the real estate closest to the mill for worker's housing. Although George S. King owned some lots in Cambria City, he liberally allowed the development to proceed from private hands. The majority of lots were sold by developers David and James P. McConaughy. James owned and operated a tannery in Johnstown and his brother David was an attorney. George King’s interest was apparently limited to the lucrative properties along Front Street, closest to the toll bridge that provided access to Cambria Iron across the river (Map 1). This area along Front Street witnessed a more intense level of buying and selling in the first decade than the rest of Cambria City. Mr. King was initially responsible for most of these transactions. The area near the mill entrance made a prime location for boarding houses and saloons to serve mill workers. In the 1860s it was a hot market with lots selling anywhere from a low of $300 to a high of $1800. The standard price of a lot anywhere else in Cambria City was a mere $125. In 1862, George King inexplicably sold 700’ along Front Street to Cambria Iron for only $100. At the standard 40’ width of lots on Front St. this translates to the equivalent of 17 ½ lots (estimated value $5,000 to $31,500). This property may have been purchased for more company tenement houses, but the deed lacked sufficient information to pinpoint the location of these lots precisely. What is known with certainty is that Cambria Iron had some interest in providing workers housing from the earliest days of its existence. An observer’s report from 1856 indicates the company already had 200 houses for its workmen plus a 3-story boarding house (Hite, 1856:5). At that
time, the company claimed a 10% return on its $40,000 investment with revenue from rent of $4000 per year (Wallace, 1989:35). By 1868, the company rented housing to about one-eighth of its total workforce (Bennett, 1977:168). The sources consulted for this research provided no information on these early tenants, but all apparently agree that there was no compulsion for workers to live in company-provided housing. It was merely one of many options under George S. King’s liberal development policies. However, with the transfer of management to Morrell, a tough profit-oriented manager, the company instituted an opposing policy. Cambria Iron built a model community, Minersville, across the river from Cambria City, where it maintained strict control of both the property and the lives of its renters. The 1880 tax records indicate no mill workers in Minersville owned their homes, in stark contrast to Cambria City’s laborers (Wallace, 1989:35). The differences between King and Morrell in managerial philosophy translated into contrasting labor and community policies which shaped neighborhood development and allowed Cambria City to exist as a unique phenomenon. In the 1870’s Cambria Iron bought up many properties in Cambria City from distressed laborers at public auction, apparently in a belated attempt to gain control of this thriving community. However, according to Wallace, by 1892 the company no longer owned any housing in Cambria City.

Although the Welsh initially dominated employment with the young company, they did not seem to be concentrated geographically in any one area. Insufficient data exists to document their residential patterns in Cambria City prior to 1860. By the time of the 1860 Census (which counted Cambria City as part of Lower
Yoder Township), the majority of the Welsh had left the area as a consequence of the 1858 strike which led to their dismissal from company employment. When Cambria City finally obtained a separate listing in the Census of 1870, the majority of residents were either Irish or German immigrants. Only a very small number could be classed as either American or English inhabitants. This trend continued up until the 1889 flood and beyond. Not until 1898, when large numbers of Southeastern Europeans began arriving, did this trend show much variation. For 40 years, the German and Irish each made up roughly half the community (Table 3). Although the ethnic composition remained fairly constant throughout this period, the spatial patterns of usage did not stay the same. The community was in a dynamic state of flux, responding to both internal and external pressures.

The early years of Cambria Iron reportedly saw a residential mix of foremen and laborers common to early industrial cities. At least one-third of Cambria City’s residents could be classified as skilled labor by the occupations listed in the 1869 Johnstown Directory. These were complemented by a small contingent of foremen, bosses, and engineers. This was soon superseded in Johnstown, as elsewhere, by residential relocation of the upper management levels away from the site of industry, leaving the laborers closely packed in around the mills. This shift in residential patterns closely mirrored the shift taking place in occupational structure in the mills as the industry began to mechanize.
Phase II: Growing Pains, 1870-1889

The population of Johnstown and its boroughs doubled and even tripled in some decades, putting enormous pressure on available housing and space in the narrow mountain valley. Figure 4 charts the dramatic increase in both the inhabitants of the Johnstown area and the number of employees working in the various departments of the Cambria Iron Company. From 1870 to 1910 the greater Johnstown area population grew by more than 400%. As the chart illustrates, the relationship between the company’s need for labor and the available labor supply was not a simple one-to-one correlation. In some periods, the company’s need for employees outstripped community growth. In the period around 1880, the company opened a new operation (Gautier Wire Division) and actively recruited skilled Welsh wire drawers to supply the manpower. These new arrivals located in Conemaugh Boro, on the edge of downtown Johnstown but adjacent to the newest plant.

This period also had a significant amount of child labor activity, possibly because the need for laborers outpaced the supply. The 1880 Census of Cambria City revealed that 10% of all children under the age of 15 were employed. In fact, children made up a depressing 15% of the total labor force at this time. Many of these children worked in the iron ore mines of the company. Their small size was an asset in tight spaces and mine shafts. Other children loaded stones in carts or hauled lumber. Young boys working in the coal mines may have gone into the mine everyday with their fathers. Stories are told of how boys were put in charge of making sure
no coal fell off the carts as it was transported out of the mine. Certainly, children who spent all day working had little time for schooling. In all likelihood, families benefited significantly from the additional income brought in by children working, especially if there were two or more in the same family.

By 1870, foreign-born immigrants made up forty percent of Johnstown's adult population and eighty-five percent of Cambria City's population. But nearly half of Cambria City's residents were already home-owners. In the Johnstown area, a surprising one-third of all iron mill workers and miners owned their homes by 1870. "The value of homes owned by the unskilled did not vary significantly from that of the skilled workers or supervisors" (Bennett, 1977:164), not surprising when you
consider that the vast majority of homes owned by either category of worker were in
the under $1,000 range. Bennett's study found many homes of skilled workers and
supervisors to be in the $200 to $500 range. The standard price of a 50' by 165' lot in
the decade prior to 1870 was $250, already double the asking price of the 1850s.

The charts in Figure 5 clearly show the dominance of the managerial elite,
(mostly native-born, Anglo-Saxons) in Johnstown. The skilled property owners in the
boroughs around Johnstown represent much smaller numbers, but are well distributed
through all the value categories. In the top two categories, they are nearly on a par
with the Johnstown elite. None of the skilled iron workers in Bennett's study of
Woods Run, P.A. (near Pittsburgh) own property above the mid-level category. In
fact, three-fourths of all property owned in Woods Run was valued at less than $100
(Bennett, 1977:164). The contrast between Woods Run and Johnstown is evident in
the fact that 65% of all iron workers in Woods Run (unskilled, skilled, and
supervisors) did not own any property, either real or personal. The most dramatic
findings are revealed in the chart of unskilled workers' property values. Very few
Johnstown residents fall into this category of unskilled labor (reflecting the upper-
class character of the city core). The number of unskilled laborers owning homes is
dramatically higher for the boroughs than it is for either Johnstown or Woods Run. A
number of the borough residents are doing very well, as reflected in the significant
number with property valued in the $4,000 to $5,000 range. Somehow, these
unskilled laborers were surpassing the skilled labor force in the value of the property
they could afford to buy. This phenomenon then must be tied to income outside the
Figure 5. Property Values of Iron Mill Workers.

Source: Compiled from Bennett (1977:165)
normal wages of an iron or steelworker.

Phase III: Bursting at the Seams, 1890-1910

The neighborhood so long dominated by the German and Irish was forced to make room for the new arrivals coming it seemed by the thousands every year. With rapid growth came readjustment of traditional patterns. In the two decades after the 1889 flood, the population of Cambria City boomed by an impressive 135%. Additional houses were scrunched in on the tiny lots, back to back, and side to side, leaving little open space. The charts in Figure 6 reveal the extent of pressure on available space. From 1895 to 1910, the crowding on individual lots intensified. By 1910 the 16th ward saw an increase to 2 ½ houses per lot, up from an average 1 ½ houses per lot in 1895. Since the 16th ward had been the area least developed earlier, these statistics reveal the filling of most available space. The charts also demonstrate the significant impact of the 1889 Johnstown flood on German property owners. Because the Irish dominated the area by Railroad Street, farthest from the river, they suffered significantly less loss of property than the more exposed German property holdings. The devastation eventually led to physical and psychological abandonment of the community by both groups.

The Sanborn maps also reinforce the rising density of land use in Cambria City. The 1886 Sanborn revealed on average that buildings covered 23% of the block area, but by 1913, the density had risen to 55%. Houses were squeezed so tightly together that only a few inches separated them. In addition to the physical density of
Figure 6. Density of Housing by Ethnic Group.
Source: Author’s Database of Deed, Census, and Tax Records.
land use, the high intensity of internal use of each dwelling unit must be considered. The 1910 Census recorded many instances of households of 40 to 60 persons each (Map 3). Not surprisingly, the older residents did not necessarily like the changes even if they stood to gain financially from the high demand for housing. This also explains why so many sought refuge in other areas of Johnstown, leaving Cambria City to the newest arrivals. As absentee landlords, they did not need to worry about the increasingly crowded conditions created by high demand for limited dwelling space.

Beyond daily survival, a primary goal for most immigrants was the accumulation of enough capital to purchase their own home. Recent immigration studies have revealed that many immigrants returned to their native lands to purchase farms or homes after reaching their financial goals in America (Brody, 1960:106-7). Brody's documentation of this reinforces the commonality of the goal - regardless of the intended destination. One testimonial to the strength of this drive is sensitively portrayed in Ewa Morawska's study of Eastern European immigrant experience in Johnstown:

Despite exasperating setbacks in the saving process resulting from recurrent unemployment, unexpected sickness, and industrial accidents, peasant-immigrants had for the first time in their everyday lives a prospect of generating a surplus of valuables... a new notion for peasants one or two generations removed from feudal serfdom... For most, owning a home still remained a remote dream...but by [1915], one of five immigrants among those present in town in 1900 already possessed one.

With the prospect of fulfilling a life-long dream before him, the laborer could
justify enduring any kind of hardship. Poor living conditions were only temporary. The work was hard, dirty, and dangerous, but it was better than no work. Even wage cuts could be rationalized, or at least endured, as unavoidable impediments to one’s progress.

The Cambria City of the early 20th century was truly a multiethnic community. While through most of this discussion the later arrivals have been classed as Southeastern European for ease of handling, in truth this category represented a wide variety of nationalities and languages. A quick glance at the ethnic churches established in Cambria City is revealing of the origins of its inhabitants. The Germans established St. Mary’s and a Swedish Catholic Church. The Irish had St. Columba’s Roman Catholic Church. St. Stephen’s Slovak Catholic Church was one of the first to represent the later immigrants. Slovaks also founded the Holy Cross Lutheran Church. Others founded St. Mary’s Greek Catholic Byzantine Church. Syrians formed the St. Mary’s Syrian Orthodox Church and Hungarians founded both St. Emerich’s and the Hungarian Reformed Church. Polish immigrants built St. Casimir’s Catholic Church and Croations built St. Rochus Catholic Church. So it quickly becomes apparent that Cambria City was a cultural hub for a diverse variety of ethnicities. Older residents, interviewed for the Folklife in America series, tell what it was like living in such a diverse community. One of their principal impressions concerned how stores posted signs in multiple languages and the mix of languages heard in the streets. Modern-day residents are descendants of this rich cultural heritage, but only a few still speak their native tongues.
As discussed in Phase I, the early pattern of residential mixing among foremen and common laborers was short-lived. At the end of the study period the majority of Cambria City residents were low-paid, unskilled workers. In contrast, the Irish who had moved up into foremen positions in the mill and executive positions in the company mines had moved into the American sections of Johnstown when the Southeastern Europeans began arriving in large numbers. The Immigration Commission report of 1910 which studied Johnstown found that although the Irish “own property in the foreign section they use it as a source of income and not for residential purposes” (GPO, 1910:474).

This same Commission drew some conclusions about the level of local investment in the community on the part of residents in Cambria City. They found that: (1) the majority of the population were of Southeastern European origins with the average length of residence less than 5 years, (2) the majority of the workforce were day laborers with below average earnings, (3) 50% lacked the incentive to invest because they planned to return to their native country, (4) residents sent $750,000 abroad in 1907 leaving little surplus to draw on for local investment (GPO, 1910: 475).

Observation of these three phases of Cambria Iron development, from three different perspectives, allows for several important generalizations, which form the foundation of further study.

1. Connections between company organization, labor relations, and community development are distinctive at different time periods and need to be
studied in their evolution.

2. The three main components of Cambria City’s development are strongly interrelated and need to be studied together to understand the whole.

3. The mechanisms of inter-relations between community development, labor, and company relations, are ethnically specific in terms of upward mobility dynamics.

These statements form the paradigm of the research methodology which is developed further in the following sections of Chapter III.
CHAPTER III

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Getting Beyond Stereotypes

As shown in Chapter II, the dominant employer in the Johnstown area, Cambria Iron Company, experienced a rapid and volatile industrial expansion during the study period. This led to the need for massive recruitment of immigrant labor to fill company positions. Local prejudice confined these immigrant laborers to communities functionally separate from the core city area. Within these communities the immigrants struggled to make a good life for themselves and obtain their share of the American Dream, symbolized by the icon of home ownership. Their struggle to reach their goals was intensified by company policies of paternalism, anti-unionism, and wage-cutting. Contrary to traditional assumptions of socio-economic mobility, these immigrants did not advance primarily through obtaining higher skilled and better paying jobs in the industry. Rather the reverse was true, many started in the high-skill, high-wage category and saw their relative position systematically eroded by both technology and industrial policies. Real wages fell significantly over the study period, making reliance on secondary sources of income enhancement the primary means to obtaining status advancement.
One of the main objectives of this research was to look at status indicators of socio-economic mobility in such a way as to shed light on immigrant strategies of adaptation and on variations among different groups. The paradoxes uncovered by initial investigation led to the search for a different methodology to properly address some of these intriguing questions. The research examined: (a) the impact of occupational status on community advancement; (b) relative spatial distribution of ethnic groups and levels of property acquisition; (c) the effect of property ownership or lack thereof on a family’s economic standing; (d) ethnic variation in approach to mobility strategies; (e) physical impact of the competition for space on the community form; and (f) the role of secondary occupations related to various demographic groups.

Based on the discussion in the previous chapter, I hypothesized that property acquisition (housing in particular), and secondary occupational diversification, constituted the major elements of workers’ responses to the evolving company’s dictates, forming the unique pattern of land use and ownership still observed in Cambria City today. Tracing the individual transitions from boarder or renter, to homeowner, entrepreneur, and landlord, clarified the strategies used by immigrants to obtain upward mobility and autonomy. This type of focus on the dynamic interaction of individual response to changing economic conditions, within the context of ethnicity and community, makes this study essentially different from others in terms of both methodology and results.
Previous studies have emphasized labor relations (Brody, 1960), ethnicity (Morawska, 1985), or culture (Gutman, 1976) of immigrant groups. These studies and others have extensively analyzed company records, industry publications, labor union activity, labor statistics, and social interactions. The review in the previous chapter showed that focusing on industry relations may have resulted in a biased and one-sided representation which could not explain many of the observed phenomena, such as the high degree of home ownership among recent immigrants, and the existence of secondary occupations. A summary of methodology is displayed in the following table cross-section (Table 4) showing the availability of specific types of records for each time period. A variety of statistical and cartographic techniques were used to approach the questions from somewhat different angles and then compare results.

**Historical Sources of Information**

**Deed Records**

The most reliable and important records for investigation on the interactions of property acquisition and community building were the deed records kept at the county seat in Ebensburg, PA., 20 miles north of Johnstown. These records included the names of both the buyer and seller, the date of the transaction, a legal description of the property, often including lot dimensions, and in most cases the amount of the transaction. However, the latter information could be hidden by individuals stating
the sale was for $1 or in consideration of other debts owed. Prior to accessing this
detailed information on buyers and sellers, one must look up the names in a deed
index to get the deed record number.

Table 4
Availability of Temporal/Geographic Records

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>1870</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Census</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occup.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deeds</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occup.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own/Rent</td>
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<td>-----</td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanborn</td>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

X = Available

These indexes to the records were bound in large volumes stored on rollers for
easier handling. The volumes were grouped by records prior to 1923, and records
from 1923 to the present. Within this grouping, the volumes were organized
alphabetically by the first letter of the last name, in either grantee or grantor books. In
the front cover of each volume was a code key index to the rest of the book. This code used key letters from the first name of each individual which then referred you to a section. Then when the code is deciphered and the right section found in the volume, the persons in each section are listed and the page number given. Just getting to this point took a bit of time. Often the names on the data base could not be located, but just as often so many variants of the same name were found that the list for one name spread over several 18 by 24 inch pages.

The only information given in these deed indexes were the name, the deed record number and the year of transaction, plus sometimes the city, borough, or township in which the property was located. When confronted with multiple listings, I tried to record only the ones given for Cambria City and simply noted if they were listed as buying and selling property outside the area as well.

At times, trying to find the pertinent records was like taking a shot in the dark. Much time and effort went into looking up the deed records for each name on the 1870 base list. When the given record number produced no deed for the parties mentioned, I usually tried to glance ahead and backwards a few pages to locate it. Sometimes the numbers were off just slightly from the index. Glancing through the elaborately hand-written records took some skill and finesse as well. I eventually got to know the general format well enough to quickly find the date and price of the sale. The lot descriptions were the main item that slowed things down. The legal description used varied from a simple block and lot number to elaborate descriptions of who lived on the adjoining properties, and metes and bounds descriptions of the
property referencing trees and fence posts. Deeds with lot numbers were extracted from the constructed database and geocoded for analysis using ArcView 3.0 Geographic Information System (GIS) software.

Tax Assessments

The other key piece of data for research on property acquisition and ownership were the tax assessment records for Cambria City. The author accessed these records at the Cambria County Courthouse and its off-site storage facility in Ebensburg, PA., in the basement of a nursing home. Because the tax assessments were available for almost every year, I could get a more comprehensive view over time of progression and change in a family’s status. I systematically scanned the records at five year intervals for surnames from my base list. The fields I found useful from these records were the name, the assessed valuation, and the number of houses or lots owned. If time had not been a constraint, I also could have recorded neighbors. However, it would still be difficult to spatially analyze because the assessments represented an aggregate amount of property owned by the individual and no location information was given. Tax assessments and deed records for Cambria City, 1870-1910, were entered into a database and analyzed in relation to ethnicity and occupations.

Sanborn Maps

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps provided a source of detailed spatial information. The History Research Institute obtained the Sanborn Maps for Cambria
Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps provided a source of detailed spatial information. The History Research Institute obtained the Sanborn Maps for Cambria City on microfilm for use at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown (UPJ) library. These maps recorded the shape, size, height, and usage of buildings at specific points in time. Although addresses are given at each location, they appear to have been assigned arbitrarily by the map maker because they bear no relation to known address numbers of the same time period. Fortunately, an original blueprint of Cambria City was obtained from the city engineer’s office. This blueprint was scanned as an image and used as a base for digitizing lot polygons into a geographic information system (ArcView GIS 3.0). The Sanborn map detail could then be coded on the base map, showing type of land use.

Census Data

My focus on patterns of ethnic ownership and usage of property in Cambria City required analysis of a variety of additional geographic and historic sources. The U.S. Census of Population hand-written manuscripts for 1870, 1880, 1900, and 1910, were used for demographic analysis of the ethnic community. These were available at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown and the Cambria County Public Library. The 1890 Census was destroyed in a Washington, D.C. fire shortly after collection and was never tabulated.

The initial demographic analysis of the community began as part of the History Research Training Institute in the summer of 1994 at the University of
City Directories

City Directories available at different periods throughout the study time frame were of some assistance with address information where it was lacking in the census. However, the use of city directories was neither as straightforward nor as accurate as one might hope. Their organization changed drastically from year to year, making it more difficult in some years to obtain useful information from them. The quality and amount of detail provided also varied considerably. In the earliest period, the directories merely gave a name, occupation, and the borough of residence. Later street names were added, and still later address numbers and information on whether the person listed owned or rented their residence.

Unfortunately, both street names and the numbering system changed at different points in the community’s history, making it difficult to coordinate address numbers to lots. This became a major issue when trying to construct a database and use it for geocoding. The directories that were organized by street name were the easiest to use, particularly the years streets were sectioned by cross streets. Alphabetical directories were manageable only when they separated the various boroughs from Johnstown proper. The directory years that lumped all of the greater Johnstown area together, and then listed persons alphabetically were impossible to gather good information from, especially when the same names tend to be used from one generation to the next within an ethnic group. One year alone, the city directory listed 42 different entries for persons with the name of Annie Boyle.
Because of the explosive growth of Cambria City over the study period, the size of the 1/10th sample in 1870 was significantly smaller than the 1/10th sample taken from 1910. Consequently, it did not take long to realize that the 1870 sample would yield relatively little data for analysis when taking into account factors of attrition. Therefore, I went back and expanded the 1870 base to include all the German and Irish households in Cambria City who were still there 5 years later, even if in a different location. This excluded transient boarders and gave a base from which to calculate progression towards home ownership, property values, persistence in the community and other key “status” variables.

**Secondary Sources**

**Historical Biographies**

Once this base group was identified, more information on each family group was searched for in the historical biographies of Cambria County. These biographies generally included anyone willing to pay the compilers fees to be written about. Naturally, most of the prominent families in the area were included, but, so too, were hundreds of ordinary folks. Although it is unlikely that those living close to subsistence levels would be able to justify such a frivolous expense, in many cases it came down to a matter of family pride. The biographies generally outlined the settlement patterns of the family patriarch who first settled in the region, followed by success stories of his descendants. Since most of the families in Cambria City were
recent arrivals, this information added substantially to the knowledge base about family and ethnic strategies from an internal perspective. The biographies and histories of Cambria County available were published in 1896 (Union Publ.), 1907 (Storey), and 1926 (Gable).

**Block Studies**

The details of transactions for specific block parcels of Cambria City were reconstructed based on Field Reports completed as part of the 1994 History Research Training Institute at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. The blocks studied were selected on the basis of their strategic geographic location along the commercial core and river front area, plus their potential for yielding a great deal of information on a variety of land uses in close proximity. The in-depth look at property transition over a long time frame reinforced the conclusions drawn from the snapshot view I obtained by stratified sampling.

**Geographic Information System (GIS) and Data Sources**

The combination of data from the sources outlined above allowed analysis of the spatial aspects of property control and social transition in Cambria City, as manifested in changes of land use and density patterns over the period of 1870-1910. Many of these sources provided measures of key variables such as occupation, age, ethnicity, and length of residence in the community. But only the deed records and the Sanborn maps contained specific, reliable data on spatial location. Consequently,
much time and effort went into cross-checking available data to tie these attributes to a specific geographic location.

Because of the unresolved problem of changing address numbers over time for the same location, I was forced to rely mostly on records with reference to specific lot numbers. Even this was tricky because lots were reconfigured and also renumbered, especially after the 1889 flood, but in most cases the deed mentioned the changes. This made it possible for me to confirm that I was tying the right ownership and attributes to the right location.

As mentioned earlier, I scanned an original blueprint map of Cambria City into the computer as a base for digitizing (this was necessary because one-half of Cambria City was lost to urban renewal efforts in the 1960s and Tiger line files present the existing configuration). Because the map was quite large, I actually scanned it in two sections: the first being the main development area from Front (or First) Street to Sixth Street; the second part then contained the area beyond Sixth Street to Tenth Street that was primarily settled after the 1889 flood. The greater availability of records on the earlier settlement area (First to Sixth Streets) made this the logical choice for displaying the results of this study in map form.

In digitizing, I had to make a choice about the scale of analysis to use. I chose to make the basic lot the unit of analysis simply because it lent consistency not obtainable by individual ownership parcels which changed configuration frequently. This meant I had to aggregate some data to make it fit the lot parameters, but this was not difficult to do since most deed records contained property dimensions or at least
specified if it was a whole or half lot. Simultaneously, this resulted in a simplified representation of the complexity of community structure present in Cambria City. After digitizing the lots, I needed to code the polygons with unique identifiers, so I chose to base it on the lot numbering system, using a different prefix number for each street. I then extracted from the relevant databases the records with specific location attributes and created a new column to re-code the lot numbers to match the polygon identifiers. At that point I was able to import the database into the ArcView project containing the base maps, and run a geocoding process to tie the attribute data to the geographic location on the map. Only then could I take full advantage of ESRI’s ArcView GIS 3.0’s analytical capabilities.

Prior Studies of Johnstown

Several previous studies on the Johnstown area contributed to the information base of this research. The most important of them are Bennett’s seminal study on the forces affecting the ability of workers to organize and sustain labor union activity; Morawska’s study of immigrant transitioning among the later Southeastern European arrivals to Johnstown; and the focus of the Immigration Commission study on industrial conditions in Johnstown as representative of the industry on the whole, and also in comparison to two other steel-town communities. Bennett’s (1977) comparison of Woods Run and Johnstown is basically an attempt to understand the factors that made it so hard to unionize iron and steel workers in Johnstown. His study represents the extensive literature on labor relations, but his approach examines
internal community relations as a key for understanding the essential differences between union and non-union towns. This aspect of community was beneficial to my research in broad terms and in the comparisons drawn. Ewa Morawska’s *For Bread With Butter* (1985) is a study of the experience of Eastern European immigrants in Johnstown that overlaps the latter part of my research focus on Cambria City. Her documentation of the struggles faced by this group in dealing with the established community structures reinforced the hypotheses and conclusions drawn during the course of my own research. Morawska’s book falls into the genre of studies focused on an ethnic entity. Her lumping of the German and Irish with the dominant Protestant elite, however, weakened the direct applicability of her study to my research focus. The German and Irish in Johnstown consisted of two separate groups: one Protestant, mainstream, early settlers, largely American born and bred; the second Catholic, excluded from the mainstream of American society, and recently immigrated from their homelands. The special study of the conditions of *Immigrants in Industries* (Immigration Commission, 1911) focused on *Iron and Steel Manufacturing* (Vol. I, Part 2) was uniquely interesting because one of the three study communities was Johnstown, PA. (identified only as Community A in the report). This study examined all kinds of indicators of the status of iron and steelworkers, including: background, ethnic concentration in occupations, rate of home ownership, social morals, family economics, women and children in the workforce, education, income, periods of unemployment, and generational persistence in the industry. Although a valuable resource for the breadth of topics closely related to my study of
community structures, the most helpful portions turned out to be the summaries of each section. Even these had to be handled carefully to detect some of the biases built into the report (the Immigration Commission reports laid the basis for tightening immigration laws in 1912). Unfortunately, the inconsistency in methodology and coverage throughout the report made direct comparison of the many tables included in the report virtually impossible.

I combined the study of spatial development in Cambria City based on census data by blocks, with a more detailed research of several key areas, plus typical families of different ethnicity, in order to trace their adaptation strategies. This essentially multiscale approach is indispensable when we deal with individual processes and strategies which, taken *en masse*, have shaped such macro-phenomena as spatial organization of the community. The combination of the resources listed above enabled me to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses stated in Chapter I. The following two chapters present and summarize the results of the study.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In accordance with the initial descriptions laid out in Chapter II, the results are presented here in the three time periods represented by phases. This chapter will show the results of tracing the evolution of ethnicity, occupation, and residential patterns of the Cambria City community and how they exhibited distinct differences in the various phases.

Phase I: Building Community, 1852-1869

Ethnicity

Although Cambria City was not incorporated until 1861, it had already acquired a reputation as the “foreign” settlement in the Johnstown area. In reality, it was only one of many such settlements scattered around Johnstown proper, each consisting of a different mix of ethnicities. The data on ethnicity reported here has been compiled by the author from manuscript census records which recorded not only the place of birth of each individual, but also the birth place of their parents. Thus, it was possible to compile statistics on ethnic mobility by recording both first and second generations of immigrant families. Without this tool, the children of
immigrants born after their arrival are lost to the record as simply “American” and the study of ethnicity is artificially distorted.

The earliest residents of Cambria City were the Welsh, German, and Irish. After their labor troubles in 1858, the Welsh disappeared from Cambria City, leaving it split evenly between German and Irish immigrants. In fact, 69% of all Cambria Iron’s Irish mill workers lived in either Cambria City or nearby Millville (Table 3). The German mill workers were dispersed between Cambria City, the 1st ward of Johnstown, Conemaugh, and Yoder Township (Bennett, 1977:340). They constituted 85 percent of Cambria City’s residents for the next several decades.

**Occupations and Homes**

Highly skilled iron puddlers demanded, and expected, to be well paid. In the mills the average puddler’s wages were initially nine times more than the ordinary laborer ($3.07/ton vs. $0.33/ton). The rollers were close to the puddlers in the hierarchy (Brown, 1989) as outlined in Chapter II. These men truly were the “aristocracy of labor”. Given the disparity in wages, it stands to reason that highly skilled workers could afford to own their homes, and that common laborers who outnumbered puddlers and rollers by as much as 5:1 would be less likely to do so.

Over half of Cambria City’s residents could boast of owning their own homes by 1870. This is an astonishingly high percentage for recent immigrants, the majority of whom were still common laborers. Home ownership declined to a mere 13% by 1920, reflecting the demographic shift in residents, as seen in Figure 7. By contrast,
Figure 7. Home Ownership in Cambria City.

Iron workers in Woods Run, PA. could only claim a 25% rate of home ownership in 1870, even including supervisors and skilled workers (Bennett, 1977:165). The national rate of home ownership in 1890 (the first year national data was collected) was merely 36% (U.S. Census Report, 1896). As noted earlier, this significant deviation from expected norms is not accounted for by traditional studies of labor or economics. Ethnic studies that focus on these success stories are often quick to credit superior traits of industriousness and resourcefulness, but pay little attention to the influence of social-economic structure.

In contrast to stereotypes of Irish immigrants as menial laborers (derived from images of railroad chain gangs), the Irish of Cambria City in 1870 totally dominated
the skilled positions in the mill. These skilled Irishmen worked as rolling mill puddlers for Cambria Iron Company. As anticipated, all of the skilled laborers owned their homes in Cambria City, reinforcing the status of skilled labor in the community during this early period. Yet, in spite of their dominance, the average value of property owned by the skilled Irish was less than half of the average owned by the few skilled German workers. However, even among the Irish property owners, the skilled workers represented only 43 percent of the total homeowners. Analysis of the occupations of all of Cambria City's homeowners in 1870, as recorded in the Census, revealed the skilled trades accounted for only 25 percent of the total homeowners, while ordinary laborers made up 32 percent.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Laborer</th>
<th>Miner</th>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Merchant</th>
<th>Skilled</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German:</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish:</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows Germans evenly dispersed throughout most categories, except for the skilled positions, whereas, the Irish are concentrated at the two extremes of skilled and ordinary labor; they have much lower proportions in secondary occupations (service, trade). An attempt to correlate property values to occupation
and ethnicity revealed only a few occupations where laborers' homes did not average above the median. Coal miners, German laborers, and an Irish policeman all fared worse than most. All other occupations, regardless of ethnicity, had property values above the median of one thousand dollars. This result is quite counterintuitive from the perspective of traditional labor theory, which normally leads to expectations of a strong positive correlation between wages and property values.

**Spatial Distribution of Ethnic Groups**

In 1854, Cambria City's developers, James P. and David McConaughy, laid out the plan of the city in generous 50 by 132 foot lots on the narrow flood-plain of the Conemaugh River valley, directly across the river from the new Cambria Iron Company. Cambria's spatial expansion proceeded slowly in the 1850's and 1860's, with uniformly low land prices averaging under $200 per lot. The sections closest to the mill's access bridge developed first. Saloons clustered close to the bridge entrance. Boarding houses, as shown on the Sanborn maps, were the predominant form of residence near the bridge to the mill, while single-family homes spread back along the main arteries. This general land-use pattern is still evident in the 1880 map of Cambria City (Map 2, access to the mill is at the extreme southern point).

Questions concerning the spatial distribution of the two immigrant groups in Cambria City were not as easy to answer for the early period. Since Cambria City was not incorporated as a city until 1862, it had no separate identity in the 1860 Census, being merely one part of Lower Yoder Township. Its first official entry in
the census did not occur until 1870, nearly twenty years after its founding. But, the 1870 Census contained no address or street information. In addition, the city directories for the time period were difficult to cross-reference as they lumped the entire region together and then alphabetized by last name. Several entries under the identical name were common, with the persons distinguished from each other only by what borough they happened to live in and in some years by occupation. The most visible evidence of separate neighborhoods came from the location of the Irish and German churches at opposite ends of town. Since the church was a focal point for community activities, it often was built in the very heart of the ethnic neighborhood.

Additional evidence of ethnic clustering was obtained from census patterns. The census enumerator, going door-to-door, recorded large blocks of a single ethnicity (for several decades, enumerators recorded ethnicity of the parents as well, making it easier to trace ethnic origins of even second and third generation residents). The Germans exhibited very large clusters of 100 to 200 families. The Irish clusters were broken up into smaller groups of around 25 to 40 families. Interspersed among both groups were a small number of American and a few Welsh or English families. Without benefit of addresses, the spatial form of these clusters is unknown.

Deed records were used to map ethnicity of known ownership parcels. Deeds recorded the names of the buyers and sellers, the purchase price, and date of sale, plus any restrictions or covenants on the land. They referenced the parcel being sold by legal description, which ranged from “metes and bounds” descriptions of property lines, to designations as the land next to John Doe, to specific lot and block numbers.
Even with the best descriptions by lot number, it was sometimes challenging to identify the spatial extent of the lot, given the number of reconfigurations drawn over the years. Some deeds were meticulous about the changes that had taken place, others merely referred to the fact that the lot was formerly known by another number. Ethnicity was never recorded on deed records, but was cross-referenced to census entries for accuracy.

The most striking pattern to emerge from this data was the absence of German owners on Railroad Street. This street had the closest proximity to both Cambria's Iron mill and its coal mines. The Irish owned most of the property in this section, reflecting their priority in the mills and in settlement; they often operated saloons from their homes. The Germans, who had more limited opportunities in the iron mills, settled along Broad Street and farther to the northwest (Figure 8). They developed a commercial core in the middle of their neighborhood. With limited capital available, it made sense to put their housing to multiple uses, providing both shelter and income.

Phase II: Moving Up - Changing Use Of Housing and Land, 1870-1889

By 1870, nearly 50 percent of Cambria City's recent immigrant households were no longer renters, but homeowners. The rate of property transactions grew steadily over the decade as more persons participated in the real estate market. Neither industry booms nor busts seemed to impact the exchange of property. Rather, the very instability of wages served to make property increasingly important as an
Cambria City Lot Buyers - 1860's

Figure 8. Ethnicity of Buyers in 1860's.
Ownership of housing was a readily obtainable goal for these early immigrants. Aspiring German merchants or craftsmen typically opened a shop in one corner of their residence. As the entrepreneur prospered he purchased additional buildings for either residential or commercial use. The family’s original quarters were often converted to apartment units. Already by 1880, at least a third of the available housing was classified as tenements. The evolving mixed-use community is evident in maps of land use changes (Map 2). Churches sat adjacent to saloons, and stores and tenements were mixed in with single family residences. The variety of land use patterns reflect an increasingly diverse structure and competition for strategically located property, such as, corner lots on each block and at the location of major intersections.

As new immigrants moved into the area desperate for rental units, taking on boarders became an attractive option to the resident homeowners. The homeowners then used this extra income to purchase additional property for renting or other business uses. This form of entrepreneurship was especially popular among the German community. German women in Cambria City became as active in renting rooms and tenements as their male kin, and even more aggressive than men in the acquisition of property. Fewer German women hired out to other employers, but many participated with spouses and sons in familial business concerns. Along Broad Street, the primary commercial corridor, several blocks were owned exclusively by female proprietors. In an interesting deviation from patriarchal norms, these women
passed ownership on to their daughters and excluded their sons and husbands.

This observation of the family response to company domination, and the changing role of women in family economics, is an especially revealing aspect of the study. With the husband's primary role of working for the company and therefore subject to volatility in wages and uncertain frequency of work, women took on the responsibility of maintaining households, not only in domestic labor but also in business. When the company took action to limit wives' access to their husbands at work, it unwittingly turned their focus from supporting their husbands at work to pursuing additional sources of income. This activity was prominent among German women, determined apparently by cultural standards. In the final analysis, this activity helped the German community in Cambria City to advance its status despite a generally disadvantageous position in the mills, and resulted in the German ownership of property averaging twice the value of the skilled Irish owners. Of course, this strategy was available only to family-oriented households. This was an additional advantage of both the German and Irish communities relative to the later arriving South-Eastern European immigrants, who were predominantly single males.

Phase III: Transitions, 1890-1910

Persistence

The relatively high ratio of home-owners would seem to indicate a stable population. The life-cycle model of out-migration versus persistence in a community assumes "...those without a stake... the young, the single, and those without
property -- moved on most frequently.” (Griffen, 1978). But, of the families who owned property in Cambria City by 1870, only one-half of the most affluent group (defined as those with real estate assets above the median of one thousand dollars), still remained twenty years later. For these families, the higher value of their property apparently facilitated moving to better areas. Spewing smokestacks may have symbolized progress to late nineteenth-century society, but living near the mills increasingly had negative consequences. The use of charcoal as fuel for industry meant thick, black, clouds of smoke that settled on the villages in the valley. Its dust built up on walls, inside and out, accumulating dirt and grime which stubbornly resisted cleaning. In addition to the filth, industry's increasing use of unskilled labor led to the in-migration of thousands of new laborers looking for cheap lodging near the mills. As Cambria City became more crowded, noisy, and dirty, those who could afford to looked elsewhere for homes. Fully forty-eight per cent of these "upper-class" families left Cambria City before 1890. More than just a migration, it was a cutting of ties. As the record of property transactions shows, not a single member of these families stayed behind with the possible exception of daughters married into other families.

In contrast, the less affluent property owners whose assets were under one thousand dollars, had a very high rate of persistence. From this group of 1870 property owners, three-fourths remained in Cambria City for twenty years or more. In spite of their overall superior condition in comparison to the similar community of Woods Run, it may very well have been a case of not being able to afford to move.
Those who stayed found alternative ways to deal with the uncertainties of employment, wages, and instabilities in the newly industrial economy. They showed tremendous fortitude in hard times and flexibility in dealing with changing realities. By either entering secondary occupations or by generating income from their meager property holdings, they found the means to survive and prosper. Although upward mobility may have been more elusive for this group and taken longer to achieve, yet the very fact of their modest property ownership provided a key to future success. A quick comparison of the lots sold in the 1860s (Map 1) to prices obtained for lots sold at the turn of the century (Map 4) reveals a ten-fold increase. Over the period, the average price per lot rose from $579 to as much as $9,300. In the face of rising demand and decreasing space, tiny plots of ground began to command inflated prices, favoring the early immigrants who bought relatively cheap housing and land.

Once immigrants had achieved the goal of home ownership, they worked hard to maintain and improve their status. One cultural aspect which helped them keep their position involved inheritance customs. In Cambria City, both German and Irish families built homes for their married children on the same lot as the primary residence. By 1900, nearly half of the second generation owners had inherited their property. Another property strategy with significant impact on spatial form involved the splitting up of lots into smaller parcels. Buying half a lot was cheaper than purchasing the entire parcel, so already by the mid-1870's, lots only 25 foot wide were quite common. However, there was no regulation on the subdivision of lots, so in some cases they were only 13 feet wide. The imprint of both of these strategies on
the physical form was an odd conglomeration of tightly spaced housing, with minimal open space, and odd house numbers like 214 1/3 or 315r (rear) recorded in the city directories (Map 3).

These data raise serious questions about old assumptions tying skill level and higher wages to accumulation of property and class divisions. At the very least, it suggests another dynamic at work in Cambria City, where home ownership and entrepreneurship apparently contributed more to social mobility than occupational wages tied to industry.

**Ethnicity**

The proportion of German and Irish homeowners who owned more than two houses in Cambria City grew steadily over time, until by 1905 nearly 50 percent of the Irish and 40 percent of the German owners had multiple properties (Figure 9). By this point in time, German and Irish represented only 10 percent of Cambria City's residents. In terms of sheer numbers they were dwarfed by immigration from Southeastern Europe after 1890. By 1900, they had already become the minority group in face of a massive influx of these Southeastern European newcomers as shown in the following chart (Figure 10).

Within 20 years, [1890-1910] the Eastern Europeans made up 4 of every 5 residents in Cambria City (Morawska, 1985:97). This dramatic shift reflected deliberate changes in company hiring policy due to mechanization (as described in Chapter II), plus a belief that these workers were less likely to agitate for labor
Figure 9. Multiple Homes.
unions. Still, with only 10 percent of the resident population, German and Irish controlled over 90 percent of the housing and private land, which reinforced their exclusive status in the multi-national community of Cambria City. By 1900, most of the owners no longer lived on their property in Cambria City but had moved to emerging middle-class suburban neighborhoods. From the high percentage of both German and Irish who owned multiple homes, it is clearly evident that acquisition and use of property constituted a major component of their upward mobility strategy. The majority of the Eastern European residents of Cambria City lacked the means to purchase property and consequently, nearly all of them were forced to rent housing from the German and Irish owners.

The dramatic shift in immigration patterns between 1880 and 1900 is accentuated by the unavailability of the 1890 Census, which was destroyed by a fire in the nation’s capital. The 1880 Census of Cambria City had reported no residents
of Southeastern European heritage, but by 1900, fully 70% of all employed residents were born in this region. The entrance of multitudes of nationalities combined with the political instability of Europe during the early 20th century made recording nationality a nightmare for both the census taker and the modern-day researcher. Besides hyphenated origins like Austrian-Hungarian or Serbian-Croatian, enumerators often simply listed a region, city or village. Given the language barriers, they were doing well to get that much information. Frustration was evident in the notes made on the census by Cambria City’s enumerator in 1910 who frequently reported not being able to obtain information, often because no one in the household spoke English. At other times residents refused to cooperate, presumably fearful of the potential use of information against them - not surprising, given how disparagingly the local newspaper referred to the “Hungarian” community. The prevailing attitude was that no self-respecting American would be found among them. The only mention of them in the paper was either to report on their crime-ridden neighborhood with its drunken brawls or to abhor the awful conditions they lived under. The Johnstown Tribune reported on June 6, 1882 that there was “something radically, criminally wrong in the management of household affairs among the Hungarians who are the principal if not the only inhabitants of the Company’s new houses on the Ten Acre.” This area across from the western end of Cambria City was more commonly known among Johnstowners as “Rotten Row”. By 1887, Cambria Iron had demolished this settlement.
The spatial distribution of these various ethnic groups within Cambria City also defied traditional norms of immigrant communities. Most cities have identifiable ethnic enclaves where members of one ethnic group tend to cluster in proximity to others with the same identity. Analysis of the community's demographic characteristics from the population census revealed clustering not by neighborhoods, or even by blocks, but instead by household groups. The head of one household might be Croatian. Then he would take on other Croatians as boarders to help pay his own rent. Next door, might be a Polish household with Polish boarders, and next to them a family with Slovakian boarders, and so on. Obviously, with such a diverse community it would be advantageous to rent from people who spoke or understood the same language and ate the same kinds of food. Because, those who rented rooms to boarders did not control the ownership of the land, they had no option except to rent whatever housing they could obtain. Thus, it was not possible to establish the kind of ethnic enclaves seen else where's because the dominant landlords were of different ethnic origins than the renters.

Density and Land-Use

Between 1895 and 1910, nearly 6,000 of these new immigrants from Southeastern Europe poured into the small community of Cambria City. The physical extent of Cambria City was barely two-tenths of a mile wide by just over a half mile long. The community was already over-crowded and chronically short of dwelling space before these latest arrivals. Consequently, this triggered both an out-
migration of the previous residents and sky-rocketing densities within the community. The standard house was merely 18 to 25' wide with no more than two floors and only 4 small rooms per floor. The census takers frequently recorded from 40 to 60 residents per home (Map 3). This was possible only because the mill operated on three shifts. Therefore, one bed could serve 3 occupants, 6 if they doubled up. Few of these homes had indoor plumbing for either toilets or water supply. In fact, raw sewage and industrial waste flowed freely into the river upstream from Cambria City.

No wonder disease often ran rampant throughout the community when drinking water was frequently contaminated with raw sewage. Most homes also had no stoves (the Sanborn maps of Cambria City show an average of one bake-house in the center of each block).

It comes as no surprise that the earlier German and Irish largely abandoned the community. Here it seems the model of Burgess’ concentric circles begins to fit Cambria City, as succession took place from one dominant immigrant group (Western Europeans) to a new group (Southeastern Europeans). However, not only the ownership of property remained with the German and Irish, but they also continued to control community power structures for their benefit. Only gradually did the Southeastern European newcomers begin to gain a foothold in both home ownership and business concerns. According to Ewa Morawska (1985:155), by 1920 about one-fifth had acquired some kind of property ownership, even if only temporarily. All of these patterns of Cambria City’s evolution are revealed in a close study of one key block at the entrance to the commercial segment which became the
heart of the neighborhood.

Patterns of Evolution Documented Through Study of One Block

I chose for intensive study the corner section of Block 365 (formerly Block 71), bounded by Broad Street and Front Street (also known as Roosevelt Boulevard), and further defined by Brallier Alley and Mullen Place (Map 3). Since it contained a large portion of frontage on two main streets, I expected to find a high proportion of mixed usage, consisting of commercial and rental property, along with residential segments. By focusing on this mixed use area, I hoped to obtain a representative sample of the kinds of change in property usage and ethnic construction of space characteristic of the evolving immigrant community.

Phase I: Preparing for Development, 1852-1869

The development of this parcel (and of Cambria City) began to take off after the formation of the Cambria Iron Company in 1852. In anticipation of the need for housing workers drawn to Johnstown by employment opportunities with the new company, two brothers began buying land and laying out lots on the flat plain directly across the river from the mill. On May 30, 1853, the McConaughy brothers prepared for the development of this section of Block 71, when David and his wife Leona, bought it from Thomas J. Power, and wife. According to deed records, the entire section was originally referred to as “lot number six”. Over time it was subdivided into two lots, then three lots, then rejoined into two lots, and finally reconfigured into
its present division of three lots. For the purposes of this paper, it is neither feasible or necessary to trace the exact changes in lot boundaries to get at the issues of land use and social change.

The McConaughy's held onto the property for eleven years before interest developed in this particular plot of ground. The reason for this length of time may lie in the fact of its relative distance from the bridge leading to the mill, when compared to sections that were being developed along Railroad Avenue. The Cambria Toll Bridge erected in 1853 by McConaughy, George S. King (founder of Cambria Iron), and others, crossed the Conemahugh River at the entrance to Branch Street, two full blocks away from Broad Street (Storey, 1907). In a pedestrian era, the areas farther out were initially less desirable simply because they required greater walking distances.

The 1860s began the first period of subdivision and building on this section of the block. David McConaughy and his wife sold the southern half fronting on Broad Street, extending seventy feet along Front Street (designating it "lot six"), through David's attorney, brother James P. McConaughy, to Francis Gallisath on April 25, 1864 for the sum of six hundred dollars. Two days later, Francis made a tidy profit of fourteen hundred dollars by selling a large segment of his lot, situated on the corner of Broad and Front Streets, to the Cambria Borough School District. Francis reserved for himself a small section with fifty feet of frontage on Broad Street and extending back only thirty-eight feet along the alley. The McConaughy portion became lot number five. Two years later, lot five was unofficially sold to George Kurtz, on the
twelfth of December. For reasons unknown the deed was never recorded (Deed Bk. Vol. 87:536). Only four months later lot five was resold to Elizabeth Ream for the sum of six hundred dollars (Deed Bk. Vol. 82:237). Thus ended the first period of property changing hands; enabling the owners to spend time developing their land by building on it.

The directories for Johnstown in this period show no evidence of the owners living on these lots (McCormick, 1868; Swank, 1869). Therefore, it is easy to presume from the quick exchange of property, and the subdividing of lots, that any subsequent building, or even retention of property, was primarily profit motivated, rather than desired for habitation. For example, George Kurtz, who held his property for only four months, established a hotel in Conemaugh Borough by the following year. His family had located in Cambria City as early as 1853, when it was still known as Yoder township (Union Publ., 1896). By 1868, Adam Kurtz had established a hotel on Chestnut Street in Cambria Borough (McCormick, 1868; Swank, 1869). Within a few years the population had jumped to 1,500 residents, and business was booming. By the time of the 1870 census, Adam Kurtz held property valued at $8,000 and had also gone into the butcher and retail business (Census, 1870), demonstrating the German propensity for establishing mercantile interests and operating hotels or boarding houses for immigrant laborers.

Of the other owners from the 1860s, Francis Gallisath, (who profited handsomely from his sale to the school district), was elected first Burgess of the newly formed borough in 1861. Consequently, he probably exerted considerable
influence on the selection of suitable property for the erection of a public school. The other owner, Elizabeth Ream, had solid connections to Cambria City, but did not actually live on her property until possibly sometime between 1870 and 1876, when she was listed as a widow living on Front Street (no number given). She was listed with her sons Frank and John Ream, both of whom worked for Cambria Iron (Wiggins and McKillop, 1876). The 1887 directory listed a Mrs. August Ream, widow, at 409 Front Street, property purchased in 1867 by Elizabeth Ream. Another son, Michael, also lived in Cambria City at 820 Broad Street (Clark, 1887). The family of August Ream, laborer, lived on Walnut Street in 1869. His wife’s name was given as Elisa, probably short for Elizabeth. The Ream family represent that portion of German laborers for Cambria Iron that were excluded from the high-skill, highly paid positions in the mill held by their Irish cohorts. However, their early settlement enabled them to buy both a primary residence and additional property.

Phase II: Build Up, 1870-1889

In 1870, August Ream owned property valued at one thousand dollars (Census, 1870). Why his wife had bought property independently in her own name is unclear, but after 1870 August Ream dropped out of the records. By 1876, Elizabeth was a widow, although not without resources. The fact of Elizabeth’s property ownership before her husband’s death spared her from having to plead hardship to gain the right to sell it, as other widows had to do. In the Johnstown Directory of 1887, in a section titled, “Rules of Commercial Law”; a married woman is lumped
with "minors, idiots, lunatics, alien enemies, intoxicated persons" and forbidden by law to make contracts, with few exceptions. One exception allowed her to contract for the purchase of a sewing machine (Singer was one of the first manufacturers to offer buying on time payments). Another stipulation stated: "She can sell her property only through her husband..." (Clark, 1887: 63-65). In light of these regressive restrictions, the fact that women were the main players in the second phase of activity is all the more remarkable.

The portion of Cambria City beyond Fifth Street that Michael Ream settled on was still remote enough before 1886 to not be included on the Sanborn map of that year. The building of a street-car line down Broad Street enabled this area to develop quickly. Combined with the expansion of Cambria Iron and an influx of more workers, a new flurry of land transactions took place. This spurt of activity continued on Block 71 until 1902. Its potential at the streetcar entrance to Cambria City did not go unnoticed.

The first to exploit this window of opportunity was, not surprisingly, Francis Gallisath. He sold his tiny fifty-by-thirty-eight foot plot for an undisclosed sum to George Shoemaker, who in turn wasted no time in selling it to Mary Sweeney. Although the deed is dated November 30, 1889, the transaction must have occurred within days of the Gallisath-Shoemaker deal for it to specifically reference Lot 5, with buildings. Mary Sweeney paid $1,300 for this section along Broad Street (next to Mullen Place), only to be wiped out immediately by the devastating May 31, 1889 Johnstown flood (Deed Bk., Vol. 67: 355).
At the time of Sweeney’s purchase, a two-story dwelling existed on the lot at 206 Broad Street, and a single-story structure - long, narrow, and set back considerably from Broad Street (oriented to the alley) - existed at 205 Broad, adjacent to 206 Broad. This structure was set back farther than the thirty-eight feet owned by Mary Sweeney. It may have been used as a stable and storage shed for the schoolhouse/post office at 208 Broad Street, on the corner of Broad and Front Street (Sanborn, 1886). In 1876, Michael Sweeney, who was both teacher and postmaster, lived in the schoolhouse structure at 208 Broad Street. Mary is not listed in the city directory, but her husband Thomas resided at 414 Railroad Street in 1887. Thomas owned real estate valued at $900 in 1870. The previous year he was listed in the directory as a steel mill puddler, and lived on First Street. From 1876 to at least 1887, he remained on Railroad Street (Wiggins, 1876; Clark, 1887; Census, 1870). At some point prior to 1902, Mary acquired the additional thirty-eight feet of lot 5, and also a portion along Front Street. The Sweeney family benefited from the husband’s prestigious position in the mill as a skilled puddler. His income enabled them to purchase a home, additional property in the commercial corridor, and support eight children. They did not appear to rely on any income outside his wages from the mill and were only modestly well-off in terms of property value.

Phase III: Intensive, High Density Use, 1890-1910

It was during the period after the flood when the lots were reconfigured to the present system. Prior to this, the section had been divided into three lots running
parallel to Broad Street, extending from Front Street back to the alley. Besides the
schoolhouse and dwelling on Broad Street, there were two dwellings along Front
Street (421 and 422) before the flood wiped out this section. Both of them were two-
story houses of moderate size (Sanborn, 1886). The Sanborn map of 1891 is revealing
as to the extent of damage caused by the flood in 1889. Nothing that existed in this
section prior to it, as shown on the 1886 Sanborn, remained. Only two structures and
two outbuildings were rebuilt. The rest of the section, and a large portion of the
surrounding sections, stood vacant. Interestingly enough, the map showed the school
house rebuilt at the center of the section along Broad Street (Sanborn, 1891). Michael
Sweeney claimed losses of $1400 after the flood and was reimbursed for about half
that amount. He may have been responsible for the rebuilding of a house on Mary
Sweeney’s lot, which he and his family occupied in 1900, one year after she died
(Benshoff, 1890; Census, 1900).

Immediately after the 1889 flood, Cambria City was incorporated into
Johnstown proper as the fifteenth and sixteenth wards of Johnstown, in order to
facilitate rehabilitation and consolidate services. One of the major consequences of
this action on Block 71 was that the jurisdiction of Cambria City Public Schools
passed automatically, by virtue of incorporation, to the Johnstown Public School
system. It is unknown who authorized the rebuilding of the school on Broad Street,
but it is clear that within ten years the City of Johnstown wanted nothing to do with
it. The school board met on October 26, 1899 and voted to sell the lot at the corner
of Broad and Front Streets, along with the buildings thereon, because they deemed it
“no longer necessary nor suitable for school purposes” (Deed Bk., Vol. 126: 239).

This action gives a window on the dim view Johnstown residents already took towards the post-flood development of Cambria City. Certainly, with the exponential growth of Cambria City’s population between 1890 and 1900, there was great need for a public school. In 1887, the public schools of Cambria City handled 200 Protestant and 175 Catholic students, only a small fraction of the 2,374 persons then living in the borough (Clark, 1887). By 1900, the population registered 5,299 persons, and even if only one-fourth were school-age children, the single school on Chestnut Street would have been inadequate for their numbers. In the earlier years as many families as could sent their children to parochial schools, mostly Catholic. Most could afford to do so only intermittently. The wave of Eastern European immigrants who descended on Cambria City in the 1890s were even less able to afford private schools. Consequently, with little support from the public schools, and both lack of money and English-language skills to act as barriers, far fewer of the most recent immigrant children were able to obtain an education. This fact very likely contributed to the higher rate of child labor evidenced after 1900.

The 1895 Sanborn map showed a structure similar in mass and size to the 1891 schoolhouse, but moved over and slightly back. It was designated as a dwelling in 1895, and two more dwellings were built between the old school and Mary Sweeney’s house at 116 Broad (renumbered from 112 formerly). By 1900, these houses on Broad Street were all rented out, with the renters often taking on boarders. Between them, the houses at 110 and 110 1/2 Broad Street had 28 boarders, ranging
in age from 14 to 60 years, mostly male laborers. Living in these two houses were
good size families of six and seven people each, making a total of 41 persons in a 50
foot wide double house.

Obviously, with the high density patterns and the enormous numbers of new
immigrants with different languages and customs from the earlier German and Irish
migrations, the character of Cambria City was changing rapidly. It seems strange that
a person like Joseph Stibich (see case study # 3, Ch. V), with both wealth and
extensive property, including a farm in the country, would have chosen to retire
peacefully to Cambria City after it became so densely congested. Large numbers of
the older residents who could afford to do so, left the environs of Cambria City for
more desirable parts of Johnstown, and elsewhere. One case in point is Elizabeth
Ream, who bought several properties in the 1860s. By 1893, she had removed to a
house in Brownstown and disposed of her Cambria City property. She divided her lot
in Block 71 into two portions, each only thirty-five feet wide. One half she sold to
Cilly Holzman for $600, inclusive of the tenements, and the other half she sold to
Frank P. Martin. Within four years, Cilly Holzman also purchased his property. The
school board sold its property in 1899 to Annie Boyle, taking a profit of only two
hundred dollars on the deal. Interestingly, at this time, the only owners of property in
this section were women. The tenements referred to in Cilly Holzman’s deed do not
show up on the Sanborn map until 1913, even though they clearly existed in 1893.
On the 1913 map, they are clearly labeled as numbers 405, 407, 409, 411, and 413
Front Street. The 1900 census recorded renters and boarders at these addresses, most
listed as "Hungarian" nationality. All the houses on Broad Street were also rental property, even the one Michael Sweeney and family lived in. For the most part, the renters were short-term. By 1920, none of them were in the same place. Some of the renters who took on boarders apparently prospered enough by doing so to later purchase their own property or become entrepreneurs. Among the latter group was Joseph Komeraty, who let out rooms to 13 boarders while renting the house at 110 Broad Street from Annie Boyle in 1900.

At the turn of the century, when women were largely prevented from owning property and acting independently of their husbands, this block of Cambria City was entirely controlled by female property owners. The story that emerged from looking at just a few records is all the more fascinating because it does not fit the stereotypical view of a patriarchal, male-dominated society as the norm for a macho, blue-collar steel town. Research conducted at the micro-level on a few lots revealed some unexpected findings about the role of women in the economic life of Cambria City. The significance of these findings underscores the ease of missing important elements when concentrating on a single scale of analysis.

Female Power Brokers

Both Annie Boyle and Cilly Holzman were buyers of multiple properties, beyond their purchases in Block 71. Sewer assessment records reveal Annie Boyle owned 301 to 305 Front Street, and 102-108 Broad Street, plus 101 to 109 Broad Street. In other words, she owned most of the first block of Broad Street on both
sides of the street, plus some key frontage on Front Street. Cilly Holzman picked up where Annie left off, owning 307 to 311 Front Street, 107 to 111 Brallier Place, and 112 Broad Street (Sewer records, Johnstown City Hall). Most of these properties owned by the two women were tenement houses (Census 1900, 1910; Sanborn, 1913). Some of them were occupied by family members. Cilly Holzman operated a grocery store at 107 Broad in 1887, and at 213 Front Street in 1889. Cilly received nearly six thousand dollars in flood relief in 1890 (Benshoff, 1890). Interestingly enough, the Red Cross considered it essential to get the city’s business owners back on their feet as quickly as possible for the good of the city. Cilly Holzman was obviously a player in the business life of Cambria City. In later years her family owned a jewelry store, a department store, and a tavern. Cilly moved out of Cambria City before 1938, but the fact she did not relinquish control, but rather rented to her male family members, gives a sense of the strong autonomy and influence she possessed in a supposedly male-dominated world.

Annie Boyle’s life paralleled Cilly Holzman’s in many ways. Annie also rented property she owned to male family members, rather than let them handle it for her. Her husband, Charles, died in the 1889 flood. He had owned a saloon at 333 Front Street for many years. The solidity and importance of his business was evidenced by the fact his widow received over fifteen thousand dollars in flood relief (Benshoff, 1890). The choice Annie made to rebuild and continue running the saloon, rather than selling out, reveals something of her fierce independence and business acumen. For many years her family lived at 101 and 105 Broad Street. They still
lived there in 1900, but by 1910, these houses had also become rental properties. One of the renters was a bartender by occupation and may have helped run the family tavern. The former homes of the Boyle family on Broad Street were rented to families and no boarders were allowed, making the character of these rental units very different from the ones across the street that were also owned by Annie Boyle.

For both Annie Boyle and Cilly Holzman, the rental of their properties on Block 71 must have been very profitable. Cilly Holzman kept her property until she was well advanced in age, and then sold it to her daughter rather than her sons. Annie Boyle’s property passed to her sons, who held it until the late 1940s. After Mary Sweeney’s death in 1899, her property was purchased by Samuel Malasky in 1902 for seventeen hundred dollars. Mary’s daughter moved to 102 McConaughy Street (Railroad Ave.) in Cambria City, but her former house on Broad Street was rented to her family, and the other property was let out to a single family. By 1913, the house at 116 Broad had been converted into a store. Numbers 112 and 114 Broad Street had been combined and expanded, and were also functioning as a store. The large three story addition added onto the rear of 112-114 Broad Street apparently provided living space for the store manager and his family. Her son, Michael, operated a hotel across the street at 101 Broad in 1903. In 1920, the store at 116 Broad, still in the Boyle family, was being run by George Elias who also rented the living quarters (Census, 1920; Sanborn, 1913).
The period from 1890 to the depression years of the 1930s were marked by stability and vitality, and by the absolute dominance of the first block on Broad Street by the families of these strong matriarchs. They held tight reign over the business aspects of their holdings and clearly demonstrated their equality with the best businessmen of their time. Not until the hard years of the depression did this section begin to lose some of its vitality. The Boyle family was able to hold onto its property through the Depression until its last direct descendant died, and it came under the control of Fidelity Trust as trustee. The other properties owned by Samuel Malasky and Helma Holzman were lost to Cambria County and sold at auction for non-payment of taxes. In the 1940s they were purchased by Victor and Mary E. Brown. This couple had previously been renting 112 Broad Street from Samuel Malasky. In 1938 Victor had been running the Streamline Sanitary Supply from his home. By 1957 he had changed to operation of the Brown Derby Hotel at the same address. The property remained under that listing until 1979. The lots which had come under control of Fidelity Trust were sold to Super Oil Company, and later Ashbridge Oil Company. A gas station was erected on the corner of Broad and Front by 1954. At the same time 112-114 Broad, adjacent to the gas station, were operated as a restaurant, and 116 Broad became a hotel. After this last period of vitality, very little happened of consequence. In 1982 and 1983, Ashbridge Oil Company took Victor
Brown and wife to court, attempting to permanently bar him from any consideration in the properties at 112-114 Broad Street. Where the gas station once stood, there is now a car lot. Little remains of the once vital business activities on this small section of Cambria City.

Summary

From this brief study of a small area within Cambria City much is learned about community life and the changing definition of community over time. In the early years, development was slow, prices were within reach of mill workers, and the community was split between German and Irish. With expansion of the steel mill operations came rapid development, which was momentarily slowed by the 1889 flood, than fueled by speculative interest in real estate which drove prices up and out of reach of the new immigrants. At the same time real estate prices were rising, real wages were falling due to fluctuations in steel prices. A complex interplay of factors allowed the earliest immigrants to become the new elite in comparison to the later arrivals. Consolidation of property became the rule, homes were converted to rental units, densities rose, and business coexisted with residences.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Strategies That Worked

Given the vicissitudes of the iron and steel industry with falling wages for high-skill labor, erratic employment, and ever present danger to life and limb, the immigrant adopted a variety of strategies to survive and prosper. Contrary to the impression of immigrant passivity found in labor history studies that note the absence of organized labor unions in Johnstown until the 1940s, close study reveals a multi-dimensional immigrant community actively engaged in promoting its own welfare. In spite of Cambria Iron's paternalistic dominance in community life, these immigrants did not remain passive pawns in the process of industrialization and community formation.

Several factors were identified in the course of this research as critical to social mobility advancement within the immigrant community. Although primary wages from the dominant industry would normally be assumed to be the key variable in a company-controlled town, this study found several other variables to be significant in determining social-economic advancement. These variables were: timing of settlement, strategic location, the ability to purchase property, secondary
occupations, family status, inheritance, and culturally specific traits. Initially, these variables served as buffers against the instability of employment with Cambria Iron, but in the long term, they helped to create stratification of the community independently of industry employment. Alternative strategies of economic support varied with ethnic background. The strategies used are summarized and contrasted by ethnic origin in the cross-tabulation of Table 6. My focus on these factors, in contrast to a more traditional emphasis on labor or educational status, constitutes the main contribution of this research. The results from the analysis of these factors represent the significant discoveries from the perspective of the research hypotheses put forth in chapters one through three.

Irish Strategies

The Irish advanced quickly into supervisory positions due to their higher status in the mills and mines, making extensive use of network connections within the Irish community. Although wages and labor status were initially important factors of status in the community, their significance diminished with the reduced need for high-skill labor in the industry. This reduction of opportunities and wages required them to actively seek alternative earnings to maintain or enhance their status. At the same time, the economic foundation established through property acquisition which the Irish developed during the first phase, helped them to develop a base for secondary occupations and prosperity in the next stages. Outside of company
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>IRISH</th>
<th>GERMAN</th>
<th>S.E. EUROPEAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timing of Settlement</td>
<td>Arrival before 1870 gave access to cheap land and choice location</td>
<td>Arrival shortly after Irish allowed access to cheap land, but area limited by Irish</td>
<td>Arrival after 1890 limited options. Competition for space resulted in high prices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Composition</td>
<td>Family members contributed to income</td>
<td>Family members contributed to income</td>
<td>Single males had no familial economic support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Traits</td>
<td>Women at home. Only unmarried daughters worked, limiting income</td>
<td>Women in business meant two-income households</td>
<td>Earnings sent abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inheritance</td>
<td>A significant factor in property acquisition</td>
<td>A significant factor in property acquisition</td>
<td>Not significant since so few owned property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Gateway to mills allowed Irish to corner saloon market</td>
<td>Built a commercial core to serve the local community</td>
<td>Scattered in various apartments and boarding houses. No key location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Purchase</td>
<td>Bought cheap, sold high</td>
<td>Bought cheap, sold high</td>
<td>Few able to purchase property at high prices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Properties</td>
<td>Profits from sale of original/inherited property used to acquire more property</td>
<td>Profits from sale of original/inherited property used to acquire more property</td>
<td>Difficulty making first purchase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>Highly paid skilled labor bought housing early. Wage reductions forced alternate income</td>
<td>Average wages for low to semi-skilled labor gave no great advantage</td>
<td>Low pay for unskilled labor limited opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Occupations</td>
<td>Saloon ownership provided a key to increasing income</td>
<td>Stores and services provided additional income</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
employment, the most common form of advancement for the Irish was proprietorship of workingmen's saloons. Since the political leadership of the borough and the saloon owners were of the same contingent, obtaining liquor licenses was a fairly easy process. The religious divide between the predominantly Protestant settlement of Johnstown and the heavily Catholic concentration of Cambria City further served to assure the success of saloon ownership in Cambria City. Irish women contributed to family economic hedging by working in Cambria Iron's woolen mill, and by going into domestic service at a much higher rate than any other ethnic group (GPO, 1911). Among the Irish, cultural taboos kept married women within the home, so it was generally acceptable only for the young, unmarried female members of a household to be gainfully employed (Arensberg, 1968). Young Irish women also alleviated their families of the burden of financial support by choosing ecclesiastical service as nuns and teachers.

Case Study #1: The Ryan Family, Irish Merchants and Tenement Owners

A single parcel of property in Cambria City illustrates how one Irish family prospered through early acquisition and then retention of a key location in the emerging community. The only access to the mill for Cambria Iron workers living across the Conemaugh River in Cambria City was a bridge near Railroad Avenue. The proximity of this property made it highly desirable for workingmen's lodgings. In 1869, at the age of 32, John Ryan purchased the first section of Railroad Avenue for $5,000 from developer James P. McConaughy. The section he bought contained lots
9 and 10 (roughly 135' by 180') at the junction of Railroad Avenue and Front Street. One year later he had set up a store on the corner, reporting the value of his property for the 1870 Census at $7,000, a considerably larger sum in contrast to the reported values of other lots within the borough. By 1886 the Sanborn map shows two houses at 308 and 309 Railroad as "tenements". The entire parcel along Front Street, directly across the river from the mill, was taken up by two long structures also identified as "tenements", numbered 414 and 415 Front Street. These structures had the appearance of long boarding houses. The Sanborn noted the absence of openings on one side of the building at 414 Front. Since the Sanborn maps were created for insurance use, it was their job to document potential fire hazards. Tragically, this deficiency in design, common to late nineteenth century tenements, may have contributed to the high death toll for residents of Cambria City during the now infamous 1889 Johnstown flood. The 1891 Sanborn documents the extent of damage. The tenements along Front Street were completely wiped out. Six years later the parcel along Front Street remained vacant as a silent testimony to the disaster (1895 Sanborn). The house on Washington Street in Johnstown which John Ryan lived in was also destroyed in the flood, killing him and six members of his family. An entire family of eleven members, living in the same house with the Ryans, also perished. (McCullough, 1968:273,283,195) The Ryan family's general store at 428 Washington, plus the one in Cambria City at the corner of Front and Railroad, were both destroyed in the flood. How the Ryan family fared afterwards is not immediately clear. Agnes Ryan paid $3,000 for the two lots on Front and Railroad (renamed McConaughy after
the flood), and she retained ownership of this property with her sisters Mary and Lizzie until 1931.

The Ryans were among the few Irish families who prospered without direct involvement in the saloon business. But, the corner of Front and Railroad was a popular site for other saloon owners. In 1895, nine of Cambria City’s eleven saloons were clustered close to the mill in this area. Remembering that the Irish had an exclusive grip on property along Railroad Street, it is easy to see that saloons contributed heavily to their mobility. As illustrated by the Ryans, the other prominent economic use of property in the Irish sector was for tenements. However, John Ryan was atypical of Irish representation in the establishment of a general store as very few Irish owners operated stores of any kind.

Case Study #2: Gaffney, an Irish Landlord

In contrast to the Ryan family that began life in Cambria City with more resources than most of their fellow Irishmen, the Gaffney family may come closer to representing the norm. John Gaffney, the patriarch of the family in Cambria City, was born in Ireland in 1827 and emigrated to New York at the age of 21. He found work with the Pennsylvania Railroad and settled first in Tyrone, PA., later moving to Johnstown to work in the Cambria Iron mill. He purchased his first lot in the newly laid out town from David McConaughy just four years after the start-up of Cambria Iron Company. At the time of the 1860 United States Census of Population, he reported the value of his property to be $700 (most lots sold in the 1850's were less
than $500). John and his wife Catherine lived at 306 Chestnut with their eight children. He helped organize St. John Gaulbert's Roman Catholic Church in downtown Johnstown, but later became identified with the Irish Catholic St. Columba's Church in Cambria City. He was identified as a laborer in the city directory. Before his family began to expand he had taken on boarders in his household. In 1879 he purchased his second piece of property from David McConaughy. The deed specifically states that this property on Broad Street included tenements. Becoming a landlord and taking in boarders were two common strategies for increasing a family's income above what they could earn in the mills or mines. John died in 1884, but two more property transactions are recorded in his name after that date and before the disbursement of his estate. One possible explanation is that recording of deeds was a haphazard affair in the mid-nineteenth century for this area. Many times property transactions were not recorded at all until sold to another person who demanded proof of title. Some properties changed hands many times without any record until the early twentieth century.

Two of John's sons took over the family property and continued the practice of acquiring property and acting as landlords. Property that was originally worth only a few hundred dollars would eventually be resold for many times that. James sold his half of lot 34 (411 Broad) to Solomon Holzman, a Jewish merchant, in 1906 for $9,000. James and his family continued to live at 413 Broad where he also had a shoe store. James began working for Cambria Iron like his father, starting at the age of 16 in the rolling mill. By 1899 he was able to build a three-story structure at 411-413
Broad, to serve as both store and home, before marrying (at the age of 40) a German woman named Clara (the extent of intermarriage between ethnic groups is a tantalizing but as yet undocumented aspect of life in this mixed community). Perhaps he raised the money to build his home by the sale of his inherited property in 1893 to his brother John S. Gaffney. James later sold another piece of property he had bought in 1903 on Chestnut St. to William Burkhard for $12,500. By 1920, his wife Clara was a widow with seven children to care for. She continued the operation of the shoe store (similar to the pattern of other German women acting as business owners). None of her children had to work in the mills to help support the family, although they did give up their servant. The oldest brother not only eventually acquired all the family inheritance from his siblings, but he also advanced in the mill. By 1900, he was a skilled roller, although the directory lists him as only a mill hand. Seven years later, he had advanced to boss of the rollers in the Cambria Steel works. He lived in Cambria City at 417 Broad, next to his brother. By 1910, he too had opened a store at his residence. The prohibition era undoubtedly closed down his liquor store but, surprisingly, the 1920 Census listed his occupation as a Clerk in the State Department. In that year he sold one of his properties on McConaughy Avenue for $10,500 and another in Upper Yoder Township for an undisclosed sum. This family case study demonstrates the importance of timing of settlement and the ability to purchase property cheaply in the early period and then maximize profit precisely when the demand was at its highest.
German Strategies

The Germans with initially limited opportunities in the mills turned to entrepreneurship earlier, and in much greater proportions than their Irish counterparts. They too opened saloons, but they also went into the brewery business to supply the numerous local saloons serving Cambria Iron employees. A large number of Germans supplemented their employment in the mills or mines with small mercantile establishments serving the local population. In the early phase, the German business concerns centered around trade or service occupations, like blacksmiths, or barbers. These early businesses constituted the primary occupation for their proprietors, in contrast to later patterns. Over time, more opportunities opened up for Germans in the mills due to two factors: one, the stated goal of Cambria's managers to mix ethnic groups in the mill; and secondly, the ability of Cambria Iron to play on ethnic rivalry and recruit Germans as strike-breakers. However, as shown earlier, the majority of these positions were entry-level at barely subsistence wages. Even as opportunity for advancement with the company declined, the population of Cambria City was booming. This enhanced the potential profitability of small shop-owners as their customer base expanded and enticed more property owners into the dual role of laborer and store proprietor.

A scarcity of living quarters in the face of massive immigration fueled a high demand for hotels and boarding houses. Those who owned and operated such facilities benefited from the continual expansion of the iron works with the unending
stream of job-seekers it drew to the Johnstown area. All ethnic groups participated in the practice of renting out rooms but the Germans relied on it extensively. As an economic strategy it was almost unfailing in its ability to move a family up the ladder. It is no small coincidence that those who owned hotel-saloons were also the holders of political power and influence in their respective boroughs, enjoying a higher degree of prosperity than the common villager or laborer. German women, at the same time, were very active in room and tenant management, as well as in multiple family businesses. “Because they had such an intimate knowledge of family finances and need, women to a remarkable extent usually made the decision to initiate small, immigrant family business concerns.” (Bodnar, 1985:82).

Case Study # 3: German Brewery Owners, The Stibich Family

One of the prominent families of the German contingent in Cambria City, the Stibichs, represented the very top level of property owners in 1870. At that early date, both Joseph and George Stibich reported individual property valued at $5,000. Joseph owned and operated a grocery store at the corner of Chestnut and Fourth Street. George worked as an iron puddler in Cambria Iron’s rolling mill, one of the few Germans to hold this highly paid position.

Joseph began his working life in the mines and furnaces of Clarion County, PA. He spent a few years at Brady’s Bend before coming to Johnstown to work for the Cambria Iron Company in 1854. Nine years later he bought his first lot in Cambria City for only $200. He bought the adjacent lot six years later for $400,
twice the original price. By 1870, his grocery store was reportedly worth $5,000. Johnstown’s 1876 directory records a store on Chestnut Street, but notes Joseph’s residence as Braddock, PA. It may be that he was among the 4,000 men who left Johnstown due to labor problems with Cambria Iron. Around 1878, he returned to Johnstown and began manufacturing soda water. Census takers recorded him and his family at the same address and occupation in 1880 as in 1870. Joseph’s store had expanded by the time of the 1886 Sanborn map, to a grocery store at 212 Chestnut, a dressmaker shop at 213 Chestnut, and a large general store at 214 Chestnut Street, plus a grain warehouse and two large storage sheds. In the mid-1880s he began buying up corner lots on Chestnut at the intersections of Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Streets, and additional lots between Sixth and Seventh Streets. By this stage in Cambria City’s evolution, corner lots were increasingly being used for small neighborhood shops, especially along Broad Street. Apparently, Joseph Stibich anticipated this trend expanding to Chestnut Street as well. Either he planned to use these properties to serve his own thriving mercantile interests or he expected to make a good profit selling these key lots to other hopeful entrepreneurs. He had already invested close to $4,500 in these additional lots by 1889. Then came the devastation of the 1889 Johnstown Flood, wiping out his store and nearly everything they owned. Flood losses tallied up in the range of $45,000 for the Stibich family. They immediately rebuilt, relocating the store to Second and Brallier. Just two years later, Joseph sold the store “at an advantageous price” and purchased a farm in Lower Yoder Township, intending to retire there. His son, John L., had continued the soda
manufacturing business on his own from his early twenties, moving it to 206 Broad just prior to the flood. He had by that time entered the brewery business with Jacob Goenner, his new father-in-law. When Jacob was among those who perished in the flood, John L. Stibich, along with Jacob's son, William Goenner, became joint managers of Goenner Brewing Company. William died in 1896 leaving John L. as superintendent of the flourishing brewery. Ten years later, the brewery had grown to a five story building encompassing most of one entire block, with storage capacity of 7,000 barrels. John L. Stibich had organized another brewery in Patton, PA., and purchased interest in the Cambria Brewing Company, also located in Cambria City. By virtue of his business success, John L. became part of the ruling elite in the greater Johnstown area, sitting on the Board of Directors of the Cambria National Bank and the First National Bank of Johnstown, plus the Cambria & Morrelville Water Company. John's sons and daughters were able to obtain a college education. After the flood, the Stibichs were among the well-to-do families who moved to the new hilltop development of Westmont where they built a luxurious home. In just one generation, this German immigrant family obtained all the benchmarks of social mobility based on both their mercantile interests and their strategic acquisition and use of property.

**East European Strategies**

As can be seen from the chart on ethnicity and upward mobility, the late arriving immigrants from regions of Southeastern Europe were limited in the
strategies available to them for advancement. Following typical immigration patterns, single young employable males were the first to leave the homeland and try their hand at new opportunities in America. However, the timing of their arrival put them at an immediate disadvantage due to several factors. One, the density of the community was already high, so that only a limited amount of space was available. Second, the influx of so many laborers served to depress wages. Third, the earlier settlers - the German and Irish - already controlled most of the land and available housing. Fourth, the competition for space and housing caused excessively high rates for what little was available. The combination of these factors led to the results noted by Morawska, “Between 1900 and 1915 the majority of the Slavic and Magyar immigrants in Johnstown had remained where they started: working as common laborers and living as renters” (Morawska, 1985:155).

The next section describes the influence of these factors and strategies on the physical composition and evolution of Cambria City.

Mobility Strategies and Land Use Change

As we observed in Cambria City, these different strategies clearly manifested themselves in the gradual change of land use and density patterns. The size of lots shrank and the number of dwelling units per lot, as well as the percentage of land coverage, rose dramatically as the dominant ethnic groups competed to maximize usage of the property under their control. As density increased to nearly intolerable levels (40 or more boarders per four room house), the original inhabitants removed to
newer suburbs on the hilltop and surrounding areas. While retaining control of property and profits, they physically disconnected from the neighborhood, becoming absentee landlords. For the immigrants who arrived in the early period, the ability to buy cheap housing and property provided an asset to be exploited. The explosive growth in population due to Cambria Iron’s rapid expansion created conditions of overcrowding and housing scarcity which pushed prices out of reach of ordinary laborers. Late arrivals struggled to overcome the dual disadvantages of inflated prices in a tight market and diminishing wages paid by employers caught up in cutthroat competition.

In the paternalistic, company-dominated community of Johnstown, immigrants were virtually powerless to control conditions of employment in terms of wages, hours, and safety. But, the mobility of workers was more than reactive; it was also pro-active, as seen in personal accounts of how union members left town at precipitous times to avoid company black-listing, and how they later returned to their jobs. Other instances record the strong pull of community ties, as former Cambria workers returned to start other enterprises. Rigidity of occupational categories are broken down as individuals emerge from census and directory tabulations in a kaleidoscope of work experience. On a personal scale, they made choices regarding alternative strategies for enhancing their meager incomes. The acquisition and use of property ultimately proved to be a powerful tool. The German and Irish immigrants of Cambria City used their early acquisition of property and entrepreneurship to advance themselves as the community became crowded with later
arrivals. As the value of property rose rapidly under pressure of enormous increases in population correlated to Cambria Iron employment growth, those who were initially less well off also advanced as their modest property holdings skyrocketed in value. My analysis revealed that internal structuration was more diverse than originally thought for working-class communities, and more important for immigrant success than work-related advancement due to increasing skill or pay, as traditional mobility and assimilation theories state.
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### Land Use Change in Cambria City

**Map 2. Land Use Change in Cambria City, 1880-1910.**
Compiled from Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps (1886-1913) and T. Doran's Plan of Cambria City (1852)

#### Land use, 1880 & 1910
- **Vacant**
- **Saloons & Breweries**
- **Retail**
- **Single family**
- **Tenements**
- **Churches**

#### Land use change, 1880 - 1910

<table>
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<th>1910</th>
<th>Change</th>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saloons &amp; Breweries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Churches</td>
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<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of lots with changing land use, 1880 - 1910
CAMBRIA CITY
1900'S LOT SALES

Map 4. Land Values 1900 - 1909
Source: Cambria County Deed Records
Map 1. Land Values in the 1860's
Source: Cambria County Deed Records