2013

From Main to High: Consumers, Class, and the Spatial Reorientation of an Industrial City

Jonathan Haeber
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FROM MAIN TO HIGH:
CONSUMERS, CLASS, AND THE SPATIAL
REORIENTATION OF AN INDUSTRIAL CITY

A Thesis Presented

by

Jonathan Haeber

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2013

Department of History
DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad.

And for Holyoke.
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When I first sought out graduate schools, David Glassberg responded to my initial
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ABSTRACT

FROM MAIN TO HIGH:
CONSUMERS, CLASS, AND THE
SPATIAL REORIENTATION OF AN INDUSTRIAL CITY

MAY 2013

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Consumer culture’s spatial dynamics have rarely been examined. This study will use a methodology of “triangulation” – a term borrowed from Geographer Richard J. Dennis – to explore the characteristics of consumer culture among the working classes in a single industrial, planned city (Holyoke, Massachusetts). Each facet of the tripartite method – literary, cliometric, and geographical sources – will be used to conclude that consumer capitalism fundamentally changed the spatial character of Holyoke’s working class communities. A time period roughly from 1880 to 1940 has been selected because novels about Holyoke in this period help augment an understanding of the city’s consumer landscape. The study examines two writers who grew up in Holyoke: Jacques Ducharme and Mary Doyle Curran. It also centers on two streets, High Street and Main Street, which served as the commercial centers for very distinct types of communities. The study draws from oral histories, sociological data, place-based analysis, advertisements, material culture, census records, newspaper accounts, and corporate records from manufacturers and the city’s largest department store.
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CHAPTER 1
AN ISLAND OF ORGANIZATION

Figure 1: Pneumatic Tube System at Jordan Marsh Department Store, Boston, MA

At the early 20th century’s largest department store, a system of pneumatic tubes snaked their way between buildings and floors, delivering all manner of merchandise and credit reports, petty cash, and mail orders in a whoosh of air. These tubes terminated in the deep recesses of the basement, where an administrator perfunctorily emptied and filled orders like a loom-fixer exchanging bobbins in a textile mill. Embedded and hidden among masonry, the pneumatic tubes functioned in the interstices of the building to transfer cash for consumer goods at speeds never before imaginable. Whereas the haggling and peddling of an earlier era roared with dialogue, the diminutive slots, where the cash was whisked away, whispered in a new language that spoke of speed, change, and efficiency.

At a mid-sized industrial city a thousand miles to the east, the autobiographical protagonist created by writer Mary Doyle Curran, Ellen, stared through the shop window
of a small drug store. Of the two windows in the store, one seemed monotonous and faded. Patent medicines filled the window alongside old-fashioned, nineteenth-century faces on dusty cardboard. One day, Ellen’s imagination was captured by a glint of red. It was an alluring devil advertising Pluto Water, a diuretic tonic. When the young Ellen demonstrates her honesty to the drug store owner he gives her the cardboard devil in gratitude. The devil made Ellen’s world “glow with color.” But after a short stint as an object of worship by her schoolmates, the devil fades and the world forgets him. Ellen, however, continues to identify with the promotional cutout, especially when she plays King of the Hill. “I stood at the top of the hill firmly brandishing my flaming sword,” Doyle Curran writes, “heroically defeating the other side and casting them down as fallen angels.”

Though Ellen is a character in a fictional novel, the red devil is not a figment of the writer’s imagination. Pluto Water displays really existed when Doyle Curran was growing up in the 1920s, and the shop window where Ellen saw the display was a real pharmacy near the writer’s childhood apartment. An advertisement in a trade journal communicates to drug store owners the benefits of installing Pluto Water’s trademark avatar, a red devil, in store windows: “An attractive window display of PLUTO WATER will be the connecting link between your pharmacy and our nation-wide advertising campaign… Once a sale is made you can bank on the purchaser becoming a regular customer.” Like the pneumatic tubes of Marshall Field’s, the Pluto Water window display was connected to national webs of interaction and association. Space – whether the

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department store basement or the drug store window – was linked to new, large, distant, and impersonal processes, bringing the allure of modernity into the most faded of outdated shop windows.

As Henri Lefebvre asserts, social relations are concrete abstractions, and “have no real existence save in and through space.” Therefore, a study of consumer space could yield enormous insight about social practices in the era of mass culture and consumption.³ This study will select one industrial city, Holyoke, Massachusetts, to examine the changing nature of working class consumer space in the early 20th century. Holyoke’s department stores, saloons, parks, and theaters evolved as products of social interaction as much as they were spaces created in an era dominated by market capitalism. The profit-oriented Euclidean grid superimposed on the industrial, planned city’s landscape could only, at best, be a suggestive template – though one that would have a profound impact. Holyoke’s working class residents intensely asserted their place in the city and even created counter-spaces of their own – often denying the spaces that the city’s capitalists were all too willing to provide (as consumer products) or impose (as places to work or circulate). Ultimately, however, neither Holyoke’s patrician profiteers nor their working class counterparts played the greatest role in reorienting the spaces of the city. Mass media, new products, national advertising, corporate capitalism, and an unprecedented infrastructural transformation contributed to the atomization of its residents’ spatial practices. The changing nature of work and social life in the city also contributed to increased contact with representations of space created by brokers in mass culture, thereby conflicting with working class production of enclave-centered

³ Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Wiley, 1992), 404.
representational space. Thus, the neighborhood enclaves of Holyoke, which had primarily been ethnic, trade, or religiously based before mass consumption, were joined to arenas of consumption and leisure that spanned the city. National developments in consumer capitalism played a role in reorganizing Holyoke’s residents by their income group, purchasing habits, and commercial leisure activities.

To return once more to the illustration of the pneumatic octopus in the department store: It is tempting to see Holyoke’s working class residents in the clutches of the octopus as much as it is to see the idolatry inherent in young Ellen’s interest in a shop window display. The octopus was, after all, the Gilded Age symbol of capitalism’s vampiric hegemony. Novelist Frank Norris called his octopus a “terror of steel and steam… a vast power, huge, terrible, flinging the echo of its thunder over all the reaches of the valley… with tentacles clutching into the soil, the soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power.” However, oral histories, statistical data, maps, and newspaper accounts show that hegemony in consumer culture was far from the order of the day in Holyoke. At the center of this study are two Holyoke writers and two city streets. The works the writers produced will help us reconstruct (and deconstruct) the internal and otherwise unrecorded dynamics of leisure and consumption in a city touched by the far-reaching implications of

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4 “Representations of space” and “representational space” are borrowed here from Henri Lefebvre to explain the two somewhat opposed (but not exclusive) uses of space in the environment. Representational space is the space that is used in day to day practice. It is the space of action and appropriation. Representations of space are designed, planned, or imposed on the landscape – usually by centralized organizers or governments. Lefebvre distinguishes between the two by using the example of a theatrical stage. The stage itself is a representation of space with a pre-conceived design. The stage becomes representational space through the “dramatic action itself” by play actors. Cf. Lefebvre, Henri. The Production of Space. Wiley, 1992; 188.

modernity. The streets will help us understand the changing nature of consumption and the role that chain stores, large-scale corporate capitalism, and Progressive-era regulation played in this process.

The first author, Jacques Ducharme, was born in Holyoke in 1910 to parents of French-Canadian descent. His great grandfather, Nicholas Proulx, was the employment agent who brought scores of poor Québécois farm families south to Holyoke in the 1850s for the Lyman textile mills. As a recruiter for Lyman, Proulx became wealthy, and his descendants – including Jacques Ducharme – were important figures in the civic and social life of Wards 1 and 2, the areas in the “Flats” and “Tigertown” that became the center of French-Canadian working class culture in Holyoke (Figure 2).  

Figure 2: Overview Map of Holyoke with Legend

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The second author was earlier identified as Mary Doyle Curran. Doyle Curran wrote from the perspective of a young Irish girl (based in large part on Curran’s own childhood). She was born in Holyoke in 1917 to Mary Sullivan and Edward J Doyle. Her father was a wool sorter at the city’s largest employer, the Farr Alpaca mill. Doyle Curran’s book and her unpublished manuscripts depict Irish, working class life from 1920 to 1939 (Figure 3). Ducharme’s novel, on the other hand, takes places from the 1870s to 1910. Pseudonyms notwithstanding, both Curran and Ducharme are writing about real events and people. Therefore, in this study, their works are treated with caution as primary sources that help fill in the gaps in newspaper articles, city directories, census records, company publications, and other archival sources. Each novel is a rich reserve of anecdotes about ethnic interactions with consumer culture, mass media, space, place, family, and memory. The novels by Ducharme and Curran demonstrate the agency and cohesion of working class communities in a Holyoke facing assimilation into mainstream consumer life.

Figure 3: Jacques Ducharme, ca. 1945 and Mary Doyle Curran, ca. 1930
The two streets – the commercial thoroughfares of Main Street and High Street – were also experiencing rapid change. Whereas Main Street was the ethnic and working class core of the city, High Street contained the city’s insurance agencies, banks, department stores and high-brow cultural institutions. High Street was also the dividing line between the sanitized suburban communities and the rough-and-tumble plebian culture of The Flats and Tigertown (see Figure 2). Nevertheless, by the end of the First World War, consumer capitalism broke down these invisible boundaries and reached farther into working class neighborhoods than it ever had before, due in part to market research firms that systemized the science of mass marketing. In partnership with ad empiricists like Charles Coolidge Parlin, local merchants of mass culture were able to quantify and systemize new ways of reaching working class consumers; the largest department store in Holyoke was no exception to this trend.

In the French novel, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (The Ladies’ Paradise), Emilé Zola counterpoised the spectacular image of Paris’ largest department store with that of the steam engine, which divided the store’s employees, broke down communal ties, and encouraged an insatiable struggle for existence in bourgeois culture. At the center of Zola’s polemic against the department store is an emerging society that historian Micheal Miller calls “more impersonal, more uniform, more machine-like, more mass-like.” In Zola’s estimation, the Bon Marché was a new version of the factory – just dressed in different garb. Its employees experienced the same hierarchical differentiation, answered

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8 The Curtis Publishing Company hired Charles Coolidge Parlin starting in 1911 to map, measure, and count its vast territory of magazine subscriptions and the commercial character of major cities in the U.S.

(even more directly) to the same need for constant turnover and profits, and worked in a space that was planned for the efficient circulation of people and goods.

Why study Holyoke consumer culture in such a context? After all, its department store never reached the epic grandeur and international reach of the Bon Marché. Yet Holyoke was exceptional in a number of other ways. At the turn of the century, it had more millionaires per capita than any other city in the United States, but its town seal of a productive beehive hints at the original intentions of the Boston capitalists (Figure 4).

![Figure 4: Holyoke Town Seal](image)

Holyoke’s workers churned out more paper than any other place in the world; and the city’s patricians relied on a steady stream of cheap, immigrant labor – in 1890 the third highest percentage of foreign born residents in the nation.¹⁰

The department store in Holyoke is a node of exchange, just one of many in Holyoke that will be examined, but no less important in demonstrating how the millionaires, workers, and culture brokers interacted in a planned, hypercapitalist, industrial city.¹¹ In Holyoke, workers encountered “conspicuous consumption” in an

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¹¹ Hypercapitalism is a term used by Marxist scholars to describe capitalistic organization
intensely direct manner – notably the type of consumption that Thorstein Veblen terms the earliest form of ownership, that of servants. Class and consumption permeated the discourse of the city. Even if the characters in the novels, Mary Doyle and Etienne Delusson, continued to resist the invasion of consumer capitalism, by 1920 it could not be ignored. Finally, local stories often tell us much more than one which is a national aggregate (as Claude Levi-Strauss once quipped, “disorder reigns” in the “vast empirical stew,” within which are "scattered small islands of organization"). Above all, local stories tell us about the quotidian life of working class people. More numerous than the millionaires who lived in Holyoke in 1900 were multitudes of workers who were making ends meet and negotiating the trials of modernity by maintaining, as best they could, ties to family, place, and community. Consumption in Holyoke, despite all the attention paid to its downtown department store was mostly inconspicuous. As a small island of organization in the vast empirical stew of early 20th century consumer culture, Holyoke has much to tell, qualitatively, quantitatively, and spatially about working class consumer life. Before doing so, it is useful to examine Holyoke within a larger, national context. The next chapter begins appropriately with the historiography of consumption in an era that Richard Hofstadter called the “Age of Reform.”


12 Qtd. in Yi-fu Tuan, Escapism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 107.
“And then, with a jerk, the train was slowly pulling out of the station, crossing the first level canal, and working its way along the river-bank toward Northampton. The river never seemed so beautiful to the child, whose whole philosophy, like that of the first Greeks, consisted of movement. Color was a kind of motion to his eyes, and here was the river flowing before his gaze, and he was moving with what seemed to him great rapidity to an unknown place.”

- Pierre Delusson in The Delusson Family

Pierre Delusson’s fictional train excursion was shared by thousands of French-Canadians whose first impression of Holyoke was its grand H.H. Richardson-designed rail depot. With the coming of the railroad, a rustic pastoral landscape was transformed by the late 19th century into “the world’s most productive industrial machine.” As the steam locomotive disturbed the solitude of Henry David Thoreau’s Walden Pond, it also
barreled its way into the 1850s agrarian landscape of Holyoke (née Ireland Parish).\textsuperscript{13} The railroad also fundamentally changed ways of doing business; Alfred Chandler notes that horizontal steel rails brought vertical corporate structures and the concomitant bureaucracy heralding the managerial revolution.\textsuperscript{14} The railroad was Holyoke’s (and the nation’s) first large-scale signal of the coming age of modernity, and it set into motion fundamental changes in society by the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Automobiles, motion pictures, radio, and electric light made their first appearance in the era of Ducharme and Doyle Curran. The very etymology of the new products connoted movement: autos were \textit{mobile} and films were \textit{motion} pictures.

A second feature of modernity was that it “implied a particular kind of people with particular types of strivings.”\textsuperscript{15} In that way, Progressives endeavored towards rational management of the material environment and moral reform (Postel argues that Populism could also make such claims).\textsuperscript{16} In any case Holyoke was technologically and socially “modern” by the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Technologically, the Boston & Maine Railroad preceded the “first planned industrial city” by four years and Holyoke boasted the longest dam in the world. The city was one of the earliest with electric light.\textsuperscript{17} Socially, it was at

\begin{flushright}
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\textsuperscript{13} Leo Marx, \textit{The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America}, 35th Anniversary (Oxford University Press, USA, 2000), 343.
\textsuperscript{14} Alfred D Chandler, \textit{The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business} (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977), 87. Chandler posits that the bureaucracy of the railroad paved the way for a new era in market capitalism, dominated by hierarchical structures with mid-level, white collar managers playing a role in consolidating and expanding the reach of large corporations.
\textsuperscript{16} Cf. Ibid.; Kindle edition. Postel argues that Populism was a thoroughly modern movement, making use of large-scale organization to effect change and build coalitions.
\textsuperscript{17} Holyoke received its first electricity October 14, 1884, only two years after Edison’s famed Pearl Street Station in Manhattan.
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the vanguard of Progressive-era health reform, municipal ownership of utilities, and the parks & playground movement.\(^{18}\) However, underlying such signals of progress was a substratum of deplorable conditions. In 1875, the city had “more and worse large tenements than any manufacturing town in the state.”\(^{19}\) Holyoke fit the caricature of the quintessential Dickensian Coketown, the city template that Lewis Mumford called the “most degraded urban environment the world had yet seen.”\(^{20}\) The makeshift shacks that comprised the neighborhood known as “The Patch” usually housed families and pigs alike – a practice that also appeared in Frederick Engels’ descriptions of the squalid conditions of Birmingham and Manchester.\(^{21}\) Strict control of time became something embedded in the capitalist production system of Holyoke – as it had been in other factory towns across the country. The tempo of each day was as efficiently synchronized as a Cistercian monastery; Farr Alpaca employee Thomas Burns worked a “twelve hour day, from six in the morning to six at night, six days a week, with a twenty-five minute walk to and from work.”\(^{22}\) These new, industrial cities may have been harbingers of modernity,

\(^{18}\) Holyoke appears to have financed the first municipally owned railroad and commissioned an extensive system of parks and playgrounds from Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr (which will be explored later). It was touted to have the “lowest water rate in the state and also one of the best water systems in the country.” Cf. “Municipal Day Is Big Feature.” *Springfield Union*, October 23, 1913, p13.


but they failed to live up to the promise of plenty offered by industrial capitalism.

Typhoid became their grim consolation prize, but a substantial portion of moralists chose not to focus on the living conditions in such tenements until the turn of the 20th century. Instead, consumption became a topic for study, and Carroll Wright, a statistician for the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics (MBLS) led the way.

Moralists and Consumption: 1875-1910

In the eyes of the MBLS, the squalid conditions in the tenements could wait. The principal concern was how the working class spent their time and money. Consumer historian Daniel Horowitz reveals that Wright’s study of working class budgets in 1875 showed an inclination towards bourgeois respectability. The study was conducted when nine out of ten dollars earned by a working class household went towards food, clothing, and shelter. The other dollar was categorized by Wright as “sundries.” Following his ardent belief that workers had very little left to spend on frivolities, Wright concluded that the paltry sundries portion that he estimated was spent provided little room for extravagance; conservative moralists were thus misapprehending the working classes as intemperate and profligate. Still, Wright continued to be concerned about the consuming working classes, and the report is obsessed with household surroundings, cleanliness, and contents. Homes that unexpectedly adopted “respectable” or “tasteful” bourgeois habits such as gardening, magazine subscriptions, or home ownership were given special praise in reports.23

By the 1880s, women’s magazines promoted proper consumption to their readership (which was decidedly middle to middle-upper class). Ellen Gruber Garvey

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notes that the largest women’s magazines, known as the Big Six, took a “special and often more self-conscious role in the construction of the woman reader as consumer.”

This role, Garvey argues, involved recruiting readers as participants in consumer culture, rather than just recipients of magazines with ad space. Women’s magazines increasingly depended on advertising rather than subscriptions, so the magazines endeavored to blur the distinction between moralist-oriented editorial content and advertorial intended to guide consumer habits. Similarly, Holyoke’s local press played a role in defining consumption taboos; an article in the *Holyoke Daily Transcript* admonished readers to “dress in such a matter that your attire will not occupy your thought… Then the society in which you move will see you, and not your housings and trappings… to think of nothing and to talk of nothing but that which pertains to the drapery and artificial ornament of the person, is to transform the trick of a courtesan into amusement for a fool.”

Meanwhile, Protestant and Catholic respectables disdained the increasing inroads of secular society at the cost of what they saw to be a disintegration of morality, tradition, and family. William Hartford puts Holyoke into perspective by examining the conflicted – and often fragmented – battles for respectability fought by Father Harkins in Holyoke’s St Jerome’s parish. For respectables at the high end of the class spectrum, such as Holyoke publisher and founder of *Good Housekeeping*, Clark W. Bryan, change was disconcerting. “We should be barbarians,” Bryan wrote in *Good Housekeeping*, “did we not ‘do as other folks do’ and adapt our ways and wants, our apparel and adornments,

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according to the fashionings of the hour in which we live.”27 In the eyes of Father Harkins and wealthy Protestants like Bryan, mass culture was beginning to define normative social practice and dissolve the old distinctions that wealth provided. In Bryan’s estimation, the home was the only remaining refuge, so he turned to publishing a magazine about defending the home against such intrusions. Father Harkins believed a syncretism of Catholic devotion and social clubs devoted to temperance could help salve the wounds of modernity.

While social distinctions blurred and religious values appeared to erode, workers also asserted their right to leisure. Roy Rosenzweig’s study of workers in Worcester, Massachusetts looks at workers’ demands for leisure time. The eight-hour day movement helped the Knights of Labor reach almost a million members before it was disrupted by the Haymarket bombing. Factory owners across the country, including Holyoke, feared a socialist revolution. With the decline of the Knights of Labor, the American Federation of Labor took up the cause and hundreds of thousands of workers claimed victory, freeing scores of wage-laborers to spend their leisure time as they pleased and further inciting the unease of conservative moralists.

By the late 19th century, a generation of intellectuals saw the leisure hours gained by the eight-hour movement as both problem and opportunity. Horowitz selects three figures to illustrate changing thought about consumer culture: Simon N. Patten, Thorstein Veblen, and George Gunton.28 Conservative moralists before the Gilded Age were just beginning to glimpse nascent signals of prosperity among a wider swathe of the population, but by the 1890s wage earners increasingly had more surplus earnings as food

costs spiraled downward. Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* in 1899 marks a turning point in unease over the “invidious” clawing for status through symbolically charged goods. Progressive reformers made it their duty to guide the buying practices of the lower classes. Protestant moralists were in part responding to the surfeit of meretricious goods that industrial capitalism made possible, but they also faced what they considered a crisis in the religious and ethnic makeup of the second wave of immigrants. Holyoke’s social and spatial separation of Protestant mill owners from Catholic mill workers – covered in great detail by Kenneth Underwood’s book about religious interaction in Holyoke – was prefaced in the 1890s by an even more intense national movement of anti-Catholic Nativism exemplified by the American Protective Association.

At the turn of the century, a few of the moralistically-inclined ideologues of asceticism had a change of heart. Horowitz identifies Patten as one salient example. His views on working class consumption evolved between the 1880s and 1907 from grappling with how to control consumption to encouraging it. In 1907, Patten published *The New Basis of Civilization*, an inclusive vision of abundance, in which the working poor could be reformed through consumption. The new morality was not one of abstention, but rather one of expression. Only after this period of abundance, wrote Patten, would there be an idyllic synthesis of restrained living; once freed from judgment and censure, working-class immigrants would become “willing puritans” and adopt the

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proper types of consumption. If, as Patten asserted, the new basis of civilization would culminate in a period of restrained living, then industrial capitalism faced new problems of economic reproduction.

The response to these perceived problems was manifold: First, new institutions such as the department store increased the speed, ease, and desirability of exchange. Second, profit-oriented spaces of leisure like the amusement park, resort hotel, and motion picture theatre helped fill non-working hours. Third, advertising and new forms of media created an “imagined community” of mass consumers (in the same way that Benedict Anderson asserted that nationalism emerged from print culture). Fourth, new debt instruments and their wider availability allowed for access to large, durable goods by a larger segment of the population. And finally, moralists themselves eventually capitulated to the religious and cultural quandary they faced. Historians have approached each of these facets of consumer culture, and a brief overview of their work below will help put Holyoke’s consumer culture between 1870 and 1940 within a national context.

Department Stores: 1869 - 1939

In recent years, historians have examined the department store because of its ability to tell a number of simultaneous stories. One of the most cited studies of department stores has been Michael Miller’s *Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store, 1869-1920*. Miller approaches France’s largest and most renowned store by looking at two aspects of its history: First, he analyses it from the perspective of a business historian by describing the internal workings of a profitable large enterprise.

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33 Horowitz, *The Morality of Spending*, 34.
He deciphers the Bon Marché’s managerial structure that made it a success, including its corporate welfare policies, paternalistic ethos, and the top-down, hierarchical promotion policies. Miller also looks at the Bon Marché as the setting for a fascinating social history, showing that the French department store adapted to larger changes in the structure of French society, the expansion of bourgeois culture, and the supplanting of gemeinschaft social relations with increasingly impersonal, bureaucratic processes.

In contrast to France, American department stores formed in very different historical circumstances. William Leach sketches the saga of John Wanamaker, who founded the famed Philadelphia department store in 1876 in a vacant Pennsylvania freight railroad station. Leach’s “Land of Desire” was crafted by new technicians of culture he calls brokers of desire. In addition to developing new methods of communicating color, light, and movement (such as the “cut” or ad picture, painted billboard, or electrical sign), brokers turned business into pleasure and exchange into indulgence. Leach steps away from the economic context of the department store to look at its cultural context, including the sensory experiences that were assembled and experienced in the department store, including the use of color and light, but also taste, touch, and smell. Like many social historians, Leach makes use of fiction, art, and music to help elaborate the ethos of the era. The central figure in his book is L. Frank Baum, author of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz and, coincidentally, one of the country’s foremost authorities on window display and design in the early 1900s. Leach concludes that three factors played a decisive role in the rise of the American department store: 1.) The growth of a new class of “brokers”, 2.) development of a commercial aesthetic, and 3.) collaboration among economic and noneconomic institutions. Leach paints a vivid
portrait of Wanamaker’s, and also convincingly demonstrates how artists, museum curators, and government agencies played a role in establishing the department store as a mainstream activity. Unfortunately, his analysis leaves little room for resistance, cooption, or agency by the consuming classes. In fact, Leach calls consumer capitalism among the most “nonconsensual public cultures ever created.”

By contrast, Jessica Sewell’s study of department stores in San Francisco between 1890 and 1915 not only provides examples of women who resist or subvert the dominant hegemonic forces of department stores, but also “claimed the streets as a space of their own, to enjoy and use without fear.” Building on the earlier work of Christine Stansell, Mary Ryan, and Sarah Deutsch, Sewell’s analysis revolves around three women, each of whom wrote extensive logs in her diary about quotidian diurnal activities. Each woman was selected for her socioeconomic position. Sewell goes beyond the separate spheres trope to show the ways in which women’s public and private spaces interacted in an urban retail environment. Sewell’s work is informed by Lefebvre’s influential *Production of Space*. Using his theoretical tools, she categorizes the consumer landscape of San Francisco into three main types: Imagined, Experienced, and Built. Sewell’s study also adopts an interdisciplinary approach, in that she makes extensive use of mapping and visualization.

**Leisure: 1890 - 1939**

Though Sewell’s study is notable as being among the few that approach gender in the context of the department store, a number of other historians have taken a look at

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gender and leisure. Best known is Kathy Peiss’ *Cheap Amusements*, a study of working class leisure time among women in New York City. In the early 20th century these women were given the opportunity to leave the sweatshop or domestic service, which rapidly expanded their free time in a cosmopolitan city. Peiss demonstrates that commercial leisure allowed working class women to affirm independence and engage in heterosocial forms of leisure activity that rejected traditional, Victorian norms. Entrepreneurs attuned to the changing nature of leisure capitalized on the rising popularity of these new, expressive forms of leisure. Though moralists tried as they could to stem the tide, such amusement persisted.

While Peiss looks at moralist concern over leisure in the early Progressive Era, Susan Currell looks at government concern during the Great Depression. Sociologists in the 1930s, including Robert Lynd saw leisure as a “problem” to be solved by government intervention. Susan Currell’s *March of Spare Time* expounds on the New Deal administration’s efforts to guide or control leisure activities. Prominent intellectuals with a leisure-oriented agenda, including Jay Nash, Paul Frankl, Henry Forman and Jesse Steiner sought to influence leisure practices. Currell also examines how the Payne Studies (a series of motion picture investigations) served to “increase anxiety over leisure-time activities and promote reform of commercial leisure which would ensure that participation in ‘wholesome’ activities could alleviate ‘social disease.’” Works Progress Administration (WPA) programs sometimes reinforced patriarchy or the division of proper leisure activities by race, and also endeavored to counteract mass consumer

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38 Ibid., 8.
culture with a “folk art” revival in square dancing and the encouragement to visit so-called ‘natural’ or pre-industrial sites that reinforced national identity.  

**Mass Marketing and Culture: 1890 - 1940**

The period just prior to the Great Depression was one of enormous growth in mass marketing. Within a decade after radios appeared in stores in 1922 more than half of American households owned a radio set. Advertising revenues overall went from $2.9 billion in 1920 to $3.4 billion in 1929.  

Roland Marchand’s pathbreaking study, *Advertising the American Dream*, looks at the visual metaphors, icons, fantasies, and parables delivered by the industry between 1920 and 1940. Much like William Leach’s “brokers of desire,” the “apostles of modernity” in Marchand’s account first had to endow their industry with a professional, respectable image and distance themselves from the P.T. Barnum and patent medicine stigmas.  

Marchand notes that the industry’s early history was marked by appeals to genteel class distinctions. These ads were not a reflection of reality, but instead indicated the background of the ad-men themselves, whose lifestyle differed markedly from their audiences. More essentially, early ads were crafted to please the client, not appeal to the existing *habitus* of the average consumer. In time, however, advertisers recognized the success of pictorial popular magazines like *True Story* and adjusted to the demands of the consumer. Marchand does not discount the effectiveness of advertising; but he also states the ads themselves were not synonymous with society; they were a distorted tableau of

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40 Ibid., 63.
43 Ibid., 78.

Despite their distortions, advertisements filled a spiritual niche that modernity left open. Such advertisements not only offered the illusion of direct personal contact, but also the possibility of the “open road.” They offered the potential to “have it all,” and Marchand concludes it was an illusion that most Americans “devoutly wished to believe.”

**Consumer Credit: 1920 - 1929**

Finally, no study of consumption in the era would be complete without briefly mentioning the earliest forms of American consumer credit. Martha Olney, who analyzed consumer credit in the 1920s, tried to determine exactly what kind of “consumer revolution” occurred in the 1920s – if one occurred at all. She found that there was, in fact, a large increase in purchases of major durable goods made possible by the availability of new credit instruments. These new durable goods – primarily automobiles, but also radios to a lesser extent – allowed for consumers to shift their disposable income from saving or spending on minor or perishable goods to more costly and longer-term major durable goods. Olney finds that advertising played a role, but concludes that advertising was – in itself – a product of the changing tax policies initiated by the First World War. The excess profits tax jumped from a minor 8 percent to an astounding height of 65 percent by the end of the war. This encouraged manufacturers to divert profits to advertising for its tax break – even if the advertising did not pay for itself in

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44 Ibid., 367.
Adjusting to Modernity

The Gilded Age concentration of wealth, depersonalization of the workplace, Nativism and xenophobia in the midst of unprecedented immigration, divided factions in labor, a legion of political and reform movements – each of these factors presented new immigrants with an environment filled with conflict and confusion. Political bosses filled a niche to some extent, in Holyoke as in the Lower East Side, but working immigrants faced dehumanizing work and growing income disparities. As Robert Wiebe observes, people "groped for some personal connection with that broader environment, some way of mediating between their everyday life and its impersonal setting." What arose from these needs were new brokers who were not offering religious salvation, but instead the fulfillment of desire. William Leach called the period following Simon Patten’s *New Basis of Civilization* a society of abundance. As Leach notes, the abundance offered was not a physical cornucopia but an imagined one comprised of images, symbols, and signs. Indeed, new institutions came to the fore to acclimatize consumers to an organized and rationalized style of consumption that coincided with scientific rationalism in the factories.

To battle these institutions, Progressive moralists adopted Nature as its weapon in moral reform; little would these reformers realize that consumer capitalism would co-opt Nature as commodity. What landscape architects of the era derisively called the “Coney Island” effect on streetcar parks was unavoidable in the context of an industrial city filled with

48 Leach, *Land of Desire*. 
with weekday workers seeking the Sunday sublime. As the next chapter will demonstrate, searching for order in the wilderness also means surrendering what was once the commons to brokers in abundance.
CHAPTER III
FROM WILDERNESS SUBLIME TO URBAN JUNGLE, 1888 – 1920

"Let there be fountains before all the mills, in all the triangles, squares and parks... Have a gigantic fountain at the railroad station, cooling the air and charming the passengers of every passing train. Pump water to your highest hills and let it come back to you with the highest jet of any fountain in the world. If you use that freely which is characteristic of your city and your industry, you lay the best foundation possible for your city beautiful."

- G.A. Parker, Hartford Park Manager, Addressing Holyoke, March 16, 1902

Nature itself became part of Holyoke’s consumer culture in the early 20th century. At the dining room of the city’s Mt. Tom overlook, the walls and ceilings were festooned with ferns and palms (Figure 7). In Steiger’s department store, the “gayest of gala garb vied with Nature in portraying autumn’s gaudy tints of the rarest blending” (Figure 8). For the first time, mass-produced goods and consumer experiences were being displayed in the context of re-created natural features. From the quasi-infinite pastoral vista of Thomas Cole’s Oxbow, to L. Frank Baum’s Wizard of Oz, to the eponymous corn-ucopia of Iowa at the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition, it became clear that the abundance of nature – if only symbolic – was perceivable in places spanning the

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49 “To Make Holyoke Beautiful,” Springfield Republican, March 16, 1902, 7.
50 “The Display at Steiger’s,” Springfield Republican, September 27, 1907, 5.
continent (Figure 9).\footnote{Cf. Jackson Lears, \textit{Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America} (Basic Books, 1995).}

Figure 7: Mt. Tom Summit House - "Garden of the Gods" Dining Room

Figure 8: Steiger's Department Store Display - "During Intermission," 1906

Figure 9: Iowa's Exhibit at the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition

The 45-foot-high "River of Corn" exhibit at the Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco symbolizes the growing faith in abundance beginning in the Progressive Era.
The movement to mold or appropriate the landscape as a Progressive Era reform agenda was due in large part to the earlier influence of Frederick Law Olmsted. Olmsted found appeal in the regenerative effects of unaltered natural features. He called for taste to be cultivated through the power of the scenic and wild. According to Olmsted, workers who lacked opportunity to escape to a park setting would inevitably suffer from paralysis, monomania, melancholy, and malaise.\textsuperscript{52} Following the creation of Central Park in 1853, fervor for urban parks spread to hundreds of municipalities. As New York gained its park “for the people,” sightseeing and wilderness excursions also gained in popularity. Places like Niagara Falls, Yellowstone, and the Connecticut River Valley became American variants of the Grand Tour.\textsuperscript{53} Initially, these sightseeing excursions were a distinctly high-brow consumer activity – one had to have plenty of disposable income to travel for the simple pleasure of viewing. However, by the 1880s, entrepreneurs saw the potential to sell the spectacle of nature as a product to the middle and lower classes. Such efforts materialized in streetcar parks (such as Lincoln Park in Dartmouth, Massachusetts) and summer vacation destinations (like the bungalow colonies of the Catskills). Holyoke’s extensive streetcar system by the 1880s, as well as the view from a nearby peak – illustrated in Thomas Cole’s \textit{Oxbow} – made it an ideal target for tourist development.

\textbf{Planning and Constructing Leisure in Holyoke}

In 1888, William S Loomis, one-time owner of the \textit{Holyoke Daily Transcript} sold his shares in the newspaper to William Dwight and purchased a majority stake in the


\textsuperscript{53} Ethan Carr, \textit{Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture and the National Park Service} (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 11–12.
Holyoke Street Railway Company. At the time, the line was comprised of horse-drawn cars, but Loomis quickly decided to electrify them. Loomis was canny enough to foresee westward suburban development in Holyoke, so he purchased 385 acres on the peak of Mount Tom and touted it as a “wild and picturesque” weekend escape catering to the “best of society.” Mountain Park and Mt Tom introduced Holyokers to the landscape Olmsted extolled, but the views came at a price. For 25 cents in 1912, a spectator could reach the top of Mt Tom by an inclined railway. Instead, most workers chose to spend five cents to reach Mountain Park and stay at the foot of the peak for the simple pleasures of vaudeville, penny arcades, roller coasters, caged bears, and dancing (though the dance hall was touted to be “well policed”). While the leisure time of the city’s workers was spent at places like Mountain Park, members of the city’s park commission had plans to create alternative spaces in the city. Commercial leisure, for many moralists in Holyoke, was the improper way to initiate Holyoke’s working class into the healing properties of Nature. These planners saw in the city itself a great, untapped potential to edify the city’s workers, and they borrowed a term that came into vogue by 1902: “The City Beautiful.”

The City Beautiful movement was born at the 1893 World’s Fair. The Columbian Exposition helped popularize a new vision of the city, one which spread the oft-quoted dictum of the architect Daniel Burnham: “Make no little plans.” Grand, alabaster boulevards in Beaux Arts and Neoclassical design captured the imagination of civic ideologues. Juxtaposed with these massive structures were well-planned pockets of parks

54 “One of the Builders of Holyoke with a Genius for Organization and a Citizen of Rare Parts,” Holyoke Transcript, July 11, 1914.
and tree-lined streets. City Beautiful shook off the rectilinear grid; instead, business buildings and tenements alike were to be adjacent to diagonal thoroughfares.\(^5\) One of the grandest – and bizarrely utopian – plans of the era was Burnham’s 1905 plan for San Francisco. In the sketches, a monumental cascade proceeded from Twin Peaks to Market Street, a feat that would have been exorbitantly expensive to pump. The plan was shelved after the 1906 earthquake, but it illustrates the architectural braggadocio of the era, a time when an architect could create a Parthenon redux and get away with exhausting the city coffers. As the quote from G.A. Parker at the beginning of this chapter shows, Burnham’s ethos was widespread, and City Beautiful, in its monomaniacal obsession with the city center, diagonal boulevards, and curving, tree-lined residential streets, often disregarded the preferences of a city’s own residents.

What the Holyoke park commissioners likely had in mind when they contacted Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. in 1901 was the utopian vision offered by people like Burnham and trumpeted by Parker.\(^5\) The commissioners’ allies included moralists writing in the *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram* who deplored the mechanical contrivances at Mountain Park and – even more – the shooting galleries, billiard rooms, and saloons downtown. An October of 1916 feature in the *Transcript* quoted Rev. E.B. Robinson of Grace Church (the only Congregational Church in the working class section of the city), who delivered a scathing polemic against gambling. What makes his sermon particularly


\(^{57}\) Note: Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. will be referred to as Olmsted for the remainder of this report. Olmsted’s response was perhaps disappointing to Mayor Avery and the alderman, because it suggested – far from grand Burnhamesque visions, practical improvement of city features such as roads, streetcar lines, and landscaping instead of monumental city centers.
revealing is that he avoided criticizing the half-dozen established gambling facilities near his church but focused his castigation on the boys shooting craps in the streets and the fundraising schemes by fraternal organizations or churches. “It is allright [sic] to demand that the police close a place in main street if there is one, but they should stop gambling at fairs and circuses as well.” The crap shooting, especially, he said was “hostile to the idea of true city life… unsocial... It is an expression of the spirit of one who would live without working. Gambling is divisive, driving people apart.” Despite the Reverend’s characterization of craps as antisocial, in its street form it was a vibrant form of sociability. 58 David Nasaw asserts the children’s community of the streets (craps included) was no atavism, but a way of cooperating in solidarity against the impersonal, rationalized environment in which they lived. 59

In response to moralist outrage over loafers and kids playing in the street, aldermen and commissioners focused on the city center and its High Street commercial district. Public policy in the era pushed working class leisure and consumption out of its urban core on High Street and into the peripheries of The Flats. Part of this process was heralded under the banner of social reform, which materialized as public bath houses, playgrounds, and crackdowns on street loitering (Figure 10).

58 For more on the activities of children in the streets, the fascinating 1913 survey by the Peoples’ Institute, a Progressive Era reform organization, conducted a “flashlight” survey in Manhattan’s Hells Kitchen. “Four-hundred civic workers” classified the street activities about “110,000 children.” Cf. John Collier, Edward Morley Barrows. The City Where Crime is Play. People’s Institute, 1914. http://archive.org/details/citywherecrimei00nygoog

Figure 10: Holyoke Bath Houses
The map above shows the locations of Holyoke's bath houses in 1906 (blue) based on descriptions in the Municipal Register and Sanborn insurance maps of 1911—parks are in green and ward numbers in red. The locations of the bath houses not only suggest the technical needs for water and drainage, but also the desire of park commissioners to appease middle and upper class residents, who found the bath houses to be nuisances that attracted "hoodlums from wards one and four."60

City Beautiful did not drastically alter the physical landscape of the Holyoke, as it had in Washington, D.C. or New York City. If Holyoke had the revenue for such changes, then they would have likely occurred. However, the city – as Constance Green notes – was emerging from a fifteen-year period of graft and overspending. This left it reliant on its factory owners and merchants to provide the impetus for change. Given these circumstances, City Beautiful in Holyoke would emerge as a capitalistic and profit-oriented vision dressed in the costume of social reform. Of course, to a lesser extent, this was also occurring in other places; park commissions across the U.S. were regularly filled by leaders in business and banking.61

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60 "Bathhouse Question," Transcript-Telegram, May 6, 1908.
City Beautiful or City Bountiful?

What becomes clear from the discourse between planners, city officials, and newspaper articles was that city planning was foremost an investment with expected financial payback. Reform Mayor Chester Chapin made the City Beautiful movement an important part of his platform; despite Chapin’s reputation as a frugal penny-pincher with city finances, he was eager for the park commission to lay out a ten-year plan.\(^62\) Chapin’s successor, N.P. Avery was an advocate of a comprehensive City Beautiful plan as well.\(^63\) The motivation for such plans was ambiguous. A close reading of records beginning in the 1901 letter to Olmsted and concluding with Holyoke’s formation of one of the nation’s earliest zoning commissions in 1920 reveals that Olmsted and city leaders were primarily concerned with the economic advantages, rather than social imperatives of these plans.\(^64\) Olmsted, in his 1908 report to the commissioners, noted that outdoor recreation could ensure “sustained high efficiency on the part of our productive workers.” Earlier in the report he mentioned that the development of an adequate trolley system in the city could reduce crowding in the tenement sections, improve the comfort of workers’ home life, and thereby result in “greater efficiency and lower cost of production.” At one point, he even pegged a dollar value on the trees that buttressed residential streets (conservatively, $75 per tree). Knowing his intended audience – that is, business and merchant-dominated park commissioners – Olmsted highlighted the financial benefits of

\(^{63}\) “Address on the Modern City Beautiful By the Mayor,” *Springfield Republican*, May 8, 1907, 10.
\(^{64}\) It was not until 1916 that the first formal zoning regulations were enacted in New York. Holyoke’s first zoning commission met in 1920, a year before the Advisory Committee on Zoning was formed under the Hoover administration, and well before most other cities of its size in the U.S. contemplated zoning.

Nevertheless, Olmsted’s report indicates that a good park plan also had the ability to domesticate and control what elites considered to be the deviant behavior of the lower classes, who “not unlike that of some spoiled children of wealthy parents… are apt in the eagerness with which they pursue certain ends either to waste and neglect or recklessly to sell for a pittance other values that they have not yet had time to appreciate.”\footnote{Ibid., 2.} The parks that Olmsted advised on in Holyoke were touted as places where “we can follow our pursuit of happiness and… where we can play without trespassing on anybody’s grounds; where nobody can complain that we make too much noise, and where we sha’n’t break anything our fathers will have to pay somebody for.”\footnote{Olmsted, “Draft Report to Mayor N.P. Avery.”} The parks would pay dividends, both in surrounding land value and worker efficiency. At the same time, Olmsted called for surveillance of entry and exit points in order for visitors to be “kept under control” through “strict supervision.” Landscape elements, such as hedges, could be used to screen out the deplorable conditions of nearby tenements and prevent the tendency to cut across the greensward or trespass. Finally, the power of eminent domain could be used to remove nearby billboard advertisements that brought down the value of the land.

While the parks were being redesigned under the direction of Olmsted, the streetcar system in Holyoke was undergoing its own rapid, infrastructural changes. An analysis of the Sanborn fire insurance maps and the 1908 ward map by the city engineer reveal an extensive electrified trolley system in the city, a system that had grown tremendously in the early 1900s and reflected the increased profitability of suburban
residential development. The positioning of the lines shows that transportation was eased for suburban neighborhoods, while the industrial communities only benefitted from a single line that coincidentally serviced shopping centers, suburban residential developments, or the streetcar parks of Mountain Park and Mt. Tom (Figure 11).

![Figure 11: Map of the Holyoke Street Railway System as it Existed in 1911](image)

The Holyoke Street Railway encouraged interactions with consumer-oriented leisure landscapes while workers were largely left without adequate transportation to their workplace. The majority of the factory districts lacked direct transportation, which explains why many workers continued to walk to work, well into the 1920s. Compare this to Figure 10, where bath-houses (non-commercial, publicly provided sites of leisure for the poor) were located farthest from the streetcar lines.

The streetcar system may not have been an explicit attempt to guide passengers to a particular type of consumer landscape (as in Japan); rather, these lines offered a diversity of leisure experiences that disassociated passengers from the industrial and manufacturing environment in the same way that Olmsted considered telephone poles a blight upon the landscape.\(^{68}\) Anybody who wished to take the streetcars to their place of

\(^{68}\) The fascinating history of Japan’s Hankyu Railway, which built its own system of rail stations explicitly designed to service company-owned department stores is a fascinating story that will not be fully described here, but it is worth examining for those interested in early mass consumption environments in Japan. Cf. Leroy W. Demery Jr., “How Japan’s
work was largely out of luck (provided they worked anywhere other than an insurance agency, department store, or pleasure park). This is perhaps why oral histories from Wistariahurst Museum and American International College have a common theme: industrial workers walked to work, despite an extensive transportation network in other areas of the city. Doyle Curran also indicates in *Paper City* that factory workers overwhelmingly walked to work, despite the streetcar system.\(^69\)

The City Beautiful movement and its descendent, zoning, resulted in a closely regulated and redesigned city landscape that attempted to reorient and domesticate working class recreation and consumption. Most importantly, the movement laid the groundwork to clean out High Street of its working class element and prepare the area for development as consumer destination – with its concomitant hotels, theaters, department stores, and dining establishments. Though playgrounds, bath houses, and parks played an integral role as sites of physical activity and sociability, they were also attempts to control the non-working time of the city’s immigrant residents; as Olmsted wrote, “the time is past when Holyoke can adhere to the ‘village’ policy of leaving children to find their own playgrounds.” “Unprofitable amusement and loafing” would surely follow if the city did not reform its landscape.\(^70\) The parks and playground movement certainly altered the city’s landscape, but the efforts of the park commissioners to remake the leisure practices of workers were only marginally successful. A few years after the apogee of the playground movement, the Valley Arena opened, drawing as many as

\(^69\) Curran, “Paper City,” 6.
4,000 boxing spectators into the working class neighborhood of Tigertown.\textsuperscript{71} Similarly, Mountain Park, its own miniature Coney Island, outlasted the high-brow Mt. Tom by five decades.\textsuperscript{72}

The two examples above show that workers defined their own leisure spaces, rather than passively accepting the spaces offered by the city’s elite. Still, the pervasive influence of capital on recreational space in Holyoke was an unalterable fact, best illustrated by what seems to be an intentional placement of the city’s bath houses in areas on the fringe of the city, where they would not interrupt the sanitized commerce on High Street (Figure 10). Additionally, moralists used the iron fist of the law to enforce proper consumption practices. Such laws limited the spaces where pawnbrokers, peddlers, and junk dealers could operate; defined the operating hours of billiard halls and shooting galleries; and even prohibited the throwing of snowballs or sledding in the street. To take one example, Chapter 34 of the revised 1912 laws relating to the sale of newspapers stated that paper boys “shall not congregate together, make any unnecessary noise, cry their newspapers in a loud voice, or in any other way disturb or annoy persons… and they shall not cry their newspapers on Sunday.”\textsuperscript{73}

Such decisions endeavored to deny the use of common spaces for its immigrant and working class residents, particularly its children. Frederick Engels noticed a similar process in Manchester (which, unlike Holyoke, was an unplanned city). There, Engels

\textsuperscript{71} Craig P. Della Penna,\textit{ Holyoke} (Arcadia Publishing, 1997), 48.
\textsuperscript{72} As for the bath houses, there is little reference to their fate, though none exist today. In 1923, the Ward 4 bath house – closest to the middle-class neighborhoods was in bad condition and citizens were calling for its complete removal because it “constitute[d] a menace.” Cf. “Park Board Creates Part Time Position.” \textit{Springfield Republican}, August 8, 1923, 9
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{The Revised Ordinances of the City of Holyoke, 1913} (M. J. Doyle Printing Company, 1913), 272.
recognized a “systematic shutting out of the working-class from the thoroughfares… a concealment of everything which might affront the eye and the nerves of the bourgeoisie.” All while the bourgeoisie made assurances that the working class was “doing famously,” Engels was concerned the ‘Big Wigs’ of Manchester were “not so innocent after all” when it came to their covert shaping of the city landscape. Likewise, Holyoke’s business owners, merchants, developers, and factory owners were either intimately involved or complicit in redesigning the leisure landscape of Holyoke between 1900 and 1940.

How did the working class respond to these developments? And in what ways did the rising culture of mass consumption provide new impetus for immigrants to ‘retreat’ from Main Street and ‘invade’ High Street – despite the patricians’ best efforts to maintain High Street as a defensive bulwark against immigrant invasion. To answer these questions, we will now examine The Delusson Family, a novel that traces the rise of one immigrant household from Main Street to High Street (and concurrently from a life in factories to one marked by mercantile prosperity).

CHAPTER IV
MOVING UP, MOVING OUT: FRENCH-CANADIANS, 1900-1940

Figure 12: Connolly, McAuslan, & Forbes Dry Goods, Holyoke, ca. 1890
This dry goods store was the workplace of Jacques Ducharme’s father, Henry P. Ducharme for a short period of time before he went into business for himself. Given the timing of this image, it is likely that Henry and Jacques’ aunt, Mederise, are among the people in the portrait.

“He was fourteen when he went to work in Jacques Dulhut’s store. At eighteen he had passed through the jobs of delivery boy, office boy, general duty boy, and finally became hosiery clerk. He gloried in his position, for it spelled to him the fact that he was progressing upwards. He had acquired a sense of self-esteem, and almost looked down on those who worked in the mills.”

- Pierre (Henry P. Ducharme) in *The Delusson Family* 75

The striking feature of the image of a dry goods store on Dwight Street in Holyoke is the sidewalk’s steep, upward angle (Figure 12). A dozen employees proudly stand on the high side. In the second story windows, vague fragments of lace curtains indicate the class-standing of the rooms. The rooms with the lace are in the Windsor

75 Jacques Ducharme, *The Delusson Family: A Novel* (Funk & Wagnalls, 1939), 139.
Hotel, Holyoke’s grandest and most expensive lodging. One can presume that Henry P. Ducharme, father of Holyoke novelist, Jacques Ducharme, was among the clerks standing on the street level.\textsuperscript{76} The image also has the distinction of capturing a fictional novel’s real-life setting, including two of its characters. The upward-angled sidewalk is an apt metaphor for the social trajectory of some French Canadians as they left factory work for more distinguished careers uphill. The character of Pierre in the novel is based on the writer’s father, Henry, whose father, Etienne came to the city in 1877 to work in the Lyman Mills. Pierre, among all the characters in the novel, yearned to integrate into the life that High Street made possible. Pierre saw in city life “all the dreams he had nourished as a boy, dreams of distance and space, of color and movement”\textsuperscript{77} – the features of modernity identified by William Leach in his pathbreaking history of department stores.\textsuperscript{78}

*The Delusson Family* would not find itself among the pantheon of great immigrant novels. Its plot is simplistic and sentimental, the syntax is unadorned and uncomplicated, and it approaches the quotidian life of a single family. But it is precisely for the latter reason that the book merits attention. Despite the hundreds of thousands of French Canadians who came to New England in the late-19\textsuperscript{th} century, very few clues

\textsuperscript{76} City directories from 1888-1896 list Henry as employed at the establishment, as well as his sister, Mederise. By 1906, he was employed as buyer for the largest department store in Holyoke. Cf. *The American Silk Journal*. Vol. 25. New York: Clifford & Lawton, 1906; 27.

\textsuperscript{77} Ducharme, *The Delusson Family*, 156.

remain as to how they lived their daily lives. Still fewer muse on the implications of abandoning the enclave in place of a home uphill, a process that was happening en masse. Census statistical abstracts demonstrate a large-scale flight of foreign-born residents from the French-Canadian neighborhoods (wards 1-2) between 1910 and 1940. Where did they go? Other than the obvious factor of attrition through immigration restriction, it appears that some went towards 3, 5, and 7 (Table 1).

**Table 1: Foreign-born Population of Holyoke by Ward**

Note the steep drop-off in the populations of Ward 1 and Ward 2. These are the wards dominated by the working-class neighborhoods of Holyoke. Ward 2, the most dramatic drop was the heart of the French-Canadian community. These are neighborhoods predominantly comprised of single-family homes in the suburban fringe of the city. Ward 3 (Elmwood) offered itself as a middle-class alternative to the high-class ward 7 (The Highlands), but it should be noted that the Highlands saw the greatest jump between 1910 and 1920.79

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79 It is important to highlight here that Ward 7 foreign-born residents hailed in large part from Ireland, but Ducharme’s family eventually found a home in Ward 7, indicating that
Figure 13: 1908 Ward Map of Holyoke
This is an oblique aerial perspective of Holyoke’s wards in 1908. The westward-facing perspective puts the working-class neighborhoods (wards 1, 2, and 4) at the lowest elevation in the foreground and the upper-class Highlands in the background (ward 7). Wards are labeled in red (wards 1 and 2 were French-Canadian neighborhoods). High street (farthest blue line) and Main Street (closest green line) are the two main commercial thoroughfares that will be examined later. Ward boundaries are in orange.

Survivance and the Ethnic Enclave

In some ways, the French-Canadian experience in Holyoke was similar to the Irish immigrants who preceded them. Both groups arrived as a result of deplorable conditions in their homeland. For both groups, the push factors played a greater role than the pull factors – escaping famine was the primary motivation. Upon arrival, both groups gravitated to large cities or industrial company towns. Capitalists took advantage of their plight to achieve impressive feats. In a few years Holyoke’s tired, poor, and huddled Irish built the longest stone dam in the world and dug 2.5 miles of power canals, reportedly by

– though uncommon – some French-Canadian immigrants reached the pinnacle of social status by moving to Ward 7. We will examine the Irish Ward 7 experience in Chapter V in the context of Mary Doyle Curran’s novel, *The Parish and the Hill*. Suffice to say, many French-Canadians who moved to the suburbs either left for Ward 3 or rural towns like Granby or South Hadley. Many others returned to Canada.
hand. However, there are also key differences between the two groups. The French Canadians arrived almost two decades after the Irish; most came just prior to the acute depressions of 1873 and 1893, when jobs were scarce (Figure 14).

![Figure 14: Year of Arrival in New England for French-Canadians, 1830-1930](image)

Note the spikes in immigration for 1870 and 1890 – both periods were followed by some of the most acute depressions in the 19th century – inciting antipathy from working Irish who saw French immigration as a threat to their wage and employment prospects (image from MacKinnon and Parent, 51).

Naturally, the Irish were antipathetic to scores of new immigrants who were willing to accept lower wages at the mills. Furthermore, Québécois households were apt to work in the mills as a family, whereas male Irish heads of household were customarily the only factory worker in a family. Language was also a key difference – very few French-Canadian immigrants came with a command of English. Unlike Boston and other large cities, Catholics in industrial communities were intensely devoted to parochial schools. These institutions helped uphold French-Canadian traditions and language. As Gerard

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Brault remarked, “The cornerstone on which the Franco-American school was built was the profound conviction that abandoning the French language was tantamount to abandoning the Catholic faith.”  

All of the above factors contributed to a Franco-American community that held on to ethnic culture and religious practices much longer than other foreign-born White communities in Holyoke. The French-Canadian enclave was the neighborhood that most effectively resisted the influence of Americanization. Similarly, Rosenzweig called French Catholic organizations in Worcester “bulwarks” of anti-assimilation. Such institutions highlighted the need for survivance, even so far as to render it a “divine mission.”  

However, records show a gradual disintegration of wards 1 and 2 due to Holyoke’s recession in the 1920s, best illustrated by looking at Holyoke Water Department population trends from 1922-1929 (Figure 15).

When Jacques Ducharme published his novel in 1939 he was aware of the quandary facing Franco-American identity. Cynthia Lees identifies the era of the Second World War to be a critical juncture for survivance – a time when “growing cracks” in the armor of cultural survival appeared in fictional accounts by French-Canadian

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Economic History 49, no. 1 (2012): 51. MacKinnon and Parent reveal some fascinating statistics drawn from census microdata samples between 1900 and 2000. Among the findings, they determined that almost 70% of French-Canadian students in Fall River and Lowell attended parochial schools, while only 20% attended such schools in Boston.

82 Roy Rosenzweig, Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920 (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 28. Survivance has come to have a number of applicable meanings, but Gerald Vizenor astutely reviews all of them in his book. Here we will use the word in the context of French-Canadian identity and Vizenor’s overarching definition: “Survivance is the action, condition, quality, and sentiments of the verb ‘survive’, to ‘remain alive or in existence,’ to outlive, persevere.” Cf. Vizenor, Gerald Robert. Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence. University of Nebraska Press, 2008; 19.
intelligentsia, including Ducharme (whose novel was among the first to be published in English). MacKinnon and Parent help connect Lees’ conclusions – which drew from fictional Franco-American literature of the era – with census data that demonstrates Franco-American war veterans accelerated the process of assimilation. Taking these conclusions into account, Ducharme’s 1939 novel almost reads like a nostalgic fantasy – a reconstruction of a French-Canadian family that successfully achieves prosperity, yet retains a close connection to Catholicism, family, and Quebec.

Figure 15: Population Trends by Water District, 1922-1929

In his novel, Ducharme uses historical facts of his own family’s saga (down to accurate descriptions of the actual homes in which they lived). However, a particularly ahistorical moment is when the Delussons buy a farm in Granby while continuing to keep their

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connection to the Precious Blood parish in Holyoke. In reality, circumstances in the 1920s divided French Canadians between two ways of life – the life they had in Quebec, or the life offered by mass culture; the life of Little Canada, or that offered by High Street. This fact is demonstrated by the list of advertisers in the 1922 commemorative booklet for the Society of Saint Jean-Baptiste’s Grande Fête Jubilaire. The 119 advertisers’ street addresses were transcribed and mapped with locations colorized based on their proximity to each other (Figure 16). The merchants are densest either at intersections of High and Dwight Streets, or Main and Cabot.

Figure 16: Density Map of Advertisers for the Grande Fête Jubilaire, 1922

A qualitative look at the advertisers reveals an interesting trend; advertisers of English-speaking businesses on High Street tried to entice French-speaking audiences by listing employees who had Francophone last names. These ads emphasized that speaking French was encouraged; A.T. Gallup, a High Street clothier stated, “entrez et parlez français

Vitaline Ducharme (the factual counterpart to Cecile Delusson) did not retire to a farm in Granby, as the novel portrays. She died in 1929 at 210 Pine Street, a house in the Highlands just a block away from the Wistariahurst Mansion.
sans gene’” (enter and speak French without embarrassment). On the other hand, advertisers on Main Street appealed to their long-established loyalty to the enclave, best demonstrated by the grocer A.D. Durocher: “M. Durocher est le seul canadien avant à son crédit quarante ans d'’affaire, dans le commerce d'épiceries.” (Mr. Durocher is the only Canadian who has to his credit forty years of business in the grocery store trade).

Though the Immigration Act of 1924 staunched the flow of European and Asian immigrants, it did not restrict intracontinental immigration. Federal laws that followed the onset of the Great Depression finally put a de facto stop to French-Canadian immigration in 1930. By the 1940s Quebec’s economy was booming, while the textile industries in New England continued a long decline. As a result, a number of French-Canadian immigrants returned to Canada. Historians have identified the 1960s and 1970s as a period when often “only middle-aged and elderly” people could be found speaking French in the mill towns of New England. Ducharme grew up witnessing Franco-American flight from wards 1 and 2; the closing of several French-language newspapers (one of which, La Justice, he bought on its last legs); the movement from parochial schools to public English-language high schools; and the decline of Franco-American mutual benefit societies. Above all, the commercial character of the city also changed in fundamental ways. French Canadians responded to these changes in diverse ways, but it became clear that wards 1 and 2 became landscapes dominated by the dead bones of industry fleeing to the South. By the closing of the 1920s, Polish, Greek, Russian, and

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Italian immigrants became the residents of the decaying tenements in “Frenchville,” as it was once known. Wards 1 and 2 became truly polyglot for the first time. As Anita Healey stated in her oral recollection of 1930s Main Street (which bisected wards 1 and 2): “We had French, German, Italian, Negro. It’s all-American – a mixture of everyone.” By the waning years of the Great Depression, Jacques Ducharme was promoting *The Delusson Family* to the Catholic Book of the Month Club in Springfield while the French-Canadian enclave he depicted was scattering to the suburbs. His novel’s popularity may have had a lot to do with a Franco-American longing for their lost enclaves; in the conclusion, the Delussons live on a farm yet return to their enclave parish for weekly visits – a denouement that may have tugged at nostalgic heart strings. In reality, mass culture was quickly occupying the vacated storefronts on Main Street, and the parish was on its way out. Ducharme’s novel could thus be seen as a call to action against the influence that mass culture had on the Precious Blood parish – the popularity of Ducharme’s novel shows that these anxieties were likely shared by his readers. Although French Canadians were adapting to, even adopting, certain aspects of mass consumer life, they were also persisting in ways that may not be apparent in water district population counts, advertisements, or census figures. Ducharme’s novel helps us determine how and why.

**From Saint Valérien to Precious Blood**

The story of the Delussons begins in the mid-19th century with Jean-Baptise

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89 *The Delusson Family* received praise from the Catholic Book of the Month Club and quickly sold its first print run of 3,500 within a month. The third edition of the book indicates that it was printed in September of 1939 (only three months after the first edition and two months after the second print run). In 1947, it was translated into Dutch.
An unexpected visitor arrives, Nicholas Dulhut (Nicholas Proulx), who is recruiting textile workers for the Lyman Mills in Holyoke to come south. Jean is reluctant. Unlike some of his compatriots, Jean’s farm is self-sufficient, and he sees no immediate need to immigrate to Holyoke. He asks Nicholas to return in a few days so he can discuss the matter with his wife, Cecile. Nicholas says that it is a wise decision and promises to return. Without much fanfare, Cecile communicates to Jean-Baptiste that she is pregnant, and the couple decides to wait a few years before moving. Both recognize the imperative of such a move – should their children live in a New England they could “go to school, or they could go into business. There would be work for them, at any rate.”

Cecile and Jean-Baptiste recognize the limited prospects of an agricultural life, yet the new life of industrial wage labor appeals to them for the opportunities it provides for their children. Such opportunities included a life of clerical or managerial work made possible by a good education.

Three years pass before Jean decides to travel to Holyoke alone, establish himself, and then send for his family. He arrives in Holyoke after disembarking from the Connecticut River Valley Railroad at Main and Dwight Streets. Nicholas meets Jean at the depot, takes him for a walk down Main Street, and procures a job for him at the Lyman Mills. They continue down Main Street to Nicholas’ apartment, where temporary lodging is provided to Jean and he meets Nicholas’ wife, Madame Dulhut. Soon, Jean receives a pay raise and secures a rental home on Ely Street for the family. His family

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90 The names of the real individuals depicted by the characters in Ducharme’s novel will be in parenthesis.
comes down to join him after selling their farm in Saint Valérien, along with all of their furniture so “they might confidently face the future.” The abandonment of their heirloom furniture represents the Delussons’ earliest step away from their past agrarian life in Quebec. Upon arrival, Cecile joins Madame Dulhut on a shopping trip for new furniture on High Street – her initiation into the rituals of consumer culture in the U.S.  

In time, Jean becomes a recognized member of the community and is approached by Franco-American merchants and businessmen about starting a mutual benefit society. A grocery store merchant, Marchessseaault (Edouard Cadieux) states to the group: “We cannot fail to make money.” Jean is suspicious of the motives of the men in the room, so he declines to invest significantly or serve on the board. In fact, when the newly formed Society of St. Louis (L’Union Saint Jean-Baptiste d’Amerique) is approached to loan money for the construction of the new Precious Blood church, it offered the loan at a higher interest rate than the local bank. This attracted the ire of the community and resulted in the near-failure of the society.

As Jean-Baptiste advances to foreman at the mill, and his oldest son, Etienne begins work at the mills, Nicholas Dulhut’s son, Jacques, longs to leave the mills for “work that would later carry no stigma.” Jacques borrows money from his father to start a men’s clothing store where “even the Yankees” come to shop. Jacques is actually based on Joseph Prew, Ducharme’s real-life grand-uncle on his mother’s side, who became so wealthy that he was 7th among the highest individual taxpayers in the city.

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92 Ibid., 28, 33.
93 Ibid., 43.
94 Ibid., 60.
95 Ibid., 69.
96 Twenty Thousand Rich New Englanders: a List of Taxpayers Who Were Assessed in
Jacques Dulhut’s rise to merchant prince is a telling moment in the novel; while Jacques becomes prosperous, he also moves out of the Flats to a “luxurious” home on Maple Street. This is the first moment in the novel when a French-Canadian character crosses the High Street line and moves to the hill. Soon afterward, Jean and Cecile decide to move to the hill as well. They find a nice apartment block on Maple Street; the real-life Jean (Ducharme’s grandfather, Etienne) did, in fact, purchase a building on 397 Maple Street – an ornamented, four-story brick apartment building with a crenellated parapet (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Etienne Ducharme's Apartment Block in Holyoke (image © Google)

Jean and Cecile’s children, Etienne, Pierre (Henry Ducharme), Marie (Mederise Ducharme), Louise (Amanda Bourbeau-Ducharme), Wilfred, and Leopold (Rev. William Ducharme) would finally have rooms of their own, and Cecile sets aside space for a

1888 to Pay a Tax of One Hundred Dollars or More (Luce., 1888), 35–37.
parlor by merging two apartment units into one. Historian Liz Cohen notes that parlors were the “first evidence of the growth of social instinct in any family.” They also served as mediating spaces between outside consumer culture and ethnic or family social life; “parlorization” involved an array of mass-produced consumer objects. The fact that Cecile could finally afford to provide almost every Delusson child with a separate room also adhered to reformist dictums of proper, middle-class domesticity. Still, Cecile “regretted the lack” of a piano in her parlor. The piano was still out of her budget, but her desire for it reflects her nascent yearning for social distinction. Economist Ben Fine identifies the piano as an artifact particularly reflective of what Thorstein Veblen would have called “invidious distinction” (or emulation).

In time, Jean’s children grow up and pursue different careers. Etienne works for the railroad and becomes the pariah of the family, traveling across the U.S. living a rough-and-tumble life wherever the rails take him. Pierre begins work at the mills, but hates it, so he decides to work for Jacques Dulhut at his dry goods store. Leopold, the youngest, wants to become a Catholic priest, so he attends school in Canada and, eventually, Rome. Marie works as a buyer at a department store. And Louise meets a man in Quebec, gets married, and lives a life with him on a farm. Examined as a whole, the Delusson family is divided in the same ways that Main and High, Little Quebec and The Hill were divided. Pierre and Marie are both active participants High Street’s consumer culture. Louise and Leopold became torch bearers of traditionalism. The only character

97 Ducharme, The Delusson Family, 112.
98 Ibid., 37.
who seems to be ambiguously divided between the two worlds is Etienne, who lives a migratory life typified by the French Canadians, yet he also works in the industry that personifies modernity. Etienne is the moral lesson of the novel: Disassociate from the enclave and become a washed-up outsider. Etienne ends up losing his inheritance and, after Jean’s death, is forced into working in the mills. He eventually redeems himself by living with his mother, Cecile on the farm in Granby.

The Delusson children match the actual lived experiences of Henry P. Ducharme and his siblings. Ernest Guillet interviewed Jacques Ducharme at his home in 1976 and confirmed that “each character represents a real person; situations and places have undergone very minor changes.” For that reason, Guillet called the novel an “in-depth case study of a specific French Canadian family,” a “canvass of Franco-American culture and traditions,” and a realistic portrait of “French-Canadian ethnic values.” Guillet’s appraisal of the novel may be a bit overreaching. Jacques Ducharme was at the high end of the French Canadian socioeconomic pyramid. He grew up on Lexington Avenue, in the very heart of the Highlands, and far away from Little Canada. He socialized with the local cultural elite and was owner of a newspaper with a very specific agenda. As Lees notes, the aims of the French Canadian intelligentsia often had much to do with supporting a unified Francophone identity in order to sell products and services that the elite provided to the working class. Ducharme admitted in his non-fiction book, Shadows of the Trees, that the demands of newspaper advertising overshadowed his

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editorial work.\textsuperscript{102}

\textbf{Figure 18: 1916 Advertisement for Henry P. Ducharme}

The ad above shows that Jacques Ducharme’s father was not only fully integrated into the ethos of High Street society, but used his ethnic identity as a tool for upward mobility. \textit{Frenchness} is no longer a matter of \textit{survivance}, but instead is used to market a coat. The products worn by women in the foreground take center stage, while symbols of the past and traditional agrarian culture, such as the stone wall and the leafless limbs on trees, appear ominously in the background.

All told, it appears that Ducharme stood between his family’s past and the culture of High Street, with its insurance agencies, banks, publishing firms, and department stores. Ducharme’s books highlight an uneasy syncretism of pride in traditional French

culture and immersion in the gestalt of modern consumer life. Thus, in *The Delusson Family* the narrator notes that Jean’s daughter Louise was “raising a family in the old tradition, numerous children and life on a farm,” but in the following clause, he muses:

“The spirit of modernity was filtering… into the ranks of the staunchest French Canadians in New England.” Indeed, when he traveled from his home in the Highlands to the *La Justice* editorial offices on Main Street, he witnessed the distinct ways of life as seen in the daily practices of each street. The generations in his family that preceded him worked in the mills and lived in Little Canada, yet his father had become fully integrated into High Street consumer culture (Figure 18). It appears that Ducharme’s advocacy for *survivance* was not simply a tool that he used to initiate Franco-Americans into consumer society (though, as a newspaper owner, his livelihood certainly depended on it), but also a way of connecting with his own family’s past.

**Participatory Community in Holyoke’s Ward 2**

Whatever Ducharme’s motivations, his admonitions had little of the success he imagined. Cultural survival was, above all, put into practice by the working class – and the working class was numerically in full control of its own cultural destiny. As late as 1900 less than 1% of working males in Holyoke held professional jobs, so the French Canadian “99%” maintained Main Street as their hub of cultural activity for over half a century. An anthropologist who wrote on identity in the context of ethnonationalism put it this way: "Ethnic communities are not merely imagined communities; more vitally, they are participatory communities.” While Ducharme imagined a united community mediated

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by his newspaper, working-class French Canadians in wards 1 and 2 were reinforcing their culture on their own terms. Ducharme may have despaired at the cultural decline of French Canadians, but he failed to notice (or celebrate) the invisible and inconspicuous ways in which French Canadians enacted, performed, and participated in maintaining their culture – a process that continues to this day.106 Perhaps this explains why Ducharme’s ideological push for survival did not receive the reception he expected; La Justice was a financial disaster for Ducharme, and he was forced to sell the paper 14 months after purchasing it.107

Holyoke author, Emma Dumas could be seen as the participatory counterpart to Ducharme’s imagined ethnonationalism; Dumas peddled her self-published, French-language novel, Mirbah, on Holyoke’s street corners.108 Her story’s protagonist (whose stage-name is Mirbah) rejects opulence, status seeking, and conspicuous consumption; Mirbah was likely created as a pious alternative to Holyoke’s real-life vaudeville star, Eva Tanguay (who amassed a fortune and lived an extravagant life). Instead, the type of consumption celebrated in Dumas’ novel is theatre – the backbone of the French

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106 In 1940 Ducharme wrote an editorial in La Justice which reads like an ultimatum. The translated text reads as follows: “Who will be the leader? This is a call. We, the new generation of Franco-Americans, are at the crossroads. Survival or Assimilation? [...] I made my choice. The proof is in the paper... The future is ours. I firmly believe this. I want others to be convinced, come and help me ... come help me in the conquest of this world too foreign to our culture. War rages in Europe. Inspired by this struggle, but on another scope, we should be prepared to defend our own culture.” Cf. Guillet, Ernest Bernard. “French ethnonationalism. Literature and Culture in an American City: Holyoke, Massachusetts,” 1978, 123-124.


Canadian ethnic enclave community in Holyoke, where as many as 19 drama clubs performed a distinctly Franco-American repertoire of plays. But theatre was especially vulnerable to the invasion of mass consumer culture. A sobering illustration comes from one of Holoke’s foremost French-American social societies with a theatre troupe, Circle Rochambeau. The society had its headquarters listed in the Bijou Theatre at 318 Main until 1921, when the new address became 312 Main. The Goldstein Brothers, owners of a chain of motion picture theaters, were rapidly growing their enterprise. Likely in response, Circle Rochambeau quietly retreated three doors down. In 1958, Circle Rochambeau, much like the Delussons, packed up and moved to High Street.

A look at the current fate of Franco-American cultural groups attests to their persistence, yet it also demonstrates their eventual atomization. Though groups like Circle Rochambeau still exist today, they are no longer congregated around the core of Cabot and Main in ward 2. Circle Rochambeau now exists far on the suburban fringe of Holyoke at 250 Westfield Road, near Holyoke Community College. La Justice (no longer a newspaper, but now a printing establishment) is on 67 Lincoln street in the Highlands. And Emma Dumas is an enigma; city directories show her at 69 High Street until 1926, where she taught French and continued to sell her only novel at social gatherings. There is no record of her death in Holyoke, so it is presumed that she returned to Quebec.

Yi-Fu Tuan defines topophilia as a special bond between people and the places they occupy; this “sense of place” (to use J.B. Jackson’s phrase) often connects ritual,
celebration, and memory to specific spaces in the urban landscape.\footnote{Yi-fu Tuan, \textit{Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 4.} Lees takes that definition further by viewing \textit{topophilia} as a clue into the ethnic loyalties of French Canadian immigrants – a theme she analyzes in New England Franco-American literature. Does, then, the flight of French Canadians from Main Street indicate a loss of ethnic loyalty? Certainly not, and J.B. Jackson perhaps provides the most nuanced way of understanding sense of place by contextualizing it in its Greek origins, \textit{genius loci}. The Greek sense of place, 

\textit{meant not so much the place itself as the guardian divinity of that place. It was believed that a locality – a space or a structure or a whole community – derived much of its unique quality from the presence or guardianship of a supernatural spirit. The visitor and the inhabitants were always aware of that benign presence and paid reverence to it on many occasions. The phrase thus implied celebration or ritual, and the location itself acquired a special status.}\footnote{J.B Jackson, “A Sense of Place, a Sense of Time.,” \textit{Design Quarterly} 95, no. 164 (1995): 24.}

Jackson’s sense of place is thus closely connected to ritual and time. As much as the spaces in The Flats became vacant and lifeless facades by the 1940s, the parish continued to congregate for ritual, redefine the spaces in which they enacted these rituals, and ultimately practiced their identity elsewhere – even in the Highlands. In \textit{The Delusson Family}, the most persistent symbol is the rosary that Cecile keeps in her hands. Whether the rosary beads appear in ward 2 or at the house on Ely Street, in her parlor up on the Highlands or at her farm in Granby, the beads are a consistent presence in Cecile’s life even after the death of Jean-Baptiste. The rosary beads – despite their migration from working-class life in The Flats, to bourgeois prosperity in the Highlands, and back to agrarian escape in Granby – help inscribe tradition and memory into newly adopted
spaces. By making the rosary the central symbol of his novel, Ducharme recognized
survivance’s reliance on such inconspicuous talismans of Franco-American identity –
ardent ethnonationalist though he was. However, while French Americans redefined their places of meaning, space increasingly played a role in the consumer landscape of Holyoke. Mass media, department stores, and chain retailers increasingly planned, claimed, and quantified their use of space to increase profit, creating what Henri Lefebvre termed representations of space.\footnote{Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 39. Lefebvre distinguished three types of space, which could overlap in an urban community – the perceived, conceived, and lived. Representations of space are defined by Lefebvre as the spaces that are conceived by central planners. Some spaces – monuments for example – could entail all three. Representations of space in the context of consumer culture make use of “abstract space,” a subset of conceived space which is described by Lefebvre as “fantasy images, symbols which appear to arise from ‘something else’… representations derived from the established order: statuses and norms, localized hierarchies and hierarchically arranged places, and roles and values bound to particular places.”} As Franco-Americans fled what was once a bustling enclave, consumer capitalism followed closely behind – a theme that will be taken up in the following chapter.
CHAPTER V
CLAIMING AND QUANTIFYING SPACE

Figure 19: Bijou Theater, Main Street, Holyoke, 1941
This theater in the heart of the French Canadian community of Holyoke contains a number of clues that consumer culture was beginning to saturate the enclave. Note the English-language ‘talkies’ on the marquee, the prominent Coca-Cola sign above the candy shop, and the streamlined Dodge roadster in the foreground.

"And the Highlands?," I asked. "Oh, all changed," and I asked, "What about the river, Ted?" and he said, “Oh you know, you really don’t see it any more because you can go right past it. There’s a big bypass so you don’t go down Northampton Street at all. You don’t go anywhere near the river any more. Big – big bypass. It’s good. It’s progress. World has to go on you know."

– Ellen Sullivan (Mary Doyle) and Ted Fuller in Paper City114

This chapter begins with two ironies. First: The Bijou Theatre (pictured above) had an unlikely backer: Charles E. Mackintosh, the reform-minded parks commissioner who wrote Olmsted in 1901 (see Chapter III). At some point between leaving his post

114 Curran, “Paper City,” 50.
with the commission in 1907 and 1920 (when the $500,000 Victory Theatre was being planned), Mackintosh joined the board of the Goldstein Brothers film syndicate (along with Joseph A. Skinner, Holyoke silk magnate). Ski115 n and Mackintosh, both successful factory owners, perceived profits in a new kind of business, one wholly different from the brick factories that originally made them wealthy. The trajectory of these two corporate captains is not unlike Horace Bigelow, the Worcester boot and shoe manufacturer who turned his attention towards a lakeside amusement park. Similarly, Roy Rosenzweig noted that the Worcester Mayor’s enthusiasm for The Birth of a Nation marked a radical turning point in the city – after which, much of the city’s “better” classes saw the film industry as a “respectable” business.116

The second irony is the film on the marquee (The Devil and Miss Jones), a light-hearted comedy about the wealthiest man in the world, J.P. Merrick, whose effigy is hung during labor demonstrations at a department store he owns. Merrick decides to work incognito at the store and figure out what the real problem is. Other than Merrick coincidentally being the last name of a wealthy thread factory owner in Holyoke, the irony has to do with the timing of the film (May, 1941).117 A Holyoke department store owner had just emerged from a similar quandary, the threatened boycott of his business, which was stopped thanks in part to a labor leader, Anna Sullivan.

**The Sanger Incident and a Threatened Boycott**

In October of 1940, Margaret Sanger, renowned birth control advocate, was

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116 Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, 211.

scheduled to speak at the First Congregational Church in the Highlands. The resulting debacle was recorded in Charles Wilson Underwood’s book, *Protestant and Catholic*. Initially the Mothers’ Health Council approached Grace Congregational Church, but was denied use of the church for the meeting because the pastor felt it was “unwise” to hold it in The Flats. He suggested First Congregational because it was farther away from the Catholic population. After the standing committee of First Congregational voted unanimously to approve Sanger’s appearance, St. Jerome’s – the city’s largest Catholic church – issued a statement condemning Sanger’s appearance and calling the sponsors of the speech “unpatriotic and a disgrace to the Christian community.”

Two days after the statement, some of the city’s business elite met at a Rotary Club luncheon, Protestant and Catholic alike. A Catholic businessman asked a Protestant department store owner why his church (First Congregational) meant to antagonize the Catholic population by allowing the Sanger speech on birth control. The department store owner (James H. Wakelin, who is anonymized in the account by Underwood) admitted to not knowing much and immediately contacted his pastor. It was decided after discussion that the speech would still go forward. However, the following day, the Father of St. Jerome’s met with Wakelin and threatened economic boycott.

Wakelin “particularly feared a boycott of his store” because, as Underwood noted, 75 percent of his staff and most of his customers were Catholic. Furthermore, the bank he presided over as President had funds of over $30,000 from the parish and he was told other laymen and parishes might

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118 Kenneth Wilson Underwood, *Protestant and Catholic: Religious and Social Interaction in an Industrial Community* (Boston, MA.: Beacon Press, 1957), 5. 119 Ibid., 9. According to Underwood, and the testimony of the Holyoke’s mayor seven years after the incident, the boycott threat was the creation of the Catholic clergy and a few “bigoted priests and laymen.” It is uncertain whether the threat would have been carried out by the parishioners themselves. Cf. Underwood, *Protestant and Catholic*, 424
withdraw funds in the conflict.  

As an important member of the church’s Board of Trustees, Wakelin returned to his church and called for an emergency meeting. Only seven of twenty members of the standing committee were able to appear for the meeting, but a vote was cast and, out “of concern for the economic well being of the church congregation,” five of the seven members present decided to rescind the decision to host the speech. The five yea votes were purportedly “hand-picked” by Wakelin, according to Underwood. After a failed attempt to host the speech at the German Turnverein social hall (which also succumbed to pressure exerted on its main trustee), the Secretary for the Textile Workers Union of America (famous Holyoke labor leader, Anna Sullivan) offered the union hall on Dwight Street as a venue. The speech went forward as planned.

The Sanger incident is worth relating here because it provides an interesting look into the power of Holyoke’s consumer institutions by 1940. The men who were pressured into capitulating, fearing a boycott of their stores (and leisure organizations, in the case of Turnverein Hall), were able to mobilize a small but powerful cadre of decision-makers in their church to close off public fora in the city. Similarly, the Catholic Church, with the numerical power of its consuming parishioners, wielded an equally persuasive weapon. The culture of consumption did not always hold such sway in the policy decisions of the community. Traditionally in Holyoke, the manufacturers were the most powerful contingent in both ecclesiastical and political circles. But in 1940, while the mayor absconded from the city to absolve himself from blame, free speech was on the brink of being squelched by a single department store owner fearing a consumer revolt. The

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120 Ibid., 10.
121 Ibid., 20–21.
redeeming moment in the story is when a female, Catholic labor organizer upended the influence and power of the Catholic church (on one hand) and the merchants (on the other) to provide what Lefebvre calls “counter-space” – that is, space that is “against quantity and homogeneity, against power and the arrogance of power, against the endless expansion of the 'private' and of industrial profitability; and against specialized spaces and a narrow localization of function.”¹²² The First Congregational Church as a social institution may not exactly fit the Lefebvrean description of a homogenous space, but in the Sanger incident, it appeared that it did – if only temporarily while it acceded to its wealthy merchant trustee.

The story of the Sanger incident poses an important question. How else did consumer capitalism become an influential factor in the use of space in the city, and how did national or regional corporations play a role? As was depicted in the photo of the Bijou Theatre earlier in this chapter (Figure 19), national brands and advertisements, national films, and nationally produced automobiles became embedded in Holyoke’s French-American community by 1941. These new consumer products are juxtaposed with a faded painting on the brick wall behind them, which reads: “Marble Works” and “Monuments.” Unintentionally, the city’s artisanal gravestone manufacturer became pallbearer for the faded past, while the art deco sign for a cafeteria; the streamlined modern curves of the vehicles; and the elaborately decorated show windows call for a different vision.¹²³ Seen another way, the photo depicts the outcome of a battle for space. Once occupied by the winning regime, the flags are planted (here represented by Coca-

¹²² Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 349.
¹²³ One interesting fact to note is that the gravestone dealer advertised on the brick is likely Normandeau Memorial Studio, which was listed at 294 Main Street, approximately where the photo was taken.
Cola signs). As with all occupying forces, however, consumer capitalism required its intelligence agents, foot soldiers, diplomats, and propagandists. The department store was perhaps best equipped to mobilize or take advantage of each. Holyoke had two of its own such stores: McAuslan and Wakelin (the department store embroiled in the Sanger incident) and Steiger’s. Though nothing remains of the McAuslan and Wakelin records, the Steiger records have been preserved, providing fascinating insight into an organizational apparatus that relied on space perhaps more than any other business in Holyoke.

**Department Stores Under Scrutiny**

In the top right corner of the masthead for the *Ware River News*, dated December 15, 1910, is the following statement: “The Merchant Who Doesn’t Advertise… Is in one sense a highwayman. He takes tolls without giving public service or private patronage.”\(^{124}\) It is perhaps not surprising that a newspaper would shame merchants into buying ad space, but on another level it also reflects a widespread popular revolt against merchants who were becoming more disconnected from the communities they served. Jan Whitaker notes that early 20\(^{th}\) century department stores were both celebrated and despised by the general public. Department stores were seen by some to shut out small businessmen and kill the commercial vibrancy of communities. Grocers claimed that they intoxicated women shoppers with glasses of whiskey, while others claimed that they were entering the undertaking business; in response, Lyman G. Bloomingdale quipped, “Coffins are the last thing we expect to get into.”\(^{125}\) Even Progressive Era reformers

\(^{125}\) Jan Whitaker, *Service and Style: How the American Department Store Fashioned the Middle Class* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2006), 9.
targeted these large, impersonal organizations. Historian Jennifer Fronc writes about Annie Marion MacLean, whose “Two Weeks in Department Stores,” conducted in part under the auspices of the National Consumers League, revealed a series of indignities towards female clerks and sweatshop-like conditions. Fronc also describes the Committee of Fourteen’s undercover investigation of department store clerks who, it was falsely believed, moonlighted as prostitutes.\textsuperscript{126}

Based on what exists of the historical record, neither of the department stores in Holyoke is ever painted in a negative light. Albert Steiger, the owner of the largest department store in the city, is depicted by the press as rags to riches peddler-turned-“merchant prince.” In fact, Steiger’s is described in glowing terms on the same page of the \textit{Ware River News} that castigated merchants for ‘collecting tolls’ without public service. Clearly Steiger’s was not among the damned. Department store owners were widely hailed both in Holyoke and Springfield to be public minded, fatherly figures. Albert Steiger planned and donated land for parks, led war bond drives, contributed bread to needy families, and provided free seasonal entertainment to shoppers and employees.\textsuperscript{127} For employees Steiger’s was “family,” and when the employees celebrated its 50\textsuperscript{th} anniversary they sang the following verses:

\begin{quote}
"Oh, we will sing the glory / Of the proud Steiger story / On the festive days our store has planned / And the sales we'll tally for each Tom and Sally / Will be nothing short of grand! / Put on your Steiger bonnet / With the gold ribbon on it / And be happy that you're here to see / Steiger's hale and hearty at her birthday party / On her golden Jubilee!"
\end{quote}

A journalist with the \textit{Springfield Republican} who attended the anniversary gala, indicated

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{127} “Albert Steiger, Inc. Records, 1872-1995.”
\end{flushleft}
that the “words of the catchy tune kept running through [his] head all the way home.”

**Moulding Minds, Making Sales**

The employees who (according to the journalist) whistled along with him on the way home were participants in a new type of organization, which quickly became a sophisticated, profitable, and well-established community institution that expanded to New Bedford, Bridgeport, Fall River, Springfield, Hartford, Meriden, and Torrington. Steiger did all he could to smooth a customer’s transition from personal, community enclave to large impersonal community of buyers and sellers. Employees were taught in the company newsletter to see every customer as an “individual problem” and clerks were to adjust their attitudes to the customers. There were lessons in elocution. A “Do’s and Dont’s” list cautioned against using the word “Lady” in place of “Madam” or “Mrs / Miss So-and-So.” One article highlighted the difficulties in selling rayon, and concluded that the chief difficulty was the customer’s unfamiliarity with the textile and her fear of the unknown. Clerks were to be educators, as well as evangelists. They were expected to read national advertisements and communicate a product’s benefits to the weary and unschooled new consuming classes. Advertisements for products were to be posted in prominent places in each department.

Clerks were also expected to be charismatic moulders of customers’ minds: “It takes intelligence to create a desire in a customer’s mind to own goods,” said an article in *Steiger Store News* “This, in short, is what we mean by good salesmanship… You must create desire for possession… Convince them how, when, and why they need certain

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128 Ibid.
130 “Do You Read Advertisements?,” *Steiger Store News*, May 1926, 3.
goods.” A story in the Christmas issue of Steiger Store News emphasized the rewards of being a good scholar of human nature: “You must study people. It is the most absorbing game in the world, even more interesting than reading stories or novels. You are dealing with all types of individuals… You can, if you will only try, make a friendly meeting of every sale, and at the same time make it profitable to you.”

**Public Relations, Planting Flags**

Steiger was both skilled at public relations and admired by much of the community. During the First World War, he published photos of an impressive pile of goods being sent to Belgium from donations to his store. He called for all locals to bring in their used clothing, “maybe a cast-off coat, maybe a pair of mittens, a blanket, set of underclothes, a scarf.” The Red Cross appeared to be suspicious of his motives – indicating in news reports that his efforts were unnecessary and overlapped with their relief efforts. Steiger still urged people to go into their closets and take out whatever they could. Empty closets, of course, meant more purchases of new clothing.

Steiger’s success depended on his public image, but equally important was his command of space – from the physical space of the city to the space that filled print media. For a 30th anniversary promotional campaign, Steiger’s claimed to have made it into “70,000 homes in Springfield” and advertised on five pages in Springfield’s three leading newspapers, the Holyoke Transcript, Greenfield Recorder, Brattleboro Recorder, Southbridge Press, and Stafford Springs Press. These circulation numbers were (according to its ad) indicative of progress in keeping “pace with the speed that marks the

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century in which we live.” Steiger’s advertisements were also appearing in Holyoke’s French-language media, the Mt Holyoke College publications, and even had air time on the radio every morning at 9 a.m. (Jane Morton, a Personal Shopper who gave advice on buying). 134

Clippings that deal with physical space – the layout of stores, street frontage, and real estate – form a significant bulk of the stories in the Steiger scrapbooks, a clue to the importance that Steiger attached to following these news reports. One writer seemed awestruck by the amount of space Steiger’s chain of stores commanded: “To-day, if all the stores controled [sic] by the Steiger syndicate were distributed along Main Street [in Springfield], 100 feet in depth, they would stretch from the Arch to Court Square on both sides of the street” (about a half mile). Similarly, the metaphor of conquest and fixing ownership of space appears in the descriptions by journalists – such as the article in the Holyoke Transcript-Telegram, which described the “ken vision” of Steiger who “nailed his mercantile flag to his Holyoke business and persevered,” and the Republican article, which mentioned he “blazed a trail that opened the way for the city’s advance to a place of great importance.” 135

As his business matured, Steiger became intimately involved in matters relating to the planned space of the city and was publicly backing a high school, post office, hotels, the widening of roads – even the relocation of a church (Figure 20). While Steiger’s sons managed Holyoke and the other stores, the elder Steiger made Springfield his favored city planning project. In January of 1914, a group comprised of Springfield merchants and business leaders formed what was called the Taxpayers’ Bridge League. An early

134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
meeting, presided over by Albert Steiger, advocated for the placement of a new taxpayer-funded, $650,000, 79-foot-wide bridge across the Connecticut River to terminate on Bridge Street – fortuitously where his department store was located. When it became clear that the bridge would not be built on the desired street, the Taxpayers’ Bridge League sent an attorney to the Mayor – “simply a pleasant talk,” the attorney told reporters, but the Bridge League meant serious business, and they intended to take the fight to the Legislature if they had to.\footnote{“Bridge Fight Threatens,” \textit{Springfield Republican}, March 1, 1916, 5.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure20.png}
\caption{Steiger's 1935 "Christmas City" Campaign}
\end{figure}

Figure 20: Steiger's 1935 "Christmas City" Campaign

The Christmas City advertising blitz shows the Steiger organization’s preoccupation with city planning. In the \textit{Springfield Republican} advertisement (left) Santa’s elves use a drafting compass and blueprint to “lay out” the city. The billboard (right) celebrates gift-wrapped boxes as key elements in a city skyline by mimicking the skyscrapers of a modern downtown business district.

One year later Steiger’s Real Estate subsidiary bought land in Holyoke on the corner of Maple and Suffolk, eventually building the elite Hotel Nonotuck – the setting for Holyoke zoning commission meetings in the 1920s. Much like Park Commissioner
Mackintosh, he partnered with the Goldstein brothers when he built the Geisha Theatre in 1914 but, realizing the importance of the space, tore it down a year later to use it in his flagship department store expansion. Finally, in 1922, when it became clear to Steiger that the Springfield bridge would end at Vernon Street (instead of Bridge Street), he was the main force behind a planning proposal that would have completely reconfigured the downtown and involved a “considerable city investment.” Steiger proposed looping the street railway system around a single city block. Coincidentally, it was a city block he offered to purchase for use as a retail center, and he intimated that action must “come at once,” that the increase in taxable property will pay the city in 10 years. When it became clear that the First Church could hamper plans, he called for its removal to Court Square (Figure 21).  

![drawing](image)

Figure 21: Vernon Street Plan Proposed by Albert Steiger, 1922

Steiger’s Vernon Street widening project called for a trolley loop that circled around a city block fronting Water Street. The newly widened Vernon Street was to be designed to accommodate both automobiles and streetcars.

Thus Steiger came to recognize that space was just as important – if not more

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important – than the products he sold, eventually declaring to a reporter that his profits in real estate equaled those received by several of his stores. He subsequently formed a separate corporation, the Albert Steiger Realty Company, and became the largest real estate holder on Main Street in Springfield and “one of the largest real estate holders in New England.” Steiger’s intense belief in his abilities to plan space climaxed when he stated to a journalist that he believed in more traffic congestion, because “more congestion meant more business.” However, when it came to trolley cars, he said, it was time for them to be “obliterated.”\textsuperscript{138} They were disrupting the flow of traffic. He may have been talking selfishly, he admitted to the journalist, but he was confident that his selfishness was best for the city. In a later plea to city officials, he clarified some of his motivations: “We ask you to permit travelers to use the routes that will advertise Springfield and will enable them to leave money here. Do not hamper them with unnecessary parking and traffic regulations.”\textsuperscript{139} The latter quote hints at the key difference between past sales strategies, dominated by the social dialectic of itinerant peddlers haggling with householders (often culminating in barter or some other form of reciprocity) and the new marketplace represented by department stores that exchanged a set fee for a standardized item. Well into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Holyoke’s peddlers were a common fixture of Holyoke’s landscape, but they were becoming rarer.

\textbf{Peddlers in the Paper City}

Both Holyoke novels examined in this study contain anecdotes about peddlers. In \textit{The Parish and the Hill}, Mary Sullivan’s mother receives a set of silver candlesticks upon the death of Mr. Adelson, a peddler who had a long friendship with the family and

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
often came bearing gifts for Mary. In The Delusson Family, Simon the peddler shouts, “Beads, Mary Ann, from Jerusa-lam, the Holy Land!” – following on the theme described in Chapter IV, the beads could be metaphors for tradition and ethnic persistence.

![Figure 22: Sales graph for Steiger’s Holyoke Department Store, 1915-1932](image)

The above graph is a composite of two pages in Chauncey Steiger’s personal notebook. It is a telling example of the ways in which selling goods became rationalized and measured – a way of business antithetical to the practice of Holyoke’s peddlers. The graph is also an interesting window into the impact of the 1920s recession in Holyoke and changing buying trends of Holyoke’s department store consumers. “1” on the y-axis represents $1,000,000 in sales, which was reached after a meteoric rise between 1915 and 1920.

The department store, which sold many of the same wares as the peddler, rationalized and formalized what had once been a very open and reciprocal form of market exchange (Figure 22). Department stores, including Steiger’s, offered installment plans, maintained a predictable business schedule, and were on a “strictly one-price system.” Above all, they did not become a ‘pox’ upon the residential neighborhoods, as some residents in wards 6 and 7 described peddlers in the Transcript. Consequently, Progressive Era regulations and city ordinances further pushed the peddler, who always operated on the fringes of the informal economy, completely out of the market economy. Perhaps the breaking point came in 1900 when the “peaceful city of Holyoke was unmercifully

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tormented.” An unidentified peddler jaunted around the city in a white suit and blue, streaked shirt from street to street selling an ear-splitting device, which “sounded like the damned in torments.” The children who followed him in “admiring and envious boydom vainly attempted to imitate his blood-curdling cries,” but couldn’t quite match the interminable pitch. 

In 1902, when the first city ordinance levied license fees, there were 77 peddlers listed in the city directory (and probably scores more who informally peddled); by 1939, that number dwindled to 18 (Figure 23). In 1906, sealer P.J. Tetrault, who inspected peddlers and hawkers to ensure they were selling proper weights of food “girded up his loins” at 4:30 in the morning to wait in hiding at the county bridge between Holyoke and South Hadley. One peddler ran, and nearly escaped by weaving in a “devious way through alleys and around blocks.” Peddlers apparently dreaded Tetrault “like the

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142 “Peddler Disturbs the Peace,” Springfield Republican, August 24, 1900, 8.
143 Holyoke, Massachusetts City Directory (New Haven, Conn.: Price & Lee Company, 1902); Holyoke, Massachusetts City Directory (New Haven, Conn.: Price & Lee Company, 1938). The breakdown is as follows: 1902 – 44 general peddlers, 13 milk peddlers, 4 dry goods, 4 vegetable, 4 tea, 2 kerosene, 2 fruit, 1 wood, 1 baker. 1938 – 16 general peddlers, 1 fruit, 1 news.
smallpox.” Any goods that the peddler was not entirely confident about could become confiscated by Tetrault – no doubt this authority was abused by sealers in some locales. It quickly became clear that peddlers were not welcome in Holyoke. A 1905 letter to the newspaper mentioned that one of the peddlers who “infest Holyoke at irregular intervals has been making himself obnoxious in his rounds in ward 6, and is likely to get into trouble.” A 1912 article opined that “pedlers [sic] will not find Holyoke and South Hadley Falls congenial ground… unless they comply with the letter and the spirit of the law.” In 1916, laws were put on the municipal books that raised the peddler’s license fees from $1 to $25. Perhaps the most ominous moment in the decline of peddlers came when Isaac Harris, seeking a license, was faced with Attorney T.D. O’Brien, who represented all of the jewelers in the city. O’Brien objected to the granting of the license on the grounds that itinerant peddlers “come to the city a few months before Christmas, open up a vacant store, and then leave – paying the city no taxes and selling crockery at cut prices, injuring the dealers, who have their business located permanently in the city.” The merchants had reason to object: According to newspaper editorials, there were rumors of gentlemen’s agreements among the merchants. Peddlers were a threat to the merchants’ cartel, and without the price protection provided by the local government through peddler’s fees and enforcement, their profits would have been much lower. Most mention of peddlers drops out of the newspapers with the onset of the Great Depression. One of the last articles in the Springfield Republican came from Boston, where the

144 “Sealer Tetrault’s Labors,” Springfield Republican, October 23, 1906, 10.
146 “Meat Stamps Forged,” Springfield Union, June 24, 1912, 10.
148 “Merchants Object to Peddler License,” Springfield Republican, October 17, 1906, 12.
Chamber of Commerce objected to a reduction in license fees on the grounds that “gullible” women were apt to be easily convinced by “slick, smooth-talking peddlers.”

One can only wonder how the Boston Chamber of Commerce would have reacted to the advice columns of the Steiger Store News!

Like French Canadians, peddlers resisted the onslaught of modern consumer capitalism in Holyoke much longer than other cities in the U.S. – this may in part be due to the ethnic makeup of the city, the large working class population, and the high density of the tenement districts. The vivid image of peddlers weaving in and out of alleys, while the authorities were in hot pursuit, demonstrates their resolve to ply a trade that confounded middle-class respectability. The assertion that peddlers were itinerant non-contributing loafers who smooth-talked housewives into buying junk is dubious. The map in Figure 23 proves that the majority of peddlers in Holyoke lived within the city’s working class districts and most sold food. They were residents as much as anyone else, and a cursory look at ethnic memoirs that include peddlers presents them in a positive light. Furthermore, peddlers contributed to city government in the licenses and fees they paid. A total of 79 licenses were granted to peddlers and hawkers in 1904, while only 31 licenses for junk dealers and 19 pool room licenses were given. In the accounts written by Ducharme and Doyle Curran, the peddlers are known by their names, hinting at their long-standing connection to the community. Mary even has a strong affection for Mr. Adelson, the man who always saw eye-to-eye with her mother. In Paper City Mr. Adelson is Mr. Steinberg, who owns a dry goods store by the Great Depression and

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leaves a menorah to her mother in his will. Why, then, was there such an outcry in the local press about the peddler? A plausible explanation is that peddlers were considered by the local media to be the “highwaymen” described in the Ware River News. Unlike Steiger, they neither advertised, nor had the income to be philanthropists. The newspapers were excellent image-makers and fantasy-painters – spinning the peddler-turned-merchant-prince yarn that made Steiger rich. But they certainly did not seem to be interested in upholding the traditional practice of peddling, despite the fact that the lone peddler probably best represented their celebrated ideals of free market capitalism. As the passage from Doyle Curran’s manuscipt in the beginning of this chapter muses, “It’s good. It’s progress. World has to go on you know.” And many of these inconspicuous characters did go on. Mary Marconi mentioned that she delivered groceries to peddlers who squatted up in the woods, far away from the authorities. Even in the depths of the Great Depression, these peddlers continued to ply their trade and thrived as hawkers of chopped firewood during turbulent economic times.\textsuperscript{151}

Despite the persistence of the peddlers, High Street’s influence on the social character of the city only grew over time. An illustrative example is the changing nature of parades in Holyoke between 1882 and 1943. In 1882, the firemen’s muster extended across every major ward in the central city area, but it made a special attempt to march for most of its length in the working-class wards 1 and 2 (Figure 24).

\textsuperscript{151} Mary Marconi, Interview of Mary Marconi by Chris Howard Bailey for the Shifting Gears Project, April 26, 1988, Center for Lowell History Oral History Collection.
The 1913 parade sponsored by merchants was not quite as ambitious down in the Flats, yet it still recognized the importance of Main Street by at least extending (and terminating) along Main Street’s commercial thoroughfare (Figure 25).

The 1922 parade sponsored by the French-American Society of Saint Jean-Baptiste for the Grande Fête Jubilaire recognized the centrality of the French-American commercial core of the city by starting and terminating at ward 2, but it made an explicit effort to
march along High Street and Maple Street, recognizing High Street’s growing importance – even for Franco-Americans, who predominantly lived in ward 2 (Figure 26).

Figure 26: Parade Route for the *Grande Fête Jubilaire*, 1922

A year later, the ostensibly panethnic parade for Holyoke’s 50th anniversary begins to show the city government’s disregard for wards 1 and 2. The parade started and terminated uphill from the canals, and it made a quick, unimpressive jaunt through Main Street, but devoted most of its path to High Street and its neighborhoods (Figure 27).

Figure 27: Parade Route for Holyoke's Fiftieth Anniversary, 1923
Almost two decades later, the anti-vandalism parade of 1941 sponsored by the American Legion (which aimed to cut down on Halloween mischief) avoided the area below High Street entirely (Figure 28).

![Figure 28: Parade Route for American Legion Anti-vandalism Parade, 1941](image)

Two years after the American Legion parade, a parade anticipating the victory in Europe did not march on Main Street at all and devoted most of its march to the Highlands – despite the high participation of Franco-American volunteers in the war (Figure 29).

![Figure 29: Victory Parade Route, 1943](image)
“I passed Morton’s every day on my way home from school but never stopped before this window until one day I was shocked into attention by a glint of red from the window. I stopped and stared. There in the midst of all the dinginess and drabness was a beautiful red devil, a devil fully equipped with horns, forked tail, pitchfork and a startling sneer. He stood on a cardboard stand labeled Pluto Water. I wanted him immediately, but I could think of no way of getting him that would seem respectable... Every day, I visited the window. The glamour and glitter of the other window seemed superficial now, and every day I tried to think up respectable lies that would make him mine.”

– Ellen (Mary Doyle Curran) in Paper City

Mary Doyle Curran was born in 1917, almost a decade after Jacques Ducharme, but it may as well have been a generation. Upon her birth, all of Holyoke’s theatres (even the Franco-American venues for troupes) had been converted to motion picture venues; the earliest affordable radios were about to be sold; the Model T was available to the new middle class consumers thanks in part to changes in the availability of installment credit; and Steiger’s emerged from the war with twice the sales it had in 1915 (Figure 31).
Most significantly, mass marketing was finally emerging as a profession and became a rising force after distancing itself from the stigma of patent medicines. Nationally, advertising in periodicals rose from $54,000,000 to $320,000,000 between 1909 and 1929. Newspaper advertising was just as dramatic, going from $149,000,000 to $729,000,000 – significant because it reflects the growing influence of national brands in local publications. In fact, one year before Mary’s birth, the Holyoke Transcript-Telegram featured ads for Wrigley’s spearmint gum, Armour packaged foods, and H-O Oatmeal (Figure 32).

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153 Marchand, Advertising the American Dream, 25.

Brands started to become part of the local discourse. On July 1, 1931, a truck with an advertisement for Wrigley’s bubble gum printed on the side pulled up to the offices of the Holyoke Water Power Co. Employees reported in *Steiger’s Store News* that an

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epidemic of “Forditis” was spreading among its shipping department and clerks. The American Writing Paper Company employee newsletter mentioned that a machine tender named Murray was thinking about buying a Ford; the newsletter snidely responded: “Thinking about buying a Ford? How about a baby grand?” (Figure 32).

More than was the case with Ducharme, Doyle Curran was born into a society of consumers, and her written works reflect misgivings about its consequences. Her two works on Holyoke, Parish and the Hill, as well as her unpublished manuscript, Paper City, dwell on the theme of death – death in all of its manifestations, but especially the death of the city and its traditions, its communal ties broken apart by acquisitive people “making and getting, and ‘going places.’” Though her story is about death, she was witnessing the birth of a culture that Holyoke had always lacked until then: a large middle class with disposable income. If we take Worcester as a rough proxy for Holyoke, Rosenzweig noted that at least 15 to 20 percent of the city's Swedes, Irish, and French Canadians had achieved the middle class level by 1915 – an income that was pegged on the low end at $1,000 to $1,200 a year for a family of five – enough to get by with a modest surplus for saving or spending on sundries.

Efforts to Track Worker Budgets in Holyoke, 1919-1930

In response to labor disputes, changing taxes on consumer goods, and the First World War manufacturers began collecting budget studies of their employees. John Scoville, a statistician for American Writing Paper Company (AWP), looked at the cost

158 Curran, “Paper City,” 50.
159 Horowitz, The Morality of Spending, 94.
of living in Holyoke in 1919. He asserted that government figures did not reflect the actual conditions in Holyoke. His estimates showed a 72.5% increase in the cost of living since 1913, as opposed to the government’s national estimate of 102%. Scoville was not without an agenda, though. AWP endeavored to justify either modest wage increases or none at all. Earlier, the company conceded to a series of increases due to wartime labor shortages and inflation, but when Scoville completed his study in 1919, the company was eager to freeze increases once it could back them up with data that proved workers were adequately paid. The employees did not appear to be too pleased; The Eagle A newsletter made a derisive comment in an article entitled “The World Will Come to an End When…” which stated among other things, “We can live according to Mr. S-----’s statistics. (We wonder if he means Sawdust?).” The reference to sawdust may have been alluding to Scoville’s estimates for the costs of heating or tobacco – cheap tobacco was known as “sawdust” and actual sawdust was a cheaper, though much less effective form of heating than coal. It could have also been an allusion to Upton Sinclair’s account in the Jungle, where sawdust and rats were used as filler by the meatpacking industry. Whatever the case, it was an underhanded jab.

Instead of wage increases, AWP appeared to be interested in an impressively sophisticated welfare capitalism organization that included basketball teams, dedicated social spaces in the Hotel Hamilton, minstrel shows, trips to amusement parks, company newsletters, and a full-time, company-appointed labor liaison. On the whole, Holyoke

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161 “The World Will Come to an End When,” Eagle A Unity, December 1919, 52.
had a vibrant welfare capitalism apparatus set up by the mid-1920s. Doyle Curran’s father worked at the Farr Alpaca mills, which provided an auditorium, had its own marching band, sold food and sundries in its factory-based cooperative at cut-rate prices, and was one of the first mills in Holyoke to have its own in-factory hospital. Farr Alpaca was also revolutionary in instituting a profit sharing plan.163

When it comes to the estimated expenditures by households for categories of needs, the Bureau of Labor Statistics budget estimates concur with the figures provided by Scoville for Holyoke residents: Food (43%), Rent (18%), Fuel & Light (6%), Clothing (13%), Sundries (20%).) The key items of concern for employers and moralists alike were the sundries because they were the most opaque expense. During the war years there was a resurgence of concern over profligacy, culminating in the Armistice. The brief moments after the war (and the end of the flu pandemic) resulted in what moralist Bruce Barton called an ‘orgy of extravagance,’ a spending binge that Horowitz believes was caused in part by runaway inflation’s effects on saving habits. On the heels of the war, the federal government conducted an unprecedented study of household budgets. The findings showed a large increase in sundry expenses; during Carroll Wright’s study of 1875, most families only spent 3 to 10 percent of their budget on such expenses. By 1918-1919, around one-fourth of a family’s budget went to miscellaneous expenses, and they went to a much wider range of items, from life insurance, to church, gifts, streetcar

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fare, movies, newspapers, postage, barbers, etc.\textsuperscript{164} Scoville uses some of the same categories in his study of Holyoke families. The resulting choices reveal inflation’s impacts on expenses for Holyoke’s working class residents, but – more importantly – the types of expenses that AWP was concerned with tracking (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sundry</th>
<th>1913</th>
<th>1919</th>
<th>Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shave</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair cut</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trolley fare</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tooth filled</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor’s call</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movie ticket</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>120.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collar laundered</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postage stamps</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Kaffir cigars</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pound nails</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>60.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone, 1 year</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 lbs ice</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scoville’s study was followed up in the 1930s with an extensive series of investigations by Mount Holyoke College students under the auspices of Amy Hewes. The studies that Hewes’ students conducted reflected the key changes that occurred in the decade from 1920 to 1930 – namely the widespread adoption of electrical appliances. The report, “Electrical Appliances in the Home” surveyed 764 families of Mt Holyoke College students and 201 women in wage-earning families living in Holyoke.\textsuperscript{165} The Mt Holyoke contingent was from families with significantly higher incomes than the

\textsuperscript{164} Horowitz, \textit{The Morality of Spending}, 120.

Holyoke contingent. For that reason, the percentages for each household type were compared (Figure 33).

![Figure 33: Electrical Appliances in the Home, 1929](image)

It should be noted that the Hewes study inadvertently focused on households that were actively interested in the ideals of domesticity, which – by the 1920s – called for the scientific management of the home through consumer goods. The women surveyed by the students in Holyoke were part of the Holyoke Home Information Center, which was incorporated in 1926 to teach home skills to new immigrants. These were women who were receptive and more likely to be early adopters of consumer goods. A 1920s photo suggests they were the more ardent of consumers among wage-earners in Holyoke. In fact, some of the coats could have probably been found on the racks of Steiger’s (Figure 34). Despite its shortcomings, the survey still provides a valuable glimpse into the prevalence of certain household goods among a segment of Holyoke’s wage-earning population.
A close look at the data reveals that the poorer women in the Holyoke segment were more likely to own electrical cleaning appliances at the same rate as the wealthier households. The washing machine and iron had the highest adoption rate, whereas the refrigerator and waffle iron were among the lowest. The high adoption rate of cleaning appliances perhaps reflects the preferences of these families in the 1920s – these appliances allowed for social distinction through the care of clothing and home; only after maintaining a clean home could wage-earning consumers then focus on improving the efficiency of providing food on the table. As William Jenkins notes in his study of Buffalo’s upwardly mobile Irish Americans: “Patterns of house visiting tested the housekeeping abilities and fashion tastes of [Buffalo’s] parish women, subtly reinforcing a pervasive bourgeois ethos blandly outlined in the advice columns of the Union and
Times but reproduced in livelier fashion through advertisements in daily newspapers and actively through conversation and gossip.\textsuperscript{166} Wage-earning households did not have to contend with the proverbial “servant problem,” but cleaning appliances still helped make a house appear as if it had a servant, even if a wage-earner could not afford one. Of course, the low adoption rate of the electrical sewing machine confounds that conclusion. The sewing machine anomaly may be explained by the higher willingness of wage-earners to buy ready-to-wear clothes.\textsuperscript{167} In any case, the high adoption rates of electrical appliances as a whole among the Holyoke women indicates their embrace of modern consumer goods. The question now remains: How do the family practices in Doyle Curran’s writing coincide with the on-the-ground data gathered by Hewes and Scoville?

In order to answer that question, we will examine character interactions with consumer goods in both \textit{Paper City} and \textit{Parish and the Hill}.

\textbf{Divisions at the Irish-American Threshold}

Irish Americans were initiated into modern consumer society sooner than other working class groups in Holyoke. Much of this had to do with the economic prosperity of the Irish, who gained a foothold in city politics as early as the 1880s and maintained a plurality in the police force, teaching, and firefighting professions.\textsuperscript{168} A second factor was


\textsuperscript{167} Cf. Andrew Gordon, \textit{Fabricating Consumers: The Sewing Machine in Modern Japan} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). As Andrew Gordon notes in his study of Singer in Japan, sewing machines were often not bought for utilitarian purposes; rather, they were frequently items of leisure or status. Wage-earning women probably weighed the costs and benefits of a sewing machine and, given their embrace of ready-to-wear clothes, decided that sewing machines were not a wise investment unless accompanied by an income-producing corollary.

\textsuperscript{168} Green, \textit{Holyoke, Massachusetts: A Case History of the Industrial Revolution in
the geographic orientation of the Irish, who were concentrated above the second level canal and had much more frequent interaction with the commercial life of High Street than that of Main Street. Finally, the Irish had the advantage of speaking English, and much of the media – especially the mass media – was oriented towards Native English speakers.

Like Ducharme, Doyle Curran’s characters, by and large, are based on real people. The places where the characters of Mary and Ellen live (protagonists of *Parish* and *Paper City* respectively) are the same places that Mary Doyle lived as a child.169 In many ways, the occupations and family organization of the Doyles typify the Irish American experience in Holyoke – Mary’s brothers (both in real-life and the novel) work as clerks, rather than in the mills, representing the occupational shift that occurred in the early 20th century (Figure 35). Mary’s mother, like many Irish families, did not work outside of the home. Lastly, the gradual migration from “The Patch,” the area that once held the makeshift shacks, to the nearby tenements, and finally to “The Hill” was a common trajectory for many immigrants in Holyoke; by the 1940 census, 23 percent of the foreign-born residents lived in the two wards that made up “The Hill.”170

The principal characters in *Parish and the Hill* include Mary’s grandfather, John O’Sullivan; Mary’s mother, Mamie O’Connor; Mary’s father, James O’Connor; brothers, Eddie, Michael and Tabby; and a series of different aunts and uncles who play varied roles of importance. *Paper City*’s principal characters are essentially the same, but with

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169 The 1920 and 1930 census shows her living at 7 Clinton Avenue and 9 Thorpe Avenue, respectively.

170 The census statistical abstracts break down foreign-born population by ward. The proportion of foreign-born residents living in wards 5 and 7 (combined) between 1910 and 1940 is as follows: 1910 – 13%, 1920 – 18%, 1930 – 22%, 1940 – 23%.
different names. Mary’s grandfather plays a role not unlike Cecile in *The Delusson Family* – he maintains close ties to his heritage and is most ardently against the culture of acquisitiveness and distinction that began to arise among Irish who lived on “The Hill.”

![Figure 35: Top Ten Occupations in Holyoke, 1902 and 1939](image)

The occupational data was culled from the Holyoke city directories of 1902 and 1939, which listed employment. The figures above not only illustrate the changing diversity of occupations in Holyoke, but also the drop in employees at large companies such as factories and the rise of clerks and salesmen (consumer-oriented occupations).
Mary’s father is most willing to leave his past behind him – a fact which is partly attributed to his background as a County Cork Irishman as opposed to a Kerry Irishman. Mary’s brothers and uncles respond to their divided ethnic loyalties in various ways. On the two extreme poles are Mary’s uncle, Smiley and her brother, Tabby. Tabby embraces consumer culture and goes on extravagant spending binges. Her uncle, Smiley is a staunch Irish Nationalist with a flair for Fenian bravado – best exemplified by the moment when he sings the Irish national anthem in front of a crowd of respectable Yankees at the Opera House. 171

The divide within the O’Connor family is not only across generations, but also within the same generation. In the beginning of Parish, there is a vivid moment when Mary is caught between deciding whether to follow her mother or her father. The “threshold” moment not only tells of a crisis of ethnic self, but also a crisis between the embrace of modernity by her father and the traditions of her mother: “I remember standing in a doorway with my father pulling me one way and my mother the other. Full of pain and panic, I wondered why neither would cross the threshold. With the clear logic of a child, I realized that I could not go both ways.”172 In some ways this crisis is similar to the crisis that Ducharme presents in his advocacy for survivance, but in other ways it is entirely distinct. Mary’s crisis not only comes in the midst of an era of immigration restriction and Americanization efforts, but also an era of a mature, established consumer culture. The ways in which the Delussions and O’Connors cope with modernity as consumers tells a lot about the influence of consumer capitalism on the daily practices of Holyokers and the changing nature of these practices from 1900 - 1940 (Table 3).

172 Curran, Parish, 95
The O’Connors as Consumers

Early in *Parish and the Hill*, Mary’s father is depicted as a cigar smoker, but by the Great Depression he smokes cigarettes; Jean-Baptiste, on the other hand, is always smoking a pipe. Relli Shechter’s fascinating study of smoking and modernity describes cigarettes as the ultimate symbol of the new consumer culture. Fast, efficient, and portable, cigarettes provided a rising middle class (Egypt’s *effendi* in Shechter’s account) the ability to mix work and leisure while displaying their status; Shechter finds that pipes, on the other hand, were considered to be items of tradition and ‘backwardness’ – the type of consumption that expended more leisure time than was necessary.173

Table 3: Interactions with Consumer Goods in Accounts by Ducharme and Curran

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumer Good</th>
<th>Delusson Family (1874 -1910)</th>
<th>Parish/Paper City (1920-1940)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco</td>
<td>Jean Baptiste ca. 1870 - uses a pipe to smoke tobacco (164)</td>
<td>Mary's father uses cigarettes in the Great Depression (113, <em>Parish</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print Media</td>
<td>Jean reads local newspaper; Cecile reads French-language newspaper (157, 164, 180)</td>
<td>Mary's father reads <em>Atlantic Monthly</em>; mother reads <em>Transcript-Telegram</em> (86, <em>Parish</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture</td>
<td>Furniture was heirloom, which had to be sold in the trip to the U.S. Upon move to Granby, the family purchases second-hand furniture (264)</td>
<td>Front rooms of Irish tenements were &quot;filled with heavy furniture, bought at the local furniture store&quot; (2, <em>Parish</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radios</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Mary's father obsessively listens to stock market reports on radio (113, <em>Parish</em>); Tabby listens to Father Charles Coughlin (180, <em>Parish</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automobile</td>
<td>The first time a vehicle appears in the story is the honeymoon for Anne Dulhut and Pierre Delusson (250)</td>
<td>Tabby drives an expensive car: &quot;What do you mean get nowhere! Look at me. I'm on top, seventy-five bucks a week, a car, plenty of clothes (216, <em>Parish</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confectionary</td>
<td>Pierre “had never been in a bank, and money was a nickel or ten cents, which sometimes he had to spend for candy” (120)</td>
<td>Mary gives Polish children in Kerry Park some of her candy; grandfather returns home and despairs at the sense of ownership (25, <em>Parish</em>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second example has to do with the consumption of print media. In *The Delusson Family*, Cecile reads the French-language press, and even has it sent from Canada by her daughter, Louise. On the other hand, by the time Mary is young her father reads a national magazine (*Atlantic Monthly*), while her mother is a regular enthusiast of the *Transcript-Telegram*. As demonstrated in Figure 32, consumer goods produced by large and impersonal corporations were regularly appearing in the local paper, which would differ markedly from the types of ads Cecile would have seen in her Quebec papers. The hybrid local-national imagined community that the *Transcript-Telgram* inculcated into readers intermixed news about births, deaths, marriages, and social events with visually stunning depictions of packaged goods, idealistic domesticity, and quick fixes to modern life’s woes – all offered by distant producers. 

Radios do not appear in *The Delusson Family* simply because consumer radios were not widely available at the time. However, in *Parish and the Hill* and *Paper City*, radio plays a central role at key moments in the narrative. In *Paper City*, Ted Fuller, a romantic interest of Ellen goes from being a ham radio operator to a “ham businessman.” When they reunite years later in California, he is somebody Ellen does not
recognize, as he spouts off stock tips and talks of “progress.” Thus the radio initiates Ted into the life of a technocrat businessman who could only talk stocks and H-bombs – “the waste of a blue-eyed boy – gentle and sweet man whom I had once loved. Lonely beyond loneliness, I knew very well how lonely he was.”\(^{174}\) Similarly, in *Parish and the Hill*, Mary’s father becomes obsessed with listening to stock tips on the radio. As her father’s stock investment tumbled, she writes, “somehow this mill worker, poor, one of poor millions, considered himself involved actively in the rise and fall of the vast American market.”\(^{175}\) Her brother, Tabby, the fast-talking opportunist who drives expensive cars, becomes enamored with Father Coughlin over the radio.\(^{176}\)

As mediator between outside, cosmopolitan culture and the insularity of the parish, radio had a profound effect on Holyoke’s working class consumer patterns. But Liz Cohen concludes that radio also helped reinforce and maintain connection to ethnic, working-class life in the midst of an impersonal outside world – especially in its early growth phase; thus Holyoke’s Franco-American community was treated to a weekly “French Hour,” family members listened to the radio together, and labor organizations used radio to strengthen their movements. It was not until the Congressional Radio Act of 1927 that large networks began to dominate the airwaves and mass advertising became part of that growth.\(^{177}\) Did Holyoke follow national trends in radio adoption? More importantly, did the working class neighborhoods become part of radio culture to the same extent as the middle class? The 1930 census helps us speculate on possible answers.

\(^{175}\) Curran, *The Parish and the Hill*, 113.
\(^{176}\) Ibid., 77–78.
to those questions.

A total of 5820 individuals in four separate census enumeration districts (EDs) were extracted and compiled. Each ED corresponded with a neighborhood that was inhabited by the authors or their characters (as indicated in descriptions from the novels). District 165 (1722 individuals) was where Ducharme grew up as a child in the Highlands – a wealthy area where factory owners and executives lived. Mary, in Parish, also called this area *cave canem* – off limits for a girl like her. District 154 (1235 individuals) was where Ducharme’s mother and sister finally settled after Ducharme left home and attended college; this area, though not quite as “exclusive” as the Highlands was still middle-upper class and was within a few blocks from Wistariahurst and other large mansions. District 167 (835 individuals) contained the main apartment block where Doyle Curran lived, as well as the areas she describes in both Parish and Paper. This was an apartment block not quite within the Highlands but also well out of the working class Patch. It marked an upward social step for her family and it was there that she faced her “threshold” decision. Finally, District 133 (2028 individuals) was largely French Canadian and in the heart of the ward 2 enclave in the Flats.

Because of the high number of multi-family addresses, radio ownership cannot be easily mapped or visualized by address. A map is only helpful in illustrating where the districts are located – 165 (green), 167 (pink), 154 (blue), and 133 (brown) (Figure 36). The data itself has been tabulated by district to show the proportion of households owning a radio set (Figure 37).

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Figure 36: Census Districts that Were Mapped for Radio Ownership
District 167 (pink), District 111 (blue), District 154 (brown), and District 165 (green).
Each represents a different ethnic or socioeconomic cross-section in the books by Ducharme and Curran. Red dots indicate a street address with a radio, and yellow dots are addresses without radios. Wards are labeled in red.

Doyle Curran’s ED 167 had a 63 percent rate of radio ownership. By national standards, this is well above the 40 percent average. By Massachusetts standards, it stands within the average rate for large cities; Springfield, for example, had an overall adoption rate of
61 percent, while Worcester’s was 60.\textsuperscript{179} However, by filtering the list to only account for foreign-born residents who were born in Ireland, the number jumps to 70.5 percent; if one filters that list for children born of either an Irish-born mother or Irish-born father, the number jumps further, to 73 percent – a full 10 percent above the average in ED 167. This trend points to a desire on the part of Irish-Americans to adapt to mainstream society and initiate themselves into new consumer practices – even more than their Yankee counterparts (New England-born heads of household in the same district only had a 67 percent adoption rate).\textsuperscript{180} Doyle Curran’s father, Edward Doyle, personifies the eager, working class participant in mainstream consumer society.

Conversely, ED 133, where Ducharme’s grandfather, Etienne first lived when he immigrated to the U.S. (and where Jean-Baptiste first resides in the novel) had a 43 percent ownership rate – almost half that of the Highlands. This is still in line with an urban neighborhood comprised of a large foreign-born population. In fact, 48 percent of the foreign-born White residents in Springfield and Worcester owned radio sets. The five percent lower rate in ED 133 could mostly be attributed to the fact that Precious Blood housed a large number of nuns (none of whom appeared to own radios and each one appears to be counted as an individual head of household). Suffice to say, this is especially high for a community whose principal language was French.

Overall, Holyoke was ahead of the nation (and certainly ahead of the South) in radio adoption. This is significant for a population that is above average in its foreign-born residents. For the fifteenth census, Massachusetts had one of the highest adoption

\textsuperscript{179} Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Abstract of the Fifteenth Census of the United States (U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1933), 450.
\textsuperscript{180} Fifteenth Census of the United States.
rates in the nation, but it does not necessarily mean that families like the Doyles were opening their arms to the products pushed by radio advertisements.

Figure 38: A&P Shop Window on 343 Main, Holyoke, ca. 1930
In 1923, the A&P Gypsies, a musical ensemble that promoted A&P chain store products, became one of the first large-scale, corporate-sponsored radio shows. The window above demonstrates the prevalence of packaged and branded goods in Holyoke’s Franco-American community by the early 1930s. This image was taken at an A&P that is just steps away from the movie theater in Figure 19.

Although the A&P “Gypsies” offered “exotic music with a nomadic motif” as early as 1923 while promoting the store’s packaged brands, it appears the Doyles still went to the corner grocer. Doyle Curran mentions that “nothing was bought by the five pounds. The flour was bought in barrels, the potatoes in huge rag bags.”\(^{181}\) Despite the resistance of the Doyles to adopting national chains like A&P, such stores were becoming extremely common in Holyoke, and along with them elaborately packaged products (Figure 38). How did such chains alter the city’s landscape and its independent grocers? A brief look

\(^{181}\) Curran, “Paper City,” 9.
at a case study of a grocer in Holyoke is worth examining.

**Mary Marconi and the A&P**

In 1988, Mary Marconi spoke with Chris Howard Bailey from her home in ward 2 at 298 Race Street. Mary came to the United States from Italy in 1915 when her brother, who owned a grocery store, needed extra help while he worked at a nearby brickyard. In October of 1917, they moved the market to the corner of Main and Appleton, where it remained until 1948, after which they moved to a nearby space with attached apartments that they rented out. Mary was married twice and had one son. When she first came to the U.S. she lived at 238 Race, but she – along with the other tenants – were evicted in 1916. Her family next purchased a home on Appleton Street, but they were evicted again. “The land it was belong to the city. So we have to move again. Because they want the house. They want to eh tear down the house. They build a mill there, where they play ball or something I don’t know. So we have to… buy something, eh solid so they can’t throw us out agin [chuckles]. So we bought this house in 1923.”

Mary lived in the home on 298 Race until her death in 1995, and her memories never extended beyond the four-block radius of Main and Spring Street in ward 2.

When Moroni’s Market started, it dealt strictly in dry goods. When they moved to the 274 Main Street location, however, they had a refrigerated room and hired a butcher who spoke French. After moving to 274 Main, a sales representative provided them with a $4,000 loan to stock their store. Mary told Chris Bailey: “We had a man, from New York, he come in… he was a salesman. The one they go around you know. Like my son now he’s a salesman… So then, then he comes in, he go [feet] on us. He filled up our

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182 Mary Marconi, Interview of Mary Marconi by Chris Howard Bailey for the Shifting Gears Project, April 26, 1988, Center for Lowell History Oral History Collection.
store… Then little by little all this salesman coming in and you can put this in, you can put this in, and everything. And that guy, he trust us for four thousand dollar.”

**Figure 39: Growth of Chain Grocery Stores in the U.S., 1919-1937**

Between 1919 and 1937, Atlantic & Pacific reached a height of 15,700 stores in the U.S., while chain grocery stores overall started the depression controlling 30% of the market (adapted from Ellickson, 6).

**Figure 40: Density Map of Holyoke's Retail Grocers from 1902-1939**

With the loan, Moroni’s was able to transition to packaged goods and modernize their
store, thanks in part to the backing of the salesman from New York.

Moroni’s was fortunate to survive the 1920s and 1930s. Between 1919 and 1932, the top 5 grocery firms went from controlling 4.2 percent of the market to 28.8 percent (Figure 39). During that same time period, Holyoke went from 6 Atlantic & Pacific (A&P) chain stores to 22, essentially matching the 365 percent growth rate of A&P stores nationwide. The impact on Holyoke grocery stores was enormous. Independent grocers went out of business and moved to other industries, and the surviving grocers spread out of the enclave and atomized into the Highlands (Figure 40). The Census of Distribution indicates that Holyoke went from 155 to 87 retail grocers (without fresh meats) between 1930 and 1939. Most merchants whose address was taken over by A&P moved on to other occupations or locations (Table 4). Mary thinks Moroni’s survived because she offered credit and delivered; in fact, on Sundays, she delivered to peddlers who had squatters’ shacks in the woods. Still, she noted that the Great Depression “was hard. But we had good customer. We had good people. We trust them. And they pay for, when they work you know. People they were really honest… Lot of them, lot of them they still owe us, but good-bye… When we close the store I burn everything what they owe me, I burned everything. I don’t need anything.” Mary’s decision to burn the credit records provides a touching example of the types of reciprocity between grocer and customer that occurred prior to the onslaught of chain stores and supermarkets.

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185 Marconi, Interview of Mary Marconi by Chris Howard Bailey for the Shifting Gears Project.
Table 4: Merchants Whose Stores Were Occupied by A&P

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
<th>1902</th>
<th>1918</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1375 Dwight</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Adelard C Menard</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>In 1932, Menard became an independent owner of a butcher shop at 73 Hampshire Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1739 Northampton</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>377 Main</td>
<td></td>
<td>Abraham Levine Gents Clothing</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>In 1935, Levine moved to 453 Main and became an independent dry goods store owner. By 1940, he was listed as a &quot;collector.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>418 Appleton</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Lucius Person</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>In 1920, Person was employed at The Drapery Shop - 237 Maple St.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>453 High</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Jacob Scolnik Coat and Apron Supply</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>Unknown, no longer lives in city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>506 South</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 Ely</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Sabastien Yenlin, Baker</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>Yenlin owned two bakeries at 51 Ely and 72 Cabot in 1919, but by 1921 he only owned 72 Cabot. Lived at 107 Clemente</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>737 Dwight</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Barger Abraham, Grocery &amp; Dry Goods</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>Abraham Barger became an insurance agent in 1919.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76 Hampshire</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Eva Boulerice</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>Unknown, no longer lives in city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>908-910 Hampden</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 South</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>329 High</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>Dress Shop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137 High</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 Center</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>A&amp;P</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite being Italian and speaking no French, Mary was determined to embed herself in the culture of ward 2 and, after much persuasion, convinced Precious Blood to finally take her in as a parishioner (though they were reticent at first). Mary eventually picked up French and English as she adapted to life in ward 2. By the 1950s, Pat’s – a cash-and-carry supermarket – moved in down the street and affected her business. By 1968, Moroni’s closed entirely and Mary retired.
CHAPTER VII
RIVERS AND ROADS

Figure 41: Line for Belle Sharmeer Stockings, High Street, 1945

“Harry ‘Moses’ Ludwig must be losing faith in his personal charms. He recently decided that a Ford was no longer a proper vehicle for his amorous adventures and has invested in a new Essex Coupe. More power to you, Harry.”

– Steiger Store News

When Underwood wrote Protestant and Catholic in 1957, he characterized the area of Main Street as the “old” business district, with “small hotels of ‘ill repute’ and itinerant lodging, of second-run movie houses catering largely to working people's diversions… clearly an area of deterioration, with former glories but a memory.” Underwood was effusive about High Street, however. It was “the central business district… major department stores and clothing retailers, the best restaurants, leading hotels and first-run, gilded movie houses” (Figure 41).¹⁸⁶ Underwood’s optimism would not save High Street in the following months. One year after his book was published

¹⁸⁶ Underwood, Protestant and Catholic, 196.
construction began on a new High Street, farther up the hill.

Backed by the enormous investment of the federal government, Interstate 91 reoriented Holyoke once again, this time for the car, marking the death knell for High Street as cosmopolitan commercial center. The concrete, six-lane behemoth cut through a rocky outcrop just north of Holyoke in November of 1964. Contractors and engineers had no trouble dynamiting the shale until they became “slightly delayed by dinosaurs.” Ellen, from Paper City, would have recognized the fossilized tracks embedded in layered stone – in the book she sold them for a quarter a piece to tourists as a child. But this time they were holding up progress. Engineers had to wait for a month while paleontologists gathered samples. The contractors were not amused – progress halted by dinosaurs? Tourists came by the thousands to see the tracks. The new Mt Tom ski resort opened its slopes, even though there was no snow. “High up on the mountain were the skiers - going through their paces on a 200-foot-long carpet about 75 feet wide and made of plastic brushes.” The journalist noted that most of the 2,000 tourists were watching the skiers instead of the dinosaur tracks.187 Once the dinosaur tracks were buried, Holyokers had before them an open road like never before, a high-speed pipeline to an infinite variety of consumer experiences – including a new Steiger’s store right off the exit (not to mention a plastic ski slope). I-91 offered direct access to the indoor Ingleside Mall. High Street was no longer the harbinger of the new capitalism; consumer capital moved on in search of new spectacles to sell, new space to occupy. In its wake, it left High Street and Main Street in the same predicament as the brick factories along the canals that moved to the South in search of cheap labor.

This study has argued that consumer culture changed Holyoke’s spatial orientation, atomizing working class practices and increasing their contact with “representations of space.” We have seen how a redesign of the park system, the influx of motion pictures on Main Street and the appearance of national brands in the Transcript-Telegram affected working class residents’ daily lives (Figure 19 and Figure 32).

Streetcar lines spread the neighborhoods of the city across a wider swath of land – breaking up communities and disassociating passengers from the industrial landscape (Figure 11). The dramatic spread of chain stores in the 1920s further atomized places where most Holyokers made their daily purchases of food (Figure 40). This study has also argued that the working class asserted their place in the city and created alternative spaces of their own, which resisted the threats that consumer capitalism imposed on space. The Grande Fête Jubilaire is one such example – its parade occupied the streets for celebration of French-Canadian survivance – not only on Main Street but also High Street. Furthermore, Mary Marconi continued to persist in ward 2, despite two evictions; she burned her credit records so her customers would no longer owe her, rejecting the values of consumer capitalist enterprises like A&P. Emma Dumas, much like scores of peddlers in the city who occupied the street corners and vacant storefronts sold in a way that confounded the homogenization of space and contributed to the persistence of ethnic enclaves, memory, and tradition. Anna Sullivan provided a space for free expression and assembly, thereby neutralizing the powerful influence that a department store owner had over his church and its communal spaces.

That leaves us with the two central figures: Jacques Ducharme and Mary Doyle Curran. Though Ducharme ends with continuance, survival and a return to an agrarian
ideal, Doyle’s works end with death and loss. The conclusion one could easily make is that Ducharme’s optimism provides solid hope for continued French-Canadian survival, while Doyle Curran’s pessimism represents a surrender of Irish American identity in the black hole of “Money Hole Hill.” That simplifies the true meaning behind Doyle Curran’s novels. The description of the suicide of Billy in Paper City begins with the inevitable loss of his life: “When they reached the bridge over the rushing Connecticut, Bill said quietly, ‘I'm going for a swim.’ He stripped and walked nude to the high bridge. He dove like a sleep-walker, gracefully – like a bird flying free — free through the air. Joe stared frozen. Bill sank once, twice. Then Joe dove desperately, but it was too late.”

Tragedy, at first, seems the outcome of Billy’s death, but the concluding paragraph paints Billy’s jump as a form of emancipation. The final paragraph of the chapter reads: “And Bill, ‘child of sunlight, child of grace,’ who knows? Perhaps he will light in that golden sweet apple tree and sing as sweetly, fly as freely as he had dreamed – a golden bird, a bird of light – a morning bird, a bird of grace – free now of both time and space.”

Thus, the river, not a rosary, serves as Mary’s central symbol. Billy’s jump into the waters, which frees him from time and space could be contrasted with Pierre Delusson’s yearning for “distance and space, color and movement.” For Doyle Curran, the river is where working women managed rows of vegetables and kept cool picnics on the banks – a place she yearned to visit from the sweltering heat of “The Hill.” The river is variously associated with darkness, the past, tradition, memory, and it is where unwanted things go, such as Mary’s beaver skin cap, old crates, and old rowboats. But the river is also a form of life and renewal for the Paper City; as Ellen retreats from the

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188 Curran, “Paper City,” 137.
189 Ducharme, The Delusson Family, 156.
waters, she grows more nostalgic and morose. Death appears at the cemetery at the top of the hill, just as often as it does in the river. Is death a negative thing in Mary’s eyes? In Parish it is an opportunity for Mary’s mother to bond with the community through wakes.\textsuperscript{190} Mary begins every chapter in Parish with “I remember,” an affirmation of the river’s interminable flow which continually replaces old memory with new – a ritual that does not end with the death of her grandfather in Parish. J.B. Jackson writes that the “golden age,” a time when the past had an innocence and simplicity “begins precisely where active memory ends - thus about the time of one's great grandfather.”\textsuperscript{191} It is no wonder that the limit to Mary’s connection with her identity centers on her grandfather. New memories accrete with old ones while other bits recede away. In the context of architecture, Jackson sees this as a necessity: “There has to be an interim of death or rejection before there can be renewal and reform. The old order has to die before there can be a born-again landscape.”\textsuperscript{192}

Walk along Holyoke’s Main Street and you will pass the forlorn, collapsing ruins of Mary Marconi’s market. The Bijou theatre no longer exists, and the union hall where Anna Sullivan hosted Margaret Sanger has been replaced with a parking garage. There are no A&Ps left in Holyoke, and the Transcript-Telegram folded in 1993. Both department stores downtown are closed. The enormous frame of the Hotel Nonotuck, where Albert Steiger envisioned a new center of commercial leisure, stands empty next to the vacant 2,300-seat Victory Theater. Mt Tom Resort is a charred foundation. These sites have died as consumer space, but they remain as genius loci for those who still

\textsuperscript{190} Curran, The Parish and the Hill, 67.
\textsuperscript{191} J. B. Jackson, The Necessity for Ruins: And Other Topics (Univ of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 100.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 101.
endow them with meaning. “I saw the dead lying stiffly in their graves,” Doyle Curran writes in *Paper City*. “I thought, they will rise lightly again from those graves. The broad river ran swiftly over the dinosaur tracks, and slowly the paper city tumbled into darkness.” Sullen as this ending may seem, the humble symbolism of her syntax points to the future. “I thought,” she writes of the dead and forgotten – separating this initial clause with a comma to highlight the declarative, “they will rise.” So with the inundation of dinosaur footprints and darkness descending on Paper City, Doyle Curran anticipates dawn and receding waters ahead. She may not point to a “New Basis of Civilization,” but Holyoke’s spaces and its streets – the ruins of consumer culture – face the possibility of being reincarnated as arenas of communal participation.
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