PREFACE

Over the past several decades, the study of work processes has become one of the most dynamic fields of historical research. Seen as economic behavior, work organizes human relations and material resources for the purposes of production and profit. Yet the interest in work exceeds the simple creation of goods and services. Scholars have long recognized work as one of the most important contact points between social groups, and specifically between elites and commoners, merchants and artisans, and manufacturers and laborers. Work was a context for the exercise of power within any community. As such, it constituted an economic relationship with social, political, and cultural ramifications.

The period roughly from 1500 to 1800 was a time of economic transition; entrepreneurs pursued markets, gathered or fashioned products, accumulated capital, and invested it in new production processes. Because technological progress was limited until the end of this period, however, work organization is the key to any understanding of the economic and social changes in work itself and in the lives of working men and women.

Though dynamic, the history of work is also a dispersed field. Few publications or associations dedicate themselves to the dissemination of new information and ideas on the topic. This collection grew from the recognition of that fact and the desire to bring together a number of younger scholars, some of whom are less well known in North America than they should be, to examine work processes and

their social and economic consequences in various contexts over time.

What follows are the proceedings of a colloquium held at the University of Pennsylvania on October 11 and 12, 1990. Its success depended to a large extent on the assistance and cooperation of numerous colleagues and friends.

Many experts offered recommendations for possible contributors, a choice made more difficult by the editors' express intention to span time and geography as well as work processes. Those deserving particular thanks are Domenico Sella of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Merry Wiesner-Hanks of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, Hermann van der Wee of the Catholic University of Leuven, Gwynne Lewis of the University of Warwick, Joan Thirsk of Oxford University, and James Amelang of the University of Florida. The essayists represent new directions in the study of work; some of their scholarship appears here in English for the first time.

Providing a forum for discourse requires more than willing participants; financial resources are necessary as well. The heads of several institutions were more than generous in their support of this project. Special acknowledgment must go to Stephen Nichols, former Associate Dean for the Humanities of the University of Pennsylvania; Richard Beeman and James Davis, Chair and Acting Chair of the Department of History of the University of Pennsylvania; Thomas Childers, Director of the Center for European Studies of the University of Pennsylvania; Lynn Hollen Lees, Director of the Seminar on Work and Population of the University of Pennsylvania; Robert Hoover, former Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Utah State University; and R. Edward Glatfelter, Head of the Department of History of Utah State University. These colleagues provided more than essential funds; they provided equally necessary and much-appreciated counsel and encouragement.

Shaping conference papers into essays can be a frustrating exercise for editor and author alike. The contributors to this volume responded to the various rigors of publication in a gratifyingly professional manner. Though it may seem gratuitous to acknowledge those who profit from an endeavor of this sort, their efforts are undeniably the key to success.

Rosalind J. Beiler collated, typed, and retyped many versions of each essay. Moreover, she was a shrewd reader and astute critic, whose comments surely improved the entire volume.

Finally, Reva Rosenband and Michele Rothenberg supported the entire project from beginning to end, advising in all matters of organization, reading drafts of many of the essays, and listening critically to even more of the ideas. They were partners in the enterprise.

THOMAS MAX SAFLEY and LEONARD N. ROSEN BAND

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Logan, Utah

The Workplace before the Factory