

Opportunity for Artisans during Industrialization

THE INDUSTRIAL FUTURE took shape all at once in the new textile towns in New England. The factory system dominated them from their foundations, casting the traditional crafts in an auxiliary role. The break with older methods of manufacturing would be much less quick and clear in most American towns and cities. The inertia of traditions of small shop artisan production coupled with differences between industries in division of labor and mechanization meant that the progress of industrialization in cities with diversified manufacturing would be slower and more complicated than in Lowell, Lawrence, and other mill towns. Opportunities for men trained in the skilled crafts differed correspondingly.

The erosion of craft manufacture in the middle decades which looms so large retrospectively received almost no public mention in Poughkeepsie. The city had no labor unions with more than temporary strength outside the building trades before 1880. Local newspapers sometimes reported strikes and occasionally organizing activities but otherwise paid no attention to mechanics beyond describing accidents on the job, interruptions of work, emigration, and demands for workers, most often in the building trades or other seasonal employments like ice harvesting and farm labor.¹ In the