

Chapter Two: The Golden Era, “The past they knew”

The Lehigh Valley Railroad’s “Mauch Chunk and Hazleton local” terminated in Manhattan, “at the foot of West 23rd Street.”¹ This was the site of a bustling transportation hub abutting the Hudson River, comprising both railway stations and ferry terminals. From here, it was a mile walk east across half of Manhattan to the 10-story Mitchell building at 41-43 West 25th Street.² When Ralph Pecora came to New York in September of 1908 to attend cutting school, he most likely took this train into this station (although others traveled from Freeland to New York City, this one was the quickest), and made this walk, carrying whatever personal luggage he deemed necessary: the Mitchell school specified that “students need not bring any implements with them” as “everything necessary is furnished to the student absolutely free.”³ He was twenty years old, in a large city for the first time in his life, on his own. The number and density of the multi-story brick buildings rising above the sidewalks, the volume of pedestrians crowding the intersections, the quantity of horse carriages and early automobiles filling the streets would all have been unfamiliar to him. But—unlike so many small-town visitors to this immigrant city—the foreign languages, accents, and gestures he encountered would not have shocked or surprised him; perhaps they even reminded him of home.

In advertisements, the Mitchell school recommended the “dull season after the holidays” as the best time to enroll in one of their courses.⁴ Ralph Pecora began his

¹ Display Ad, *New York Times*, Aug. 23, 1908, C4.

² This building is still standing. The ground floor is currently (in 2011) the site of Schneider’s Baby and Teen Furniture Store.

³ Display Ad, *American Tailor and Cutter*, June 1912, ii-iii.

course of instruction in early September, perhaps hoping to return to Freeland and to the shop on Washington Street before the busy holiday season began. The school operated upon a system of rolling admissions: a student could enter at a time that was convenient for him and received his diploma once he'd become proficient at a set of predetermined skills. A rolling admissions policy afforded the school a constant stream of tuition fees and allowed the owners to save on the administrative costs of planning and scheduling set classes. The policy was sold to students through the promise that their progress would be neither "retarded nor unduly hastened by the progress of any one else."⁵ There was no application or testing process prior to enrollment. Students who wished to attend classes simply showed up at the school office, tuition payment in hand, and were able to start their instruction the next day. Out-of-town students were advised to plan their travels so that they arrived in New York City while the office was still open. Mitchell agents would then help them to find lodgings "within a convenient distance of the school" and "where the surroundings will be desired," at a cost of "\$5.00 per week up." Students who could not avoid arriving after hours were directed to the Arlington Hotel, at 18 West 25th Street, just a few doors down the street.⁶

Tuition fees varied according to the length of the course and the experience level of the student. Ralph enrolled in the Mitchell School's cheapest and briefest course, the \$50 cutters course, intended for "experienced cutters in actual practices."⁷ The course was limited to 15 days of instruction, but a good student could finish sooner if he was a

⁴ Display Ad, *American Tailor and Cutter*, December 1911, 151.

⁵ Display Ad, *American Tailor and Cutter*, February 1912, back cover.

⁶ Display Ad, *American Tailor and Cutter*, February 1912, back cover.

⁷ A cutter was a person who drafted and cut out pattern pieces for garments. In larger tailor shops, the cutter played a separate role. In smaller tailor shops, the owner often served as his own cutter.

quick study. The more expensive courses—the \$100 beginner’s course, for those who “are journeymen tailors or familiar with tailoring” and the \$250 novice course, for those “not practically identified with merchant tailoring”—were of unlimited duration, although advertisements advised potential students that most attendees finished the beginner’s course in five to eight weeks.⁸ Those without any experience were estimated to need at least three months to become sufficiently skilled.⁹ The salary promised to students upon graduation was \$25 to \$100 per week. Tuition fees thus represent a few days’ to two weeks’ salary for students with some experience, and potentially several weeks’ salary for someone just entering the trade.¹⁰

The skills taught at the Mitchell School were summed up, in one advertisement, as “measuring, drafting, trying-on, style expressions, alterations, their cause and effect.”¹¹ The most technical of these skills was drafting, the process of drawing the many pieces that make up a garment onto large sheets of paper and then cutting the pieces out of the desired fabric. Tailoring schools were often referred to as “cutting schools” and their graduates as “cutters.” **Makers of handmade clothing today rely upon pre-drawn patterns, available in a variety of sizes, which typically require some alteration prior to cutting in order to fit the particulars of individual figures. Further alterations are often required after the pieces have been cut out, basted together, and tried on. Tailors at the turn of the twentieth century had the option of utilizing a similar system of what were called block patterns—basic, “blocky” approximations of the**

⁸ Display Ad, *American Tailor and Cutter*, June 1912, back cover.

⁹ William Clowry, “How the Tailor Becomes and Artist,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Sept. 4, 1904, pg. E3.

¹⁰ Display Ad, *Modern Fashions*, January 1908, p. 17.

¹¹ Display Ad, *The American Tailor and Cutter*, June 1912, iii.

pieces that make up a jacket say, or a pair of trousers—but most chose to draft patterns themselves, on a case-by-case basis, according to one individual’s specific measurements and the desired style of the finished garment. Garments cut from individually drafted patterns were found to require fewer alterations after the pattern had been cut (in the tailoring trade, such alterations were known as busheling) and to ultimately result in a finer fit. Drafting, however, was not an easy skill to master. Pattern pieces not only needed to exactly match a customer’s measurements, they also needed to capture the flair of a particular style, to accommodate the desired ease and drape of the completed garment, and to fit, like a three-dimensional puzzle, with every other piece in the garment. Drafting the pattern was a time consuming step, responsible for a significant portion of the price of tailored goods. During the nineteenth century, as the ready-made industry began selling men’s clothing at a fraction of tailors’ prices, the tailoring industry developed a set of shortcuts for pattern drafting, a kind of compromise between block and hand-drawn patterns known as “proportional systems.”¹²

Using proportional systems, a tailor could draft a pattern based upon only a few—or, in some cases, just one—of the customer’s measurements. These measurements, known as absolute measurements, were the basis for a few key lines in the pattern garment and the rest of the pattern was sketched out in relation to these “measured lines.” The formula for these “related lines” was arrived at through careful analysis of male proportions: the relationship of one measurement in the body to all others. Proportions naturally vary according to weight and bone structure; a tall, thin man with a concave chest is proportional in a very different way than is a short, fat man with a barrel chest.

¹² Michael Zakim, “Customizing the Industrial Revolution: The Reinvention of Tailoring in the Nineteenth Century,” *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 33 No. 1 (Spring 1998), 41-58.

Proportional systems were made functional and efficient by developing variations for a range of figure types. All proportional systems recognized differences in posture (typically categorized as “normal,” “erect,” “stooped” or “sloping”) and stomach size (“normal,” “average,” “corpulent” or “stout”) (Figure 2.1). Some systems utilized even more terms, and further specified the intended figure type, for example drafting systems designed to suit the “large-bladed, sloping-shouldered, short form”¹³ and the “square shouldered, short neck, and corpulent figure.”¹⁴ Proportional systems were also categorized by the types of measurements they required. Some tailors swore by Short-Measure Systems, also called Direct Measure or Cross Measure, which utilized the measurements taken from the back of the neck to the center of the back and to the waist; from the center of the chest to the bottom of the armpit; and from the bottom of the armpit up over the shoulder blade to the center of the back. Others preferred the Standard System of what were essentially long measures: the length from the shoulder to the waist, and the circumferences of the chest, stomach and seat.

Proportional systems saved time because they were systematic—a tailor followed a schematic rather than having to decide for himself how to structure and shape the lines that connected various elements of the garment—and because the resulting fit was found to be more exact than when patterns were drawn according to absolute measurements alone. Measurements taken from one human being by another were not that trustworthy. In addition to the obvious possibilities that different shoes and undergarments would affect measurements and/or that the tailor himself would make a mistake, flesh itself was

¹³ Jno. J. Carlstrom, “Proportionate Strap Measure System,” *American Tailor and Cutter*, September 1909, 68.

¹⁴ Frank H. Erb, “Corpulent Sack System,” *American Tailor and Cutter*, November 1909, 138.

a difficult medium: soft, pliable, and inconsistent. According to a 1907 tailoring manual, “the form will not measure the same for five consecutive seconds; a deep breath, a shifting of the weight from one foot to the other, or any other slight movement on the part of the customer not only changes his size, but so varies the relations of the points to each other that absolute measurements are unattainable.”¹⁵ A 1900 British guidebook on the “Wearing and Caring for Clothes” addressed this problem from the customer’s point view, advising men being measured by their tailors to maintain as natural a posture as possible:

[D]o not throw out your manly chest until your waistcoat buttons creak, and do not assume an attitude as stiff as that usually affected by a young policeman on point duty for the first time. You are not going to keep to that position for the rest of your natural life, and it is not fair on a tailor to humbug him into making clothes for a man like that when they are really going to be worn by a man quite different in every respect from him—I mean your normal self.¹⁶

Proportional system acted as a check on both unreliable measurements and idealized self-presentation. Tailors using proportional systems compared the measurements taken from a customer against charts of typical proportions. In cases in which the chart and the measurement differed significantly, the measurement was taken again. All of this effort was invested up front with the hope that a garment would be perfect at the first fitting. Alterations to already-cut garments were time-consuming and thus costly, reducing the profit on goods whose prices were agreed upon per piece and not per worker hour. Getting a customer to stand properly for a fitting was another of the tailor’s many challenges. Manuals cautioned against having customers try on garments in front of

¹⁵ Frederick T. Croonborg, *The Blue Book of Men’s Tailoring: Grand Edition of Supreme System for Producing Men’s Garments* (Fort Bragg: R. L. Shop, 2005, reprint of 1907 edition), 5.

¹⁶ Edward Spencer, *Clothes and the Man: Hints on the Wearing and Caring of Clothes* (New York: Grant Richards, 1900), 29.

mirrors, “for if the customer sees himself he generally assumes an attitude different than his usual one.”¹⁷ Instead tailors were advised to place customers before a picture hanging on the wall in order to trick them into a relaxed state of distraction.

Proportional systems were a textbook, rather than an apprenticeship skill. A student learning how to draft a garment according to a particular proportional system needed to study a model draft of the pattern and to follow a very detailed list of instructions (Figures 2.2). Instructions for drafting overcoats sometimes listed as many as 50 steps, and trousers could require 25 steps. Success depended upon the accuracy with which the student followed these instructions, unlike the more traditional method of drafting according to the supposedly impossible-to-obtain absolute measurements, in which a cutter’s personal experience and intuition guided his hand. The early-twentieth-century popularity of proportional systems (and of the schools that taught them) marks an important shift within tailoring: away from the variable and unquantifiable skills of a craft to the systematized standards of a trade. An advertisement for Chicago’s International Cutting School succinctly captured the difference between the two in its promise to teach students “A system that cuts by rules, not by judgment.”¹⁸ A rules-based system is, of course, less flexible and creative than a judgment-based system, but the gain in accuracy and efficiency offered by proportional systems was believed to more than balance this loss of personal freedom. The accuracy and efficiency of these rules were the reason that someone who already considered himself an “experienced cutter” would pay one or two week’s salary for a cutting-school education. The skills he gained

¹⁷ Croonborg, 229.

¹⁸ “International Cutting Schools,” four-page advertising flyer in the private collection of Ralph Pecora, Sr., no date, front page.

would, he hoped, significantly enhance his employability, if he was a journeyman, or his profit if, like Ralph Pecora, he owned his own shop.

The Jno. J. Mitchell School was one of many cutting schools teaching proportional systems in New York City's garment district in 1908, but it was by far the oldest, founded in the 1880s, while most others had been established in the first decade of the new century. Within a 15-block span, there was also the American Gentleman School of Cutting, at 853 Broadway, the New York Cutting School, at 1133-35 Broadway, and the Croonborg's Sartorial Academy, at 1181 Broadway. Croonborg's also had an academy in Chicago, at 115 S. Dearborn Street, practically next door to the International Cutting School at 105 S. Dearborn.¹⁹ Each of these schools was one of several enterprises in the corporate portfolio of a parent tailoring corporation. The bankruptcy notice for the John J. Mitchell Company printed in the *New York Times* in 1914—it was both one of the first tailoring corporations to be established and one of the first to go under—provides a complete list of this corporation's commercial offerings:

[T]he assets of the above named bankrupt, consisting of the good-will, subscription lists, subscription contracts, advertising contracts, etc. of the following publications: "Smart Style," "Sartorial Art Journal," "American Tailor and Cutter," "American Furrier," and "Advance Styles"; also good will, contracts, etc. of the Mitchell's Men's and Women's Schools of Cutting; text books, bound and unbound, patterns, tailors' implements, technical library of tailoring, dressmaking and design; drawings, plates, electrotypes and paper stock; furniture and fixtures, including large number of high-class desks, tables, show cases, book cases, filing cabinets, Remington typewriters and general office equipment will be sold at public auction...²⁰

¹⁹ Display ad, *Modern Fashions*, January 1905, 10; "Special Publication Notice of the New Supreme System and Red Book of Men's Tailoring by Fred'k T. Croonborg," advertising flyer in private collection of Ralph Pecora, Sr., undated, 8.

²⁰ Anon, "Receivers' Sales," *New York Times*, July 16, 1914, 15.

Other tailoring corporations—such as the A. D. Rude Company, which owned the New York Cutting School, and the Croonborg Fashion Company, Limited, which owned Croonborg’s Sartorial Academy—were involved in a nearly identical set of activities, with the exception of the large number of trade publications printed by the Mitchell Company; most other tailoring corporations owned one or at most two. The tailoring schools owned by these corporations were also quite similar, teaching the same types of skills at comparable tuition fees. Each school was thus not only in competition with the old way of learning by doing but with every other school in the vicinity. In advertisements and promotional materials, schools strove to set themselves apart from one another by claiming to have perfected proportional systems known only to their instructors and/or developing a distinctive brand identity. The Jno. J. Mitchell School presented itself as more traditional and scholarly than other schools, uniquely dedicated to teaching students the theory behind recommended practices. An ad from 1912 declared:

The method of instruction employed in the Mitchell School is entirely different from all others. The student is not only taught how to do a certain thing in a certain way, but why it is that way. He knows the why as well as the how. As a result, when he is through, he not only knows when a garment is right, but why it is right; and if it is wrong, he knows why it is wrong and what the remedy is.²¹

By contrast, the rival New York Cutting School, at Broadway and 26th Street, described its courses as a quick path to financial success. A typical advertisement for this school asked students to ponder the question: “WHAT DOES PAY MEAN TO YOU? [caps original]” and promised students, “There is always room at the top, and the course of instruction in Garment Cutting at the New York Cutting School will help you get

²¹ Display Ad, *American Tailor and Cutter*, June 1912, ii-iii.

there.”²² It is no surprise that Ralph Pecora, who enjoyed discussing philosophy with his neighbors and “didn’t want any trash in his library,” chose the Mitchell School for his education.

While the systems and skills taught at these schools were presented as “scientifically correct,” a great deal of ornate rhetoric concerning the artistry of tailoring appears in tailoring school advertisements. As is so often the case, the tailoring trade’s proclamations of its own artistry and skill grew more fervent as the possibility of its obsolescence became more of a reality. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the ready-made industry made great strides in decreasing the disparity between the fit of off-the-rack and custom-made goods by using the same proportional systems being taught at cutting schools. By 1900, ready-made garments were available in a wide range of sizes, many of them designed for what were often termed “hard to fit” figures, those which, according to one ready-made company’s 1914-15 style book, fell into any of the following categories: “Stouts, slims, short stout men, big and little men, men who are built ‘close to the ground’, long bodies and short legs, men with slightly stooping shoulders.”²³ These were all men who, less than 20 years ago, would not have been able to purchase ready-made clothing, or would not have been able to purchase ready-made clothing that fit well. These new claims of being able to fit anyone moved ready-made goods beyond the basic consumer appeal of a lower price to attack the tailoring trade at its primary point of differentiation: fit. In advertisements directly addressing current patrons of tailors, ready-made manufacturers claimed parity with, and *then* touted their

²² Anon, “The Successful Man,” *Modern Fashions*, January 1907, 10.

²³ Claudia B. Kidwell and Margaret C. Christman, *Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1974), 107.

price-advantage over, custom-made clothing. One half-column advertisement in the *New York Times* promised customers suit jackets with “snug-fitting collars” and “concave shoulders” and advised readers to “Remember that business men and professional men who ordinarily patronize high-priced tailors can find perfect-fitting and as durable garments here for less than one-fifth tailor’s prices.”²⁴

Large city newspapers eagerly accepted ready-made manufacturers advertising dollars and ran stories about them describing what were, at the time, typical problems of a successful industry: allegations of sweatshop conditions and struggles with labor union and strikes. Stories about tailors, on the other hand, were too often tales of suicides brought upon by financial ruin or fires caused by failure to pay off organized crime. When journalists did address the tailoring trade more generally, coverage often had a tongue-in-cheek tone. In a 1904 article, titled “How the Tailor Becomes an Artist,” Chicago journalist William Clowry facetiously refers to the instructor at an unnamed Chicago cutting school as “the professor,” playfully marks his use of terms like “exquisite technique” and “old masters,” and archly comments, “the visitor begins to wonder whether he is not in an art academy instead of a tailor’s school.”²⁵ An anonymous 1905 column in the *New York Times* even more bitingly mocks a quoted passage from the *Sartorial Art Journal*, one of two tailoring magazines published by the Jno. J. Mitchell Corporation, which brags that a skilled tailor can “make his overcoats speak of bleak December, his dress suits of frolic and festivities, his frock coats of dignity and wealth, and his waistcoats jingle like limericks.” The columnist’s more realistic view of these same garments includes the observation that “To the average man

²⁴ Display Ad, “Blue Serge Suits Are Ready To-Day,” *New York Times*, May 27, 1905, 16.

²⁵ Clowry, “How the Tailor Becomes an Artist.”

the heavy overcoat speaks not merely of bleak December, but of several months from November to April inclusive ... At other seasons they suggest the moth closet or the pawnshop.” The quoted passage further claims that a tailor can create garments that suit not only his customer’s figure but his temperament as well. For the artist, “he can make overcoat, undercoat, waistcoat, or trousers seem a sensuous haze, a reverie in color.” For the musician, he can impart “an expression that suggests ... the clashing of cymbals, the rat-tat of a drum, the ragtime movement of a cakewalk, the wail of despair, the shout of triumph, the roar of a lion, or the bray of an ass.” The editorialist concludes that “to write about [clothes] in lofty strain suggests that the bray of an ass is unmistakable.”²⁶ This writer, surely, would rather pay less for a mass-produced off-the-rack waistcoat than splurge on a custom-made waistcoat that, according to the tailor who made it, jingled like a limerick.

A prospective tailor at the turn of the twentieth century could find a very different description of the tailor’s life in the many trade magazines available, all published by corporations that also owned tailoring schools. These publications’ commercial aims are apparent. Significant copy in every issue is dedicated to elaborate descriptions of the many products offered by the parent corporations: cutting-school courses, textbooks containing collections of garment drafts, block patterns drawn using the school’s particular system, and mail-order courses offered for those who could not travel to New York City or to Chicago. Another lengthy recurring feature in these publications are ornate essays decrying the inadequacy of ready-made garments, and celebrating the finer fit, higher style, better quality, and greater individuality of custom-made goods. But these magazines provided more prosaic information as well. In incidental and end-of-

²⁶ Anonymous, “The Apotheosis of Clothing,” *New York Times*, Jan. 29, 1905, 6.

column features, these publications talked to tailors about tailors in concrete, and usually encouraging, terms. Classified ads provided a sense of probable customer base and income: “Did about a \$5,000 business last year. Town of 900 inhabitants and military post of over 500 men. All good dressers and ready money.”²⁷ Personal notes kept track of tailors’ travels and relocations to larger venues. (Needless to say, fires or bankruptcies were not noted.) Obituaries spoke respectfully of the fine personal qualities of prominent deceased members of the trade. Reports from the meetings of tailoring associations described the recreation enjoyed, tailoring demonstrations viewed, and menus consumed at annual or monthly meetings. A report on the October 1911 meeting of the Anthracite Region Custom Cutter’s Association noted a local touch: a gift made to the guest speaker of “a unique clock, made entirely, except for the works, from a large block of anthracite coal.”²⁸

There is no evidence that Ralph Pecora was a member of the Anthracite Cutter’s Club. Perhaps the membership fees were too high, or perhaps he did not feel comfortable inserting himself into a group whose self-described “well-known good-fellowship” may have felt cliquish to an outsider.²⁹ He was, however, a dedicated reader of tailoring publications. After Ralph’s death, three volumes of hand-bound excerpts from various tailoring magazines—nearly 800 pages in all—were found in his shop. They are organized according to publication: one volume consists primarily of examples from the *American Tailor and Cutter*, a Mitchell publication for the “Cutter and the Merchant

²⁷ Anon, “Business Opportunities,” *American Tailor and Cutter*, August 1909, 56.

²⁸ Anon, “Report of the Anthracite Club meeting,” *American Tailor and Cutter*, November 1911, 124-125.

²⁹ “Report of the Anthracite Club meeting,” 124.

Tailor who does his own Cutting”; a second of clips from the *Sartorial Art Journal*, a Mitchell publication for merchant tailors; and a third of pages of *Modern Fashions*, published by A.D. Rude and Son, which ran the success-oriented New York Cutting School. The pages have been arranged chronologically, bound into signatures with strips of thread, and glued between flaps of recycled brown packing paper, one printed with a return address for the American Fashion Company, a manufacturer of women’s suit patterns, and affixed with cancelled three- and ten-cent postage stamps. The earliest clippings that Ralph saved date from 1902, and the latest 1917. Most of the pages are dated 1908-1910, the years in which Ralph trained as a cutter and established his reputation in Freeland. These excerpts not only provide examples of the rhetoric and features characteristic of these publications, they are concrete evidence of one working tailor’s exposure to and assessment of their contents. It is certain that the young Ralph Pecora read these three publications and that he valued these 800 pages enough to extract them, rebind them, and save them for the rest of his life.

The vast majority of what Ralph clipped and saved from these publications are garment drafts, the sketches of and instructions for drafting patterns according to certain proportional systems. Drafts were the most objectively valuable element of tailoring publications. Text books containing similar drafts sold for 10 and 12 dollars (a subscription to *American Tailor and Cutter* cost 3 dollars per year).³⁰ Ralph saved hundreds of these drafts—several textbooks worth—the vast majority pertaining to just four types of men’s garments: suit jacket, trousers, waistcoat, and overcoat. This is not a

³⁰ These figures are taken from advertisements that appear in these magazines, most of which also sold their drafts in textbook forms. I do not know what a subscription to *Modern Fashions* or *The Sartorial Art Journal* cost; 1895 and 1909 advertisements for *The American Tailor and Cutter* give a price of \$3 annually.

strict redundancy, for every one of these drafts claims superiority over every other draft in some way. Drafts in the *American Tailor and Cutter* typically boasted a more perfect fit for particular figure types. Drafts in the merchant tailor's *Sartorial Art Journal* claimed superior stylishness. *Modern Fashions* justified each new draft with the claim that *this one* was the easiest to draw. Unfortunately, there is no indication as to which, if any, of these drafts Ralph ever used to construct a garment, and Ralph's son does not remember his father ever consulting these books in his work. All that their preservation tells us, a hundred years after they were carefully removed from their original binding, is that they were valued enough to be saved. Also saved by Ralph were dozens of illustrated reports from Garment Exhibitions, displaying sketches and descriptions of outstanding examples of tailor-made garments, and 50 or so high-quality sketches of men wearing what were at the time the latest fashions (Figures 2.3 and 2.4).

Together, these features document the beginning and end points of tailoring, the detailed nitty-gritty of pattern drafting and the beauty of the realized garments. Piece by piece, this young tailor compiled an anthology that recognized the two seemingly contradictory categories of skills required of a tailor: an engineer's precision and an artist's vision. Ralph also "accidentally" preserved essays, personal notes, business notes, and classified ads that appear on the backs of these deliberately-saved pages. He was exposed to these features and he may or may not have read these features, but they were not, in 1908 and 1910, what he considered to be most fascinating or worthwhile about the tailor's life. His anthology is a craftsman's anthology. Presumably, he went to school to master a craftsman's skills.

As promised in Mitchell School advertisements, Ralph was awarded a diploma upon graduating from the Cutter's Course, certifying "that Ralph J. Pecora has taken the Cutter's Course of Instruction in Men's Garment Cutting" and has attained "proficiency" (Figure 2.5). Although it is just a single piece of paper, it too tells a story about the tailoring trade in 1908, in this case a story about how the Mitchell Corporation presented the trade to its students as it sent them off into the world. The certificate has two basic elements: a wide decorative frame at the top of the rectangle, which dips down to points on either side, and the text and signatures. The decorative panel is equal in size to the space taken up by the writing, and rich with suggested meaning. Even the abstract design elements encapsulate a tension. In the interior of the banner, scrolling vines and tendrils trace Art Nouveau patterns, while, at the periphery, Art Deco angles and geometric shapes create a hard, sleek edge. Even more telling is the deliberate symbolism of the central cameo, which contains a woman surrounded by a collection of tailoring tools, clearly meant to be an allegory of the trade. This woman is dressed in a simple, draped peasant blouse and skirt, wears her hair tied back at the sides but loose on her shoulders, and with her left hand extends a laurel wreath to the new graduate. Her right hand holds up a large shield, emblazoned with a pair of scissors, which is leaning against an oversized iron tipped down flat on the ground. At the woman's feet are other cutter's tools: a triangle, a compass, a ruler, and a roll of paper. Behind her left shoulder are bundles of grain and a lush bush: emblems of abundance for an older, agrarian way of life (one of course far in the past for both New York City and Freeland by 1908). Behind her right shoulder are a globe, the bust of a soldier, and an oversized gear: symbols of progress and promise for a globalizing, industrializing world. She offers all of this to the

graduate, the traditional and the modern, the local and the global, the warrior's determination and the naturalist's patience; all to be gained through the simplest tools: a pair of scissors, a ruler, and a roll of paper.

Ralph framed this diploma in a wide wooden frame with gilt edging and displayed it in a prominent location in his shop for the next 50 years. He was now a trained cutter and would be for the rest of his life. Ralph's time away from home had permanently changed him another way as well. Upon returning to Freeland, he told his brother Michael that he had met the girl he was going to marry. In this case, "girl" was a literal rather than a figurative description. Madeline Greco (also spelled Grieco and Greggo in some documents) was just twelve years old in 1908, nine years younger than the man who could now be called her fiancé. She was a Brooklyn girl, the daughter of Italian immigrants, the fifth child in a family of seven. Whether her and Ralph's union was engineering or artistry is an open question among their descendants. Ralph's last living son, Ralph Pecora, Jr., simply remembers that his father met his mother while he was at cutting school. His sister Amelia told her daughter-in-law Brenda Pecora that her father had decided to marry Madeline following a surgery that he underwent at a hospital in Brooklyn. According to this story, her father stayed with the Greco family during his recovery and the young Madeline, who had been assigned the task of caring for him, stole his heart through her gentle and attentive ministrations.³¹ Carl Pecora, one of Ralph Pecora Sr.'s grandsons, believes that the marriage was arranged. His sister Patty Kudlick seconded this version of their family history and added her understanding that Ralph and Madeline were distantly related.³² It is possible that all of these stories are true. Ralph

³¹ Brenda Pecora, interview by author, Freeland, Pennsylvania, June 30, 2009.

could have either preceded or followed his 15 days of instruction at the Mitchell school with a necessary although not urgent surgery at a Brooklyn hospital. If the families were distantly related, a relative could have arranged for him to stay with the Grecos while recovering. Ralph's statement to his brother Michael that had met the girl he was going to marry could indicate that he was so taken by young Madeline that he set his sights on her, determined to wait until she grew up, or it could mean that her parents had made an arrangement with him: he would marry her when she was of age. They would wait seven years, and marry in Brooklyn in 1915.³³

Ralph spent those years building up his business and saving money to buy a home and a store of his own. These were good years for Freeland, perhaps the best years that the town would ever experience. The success of the 1900 anthracite miner's strike, in which 10,000 men stopped work, gave the United Mine Workers' Union confidence to press further with the strike of 1902, in which 147,000 anthracite workers walked off the job. The strike began in May and lasted more than five months, ending only when President Theodore Roosevelt appointed a committee of commissioners to act as arbitrators between labor and the operators. The commissioners toured the anthracite region and listened to three months of testimony from 558 witnesses, approximately a third of them miners or miners' wives and children. The operators refused to recognize the union up until the end, but mine workers won a 10 percent increase in wages (they had been asking for a 20 percent increase) and a reduction in the work day from ten to nine hours (they had been asking for an eight-hour day.)³⁴ In his autobiography,

³² Carl Pecora, Jr. interview by author, Freeland, Pennsylvania, June 30, 2009; Patty Kudlick, interview by author, Newark, Delaware, July 26, 2009.

³³ Carolyn Pecora, interview by author, Fishkill, New York, October 19, 2008.

American Federation of Labor President Samuel Gompers describes the 1902 anthracite strike as “the most important single incident in the labor movement in the United States ... from then on the miners became not merely human machines to produce coal but men and citizens.”³⁵

The 1902 strike is also remembered as a significant turning point in ethnic relations in the region. Mine operators had long been suspected of bringing immigrants into the region deliberately in order to prevent solidarity among workers. United Mine Workers’ President John Mitchell refused to accept that these newcomers, many of whom barely spoke English, could not be organized. Before and during the 1902 strike, he sent his organizers, many of them trained to speak five or six languages, out to address these immigrants in their neighborhoods and meeting halls, eventually bringing Slovak and Polish, Hungarian and Russian into the union fold. Miners and ex-miners who were interviewed by folklorist George Korson in the 1920s remembered Mitchell saying in speeches, “The coal you dig is not Slavish coal, Polish coal, or Irish coal. It is coal.”³⁶ In his book on Italian immigrants, the historian Robert Foerster calls attention to the 1902 strike as a particular turning point in the organization of Italian miners, who, he found, lacked a cultural tendency to organize. Previously, he writes, Italian laborers in the

³⁴ Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht, *The Face of Decline: The Pennsylvania Anthracite Region in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 38.

³⁵ Quoted in Jonathan Grossman, “The Coal Strike of 1902 – Turning Point in U.S. Policy,” United States Department of Labor, History at the Department of Labor, accessed March 10, 2010, <http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/coalstrike.htm>.

³⁶ George Korson, *Minstrels of the Mine Patch: Songs and Stories of the Anthracite Industry* (Hatboro, Pennsylvania: Folklore Associates, Inc, 1964), 216.

anthracite region “[had] often been strike breakers. They helped defeat the Pennsylvania coal strike of 1887-1888.”³⁷ In 1902, they too refused to pick up shovel or pick.

Several years after the successful end of the 1902 strike, John Mitchell made his second appearance in Freeland, once again speaking in the town’s public park. The Freeland appearance, on August 23, 1905, was part of a regional tour that required him to deliver 11 speeches in 11 towns in 18 days.³⁸ Mitchell’s stature in the anthracite region had grown considerably since his first appearance five years ago. Following the success of the 1902 strike, all miners—both hard and soft coal workers—were said to keep two pictures hanging on the walls of their homes: one of Jesus Christ and one of their union leader.³⁹ Like so many other emissaries of the larger world, Mitchell arrived in Freeland via train and disembarked at the Lehigh Valley Rail Road passenger station, where he was greeted by a welcoming committee that consisted of an estimated 2,000 miners. These ardent supporters escorted him to his podium in the park, down streets lined with an additional 10,000 cheering spectators, many of whom came in from nearby patch towns for the occasion.⁴⁰ Before Mitchell came to the podium, one district vice president addressed the crowd in Polish and another in Lithuanian.⁴¹ Mitchell himself spoke for thirty minutes, reminding his audience of his goals of obtaining an eight-hour working

³⁷ Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Immigrant of our Times* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1919), 402.

³⁸ Anon, “Mitchell’s Tour,” *Freeland Tribune*, Aug. 4, 1905, front page.

³⁹ Donald Miller, interview for *American Experience*, transcript accessible through *American Experience* web site, portion titled “John Mitchell – The Union Organizer,” accessed October 23, 2010, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/1900/filmmore/reference/interview/miller_johnmitchellunion.html.

⁴⁰ Andrew E. Funk, Jr., “A History of the Freeland Area: No. 7,” *The Standard Speaker*, March 7, 1949, afternoon edition; Charles K. Stumpf, *Freeland* (Hazleton: Panorama, 199?), reprint of articles that originally appeared in the pages of *Panorama* magazine, July 1991 through Dec. 1993, 18.

⁴¹ Anon, “Mitchell’s Speech,” *Freeland Tribune*, Aug. 25, 1905, front page.

day for all miners and guaranteed union recognition by all contractors. As the editor of the local newspaper interpreted it, Mitchell promised to win for miners the status and benefits of a carpenter or a tailor: “the speaker said the union proposed to elevate the miner to a position when he will be as highly paid and as humanely employed as any craftsman in the United States.”⁴²

Those 8,500 people who crowded into Freeland’s public park to hear Mitchell speak gathered to support a man who inspired a sense of solidarity that had crossed both regional and ethnic boundaries. A year later, in September of 1906, area residents came together in a show of utter localism: the celebration of the town’s thirtieth anniversary of incorporation, a three-day event touted as Freeland’s Pearl Jubilee. From September 16-18, people packed the sidewalks to view the three parades showcased in the event: an opening-day march of nearly 2,500 school children, a “civic and industrial” parade on day two celebrating the town’s business and municipal leaders, and a closing “fantastic” parade for which local social clubs were invited to don fanciful costumes, with cash prizes going out to the best (Figure 2.6). (The winner was the Good Will Athletics and Social Club, which presented a “half mile representation of the drama ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’.”)⁴³ Near-constant music was provided throughout the day by the town’s four marching bands: the Citizens Band, the Slavonian Band, the Greek Catholic Band, and St. Ann’s Band (associated with the Italian Catholic church) (Figure 2.7). All of the musicians were paid for their efforts, and were not afraid to bargain for what they thought was a fair wage. Days before the celebration was to begin, the *Freeland Tribune* printed the following headline, “Music Question Halted Plans – Increase in Pay for Bands Causes

⁴² Anon, “Mitchell’s Speech,” *Freeland Tribune*, Aug. 25, 1905, front page.

⁴³ Anon, “Aftermath of the Jubilee,” *Freeland Tribune*, September 21, 1906, front page.

Serious Delay.”⁴⁴ When not viewing a parade, townspeople and those who came in from out of town (attendance figures have been estimated at 17,000 for the three-day event) could view vaudeville shows at local venues, ride a merry-go-round brought in for the occasion, or opt for the thrill of a ten-car Ferris wheel, which would, at its peak, take them up beyond the rooftops of their two-story town (Figure 2.8). Gambling had been expressly forbidden during the event, but other not-purely wholesome diversions were available. A “hoochee-coochee show” was permitted to operate, although the town burgess did ask that the exhibition be “toned down.”⁴⁵ Stories in the *Freeland Tribune* stress both the excitement and mania of the celebration, and the respectable behavior of participants. A report on the opening ceremony states that “Centre street was a mass of humanity, which jostled and jarred and crushed and crowded” but adds the caveat “in a good-natured manner.”⁴⁶ A later report mentions the abundance of “confetti, ticklers, dusters and paper bags” on the streets, but assures readers that there was “no sign of anything that the most fastidious can object to.”⁴⁷ Commemorative postcards showing bunting-draped buildings, rows of electric lights arched from lamppost to lamppost, and parade spectators standing on front-porch roofs were issued just days after the closing ceremony, and survive in private collections to this day.⁴⁸

In retrospect, these two crowd-pleasing, crowd-creating events stand as a kind of opening rally for Freeland’s good times. In the years immediately following the Pearl

⁴⁴ Anon, “Music Question Halted Plans,” *Freeland Tribune*, September 12, 1906, front page.

⁴⁵ Anon, “Street Attractions,” *Freeland Tribune*, September 19, 1906, front page.

⁴⁶ Anon, “Official Opening of Pearl Jubilee,” *Freeland Tribune*, September 17, 1906, front page.

⁴⁷ Anon, “Good Natured Crowds,” *Freeland Tribune*, September 19, 1906, front page.

⁴⁸ History of Freeland, Pa, “1906 Pearl Jubilee,” accessed November 02, 2010, <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/ct0u/1906jubilee.html>.

Jubilee, Freeland's economy continued to grow, while the town's population of immigrant workers and commercial entrepreneurs coalesced into a working community, with an involved municipal government, a strong local bank and public-school system, a rich set of multicultural traditions, and an established custom of solidarity in all industries—silk mill, overall factory, railroads, and mines—which gave workers the confidence to periodically stand up against their employers to demand better working conditions and higher pay. When efforts began to revive the town following the post World-War-I decline in coal production, this Jubilee-Era Freeland was the Freeland that residents were hoping to restore. The span of time from the Jubilee to the beginning of that decline was not even two decades, but to residents who loved the town, this highly functional community became the gold standard, the vision that kept those who stayed from moving away even as the current quality of life in the community declined. As geographer Ben Marsh wrote of the anthracite region in general, “in the nineteenth century the tension between people's desires and the reality drew them toward the future they hoped for; in the second half of the twentieth century that tension has drawn them toward the past they knew.”⁴⁹

Like all growing towns, Freeland was busy with construction in the 1900s and 1910s. In just the seven years between the Sanborn Fire Insurance surveys in 1905 and in 1912, Freeland's domestic buildings increased by 270 units, from 707 to 980. Prior to this, the town had seen less significant growth in housing stock, from 626 units in 1900. The 1900 map records an interesting new type of domestic building, a tenement building. By 1905, a second tenement had been constructed. Both were situated in the middle of

⁴⁹ Ben Marsh, “Continuity and Decline in the Anthracite Towns of Pennsylvania,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (September 1987), 337.

town. Previous to their construction, those who did not own or rent homes had three options: live with a family member, board at a hotel, or board at a private residence, paying a modest weekly rent for the right to eat with the family and use a single bed (not always in a private room). While hotel living and boarding arrangements continued to be utilized by bachelors well into the middle and even end of the twentieth century, apartment living was an appealing new alternative for a family or individual who wanted more privacy but could not afford the rent on a house, or who did not want to settle for one of the newer homes, which were typically very small and situated on the edges of town.⁵⁰ By 1912, several blocks of these new, small, attached double houses had been constructed on the southern side of the Lehigh Valley Railroad tracks, an area that in 1905 contained just an icehouse and a lumber yard. Extensive new development also occurred west of Centre Street. On the 1912 map, four new streets have been mapped west of Centre. The houses in this section of town were also all double, and even smaller than those built south of the railroad tracks. Many were what are sometimes called “one by one” homes, consisting of just one room on the first floor and one room above. However, even the smallest homes typically had a front and/or back porch, and all were built onto lots large enough to allow the homeowner to add extensive additions, were he or she someday in the financial position to do so. All of this new construction was still not enough to fully meet demand. The *Freeland Tribune* reported in April of 1915 that

⁵⁰ Frank Balon recalls that his family had single, male boarders living in rooms above their bar into the 1980s; Frank Balon comment on History of Freeland, Pa. website, “20th and early 21st-century businesses; Bars, Breweries, Bottling Works; Balon’s Bar and Grill,” accessed December 12, 2010, <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/ct0u/20Cfood-drink.html>.

“Freeland’s population could be increased by 500 within a month if the town had vacant dwellings to accommodate the number.”⁵¹

Freeland’s commercial buildings also increased in these years, although in more modest numbers. Between 1905 and 1912, 25 commercial buildings were added to the town’s already-robust group of 190 commercial structures. Some of these were purely business buildings, with multiple floors of stores and offices, and others were live/work spaces, where kitchens, living rooms, and bedrooms shared a building with street-level storefronts. The two-story wood-frame building at 530 Centre Street that would become Ralph Pecora’s home and tailor shop for more than fifty years was a new building in 1905, sitting vacant beside a three-story brick furniture store, on a lot that had contained a single home, built crookedly onto the lot, in 1900. In 1912, a millinery was renting the shop at 530 Centre and the furniture store (first called Albert’s and then Pitman’s) added a fourth story to the building, making it the tallest structure in town, although not necessarily the most prominent, as Freeland is a hilly town and 526 Centre Street sat on a downward slope.⁵² (See figures 2.9, 2.10, and 2.11 for Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of the building at 530 Centre Street in 1900, 1905, and 1912.) Other businesses that would be Ralph’s neighbors for decades established themselves in this boom time. Morris Chenetz, whose wife and daughter would become good friends of Ralph’s wife and daughter, opened a men’s clothing store at 529 Centre Street in 1906. The Refowich Building, home to the Refowich Movie Theater, which would entertain Ralph’s children several nights a week when they were teenagers and young adults, was opened in 1914,

⁵¹ Anon, “Vacant Dwellings in Great Demand,” *Freeland Tribune*, April 19, 1915, front page.

⁵² Stumpf, 24

in a new building that replaced a saloon, a cobbler, and a billiards hall.⁵³ In May of 1915, James Gallagher became the second men's clothier to occupy the block, taking one of the two storefronts in the Refowich Building. In 1916 or 1917—family history is vague on the exact year—Ralph Pecora and his brother Michael became the third sellers of men's suits to occupy this booming block within a booming town.

The Refowich Building was a showcase building (Figure 2.12). It was just two stories high but built to make an impression, with an elaborate marble entranceway, dormered second-story windows, and a towering frontispiece stretching another half-story beyond the roofline. The building, and the theater it housed, was owned by three brothers, Jake, Ike, and Moe Refowich. (Their relation to the Abe Refowich, whose clothing store went into bankruptcy more than a decade ago, is undetermined.) From the beginning, these brothers demonstrated a flair for grand gestures and self promotion, and repeatedly experienced the failure of their best-laid plans. After two years of construction, the grand opening celebration, planned for Feb. 16, 1914, had to be cancelled due to one of the worst winter storms in 20 years.⁵⁴ The theater opened a day late, but apparently still in a grand style, as “all evening expressions of delight that the town had such a pretentious photoplay and vaudeville home were heard.”⁵⁵ The following year, the onstage, and much advertised, marriage of Refowich pianist Walter LeRoy deZine and chorus girl Miss Grace Bird had to be cancelled when no clergyman in town would perform such a public ceremony. The couple married quietly in a church.⁵⁶

⁵³ Stumpf, 19 and 23.

⁵⁴ Stumpf, 23.

⁵⁵ Anon, “Grand Opening,” *Freeland Tribune*, February 19, 1914, front page.

⁵⁶ Stumpf, 27.

The theater itself, as a theater, was an unquestionable success, selling an estimated 150,000 tickets within its first year of operation.⁵⁷ The Refowich was the newest, largest, and most ornate of four movie theaters in town at this time (and according to advertisements placed in the local paper, “one of the safest ever erected”).⁵⁸ Even in this small town, there were enough patrons to go around. Attendance figures for all Freeland movie theaters in 1915 have been estimated at an astonishing 2,000 ticket holder per day.⁵⁹ Going to the movies was an everyday, sometimes multiple-times-day, activity for Freeland residents in the 1910s, and would remain so well into the 1940s. The admission fees—usually five cents, although the Refowich charged ten cents for balcony seats—were modest and the typical program of several reels of short films and one or two vaudeville acts had a broad appeal.⁶⁰ All of the films were of course silent at this time, but Freeland residents had an opportunity to see their first “talkie” in 1913, when Thomas Edison’s “Kinetophone” was demonstrated at the Grand Opera House.⁶¹

In addition to this new form of entertainment, Freeland was acclimating to new forms of communication and transportation in the first two decades of the twentieth century. By 1916, there were 262 telephones in operation in Freeland, an increase of 50 from the year before.⁶² Ralph Pecora is remembered by Stanley D’Amore, whose stepfather worked for Ralph in the 1920s and 30s, as an early owner of a business

⁵⁷ Stumpf, 26.

⁵⁸ Display Ad, *Freeland Tribune*, February 13, 1914, front page.

⁵⁹ Stumpf, 27

⁶⁰ Stumpf, 20.

⁶¹ Stumpf, 22.

⁶² Stumpf, 26-27.

telephone, but the exact date at which he acquired a telephone is unknown.⁶³ Almost certainly, he would not have invested in this technology until he moved from his mother's to his own home on Centre Street. This would have been right around the time that an airplane was first spotted flying over the town, in 1916.⁶⁴ Automobiles were in the news in Freeland as early as 1905. A report in the "Local Notes" of the *Freeland Tribune* records an automobile accident on August 28, 1905 and just two weeks later the paper printed the rumor (which turned out to be untrue) that an automobile factory, the Matheson Motor Car Company, would be relocating to Wilkes-Barre from Holyoke, Massachusetts.⁶⁵ Between the 1905 and 1912 visits by a Sanborn Fire Insurance agent, eight "garages"—one commercial and seven private—were added to the town's built structures. The private garages appear in the back or side yards of large, freestanding (as opposed to double) homes, many of them adorned with dormer windows and wrap-around porches. These garages replace what had been private livery stables, constructions so ubiquitous when Sanborn began mapping American cities in 1867 that agents adopted the easily executed shorthand of drawing an "x" between their four corners. The single commercial garage in town in 1912 was a large and spacious building beside the Freeland Lumber Company's storage shed. Stanley D'Amore remembers Ralph Pecora as an early owner of an automobile, but the earliest record of Ralph as a car owner is a photograph of him standing with his elbow cocked against the open window of a pristine Ford with a 1928 license plate (Figure 2.13). By 1928, two-

⁶³ Stanley D'Amore, interview by author, Freeland, Pennsylvania, June 31, 2009.

⁶⁴ Stumpf, 28.

⁶⁵ Anon, "Local Notes Written Up," *Freeland Tribune*, August 28, 1905, front page; Anon, "New Industry for Wilkes-Barre," *Freeland Tribune*, September 13, 1905, front page.

thirds of the residents of the “Middletown” studied by Robert and Helen Merrell Lynd in the 1920s were car-owners, and the Sanborn Insurance Agency had developed a code for the automobile-housing structures that were becoming as ubiquitous as livery stables had been fifteen years earlier, marking all garages with a simple “A.”⁶⁶

The number of new technologies which became commonplace in the first few decades of the 20th century—and which continued to emerge right on through to its end—is astonishing, but people’s worlds did not, of course, change overnight. The new mixed with the old, integrating into a framework of traditional methods and habits that, for the older generations, would always be the “normal” against which change was measured. Freelanders rode a Ferris wheel at the Pearl Jubilee celebration in 1906 and were called upon, through a notice in the local paper, to help a neighbor search for a lost cow in 1907.⁶⁷ Town residents saw their first “talkie” in 1913 and read reports of dog fights, mud puddles on Centre Street, and the first robins of spring in the “Freeland News in Brief Form” section of the *Freeland Tribune* that same year.⁶⁸ Ralph Pecora enrolled in a five-week course of instruction in garment cutting in New York City in 1908 and seven young women listed themselves as “Apprentice Dressmakers” on the Census form in 1910. Still, there is no doubt that Freelanders, and Americans in general, perceived themselves as living in a new time as the 20th century dawned and progressed, a perception that seems to have been being both exciting and disarming. Advertisements in the local newspaper insist upon the freshness and currency of championed products,

⁶⁶ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 1982), 64.

⁶⁷ Anon, “Items of Note,” *Freeland Tribune*, August 21, 1907, front page.

⁶⁸ Anon, “Freeland News in Brief Form,” *Freeland Tribune*, Feb. 24, 1914, front page; Anon, “Freeland News in Brief Form,” *Freeland Tribune*, Feb. 28, 1913, front page; Anon, “Freeland News in Brief Form,” *Freeland Tribune*, March 10, 1913, front page.

while preserving some of the rhetoric of a local, personal, and agricultural way of life. An advertisement for the Hotel Schultz appearing in the *Freeland Tribune* in 1907 promised a setting in which everything is “new and up-to-date” and a property that was “managed personally by the proprietor.” Notices for the “Big Wilkes Barre Fair,” held in August of that year, guaranteed that both the “great display of merchants and manufacturers” and the “cattle, sheep, swine, and poultry” will be lit by enough electric light to make the night “as light as day.”⁶⁹

Advertising itself was a new practice for small-town, small-scale businessmen, one which they were warned to ignore at their own peril. A 1908 notice in the *Freeland Tribune* titled “Use Printers Ink” (itself an advertisement for the paper’s advertising department) alerted readers to the “serious menace” of mail-order houses that were “flood[ing] the country with advertising” and advised them to “resort to publicity and advertise in the local press.”⁷⁰ Tailors were particularly bothered by the question of advertising. For hundreds of years, tailors had relied upon word-of-mouth and personal reputation to establish and secure a customer base. By the 1910s, with ready-made manufacturers also “flooding the country with advertising,” trade leaders began advising tailors to “resort to” direct customer appeals as well. The trade publications that Ralph saved recommended two types of advertising: co-operative advertisements, prepared and funded by unions or trade organizations, and individual advertisements, touting the output of a particular tailor or tailoring firm. The first had the appeal of saving a tailor the task of crafting ad copy and the expense of having it printed; the second had the advantage of personalization. Examples of both types of ads are printed in these

⁶⁹ Display Ad, *Freeland Tribune*, August 21, 1907, front page.

⁷⁰ Anon, “Use Printer’s Ink,” *Freeland Tribune*, May 1, 1908, front page.

publications as models for tailors seeking guidance on writing and designing advertisements. Many of these model ads take the risky tactic of speaking directly of the many physical imperfections that might make ready-made clothing an unattractive choice for an individual. “There’s no reason why a man whom nature forgot to favor with Apollo-like limbs should be punished by ill-fitting trousers” one states, and another, headed by the observation that that “Most Men Are ‘Lop Sided’,” promises that “A REAL tailor Corrects nature’s mistakes.”⁷¹ In comparison to the “Stouts, slims, short stout men, big and little men, men who are built ‘close to the ground’, long bodies and short legs, men with slightly stooping shoulders” that appear in the 1914-15 ready-made style book mentioned previously, these characterizations are comically unflattering.⁷²

Not all advice on advertising provided by tailoring publications was this clumsy. *Modern Fashions*, the most business-savvy of the publications Ralph saved, is also the most perceptive regarding advertising. A 1907 essay advises that “cut and dried forms of advertising should be avoided” and “that advertisements should be changed daily or weekly.”⁷³ Advertisements for affiliated products that appear in the publication’s pages are themselves models of what is now considered effective advertising. Graphics are simple and bold, text is short and punchy, and promises are vague. And yet these advertisements provide no justification for the price difference between tailor-made and ready-made goods. In fact, they opt to pretend that the price difference does not exist. When it came to the price war, tailors found themselves in a no-win situation at the beginning of the twentieth century. They could use the same catchy phrases and flattery

⁷¹ Anon, “How to Advertise,” *Sartorial Art Journal*, September 1914, p. 129.

⁷² Kidwell and Christman, 107.

⁷³ Anon, “Advertising,” *Modern Fashions*, January 1907, 20.

as ready-made manufacturers, but without the deal-sealing price advantage; or they could directly address price, and risk sounding “out-of-touch” and paternalistic, like the following list of “Don’ts which it will certainly do the public no harm to make a careful note of” from a 1912 leaflet issued by the Journeyman Tailor’s Union: “Don’t buy cheap clothing. It means the cheapest material – shoddy and cotton, cheap labor and the worst working conditions. Don’t buy of the merchant who advertises \$30 and \$40 suits at \$15 and \$20. He underrates public intelligence. Insist on getting *your money’s worth in clothes* not in advertising. Don’t be humbugged.”⁷⁴ The fact of the matter was that a large portion of the population would eagerly buy a \$40 suit for \$20, if given the opportunity, and would consider it a sign of their own intelligence to have gotten such a good deal.

As Barbara Tuchman writes in *A Distant Mirror*, six hundred years ago tailors working in Europe and England were protected by commercial laws designed to keep all goods at a “just price” (for both producer and consumer). Among other things, these laws forbade “working late by artificial light, employing extra apprentices or wife and under-age children, and advertising of wares or praising them to the detriment of others.”⁷⁵ The laws were regularly broken, and merchants paid the stipulated fines, but they were on the books; these were the sanctioned rules of the games. By the Renaissance, these types of laws had disappeared, but the tailoring trade remained effectively protected by the high demand for the goods they produced and the necessarily slow process of producing them. Regardless of how many children were employed or

⁷⁴ Anon, “The Custom Tailor’s Union Label,” *American Tailor and Cutter*, July 1912, 11.

⁷⁵ Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 1978), 37.

how many lamps burned, every tailor-made garment required a set number of man-hours of labor, and thus could not be sold beneath a certain price. Prices also remained stable through scarcity of supply. A tailor wouldn't produce a garment until it had been requested, and thus never had any extra stock to clear out. Industrialization changed everything. Speed of production became paramount, supply abundant, and price the primary criterion for customer purchases. Regardless of how many efficiencies and modern techniques a tailor adopted, he could never catch up with the machines, or machine-made prices. Once the basic terms of the price game had been established, neither tailoring trade publications, nor cooperative advertisements, nor advertisements for individual firms ever found a way to convince the general public that they should pay twice as much for a higher-quality version of the same basic goods.

And yet tailors themselves, talking to one another in trade publications, remained optimistic: that small efficiencies would lower production costs significantly, that a certain class of men would never buy ready-made garments, that they could find the right words to justify the price of their goods. This optimism has a counterpart in the optimism of anthracite residents regarding the future of their communities. Outside observers were shocked by the environmental destructions and social chaos of coal communities, and certain that the economic boom of mining activity could only end in a degraded bust. In 1904, the sociologist Peter Roberts described the anthracite region as “ugly, repulsive, base, and depressing.” He described an environment characterized by “black creeks full of water laden with coal-dust,” “acres of culm heaps ... [which] stand like black monsters,” “scores of mining patches whose houses have been built with depressing uniformity,” and “heaps of ashes, tin-cans, old bottles, empty beer kegs.” Such an

environment, he declared, “inflicts upon the man incalculable wrongs which influence their whole life.”⁷⁶ Around the same time, the residents of Anthracite communities celebrated their communities in events like the Pearl Jubilee, and invested in their futures through municipal improvements, like the 1907 paving of Freeland’s Centre Street, the 1911 replacement of the roof of the dance pavilion in the Freeland public park, and the 1913 addition to Freeland’s public elementary school, which nearly doubled its size.⁷⁷

These two perceptions of the same entities (in these cases a trade and a community) co-existed, and inspired equally strong allegiance in those looking in from outside and those looking out from in. Ultimately, the doomsayers were right—tailoring did not remain a viable trade, coal communities did die with the profitability of coal—but they were not immediately right. Ralph was a tailor until the day he died in 1959, and his hometown was still able to inspire a sense of pride and loyalty in his grandchildren who grew up there. Outsiders have nothing to lose by prescribing big-picture, long-term hopelessness. Insiders, required to live in that “hopeless” environment, are more apt to look at the near future, the small picture, the “this and that” which can be improved about their everyday lives.

Before his marriage, Ralph’s every day consisted of working and saving money. Freeland’s prosperous years were good years for this young tailor as well. Between his father’s death in 1905 and the next visit to Freeland by the Sanborn agent in 1912, the Pecora family built an addition to their house on Washington Street that increased the living space by about 60%. While Ralph was the eldest son of a non-working widow, he

⁷⁶ Peter Roberts, *Anthracite Coal Communities: A Study of the Demography, the Social, Educational and Moral Life of the Anthracite Region* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1904), 155.

⁷⁷ Stumpf, 19, 20, and 23.

was not solely responsible for the family's financial survival, or for paying for this investment. For the first two decades of Ralph's career, the tailor shop was a family business, billed as "Pecora Brothers." While Ralph was away at cutting school in 1908, his then 17-year old brother Michael watched the shop in his absence.⁷⁸ In 1910, Ralph and Michael are both listed as "tailors" on the 1910 census form, although Ralph is cited as working in his "own shop," while Michael is marked as an employee. (See Figure 2.14 for an image of Ralph and Michael from around this time.) In 1910, Ralph also had a second employee working for him, his 16-year old sister Louise. Meanwhile, 21-year old Madeline, the eldest daughter in the family, was working at the Freeland Overall Manufacturing Company.

It is not known why Madeline worked out of the home, in an industrial garment factory, while her younger sister stayed home and worked with her brother at custom construction. Certainly economic diversification was a good strategy for any family. While business necessarily fluctuated at the tailor shop, work at the factory was reliable and steady. (An early photograph, taken in daylight, of Ralph and Michael playing checkers in front of the haberdashery counter of the shop at 530 Centre Street suggests that these young tailors had many idle moments during their work day; see Figure 2.15.) It is also possible that the elder Madeline was anxious to spend time away from her family while the younger Louis preferred to be home. As the years progressed, these positions switched. Madeline married a Freeland man—John Bitetti, a carpenter—and settled down in one-half of a double home on Centre Street, four blocks from her brother's tailor shop and six blocks from her childhood home. Louise, after working with her brother for ten years, went to nursing school and ended up in Brooklyn, where she

⁷⁸ Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview by author, Fishkill, New York, June 14, 2009.

became the director of nursing at Miseracordia Hospital. The remaining Pecora children—14-year old Amelia, 12-year old Mary, 9-year old Elisabeth, and 5-year old Matilda—were all in school in 1910 and not working.⁷⁹

It is likely that, in the first years of operating his own business, Ralph Pecora had the same types of customers as his father once had—native-born men who, as Peter Roberts suggests, had internalized the American concern for conspicuous consumption that would motivate them to pay more for a custom-made suit. While Freeland's streetscapes and neighborhoods were changing rapidly at the turn of the twentieth century, and its population growing in absolute numbers, the town's class system remained fairly steady during the years that Ralph moved from childhood to young adulthood. In 1900 and in 1910, just over 50% of households (53% in 1900 and 54% in 1910) were headed by first-generation immigrants and just under 50% (47% in 1900 and 46% in 1910) by native-born residents. The relative proportions of white- and blue-collar workers also remained fairly steady, with a slight increase of white-collar workers: from 25% in 1900 to 27% in 1910.

Determining white vs. blue-collar employment is a murky area when analyzing an employment structure very different from the factory- vs. office-worker base that the terms were designed for. Some occupations are obviously white collar: Freeland's clergy, attorneys, teachers, physicians, dentists, merchants, and municipal officials clearly fall into the "higher status" category. Beyond these clear cases, some judgment calls needed to be made. For the sake of this tally, all men (and the few women) who owned their own businesses were counted as white-collar employees—whether butchers,

⁷⁹ 1910 Federal Census (Population Schedule), "Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Freeland Borough, Fifth Ward, Dwelling 153, Family 213, Mary Pecora household."

barbers, carpenters, tailors, milliners, saloon keepers, hotel proprietors, or garment factory owners. All laborers, servants, and garment-factory employees were counted as blue collar, along with the vast majority of those employed in the dominant industry, mining, the exceptions being the few white-collar mine foremen and bookkeepers. Blue-collar vs. white-collar occupation does not of course correspond directly to economic security or wealth. While the town's doctors and attorneys certainly had more money than its day laborers, it is difficult to know whether a saloon keeper or a miner earned a better living. A look at those families that could afford live-in servants reveals some surprises. While the vast majority of the 68 young women employed as live-in servants in 1910 reside with merchants, attorneys, clergymen, saloon keepers, and factory owners, 5 of them live with miners and 1 with a school janitor. It was also fairly common for a man to begin his working years as a miner and then transition into another line of work, most commonly owning a saloon or a grocery store.

One peculiarity of the class structure in Freeland, as in most anthracite towns, was the lack of a resident owner class. As Rowland Berthoff writes, "the uppermost social class of the anthracite region did not live there, infrequently visited it, and played no part in high society. They were the capitalists, chiefly New York and Philadelphia men, who controlled the dominant railroad and mining corporations of the region."⁸⁰ It is possible that in Freeland in the early twentieth century, as the anthropologist Dan Rose said of nearby Hazleton in the 1970s, "[c]lass was not much of a viable folk model." By "folk model" Rose means a vision of society, and of local history, that corresponds with the residents' own consciousness of their social reality. After completing an extensive

⁸⁰ Berthoff, 275.

ethnographic study of Hazleton, Rose determined that “people, even from the working class, consider themselves middle class.”⁸¹

Anecdotal evidence suggests that rather than leveling up, like Hazleton residents in the 1970s, Freeland residents in the early twentieth century leveled down. Katharine Ravina, born in 1922 and a resident of Freeland for the rest of her life, offered the following playful invitation at the end of an interview, “Come to Freeland, where we’re all peasants.” Her father came to Freeland as a miner—working, as the majority of Italian miners did, “in the strippings”—then made his living as a shoemaker, owning his own shop on Centre Street for 20 years, before opening a café in the front room of his house in 1941.⁸² She is a secretary at a nearby state park, and was still working in 2009, at the age of 87.⁸³ Stanley D’Amore, whose step-father worked for Ralph Pecora and who was born in 1916, described the Freeland of his childhood as “one integrated ghetto,” where people from all backgrounds and of all professions lived and worked side by side. On Saturday nights, he said, “The whole town would emerge on Center Street from 7 until 9...The streets were so crowded, we [young people] would walk along the gutter line to make room for the elderly.”⁸⁴ Of course the fond memories of people in their 80s and 90s for the town of their childhood should not be taken as fact. In their study of an unnamed bituminous mining town, Herman Lantz and J.S. McCrary also found that informants denied the existence of class, but that their denials exhibited a

⁸¹ Dan Rose, *Energy Transition and the Local Community: A Theory of Society Applied to Hazleton, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 131.

⁸² Stumpf, 41.

⁸³ Katharine Ravina, telephone interview by author, June 17, 2009.

⁸⁴ Stanley D’Amore interview, June 31, 2009.

“tendency to point inadvertently to indices of social class.”⁸⁵ The same tendency is evident in Katharine’s use of the term “peasants” and Stanley’s description of Freeland as a “ghetto.” Additional statements made by both Katharine and Stanley point even more directly to an unacknowledged awareness of class distinctions. Katharine said that her family members were never customers of Ralph Pecora’s because “we couldn’t afford him.” And, although he didn’t use the term, Stanley effectively described Ralph as a higher-class person by mentioning his early possession of an automobile and a telephone.

Whether high-class or low-class—and whether or not those distinctions were openly acknowledged—every working person living in Freeland ultimately had coal to thank for his or her living. As discussed in Chapter 1, Freeland was one of a few towns in the Anthracite region to develop significant economic diversification. In addition to the “chief industry of coal” a 1910 Encyclopedia Britannica entry notes the borough’s “foundries and machine shops of considerable important,” along with its “silk, overalls, beer and hames” factories. The town’s several dozen small businesses were another layer of economic activity, one which employed as many people, if not more, than the town’s non-coal industries. And yet none of these enterprises would have existed if it weren’t for coal. Coal was the driving economic force, the reason that the railroad tracks on which silk and overalls were shipped were laid through these small towns, that the immigrants who worked in these factories and owned these small businesses traveled across the Atlantic to settle in the region, that an Austrian saloon keeper or Slovak grocer could enjoy the necessary business to maintain a viable establishment and maybe even employ a live-in servant. When anthracite coal was good business, all businesses in the

⁸⁵ Herman R. Lantz and J. S. McCrary, *People of Coal Town* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 216.

area did well, through a kind of economic capillary effect. Large amounts of money (in aggregate, not to any individual miner) was paid out by mining corporations to mine employees and then trickled up through a local network of saloon keepers, grocers, doctors, movie theater owners, tailors. Anthracite coal was doing very well in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and anthracite coal communities did well as a result.

By 1915, Ralph Pecora was doing well enough—and/or his fiancé was old enough—to travel to Brooklyn and bring Madeline Greco back to Freeland as his wife (Figure 2.16). The wedding took place in Brooklyn. Prior to the marriage, the couple had never been alone together, although one family story has him stealing a kiss from her in a hallway while a guardian walked on ahead.⁸⁶ It would be some time before they enjoyed real privacy. They spent their honeymoon night in the Greco home at 332 Withers Street in Brooklyn—then a neighborhood of first-generation Italian immigrants and their children—and the following day traveled back to Freeland, via train, along with Madeline’s mother Maria, who was anxious to ensure that, as her granddaughter-in-law Carolyn Pecora later put it, “everything was on the up and up.”⁸⁷ In Freeland, they would live in the Washington Street house with Ralph’s mother and siblings, none of whom Madeline had met before, for a year before moving into their own home. Thirty years later, Carolyn Pecora made a similar journey to Freeland. She had met Ralph Pecora, Jr., then stationed at a naval aviation engineering school, in Nashville and married him in 1946. After the war ended, Ralph, Jr. and Carolyn moved back to Freeland and lived

⁸⁶ Brenda Pecora interview, June 30, 2009.

⁸⁷ Carolyn Pecora interview, October 19, 2008; 1910 Federal Census (Population Schedule), “New York, Kings County, Borough of Brooklyn, Fifteenth Ward, Dwelling 84, Family 332, Giovanni Greggo household..”

with his family, of whom all but Ralph's brother Carl were strangers to her. Carolyn remembers that the train from Nashville left them off in Hazleton and that Ralph's parents picked them up in their car and drove them back to Freeland through the farms and fields that dominated the valley between the Hazleton and Broad Mountains, rather than taking the more direct route, past the dreary patch towns and strip mines which surrounded Freeland. Carolyn remembers being shocked by the mining landscape when she did first see it, as well as being startled by the foreign accents she heard on Freeland's streets (in Nashville, she had known exactly two people who spoke with an accent) and by the sheer number of bars in town (Nashville had been a "dry city" until 1939).⁸⁸

Madeline Greco Pecora, traveling directly into Freeland through the region's other coal towns, was given no bucolic introduction to the anthracite region, but the neighborhood of Brooklyn she came from had far more in common with Freeland than did Carolyn's hometown of Nashville. Like in Brooklyn, many of her new neighbors in Freeland were first-generation immigrants who spoke English with an accent, if at all. Freeland's ethnic enclaves were much smaller than Brooklyn's, and the town's Italians were never numerous enough to claim even a single city block for themselves, but, like in Brooklyn, recent immigrants lived near one another, shopped in one another's stores, drank in one another's saloons, and established ethnicity-specific churches. Also like Brooklyn, Freeland was almost entirely a man-made environment by 1915. The Pearl Jubilee postcard images, taken nine years earlier, show streets, sidewalks, stores, homes, lampposts, and a great many three-story electricity poles towering over most buildings, but no trees, grass, flowers, or bushes (Figure 2.17). The town's sole green space, the five-block public park, was just as man-made as the sidewalks and the streets, and just as

⁸⁸ Carolyn Pecora interview, June 14, 2009.

dependent on the intervention of man for upkeep. In July of 1914, its trees were in such bad shape—likely from a combination of the coal dust in the air and a summer draught that Mrs. E. B. Coxe, the widow of the once-mine owner, paid a gardener to nurse them back to health.⁸⁹ If anything about Freeland was unfamiliar or foreign to Madeline, it would have been the slow pace and neighborly concern of small-town life. Madeline may not have enjoyed a sense of big-city anonymity and freedom on her Brooklyn block, but the city was large and, assuming she was allowed to travel on her own, opportunities for getting away from the watchful eyes of her neighbors existed. In Freeland, the whole town had watchful eyes, a characteristic of small-town life that the municipal government utilized when addressing social problems. The year before Madeline arrived, Freeland's Burgess issued a "jag list" of "intemperate and habitual drunks" who should not be served in any of the town's saloons.⁹⁰ In April of 1915, the borough enacted a 9:00 curfew for all children under 16. A child caught breaking the curfew was brought home to his or her parents, who were responsible for paying a fine.⁹¹

Madeline's children and grandchildren remember her describing the transition from life in Brooklyn to life in Freeland as a tough one. Her granddaughter Patty Kudlick said, "At first she hated leaving Brooklyn. She did not like coming to this small town area when she was used to living in Brooklyn."⁹² Although there were plenty of people living in Freeland in 1915 who were not born there, Americans born in other states were actually quite rare. More than half of the heads-of-household in 1910 were

⁸⁹ Stumpf, 24.

⁹⁰ Stumpf, 24.

⁹¹ Anon, "Council Passes a Curfew Law," *Freeland Tribune*, April 7, 1915, front page.

⁹² Patty Kudlick interview, July 26, 2009.

immigrants from other countries, but among Freeland's 7,419 residents in 1910, just 45 were born out of state. (With the exception of two from Michigan, all are from Mid-Atlantic or Northeastern states.)⁹³ Those born in other small towns in Connecticut or New Jersey likely had few distinguishing traits from Freeland's Pennsylvania-born residents, but Madeline's Brooklyn accent did attract attention. Granddaughter, Pamela Drobney remembers her mother telling her that when Madeline moved to Freeland "people used to sort of laugh at her because of her accent . . . Like a dolla, instead of a dollar, and that stuff . . . she was very self conscious about that."⁹⁴ Within Freeland's small-town culture, Madeline must also have been unusually aggressive in her dealings with local merchants, for several people identified her determination to get the best price on every purchase as her one outstanding trait. Stanley D'Amore, who was friends with Ralph and Madeline's oldest son John, as well as the stepson of one of Ralph's employees, remembers Madeline reviewing the food purchases Stanley would make before he and John would go on camping trips together: "she made sure that we purchased the food items at bargain prices. A penny higher than the bargain price was a no-no."⁹⁵ Madeline's grandson, Carl Pecora, Jr. remembers that his grandmother wouldn't even buy a bottle of ketchup, before pricing it at each of the two grocery stores in town. If she were dealing with a merchant with whom she could bargain, the negotiations could go on for a long time. Carl, Jr. remembers the lengthy series of interactions which preceded her purchase of a coat:

⁹³ Andrew Funk, Jr., "A History of the Freeland Area: No. 8," *The Standard Speaker*, March 8, 1949; 1910 Federal Census (Population Schedule), "Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Freeland Borough."

⁹⁴ Pamela Drobney, interview by author, Sugarloaf, Pennsylvania, June 28, 2009.

⁹⁵ Stanley D'Amore interview, June 31, 2009; quote comes directly from a handwritten sheet of remembrances prepared by Mr. D'Amore for the author.

I remember her with Old Man Racusin. He had a clothing store across the street. She went in and she looked at a coat one time. It must have took her a couple of weeks before she got this coat. She'd go in there and she'd be bickering with him: "Oh, it's too much." Then she'd come home. Then he'd come over the tailor shop and offer her a deal. "No, that's too much." Then she'd go over there, and this went on, and finally she got it.⁹⁶

Madeline's son Ralph Pecora, Jr. directly attributes his mother's aggressiveness in the marketplace to her Brooklyn upbringing. He remembers his mother telling him how her own mother trained her to "trick" the butcher into selling her freshly ground meat, rather than meat which had been ground earlier and sat out all day:

[Her mother] wanted her to pick out the meat from the cabinet, which was chilled with ice at that time. She wanted ground meat, but not to tell the butcher that. Pick out the piece of meat, and when he gets ready to wrap it, say, "Oh my mother wants that cut up, wants it ground." And then he would take the meat and reluctantly cut it, and put it in. Because they didn't have good refrigeration ... pick out a nice piece of meat, get it cut, get it ground.⁹⁷

Although she moved from one Italian household to another, Madeline also had to adjust to a different family culture from the one she had been raised in. When asked to characterize Madeline, children and grandchildren often used her husband Ralph as a point of comparison. Various people described Madeline as being "more outgoing," "more talkative," and "more of a nervous type" than her husband.⁹⁸ Also striking is the fact that Ralph is primarily remembered in general terms—"dignified," "patient," "reserved"⁹⁹—while Madeline is remembered for specific statements or actions: he

⁹⁶ Stanley D'Amore interview, June 31, 2009; Carl Pecora, Jr. interview, June 30, 2009.

⁹⁷ Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

⁹⁸ Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008; Pamela Drobney interview, June 28, 2009; Madeline Pecora Nugent, interview by author, Newport, Rhode Island, May 23, 2009.

⁹⁹ Carl Pecora, Jr. interview, June 30, 2009; Madeline Pecora Nugent interview, May 23, 2009; Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008; Carolyn Pecora interview, October 19, 2008.

didn't accrue stories, and she did. Her son Ralph, Jr. remembers the time that word got around that a neighbor woman, Mrs. Corrigan, was complaining that Madeline was too friendly with Mr. Corrigan. "[M]y mother's comment on that was, when she heard that, she said who in the hell would want him!"¹⁰⁰ Ralph's sister Amelia passed a story on to her daughter Madeline Nugent about the time that her brother Carl (Carl, Jr.'s father) slid down a rough wooden board and ended up with splinters all along his thighs and backside. Madeline refused to tend to him, instead calling on her husband to act the nursemaid.¹⁰¹ One story remembered very well by the author is the Christmas that this same Carl was given nothing but coal in his stocking. Ralph, Jr. remembers that this harsh punishment was meted out by his mother, and as payback for his mother's frustrations: "[Carl] gave Mom a hard time" that year.¹⁰² All of these stories suggest that—in addition to being, as Carl Pecora, Jr. put it, "cheap"—Madeline had a strong will and a tendency toward sometimes abrupt honesty. And yet, she must have had a sense of humor about herself, for the son who was so bad that he once got no Christmas presents was also the child who seemed to many descendants to be Madeline's favorite, because he wasn't afraid to tease her about herself, he knew how to make her laugh.¹⁰³ Carl's son, Carl Pecora, Jr., shares his father teasing attitude toward Madeline, saying "I used to get a kick out of her."¹⁰⁴ Other grandchildren seem less comfortable with what they perceived as their grandmother's nervousness and bluntness. Patty Kudlick remembered

¹⁰⁰ Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

¹⁰¹ Madeline Pecora Nugent interview, May 23, 2009.

¹⁰² Ralph Pecora interview, October 19, 2008.

¹⁰³ Brenda Pecora interview, June 30, 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Carl Pecora, Jr. interview, June 30, 2009.

one statement in particular that surprised her as a child: her grandmother's complaint that "every time, [I] have to get pregnant every time."¹⁰⁵ Madeline's pregnancies did come often, and close together. By 1920, she was the mother of a three-, a two-, and a one-year old child.

Either soon before or after the birth of the oldest of these children, a girl named Marie, Ralph moved his wife and business out of his mother's house and into the Centre Street location, which had been purchased with a mortgage, unlike his family home, which his father had bought outright.¹⁰⁶ Soon thereafter, he hired his first non-sibling employees: a native-born man nine years his junior named Luther Peters and a slightly-older recent Italian immigrant named Gerardo Luigi Mazziotta, who went by the nickname Lou.¹⁰⁷ Luther was deaf and lived with his parents in Drifton for most of his adult life.¹⁰⁸ His father was a mine employee. Most probably, Ralph took Luther on as a kind of paid apprentice, teaching him the basic skills of tailoring and gradually introducing him to more difficult tasks. Ralph Pecora, Jr. remembers that "Luther took care of mostly the repair work, shortening of pants and coats and pressing, that sort of thing."¹⁰⁹ Gerardo Mazziotta, on the other hand, was a skilled tailor when he immigrated

¹⁰⁵ Patty Kudlick interview, July 26, 2009.

¹⁰⁶ 1920 Federal Census (Population Schedule), "Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Freeland Borough, Sixth Ward, Dwelling 92, Family 93, Ralph Pecora household."

¹⁰⁷ 1920 Federal Census (Population Schedule), "Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Hazle Township, Drifton, Dwelling 9, Family 9, Leonard Peters household;" Gerard Mazziotta, "World War I Draft Registration Card," accessed October, 2010, subscription database, <http://www.ancestry.com>.

¹⁰⁸ 1910 Federal Census (Population Schedule), "Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Hazle Township, Drifton, Dwelling 74, Family 74, Leonard Peters household"; 1920 Federal Census (Population Schedule), "Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Hazle Township, Drifton, Dwelling 9, Family 9, Leonard Peters household;" 1930 Federal Census (Population Schedule), "Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Hazle Township, Drifton, Dwelling 142, Family 142, Leonard Peters household."

¹⁰⁹ Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

to the United States in 1914, at the age of 30.¹¹⁰ Here is another example of the mystery of small-town immigrant destinations: from Calvello, Italy, the home given on his immigration form, how did Gerardo find his way to Freeland? In this case, family connections may be the explanation. The Carmine Mazziotta living in nearby Hazleton by 1920 may have been Gerardo's brother or cousin or the "mother-in-law" Catherine Mazziotta, living with the Bellezza family on Washington Street, may have been his own mother, making Marguerite Bellezza his sister.¹¹¹ Regardless of how he found his way to Freeland, by 1928 he had married the widow Anna D'Amore and was living on South Street with his two young children and two older stepchildren, one of whom was Stanley D'Amore.¹¹² Stanley remembers his stepfather as a skilled and creative craftsman, who could have run a successful business of his own, were his English skills better.¹¹³ As an employee, Lou was trusted with the complex and high-profile task of constructing new suits from pieces that had been drafted and cut by Ralph.¹¹⁴

An early photograph shows Ralph and his staff of four standing in front of the Centre Street shop (Figure 2.18). The image is undated and has no caption, but it is hard not to see the pride of new ownership in Ralph's expression and posture. He stands to the

¹¹⁰ U.S. Department of Labor, "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States, SS Loraine sailing from Havre, February 14, 1914, No. 10, Gerard Mazziotta," accessed October, 2010, subscription database, <http://www.ancestry.com>.

¹¹¹ 1920 Federal Census (Population Schedule), "Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Hazleton City, Fourteenth Ward, Dwelling 204, Family 220, Carmine Mazziotta household"; 1920 Federal Census (Population Schedule), "Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Freeland Borough, Fifth Ward, Dwelling 111, Family 114, John Bellezza household."

¹¹² Gerard Mazziotta entry, *Freeland Directory 1928-29* (Philadelphia: R.L. Polk and Company, 1928), 91; 1930 Federal Census (Population Schedule), "Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Freeland Borough, Sixth Ward, Dwelling 153, Family 158, Gerardo Mazziotta household."

¹¹³ Stanley D'Amore interview, July 31, 2009.

¹¹⁴ Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

far right of the group, with his arms on his hips and what can only be described as a smirk on his face. He is fully dressed, in vest, coat, and tie, and has a measuring tape draped around his neck. His sister Louise, positioned next to Ralph, echoes his pose, hands on hips and chin raised. Beside her, Luther, Lou, and Michael stand in their shirt sleeves, hands at their sides or in their pockets, wearing the bemused expressions of people who have been drug away from more important tasks for the sake of a photograph. Behind them, the shop is clearly visible; this is as much a photograph of a building as it is of its occupants. The store has two sections, each fronted by a plate glass window, opening to the left and to the right of a central doorway. The window to Ralph's right has been prominently stenciled with his name and, in even larger letters, the word "tailor." Smaller sign promises "hand tailored suits" and "the genuine Bruner Woolens." Bolts of fabric are visible behind the glass. In the window to Ralph's left, stenciled letters again announce that this is the site of a "tailor" and further promise the everyday services of "cleaning, pressing, and repairs." Two illustrated fashion plates have been propped up in this window and a number more are visible on the wall.

Although not evident in this image, Ralph's descendants all remember that the double storefront occupied up almost all of the first floor at 530 Centre Street, with a small pantry and kitchen behind them. Behind the building, a single-story passageway led to a long, narrow workshop (also single story). A small, L-shaped yard wrapped around this workshop, and was used for hanging laundry, growing a few vegetables and herbs, and sunbathing, when the Pecora daughters became old enough to want to spend time at such a pursuit.¹¹⁵ The family living space was sequestered almost entirely to the upper level. This second story consisted of seven small rooms that were likely all

¹¹⁵ Pamela Drobney interview, June 29, 2009.

intended to be bedrooms, but which Ralph used two of for his personal library. The southern wall of both the home/shop and the workspace stood directly against the furniture store at 526 Centre Street. To the north, an alleyway existed between the Pecora shop and 532 Centre, which was occupied by J. J. Newberry's Five and Ten Cent Store by 1921.¹¹⁶

Whether Ralph moved into this building in 1916 or 1917, he relocated during a very promising economic time for the anthracite region. Anthracite production reached an all-time high of 100 million tons in 1917, spurred by the demands of war-time manufacturing.¹¹⁷ Other industries were booming as well: twice in 1916, the Freeland Overall Company ordered new machines and increased working hours for employees in order to meet growing demand.¹¹⁸ Socially and politically, however, the late teens were viewed as a dark time by many, due primarily but not solely to the United States' entry into World War I. In Freeland, as in the rest of the country, the war affected even those who weren't fighting in it. People of German descent were required to register with the police; postage, dance hall admissions, movie theater tickets, and railroad fares were taxed; and food and electricity was rationed.¹¹⁹ The stress of war time was compounded in early October of 1918 by the outbreak of the Spanish influenza in Freeland. To control the spread of the virus, all churches, schools, and places of amusement (including Freeland's widely popular saloons and movie theaters) were forced to close, and most

¹¹⁶ "Five and Ten Cent Stores," *Freeland Borough Directory 1921-22* (Luzerne Publishing Company, 1921), 116.

¹¹⁷ Donald L. Miller and Richard E. Sharpless, *The Kingdom of Coal: Work, Enterprise, and Ethnic Communities in the Mine Fields* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 286.

¹¹⁸ Stumpf, 27.

¹¹⁹ Stumpf, 30 and 32.

public gatherings, including funerals, were forbidden. The pastor of St. Anthony's church publicly decried the closing order as "discrimination on the part of health authorities," pointing out that the profitable and powerful "factories, workshops, and trolley cars" of the town—all sites of public gatherings themselves—were allowed to continue to operate.¹²⁰ Idle teachers were put to work distributing food and linens to housebound residents and four army doctors helped tend to the sick. By late October, 277 cases of the flu had been reported in the town of Freeland alone.¹²¹ In late November, the State Department of Health reported 42,000 influenza deaths statewide.¹²² By that time, the worst was over: on November 9th, the closing orders and bans on public gatherings had been lifted and on November 11th, bells and alarms (including the colliery bells) announced the end of the war.¹²³

This "boom-time" in Freeland's history provides some typical examples of the dialectic of progress: destroying while it creates, taking while it gives. In the case of World War I, the boon of peak production was linked with the literal loss of life, a loss that was culturally acknowledged and publicly mourned. It was not as acceptable to be viewed as mourning the losses of ways of life that the progress of new technologies and new economies brought. The public ambivalence regarding rapid change evident in the advertisements of the 1900s was replaced by an almost stridently celebratory attitude toward progress following the end of World War I. In 1919, the Freeland Chamber of

¹²⁰ Anon, "Closing Order Denounced," *Freeland Tribune*, October 17, 1918, front page.

¹²¹ Stumpf, 32.

¹²² Anon, "More Influenza in Upper Luzerne," *Freeland Tribune*, November 20, 1918, front page.

¹²³ Stumpf, 32.

Commerce adopted as its slogan the phrase, “Be a Progressive – Don’t Be a Knocker!”¹²⁴ This adjustment in public face occurred at a moment when the balance between new and old had shifted in favor of the new. In 1914, the *Freeland Tribune* stopped printing the “Freeland News in Brief Form” sections—in which dog fights, lost cows, and robin sightings had been noted—and was filling all but the first page, which was still dedicated to local news, with Hollywood gossip, illustrated spreads of women’s commercial fashions, and paid notices, formatted as news stories, for soon-to-be-released films. In 1918, grocer Henry George became the first grocer in town to establish a “cash and carry” policy, doing away with the credit that had for so long been a benefit of dealing with local merchants. That same year, Krouse’s, one of Freeland’s large commercial livery stables, went into bankruptcy and was forced to auction off its livestock and equipment. Another sign of the times was the 1918 opening of the Freeland Junk Company, a new type of business to deal with a new type of need: disposal of the large quantities of “scrap iron, rubber, burlap bags, cotton waste, and rags and bones” that were the waste products of what was by now a consumer culture.¹²⁵

There are no records of what people said in their homes or at the saloons about changes like these, although, according to a disapproving note in a 1912 issue of the *American Tailor and Cutter*, tailors were notoriously sour on modernity: “The pessimist is always with us, and in no line of business does he shine so persistently as in the tailoring trade.”¹²⁶ Ralph Pecora’s attitudes toward the changes of his early adulthood are unrecorded—he never kept a journal or saved letters that he may have written or

¹²⁴ Stumpf, 33.

¹²⁵ Stumpf, 31.

¹²⁶ Anon, “The Future of Tailoring,” *American Tailor and Cutter*, October 1912, 85.

received, and his descendants remember his reticence and his silences, rather than his viewpoints or opinions—although he did leave behind one intriguing clue. His interest in mysticism and spiritual self-improvement, most clearly evidenced by a deep and dedicated study of Rosicrucianism in the 1940s, appears to have been kindled around this time, assuming that the 1918 book titled *New Thought Healing Made Plain* found in his possessions 50 years after his death (with a four-leaf clover pressed between two pages) was bought new. Like many examples of early (and late) twentieth-century self-help books *New Thought Healing* grounds its claim in quasi-scientific terms, relying upon atomic particles and force fields to explain the healing powers of the mind. This is mysticism for the forward-thinking, the progressive, and not the traditionalist. As the author states early in the book, ““You see the world keeps moving on, and no conservatism can stop it.”¹²⁷ The author further insists that this unstoppable movement can only be for the better: “The universe is on its way to higher and better states. That which tends toward infinity tends toward perfection . . . Development, expansion, growth, all lead to increasing freedom from all that restricts and binds.”¹²⁸ Some of these restrictions are physical ailments and others are negativism or self-doubt, both of which the mind is said to be able to heal:

Even though you are overwhelmed by poverty, sickness and sorrow, affirm the opposite. Say with all the earnestness you can muster: I am rich, I am well, I am happy. Say it again and again, day after day, though all things conspire to give the lie to your words. If you do this faithfully you will at last enable the Subconscious Mind to make your words come true.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Kate Atkinson Boehme, *New Thought Healing Made Plain* (Holyoke, Massachusetts: The Elizabeth Towne Co., Inc., 1918), 19.

¹²⁸ Boehme, 78.

¹²⁹ Boehme, 40.

The grin on Ralph's face as he stands with his employees outside of his tailor shop may be the spontaneous grin of a young man who feels America's economic promises firmly within his grasp, or it may be the forced grin of someone who can imagine a future in which he is overwhelmed with poverty, sickness, and sorrow and is determined to appear and even feel confident nonetheless. A photograph leaves us with only image, outward display, and the moment a person spends extra time grooming or dressing for a photograph she or he takes deliberate control of the record that image leaves, implicitly favoring external display over any internal truth. Ralph's three-piece suit was probably not donned only for the picture—family members and neighbors remember him wearing three-piece suits on a regular basis—but his pose, unlike that of his brother or Luther or Lou, is clearly posed. Regardless of how proud or confident he felt when he was photographed, he is a “proud and confident young man” in this image. This pose, again, could have been an honest reflection of spontaneous good spirits, or it could have been deliberate, an effort. What is certain is that as the twentieth century progressed, and as Freeland's prosperity and the profitability of custom tailoring both declined, Ralph emerged as a man himself willing to making serious and deliberate efforts to remain economically successful, even when those efforts required him to abandon some of the traditional practices and pleasures of the tailoring trade. These efforts, and the social and economic environment they were made in, are the story of the Chapter Three.

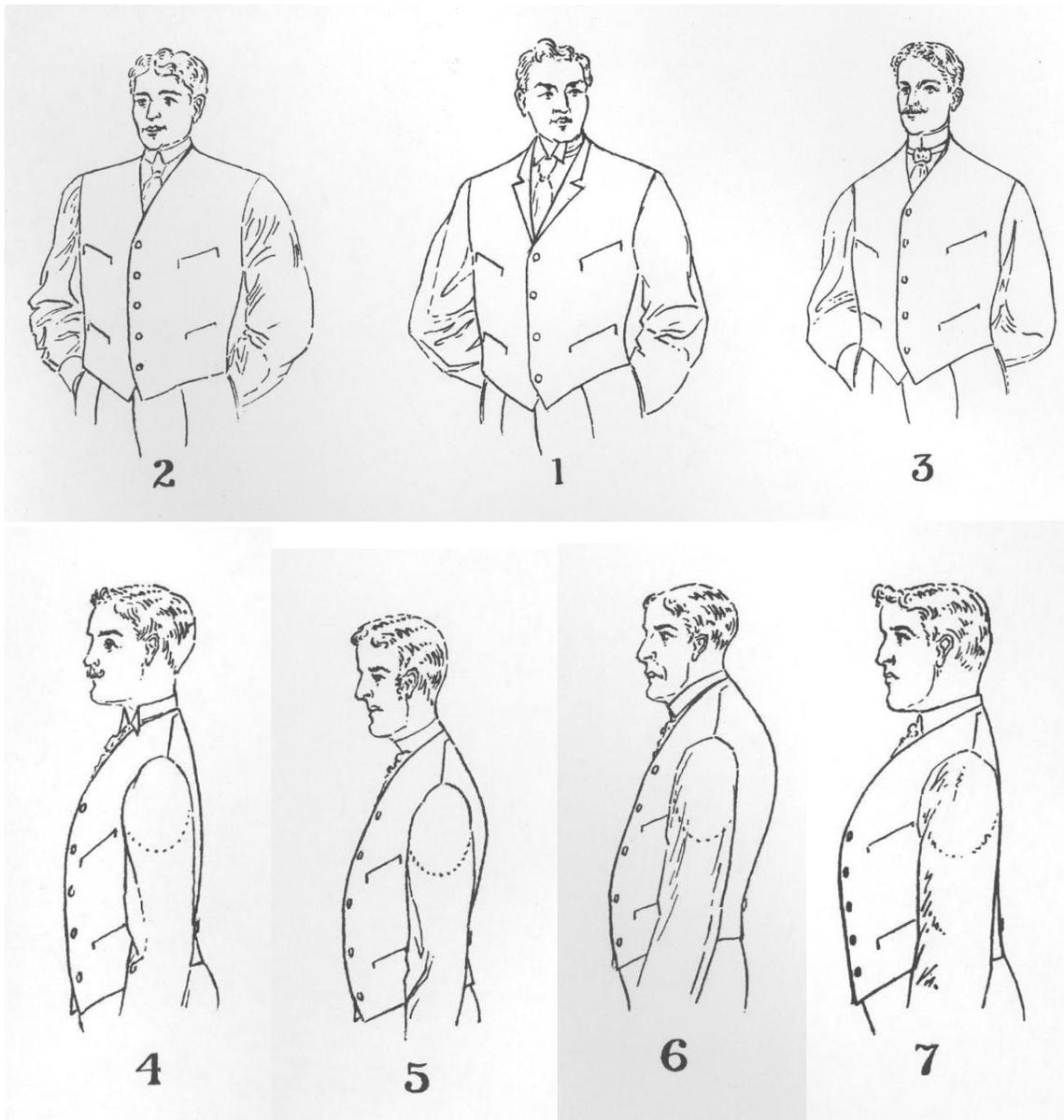
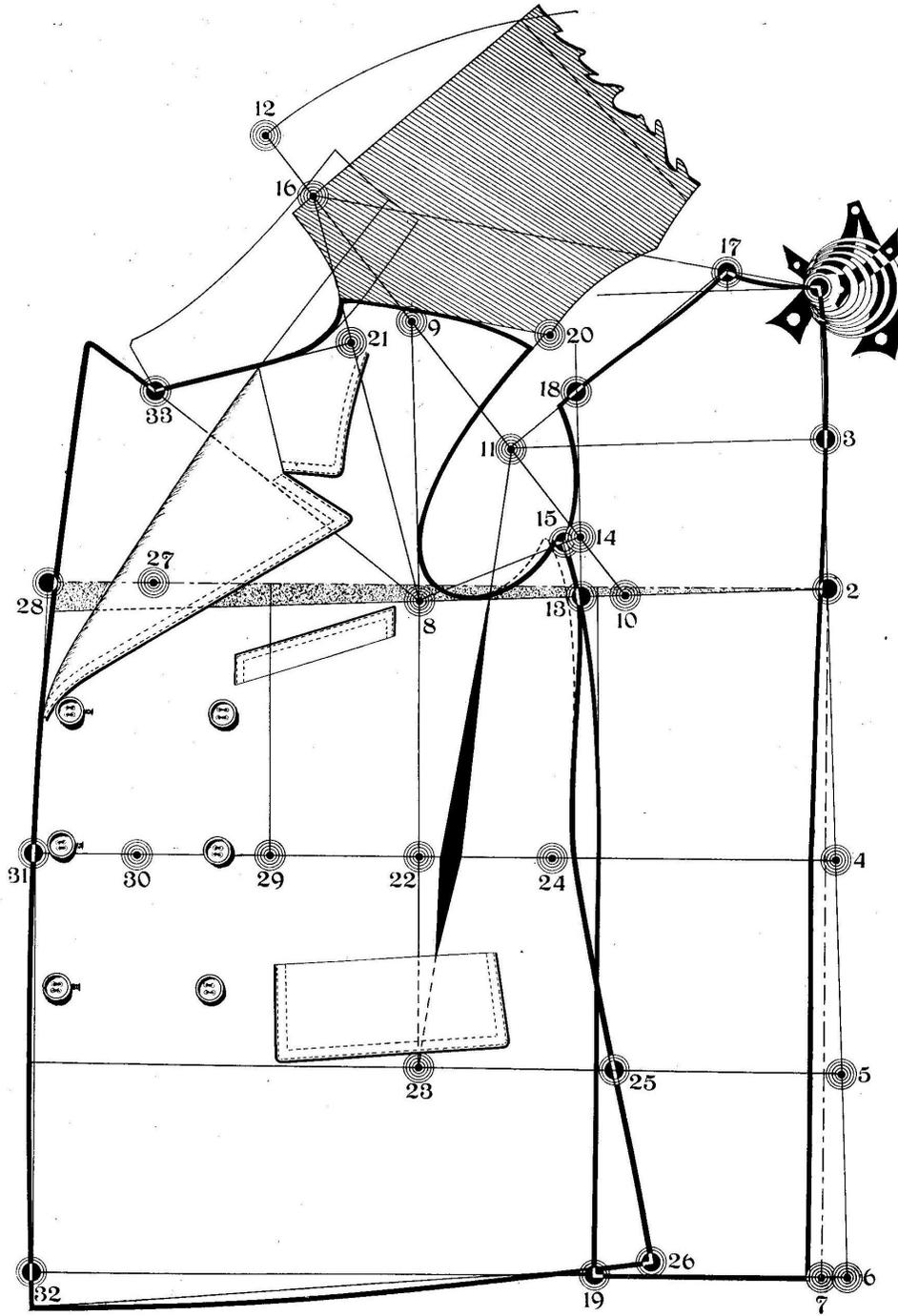


Figure 2.1: Sketches of various types of male figures from a 1907 tailoring manual: 1) normal, 2) square shoulders, 3) sloping shoulders, 4) erect, 5) stooping, 6) sloping, large blades and stooping, and 7) square, small blades and erect. Illustrations taken from Frederick T. Croonburg's *Blue Book of Men's Tailoring: Grand Edition of Supreme Systems for Producing Men's Garments*.



SHORT-MEASURE SYSTEM.

BY MATTHEW D'ANGELO.

Figure 2.2: Draft for a suit coat drawn using a “short-measure system.” Sleeves were not typically included in drafts for jackets and overcoats. It was assumed that the tailor would know how to draft a sleeve without guidance. Draft from *American Tailor and Cutter*, April 1910, p. 283.



Figures 2.3 and 2.4: Illustrated fashion plates from the Mitchell Company's *Sartorial Art Journal*. The illustration on the left comes from the December 1913 issue and the illustration on the right appeared in September 1914.



Figure 2.5: Ralph J. Pecora's cutting school diploma, dated September 26, 1908.



Figure 2.6: Postcard image of spectators viewing one of the three parades featured in Freeland's 1906 Pearl Jubilee celebration. Image from Charlotte Tancin's *History of Freeland* website. Postcard supplied by John Zubach.

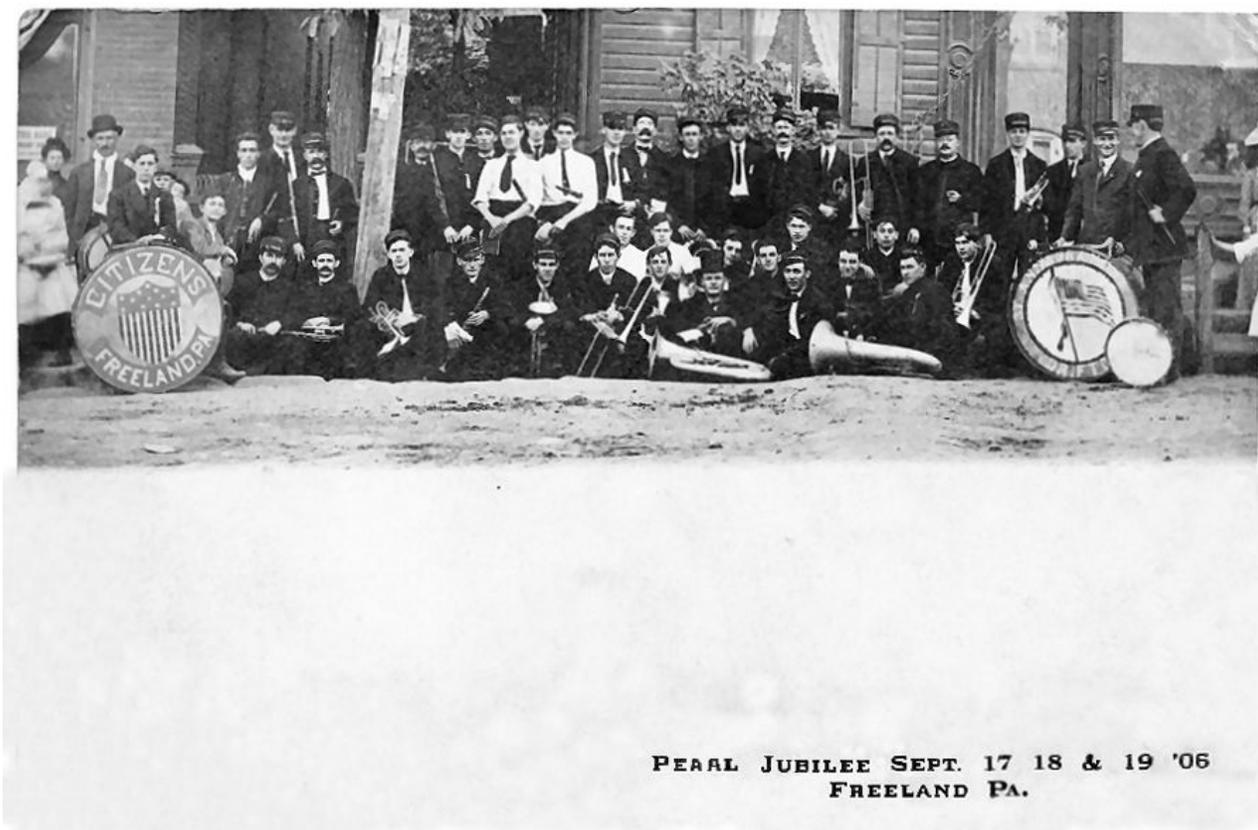


Figure 2.7: Postcard image of Freeland's Citizen's Band and St. Ann's Band, photographed together. Image from Charlotte Tancin's *History of Freeland* website. Postcard supplied by Christina Sachs Humphreys



Figure 2.8: Freeland's Pearl Jubilee Ferris wheel. Image from Charlotte Tancin's *History of Freeland* website.

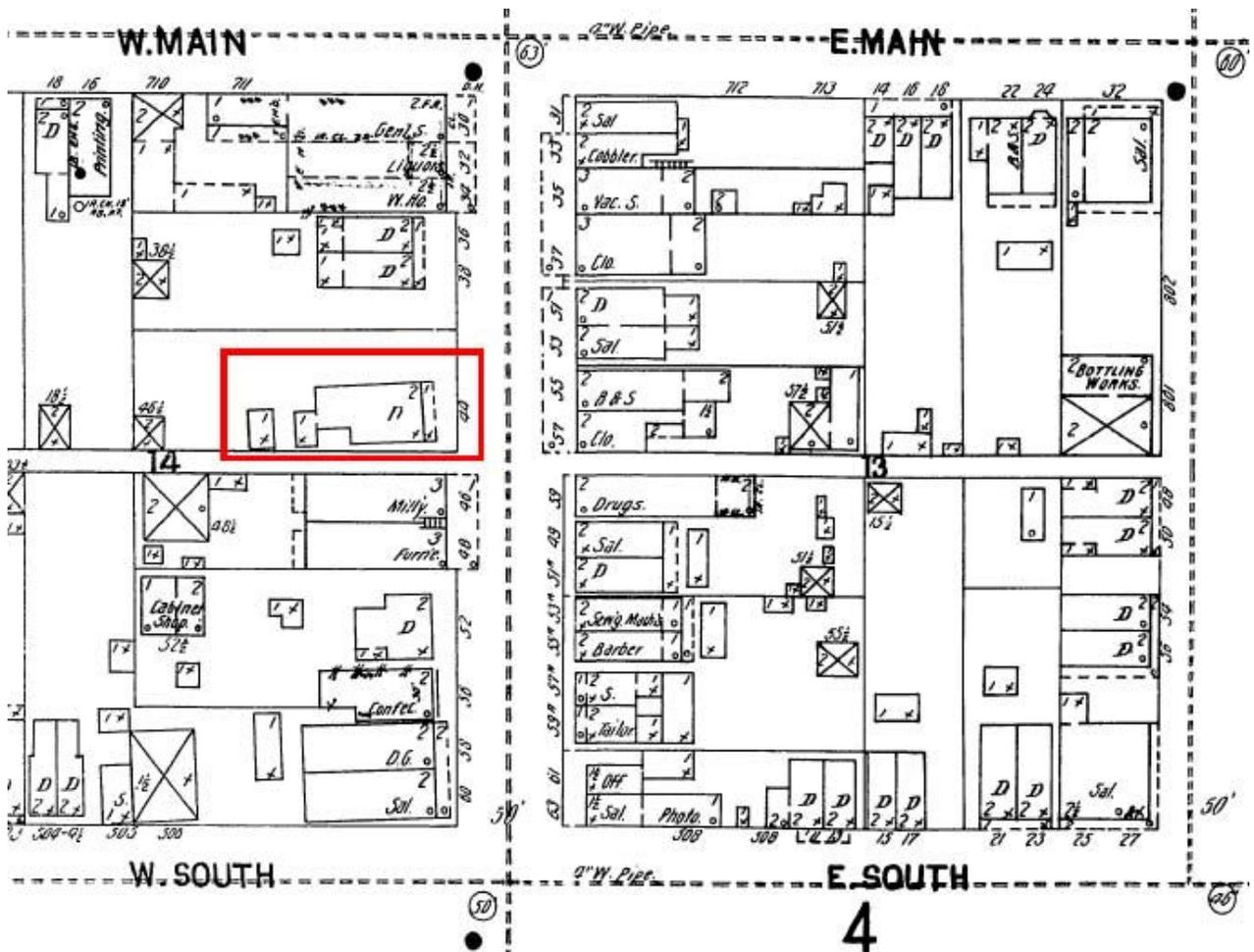


Figure 2.9: Excerpt of the 1900 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing the building (outlined in red) then occupying the lot that would become 530 Centre Street, following the street renumbering.

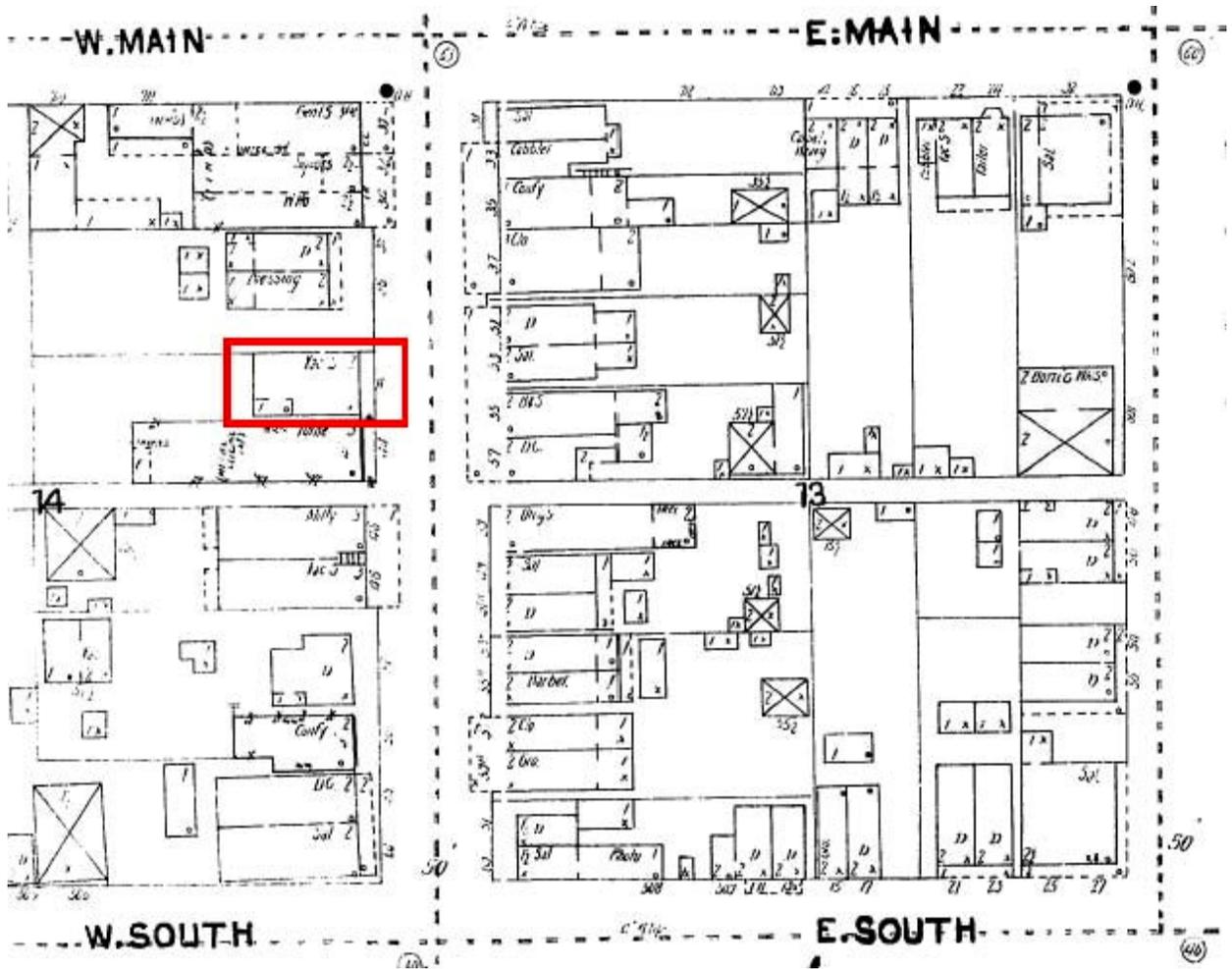


Figure 2.10: Excerpt of the 1905 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing the building at 530 Centre Street (outlined in red), before it was purchased by Ralph Pecora.

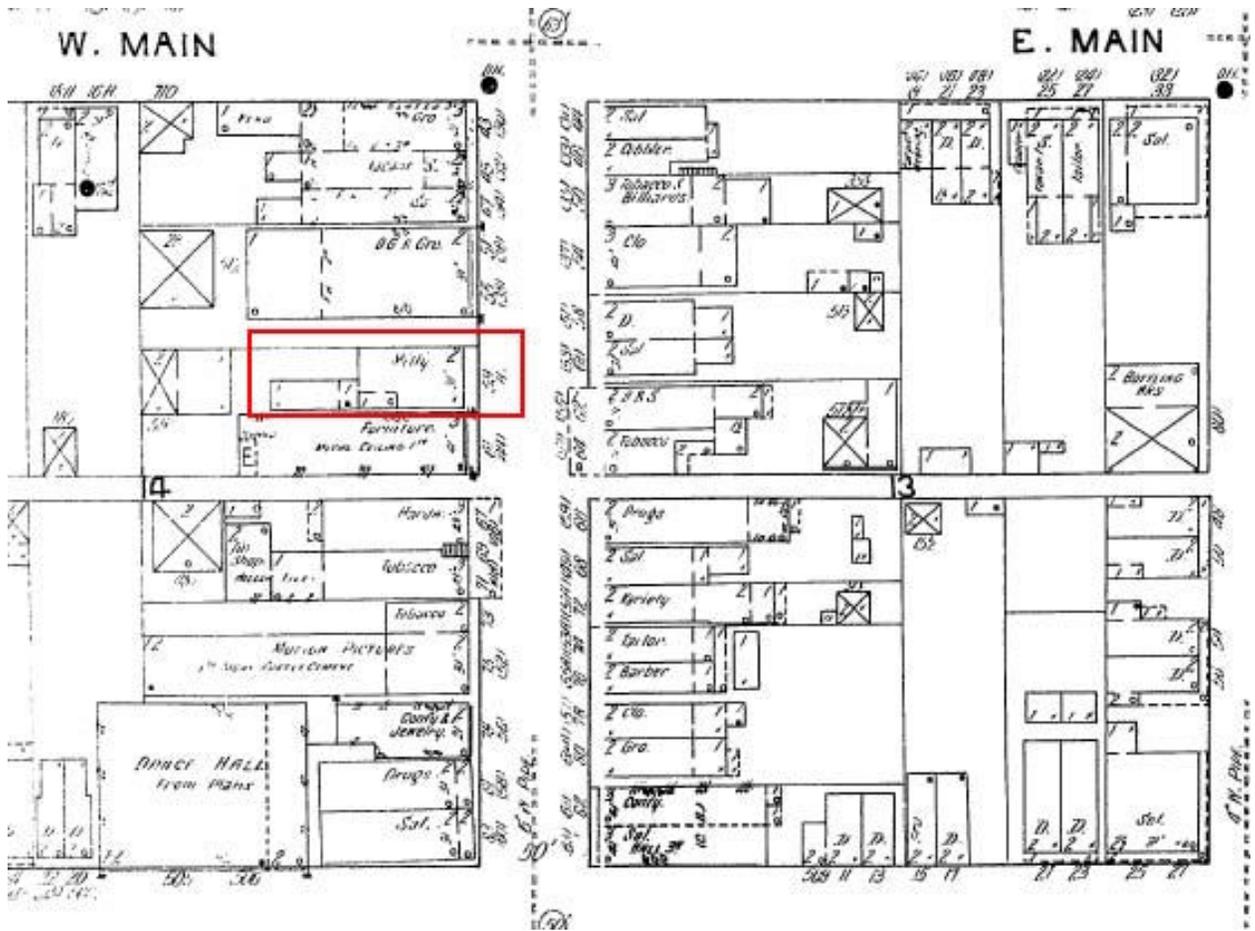


Figure 2.11: Excerpt of the 1912 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing the building at 530 Centre Street (outlined in red), now complete with the one-story backyard shed that Ralph would use as a workshop. Note the difference in the size and density of buildings on Ralph's side of the street between this and the 1900 map (Figure 2.09).



Figure 2.12: Undated postcard image of the Refowich Building, located at 537 Centre Street. The Refowich would become a Freeland landmark and is still standing today, although its space has been converted to senior-citizen apartments. Image from Charles Stumpf, *Freeland*, p. 24.

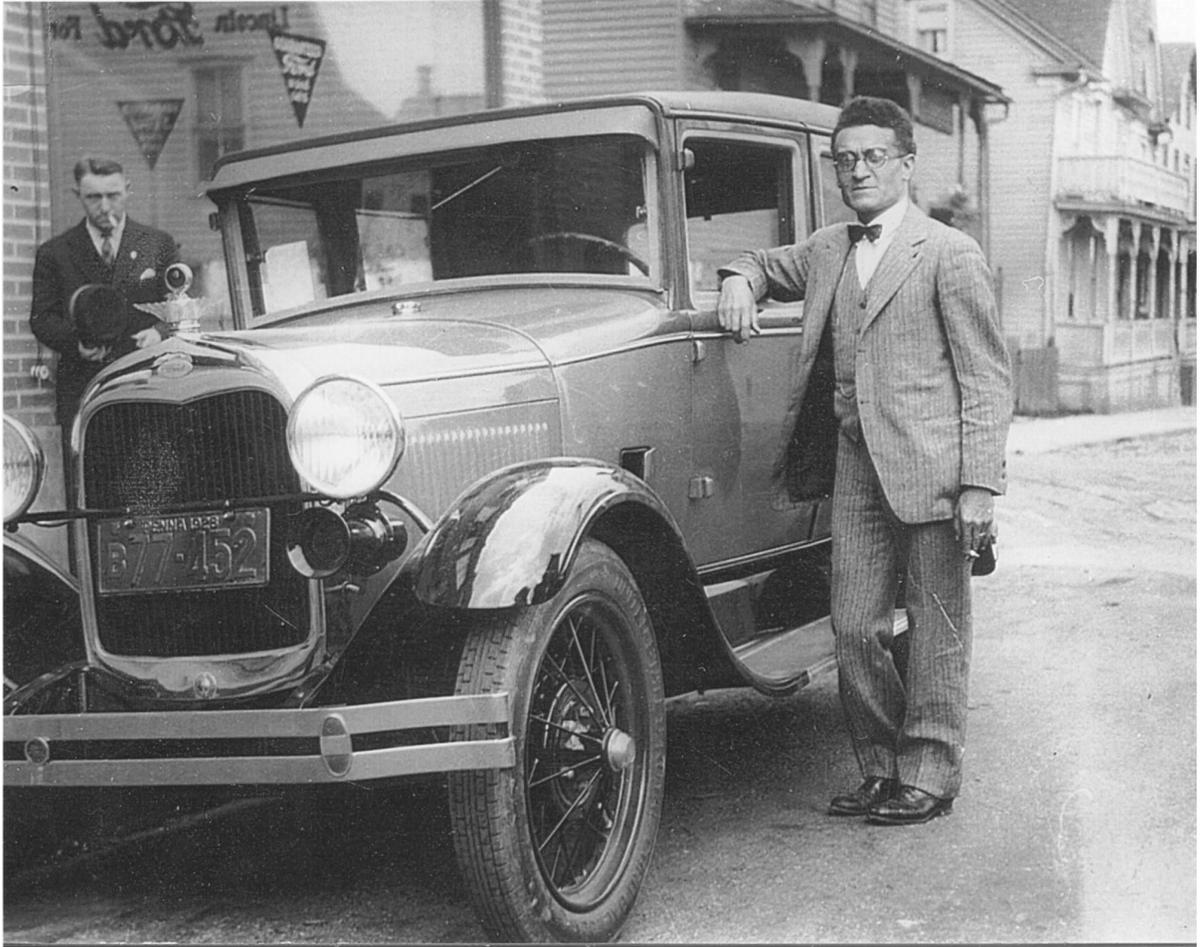


Figure 2.13: Undated image of Ralph Pecora standing very proprietarily beside an automobile with a 1928 license plate.



Figure 2.14: Undated image of Michael and Ralph Pecora looking very cocky in stylish, young men's suits.



Figure 2.15: Undated image of Ralph and Michael Pecora playing checkers in front of the haberdashery counter of the shop at 530 Centre Street.



Figure 2.16: Photograph of Madeline and Ralph Pecora soon after their wedding.



Figure 2.17: This photograph of Centre Street decorated for the 1906 Pearl Jubilee makes apparent the extent to which Freeland, or at least the town's central business district, was a man-made environment. There are no trees or grass visible anywhere in this image. The tracks running up the middle of the street carried a trolley, which ran between Freeland and the patch town of Harleigh, from 1894 to 1932. Image from Charlotte Tancin's *History of Freeland* website.



Figure 2.18: The Centre Street tailor shop and its employees. From left to right, Ralph Pecora, Louise Pecora, Luther Peters, Gerard Mazziotta, and Michael Pecora.