

### Chapter Three: The Memory of the Body as Well as of the Mind

Approximately 70 years after watching his father work, and helping with some of that work himself, Ralph Pecora, Jr. recalls both the processes and the materials used in the handmade construction of clothing quite clearly. He remembers his father drawing patterns “on black paper, with white chalk,” to fit a customer’s individual measurements. He remembers the cut pieces of these patterns stored on a shelf, in stacks “that went up to the ceiling,” ready to be taken down and used again when that customer next requested a garment, “and if they put on weight after a period of time, he would adjust it. Pin a little more on, or whatever.” He remembers yards of fabric rolled up with a piece of dampened canvas, left to “soak well,” and then unrolled and hung near the stove “in the kitchen, mom’s kitchen over a rack,” where the fabric would shrink into a tighter, more stable configuration of fibers as it dried (Figure 3.1). He remembers a “table up in front with [fabric] samples, with a bright light” hanging over it, and another table, a “wide table, like five feet wide, going the full distance on [one] wall.” He remembers his father’s desk, “he had everything that he needed on the desk,” and “a mirror, a big mirror, about five feet tall and about two feet wide, tilted so that people could look at themselves as they were trying clothes on.” All of this was in the front shop, the area that customers entered when they stepped in from the street and the space within which they interacted with the tailor: selecting fabric, discussing a desired style, trying on half-finished and then finished garments. In the back shop, behind the house but “connected to [it] at that point with a covered walkway” was the large equipment used mainly by the employees Luther and Gerard. Ralph, Jr. remembers that “they had the big wide tables,” along with “machines galore”: “Straight sewing machines, I’d say there were three to four. [My

father] had a zig-zag machine. He had...a blind stitch machine. For hems...And he had another machine that he would do for furs... Plus a pressing machine. Plus racks for hanging clothes up that they were working on.” He remembers the process of oiling his father’s sewing machines once a week, and the fascination of using the blind stitch machine, “when you sew cuffs, the needle doesn’t go through, it has a curve in it...you don’t see it on the outside.”<sup>1</sup>

Ralph Pecora, Jr. has retained impressions of textures, of colors, of lighting, of size. He remembers the physical movement either encouraged or required by the particular placement of items in a particular physical environment; for example, the chair that went with his father’s desk was positioned so that “he could swing it around and use it for his sewing machine” as well.”<sup>2</sup> These are tactile memories, embodied memories, recollections of the muscles as much as the mind. In comparison, of the upstairs of his house, rooms in which Ralph, Jr. performed the passive activities of sleeping, bathing, and relaxing, he remembers very little; only that there were the two rooms for the library along with “two, three, four bedrooms. And a bathroom.”<sup>3</sup> Ralph’s memories of his father’s shop and equipment evoke the embodied memories of processes and equipments shared by the ex-anthracite miners interviewed by Thomas Dublin in the 1990s. For example, John Zokovit’s recollection of loading the coal into cars:

[W]e used to make a chute, we called it a chute, out of galvanized tin ... And then we had to scoop [coal] into the chute, and sometimes, them weeks that you worked maybe two, three days, and you were off two, three days. And there was water, you know, that damn sheet iron would get rusty. So, whenever you were off two or three days and you'd start,

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview by author, Fishkill, New York, October 19, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr., interview by author, Fishkill, New York, June 14, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

you'd have to get in ... on your rear end, and push this coal all the way down to the platform where the cars was.<sup>4</sup>

Or John Pavuk's memories of dynamiting and harvesting coal from shallow veins deep underground: "We'd drill holes in and blow it down ... And you had to load that up. And you're on your knees, your head's hitting the roof, and you're like scooping ... but then you could be next to me shoveling and I couldn't even see you. I'd only see your light."<sup>5</sup>

Or John Mordock's description of propping up the roofs of areas that had been mined out: "So then you would set the prop in the hole, and raise it to the ceiling ... you had to keep going, make sure you pushed it right up there, and it would lodge in there, and then we'd hold it with bars, hold it there, one guy would have to scale it and get up there and drive a wedge in on top of the prop to hold against the top rock."<sup>6</sup>

The men interviewed by Thomas Dublin remembered these movements and sensations even though they hadn't mined in decades, much as Ralph Pecora, Jr. remembered the layout and equipment in his father's work area even though he hadn't seen the shop for more than 50 years and had never worked full-time as a tailor in it. By the time he was old enough to train to take over the business, there wasn't much business left to take over. Instead, Ralph worked at a nearby steel mill after graduating from high school, was drafted into the navy during World War II, and studied engineering in college, on the GI Bill, after the war's end (Figure 3.2). He earned a very successful living working as an engineer for an oil company, and lived in far more prosperous

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<sup>4</sup> John Zokovitch, interview by Walter Licht, Morrisville, Pennsylvania, June 5, 1995; transcript provided by Thomas Dublin.

<sup>5</sup> John Pavuk, interview by Thomas Dublin, Manville, New Jersey, April 20, 1994; transcript provided by Thomas Dublin.

<sup>6</sup> John Mordock, interview by Thomas Dublin, Morrisville, Pennsylvania, May 15, 1995; transcript provided by Thomas Dublin.

communities than Freeland in New Jersey and New York State. Still, he remembers his father's business with what can only be described as fondness and pride, even though tailoring was time-consuming and tedious, and never made his father a rich man. The miners Dublin spoke to also expressed fondness for and pride in their physically demanding and highly dangerous work. A significant percentage even claim that they would go back underground tomorrow, were the jobs available. Similarly, Ralph Pecora, Jr. retained a life-long interest in constructing items out of fabric. His wife Carolyn remembers that he "made drapes for the first house, the first house we owned" and that he helped her make the drapes that are hanging in the house they are currently living in, after more than 60 years of marriage. She also remembers that they bought the fabric for that first set of drapes from what to Ralph was a local business, "an upholstery place in Freeland," even though their first house was in New Jersey, and that when Ralph, who had never advanced much beyond hemming, asked the owner how to construct a set of drapes, "she showed him how to do the pleats and everything."<sup>7</sup>

The loss of an industry and/or a trade, and the related disintegration of a community, are never simply economic losses. While the losses of income and economic security typically consume the attention of those facing these losses in the short term, it is the personal and interpersonal losses that are most regretted decades later. Workers of defunct industries lament the opportunity to use skills that had been mastered by the mind and the body; those who have moved to new jobs in new parts of the country long for the particular look and feel of abandoned physical environments; past and present residents of once-thriving small towns miss the faces and personalities of merchants who not only sold them goods, but knew their names and their family members, and, when asked,

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<sup>7</sup> Carolyn Pecora, interview by author, Fishkill, New York, October 19, 2008.

could give quick lessons on using what had just been purchased. After 1920, the story of Ralph Pecora's tailor shop, of the town whose main commercial street it was situated on, of the industry that made that town's streets and businesses possible is a story of decline. It is also, of course, a story of adjustment. Some of these adjustments, for both miners and small business owners, were rational economic decisions: procedural efficiencies, marketing initiatives, or cost-saving measures, implemented at the individual level, but often upon the recommendation of industry experts. Other adjustments were interpersonal and could even be called irrational: decisions or efforts that were, in large or small ways, harmful to individual economic self-interest, but which explicitly recognized and relied upon the power of a strong community to accomplish something that individual efforts could not. In this chapter, we will see how Ralph and his community made use of both types of adjustments, as they weathered the decades of economic decline that began the moment that the post-World-War-I peak production of anthracite had passed.

Attempting a single explanatory framework for decline can be a frustrating undertaking. Certainly, in the case of Ralph Pecora (and the many small business owners in similar situations across the country), no one trend adequately explains his economic reality. He was affected by the decreasing demand for and profitability of anthracite; the "modern" shift toward a more casual, less fitted, mass-produced men's wardrobe; the rise of shopping malls and national chains. These strands overlap and interlock, forming a fabric of change that needs to be kept whole.

Even for employees whose economic fates were clearly tied to a single industry, explanations for decline can be contentious and complex. The bituminous miners

interviewed by Herman Lantz and J.S. McCrary in the 1950s generally agreed upon when the decline in their mines began (in the 1920s), but just as consistently disagreed about the cause. Some blamed the replacement of man-power with machines; others miners' insistent demands for higher wages; others the outdated physical layout of the mines they were working in; others the carelessness techniques of management that resulted in mine-closing collapses and cave-ins; and still others the exhaustion of their particular seams of coal.<sup>8</sup> Outsider observers were, and remain, equally unwilling to provide a single explanation for anthracite's decline. In an article written in 1938, the geographers Raymond and Marion Murphy list strikes, competing fuels, equipment that could burn lower grades of coal, Russian imports, high taxes and royalties, and high freight rates (guaranteeing profits for the companies owning both the railroads and the mines, but hurting the miners) as possible causes for the decline of the anthracite industry and ultimately conclude "it is difficult to decide just where to place the blame."<sup>9</sup> Writing almost 70 years later, Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht spread the blame for the decline of the anthracite industry over a relatively condensed list of just three responsible parties: the United Mine Workers of America, which favored the interests of bituminous miners over anthracite; the mining companies, who adopted a strategy of economic diversification and abandoned the mines as a money-making venture; and federal, state, and local governments, none of which took action in the miners' interest.<sup>10</sup> Rather than begin an ultimately irresolvable argument about the relative importance of the various

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<sup>8</sup> Herman Lantz and J. S. McCrary, *People of Coal Town* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 188-189.

<sup>9</sup> Raymond E. Murphy and Marion Murphy, "Anthracite Region of Pennsylvania," *Economic Geography*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (October 1938), 345-346.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht, *The Face of Decline: The Pennsylvania Anthracite Region in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 180.

economic forces active in Ralph Pecora’s lifetime, I will attempt (like these scholars) to keep multiple trends actively in mind, to look at personal and interpersonal experience without “plac[ing] the blame.”

Ralph became a mortgage holder when the local and national economies were both booming and then, just a few years, found himself a mortgage payer—and the father of one, then two, then three children in as many years—during the rocky post-World-War-I years. The shift from a war- to a peace-time economy was not a smooth one. Nationally, a period of rapid inflation and large-scale unemployment followed war-time spending, and a subsequent wave of strikes shut down steel mills and ship yards, and even the city of Seattle for five days.<sup>11</sup> Within the anthracite region, the end of the war meant the end of war-time demand for hard coal. At the same time, anthracite was losing consumer market share, as oil heaters and gas stoves replaced those powered by coal. The anthracite historian Harold Aurand found that “advertisements for coal cooking stoves disappeared from the *Ladies Home Journal* magazine after 1918.”<sup>12</sup> It is an interesting bit of local color to note that Allan Sharp’s Bakery, which opened in Freeland in 1922, used only anthracite coal in its ovens, but individual displays of loyalty like this could never balance the larger national trend.<sup>13</sup> The creation of immigration quotas in 1921 (made far more restrictive in 1924) reduced the influx of trained immigrant tailors like Gerard Mazziotta, and exacerbated a trend that had begun almost two decades earlier: the shortage of competent journeymen.

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<sup>11</sup> Alan Brinkley, *American History, 13<sup>th</sup> edition* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 624-625.

<sup>12</sup> Harold W. Aurand, *Coalcracker Culture: Work and Values in Pennsylvania Anthracite, 1835-1935* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2003), 13-14.

<sup>13</sup> Charles K. Stumpf, *Freeland* (Hazleton: Panorama, 199?), reprint of articles that originally appeared in the pages of *Panorama* magazine, July 1991 through Dec. 1993, 34.

Long before the immigration restrictions of the 1920s, many “front-shop” tailors perceived the shortage of journeymen as a threat as, if not more, dire than the ready-made industry. In a 1910 address before the Merchant Tailor’s Exchange of Boston, master tailor Robert Mather proclaimed that “secur[ing] a competent supply of journeymen tailors is without doubt the leading question of the hour in the tailor trade.” Mather blamed “The great increase in the cost of living and the attractiveness of other occupations” for discouraging the “men and boys who should be learning the trade.”<sup>14</sup> Another way of stating Mather’s hypothesis is to simply say that tailors were no longer making enough money to attract young people into the field. This labor shortage created a curious twist on the trade’s supply-and-demand dynamic. As the number of journeymen dwindled in response to a perceived shortage of demand, those tailors already established in the field found that they had more work than they could handle in a timely manner and were sometimes forced to turn business away. The journeyman shortage may explain why Ralph would invest the time and energy in teaching the inexperienced Luther Peters tasks that a trained journeyman would have already known.

If hiring Luther was Ralph’s first adjustment to the economic realities of his lifetime, his second was to stop calling himself a tailor. According to the United States census, Ralph Pecora was a “retail merchant” in 1920, in possession of a “clothing store” that employed several people who were described as tailors or tailoresses on contemporaneous government documents: his brother Michael, his sister Louise, Luther Peters, and Gerard Mazziotta.<sup>15</sup> Although both plate-glass front windows of the Centre

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Mather, “The Question of Journeymen: An address delivered before the Merchant Tailor’s Exchange in Boston,” *Sartorial Art Journal*, July 1910, 24-25.

Street shop displayed the word “tailor” in large, capital letters, Ralph likewise chose not to use “tailor shop” as the sole descriptor of his business when placing a half-page display ad in the Freeland Borough Directory for 1921-22. Instead, he listed the business as “Pecora Brothers Tailors, Clothiers and Men’s Furnishings.” This somewhat long-winded name won the business three mentions in the Classified Business Directory section of the same directory: under the subject headings for “clothing,” “men’s furnishings,” and “tailors.”<sup>16</sup> Comparison with the only other Freeland tailor to take out a display ad in the 1921-22 Directory indicates that these occupational and commercial descriptors were deliberate choices and not indications of broad lexicographical shifts. James Veraldi, who owned a tailor shop at 511 Centre Street, describes himself as a “tailor” in the 1920 census and, in his quarter-page display ad, lists his store simply as a “Ladies’ and Gent’s Tailor.”

Veraldi chose to align his business (and himself) with a long tradition of tailoring as simply tailoring. A customer would know exactly what to expect of Veraldi: that he would make and sell customized clothing. Ralph instead situated himself within an overlap area of men’s clothing production, encompassing both the personalized appeal of customized production and the price-points and disposability of mass-produced goods. He was attempting to be both a skilled craftsman and a savvy businessman; to enjoy the comforts of the past along with the promises of the future. Although not all tailors chose

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<sup>15</sup> 1920 Federal Census (Population Schedule), “Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Freeland Borough, Sixth Ward, Dwelling 92, Family 93, Ralph Pecora household;” 1920 Federal Census (Population Schedule), “Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Freeland Borough, Fifth Ward, Dwelling 129, Family 132, Mary Pecora household;” 1920 Federal Census (Population Schedule), “Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Hazle Township, Drifton, Dwelling 9, Family 9, Leonard Peters household;” 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.”

<sup>16</sup> “Classified Business Directory of Freeland,” *Freeland Borough Directory 1921-22* (Luzerne Publishing Company, 1921), 114, 121, and 125.

this path, Ralph was not a trailblazer. The tailoring publications he read had been prescribing a forward-thinking, business-centric approach for years.

By 1920, those tailoring trade magazines that were still in publication were as concerned with the best practices of successful tailoring businesses as they were with the fine points of various drafting systems. “How to” essays began to almost exclusively address a variety of supposedly profit-enhancing strategies, and letters from readers, formerly focused on fit and fashion, shifted to descriptions of the business practices that tailors had implemented in their shops. Tailoring publications had always been concerned with the viability of the tailoring trade, and thus also interested in practices that might increase the possibility of an individual tailor’s lasting success. What changed were the types of skills tailors were encouraged to develop and perfect. Before the turn of the twentieth century, the majority of the editorial and technical content in the admittedly small sample of tailoring publications from this period that Ralph archived pressed tailors to enhance their cutting and fitting skills: tailors would beat the ready-made industry by offering a better fitting, better looking, higher quality product. In the 1900s and 1910s, the conversation shifted. Now, as a 1911 article in the *American Tailor and Cutter* stated, tailoring skills alone were not enough: “It behooves the small tailor to be up and doing if he is to hold his trade. Not only must he become a better cutter, but his business methods must be improved if he is to meet the demands of his customers, hold his trade, and still secure his usual margin of profit.”<sup>17</sup>

The twentieth-century tailor as businessman had a lot more to worry about than did a tailor operating a small shop 50 or even 30 years before. He was urged to balance the costs of outside services and products with the presumed savings that would result;

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<sup>17</sup> Anon, No title, *American Tailor and Cutter*, December 1911, 168.

establish a credit policy he felt comfortable with and communicate it to his customers; write advertising copy and place the ads in local publications; set prices for his goods that seemed reasonable beside ready-made price-points; maintain an up-to-date awareness of what was fashionable among different classes and different age groups of potential customers; and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of literally hundreds of drafting systems.

Many tailoring publications were improving business methods themselves in the early twentieth-century by filling more and more of their column inches with paid advertisements for outside products. The Mitchell Corporation relegated all outside advertisements to the last few pages of its publications, but A.D. Rude and Co. practiced prominent and sometimes deliberately disruptive placement of paid notices. In the publications *Modern Fashions* and *American Gentleman*, paid advertisements may occupy full interior pages or separate the illustration for a garment draft from its accompanying instructions. Both the Rude and the Mitchell publications began printing “advertorials” in the twentieth century. Set in plain font under headings like “Trade Notes,” these disguised advertisements praised the products of outside companies or directed readers to advertisements appearing on other pages.<sup>18</sup>

During the 1910s, the number and variety of product advertisements in these publications increased steadily. As the tailoring business faltered, the business of tailoring products and services prospered. A tailor who wished to embrace the “Efficiency that Brings Success,” touted in a 1912 essay in the *American Tailor and Cutter*, could choose from a great many time-saving products and services advertised

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<sup>18</sup> All found in the January 1910 issue of *Modern Fashions*, pgs. 16-17.

later in the decade.<sup>19</sup> The Perfect Coat Front Pad Co. would sell him pre-made versions of the canvas and padding that formed the anterior foundation of a men's suit jacket.<sup>20</sup> The Commercial Weaving Company would repair "all cuts, burns, misweaves, moth holes, and mill damages."<sup>21</sup> The "Collar-Hook Tape Measure" would "give the exact measures of the scye depth, waist length, coat length, strap measure, vest opening and vest length to the exactness heretofore impossible."<sup>22</sup> Frear Novelty Co.'s "Skirt and Trouser Hanger," with its patented zigzag hook, would free the tailor from the task of correcting hanger-induced "wrinkling of Coat Collars."<sup>23</sup> A publication titled *How to Figure Fast* would "[c]ut out the brain-fagging, nerve-trying old way of figuring" and liberate him "from the drudgery of cumbersome calculations."<sup>24</sup> And—one of the most extravagant promises of all—the Sanitex Company's cleaning machine would not only "[lift] out stains of every kind without leaving a mark," but make a tailor a rich man: "The only way to get rich, Mr. Tailor, is to get money. The only way to get money is to get business. The only way to get business is to get after it. The best way to get after it is to push the cleaning and pressing end of your business."<sup>25</sup>

All of these businesses and services were efficiency methods. They didn't change the tasks that a tailor offered to his customers. Instead, they promised to help him

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<sup>19</sup> Anon, "Efficiency that Bring Success," *American Tailor and Cutter*, March 1912, 263-264.

<sup>20</sup> Display Ad, *American Gentleman*, August 1917, 52.

<sup>21</sup> Display ad, *American Gentleman*, August 1917, 74.

<sup>22</sup> Display ad, *American Gentleman*, August 1917, 82.

<sup>23</sup> Display ad, *Modern Fashions*, July 1915, 22.

<sup>24</sup> Display ad, *American Gentleman*, August 1917, 76.

<sup>25</sup> Display ad, *Modern Fashions*, July 1915, 25.

complete these tasks more quickly, exactly, perfectly, and/or cheaply; in some cases by moving the actual work (e.g. producing coat fronts or reweaving holes) off-site and in others by selling the tailor a tool (a cleaning machine) or a trick (a fast-figuring method) that would improve his own efficiency. These goods and services offered the tailor who chose to purchase them the hope of salvation through volume. By doing more, more quickly, he would presumably bring in more money, even if the majority of the business encompassed by this “more” consisted of low-price-point tasks, like cleaning and pressing.

Although Ralph Pecora, Jr. very specifically remembers the processes and equipment with which his father constructed hand-made suits, the customers he remembers best are those who made repeated purchases of low price-point services. Both he and his late sister Amelia recalled the woman who would buy clothing in a size 12 and ask their father to alter it to a size 14. Ralph tells the story as follows: “She’d always buy a size 12 ... And she’d come in and put these suits on, and she’d say, it’s a little bit tight Ralph. And he would say to her, why don’t you buy a size 14. And she’d say, Ralph, I wear a size 12.”<sup>26</sup> Amelia also remembered, 70 years after the event, the morning she walked through the tailor shop on her way to school and ran into a man in his long underwear, reading the newspaper while her father pressed his suit.<sup>27</sup> Ralph did “push” the low-price-point aspects of his business. From the first, the windows of the Centre Street shop prominently displayed the words “cleaning” and “pressing.” Sometime in the 1920s, he invested in dry-cleaning equipment. Stanley D’Amore, the stepson of Gerard Mazziotta, remembers that Ralph’s oldest son John was responsible for operating the

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<sup>26</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> As told to author by Amelia Pecora; author’s personal recollection.

“new-fangled dry cleaning machine.”<sup>28</sup> In later years, perhaps due to safety concerns, Ralph hired out his dry cleaning. Patsy Corrigan, who lived above the Newberry’s Store next door (and who would be accused by his wife of spending too much time with Ralph’s wife Madeline), was the courier who picked up the garments and returned them clean.<sup>29</sup>

Even low-price-point services like pressing and making alterations could be a hard sell at certain economic times, particularly in a working-class community like Freeland. Tucked into Amelia Pecora’s scrap book from her high school years were four small sheets she’d filled, front and back, with information about herself and her family when she was 11 years old. She notes her height, her weight, her teacher’s name, and the names of her six siblings. She describes her mother as a “good cooker and baker,” and then devotes the remaining four pages to a description of her father’s business:

My Father is a tailor ... My Father does always the right thing and does it good and neet. He may charge a little dear for the things he makes. Why shouldn’t he when he used the very best cloth and the very best thread that is very expensive. He is always sure to have everything done right. Everybody who brought their clothes to him to be fixted or to have a suit made they were always satisfied with the work. No one wasn’t.<sup>30</sup>

That Ralph’s prices were “a little dear” must have either been something that Amelia’s father or mother complained about hearing from other people or that she had heard from classmates, who would have been echoing their parents, in school. Amelia’s ready defense, and her choice of words (“Why shouldn’t he,” most likely mimicking either

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<sup>28</sup> Stanley D’Amore interview, June 31, 2009; quote comes directly from a handwritten sheet of remembrances prepared by Mr. D’Amore for the author.

<sup>29</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Amelia was a notorious packrat. This scrapbook, along several other boxes of personal mementos are now in the possession of her daughter, Madeline Pecora Nugent.

Ralph’s “Why shouldn’t I” or Madeline’s “Why shouldn’t you”) suggests that the issue of Ralph’s prices, and the things people said about them, was openly discussed within the family. Amelia wrote this description in 1932 or 1933, when the prices of even basic goods seemed “too dear” to a large percentage of the U.S. population, but her list of counterpoints—her father’s use of the “best cloth” and “the very best thread,” his commitment to “hav[ing] everything done right”—makes clear that, for Ralph, by the early 1930s, price existed within a framework of contention that extended beyond specific economic ups and downs. Amelia sets up a dichotomy of price *versus* quality, and is proud of the fact that her father chose the latter. Presumably, he was proud of this fact as well.

What Amelia does not mention, and what she may not have even been aware of—her brother Ralph described a strict gender-based division of labor in the family: “So, we [boys] were helping Pop out in the store, in the business, and [the girls] were helping Mom”—was that Ralph did make a very significant concession to the consumer demand for lower-priced and lower quality goods.<sup>31</sup> Customers who wished to purchase customized clothing from Ralph Pecora had two options: they could purchase a top-tier “hand-made” garment, for which all of the work of taking measurements, drafting pattern pieces, shrinking fabric, and constructing, fitting, and finishing would be completed on site; or they could opt for a more moderately-priced “tailor-made” garment, which would be constructed by a company called Homeland Tailors, located in Baltimore, Maryland, based upon measurements taken and sent in by Ralph. Homeland Tailors operated what was called a tailor’s workshop, basically a factory for made-to-measure clothing. Tailor’s workshops drafted and cut out pattern pieces based upon individual

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<sup>31</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

measurements provided by their clients, and then used all of the efficiencies of mass production to construct garments much more quickly, and inexpensively, than a small tailor shop could. To a certain extent, tailor's workshops were a variation on the traditional division of labor between the master tailor, who sometimes did nothing more technical than interact with customers and take measurements, and "back-shop" workers, who did everything else. But there were important procedural differences. Relying upon a group of journeymen who were in another city or state, rather than just in the other room, meant that the master tailor had no opportunity to review or advise work while it was in progress. Workshop production also meant that the master tailor lost the opportunity to fit garments while they were under construction. Workshop goods were thus inevitably of poorer quality and fit than garments sewn on site. Tailors who utilized workshops acknowledged this disparity by selling "workshop" goods as a category separate from "custom" production. Ralph chose the terms "hand-made" and "tailor-made." A tailor advertising his business "in an Ohio city of 18,000 population" in the *American Tailor and Cutter* in 1908 described the two categories of goods that he offered as being "on an agency plan" or "along strictly custom lines."<sup>32</sup>

Tailor's workshops had been around since the early twentieth century. They were generally located in large cities, where there was an abundant labor force of men (often immigrants) with some tailoring knowledge. Tailor's workshops initially sprang up in response to the shortage of journeymen mentioned earlier—the 1908 advertisement for the Ohio shop states that it is a "[s]carcity of good 'jours'" which "makes it necessary to operate both ways"—however, the lower-price point of workshop goods soon became a selling point in itself. Tailoring workshops began by advertising themselves as a solution

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<sup>32</sup> "Business Opportunity," *American Tailor and Cutter*, April 1908, 258.

to the labor shortage, but soon switched their tactics to focus on the sales potential of moderately-priced customized clothing. In 1911, Cincinnati's Englander Tailoring Co. promised tailors that its workshop "eliminates the worry for lack of help; and gives an opportunity to solicit and accept any amount of order with the confidence that they can be filled with exacting care in every particular and on time."<sup>33</sup> Six years later, Chicago's A. Knapp Company told readers, "Many Merchant Tailors fail to realize the opportunities they have to increase sales by catering to those who want moderate priced suits."<sup>34</sup> Workshops were a tantalizing innovation for many tailors, offering the possibility of increased business without the cost of additional investment. However, workshops presented long-term dangers as well. By making visible the role of the master tailor as a mere "taker of measurements" and by establishing a lower price-point for "customized" clothing, the value of the tailor's services in the marketplace were further degraded. By bowing to the efficiency and rationalization of factory production, and making price rather than quality the primary selling point, tailors abandoned a product model that the ready-made industry could never compete with—fully customized goods, sewn on site and fitted throughout production—for one that it could—a moderately-priced garment that fit tolerably well. In effect, tailors who chose to utilize workshops traded short-term profit for long-term sustainability. Nonetheless, many tailors decided that they needed to utilize the new method if they wanted to have even a short-term future to enjoy.

Neither memories nor business records reveal exactly when Ralph Pecora began utilizing the services of Homeland Tailors. The earliest dated evidence connecting Ralph with Homeland is a letter written by his daughter Amelia on a piece of Homeland-Tailor

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<sup>33</sup> Display ad, *Modern Fashions*, July 1911, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Display Ad, *American Gentleman*, August 1917, 58.

stationery, with a date on top of “April \_\_ , 1933.” (Apparently, the young Amelia could not remember the exact date when she wrote this letter, to her cousin Tillie.) The design of the stationery stresses the corporate-individual partnership that workshops like Homeland Tailors depended upon. On the bottom of the page is an image of an eager young Homeland salesman, extending his hand to seal a deal, along with the copy, “Representing Homeland Made-to-Measure Clothes, ‘Built on Principle’.” On the top of the page are Ralph’s name, address, and telephone number (Figure 3.3.)<sup>35</sup> Ralph received and saved other pieces of what is now referred to as “marketing collateral” from Homeland, all if it stamped with his name and contact information. One such item, a cardboard placard illustrated with the same eager young salesman, declares that Homeland Clothes are “Tailored Just For You” and promises “Values that are possible no other way.”<sup>36</sup> Among Ralph’s possessions were also several envelopes addressed to Homeland Tailors, Inc., within which he would send his orders. Ralph also saved a personalized piece of collateral from another company: a small notebook with an advertisement for “Davis Tailor-Made Clothing” in the inside front cover and his name and address and a 1936-37 calendar on the back. Ralph Pecora, Jr. only remembers his father working with Homeland Tailors, but it is possible that he utilized other companies as well. It is also possible that the Davis corporation sent Ralph this notebook in a failed bid for his business and he saved it because he was incapable of throwing away good paper.

Regardless of how many workshops Ralph worked with or when he began to send them orders, it is safe to assume that he did so not because of a shortage of capable help,

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<sup>35</sup> Amelia Pecora, letter to “Tillie,” April X, 1933, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent.

<sup>36</sup> Undated marketing collateral for Homeland Tailors, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent.

but in order to offer customers “values that are possible no other way.” Between Gerard’s skills and Luther’s willingness to take care of basic tasks, Ralph had all of the help he needed for a shop of his size in a small town like Freeland. A worker’s time book, covering May 1, 1927 to January 30, 1930 and signed “paid RJP” at the end of each bi-monthly pay period, indicates that, rather than being overworked, this particular employee (there is no indication whether it belonged to Gerard or Luther) did not have a set, full-time schedule (Figure 3.4). Like the miners who dominated his community, this back-shop tailor worked a variety of hours, day by day, and week by week, depending on the demand for his services and for the product he helped to produce. There were days when he came in at seven in the morning and did not leave until seven-thirty or eight at night, and also days when he stopped working around noon or (on non-holidays) logged no hours at all. (Again like the miners) this worker thus had a very uneven monthly income with which to pay his fixed monthly expenses. For the first two slow weeks in January of 1929 and 1930, he made around \$35—at a time when Gerard’s monthly rent was \$35 and the rent paid by Luther’s parents, who he lived with, was \$30.40.<sup>37</sup> During the second pay period in May of 1927 and 1928, however, he earned around \$68.00.

Seasonal fluctuations are apparent—as indicated by the advertisement for the Mitchell school that opened Chapter 2, the weeks before and after Christmas were slow every year—but year-over-year trends are apparent as well. The three years of data for the period from May 1-Dec. 31 (due to the start date of the book, the only period for which three years of data are available) trace a clear decline in both hours worked and

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<sup>37</sup> 1930 Federal Census (Population Schedule), “Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Freeland Borough, Sixth Ward, Dwelling 153, Family 158, Gerardo Mazziotta household;” 1930 Federal Census (Population Schedule), “Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Hazle Township, Drifton, Dwelling 141, Family 141, Leonard Peters household.”

income earned. In 1929, this worker logged 2,006 hours during these months, for which he was paid \$1012.04. In the same eight months in 1928, he worked 1,935 hours and was paid \$934.91. For the same period in 1929, he worked 1,793 hours and was paid just \$700.27. The lower pay in 1928 and 1929 reflects not just a decline in hours worked, but also a drop in hourly wage from 50 to 45 cents an hour, beginning on September, 15 1928.<sup>38</sup> The recollections recorded by Thomas Dublin of garment factory employees in this same period help put these pay rates in perspective. When Anna Myers quit high school and began working in a clothing factory in nearby Mauch Chunk in 1923, she was paid 26 cents an hour, for regular 10-hour days.<sup>39</sup> When Tom Stohl began working in the Nesquehoning Silk Mill in 1928, after quitting school at 14, he was paid 12 cents an hour.<sup>40</sup> Anna and Tom thus would have brought home bi-weekly pay checks of \$31.20 and \$14.40 respectively.

A tailor lowering the wage he paid his workmen and teenagers dropping out of school in order to work full-time are two pieces of a much larger whole: the economic decline in the anthracite region that began long before the stock market crash of 1929. Production of coal (throughout the history of the industry, a quantity determined by demand rather than by supply) declined 10 percent in the years immediately following the end of World War I, and then dropped to almost half of peak-production during the strike year of 1922.<sup>41</sup> The 1922 strike lasted six months and ended with a government decision to grant neither the coal companies' proposal to lower wages nor the UMWA

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<sup>38</sup> Miscellaneous business records of Ralph Pecora, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Dublin, *When the Mines Closed: Stories of Struggles in Hard Times* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 190-191.

<sup>40</sup> Dublin, *When the Mines Closed*, 89.

<sup>41</sup> Murphy and Murphy, "Anthracite Region of Pennsylvania," Figure 10, 347.

demand that wages be raised.<sup>42</sup> Three years later, the longest strike in the history of the industry began, stretching 170 days from the fall of 1925 into the winter of 1926, again prompted by a demand for higher wages.<sup>43</sup> While motivated by what the miners perceived to be basic economic need, the strikes of 1922 and 1925 were popularly viewed as precipitating the industry's decline by further eroding demand for what, to the public, was coming to seem an unstable resource. Writing in 1938, the geographers Raymond and Marion Murphy concluded that "Every time a user of anthracite was forced to try some other product [due to a disruption in supply caused by a strike] there was the possibility that he might fail to return to the fold."<sup>44</sup> Following a post-strike rebound in 1926 (in order to meet a backlog of demand), production declined five percent year-over-year throughout the end of the 1920s.<sup>45</sup>

The garment-factory pay checks of women and teenagers supported many mining families throughout these, and other, tough times, but some families chose to try their luck elsewhere. The late 1920s were the years when people began leaving the region in significant numbers. Popular destinations during this first phase of out-migration were Detroit, where men sought jobs in automobile factories; Pittsburgh, where the steel mills were hiring; and Philadelphia, which offered employment opportunities in a variety of industries.<sup>46</sup> Freeland's population first dropped during this decade, from 7,419 in 1920 to 7,098 in 1930.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Dublin and Licht, *Face of Decline*, 55.

<sup>43</sup> 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), 292.

<sup>44</sup> Murphy and Murphy, "Anthracite Region of Pennsylvania," 345.

<sup>45</sup> Murphy and Murphy, "Anthracite Region of Pennsylvania," Figure 10, 347.

Even in parts of the country that enjoyed the economic boom typically associated with the 1920s, tailors were finding it increasingly difficult to make a living. In *Middletown Revisited*, Robert and Helen Merrill Lynd found that one of the many things that Middletown residents were buying in department stores in the 1920s, rather than making themselves or purchasing from local merchants, was ready-made clothing. The number of “tailors and tailoresses” in Middletown decreased by over 25 percent during the decade, from 40 in 1920 to 29 in 1930.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, the number of tailors in Freeland held steady throughout the 1920s. There are four tailors listed in the 1921-22 Directory and four tailors listed in the 1928-29 Directory, with three of these four being the same names.

While the fate of a great many other small-town tailors would need to be examined before any conclusions could be drawn about the fortunes of tailors in small and larger communities during this period, some loose generalizations about these two particular communities can act as a reminder of the individual variations that are invariably glossed over in any discussion of national trends. By the 1920s, many Middletown residents were living in sprawling suburbs; in the Freeland of the 1920s, everyone lived within a 15 or 20 minute walk from every one else (See Figure 3.5). Suburban residents of Middletown complain to the Lynds about not knowing their neighbors; Freelanders were in daily contact with their neighbors. Middletown children participate in structured leisure activities like piano lessons and sports leagues; of his childhood in Freeland, Ralph Pecora, Jr. remembers playing leap frog in alleyways,

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<sup>46</sup> Miller and Sharpless, *The Kingdom of Coal*, 311.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew E. Funk, Jr., “A History of the Freeland Area: No. 8,” *The Standard Speaker*, March 8, 1949.

<sup>48</sup> Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1937), 199.

stomping around on the sidewalk with tin cans bent around his shoes, and following miners' sons underground to play the game of "picking coal."<sup>49</sup> It is one of our cultural tropes to describe small towns as "a place that time forgot," but that doesn't accurately describe Freeland in the 1920s—an early adopter of electricity, Freeland also embraced the electrical appliances that followed; by 1930 42% of Freeland residents owned radios, at a time when the rate of radio ownership was 40% nationwide.<sup>50</sup> The difference between Freeland and Middletown seems not to have been the degree to which technology was adopted, but the degree to which technology dictated patterns of interaction. While in *Middletown Revisited*, families seldom eat dinner together because teenage children are always off somewhere in the car, Ralph Pecora, Jr. remembers that his family used their car almost exclusively for weekend pleasure trips, taken together.<sup>51</sup> In Middletown, radios are personal status symbols, enjoyed within the privacy of individual homes; in Freeland, according to the memories of residents, radios and televisions were community resources, enjoyed in groups at the town's many small saloons and cafes. The granddaughter of the proprietor of one such saloon, Remak's Bar, remembers that "[b]efore TVs became widespread, my grandmother would allow the patrons to crowd into the living room, just beyond the bar, to watch the heavyweight fights of the 1940s, such as the Joe Louis and Billy Conn battles, but, as soon as the fights were over, they had to clear out and go back to their Stegmaier."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, June 14, 2009.

<sup>50</sup> 1930 U.S. Federal Census (Population Schedule), "Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Freeland Borough;" Gary Cross, *An All Consuming Century: Why Commercialism won in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000): 62.

<sup>51</sup> Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1937), 184; Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, June 14, 2009.

If the preceding paragraph seems to present a rosy picture of small-town life, it should be remembered that these are differences, rather than value judgments. Depending on personal perspective, clamping tin cans to your shoes may be a poor substitute for playing on a sports team, and watching a heavyweight fight in someone else's living room and being "cleared out" when it is over may be a poor substitute for affording your own radio and enjoying the fight at home. It should also be remembered that the community spirit evident in Freeland during this period was the product of collective struggle, rather than collective prospering. Years of living with coal company monopolies and persistent economic insecurity had forced people to rely upon the resources offered by one another, after a rocky period in which inter-ethnic conflict and jealousy had been the norm. While "getting by with a little help from your friends" sounds idyllic, such diffuse interdependency can create a situation in which fitting in is necessary not just for personal happiness but for survival. Close-knit communities can also discourage personal experimentation and social criticism. Writing in the late 1980s, the geographer Ben Marsh eloquently captured the restricting side of anthracite communities: "[The region's] past has constrained people's repertoire of responses to the world, limiting them to those that conserve community."<sup>53</sup>

Of course, the preceding discussion does not tell us much about the life of a tailor in Freeland or in Middletown during the 1920s. The Lynds, unfortunately, did not spend any time interviewing Middletown tailors or other small business owners. The available evidence about Ralph's business paints an ambivalent picture. On one hand, a series of

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<sup>52</sup> "Businesses—20<sup>th</sup> and early 21st-Century Businesses – Restaurants, soda fountains, hangouts, cigar stores, beer distributors, bars, breweries, bottling works– Remak's Bar," History of Freeland, PA website, <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/ct0u/20Cfood-drink.html>, accessed September 26, 2010.

<sup>53</sup> Ben Marsh, "Continuity and Decline in the Anthracite Towns of Pennsylvania," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Sept. 1987), 347.

economizing measures suggests that Ralph was experiencing financial difficulties during the decade. Around the time that he lowered his employees' wages by five cents an hour, he decreased the size of his shop by half, choosing to rent out the right side of the building, numbered 530 Centre Street, while keeping the space and front window at 528 Centre Street for his tailoring business (Figure 3.6). (Ralph rented just the store portion of the building. The family continued to occupy all of the living space behind and above the storefronts.) Ralph's tenant in 1928 was Leon Polk, cigar agent and pawnbroker.<sup>54</sup> Later tenants would include an ice cream parlor in the 1930s and an optician in the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>55</sup> Ralph also opted not to pay for a display ad in Freeland's 1928-29 Directory or even to pay the presumably small sum to have his business listed in bold print in the classified section (as did his competitor James Veraldi). On the other hand, just because a man is economizing, it does not mean that he is in desperate financial straits. He might be saving toward a larger goal, one that now, more than at any previous time, seems to be within reach. Considerable evidence suggests that this latter scenario applies to Ralph Pecora. Between 1920 and 1930, Ralph paid off his mortgage, freeing himself from the overhead cost of monthly payments and, now that he was a landlord, turning the building he owned into a net producer of income. Also at sometime in this decade, Ralph accumulated a sum of money sufficient to buy his brother Michael out of their partnership (although he continued to use the name "Pecora Brothers" in the local directory.)<sup>56</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. remembers that personal circumstances caused the split

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<sup>54</sup> "Polk's Freeland Street and Avenue Guide and Directory of Householdors 1928-29," *Freeland Directory 1928-29* (Philadelphia: R.L. Polk and Company, 1928), 138.

<sup>55</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, June 14, 2009.

between the two brothers: “Uncle Mike was too much interested in a girl he was courting, so Pop decided to buy him out and let him go his way.”<sup>57</sup> Michael married the girl, and work for years as the driver of a bakery delivery truck. While there is no evidence of animosity between the two brothers as a result of the split, they would never be business partners again.

Ralph was now free to run his business the way he wanted to, without a brother to come to agreement with or a monthly bank payment to meet. His opting for a smaller physical footprint and a lower profile in the local directory suggests a shift in emphasis around this time, away from street traffic and impulse purchases to the repeat business of loyal customer who would seek Ralph out regardless of the visibility of his shop.

Who Ralph’s customers were during the (for the anthracite region) rough decade of the 1920s, and what they bought from him, are intriguing questions. His use of Homeland Tailors, which likely started in the 1920s, and his traffic in the small-scale repeat business of pressing and alterations were mentioned earlier. However, the considerable hours logged by the unnamed employee in the 1927-30 time book during even slower weeks and months are proof that Ralph was still doing a fair amount of the type of “hand-make” work that he had been trained in at the Mitchell school. According to Ralph Pecora, Jr., the people who would order hand-made garments—the garments which required his father to create a pattern “on black paper, with white chalk,” dampen cloth and hang it “in the kitchen, mom’s kitchen over a rack,” and perform fittings in front of “a mirror, a big mirror, about five feet tall and about two feet wide”—were the

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<sup>56</sup> “Michael Pecora,” *Freeland Directory 1928-29* (Philadelphia: R.L. Polk and Company, 1928), 100; 1930 Federal Census (Population Schedule), “Pennsylvania, Luzerne County, Freeland Borough, Dwelling 56, Family 56, Michael Pecora household.”

<sup>57</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

upper-class members, not of Ralph's hometown, but of his regional community. Specifically, the tailor's son mentions "doctors, lawyers, business people," railroad owners and engineers, and Mr. and Mrs. Butler, "who were big in the coal mining industry." These people lived in White Haven, a small community about six miles to the east of Freeland, and in larger and more prosperous Hazleton. Sometimes they traveled to Freeland to place orders and be fitted, and sometimes their tailor travelled to them, "tak[ing] samples with him, in a suitcase," and occasionally taking his son as well.<sup>58</sup>

Ralph Pecora, Jr. credits his father's abilities as a creator of hand-made garments with winning these customers. While he was not familiar with the reputations of any tailors located in White Haven or Freeland, he was confident that, of the Freeland tailors, his father was the best trained and had the most knowledgeable and skilled help. (This, however, did not prevent Ralph's wife Madeline from threatening to take her business "down to Veraldi" when he took too long with some mending or alteration that she'd requested.)<sup>59</sup> Hazleton and White Haven doctors and lawyers would not, however, have known Ralph by sight or by personal reputation as a matter of course. In the 1930s, Ralph was named to the Board of Directors of the Hazleton Federal Savings and Loan Association. Ralph Pecora, Jr. believes that this appointment first brought his father into contact with out-of-town, upper-class customers—"So he used to go to their meetings ... He was well known. And that's how he got to know the doctors and the lawyers and all this."<sup>60</sup>—but it seems more likely that Ralph was named to the board because these doctors and lawyers already knew him, and had known him for years. How Ralph

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<sup>58</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008

<sup>59</sup> Carolyn Pecora interview, October 19, 2008

<sup>60</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008

initially became acquainted with these men is something of a mystery. One possibility is that his personal hobbies also functioned as networking opportunities. His obituary mentions that “In his younger days, he was a well-known sportsman in the hunting and fishing circles.”<sup>61</sup> Hunting and fishing are not town-specific activities. While traveling to different fishing holes and hunting grounds in the hinterland that Freeland, White Haven, and Hazleton share, Ralph may have come into contact with enthusiasts from other towns, men who either became his customers or recommended him to future customers. And once he had secured that first customer in Freeland or in White Haven, good workmanship and a pleasant manner could—in the traditional way—ensure that this customer would return with more business, and would recommend Ralph to friends.

This change in customer base marked the end of Ralph Pecora’s existence as a strictly small-town tailor, earning his living from the business of his fellow townsmen. His neighbors’ fortunes had changed, the local market for his product had changed, and so he expanded his circle of potential customers, drawing in individuals from a wider world. Ralph’s recognition of the commercial limits of his local community coincided with a renewal of that community’s own attempts to encourage outside investment. In the spring of 1923, an advocacy group named the Freeland Business Men’s Association formed, with the stated purpose of bringing about “the Betterment of Freeland.”<sup>62</sup> According to Andrew E. Funk, Jr., who wrote a nine-part history of Freeland for Hazleton’s local paper in 1949, this group was part of a broad effort by “business and

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<sup>61</sup> “Ralph Pecora Taken in Death,” photocopy of undated clipping from an unidentified newspaper, provided by Carl Pecora, Jr.

<sup>62</sup> Display ad, *Freeland Directory 1928-29* (Philadelphia: R.L. Polk and Company, 1928), front cover.

civic heads” to “bolster the area’s economy with new industries.”<sup>63</sup> The occupations of the Freeland Business Men’s Association’s officers provide a sense of the leadership class in a small town like Freeland: President D. V. Brennan is listed as a “salesman” (of an unnamed product) in the white pages, Secretary M. Krusko is the owner of a drugstore, and Treasurer Sam Morris is the proprietor of a clothing store.<sup>64</sup> Despite the booming national economy, the group’s efforts were not successful. In fact, the only industry credited with beginning operation during the 1920s was the Freeland Bobbin works, which had in fact been in business since 1920, but expanded its operations in 1923, more than doubling its workforce from 10 to 25 employees, and expanded again to 42 employees in 1928.<sup>65</sup> The usual reasons can be blamed for the reluctance of factories to relocate to Freeland: the region’s entrenched labor culture; the undermined and unstable ground; and suspected (but never proven) pressure from coal companies, intent on maintaining a monopoly on employment opportunities for men. The poor quality of the ground was more than just rumor. In 1926, the Washington Silk Mill, located on Ridge Street, was badly damaged when the ground beneath it subsided following the removal of water from a Woodside mine.<sup>66</sup>

The commercial growth that did occur in Freeland during the decade was in the town’s small-business sector: from 1921 to 1928, Freeland’s barbers increased from 9 to

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<sup>63</sup> Funk, “A History of the Freeland Area: No. 8,” March 8, 1949.

<sup>64</sup> Display ad, *Freeland Directory 1928-29* (Philadelphia: R.L. Polk and Company, 1928), front cover; “Alphabetical List of Names,” *Freeland Borough Directory 1921-22* (Luzerne Publishing Company, 1921), 37, 68, and 80.

<sup>65</sup> “Businesses—20<sup>th</sup> and Early 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Businesses – Factories – Freeland Bobbin Works,” History of Freeland, PA website, <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/ct0u/20Cfactories.html>, accessed September 26, 2010.

<sup>66</sup> “Businesses—20<sup>th</sup> and Early 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Businesses – Factories – Washington Silk Company,” History of Freeland, PA website, <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/ct0u/20Cfactories.html>, accessed September 26, 2010.

13, its billiard halls from 4 to 6, and its grocers from 28 to 44. These were businesses that could be opened with a small initial investment, and that sold either a necessity (groceries) or a small luxury (a haircut or a game of pool) that people would indulge in even in hard times. Other types of businesses did not fair so well. Confectioners dropped from 14 to 6; jewelers from 3 to 1; and the 11 “shoemakers” listed in the 1921 Directory had become 9 “shoe repairers” in 1928. Interestingly, the number saloons actually increased from 26 to 29 during the prohibition decade (although the 29 are explicitly listed as “Saloon-soft drinks” in the 1928-29 Directory.)<sup>67</sup> The fate of small-town saloons during prohibition is an interesting question, but one that goes beyond the scope of this work. I will only offer the speculation that Freeland’s saloons were so integral to the town’s social life that local residents continued to patronize them even when they were not selling liquor.

Following the stock market crash in 1929, the already ailing anthracite industry deteriorated rapidly. In 1931, total production of anthracite fell to nearly half of what it had been during the peak years of World War I. In 1932, production declined another 20 percent.<sup>68</sup> Decreased production meant unemployment, and when the miners didn’t work, the rest of the community suffered. Writing in 1938, the geographers Raymond and Marion Murphy observed, “The stores are busy in normal times for the miners have money to spend and believe in spending it. But when the mines are shut down there is a lifeless quality to the town.”<sup>69</sup> A 1934 study found that in the coal town of Mahanoy

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<sup>67</sup> “Classified Business Directory,” *Freeland Borough Directory 1921-22* (Luzerne Publishing Company, 1921); “Classified Business Directory,” *Freeland Directory 1928-29* (Philadelphia: R.L. Polk and Company, 1928).

<sup>68</sup> Murphy and Murphy, “Anthracite Region of Pennsylvania,” 347.

<sup>69</sup> Murphy and Murphy, “Anthracite Region of Pennsylvania,” 341.

City, where six out of seven collieries closed between 1930 and 1932, local merchants had suffered a 70 percent drop in business in four years.<sup>70</sup>

Even though the fates of miners and merchants were interconnected, their abilities to weather tough economic time differed significantly. Merchants often owned their homes and the storefronts that were located in them; may have done well enough during even the lean 1920s to accrue a modest savings; and had the resource of their stock or skills to fall back on: a grocer could buy food for his family wholesale, a tailor could clothe himself for just the cost of material, a shoemaker (or “repairer”) could mend worn soles for free. Miners, on the other hand, typically rented, generally had no significant savings, and needed to purchase all of their basic goods at retail prices. As a result of being less secure, miners were also more mobile. A merchant who owned his home would have little to gain by leaving the area, while a miner who rented may as well take his chances somewhere else. Outmigration figures for miners and merchants varied considerably. Between 1930 and 1940, Freeland’s population declined a relatively modest 7%, while the adjacent patch towns of Eckley and Upper Lehigh lost 22 and 26% of their populations respectively. Nearby Drifton shed an astonishing 69% of its population during the decade, going from 1,633 residents in 1930 to just 510 residents ten years later.<sup>71</sup> As in the 1920s, those who left sought out work in Philadelphia or Pittsburgh or Detroit; but, unlike the previous decade, jobs in these cities were increasingly rare, and the competition for them fierce.

Miners who chose not to leave the region developed two distinct survival strategies, one which relied upon individual initiative and the other upon the strength of

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<sup>70</sup> Dublin and Licht, *The Face of Decline*, 75.

<sup>71</sup> Funk, “A History of the Freeland Area: No. 8.”

the community. The entrepreneurial approach, dominant in the scattered coal fields in the southwestern part of the region, was to dig coal on one's own and sell it directly to markets in New York City and Philadelphia. Independent or "bootleg" mining was not a new idea, but as the number of idle and abandoned mines mushroomed during the 1930s, due both to decreased demand and the rise of machine-powered strip mining, the practice became increasingly common. During the mid and late 1930s, bootlegged product has been estimated to have accounted for 10 percent of total anthracite production.<sup>72</sup> It was of course illegal to take coal from company-owned mines, but patrolling the dozens of inactive mine entrances was difficult and often not worth a company's time. The more serious threat facing bootleggers was physical safety (Figure 3.7). Bootleg miners took risks that company miners would not: working without supervision or safety provisions, and sometimes giving in to the temptation to take coal from pillars that had deliberately been left standing in order to support the mine roof.<sup>73</sup> Operating in small teams, utilizing old-fashion hand-equipment techniques, yields were modest and profits small. Those who bootlegged, though, saw it as their only option.

In the five communities that made up the southeastern portion of the anthracite region, an area known as the Panther Valley, an entirely different strategy succeeded in reactivating idle mines and idle miners: an equalization of work campaign. Equalization of work demanded that the Lehigh Navigation Company, which owned all of the mines in this region, work each equally, rather than focusing operations on those mines in which the coal was closer to the surface and thus cheaper to harvest. Before the equalization push was started, miners employed in the "low-cost" mines enjoyed twice as many work

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<sup>72</sup> Dublin, *Face of Decline*, 74.

<sup>73</sup> Dublin, *When the Mines Closed*, 225.

days per year as those employed in “high-cost” mines.<sup>74</sup> All miners, both those benefitting and being hurt by the imbalance, united in demands to equalize the work. An equalization strike in 1933 ended inconclusively, but pressure from community merchants, clergy, and newspaper editors was successful in securing an equalization agreement later that year. Many of these community leaders were highly outspoken in their support of the miners, openly challenging the power and the presumed rights of the coal companies to decide when and where to operate. John Pounder, a Baptist minister and spokesman for the Panther Valley Equalization Committee, blatantly asserted that “the freedom of choice on the part of coal companies to operate only their low cost collieries, mines, and strippings [must] be denied.”<sup>75</sup> Once won, equalization was policed by the miners themselves, who kept track of how many days each of the Lehigh Navigation Company mines worked and called for work stoppages when imbalances were observed. Throughout the 1930s, equalization succeeded in securing a steady level of work for Panther Valley miners. As Thomas Dublin observes, “Times were not good for miners in the Panther Valley, but at least all shared the burdens of short time equally.”<sup>76</sup>

Attempts to enact equalization in other parts of the anthracite region were not only unsuccessful but resulted in an ultimately violent split between the United Mine Workers Association (UMWA) and a breakaway union, the United Anthracite Miners of Pennsylvania (UAMP). The UMWA, which represented both anthracite and bituminous miners, shied away from the equalization drive from the outset, deeming it too radical a

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<sup>74</sup> Dublin, *Face of Decline*, 71.

<sup>75</sup> Dublin, *Face of Decline*, 66.

<sup>76</sup> Dublin, *Face of Decline*, 70.

demand to pick up at the national level. Equalization pushes in other parts of the anthracite region continued nonetheless. Workers in the northern coal fields struck for equalization in 1932, but the strike lasted just three weeks and resulted only in the expulsion of strike leaders from the UMWA, which had not backed the action. These expelled members formed the UAMP and began recruiting members from the employees of high-cost, idle mines. However, by the time the UAMP convened in Wilkes Barre in August 1933, the equalization campaign had taken a back burner to the demand that members who had been fired at the urging of the UMWA be given back their jobs. The UAMP called a series of strikes, which led to violent clashes between striking and working miners. In addition to these hand-to-hand skirmishes, bombs were planted on the porches and in the automobiles of working miners and local UMWA leaders. The only fatalities, however, were the leader of the UAMP, Thomas Maloney, his son, and a local school official, who were killed by mail bombs in the spring of 1936. These murders occurred months after the UAMP had officially disbanded following a federal arbitrator's ruling in favor of the UMWA late in 1934.<sup>77</sup> In this case, the demand for equalization of work resulted in the antithesis of solidarity: violent and even deadly struggle between opposing factions.

Dublin concludes that geography explains the success of the Panther Valley effort and the failure of others. In the Panther Valley, all of the mines were owned by a single company and each of the mining communities within the valley shared a common enemy and, to a large extent, a common culture. In the northern coal fields, ownership was spread across a variety of companies (although a good number of them were widely recognized as sham holding companies set up in response to anti-trust rulings) and the

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<sup>77</sup> Dublin, *Face of Decline*, 72-74.

fortunes of miners in different communities seemed to be less explicitly linked. It would also have been logistically difficult to coordinate and enforce equalization across a variety of companies' holdings.<sup>78</sup>

Although Freeland is geographically much closer to Wilkes Barre than to Panther Valley, the clash between communities and rival unions in the northern coal fields does not reflect any strife within the community of Freeland during these years. In fact, Freeland's Depression years are remembered as a time in which ethnic conflicts receded, community loyalty grew, and people willingly shared what resources they had. These same responses are now a part of our national mythology about the Great Depression—for some, a way to congratulate ourselves about our innate national character; for others, a comparison against which to bemoan the current deterioration of our society—but available sources confirm that, in this community at least, there was a great deal of truth to the unity-through-adversity tale. Ben Marsh has observed the same support responses in the string of anthracite communities to the south of Freeland that he studied in the 1980s, concluding that “When the industry failed, the community that had defended individuals from the problems of mining continued to protect them from the problems of no mining.”<sup>79</sup>

One of the more striking developments in anthracite towns during the Depression years was the disappearance of the ethnic strife that colors the folks songs transcribed by George Korson and that was found to be a common subject of 19th-century newspaper articles by Rowland Berthoff. In comparison to the beatings, stoning, and dynamitings Berthoff notes, men and women who were children in Freeland during the Great

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<sup>78</sup> Dublin, *Face of Decline*, 74.

<sup>79</sup> Ben Marsh, “Continuity and Decline...,” 339.

Depression remember an atmosphere of almost-idyllic friendliness and cooperation. Lorraine Rehn Gricevics, who was born in Freeland in 1925, remembers playing with children from a variety of backgrounds as a child. She was a Slovak Lutheran, while one of her best friends was Elvira Bitetti, an Italian Catholic and the daughter of Ralph's sister Madeline. Lorraine remembers walking with Elvira to Saturday confession and helping her decide what to confess that week: "I would tell her, say you said a few curse words." She also remembers the way that the priest, who happened to be Elvira's uncle, would tease her: "Father Bitetti would say, what are you, are you Italian? I would say no, I'm Lutheran. He'd say, well that's better than being nothing."<sup>80</sup> Bob Zimmerman, born in Freeland in 1935, has a German, English, and French background, but his best friend when he was young was a Tyrolean boy. Like Lorraine, his friend's Catholicism both intrigued and puzzled him. He remembers, perhaps exaggeratedly, that his friend would have to pray 50 Hail Mary's and 50 Our Father's before he would be allowed to go out and play.<sup>81</sup>

The recollections of residents from other towns suggest that ethnic integration was a region-wide development. In Thomas Dublin's book of oral history, *When the Mines Closed*, Theresa Pawlocak, born in Lansford in 1915 to Croatian parents, recalls a time in which ethnic differences were a source of uneasiness for herself and her family, but also remembers when that uneasiness disappeared. Rather than filtered through religion, her understanding of ethnicity is grounded in food. "I remember as a little girl, we had an Italian neighbor and they sent over spaghetti and meatballs, we didn't even want to taste it ... Then later on my mother got the recipe and she started making it, and

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<sup>80</sup> Lorraine Rehn Gricevics, telephone interview by author, July 12, 2009.

<sup>81</sup> Bob Zimmerman, interview by author, Weatherly, Pennsylvania, December 28, 2009.

boy, before you know it we're spaghetti eaters! We're all eating spaghetti and the cheese and all! You learn."<sup>82</sup> She also remembers that her mother, who "never knew how to bake a cake, because in those days in Yugoslavia, nobody made cakes," learned how to bake from an Englishwoman who lived in the neighborhood. In exchange, her mother taught her English neighbor how to make apple strudel, nut roll, and poppy seed roll.<sup>83</sup>

One interesting aspect of these memories is how keenly these subjects, who were children at the time, were aware of their own ethnicity and the ethnicity of others, without that awareness dictating a pattern of social interaction or a sense of identity. By the 1930s, with the stream of newcomers dried up and anthracite communities losing population in significant numbers, diversity had become a community resource, rather than a threat. A Croatian woman could learn how to cook spaghetti and bake cakes from her Italian and English neighbors. Likewise, a Freeland Catholic of any ethnic background could choose from among the town's five churches, according to his or her preference for a particular priest's sermons, or even the scheduled time of that parish's services. In her diary for 1940, Ralph's third daughter Amelia (who was 19 at the time), makes note of variously attending Sunday services at St. Ann's (the "Irish church"), St. Anthony's (the "Italian church"), and "the Greek basement," which was an Orthodox Greek church that happened to be located beneath the street level. In *When the Mines Closed*, Irene Gangaware (whose parents were both Slovak) remembers attending church in Lansford at Saint Michael's, which she indentified as "the Slovak parish" but also at

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<sup>82</sup> Dublin, *When the Mines Closed*, 218-219 .

<sup>83</sup> Dublin, *When the Mines Closed*, 207.

Saint Ann's, of which she commented, "They call it the Irish Church, but it's 99 percent Italians, so who cares."<sup>84</sup>

An at least rudimentary grasp of others' languages could also be gleaned from one's neighbors. Lorraine Gricevics and Bob Zimmerman both remember older people in their neighborhoods who did not speak English and yet were able to converse with neighbors who spoke another non-English language. Lorraine remembers an Italian woman who would come to their house and "speak Slovak to Grandmom" and then "go up the street to visit a Polish man" and speak Polish to him.<sup>85</sup> Bob remembers that "when I was a child, our next-door neighbor was Slovis" and the "neighbor across the street was Lithuanian" and that "they could converse with one another." Bob also remembers that, when he dropped off the newspaper at Ralph Pecora's tailor shop while working as a paperboy, Ralph—who was under the mistaken impression that Bob was Polish—would always say something to him in Polish, which Bob did not understand.<sup>86</sup>

Another interesting aspect of these Depression-era recollections is the evident give-and-take of knowledge and traditions—as opposed to a one-directional flow from higher-status to lower-status cultures. This give and take can be viewed as one of the many manifestations of the social principle of reciprocity that has been widely recognized as an organizing basis of life in anthracite communities. Anthropologists define reciprocity as a principle of exchange governing transactions between social equals, "who are normally related by kinship, marriage, or other close personal tie."<sup>87</sup> In *Coalcracker*

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<sup>84</sup> Dublin, *When the Mines Closed*, 159-160.

<sup>85</sup> Lorraine Rehn Gricevics interview, July 12, 2009.

<sup>86</sup> Bob Zimmerman interview, December 28, 2009.

<sup>87</sup> Conrad Kottak, *Cultural Anthropology, 13e* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 182.

*Culture*, Harold Aurand puts this principle into everyday terms: “give good to the neighbors for they will return good to you.”<sup>88</sup> Acts of kindness or giving motivated by reciprocity are very different from acts motivated by charity or compassion. Reciprocity is a system of both giving and receiving, in which participants contribute to what Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, speaking of early 19th-century Maine, calls a “common fund of neighborliness,” from which resources may be drawn as needed.<sup>89</sup>

Reciprocity has been identified as an organizing principle of the social and economic relations of anthracite communities from the very beginning, but the circle of those included in reciprocal transactions expanded greatly over time. In the early years, reciprocal obligations were typically limited to one’s ethnic group or one’s immediate co-workers (including the animals one worked with: Aurand mentions “a ballad purporting to be a letter written by a mule to his driver noting that he never kicked him because the boy never whipped him.”)<sup>90</sup> John Mitchell’s comprehensive organizing before and during the strike of 1902 is believed to be responsible for broadening miners’ sense of reciprocal obligations to workers from different ethnic backgrounds and different towns. The memories of people who were children or teenagers in anthracite communities during the 1930s and early 1940s suggest that the population losses and economic struggles of the Great Depression further broadened and heightened the sense of reciprocal obligations felt by all residents, extending it to every other person with whom they shared a community and making it the dominant feature of their social worlds.

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<sup>88</sup> Harold Aurand, *Coalcracker Culture*, 120.

<sup>89</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Midwife’s Tale* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 63.

<sup>90</sup> Harold Aurand, *Coalcracker Culture*, 120.

Amelia Pecora's early diaries provide a detailed account of one young Freelanders' experience of this reciprocity-dominated world. Amelia began keeping a diary in 1939 and continued to do so for the rest of her life. (See Figure 3.8 for a photograph of Amelia as a young woman.) She wrote in her diary every day, although not all books or even all entries within books are extant. Portions of her 1939 and 1940 diaries have survived, and their content is very telling. In these entries, each about a page long, this young woman—who has just graduated high school, is dating, and is struggling to find a job—writes very little about her personal thoughts, feelings, or hopes for the future. Instead she keeps track of small gifts given and accepted, food eaten and offered, visits made and received. Excerpts like the following are representative:

December 8, 1939: At 3:00 Mother and I went down to see Marie Beth and her baby daughter. She came home from the hospital Tues. Mother gave her a big, pink, woolen blanket. Looked at all of her baby and sick cards. Then we went down to see Cassie who also came home from the hospital Tues. Talked quite a while. Home 5:45

December 9, 1939: Got dressed and went to see Harriet. She got home from the hospital 12:00. Brought her a big box of oranges, tangerines, grapefruits and some raisin sweet cake. Sat and talked with her till 3:00....Brought some cake down Leo Ravena's and talked a while.

December 11, 1939: Harriet called up and at 11:30 I went over. She is still in bed. I brought a book of jokes, my autograph books and Ripley's book over. I also brought my knitting and did a lot of it there. We talked and ate pretzels. Home 4:00.<sup>91</sup>

At first glance, these details seem trivial, but read against a background of reciprocal exchange, their significance becomes apparent. What Amelia is writing about in these three entries is not just oranges, pretzels, and sick cards, but her own and others' social status. The exchange of food, gifts, conversation, and personal attention she records

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<sup>91</sup> Diary of Amelia Pecora, December 8, 1939, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent; Diary of Amelia Pecora, December 9, 1939, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent; Diary of Amelia Pecora, December 11, 1939, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent.

describes a web of alliance and relationship that is the basis of her social world. This exchange is very different from a market exchange, in which debit and credit is tallied for each discrete trade. Instead, reciprocal exchange is general and long-term; a diffuse, open sense of mutual obligation that is continually renewed through everyday, small-scale acts. Obligations to one's neighbors thus remain for as long as they are neighbors, and social status is connected not to the value of the goods used to satisfy these obligations, but to the acts of giving and receiving themselves.

Threats to social standing come from the same sources. So much of Amelia's diaries are missing because she destroyed them herself: tearing out some pages and crossing out the writing in others, transcribing certain events from destroyed entries onto the blank backs of pieces of junk mail and tucking them into extant books. Careful analysis of remaining context clues, combined with an examination of the text barely visible beneath crossed-out lines, indicates that what Amelia edited out of her life were moments in which she failed in either her obligation to give or to receive. The longer removed passages all seem to have been related to unsuccessful romantic relationships, relationships in which Amelia was the less enthusiastic party: she turned down six proposals before marrying at age 26. The beginnings of these romances appear in her diaries—a young man pays her particular attention, takes her out on dates, and buys her small gifts—but the ends are always missing, the moment in which she unequivocally refuses to reciprocate the level and intensity of his affections. The scribbles attempt to hide smaller cracks in the social web of reciprocal obligation. Amelia crossed out a mention of finding a date annoying, yelling at a friend, and yelling at her brother: all instances of not graciously accepting another's company. She crossed out her record of

calling a young man instead of waiting for him to call her, of wanting to score the highest grade on one of her nursing exams, and of taking a nursing uniform from the hospital laundry room after misplacing her own: all instances of wanting something for herself alone. The junk mail that she transcribed “safe” events onto dates from the late seventies or early eighties, meaning that Amelia did this editing when she was in her late fifties or early sixties. This sense of reciprocal obligation to others and the shame at shirking them had stayed with her late into life, even though she had moved away, after marriage, from the town within which these obligations applied.

The rules and expectations of reciprocity, and the web of alliance they created, can help us make sense of why anyone would have stayed in Freeland, or any other anthracite community, as the town died. These towns were places in which residents were counted on and in which they could count on other people; these people (and the oranges, pretzels, and baby gifts they offered) were a resource that would be lacking in any new location, a resource that many valued more highly than a steady wage. Reciprocity can also help us to make sense of the role of the small business in these communities during the 1930s and early 1940s. Small-business owners were friends and neighbors, as well as merchants. Money spent in their establishments was an investment in one’s own community, and in return for loyal business, small-business owners and even landlords extended credit without interest, over indefinite periods of time. In *When the Mines Closed*, Ella Strohl remembers that for six months, while her husband was unemployed, they paid no rent and paid nothing for the meat she got from the butcher. Then, when her husband was working again, they made double payments to the landlord and the butcher, one for that month’s bill and another for a portion of what they owed. In

a few months, they had satisfied their debts and had paid no more, in total, than they would have if her husband had worked steadily over the preceding year.<sup>92</sup>

Of course, the experience of a small-town grocer or a landlord cannot be accurately compared to that of a small-town tailor. A merchant of a basic necessity like groceries or housing could count upon his fellow townspeople to keep spending, or at least accruing bills, even when times were bad; a merchant of a product that, by the 1930s had become a luxury, needed to rely upon other strategies. And so, while Ralph's daughter Amelia navigated a web of reciprocal social relations located within the streets and households of Freeland, Ralph continued to cultivate relationships with Hazleton's bankers and White Haven's hunting and fishing enthusiasts, relationships which, according to his son, served the primary purpose of securing customers. At the same time, Ralph Pecora maintained a presence in his own community, taking out a display ad in the play bill for the 1939 Freeland High School Production of a musical called "Chain Lightning;" erroneously greeting the German/English paperboy in Polish; appearing briefly on the front stoop of his shop in a thirty-minute silent movie of Freeland's streets, stores, schools, and inhabitants, dated to the late 1930s by local historians, based on the styles of clothing and models of cars.<sup>93</sup> Ralph also continued to enjoy the regular business of local customers who, even if they could not afford new suits, continued to come to his shop to have garments cleaned, pressed, and/or altered. Some of these customers were friends of or friendly with Ralph. Others were sent to him by the owners of Freeland's ready-made men's clothing stores, with whom, accordingly to Ralph

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<sup>92</sup> Dublin, *When the Mines Closed*, 110.

<sup>93</sup> This film was found on a reel in the basement of the Refowich Theater in the 1990s. As of March of 2011, no one has been able to determine who created it or why. The Freeland Historical Society has transferred the film to DVD format and made it available to interested parties for a fee of \$15.

Pecora, Jr., his father always remained “very friendly.”<sup>94</sup> Among Ralph, Sr.’s surviving business records are periodically updated price lists for typical alterations that he negotiated for the customers of ready-made retailers Morris Chenetz and Louis Nassan. Ralph was also clearly sending orders to Homeland Tailors in the 1930s, although the demographic and/or geographic identities of the customers who ordered tailor-made clothing from him is unknown.

The combined revenue from hand-made garments; cleaning, pressing, and alterations; and tailor-made clothing seems to have met the needs of the now nine-member Pecora family during the Great Depression, as well as provided for a few luxuries. While Amelia’s diary entries for these years do not record any large purchases, small daily expenditures were a way of life. In just the two weeks between November 23 and December 7 of 1939, her parents bought tickets for themselves, Amelia, and her older brother John to the Bette Davis film “Old Maid”; her mother ordered a “big beautiful dollar birthday cake from Dugans” for her sister Beatrice’s birthday; and her father bought her and her mother two 25-cent tickets to a card party, where Amelia additionally purchased a “10c plate of chocolate ice cream.”<sup>95</sup>

The ability to purchase small luxuries like these constituted a class difference in Freeland’s relatively unstratified social world. Lorraine Gricevics, the daughter of a mine blacksmith, and Bob Zimmerman, the son of a miner, do not remember being treated to any unnecessary purchases as children and young adults. Lorraine did attend the movies every Saturday, but she never paid for her ticket. The same Father Bitetti who had just

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<sup>94</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

<sup>95</sup> Diary of Amelia Pecora, November 23, 1939, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent; Diary of Amelia Pecora, November 27, 1939, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent; Diary of Amelia Pecora, December 7, 1939, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent.

heard her friend Elvira's confession would take the two girls to the Refowich, which had a policy of admitting local clergy and their guests for free, walk them through the door, and then walk back out again.<sup>96</sup> Bob Zimmerman remembers that most of his free time as a child was spent outside: skating on or skinny dipping in the pools of water in the strip mines, or playing games of baseball in empty lots, with cracked bats and balls that had lost their covers and gradually shed layers of string. He also remembers "picking coal," the colloquial term for gathering loose coal from beside the railroad tracks and around the mine entrances for household use.<sup>97</sup> Bob remembers that "almost everyone in town picked coal," but that almost everyone did not include Ralph Pecora, Jr. Ralph, Jr. picked coal only once, out of curiosity, and ended up losing his father's "seven-dollar hammer" in the process, a loss that cured him of his curiosity: "A \$7 hammer could buy almost a half a ton of coal. And I got a little bucket-full. I remember that. It wasn't a very good deal."<sup>98</sup> In attempting to establish Ralph Pecora's standing in Freeland, Stanley D'Amore focuses on an even more minute detail than the difference between paying for movie tickets or sneaking in, or playing at picking coal versus meeting a basic household need. According to Stanley, people knew that Ralph was somebody because "He never bought a single bottle of Coca-Cola, he was known as the man to buy a six pack."<sup>99</sup>

While Ralph was earning enough as a tailor for his family to enjoy a slightly higher standard of living than many of their neighbors, he was not earning enough to

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<sup>96</sup> Lorrain Rehn Gricevics interview, July 12, 2009.

<sup>97</sup> Bob Zimmerman interview, December 28, 2009.

<sup>98</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

<sup>99</sup> Stanley D'Amore interview, June 31, 2009; quote comes directly from a handwritten sheet of remembrances prepared by Mr. D'Amore for the author.

accrue significant savings or to pass on any inheritance to his children. Ralph Pecora, Jr. was very aware of the limits of his father's financial situation as he entered adulthood: "College seemed to be out of the picture for me ... Pop just didn't have the money."<sup>100</sup> Instead of planning for college, Ralph enrolled in the commercial course at the Freeland High School, thinking that perhaps he would be able to take over his father's business. But, when he graduated in 1941, that business did not seem very promising. According to Ralph, Jr., "Pop felt that the future wasn't there."<sup>101</sup> The eldest Pecora son, John, was working at a well-paying job at the Bethlehem Steel mill, more than sixty miles from Freeland; a position that, according to Ralph, he was able to get through one of his father's connections in White Haven. The eldest unmarried daughter, Amelia, was enrolled in nursing school at the Hazleton State Hospital, a training program that she paid for herself from the savings she had accrued while working as a server at the Hazle Dip ice cream stand. Ralph, Jr. also left Freeland in pursuit of a future for himself. His brother John helped him to get a job at Bethlehem Steel, which was by then manufacturing "[explosives] shells and things," and then the draft started.

Since he was manufacturing war material, Ralph, Jr. was granted draft deferments for two-and-a-half years, before being called into the navy. His brother John was drafted into the Army and ended up in England, where he was involved in intelligence work. Carl Pecora was drafted in the marines, was stationed in the Pacific, and fought in the battle of Iwo Jima. (See Figure 3.9 for an image of the entire Pecora family, taken as a memento before the three brothers went off to fight in the war.) Ralph never left the

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<sup>100</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, June 14, 2009.

<sup>101</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

United States or saw active combat. Instead, he was placed in “aviation machinists mate school” in Memphis. By the time his training had ended, the war was over and he was engaged to Carolyn. Despite not having left the United States, Ralph describes his experience during the war as having had a “tremendous” effect on his future, as it took him away from the anthracite region and gave him access to an education that had been previously unthinkable.<sup>102</sup> His wife Carolyn believes that World War II had a tremendous effect on their entire generation. As she put it, “Times changed. The war came along.”<sup>103</sup>

Times changed in the anthracite region as well: for the young men who were drafted, the young women who moved away from home to take available factory jobs, and the middle-aged miners who, in response to war-time demand, found themselves working six-day weeks after a decade of struggling to get by.<sup>104</sup> Even before war-time re-employment, Freeland’s prospects were looking up. A new highway linked Freeland and White Haven in 1940, and three new industries arrived in town the same year: the Freeland Dress Company, Freeland Mills, Inc., and the Eikov Manufacturing Company.<sup>105</sup> The collective annual payroll of these three manufacturers has been estimated at \$120,000, money which, before there were any malls or chain stores accessible to residents, trickled down from employees’ paychecks to the cash registers of local businesses.<sup>106</sup> Encouraged by this pre-war success, after the war, the Freeland

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<sup>102</sup> Ralph Pecora, Jr. interview, October 19, 2008.

<sup>103</sup> Carolyn Pecora interview, October 19, 2008.

<sup>104</sup> Dublin, *When the Mines Closed*, 8.

<sup>105</sup> Stumpf, 44.

<sup>106</sup> Funk, “A History of the Freeland Area: No. 9.”

Community Corporation began purchasing land appropriate for future industrial sites, with the plan to construct shell buildings as needed to attract interested industries.

Writing in 1949, Andrew E. Funk, Jr. expressed a broad sense of optimism about this effort, as well as about Freeland's future. He wrapped up his nine-part newspaper series on Freeland's history with praise for recent efforts to "put Freeland back on the path of progress and growth that it had enjoyed during its 'Golden Era'," confidence that these efforts will "once again make it a solid, progressive, and active community," and a final tribute to the "struggles and accomplishments of a free people in a free land, FREELAND."<sup>107</sup>

Funk's optimistic predictions did not come true. The post-war mining boom came to an abrupt end in 1949, when production dropped by nearly 25 percent in just 12 months. By 1953, production had dropped another 30 percent.<sup>108</sup> During the depression, mines had sat idle. Now they began closing, one after the other until the last underground anthracite mine in the region closed in Lansford in 1972. Population loss accelerated, and became skewed by age. Young men and women left the region in large numbers while older residents who owned homes and had deep attachments to their communities were more likely to stay. Many men began what would turn out to be decades-long periods of long-term commuting, working in and boarding near factories in New Jersey and Philadelphia during the week, and coming home on weekends to be with their families. Efforts to lure new industry to the region were taken up by nearly every anthracite community, resulting in a bidding war that only a few communities could win.

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<sup>107</sup> Funk, "A History of the Freeland Area: No. 9."

<sup>108</sup> Dublin, *When the Mines Closed*, 9.

Hazleton had one of the most successful and most aggressive industrializing campaigns, eventually bringing a national highway exchange and two industrial parks to the community. Community leaders made no secret of the competitive nature of their efforts. A 1956 fund-raising pamphlet titled “A Primer for Giving” provides a long list of nearby communities that Hazleton was then in direct competition with for new jobs: “Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Pottsville, Pittston, Nesquehoning, Shenandoah, Shamokin, and even Freeland and Tamaqua.”<sup>109</sup> Communities “won” new industry by offering the most attractive subsidies and concessions to factory owners; the cost of new jobs could be quite high. In 1947, the Hazleton Chamber of Commerce raised a half-million dollars to offset the construction of an Electric Auto-Lite factory in the community. In return, Electric Auto-Lite promised 1,000 new jobs, but at its peak the plant never employed more than 300 people.<sup>110</sup>

Communities could lure industry through donations of cash, land, and shell buildings, as well as by overlooking potential hazards to employees and the larger community. By the 1990s, the two largest industries in the anthracite region were toxic waste disposal (former mines make excellent landfills) and prisons.<sup>111</sup> For better or for worse, Freeland succeeded in attracting neither of these industries. Today, the only industry in Freeland is a Citterio’s plant, which produces cured Italian meats.<sup>112</sup>

Even during Freeland’s temporary resurgence in the 1940s, Ralph Pecora’s business was faltering. As the century progressed, men’s everyday clothing became

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<sup>109</sup> Dublin and Licht, *Face of Decline*, 127-128.

<sup>110</sup> Rose, 110-112.

<sup>111</sup> Dublin, *Face of Decline*, 173-174.

<sup>112</sup> Carl Pecora, Jr. interview, Freeland, Pennsylvania, June 30, 2009.

increasingly casual and the expected fit of business attire less exacting; demand for a tailor's skills further declined. Carolyn Pecora lived with her in-laws for a year following her marriage to Ralph Pecora, Jr. in 1946 and remembers that her new father-in-law was doing just "a little bit of business" by that time.<sup>113</sup> Evidence suggests that some of that business had nothing to do with tailoring. Found tucked into the employee time book from the late 1920s were scraps of paper recording various services rendered and amounts owed. The majority of these receipts record alterations, dry cleaning, and pressing jobs; but, nearly thirty percent track business of other sorts. Ralph sold his brother-in-law Louie Corazza "5 gal. Motor oil" and "5 gal. Atlantic Oil" in May and September of 1941. That same year, he also sold Louie Corazza "1 shirt" and "One Ranger Coat #496" from the Chippewa Falls Woolen Mill Company, and "1 box 22 Hornet" and "1 pr. Boots" from the H. and D. Folsom Arms Company. An undated receipts records the sale to "And. Kostic" of "1 pr shoes" and "1 tapered line."<sup>114</sup> Among Ralph's extant papers is a 1949 letter from the H. And D. Folsom Arms Company, addressed "To All Our Dealers" and describing the "latest Fishing Tack Discount Sheet" that was presumably included in the mailing.<sup>115</sup> Another piece of extant 1949 business correspondence from the Gemological Institute of America addresses "Mr. Pecora" as a

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<sup>113</sup> Carolyn Pecora interview, October 19, 2008.

<sup>114</sup> Miscellaneous business records of Ralph Pecora, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent.

<sup>115</sup> "To All Our Dealers," Mailing from the H.&D. Folsom Arms Co., Inc, New York, New York, May 16, 1949, private collection of Madeline Pecora.

jeweler.<sup>116</sup> Two years earlier, Amelia Pecora's diary makes note of selecting her engagement ring from "Daddy's jewelry magazine."<sup>117</sup>

It's hard to know what to make of these sales of tackle, boots, and jewelry. Was Ralph taking advantage of his tax status as a business to procure goods for his family at wholesale prices, or was he making a legitimate attempt to diversify his business interests, like the coal companies, which secured other revenue streams before abandoning the mines; or the many Freeland residents who ran cafes or saloons in their living rooms, some of them—like Ann Swankowski's father, who ran a candy and cigar store called Timesquare in the evenings, after working his day job as the paymaster for the Jeddo Highland Coal Company<sup>118</sup>— after a full day of another type of work.

Although Ralph may not have been doing much tailoring by the mid 1940s, he hadn't lost the interest or the ability. Months after Amelia picked out her engagement ring from her father's jewelry magazine, he began working on her fiancée's wedding suit. On January 3, 1948 the couple picked out the fabric, "a blue serge material," and the tailor took his measurements. On January 23, the suit was ready for the first fitting and on February 1, Amelia's new husband wore it to be married.<sup>119</sup> The latest dated receipts of any tailoring work in Ralph's extant business records reference the complicated alteration of two girl's overcoats completed in November of 1951. Noted on the receipts

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<sup>116</sup> Letter to Mr. Pecora, from Gemological Institute of America, Los Angeles, California, April 22, 1949, private collection of Madeline Pecora.

<sup>117</sup> Diary of Amelia Pecora, October 15, 1947, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent.

<sup>118</sup> "Businesses—20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Businesses – Restaurants, soda fountains, hangouts, cigar stores, beer distributors, bars, breweries, bottling works – Timesquare," History of Freeland, PA website, <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/ct0u/20Cfood-drink.html>, accessed January 18, 2011.

<sup>119</sup> Diary of Amelia Pecora, January 3, 1948, Diary of Amelia Pecora, January 23, 1948, Diary of Amelia Pecora, February 1, 1948, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent

are the tasks of increasing the length of sleeves and hems, cleaning up spots and snags, and moving buttons.<sup>120</sup>

Regardless of how much tailoring work he was completing, Ralph's identity as a tailor to others remained firmly in place. Carolyn Pecora was keenly aware of the way in which her father-in-law's profession (if not his actual business) structured his days and the household rhythms. She remembers that, when she was living with her in-laws, Ralph would come downstairs to the kitchen several minutes before nine in the morning; drink a cup of coffee and eat some crackers, taken from a warming drawer in his wife's combination coal and gas oven; and then walk through the pantry and into his shop, where he would stay until exactly noon, when he would return for lunch. After lunch, he would go back out into the shop until closing time at six, which was also when the family ate dinner.<sup>121</sup>

Carolyn's knowledge of her father-in-law's activities ended at the door to his shop. To her, this was his area, as the kitchen was Madeline's. While living with the Pecora's, she spent most of her time upstairs in one of the two library rooms, reading or sewing while her husband taught himself the academic subjects he hadn't taken in high school, in preparation for applying to a university engineering program.<sup>122</sup> Ralph's grandchildren, however, spent a considerable amount of time in the tailor shop with their grandfather. This is where they visited when they visited him. Their descriptions of Ralph's personal characteristics tend to be vague—"he was a business-men type ... always dignified," "he was patient," "he was a very kind, gentle man"—but their

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<sup>120</sup> Miscellaneous business records of Ralph Pecora, private collection of Madeline Pecora Nugent.

<sup>121</sup> Carolyn Pecora interview, Fishkill, New York, June 14, 2009.

<sup>122</sup> Carolyn Pecora interview, June 14, 2009.

memories of his shop are specific and concrete.<sup>123</sup> Carl Pecora, Jr., born in 1950, remembers his grandfather's roll-top desk, filled with papers and books, and particularly the top drawer in that desk, in which Ralph kept candy that he was always willing to share.<sup>124</sup> Amelia's children, Madeline Pecora Nugent and Pasquo Pecora, born in 1948 and 1950 respectively, both remember the large jade plant in the store's front window and the big, long cutting table pushed up against one wall. Carl's sister Patty, born in 1952, remembers sitting cross-legged on that cutting table, drawing pictures.<sup>125</sup> Both Pasquo and Madeline, independent of one another and unprompted, reached for pieces of paper when asked to talk about their grandfather, and drew detailed schematics of what they remembered of his work space, down to the shelves and storage cubbies built into the walls (Figures 3.10 and 3.11). None of the grandchildren interviewed for this project remember Ralph doing much work in his shop, but all remember it as a vibrant, social environment. Carl remembers that his grandfather was always receiving visitors, although less often customers: "I remember people coming in all of the time to talk to him. He was a fairly popular guy at the time."<sup>126</sup> Madeline agrees that "People used to come into his shop to talk to him, to get advice and to talk over philosophical things and so on with him." Madeline also remembers the endless stream of people her grandfather would stop and talk to when he took her and Pasquo on walks through town. "I remember walking with him through Freeland, and he would be [saying] 'Hello Mrs.

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<sup>123</sup> These quotes come from interviews with Carl Pecora, Jr., Madeline Nugent Pecora, and Patty Kudlick respectively.

<sup>124</sup> Carl Pecora, Jr. interview, June 30, 2009.

<sup>125</sup> Patty Kudlick, interview, Newark, Delaware, July 26, 2009.

<sup>126</sup> Carl Pecora, Jr. interview, June 30, 2009.

This’ and ‘Hello Mr. That’, and he’d stop and chat, and ... I was like ‘Grandpop, you know everybody!’”

Madeline does remember seeing her grandfather at his sewing machine, but only when he was doing a personal favor for her mother, fixing something of hers that needed mending or alteration. A photograph of a white-haired Ralph sitting at his roll-top desk, holding a newspaper open in front of him, suggests that when not receiving visitors, this man who went to work everyday without doing much work spent a lot of time reading (Figure 3.12). One of his particular literary interests during the last two decades of his life was the Rosicrucian Order. This secret society, tracing its origins to seventeenth century Germany and still active today, promises followers knowledge of mystical truths hidden from the common man. Among Ralph’s extant possessions were two reference books pertaining to the order, the *Rosicrucian Manual* and *Mansions of the Soul, the Cosmic Conception*. He also accrued an extensive collection of pamphlets produced by the Rosicrucian Order AMORC and filled a blank address book with sketches, notes, and quotations pertaining to Rosicrucian beliefs and symbolism. This notebook is remarkably neat: the handwriting is consistent and legible; diagrams are composed of steady, even lines; and the occasional pasted-in page is expertly bound, so that it lays perfectly flat when the book is closed. In its purpose and in its careful construction, this notebook is reminiscent of the reference manual Ralph made from his tailoring magazines decades ago.

The content of Ralph’s Rosicrucian notebook indicates that the quasi-scientific aspects of Rosicrucian philosophy particularly interested him. Many of the copied passages iterate simple statements of scientific fact—e.g. “A molecule is composed of at

least one atom” or “Electrons are of two kinds: those vibrating at an even number those vibrating at an uneven number”—and then connect these facts to larger spiritual claims. The discussion of electrons leads to the conclusion that “Electrons are particles of spirit,” which in turn connects to an extended analysis of “Nous,” “the Universal Creative Force.” This is a worldview in which science explains, rather than challenges, a traditional, spiritual view of life. Ralph’s granddaughter Madeline, who became the keeper of her grandfather’s Rosicrucian materials following her mother’s death, stresses that Ralph’s interest in Rosicrucianism complimented rather than replaced his Catholic faith. He continued to attend weekly mass, at the same time as he was practicing thought experiments like the following, told to Madeline by her mother:

There was one time [my mother] went [to visit her father] on a Tuesday instead of a Thursday, and she came into the tailor shop . . . and Grandpop was there at his machine and he said, “Oh Amelia, nice to see you today, how come you came today, you don’t usually come today.” She said, “I don’t know I just felt like I’d come today.” He said, “Oh.” She said, “Well why did you ask?” Well he was doing some sort of a [thought] experiment.<sup>127</sup>

It is striking that this tailor, who held onto traditional practices and values of hand construction while embracing modern innovations like tailoring workshops and dry cleaning, would become so interested in a philosophy that explicitly attempted to reconcile science and religion, the new and the old. His daughter Amelia made a similar effort to accept her new life as a wife and (soon) a mother on a farm in nearby Sugarloaf, while keeping childhood habits close. For years after her marriage, she made the forty-minute drive to Freeland once a week, both to visit with her parents and to do her grocery shopping, even though there were grocery stores closer to her new home. According to

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<sup>127</sup> Madeline Pecora Nugent, interview by author, Newport, Rhode Island, May 23, 2009.

Madeline, her mother preferred to shop in Freeland because she knew the shops and the shop owners in Freeland, and found comfort in performing this necessary activity in a familiar environment. Madeline has distinct memories of her mother's and grandmother's shopping routine: "They used to always look at the paper, and you know go where they got the best buys, and turn in their coupons ... so we used to go from the one store to the other store and come back home again."<sup>128</sup> These weekly trips to Freeland create an interesting textual rhythm in Amelia's diaries. On days when she stays home, her diary entries are brief and nondescript; typically consisting of a report on which chores she completed and how long these chores took her, along with a tally of her children's scrapes and ailments. On the days that she goes to Freeland, the old pattern of detailing encounters and interactions returns. She goes here and there, runs into this person and that person, talks for twenty minutes, for half an hour, is offered something to eat and gladly accepts. Over time, however, even the "Freeland-day" entries shrink, as, like Amelia herself, friends and peers move away. Still, Amelia continues to do her shopping in Freeland, buying not only groceries but furniture, clothing, medicine, haircuts, and the occasional drug-store ice cream sundae. Through these weekly visits, her children became as familiar with the stores that their mother and grandmother frequented as they were with their grandparent's house. Talking about her weekly walks up and down Centre Street, Madeline and Pasquo's younger sister Pamela said, "it almost seemed like we were at Grandmom's the whole way, the whole [town] just sort of seemed like part of Grandmom's home."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Madeline Pecora Nugent interview.

<sup>129</sup> Pamela Drobney, interview by author, Sugarloaf, Pennsylvania, June 28, 2009.

Of Ralph's seven children, his youngest son Carl was the only one to stay in Freeland as an adult. After the war, he married Dorothy O'Donnell, an Irish girl from Drifton, and moved into a house just a few blocks from the tailor shop. Carl's four children grew up in the same town as their father had, and as his father before him. Speaking of their Freeland childhoods, his eldest son and daughter, Carl, Jr. and Patty, describe an everyday sense of town as home. Carl, Jr. remembers picking up the telephone and saying to the operator, who happened to be his mother's cousin, "I want to talk to Grandpop," and being immediately connected.<sup>130</sup> Patty tells the story of the day, when she was just three or four, that she decided that she wanted a piece of the candy her grandfather kept in his desk drawer and "took off to go there." She would have had no trouble reaching her destination, if a neighbor hadn't telephoned her mother to report that young Patty was wandering unescorted down the street. As she got older, the freedom to go out unescorted was something that Patty particularly treasured about her hometown: "you just could go out at night ... it was just a very secure, safe place to be. None of us thought about crime or anything like that."<sup>131</sup> The places she went out to were the same small cafes, restaurants, and "hangouts" that Amelia Pecora writes about in her diaries—homes away from home that were (as fifty years ago) often literally in somebody else's house (Figure 3.13.).

Despite mine closings and population losses, many of Freeland's stores and restaurants stayed in business into the 1960s and later. Carl Pecora, Jr. says that "You could pretty much buy anything in Freeland" when he was a child and teenager, and remembers the same weekly promenade mentioned by Stanley D'Amore, decades earlier:

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<sup>130</sup> Carl Pecora, Jr. interview, June 30, 2009.

<sup>131</sup> Patty Kudlick interview, July 26, 2009.

“Friday nights in Freeland, the streets would be crowded. People would be going shopping, they’d get paid on Fridays and go do their shopping and stuff. Everybody would be hanging out on the streets . . . It was real active. There were a lot of stores.” According to Carl, this activity dwindled in “the later 60s, the 70s, after they built the malls.”<sup>132</sup> Even without the activity of a busy Friday night, stores and businesses hung on for another decade or so. This was true of many anthracite-region communities. In the late 1980s, Ben Marsh counted “a carpet store, furniture store, music stores, and dozens of restaurants and bars” in the downtown of Mt. Carmel, a town of 8,000. He explained the longevity of these establishments by noting the “healthy, walkable, and safe downtowns” and “the elderly proprietors, who own the buildings in which their businesses are located,” and are able to work long hours for a modest income because they “have little else to do.”<sup>133</sup>

Elderly proprietors who own their buildings and work long hours may be able to keep businesses open for decades, but eventually illness and death, combined with an unwillingness of children or grandchildren to work long, unrewarded hours, will close these establishments as well. The 1980s were a particularly tough decade for Freeland. Family-owned establishments, many of which had been passed down through several generations, were finally shuttered: Sharp’s Bakery, with its anthracite ovens, in 1981; Racusin’s Clothing Store, which was bought by Rite Aid Pharmacy, in 1983; J. J. Newberry’s Five and Dime in 1985; and Brueningsen’s grocery store, which had been in

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<sup>132</sup> Carl Pecora, Jr. interview, June 30, 2009.

<sup>133</sup> Marsh, 349.

continual operation since the 1890s, in 1986.<sup>134</sup> The two remaining garment factories, the Freeland Shirt Company and the Freeland Manufacturing Company, closed in 1981 and 1982 respectively.<sup>135</sup> Early in the decade, three now-vacant landmark buildings, the Grand Opera House, the Freeland Sportswear Building, and the Refowich Theater Building (which had ceased operating in 1975), were purchased by an out-of-town realtor and converted into apartments.<sup>136</sup>

By the 1980s, both Ralph Pecora's tailor shop and the Pecora family home were gone. The business closed with Ralph's death in 1959, at the age of 72, although the shop remained as it had been for another two decades. Without putting away or boxing up any of his supplies or equipment, Madeline turned the tailor shop into a living room by placing a television set on top of the cutting table and positioning a recliner in front of it. She sat there in the evenings, watching the television or watching the street.<sup>137</sup> On Friday nights, when the streets were most active, she'd sit on a kitchen chair in the entranceway between the two doorways at 528 and 530 Centre Street, and, according to her grandson Carl, "all these people would come by and stop and talk to her."<sup>138</sup> Around the time that Freeland's street activity died down, Madeline's health declined. She was deemed incapable of living alone and, for a year or two, rotated from one of her children's home to another. She ended up in a nursing home. The pipes froze and burst

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<sup>134</sup> Stump, 42 and 46.

<sup>135</sup> Stumpf, 46.

<sup>136</sup> Stumpf, 46.

<sup>137</sup> Patty Kudlick interview. July 26, 2009.

<sup>138</sup> Carl Pecora, Jr. interview, June 30, 2009.

in the empty house at 528 Centre Street one winter. Repairs were deemed too expensive. In 1979, the lot was sold and the building was torn down.

Before the house was destroyed, children and grandchildren went back to Freeland and cleaned out Ralph's and Madeline's belongings. Each took what they could most use or what most interested them from among the rocking chairs and bed frames, wall art and bookshelves, and the shop full of Ralph's tailoring tools and materials, some of which hadn't been touched for twenty years. Now, another generation has passed and these objects have trickled down to grandchildren and great-grandchildren, still spoken of as having come from "the house in Freeland." Carl Pecora, Jr. keeps his grandfather's roll-top desk, once stocked with candy, and the matching, wheeled chair, which Ralph Pecora, Jr. remembers his father rolling from sewing machine to desk, in the front room of his house in Freeland (Figure 3.14). Patty Kudlick has several shelves full of her grandfather's books in her dining room in Newark, Delaware. Beverly Seybert, the daughter of Ralph's youngest daughter Rita, has his glassed-in bookshelves in a small upstairs room, reminiscent of her grandfather's personal library, in her home in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania. Pamela Drobney still uses one of Ralph's "gooses," those rounded pieces of metal used to press shoulder seams, when sewing or ironing in her home in western Pennsylvania. Pasquo Pecora has relocated one of the hanging glass lamps that illuminated Ralph's cutting table to his front foyer in Sugarloaf, Pennsylvania. And this author has mounted Ralph's cutting school diploma over her sewing machine in New York City.

Ralph himself, never a vibrant personality, grows increasingly vague in his descendants' minds with the passage of time, but the objects that he lived with and

handled remain intact. His descendents hold what he held. They sit where he sat. They turn on a light and experience what to him would have been a familiar glow. These material connections create a web of continuity grounded in physical experience, in lived reality, in the memory of the body as well as the memory of the mind. They are the same types of concrete, embodied connections that held Freeland together during the simultaneously strong and weak years of the Great Depression; that prompted Amelia Pecora to keep a diary of baby cards, oranges, and pretzels; that inspired Charlotte Tancin to dedicate hours of her free time to constructing a website on which history is told through artifacts and photographs, storefronts and streets. When asked about his grandfather, Pasquo Pecora sketched a desk, a jade plant, a cutting table. When asked his grandfather's tailor shop, Carl Pecora, Jr. said, "Here, let me show you," and led me and my escort Pasquo (also my father) out his front door. We walked past the playground where Carl, Sr. once slid down a bare board and got a rear end full of splinters, where Carl, Jr. once broke his arm on the monkey bars; past the bank parking lot that had been the site of the A. & P., one of the two grocery stores patronized by Amelia and her mother on their weekly trips; past the Refowich Building, which now houses senior citizens who once sat on the backless benches set up for children in the theater's front rows. We crossed Centre Street, passed the building that used to be J. J. Newberry's Five and Dime and is now a combination video store and tanning salon, and arrived at 528 Centre Street, paved from corner to corner (Figure 3.15). Carl pointed out the tar line tracing the outline of what had been the tailor shop's roof, staining the side of the empty brick building (once Albert's and then Pitman's Furniture) next door. Together, he and Pasquo walked me "through the house." Here was the front door, here the shop; here the

pantry; here the kitchen; here the stairs to the second floor. Madeline used to hand sandwiches to beggars through this window. These library rooms, where Ralph liked to sit, overlooked the street. Was Ralph kind, gentle, good with children? Was he stubborn, philosophical, business savvy, good with his hands? It depends on who you ask, on when they knew him, on what they are able to remember at the time. But everyone agrees on these three things: he was a tailor, this was his house, and Freeland was his town.



Figure 3.1: Madeline Pecora in her kitchen, February 1946. The drying rack on which Ralph Pecora, Jr. remembers his father hanging damp canvas is visible over her left shoulder, mounted on the wall.



Figure 3.2: Photograph of Ralph Pecora, Jr. as a young sailor, taken in 1945.

Telephone:- 335-R

RALPH J. PECORA  
528 CENTRE ST.  
FREELAND, PA.

April. 7, 1933  
528 Center Street  
Freeland, Penna.

Dear Tillie,

I am sorry I didn't get you anything for Easter. But I just didn't I got you this and hope you like it and I must tell you I thank a hole lot for the egg. You didn't have to bother and go through all the trouble. I must thank you a lot for I was not home that night I was to the movies.  
Thanks lots Tillie.

your loving cousin,  
Amelia.

Representing

Homeland Made-to-Measure Clothes

"BUILT ON PRINCIPLE"



Figure 3.3: A page of Ralph Pecora's Homeland Tailors stationary, used by his daughter Amelia to compose a letter to her cousin Tillie, in April of 1933.

Time, week ending Saturday, <u>Nov. 30</u> 19 <u>28</u>										Time, week ending Saturday, <u>Dec. 15</u> 19 <u>28</u>														
NAMES	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	Total Time	Rate p. day	AMOUNT		NAMES	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	Total Time	Rate p. day	AMOUNT		
										\$	Cts.											\$	Cts.	
16-7:30-12-1								6		9	30	1-7:30-12-12:30									7		11	00
17-7:30-12-1								6		10	00	3-8-12-1									5:30		8	30
19-8-12-1								6		9	00	4-8-12-1									6		9	00
20-7:30-12-1								6		9	00	5-8-12-1									2:45		9	15
21-8-12-1								6		9	00	6-8-12-1									6		9	00
22-7:30-12-1								6		10	00	7-8-12-1									6		9	00
23-7:30-12-1								6		9	45	8-7:45-12-1									2:45		9	45
24-7:30-12-1								6		10	00	10-8-12-1									6		9	00
26-8-12-1								6		8	30	11-8-12-1									6		9	00
27-7:45-12-1								6		8	45	12-8-12-1									6		9	00
28-7:30-12-1								6		10	00	13-7:30-12-1									12:30		10	00
29-7												14-8-12-1									5:30		8	30
30-7:30-12-1								6		9	30	15-8-12-1									12:30		10	30
30										113	90											121	12	
30										113	90											121	12	
15										56	5											60	5	
30										45	2											48	4	
30										50	8											54	4	
1928										51	0											54	4	
										8												2	3	
																						40		
																							55	0

Figure 3.4: Two pages from a book used to track hours worked by one of Ralph's employees from May 1, 1927 to January 30, 1930. Ralph drew the red X's and dated the bottom of the pages after settling the accounts.

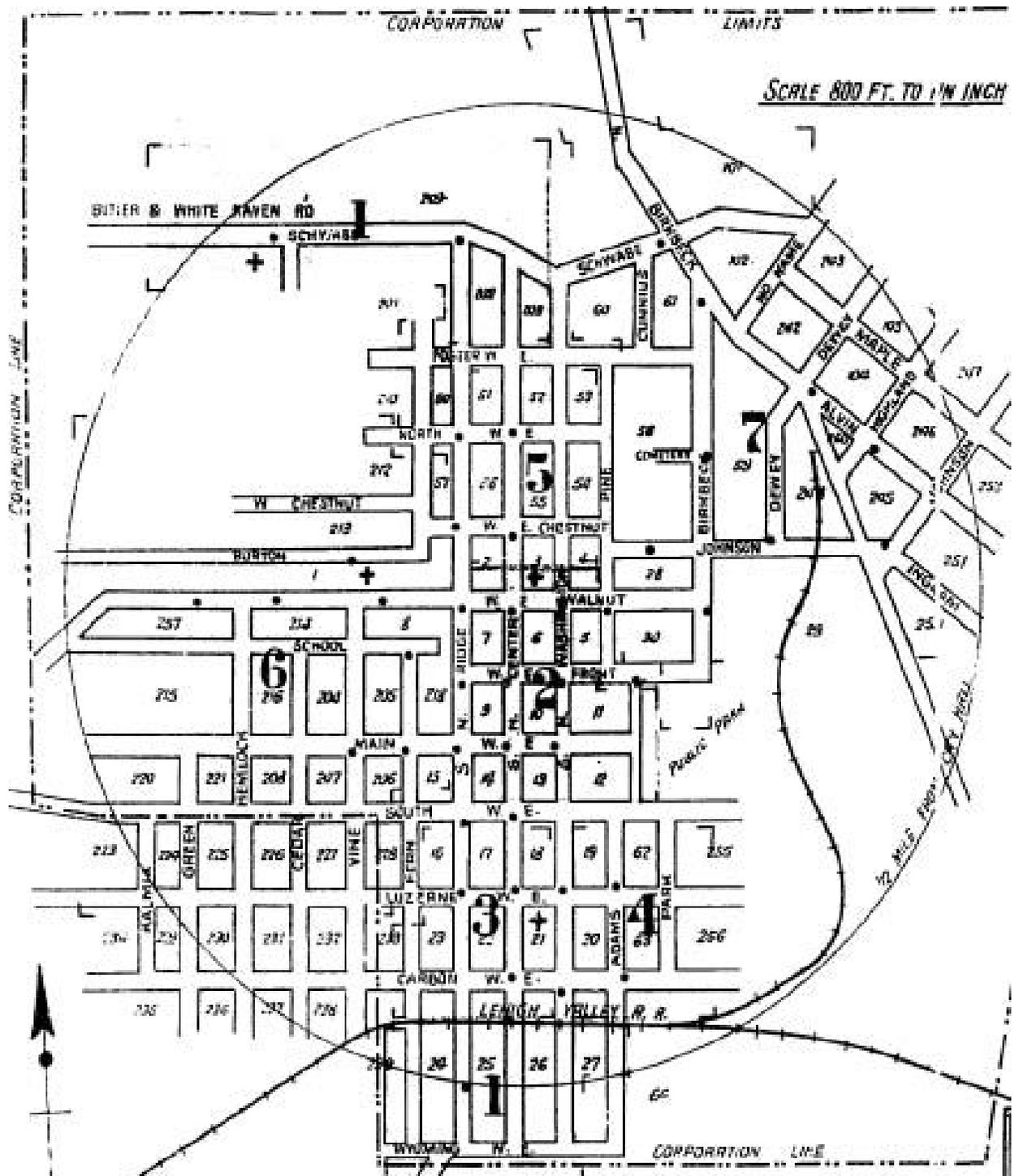


Figure 3.5: Freeland’s compact blocks, as mapped by the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company in 1923. The “suburban development” in the upper right-hand corner is less than a mile from the center of town.



Figure 3.6: Ralph Pecora standing in the doorway of his shop in 1939, after he had begun renting out the space at 530 Centre Street. The tenant in this photograph is the Hazle Dip Ice Cream parlor, where several of his children worked after school. Freeland resident Lorraine Rehn Gricevics used to hang out at this ice cream parlor as a teenager and was impressed that, though the crowd inside sometimes got loud, Ralph never complained about the noise.



Figure 3.7: Photograph of a 1936 bootlegging accident at a small mining town called Wiggans Patch. Note the large number of civilian rescuers and onlookers and the very basic technology being used to extract the miners. Since bootlegging was illegal, area residents were left to their own devices to deal with problems when they occurred. Image from Dublin and Litch, *The Face of Decline*, p.77.



Figure 3.8: Ralph's daughter Amelia Pecora in Freeland, most likely twenty-four years old. Although the photograph is undated, the following diary entry almost certainly records its taking: "Feb. 4, 1945 – Daddy took pictures of me by some huge snow banks on Ridge Street."



Figure 3.9: Photograph of the Pecora family, taken in April of 1943, before the three sons left to fight in World War II. According to Ralph Pecora, Jr., each member of the family was given a copy of this photograph to keep with him or her until the war ended. Front row: Amelia Pecora, Rita Pecora, Carl Pecora. Back row: Beatrice Yori, Marie Ross, Madeline Pecora, Ralph Pecora, John Pecora, Ralph Pecora, Jr., and the dog King.

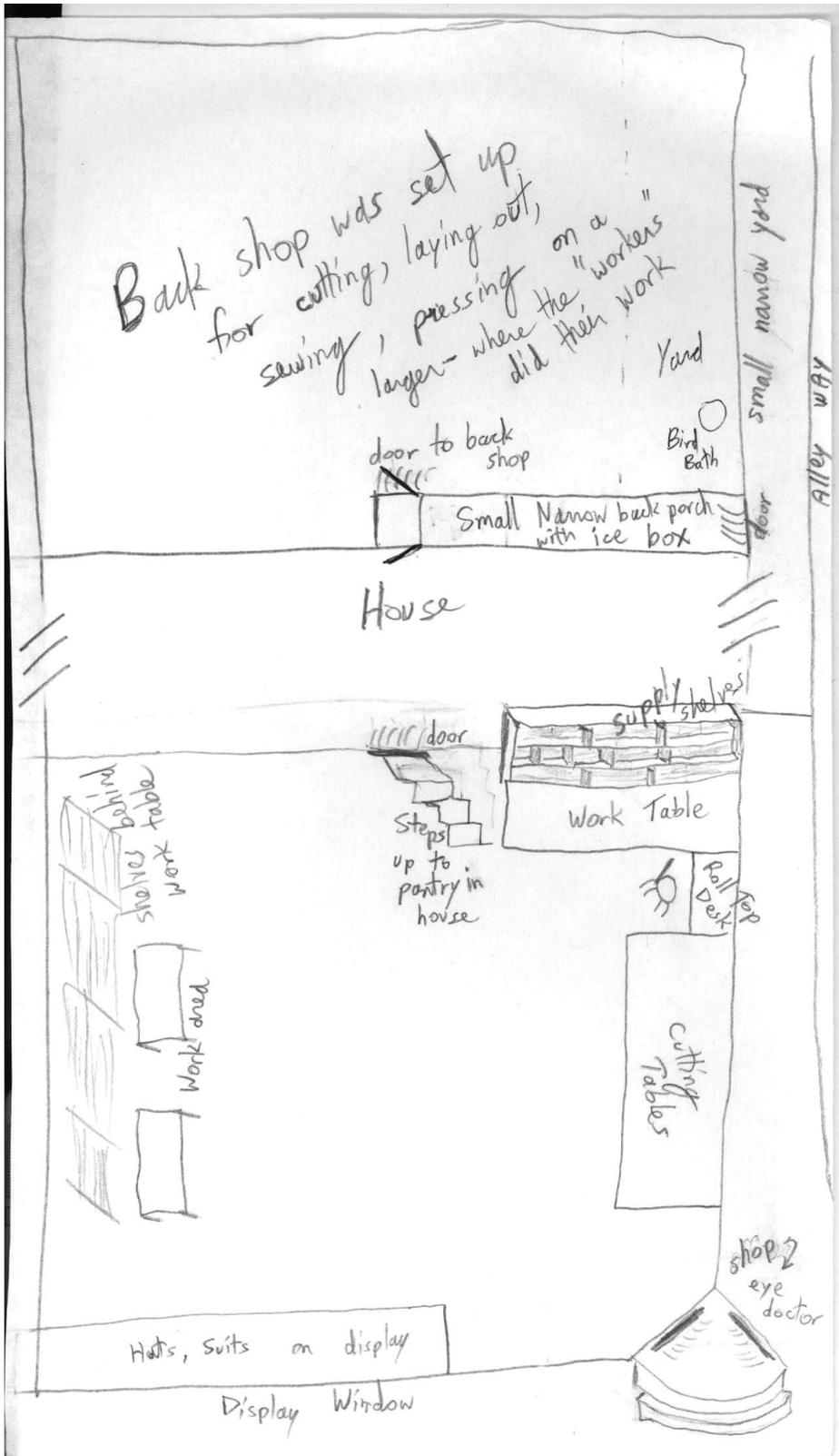


Figure 3.10: Ralph Pecora's tailor shop and the back shop area as sketched by Pasquo Pecora on June 27, 2008.

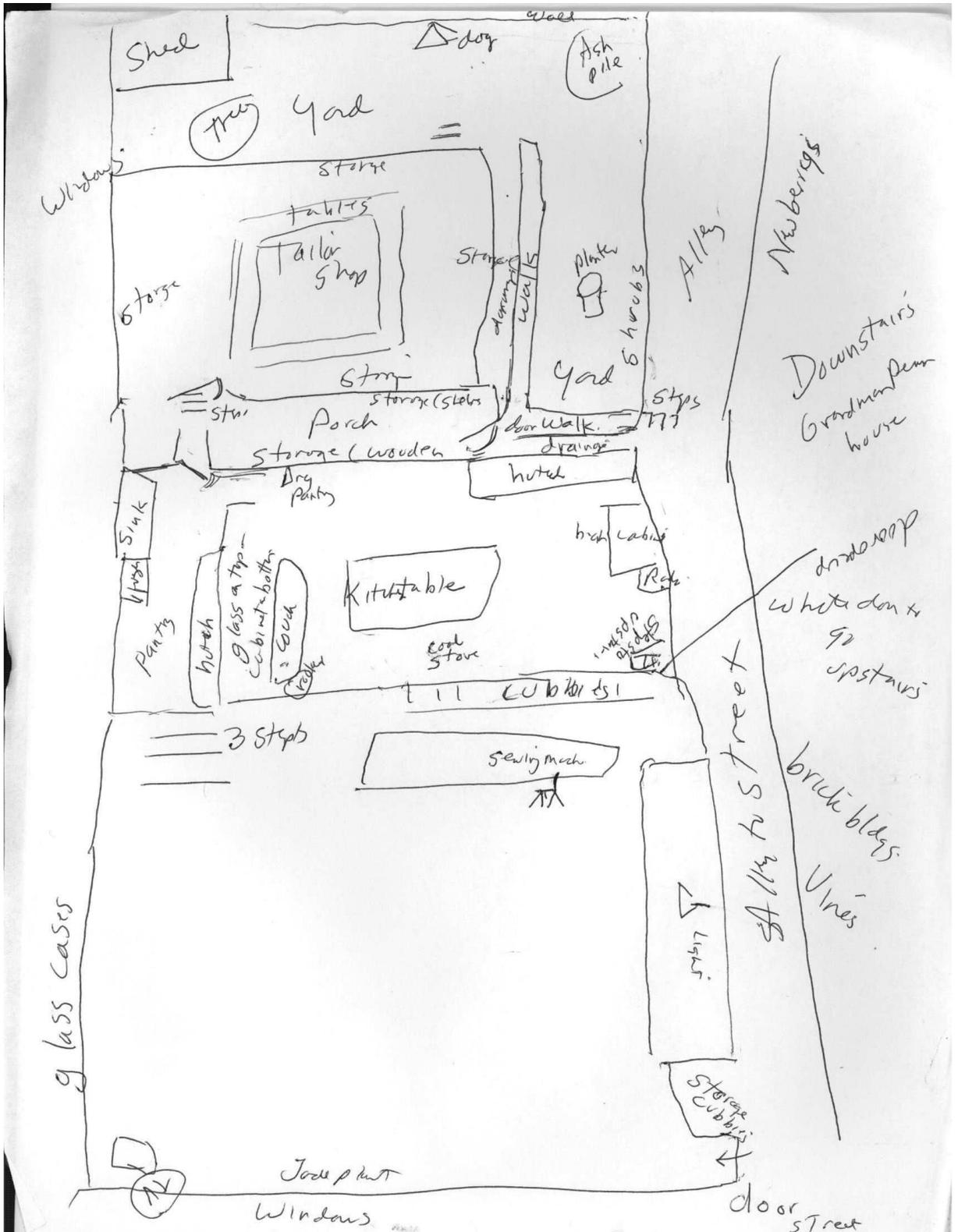


Figure 3.11: Ralph Pecora's tailor shop, Madeline Pecora's kitchen, and the back shop area as sketched by Madeline Pecora Nugent on May 23, 2009.



Figure 3.12: Photograph of Ralph Pecora at work, without much work to do, taken in 1956. His roll-top desk is at his back and the edge of his sewing machine is just visible behind his newspaper. Note the stacks of books and papers on the wall behind him.



Figure 3.13.: Undated photograph of Kuklis' Café, one of Freeland's many "housefront" bars and restaurants. Kuklis' was in business from 1935-1987; the style of the sign suggests that this image is from the 1940s or 1950s. Image from Charlotte Tancin's History of Freeland website.



Figure 3.14: Ralph's roll-top desk and matching chair, now in the Freeland home of Carl Pecora, Jr. Two photographs of Ralph are visible on top of the desk.



Figure 3.15: 528 Centre Street as it is today. The tar line on the empty, brick building to the left provides the only evidence that there was once a home here. Ralph's grandchildren jokingly refer to the digital clock/thermometer on the sidewalk as "Grandpop's clock."