

**Plebian Born: An Examination of the life of T.M. White (1861-1938) through the
Lens of Class, Gender and Melodrama**

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Abstract

T. M. White (1861-1938) was a St. John's wheelwright, actor, labour leader, political hopeful and civil servant. His was the life of an ordinary person, a liminal man aspiring to middle class respectability. This biographical microhistory illuminates aspects of the culture of the time and place viewed through the trifold lens of class, gender (masculinity) and melodrama. Through White's involvement in the Total Abstinence and Benefit Society and the Mechanics' Society, the role of volunteer associations as an educative and socializing force for working class men is evident. Also, White's activities with the Mechanics' Society and the Newfoundland Industrial Workers Association provide snapshots of the early days of the burgeoning labour movement. Similarly, White's involvement in amateur theatre provides a window into a segment of local theatre culture. Finally, White's attempts to attain elected office and his lawsuit against businessman R. G. Reid provide a view of the political culture of the era as it impacted an individual.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Thomas Michael (T. M.) White was born in St. John's, Newfoundland in 1861, the son of a blacksmith.¹ He became a wheelwright, engaged in the carriage making and undertaking business, and ended his working life as a city appraiser. White had a wide range of civic and other involvements. He had a lifetime of active participation both in the Total Abstinence and Benefits Association (TAB), and in amateur theatre as an actor, stage manager and director. He championed labour issues through the Mechanics' Society² and later the Newfoundland Industrial Workers Association (NIWA). He also made a few failed attempts to gain political office. T. M. White was not a typical artisan. Clearly his ambitions and interests extended beyond his shop.

The obvious question is why study this ordinary man, who barely rates a footnote in the history of St. John's? First, I have a disclosure to make. He is my great-grandfather – a man about whom little was said in the family, except that he was an actor. In contrast, his biographical profile in *The Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* shows he was a man involved in many sectors of his society.³ My father and my aunts never mentioned his involvement with labour organizations or his attempts at gaining political office. In retrospect, the silence was intriguing. I was looking for a story from history, a

¹ In this paper the term 'Newfoundland' is used to describe both the colony known as Newfoundland and the island of Newfoundland. Newfoundland did not become a province of Canada until 1949 and did not change its name to Newfoundland and Labrador until 2001.

² The Mechanics' Society, established 1827, was distinct from the Mechanics' Institute, established 1849. The membership of the Society was largely Roman Catholic. See *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador*, Vol. 3 (St. John's: Harry Cuff Publications, 1991), 489.

³ "White, Thomas Michael," *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* Vol. 5 (St. John's: Harry Cuff Publications, 1994), 561.

story of a person that had not been told. It seemed to me that there was a story to uncover in my great-grandfather's life that would be worthy of historical investigation.

T. M. White's legacy is neither remarkable, nor large, nor lasting; however, he lived in a time of great social change offering new possibilities of advancement for the ordinary person. St. John's was beginning to look like a city. It boasted two cathedrals, an Athenaeum, a courthouse, a stately legislature building and an imposing government house. Educational facilities offered schooling to children of the poor as well as the affluent. Theatre flourished as both local amateur and travelling professional groups offered melodramatic diversions to all sectors of the population. Many men joined one or more of the numerous societies appropriate to their class and religion that were active in the town. Through these organizations men shared in the values and camaraderie of a fraternal collectivity. Many of these societies of both the Roman Catholic and Protestant persuasions promoted the respectable value of temperance. Some organizations, such as the fishermen's Star of the Sea and the tradesmen's Mechanics' Society, were organized around occupation. They fostered a communal pride and nurtured notions and norms of respectability. On the economic scene, the construction of the railway brought the promise of prosperity through jobs, giving many of the working people hope and confidence in the future. Finally, and perhaps most importantly in terms of influencing the trajectory of White's life, the ordinary workingman of Newfoundland received the right to vote and this vote was by secret ballot. Working people were now a force that could not be ignored by the ruling elites. Political parties had to appeal to the needs and interests of working people. T. M. White, a young artisan who displayed leadership skills and a talent for making speeches was in the right place at the right time to be noticed by

the political and business power brokers. His tradesman's background, his leadership in the TAB and the Mechanics' associations, and his theatre experience all coalesced to make him a natural candidate for parties targeting the working-class vote.

This thesis argues that T. M. White is noteworthy because many of the dominant forces percolating in St. John's society at that time converged in his life. Melodrama, masculinity, and class awareness underlie his involvements and choices. On stage he was the masculine villain, but in real life he adopted the norms of masculine respectability promoted in the TAB and other societies. He was a self-employed tradesman who, touting his plebian birth, championed labour interests, yet he seemed to be angling for higher social position – a white-collar job. There is a tension between his labour advocacy and his own ambition. He played the role of the workingman's politician but participated in the messy politics of backroom deals with members of the Conservative party and the St. John's business elite. Although White's wide-ranging activities provide insight into late 19th century St. John's society, and add to an understanding of how an individual negotiated gender and class while engaged in the pursuit of economic security and social status in St. John's, it is his attempts to win political office and his relationship with the Reids, a powerful business family, that add the melodrama to his story. This melodrama pits a socially ambitious workingman against the forces of the business establishment.

This study of T. M. White is biographical; it involves research into the life and activities of one person. Even though biographies have always been popular, until recently individual subjects were frowned upon as subjects of serious historical inquiry.⁴

⁴ Jeremy D. Poplin, review of *Biography and History*, by Barbara Caine, *Biography* 32, no.2 (Fall 2011): 330.

Social historians tended to veer away from biography. This position is softening and recently some academics have advocated for the inclusion of historical biography as a subfield of history recognizing a biographical turn in history writing.⁵ Joan Scott observes biographies reveal how gender is constructed in the context of an individual's activities, social organizations and historically specific cultural representations of the time.⁶ This type of biographical analysis can be applied beyond gender to enhance our understanding of how class and race were constructed in a particular historical context as well. Nick Salvatore, in an analysis of the relationship between biography and social history, contends that the value of understanding a "particular life in its broad social context is...[that] it examines the process of historical change through an individual."⁷

Yet research into the life of T. M. White involves delving into the activities of an ordinary citizen about whom little is known. In this case, the research questions steer the inquiry into the realm of microhistory. The distinction between microhistory and biography is succinctly explored and summarized by Jill Lepore:

If biography is largely founded on a belief in the singularity and significance of an individual's contribution to history, microhistory is founded upon almost the opposite assumption: however singular a person's life may be, the value of examining it lies in how it serves as an allegory for the culture as a whole.⁸

According to Georg Iggers and Q. Edward Wang, microhistorians demonstrate the workings of social and political forces in the lives of the people influenced by these same

⁵ Daniel R. Meister, "The Biographical Turn and the Case for Historical Biography," *History Compass* 16 (2018) DOI: 10.1111/hic3.12436.

⁶ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December, 1986): 1068.

⁷ Nick Salvatore, "Biography and Social History: An Intimate Relationship," *Labour History* 87 (November, 2004): 190.

⁸ Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June, 2001): 141.

forces at the local level.⁹ Lepore also notes that in their examination of the lives of ordinary people, microhistorians work with few surviving records to solve the “small mysteries about a person’s life as a means to exploring the surrounding culture.”¹⁰ This will be the case with White. Giovanni Levi, an Italian microhistorian, affirms the use of narrative as a characteristic of microhistory and says that the narrative shows the relationship between an individual and their free will to make choices in the context of the systems and norms of society.¹¹ Lepore and Levi also both say that a microhistorian can even insert themselves into the narrative in the role of an investigator.¹²

Historians working in the field of women’s history, such as Natalie Zemon Davis, have contributed to bringing biography under the umbrella of respectability in uncovering the life stories of ordinary people in the past.¹³ Davis’ biographical microhistory of a 16th century man *The Return of Martin Guerre*¹⁴ has influenced more people to use biography as a subject of historical inquiry.¹⁵ Most inquiries into the lives of ordinary people will not contain the dramatic elements of Martin Guerre’s life, but even the mundane activities of ordinary men and women contribute to the overall picture of a society in a particular time and place. The research into the life of T. M. White combines elements of biography, microhistory, and social history. Yet it is the narrative, the telling of the story

⁹ Georg G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (London: Pearson Education Ltd., 2008), 275.

¹⁰ Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much,” 141.

¹¹ Giovanni Levi, “On Microhistory” in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 98-99.

¹² Ibid.; Lepore, “Historians Who Love too Much,” 141.

¹³ Banner, Lois W., “AHR Roundtable: Biography as History,” *American Historical Review* (June, 2009): 579.

¹⁴ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹⁵ Banner, “Biography as History,” 579.

of a person who lived a life in the context of a society long gone, that is the focus of this research.

No diaries or personal papers of T. M. White remain but an examination of the contemporary newspapers enables one to recover some of his activities and to gain a glimpse of aspects of St. John's society. Robert Cuff summarizes White's political and labour involvements in a *Newfoundland Quarterly* article but he does not attempt to assess class or other social influences on White's choices and actions.¹⁶ Although White champions the interests of the workingman, his own life indicates he had a desire for an enhanced social status and greater public respectability.

Theatre and the genre of melodrama were persistent and pertinent forces throughout T. M. White's life. Rohan McWilliam in his article "Melodrama and the Historians" states, "Melodrama is recognized as the key modality of the 19th century, offering a point of entry into the mentalité of Victorian society."¹⁷ He notes that melodramatic discourse was not limited to the stage but it dominated popular fiction, it underpinned the pleadings of barristers and the testimony of witnesses in courtrooms, and it informed the discourse of democratic elections. According to McWilliam, melodrama not only influenced nineteenth century communication, public forms of communication were imbued with melodrama.¹⁸ In light of both the melodramatic timbre of the era and the dominance of the melodramatic genre in White's life on the amateur stage, this paper will frame and view the story of White's life through the lens of melodrama.

¹⁶ Robert Cuff, "Prominent Figures From Our Recent Past: Thomas White," *Newfoundland Quarterly* (Winter, 1987): 32-33.

¹⁷ Rohan McWilliam, "Melodrama and the Historians," *Radical History Review* 78 (2000): 57.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

This life and times study of T. M. White addresses the following research questions. What does White's life tell us about class identity, social interaction and social mobility in the period? Do White's words and actions, or the rhetoric of the associations in which he was a participant, provide evidence of how gender, or more specifically masculinity, factored into identity? Does White's life provide examples of melodramatic sensibilities manifesting in life as well as art? In order to explore these questions this paper is loosely organized chronologically beginning with his early life and ending with his later years viewed through White's main activities organized by categories.

Chapter 2 reviews selected historiography pertinent to the examination of White's life in the context of class, masculinity and melodrama. It considers the historiography pertaining to these themes on a larger geographic scale of North America and beyond, and then revisits these in the context of the historiography of Newfoundland and Labrador. The historiographical review begins with a selection of the historiography on class, artisans and the emerging middle classes in 19th century in North America and the United Kingdom. It also highlights historiography that explores the changing expectations of masculinity that were attendant with evolving class attitudes, values and respectability. In keeping with these themes and the life of T. M. White, applicable scholarship on temperance, temperance drama, and melodrama are also reviewed. Following this there is an overview of historiography on St. John's with a focus on class, highlighting religion and ethnic identity. The selected historiography also examines the role of volunteer associations in St. John's in the 19th century, particularly those associations in which White was a member. The historiographical review lays a foundation for a study of class, masculinity and melodrama in the life of T. M. White.

Chapter 3 examines what is known of T. M. White's family background and his early life. It roots White in the working class of St. John's. Following this, White's life as a young man of business is reconstructed through archival research primarily drawing on newspapers. Through the available advertisements and notices, one can see White as a young carriage maker who was attempting to find his place in St. John's, a place determined by expectations of class and gender.

Chapter 4 examines White's involvement with male and largely working-class volunteer associations of the Mechanics' Society and the Total Abstinence and Benefit Society. These societies were formative in shaping White as a man of his era. The TAB gave White his exposure to theatre, and the Mechanics' Society placed him in the public eye as a labour leader.

The next two chapters examine White's involvement with amateur dramatic productions and with real life political theatre. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth account of White's lifetime career in amateur theatre in St. John's. Again an examination of advertisements and reviews in the local newspapers enables a reconstruction of White's life in the theatre as a producer, a director and a stage villain. Through tracking White's theatre projects, a larger picture of amateur theatre in St. John's emerges, throwing light on gender roles and highlighting the popularity of melodrama in the canon of local theatricals.

Chapter 6 examines White's failed attempts at gaining political office, as well as a lawsuit he initiated against business giant Robert G. Reid. Although the time was right for a working-class candidate to have a successful career as an elected politician, White was not to be so fortunate. He was not elected as a member of either the legislative assembly

or the municipal council. The election campaigns and the court case were displays of real life melodrama underpinned by the prevailing attitudes of class and masculinity.

Finally, Chapter 7 examines the latter part of White's life where he attained a level of financial security in a civil service position. In this period he continued his involvement in theatre and in the TAB and he also found renewed involvement in labour causes through the Newfoundland Industrial Workers' Association. This section will consider whether he attained the elusive middle class respectability he appeared to spend a lifetime pursuing.

White is an example of a 19th century artisan who sought entry into the emerging white-collar middle class of St. John's. It is through the combined lens of class, masculinity and melodrama that one gains an understanding of White as a liminal man chasing respectability as he navigated the expectations and opportunities of his society. The forces that shaped White's life were dominant forces in St. John's society in the late 19th century. White's activities illuminate aspects of associational life, theatre, business, labour, and politics in the city. It is in the arenas of politics and the courtroom, however, that his life mirrors the melodrama of the stage. It is when the spotlight shines on White's melodramatic public pursuit of the trappings of respectability both in his attempts to gain political office and in his lawsuit against a powerful business family, that class prejudices and limitations are revealed and the backroom deals of politicians and businessmen take centre stage.

The story of T. M. White is explored through the vehicle of microhistory loosely employing a narrative structure. It is White's story but it is more than White's story. Instead, microhistory provides a window where White's activities speak to broader social

issues and forces at play in St. John's society of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Volunteer organizations, temperance, theatre, melodrama, labour and politics were just some of the dynamic forces in the societal organism that influenced the lives of people in St. John's at the time. This story of one individual illustrates the institutions and forces circulating in a society that enabled a man who was plebian born to attain middle class respectability.

Chapter 2 Historiography

The study of T. M. White's life is grounded in a selection of historiographical topics related to class, masculinity and melodrama applicable to the historical period in St. John's and elsewhere. The research is first situated in the context of a selection of historiography on class, artisans, and the emerging middle classes in the 19th century. Next, because gendered behaviors and expectations are inherent in and interdependent with class attitudes, behaviors and expectations, a selection of the historiography on gender, specifically "manliness," pertaining to the period is highlighted. In keeping with the expectations of a man of his class at that time, White was involved in his community through volunteer organizations and theatre where expectations of temperance were promoted; therefore, these topics are examined in the context of a broader historiography of class beyond the local context. As well, because the genre of melodrama was dominant in the period and in White's theatre career, melodrama is examined as a historical lens through which to view the life and times of a man coming of age and making his way in the world in the Victorian era. Finally all of these topics are situated in the context of Newfoundland and Labrador historiography with a focus on aspects of class in late 19th century St. John's. This involves highlighting the connections between religion, ethnicity and volunteer associations in fostering class identity.

2.1 Class

T. M. White, the blacksmith's son, was an artisan, a small businessman, a labour leader, an active community member and a civil servant. He moved from the workbench to an office desk – from wearing a wheelwright's apron to a white collar and tie. The

different roles that he played in his working life invite an examination of “class” in St. John’s from the perspective of how it manifests itself in the lives of ordinary people. In order to discuss class in St. John’s, one first needs a language and a framework for discussion.

Scholars and non-scholars alike have long attempted to define the distinctions between the members of the working and middle classes. These include broad stroke categories such as: wages versus salary; manual work versus office work; and blue collar versus white collar. The distinction may also be evident in an income threshold that allows for a certain standard of living in a particular society together with shared values reflected in attitudes toward family, gender roles, education and community involvement. There is no comprehensive list of criteria that perfectly demarcates the working class and the middle class. This paper will not attempt to define either working class or middle class through a critical and in depth analysis of each category. Canadian labour historians such as Gregory S. Kealey and Brian Palmer have examined artisans and the working class in the context of 19th century industrializing Toronto and Hamilton and the emergence of the trade union movement.¹⁹ It is recognized today that a larger and more nuanced understanding of the people who comprised Canada’s working class involves looking at the lives of people who lived and worked in places other than the urban factory setting.²⁰ Because St. John’s was a small city and did not have a large industrializing base like Toronto or Hamilton, and because the focus of this study is a man who began his

¹⁹ Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism 1867-1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1979)

²⁰ Paul Craven, “Introduction,” in *Labouring Lives: Work and Workers in Nineteenth Century Ontario*, ed., Paul Craven (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 4-5.

career as a skilled artisan and ended his working life as a civil servant, instead the paper will apply the work of David Burley, Andrew C. Holman and Robert B. Kristofferson who look at the lives of similar small town Ontario artisans who moved into white collar positions.²¹ The paper also references Stuart Blumin who examines similar trends in the United States. Kealey, Palmer, Burley, Holman and others who have studied the lives of the working and middle classes of the period all note the roles of fraternal associations, temperance, masculinity and the general move toward self-improvement.

For the purpose of this paper, the term working-class in St. John's of the late 19th century refers primarily to wage earning manual workers, including skilled tradespeople such as T.M. White's father. Even within the working class, E. J. Hobsbawm notes there were various hierarchical social levels ranging from unskilled labourers at the lowest level to artisans or skilled craftsmen on the higher end of the spectrum.²² He observes that artisans were sometimes viewed as part of the lower middle class and in some cases as socially superior to some white-collar workers. Hobsbawm stresses that a trained artisan or craftsman had a trade, a skill, something to be valued and would not be confused with a labourer.²³ An artisan was higher in the social hierarchy than a labourer. Writing about the social status of artisans in New Brunswick, T.W. Acheson notes the artisans often acted as a class in themselves, although within the spheres of artisans there were different

²¹ David G. Burley, *A Particular Condition in Life: Self-Employment and Social Mobility in Mid-Victorian Brantford, Ontario* (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); Andrew C. Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty: Middle-Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill University Press, 2000); Andrew C. Holman and Robert B. Kristofferson, eds., *More of a Man: Diaries of a Scottish Craftsman in Mid-Nineteenth-Century North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

²² E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour*, (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1964), 272-275.

²³ Ibid.

social and income strata. Some artisans in certain lines of work made little more money than day labourers.²⁴ Other artisans not only had higher incomes and social status but also took on leadership roles in the community.²⁵ Some of these artisans were part of what has been described as a labour aristocracy.²⁶ Hobsbawm says, “the apprenticed journeyman was the ideal type of labour aristocrat, not only because his work called for skill and judgement, but because a ‘trade’ provided a formal, ideally an institutionalized, line of demarcation separating the privileged from the unprivileged.”²⁷ According to Hobsbawm, the term “labour aristocracy” has been used to describe “certain distinctive strata of the working class, better paid, better treated and generally more ‘respectable’ and politically moderate than the mass of the proletariat.”²⁸ Bryan Palmer acknowledges the “distinct social and cultural place” of late 19th century skilled workers but says that is not sufficient criteria to label a group a labour aristocracy. Instead there has to be “an integration into the system of capitalist authority.”²⁹ T. M. White, as a self-employed artisan, labour leader and politician advocating for the railway deal with R. G. Reid, demonstrated integration into the capitalist system and so could be viewed as a labour aristocrat.

²⁴ T. W. Acheson, “Bone and Sinew: The Artisans and the Social Order” in *Labour and Working Class History in Atlantic Canada: A Reader*, eds., David Frank and Gregory S. Kealey (St. John’s, NL: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1995), 77.

²⁵ Ibid. 79-88.

²⁶ Caution should be used in employing this term for there is a wide range of scholarly opinion on its application. This paper does not attempt to delve into the validity of the varying definitions and interpretations of ‘labour aristocracy.’

²⁷ E. J. Hobsbawm, “Artisan or Labour Aristocrat? *The Economic History Review*, New series, 37, no. 3 (August 1984), 355-372. www.jstor.org/stable/2597286.

²⁸ Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men*, 272.

²⁹ Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict*, 240.

E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*³⁰ is a foundational work for defining class. For Thompson, class is viewed neither as a "structure", nor "category", but instead as something that "happens" in human relationships.³¹ These shared relationships result in a common identity. This identity is a social and cultural formation. Class-consciousness emerges from the culture reflected in experience, as it is "embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms."³² Just as this identity is shared between class members, it is different from and even opposed to people whose interests differ. Thompson's focus is the working class but scholars studying the middle classes have also applied his approach.

Two scholars of social history who have cautiously applied Thompson's approach to their study of the emerging middle class are Stuart M. Blumin in *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900*,³³ and Andrew C. Holman in his similar Canadian study, *A Sense of their Duty: Middle-Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns*.³⁴ Blumin studies the emerging American middle class in large northeastern American cities over a period of 140 years. Holman, however, examines the emerging middle class in a much shorter time frame and in the confined geographical and social context of late 19th century Galt and Goderich, Ontario. Blumin notes that there has been a lack of study on the middle class, an absence of appropriate theoretical frameworks to approach such study, and a problem of defining boundaries in the elusive

³⁰ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1963).

³¹ Thompson, 9.

³² Thompson, 10-11.

³³ Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

³⁴ Andrew C. Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty: Middle-Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill University Press, 2000).

class.³⁵ Holman attributes this lack of scholarly attention to a problem of definition because the middle class was seen as an indefinable group or groups of people wedged between labour and big capital. This middle had no easily definable identity.³⁶ Holman observes that the middle has been made up of diverse groups and that the “conceptual challenge of studying the middle class is to reconcile the movements of individual ‘middling’ groups with the continuing existence of the constitutional whole over time.”³⁷ The definition of middle class, as with any class, would vary depending on the historical context of time and place. Despite the reference to changing boundaries and diversity, neither Blumin nor Holman analyzes race or ethnicity in the discussion of the emerging middle class.

In applying Thompson to the study of the middle class, Blumin and Holman are both cautious in their use of the term “class consciousness” and they dispense with the concept of class conflict. Blumin qualifies his adoption of Thompson’s approach to class by noting that Thompson may not necessarily have applied this approach to the middle class and “to experiences that express social differentiation but not overt conflict.”³⁸

To bridge the divide between Thompson and the study of the middle class, both Blumin and Holman see value in Anthony Giddens’s work on societal composition and change. Giddens was a sociologist and prolific writer in the 1970s and 80s who

³⁵ Blumin, *Emergence*, 1-16.

³⁶ Holman, *Sense of Their Duty*, 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁸ Blumin, *Emergence*, 12.

formulated the theory of structuration.³⁹ Holman says structuration is “the process whereby economic classes become social entities.”⁴⁰ Structuration involves analyzing a blending of societal structures and individual agency in the study of social class. Classes exist in relation to each other but the relationship is not necessarily one of conflict.⁴¹ For Giddens, class-consciousness is not necessary; instead, he speaks of class awareness, which involves an awareness of common attitudes and beliefs shared among a group of people.

Both Blumin and Holman adopt Giddens’s approach of “class awareness” as an alternative to Thompson’s concept of class-consciousness.⁴² This awareness emerges from shared experiences and values but is not necessarily expressed ideologically. Middle class identity was “a local identity defined by the presence of domestic classes above and below one’s station and by the existence of shared, daily experience.”⁴³ What and who is middle class varies according to time and place.

Blumin and Holman both explore people in relationship to each other through the activities of their daily interactions. Class manifests itself in the relationships expressed in human interaction. In their studies of the emerging middle class, Blumin and Holman examine many of the same phenomena and institutions – phenomena and institutions that are manifest in the life of T. M. White. They examine changes in employment circumstances, particularly the shift from manual to non-manual labour and the growth of clerical and white-collar jobs. They also examine the roles and activities of volunteer

³⁹ Rob Stones, *Structuration Theory* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 2.

⁴⁰ Holman, *Sense of Their Duty*, 14.

⁴¹ Ibid., 14.

⁴² Blumin, *Emergence*, 8-11.

⁴³ Holman, *Sense of Their Duty*, 18.

associations and temperance movements in constructing and perpetuating class identities. In addition, they both look at domestic life in terms of roles and expectations of men, women and children, as well as trends in domestic consumption. Neither Blumin nor Holman specifically examines the combination of masculinity and class as a framework of analysis; however, most of their research and analysis is focused on men's work and activities.

2.2 Masculinity and Class

Family Fortunes, a foundational work by Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall published in 1987, explores the roles of men and women of the middle class in provincial England over a period of seventy years from 1780 through the first half of the nineteenth century. They examine these roles in the context of institutions, ideologies and practices of the time, as well as examining the roles of men and women within the family and the place of the family within society. They argue that gender and class are interdependent and that "class consciousness always takes a gendered form."⁴⁴ They examine manliness and femininity as they were manifested in daily life. They are interested in the "processes and conditions on which middle-class experience rested."⁴⁵ In their study they examined many of the societal forces that influenced the life of T. M. White: religion, voluntary associations, occupations and the home.

A few years later, in her far-reaching discourse-grounded social history, *Imperial Leather*, Anne McClintock posits that "race, gender and class are not distinct realms of

⁴⁴ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 13.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 29.

experience...Rather they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other.”⁴⁶

McClintock explores the history of British imperialism in the context of power and sexuality. Although McClintock’s work probes levels of relationships of imperial power and nuances of gender, race and class in multiple contexts including psychoanalysis, her basic premise applies to any consideration and any context of gender, class and race.

More recently, Holman and Robert B. Kristofferson address masculinity and class as a dominant focus in *More of a Man: Diaries of a Scottish Craftsman in Mid-Nineteenth-Century North America*.⁴⁷ Where Holman’s social history of Galt and Goderich looks at the broad swathe of emerging middle class society, the diaries chronicle the life of a single man and his place in that late 19th century world. The researchers have access to Andrew McIlwraith’s own words and observations. For the most part the entries are curt accounts of daily activities. It is not an introspective or descriptive diary but there is enough for Holman and Kristofferson to discern McIlwraith’s concerns and priorities. They find a “liminal” man - one who is on the threshold between apprenticeship and future independence.

Holman and Kristofferson note that independence for craftsmen traditionally meant having a shop of one’s own – being self employed.⁴⁸ With industrialization this changed and many craftsmen found themselves employed in factories. These were the artisans who are the focus of the research of Kealey and Palmer. David Burley in his 1994 examination of self-employment in a small town in Ontario has noted that this shift

⁴⁶ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 5.

⁴⁷ Andrew C. Holman and Robert B. Kristofferson, eds., *More of a Man: Diaries of a Scottish Craftsman in Mid-Nineteenth-Century North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

affected social values, the organization of life and a “concept of self.”⁴⁹ Traditionally craftsmen strove for independence – to be one’s own master. A mature and manly craftsman supported his family through his craft.⁵⁰ As this changed and many craftspeople became factory wage earners, historians have observed that men found identity in the solidarity of unions.⁵¹ Other men, like McIlwraith, who became a bookkeeper, and T. M. White, who became the city appraiser, joined the ranks of salaried white-collar middle class men. Interestingly, not everyone looked upon the movement to office work favourably. Acheson noted a New Brunswick newspaper article scolded people for denying the dignity of manual work by abandoning the trades in favour of occupations where men could sport white collars.⁵²

Holman and Kristofferson suggest that self-improvement was a means of dealing with masculinity in crisis as a result of the changing circumstances and opportunities available to craftsmen. This is the intersection of class and gender underlaid with the shifting distribution of societal power that McClintock delineates. John Tosh, writing about masculinity almost twenty years before Holman and Kristofferson, cautions that using the term “crisis” implies stability the rest of the time and notes that there is a difference between an individual’s insecurity and larger societal experience.⁵³ However, despite his caution regarding the use of the term “crisis”, Tosh affirms the connection between changing economic circumstances, class expectations and masculinity.

Individual men who faced economic uncertainty and lack of employment experienced a

⁴⁹ David G. Burley, *A Particular Condition in Life: Self-Employment and Social Mobility in Mid-Victorian Brantford, Ontario* (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 65.

⁵⁰ Burley, *Particular Condition*, 65.

⁵¹ Holman and Kristofferson, *More of a Man*, 23.

⁵² Acheson, “Artisans and the Social Order,” 75.

⁵³ John Tosh, “What Should Historians Do With Masculinity?” *History Workshop Journal* 38, (1994): 193.

loss of masculine self-respect.⁵⁴ The upwardly mobile artisan aspired to respectability.⁵⁵ According to Tosh, masculine respectability extended beyond the overused term “manliness” with “its emphasis on self control, hard work and independence.”⁵⁶ Victorian masculine respectability also involved the establishment of a household, dignified work and engagement in associational life.⁵⁷

Many men of the working and middle classes participated in voluntary associations. Bryan Palmer in his examination of working class life in Hamilton, Ontario in the latter half of the nineteenth century notes the importance of associational life to the workingman who participated in friendly societies, mechanics’ institutes and sporting organizations and workingmen’s clubs.⁵⁸ In these societies Palmer says men sought illness and death benefits, social opportunities, recreational activities, and even affirmation of respectability.⁵⁹ He notes they learned the value of equality, fraternity, and co-operation in the context of consciousness of the emerging labour movement. Gregory Kealey also highlights these advantages to membership in Toronto’s Orange Lodges.⁶⁰ Similarly, Lynne Marks in her work on small town Ontario notes the importance of associational life in the lives of men of all classes. These associations were defined by masculinity – a class-conscious masculinity that cultivated and valued the respectable

⁵⁴ Ibid., 192.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 190.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 183.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 183-187.

⁵⁸ Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1979), 38.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 43.

⁶⁰ Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism 1867-1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 1980), 112.

breadwinner over the rough and rowdy types of men.⁶¹ She observes that in many situations and organizations the line between respectable and rough was sometimes blurred. Although Marks primarily focuses on the dominant Protestant community, she notes that both Protestant and Roman Catholic institutions promoted temperance as a means of achieving respectable masculinity. Both Marks and Palmer note the role of Mechanics' Institutes in promoting and providing self-improvement activities and opportunities.

Holman and Kristofferson observe that McIlwraith wanted to become “*respectable* in appearance and behavior.”⁶² In addition to diary writing, McIlwraith and his peers engaged in several self-improvement activities. Whatever the underlying reasons for the pursuit of self-improvement and respectability, one can reasonably conclude that the changing occupational situation and the availability of new learning opportunities, combined with shifting class structures and values, precipitated an expansion and redefinition of masculinity. The life of T. M. White also reflected this shift.

2.3 Temperance, Class and Masculinity

Temperance movements proliferated in the late 19th century coinciding with the growth of a middle class and the popularity of self-improvement activities. Temperance was a means to self-improvement and T. M. White was a lifetime member of the Total

⁶¹ Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks; Religion, Leisure, and Identity in late-19th Century Small -Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 108.

⁶² Holman and Kristofferson, *More of a Man*, 5.

Abstinence and Benefit Society. Temperance societies were often associated with specific religious denominations but they were symptomatic of broader societal concerns.

Many authorities such as churches, government bureaucracies and business organizations in England, Ireland and North America perceived the excessive and persistent consumption of alcohol to be a grave social problem.⁶³ This concern also extended to continental Europe and beyond. Fourteen international conferences addressed alcohol abuse in the working class between 1885 and 1913.⁶⁴ Recently, Johan Edman analyzed conference documents and papers and determined that alcohol consumption was characterized as a “collective problem...firmly established in the growing and politically ever more significant working class.”⁶⁵ The conference participants, who represented various sectors of governments, business and volunteer organizations, saw it as contrary to the societal goals of modernity and a potential threat to the health of a nation.⁶⁶

Similarly, John Frick, in *Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform in 19th Century America*, observes that many 19th century middle and upper class people viewed alcohol consumption as more than a moral issue, but as a threat to progress, “an impediment to the emergence and cultural advancement of the middle class.”⁶⁷ In earlier eras, farmhands and apprentices worked closely with their masters. This supposedly provided some

⁶³ John W. Frick, *Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19-21, 38-39, 82-83.

⁶⁴ Johan Edman, “Temperance and Modernity: Alcohol Consumption as a Collective Problem, 1885-1913,” *Journal of Social History* 49, no.1 (Fall 2015): 22.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 28-38.

⁶⁷ Frick, *Theatre*, 30.

measure of control of alcohol consumption.⁶⁸ In contrast, the anonymity of urban factory jobs and the availability of urban taverns contributed to excessive drinking as a leisure activity for young men. This resulted in absenteeism, inefficiency, accidents and even drunkenness in the workplace.⁶⁹ According to Frick, it was in the economic interest of the entrepreneurial class to curb drunkenness.⁷⁰ Edman goes further and says countries saw it in their national interests as modern nations desiring “industrial competitiveness, an efficient infrastructure and a strong military institution” to promote temperance.⁷¹

A class bias was inherent in the temperance message. Temperance rhetoric was often directed against the perceived ills and vices of the working class. Paul Johnson in a 1986 article says that not only was temperance key to “the making of a distinctively middle class way of life...temperance spearheaded a century long assault on the mores of working people and immigrants.”⁷² Frick notes that although temperance began as a top down movement in the United States, it increasingly became more democratic. He gives the example of six artisans in a Baltimore tavern forming the Washingtonian Temperance Society aimed at reforming members of their own class.⁷³ This group recognized that they needed to provide an alternative to the entertainment of the bar room.

The bars were often not simply a place for men to drink but also to socialize, to play billiards, to hear music and even to get their mail. The Washingtonians created reading rooms, sponsored hymn sings and poetry readings, and held parades, balls and

⁶⁸ Frick does not suggest that there was no problem with excessive drinking in earlier eras or in rural places.

⁶⁹ Frick, *Theatre*, 30-31.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷¹ Edman, “Temperance and Modernity,” 42.

⁷² Paul Johnson, “Drinking, Temperance and the Construction of Identity in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Social Science Information* 25, no. 2 (1986): 522.

⁷³ Frick, *Theatre*, 32.

theatricals.⁷⁴ Temperance halls, large and small, spread across America, the larger being multi-roomed buildings housing meeting rooms, reading rooms and libraries and often boasting a large theatre.⁷⁵ Such a temperance hall existed in St. John's at the Total Abstinence and Benefit Society and was frequented by White throughout his life.

"Reform" movements made the non-drinking man the model of respectability. Scholars have suggested that membership in temperance organizations and other organizations was not simply a commitment to self-improvement but was a commitment to middle class values.⁷⁶ Matthew Allen, in his 2011 social history analysis of the St. Patrick's Temperance Association in mid nineteenth century Sidney, Australia, says it "functioned as a symbol of respectability for different social and cultural groups."⁷⁷ Similarly, Paul O'Leary, in a 2005 social history analysis of class, gender and ethnicity among the Irish in South Wales, observes that a member of a temperance society embraced particular aspects of the cult of respectability.⁷⁸ This involved ascribing different roles to men and women, separating the public and private spheres. Men engaged with the public sphere not only through work but also through associational life. The various associations at designated times in the year took to the streets in parades and processions with bands and banners. Clothing was a marker of respectability so the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 76.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 150-151.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 31.

⁷⁷ Matthew Allen, "Sectarianism, Respectability and Cultural Identity: The St. Patrick's Total Abstinence Society and Irish Catholic Temperance in mid-Nineteenth Century Sidney," *Journal of Religious History* 35, no. 3 (September, 2011): 391.

⁷⁸ Paul O'Leary, "Networking Respectability: Class, Gender and Ethnicity among the Irish in South Wales, 1845-1914," *Immigrants and Minorities* 23, no. 2-3 (2005): 255-275.

marchers would wear their Sunday best and display orderly, disciplined behavior in a public statement of respectability.⁷⁹

The growth of temperance movements and the building of halls with theatres allowed for more creative means of promulgating the temperance message. Where there is a theatre, there will be a play and so temperance dramas emerged. Frick notes that there has been an absence of scholarship by theatre historians on temperance dramas and 19th century melodrama in general. He addresses this gap with his detailed social history of theatre and temperance reform in America.⁸⁰ The plays and the social contexts in which they were performed are analyzed to demonstrate the role of theatre in shaping and promulgating middle class values, particularly temperance, with respect to the consumption of alcohol. Temperance leaders found drama more effective than lectures in disseminating their message and they used the genre as an instructive tool targeting lower class audiences.⁸¹

2.4 Melodrama

Melodrama was the dominant genre of theatre in the 19th century.⁸² It is characterized by exaggerated and emotional acting in a plot line that polarizes good and evil and where characters engage in a moral struggle between damnation and salvation.⁸³ This model is well suited to the temperance message that “through hard work and ‘right

⁷⁹ Ibid., 264-270.

⁸⁰ Frick, *Theatre*, 2.

⁸¹ Joseph Dewey, “Drama, Drinking and Temperance,” *The Sage Encyclopedia of Alcohol: Social, Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, <http://dx.doi.org.qe2a-proxy.mun.ca/10.4135/9781483331096.n178> (accessed 17 February, 2018): 485-486.

⁸² Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 151.

⁸³ Frick, *Theatre*, 5.

thinking' any man could 'make himself over'."⁸⁴ Temperance melodrama, though didactic and overwrought with emotion, proved popular and, with morality plays such as *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*, attracted even middle-class audiences.⁸⁵ This play was a popular one in St. John's through the 1880s and 1890s.

Kristen Guest, writing a few years after Frick, notes that scholars assert that melodrama reflects concerns of the people of the era for "it makes visible the struggles of the powerless against the pressures of capitalism."⁸⁶ Guest states that up to 1870 melodramas highlighted the struggle of victims such as the poor, women, the elderly or children against a hostile world and harkened back to a nostalgic and better world order of the past. In the latter third of the 19th century, melodrama's victims also included men of status such as squires or businessmen as they struggled within a new impersonal and abstract economic reality. These plays brought to the fore contemporary anxieties pertaining to masculine identity and money.⁸⁷ Guest notes that the introduction of limited liability companies caused a level of concern among some of the middle class who perceived that one's personal reputation and private moral character became divorced from one's behaviour in the public marketplace.⁸⁸ Christina Burr writing about work and labour reform in late 19th century Toronto notes that the working class favoured melodrama. She suggests that ordinary working people were trying to make sense of the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 57.

⁸⁵ Dewey, "Drama, Drinking and Temperance," 486.

⁸⁶ Kirsten Guest, "The Subject of Money: Late Victorian Melodrama's Crisis of Masculinity," *Victorian Studies* 49, no. 4 (July 1, 2007): 635-657.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 635-636.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 637.

changes brought about by industrial capitalism.⁸⁹ Michael Booth, an expert in 19th century theatre, also notes the emphasis on the themes of business and finance. He says that the villain and hero struggle “in an environment of banks and broking offices, spilling over, of course, into the home and threatening the family with destruction.”⁹⁰ This concern is reflected not only in the melodrama of the period but also in the relationship between business giant R. G. Reid and liminal T. M. White.

According to Rohan McWilliam, some historians have been so influenced by melodrama in their analysis of aspects of the Victorian era, that he calls it a melodramatic turn.⁹¹ For McWilliam and others, the world of melodrama is key to understanding “the construction and presentation of the Victorian self.”⁹² Melodrama offers a vehicle to understand Victorian “identity, emotion, gender and patriotism.”⁹³ Melodrama was so pervasive that it influenced communication in court and in elections. McWilliam cautions against overusing the melodramatic application; he is concerned that overuse will render the concept meaningless. His focus is the application of melodramatic imagination to 19th century Britain, but he says that the melodramatic sensibility characterized by “extreme emotions, hidden conspiracies and grand gestures” was evident in North America as well.⁹⁴

McWilliam says that although melodrama illustrates class attitudes and divisions, it can also be used to analyze culture in a way that transcends class. It offers a type of

⁸⁹ Christina Burr, *Spreading the Light: Work and Labour Reform in Late-Nineteenth-Century Toronto*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 25.

⁹⁰ Michael Booth, “Introduction,” in *The Lights o’ London and Other Plays*, ed. Michael Booth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) xx-xxi.

⁹¹ McWilliam, “Melodrama and the Historians,” 58.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 59.

cultural history and a way to examine theatricality and performative elements existing in a society's culture beyond the stage.⁹⁵ Melodramatic rhetoric was evident in the editorials of newspapers, the pleadings in the courtrooms, and the political debates of the era. He notes that inherent in melodrama was the idea that character should be "visible and transparent. Villains were often people who were not what they seemed."⁹⁶ He says that melodrama "despised duplicity; its stories connected the personal to politics."⁹⁷ In exploring T. M. White's life the personal will be shown to be connected to politics.

Melodramas on various themes were a staple on the stages of St. John's in the 1880s and 90s. A perusal of the contemporary newspapers reveals that White produced, directed and acted in many of these throughout his life. A wider examination of White's life illustrates that the melodramatic imagination extended beyond theatre and into the rhetoric of newspapers, political campaigns and courtrooms of the day. White played melodramatic roles both on and off the stage.

2.5 St. John's

Individuals cannot be divorced from the place and time in which they live. An understanding of how T.M. White reflects his society demands an understanding of St. John's, Newfoundland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many books have been written about historical St. John's but few are academic. Most are aimed at the general reading public. Paul O'Neill's comprehensive popular history *The Oldest City: The Story of St. John's, Newfoundland* is a survey of almost every aspect of life in the city since its

⁹⁵ Ibid., 63,64

⁹⁶ Ibid., 75.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 75.

inception.⁹⁸ It is a starting point for research into a myriad of topics. In 2010, historian Carolyn Lambert notes that most local histories provide only “fragmentary glimpses” of the city.⁹⁹ Almost a decade later this is still the case. Aspects of life in St. John’s can be gleaned from reading articles and books on various 19th century topics such as biographies as well as church, school and organizational histories, but for readers or researchers seeking in-depth academic studies of St. John’s, there are few available. In fact, many of these are graduate theses and most do not deal with social or cultural history.

Historian Melvin Baker, in his 1982 Ph. D. thesis, documents the development of municipal government and the provision of services such as water, fire protection and hospitals in late 19th century St. John’s.¹⁰⁰ This is important for understanding the peculiarities of development and service provision (or lack thereof) in the municipality but still leaves the social side of the city to be examined. Similarly, John Joy, in a 1977 master’s thesis, uses quantitative methods to analyze trade and manufacturing in St. John’s.¹⁰¹ Joy fills in a picture of the small manufacturing sector that was active in the city from 1870 to 1914. His is an economic history, not a social history; it is not about the people involved. So too, Richard MacKinnon’s master’s thesis on carriage making in St. John’s is about the making of carriages rather than about the people who made

⁹⁸ O’Neill, Paul, *The Oldest City: The Story of St. John’s, Newfoundland Vol. 1*. (Erin, Ontario: Press Porcupic, 1975); *A Seaport Legacy: The Story of St. John’s, Newfoundland Vol. 2*. (Erin, Ontario: Press Porcupic, 1976).

⁹⁹ Carolyn Lambert, “Far From the Homes of Their Fathers: Irish Catholics in St. John’s, Newfoundland, 1840-1886,” (Ph. D. thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2010), 16-17.

¹⁰⁰ Melvin Baker, “The Government of St. John’s, Newfoundland, 1800-1921,” (Ph. D thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1980); Melvin Baker, *Aspects of Nineteenth Century St. John’s Municipal History* (St. John’s: Harry Cuff Publications, 1982).

¹⁰¹ John Joy, “The Growth and Development of Trades and Manufacturing in St. John’s, 1870-1914,” (master’s thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977).

them.¹⁰² MacKinnon does list the names and locations of carriage making businesses operating in St. John's in the late 19th century but he does not mention T. M. White.¹⁰³

In yet another thesis, James Hiller (1971) provides a political and economic context for the social climate of St. John's in the late 19th century.¹⁰⁴ Hiller chronologically sorts out a complex web of self-interest, economic desperation and developmental salvation schemes among mercantile and political interests. It is not a social history, however, as the focus is on decisions and decision makers rather than ordinary citizens.

St. John's was the seat of government and the center of mercantile activity for the colony. It was where most of the decision makers resided and it was in St. John's that most political alliances were formed and re-formed. S. J. R. Noel, in his study of Newfoundland politics, claims that 19th century political parties were "ad hoc creations, cabals of politicians whose association with one another signified nothing more than their common desire to capture the government."¹⁰⁵ He notes that elections had traditionally given people a choice between "merchants and lawyers and lawyers and merchants," and that political labels were meaningless.¹⁰⁶ In the late 1880s all adult males in

¹⁰² Richard MacKinnon, "Carriage-making in St. John's Newfoundland; A Historical Study of the Products of a Folk Industry," (master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1982).

¹⁰³ MacKinnon confuses T. M. White's and John J. McGrath's carriage making business of McGrath & White located at 124 Gower Street with Thomas McGrath's carriage making business originally located at 115 Duckworth Street. MacKinnon mistakenly says that from 1885, 124 Gower Street was the second location of Thomas McGrath's business. Thomas McGrath was the father of John J. McGrath, White's business partner. Thomas died in 1881, two years before the business McGrath & White opened its doors. Thomas McGrath's business was insolvent and its assets were sold on public auction. He did not have a carriage making business on Gower Street. See footnotes #155-156.

¹⁰⁴ James Hiller, "A History of Newfoundland, 1874-1901," (Ph. D thesis, University of Cambridge, 1971).

¹⁰⁵ S. J. R. Noel, *Politics in Newfoundland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 25.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Newfoundland were granted the right to vote and the vote was to be by secret ballot.¹⁰⁷

Kurt Korneski in *Conflicted Colony* notes that the power brokers behind the political alliances had to adapt their strategies and policies to accommodate the interests of ordinary working people.¹⁰⁸ Attempting to seize this new political opportunity, T. M. White, the politician, claimed he was a workingman's candidate as he courted the votes of the St. John's workingman.

2.6 Religion in St. John's

T. M. White lived in a time and place where religion supposedly defined and divided people. Historical St. John's (and Newfoundland as a whole) is often portrayed as a center of religious strife and division - specifically Roman Catholic versus Protestant. This perception is partially due to an early political history by Gertrude Gunn. She describes the Irish residents of Newfoundland as ignorant, ill bred and predisposed to violence.¹⁰⁹ Carolyn Lambert in her social history of Irish Catholics in mid-19th century St. John's notes that the view of Newfoundland in this period as a place rife with sectarian prejudice and violence has been adopted in the work of later popular historians such as Patrick O'Flaherty and John Greene.¹¹⁰ Contrary to common impression, however, Lambert reports that between 1840 and 1886 she found no evidence of anti-Irish attitudes or anti-Catholic sectarian violence in the city.¹¹¹ Lambert's findings are surprising in the light of popular perceptions of the time. O'Flaherty acknowledges that a

¹⁰⁷ Kurt Korneski, *Conflicted Colony: Critical Episodes in Nineteenth-Century Newfoundland and Labrador* (Montreal & Kinston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 97.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Gertrude Gunn, *The Political History of Newfoundland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966).

¹¹⁰ Lambert, "Far From the Homes," 5.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 45

period of peace existed between adherents of different religions in the twenty year period prior to 1883.¹¹² Nevertheless, he observes that whatever peace there had been was likely “uneasy.” In 1883, the Harbour Grace Affray erupted. This violent conflict occurred as a result of a group of ethnically Irish Roman Catholic residents resisting a group of Protestant Orangemen parading in the predominantly Catholic Riverhead area of the Conception Bay town. Five people were killed and seventeen wounded. The event and the subsequent protracted court drama filled the newspapers and inflamed the public. O’Flaherty notes that the Affray created a lasting division in Newfoundland that affected both politics and the social relations of ordinary people.¹¹³ Whether or not there was conflict or simply “an uneasy peace” between Roman Catholic and Protestants in St. John’s prior to 1883, there was certainly a social divide manifested in and reinforced by a denominational school system, a divide that persisted until the late 20th century.

Other scholars have also acknowledged the religious divide that prevailed in the colony. James Hiller in his examination of Newfoundland from 1874 to 1901 suggests that the tension that existed between Catholics and Protestants was due to the imbalance of political and economic power between the two groups.¹¹⁴ Hiller’s explanation for religious strife is rooted in an analysis of the specific social and economic realities of life in Newfoundland.

Newfoundland historiography, whether political or social, reveals that religion impacted many aspects of life in 19th century St. John’s society beyond simple church

¹¹² Patrick O’Flaherty, *Lost Country: The Rise and Fall of Newfoundland 1843-1933* (St. John’s: Long Beach Press, 2005)148.

¹¹³ Ibid., 151.

¹¹⁴ Hiller, “A History of Newfoundland,” 14.

going. Denominational divisions influenced education, politics, volunteer organizations, and even social activities. How much actual conflict existed between ordinary people of differing religions remains a subject of inquiry. Nevertheless, although the majority of Catholics tended to be in the working or fishing classes and a small number of residents comprised the Roman Catholic elite, including some of the major merchants, according to Lambert by 1880 “a small but growing business and lower middle class” was emerging in St. John’s.¹¹⁵

2.7 Class in St. John’s

Most scholarly investigations of class relations in Newfoundland and Labrador involve the fisher people and the merchant capitalists - class relations that are mostly particular to outports. This is evident in Jerry Bannister’s 1994 survey essay, which examines the historiography of class in the scholarly work on Newfoundland history.¹¹⁶ In his survey of the historiography, Bannister finds that these studies do not focus on actual class, culture and relationships. Bannister applauds the work of labour historians Sean Cadigan, Bill Gillespie and Peter McGinnis for examining the dynamic relationships between classes as a focus of study and for enabling fishing families to be seen not simply as victims.¹¹⁷ It is with the labour historians that the examination of class moves beyond the outport and the fishery to analyze class dynamics involving women and labour in St. John’s.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Lambert, “Far From the Homes,” 60.

¹¹⁶ Jerry Bannister, “A Species of Vassalage: The Issue of Class in the Writing of Newfoundland History,” *Acadiensis*, XXIV, 1 (Autumn 1994): 134-144.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 140-143.

¹¹⁸ This is part of a larger movement of historians in the 1980s and 1990s such as Gregory Kealey and Linda Kealey who studied workers’ histories in Canada.

Bill Gillespie examines the rise of unions in Newfoundland and Labrador and looks at some early collective labour activities in St. John's.¹¹⁹ This is valuable for he looks at the beginnings of the labour movements in Newfoundland in the 19th century. White was part of the early days of labour unions and was president of the Mechanics' Society. During the period that White was active with the Mechanics' Society, dockworkers were organizing on the St. John's waterfront. Jessie Chisholm examines the development of the Longshoremen's Protective Union from 1890 to 1914. She provides details regarding the nature and conditions of work on the St. John's docks including the wages, strikes, the treatment of the strikers and the participation of juveniles.¹²⁰

Peter McInnis in his master's thesis provides an in-depth look at the Newfoundland Industrial Workers Association (NIWA) during World War I.¹²¹ In both his thesis and a later article, he documents the determination and resilience of the workers in standing firm against the tactics of the Reid Newfoundland Company.¹²² White was involved with this strike and became president of the NIWA.

Bannister calls for more study dedicated to relationships between classes as manifested in popular culture and values. Other historians, writing since Bannister, have moved the discussion into the domain of popular culture and values. Yet, surprisingly little has been written on class relations in St. John's. Linda Cullen and Marilyn Porter have compiled a collection of St. John's focused essays on women, family and class in

¹¹⁹ Bill Gillespie, *A Class Act: An illustrated History of the Labour Movement in Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's: Creative Publishers, 1986).

¹²⁰ Jessie Chisholm, "Organizing on the Waterfront: The St. John's Longshoremen's Protective Union (LSPU), 1890-1914," *Labour/Le Travail*, 26 (Fall 1990), 37-59.

¹²¹ Peter McInnis, "Newfoundland Labour and World War I: The Emergence of the Newfoundland Worker's Association," (master's thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1987).

¹²² Peter McInnis, "All Solid Along the Line: The Reid Newfoundland Strike of 1918," *Labour/Le Travail*, 26 (Fall 1990).

the first half of the twentieth century.¹²³ The collection includes essays on a variety of topics including Bonnie Morgan's essay comparing class differences evident in parish life in two different Anglican parishes in St. John's, and a biographical sketch by Helen Woodrow on Julia Salter Earle and another by Margot Duley on Armine Gosling.¹²⁴ These essays reveal the complexity and pervasiveness of class relations in the lives of St. John's women. The collection whets the appetite for the exploration of so many more aspects of St. John's social history in this and other periods. Margot Duley, in her book, *Where Once Our Mothers Stood We Stand: Women's Suffrage in Newfoundland 1890-1925* examines the first suffrage movement in the late 19th century St. John's, but the focus is on the activities of the few largely upper class and Protestant women who were involved.¹²⁵

A starting point for examining class in St. John's relevant to a study of T. M. White is not academic historiography at all, but is instead a film, *I Can Mind the Time with Tom and William Coady (Blacksmiths)* produced by Memorial University Extension services.¹²⁶ The film evocatively describes the workingman's St. John's in White's time. It features an interview with William Coady and his father Tom who was born in 1885.

¹²³ Linda Cullum and Marilyn Porter, eds. *Creating This Place: Women, Family and Class in St. John's, 1900-1950* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill University Press, 2014).

¹²⁴ Bonnie Morgan, "Activist Anglicans and Rectors' Wives: The Impact of Class and Gender in Women's Church Work in St. John's," in Cullen and Porter, 25-46; Helen Woodrow, "Julia Salter Earle, Seeking Social Justice," in Cullen and Porter, 71-88; Margot I. Duley, "A Full and Useful Life," in Cullen and Porter, 114-145.

¹²⁵ Margot Duley, *Where Once Our Mothers Stood We Stand: Women's Suffrage in Newfoundland 1890-1925* (Charlottetown: Gynergy Books, 1993).

¹²⁶ *I Can Mind the Time with Tom and William Coady (Blacksmiths)* Memorial University of Newfoundland Division of Educational Technology, 1985, CITL- MUN Archive Video Collection. Collections.mun.ca/cdm/ref/collection/extension/id/969 accessed April 3, 2019 www.youtube.com/watch?u=00B0o9Ujojg.

Tom's father preceded him in the blacksmith's trade.¹²⁷ Tom relates that his father and uncle came to St. John's as teenagers to apprentice and board with William McGrath on the corner of Hill o' Chips. He provides details regarding wages, apprentice curfews and hours of work from his father's era, as well as recounting details from his own life as a blacksmith in a city serviced by horses in the first half of the twentieth century. White's life was lived in this context of a workingman's St. John's in which a broader middle class identity was forming.

A more academic place to begin is Sean Cadigan's essay "Artisans in a Merchant Town: St. John's, Newfoundland, 1775-1816."¹²⁸ Even though Cadigan is writing about a period a century earlier than the time of White, it is important for establishing the place of artisans in the early development of St. John's and their relationship to the merchant class. At the end of the 18th century, St. John's grew and so did its artisan population.¹²⁹ Cadigan notes that there is little evidence available to assess the status of artisans in the social and economic hierarchy of St. John's. He concludes that the artisans were economically disadvantaged. Due to a prosperous fishery it was difficult for artisans to recruit labour.¹³⁰ Also, the artisans were in a dependent relationship with the merchants because they were reliant on credit.¹³¹

A few years later, John Fitzgerald in his Ph.D thesis also examines the social and economic inequality that existed in Newfoundland in the first half of the nineteenth

¹²⁷ The Coady family has been engaged in the blacksmith trade in St. John's from the 1800s to the present day.

¹²⁸ Sean Cadigan, "Artisans in a Merchant Town: St. John's, Newfoundland, 1775-1816," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 4, no.1 (1993): 95-119.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 96.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 97.

¹³¹ Ibid, 101.

century but focuses on conflict within the Irish Catholic Newfoundland community.¹³²

He observes that there were historic, long-standing divisions or factions in the Irish Catholic Newfoundland population. There is a suggestion that some of these divisions were class based but that theme is not developed.

In a collection of essays, Phillip McCann explores education, religion and social life in Newfoundland in the first half of the 19th century - the period immediately before the birth of T. M. White.¹³³ McCann finds that as early as 1846, a group comprising three hundred and sixty St. John's craftsmen, artisans and others signed a petition asking for compensation for the devastation of the great fire of that year. Retailers but no merchants were listed. The group members called themselves "Certain of the middle class."¹³⁴ McCann argues that by the middle of the nineteenth century a middle class identity was forming in St. John's. Newspaper items also provide evidence of this middle class identity later in the century as well. For example, *The Colonist* states that unlike the large property holders, "the middle class, artisans and labourers" were in favour of municipal incorporation."¹³⁵ It is interesting to note that here the artisans are not assumed to be in the middle class. McCann in his research also documents educational opportunities, social habits and entertainments available to the various classes. Unfortunately, he does not attempt to examine the forces behind the creation of class identities.

It is the forces behind the creation of identity that interest Kurt Korneski in *Conflicted Colony*. He examines episodes in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador

¹³² John Fitzgerald, "Conflict and Culture in Irish-Newfoundland Roman Catholicism, 1829-1850," (Ph. D. thesis, University of Ottawa, 1997).

¹³³ Phillip McCann, *Island in an Empire: Education, Religion, and Social Life in Newfoundland, 1800-1855* (Portugal Cove-St. Phillip's: Boulder Publications, 2016).

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ *The Colonist*, March 13, 1886.

pertaining to specific legislative, diplomatic and policy decisions as they both impact and are influenced by ordinary people in various specific locales.¹³⁶ He employs a borderlands perspective stating that 19th century Newfoundland “was an archetypical borderland: a space where changes in the relative authority of different imperial, national, and indigenous claimants to territories shaped the lives, opportunities and identities of a large number of people.”¹³⁷ This approach focuses attention on the lives and relationships of ordinary people. Korneski is interested in people’s sense of place, how place informs perspective and how place and perspective change over time. He notes that in addition to class, gender and ethno-religious differences that existed among the people of the Avalon Peninsula, place also created different perspectives, which could result in political action. Korneski reveals the importance of place in the evolution of dichotomous attitudes towards railway development. He uncovers a rationale rooted in place underlying the opposition to the railway construction by the people of Foxtrap, a rural community a short distance from St. John’s; in contrast the working people of St. John’s supported railway development for very different reasons.¹³⁸ Simply put, the people of Foxtrap feared losing land that they farmed. The people in St. John’s saw economic opportunity and progress.

In an earlier journal article, Korneski examines the impact of class, race and gender on the railway development in Newfoundland during the last two decades of the 19th century.¹³⁹ This trifold lens of gender, race, and class fits with the earlier referenced McClintock’s interdependent triangular framework of class, race and gender in identity

¹³⁶Korneski, *Conflicted Colony*.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 72.

¹³⁹ Kurt Korneski, “Race, Gender, Class, and Colonial Nationalism: Railway Development in Newfoundland, 1881-1898,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 62 (Fall 2008): 79-107.

formation. Korneski provides an interpretation for the development of the railway that goes beyond economic progress and employment. He posits that for the ordinary working “man”, the railway did not simply mean employment but was entailed with self-defining perceptions of what it meant to be a British man. It provided “the most promising means by which they might live according to the ideals of masculinity central to the prevailing definitions of Britishness.”¹⁴⁰ This is an interesting interpretation and was certainly articulated by Reverend Moses Harvey and other authority figures.¹⁴¹ In a failed election attempt, White advocated for the workingman and presented the railway as a means of economic security.

Recently, Patrick Mannion has studied class and gender in the context of Irish identity in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Maine between 1880 and 1923. The geographic focus of the Newfoundland part of his study is St. John’s where he highlights the Benevolent Irish Society (BIS), which was instrumental in fostering Irish identity in the community. He contrasts the middle class membership of the BIS to the working class membership of the Total Abstinence and Benefit Association and the Mechanics’ Society where there was little emphasis on the Irish heritage of the members. He notes that Irish public expression of Irish identity was middle class and masculine.¹⁴² Yet the middle class members of the BIS demonstrated an ardent loyalty to Britain and the Empire alongside their pride in their Irish heritage.¹⁴³ He also notes that the Roman

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 81.

¹⁴¹ Korneski, *Conflicted Colony*, 76-77.

¹⁴² Patrick Mannion, *A Land of Dreams: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Irish in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Maine 1880–1923* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2018) 75.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Catholic Church under Bishop Michael F. Howley promoted and fostered pride among the parishioners in being loyal subjects of the British Empire.¹⁴⁴

Mannion in his examination of Irish identity in St. John's draws on the work of Carolyn Lambert who makes a valuable contribution to the social historiography of St. John's in her Ph. D. thesis.¹⁴⁵ She examines the political, religious and social contexts of Irish Catholics in 19th century St. John's between 1840 and 1886, a period of great social change. To do this she analyzes the influences of the Roman Catholic Church, education, associations, politics and Irish nationalism. Lambert fills in social details about life in St. John's and adds to the historiographical work of Melvin Baker, John Joy and the labour historians. Her work is pertinent to the study of T. M. White and the social activities of the working class in St. John's. She examines in detail Roman Catholic associational life in the town. The activities and rationales of the associations highlighted by Lambert are similar to those of the associations discussed by Blumin, Holman, Palmer and Marks. Whether in Newfoundland, Ontario or the United States, the emphasis was on self-improvement and respectability. White was active in at least two of the associations Lambert examines.

Lambert analyses the functions of the associations in the wider society and highlights the class divisions they demarcate. She examines the middle to upper class BIS, St. Joseph's Catholic Institute (SJCI) and St. Vincent de Paul Society (men's and women's); the working class Mechanics' Society and TAB; and the seamen's Star of the Sea Association (SOS). Finding that there was an overlap in mandate and membership

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 137.

¹⁴⁵ Lambert, "Far From the Home".

between some of the associations, Lambert says that the overlap in executive members among the associations shows that class lines were often blurred.¹⁴⁶

Lambert notes that all of the organizations she researched had ties to the Roman Catholic Church regardless of whether they were founded by the Church directly or by lay people. She offers three reasons for the growth in the number of Catholic associations. First, St. John's was becoming more socially and economically stratified as its population increased. This stratification implies that associations were required to address the needs and interests of the differing social classes. Second, an established elite developed in the Catholic community. Lambert observes that this group was comprised of "merchants, politicians, military officers, senior civil servants, lawyers, and businessmen."¹⁴⁷ Leaders were available to take active roles in the community. And finally, the Church sought to control all aspects of community social life.¹⁴⁸ She says "a largely, lower class Catholic community was striving for, or being driven towards, respectability. As such, this impulse was not always so much a choice, as something that was enforced by the Church's own perception of how community should be defined."¹⁴⁹

Although Lambert rightly acknowledges the dominant influence of the Roman Catholic Church in shaping a culture of respectability among the working and fishing classes of Roman Catholics in St. John's, to take the desire for education, community involvement, charity, and temperance away from ordinary people and individuals and attribute all to the influence of the Church is one-sided. The people had ambitions that

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 212.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 60.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 190.

were personal, professional, aesthetic and these are also important in the growth of the Catholic associations of St. John's. Even with a powerful local Roman Catholic Church, individual people had agency and sought change in their personal circumstances.

Lambert outlines the activities of the various associations, highlighting the emphasis on self-improvement. She notes that the Jubilee Volume of the TAB published in 1908 states that a goal of the society was to elevate "their individual characters as men and as Christians."¹⁵⁰ Part of elevating this character was self-education. Both the working class Mechanics' Society and TAB had reading rooms and libraries. The TAB also had a billiards room, a boat club, a cricket club, and two bands.¹⁵¹

Both the Star of the Sea (SOS) and the TAB had theatres and hosted visiting professional and local amateur theatre companies. Lambert notes that the middle class associations hosted readings and concerts while the working class TAB and SOS primarily mounted plays in their theatres.¹⁵² Although she says this is because they had the two largest theatres in town, she implies that the plays were more to the taste of the working class even though she says that all classes in the city attended the dramatic entertainments. Lambert says the popularity of the plays was because there was little to do in the winter for entertainment. She also says that the Roman Catholic Church lent its support to the theatrical productions because drama kept the people of the lower class "occupied and out of trouble" and was a vehicle to promote temperance.¹⁵³ Lambert focuses on the Irish themed plays and entertainments. She does not discuss the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 194.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 197.

¹⁵² Ibid., 242.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 243.

temperance dramas or the genre of melodrama. A larger study of the plays and entertainments and their audiences would add to an understanding of the composition, activities and sensibilities of St. John's social classes.

The foregoing overview of the historiography demonstrates the relevance of the wider studies on the emerging 19th century middle classes elsewhere to the trends that were occurring in St. John's at that time and that influenced the life of T. M. White. White's story - the life of one man- illustrates many of the forces that were at play in the lives of skilled tradesmen in other cities and towns in North America and Great Britain. Lambert's comprehensive picture of Roman Catholic associational life in St. John's illustrates that people in St. John's had organizations with similar concerns and mandates to those highlighted earlier by Blumin, Holman, Palmer and Marks. Societal institutions encouraged temperance and respectability. Expectations of masculinity were being redefined to include white-collar work, community involvement and the ability to be the sole provider for a wife and family. Coinciding with this redefinition of masculinity with its emphasis on refinement and respectability, a melodramatic sensibility pervaded not only the stage but also the tone of the era and served to reinforce ideals of respectability. Grounded in this historiography, an in-depth examination of T. M. White will provide insight into how the life of an individual illustrates the confluence of class, masculinity and melodrama in St. John's.

Chapter 3 Working Class Roots and Middle Class Aspirations

Thomas Michael White was the son of a blacksmith. He later claimed to be “plebian born.”¹⁵⁴ He publically proclaimed this working-class pedigree in a mid-life election campaign. Was this merely an attempt to create an affinity with the workers of St. John’s to garner votes or was he content to see himself as a workingman? White might have identified with the working classes, but his actions and activities suggest a desire to become one of the emerging middle class. According to Stuart Blumin, in 1858 Walt Whitman defined the middle class as “men of moderate means, living at a rate of a thousand dollars a year or thereabouts.”¹⁵⁵ This is an American figure, and the income level to define middle class in St. John’s would likely be different. Coincidentally, however, for White it would be a desire for one thousand dollars a year that ultimately limited his social and career advancement.

In late 19th century in St. John’s and elsewhere, the emerging middle class with its aspirations of respectability consisted not only of merchants and lawyers, but also of a growing group of white-collar workers. Self-employed artisans were also sometimes included in the umbrella of the middle class.¹⁵⁶ It seems that for the young T.M. White, however, attaining middle-class status meant office work rather than manual work; it meant wearing a white collar and attaining the threshold income that would permit a certain standard of living. These would give him entry into the shared values of the middle class.

¹⁵⁴ *The Evening Herald*, October 30, 1899.

¹⁵⁵ Blumin, *Emerging*, 1.

¹⁵⁶ Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 108; Phillip McCann, *Island in an Empire*, 186-187.

3.1 Early Life

Little is known of T. M. White's parentage and early life. Nevertheless, to give a sense of his family background and heritage as a tradesperson, it is necessary to explore a little of his genealogy. T. M. was born into a culture and class of St. John's tradespeople to George White and Ellen Power on September 28, 1861 and was baptized at the Roman Catholic Cathedral.¹⁵⁷ Three years later, his sister Margaret was born.¹⁵⁸ The evidence indicates that White came from lines of blacksmiths on both sides of his family.

According to White himself, his father was a blacksmith.¹⁵⁹ An account by P.K. Devine in *Ye Old St. John's*, reveals that White's maternal grandfather was also a blacksmith.¹⁶⁰

Oral tradition passed down in the family attested that T. M.'s father, George, came from Trinity, Newfoundland and was originally a Protestant.¹⁶¹ Elders in the family said that George had a disagreement with the Church of England minister and that he joined the Roman Catholic Church. We do not know why or when he changed religions. There are no records of a George White joining the Roman Catholic Church in Trinity.

The 1850 baptismal records of the Roman Catholic Cathedral in St. John's, however, list

¹⁵⁷ TRPAD, Basilica of St. John the Baptist Records, Box 6, May 1861- December 1862, Entry #620.

¹⁵⁸ TRPAD, Basilica of St. John the Baptist Records, Box 6, June 1864- December 1865, Entry #680.

¹⁵⁹ T. M. White, copy of letter to John F. McDonough, McDonough & Blansfield, 76 Center Street, Waterbury, Connecticut, November 4, 1915.

¹⁶⁰ P. K. Devine, *Ye Olde St. John's* (St. John's: Newfoundland Directories, 1936), 109.

¹⁶¹ William J. Connors, grandson of T. M. White (and father of the author), said many times that T.M.'s father was a Protestant from Trinity. That was all that was known in the family of the Trinity connection. Records from the Anglican church in Trinity show that in 1830 a George White from Wymborn, Dorset married Anne Walters of Trinity. Baptismal records show that George was a blacksmith and that they had five children between 1832 and 1840 including a son, George Thomas White, born in 1833. After 1840 there are no definitive records of the family in Trinity. The records on microfilm (reel 31) at TRPAD for St. Paul's Church, Trinity, show a man, George White aged 36, died in 1847, and a woman, Ann White, married in 1848. The typed transcription says she was a spinster but the original handwritten document does not give her marital status. It is possible that T.M.'s grandfather died young and that his wife remarried such that a teenaged George had to make his own way in the world and that was why he relocated to St. John's.

“George White, a protestant about 15 years old.”¹⁶² This George White was likely T. M.’s father. The 1858 list of original members of the Roman Catholic Total Abstinence and Benefit Association also contains a George White.¹⁶³ White was not typically a Catholic name in Newfoundland. Two years later in 1860, George White from Trinity married Ellen Power¹⁶⁴ at the Roman Catholic Cathedral in St. John’s.¹⁶⁵ This indicates that T. M.’s father converted to Roman Catholicism at least two years before he married; the conversion was not on the eve of the wedding as is often the case. This strengthens the likelihood that he was the teenager who was baptized in 1850.

According to directories from the period, George White, the blacksmith, lived on 52 Victoria Street.¹⁶⁶ McAlpine’s 1871 Directory also lists a G. White as a carriage maker at 115 Duckworth Street.¹⁶⁷ This is not listed as a residence. These were the premises of Thomas McGrath, carriage maker, wheelwright and undertaker, and brother of William McGrath blacksmith and a founder of the local TAB.¹⁶⁸ No other G. White is listed in the blacksmith or carriage making trades in St. John’s in the immediately

¹⁶² TRPAD, Basilica of St. John the Baptist Records, Box 4, 1850, Entry #20.

¹⁶³ St. John’s Total Abstinence and Benefit Society (TAB), *Jubilee Volume, 1858 -1908* (St. John’s: Chronicle Print, 1908), 131.

¹⁶⁴ All that is known of Ellen’s family comes from an account by P.K. Devine. Her father was a blacksmith on Gregory’s Lane, which ran from Duckworth Street to Water Street across from the bottom of Victoria Street. The Powers were described as a musical family with a talent for piano as well as possessing some education. Devine says that they were well educated (but that is all relative). The only son succeeded the father in the business, four daughters married and the unmarried daughter taught piano. When George first married Ellen, he and his wife and another sister and her husband lived in the Power home. According to Devine, due to the musical talent of the Power family, it was “a treat for favored citizens to spend an evening at that hospitable home.”

¹⁶⁵ TRPAD, Basilica of St. John the Baptist Records, Box 8, 1860, Entry #170.

¹⁶⁶ *Hutchinson’s Newfoundland Directory, 1864-65*, p.220; *Lovell’s Province of Newfoundland Directory for 1871*, p.327; and John Sharpe compiler, *Directory for the Towns of St. John’s, Harbour Grace, and Carbonear, Newfoundland for 1885-1886*.

¹⁶⁷ *Hutchinson’s*, 60, 156.

¹⁶⁸ *Hutchinson’s*, 156; *McAlpine’s Maritime Provinces Directory for 1870-71* (Halifax David McAlpine, 1871) 1169; Rochfort, John A., *Business and General Directory of Newfoundland, 1877* (Montreal: Lovell Printing and Publishing Company, 1887).

preceding or subsequent years. It is likely that George White, the blacksmith who resided on Victoria Street, was employed at that time at the McGrath carriage works on 115 Duckworth Street. This leads one to speculate as to whether as a youth, newly arrived from Trinity, George could have apprenticed and worked with either William or Thomas McGrath, as did the previously referenced Coady men who apprenticed with William McGrath when they came to St. John's as teenagers.¹⁶⁹ George would have had some knowledge of blacksmithing from his father in Trinity.¹⁷⁰ He also would have needed work and lodgings in St. John's. Working with the McGraths might also have been an impetus for becoming a Roman Catholic and later in joining the TAB. In any case, George White would certainly have known the McGrath brothers through his trade and his membership in the TAB. Later it will be seen that T.M. would also have a connection with the McGrath family. This, however, is speculation and there is no clear record of where T.M.'s father worked before 1890 when the records show he was employed at Carnell's Carriage Works.¹⁷¹ After the Fire of 1892 George is listed as a carriage maker with S. G. Collier and as residing at 16 Cathedral Street next door to T.M. White at 18 Cathedral Street.¹⁷²

From the scant details that can be found about T. M. White's parents, it is possible to piece together a picture of George White's socio-economic status. T. M.'s parents were not people of secure means even though George was a skilled tradesman. According to a letter written by T. M. White in 1915 to his sister's solicitor in the United

¹⁶⁹ *I Can Mind the Time, With Tom and William Coady (Blacksmiths)*.

¹⁷⁰ See Footnote #155.

¹⁷¹ *Might and Company's Directory St. John's, Harbour Grace and Carbonear, Newfoundland, 1890*.

¹⁷² *McAlpine's Newfoundland Directory for 1904*, Halifax: The McAlpine Publishing Co. Ltd.

States, White said his father was a blacksmith who for much of his life was often not fully employed and was at times unable to find any employment.¹⁷³ For many years George could only find work at three-quarter time making \$1.12 a day. This wage is similar to the apprentice wage articulated by Tom Coady in the video documentary *I Can Mind the Time* who said his father in the same period would have made \$6.60 for a sixty hour work week of ten hours a day.¹⁷⁴ The reference to periods of partial employment and unemployment indicates that George did not have a regular employer and that he worked at different establishments when he could find employment. George, though a skilled tradesman, did not fit the profile of the labour aristocracy. He was not privileged or better paid than his fellow artisans. We do not know anything about his political values and he does not seem to have been in any position to be complicit in maintaining the existing political and economic system of the day. Factoring in that George had periods with no work, he would not have made much (if any) more money than unskilled municipal labourers who made \$1.00 per day.¹⁷⁵ George's apparent financial status was more plebeian than labour aristocrat by any definition.

T.M.'s letter also reveals that like many St. John's residents, his parents lost their home in the fire of 1892.¹⁷⁶ Presumably this was the house on Victoria Street. T. M. said that his parents received \$400 in fire insurance and two thousand feet of lumber. He said this was the amount of lumber allocated to fire victims who lost homes. The allocation

¹⁷³ T. M. White, letter to John F. McDonough, 1915 (unpublished copy given to Margo Connors from Nella Foley, granddaughter of T. M. White in 2014).

¹⁷⁴ *I Can Mind the Time with Tom and William Coady (Blacksmiths)*.

¹⁷⁵ Jesse Chisholm, "Organizing on the Waterfront," 37.

¹⁷⁶ T. M. White, letter to John F. McDonough, 1915.

was valued at \$36.00 because lumber at that time sold for \$19.00 per thousand feet.¹⁷⁷

After the fire, his parents spent some of this money travelling to and from Naugatuck, Connecticut (presumably to visit their daughter). Upon returning to St. John's with their money depleted, they built a partially finished and poorly constructed house on land leased from T. M. White. This was the house at 16 Cathedral Street referred to earlier. They were to pay T. M. an annual ground rent of \$22.00. This is all that is known of White's parents.

It is obvious from T.M. White's later activities that he had some formal schooling. He also would have had skills-based education as part of his apprenticeship as a wheelwright but we do not know if or where this blacksmith's son went to school. There is no record. In 1871, White would have been ten years old and living at the top of Victoria Street just around the corner from the Benevolent Irish Society (BIS) Orphan Asylum School on the east corner of Garrison Hill and Queen's Road; it is reasonable to assume that he attended this school for some of his childhood.

The BIS started the Orphan Asylum School in 1827 with the intention of later opening an orphanage. They did not realize this goal but offered schooling to the children of poorer families.¹⁷⁸ Even though the Orphan and Asylum School was non-denominational, its student body was mainly Roman Catholic. After the arrival of the Congregation of the Presentation Sisters in 1833 and the Sisters of Mercy 1847 to teach Roman Catholic girls, Roman Catholic boys in the city attended the Orphan and Asylum

¹⁷⁷ There is a slight error in White's numbers. If the lumber sold for \$19.00 per thousand foot, then two thousand feet of lumber should have been valued at \$38.00.

¹⁷⁸ Mannion, *Land of Dreams*, 43.

School.¹⁷⁹ Later, in 1856, Bishop J. T. Mullock opened St. Bonaventure's College as a seminary and offered the opportunity of higher learning to male students in addition to those who were candidates for the priesthood.¹⁸⁰ It is unlikely that White's father, who did not have a generous income and had periods of uncertain employment, would have paid the fees for his son to attend St. Bonaventure's when T.M.'s main education would be through an apprenticeship in a trade.

The only extant records for the Orphan and Asylum School are for post-1875 when the Christian Brothers took over the operation of the school and it became St. Patrick's Hall School.¹⁸¹ T.M. White is not listed on the school register in that period. By then it is likely that at 14 years old, White would have finished any formal schooling and apprenticed as a wheelwright. According to Michael Childs, in England traditional apprenticeship involved a master committing to teach a youth the skills of a trade and to supervise his moral and physical welfare in return for a premium and a commitment of service.¹⁸² Childs states that there was likely a gap between the ideal and the reality in many of these apprentice arrangements. Similarly, Bill Gillespie in *A Class Act* notes the harsh conditions experienced in Newfoundland by boy apprentices who were indentured to their masters for a period of five years.¹⁸³ The video documentary *I Can Mind the Time with Tom and William Coady (Blacksmiths)* also states that apprenticeships in St. John's involved a commitment of five years to the employer with long hours, strict discipline

¹⁷⁹ Lambert, 124.

¹⁸⁰ St. Bonaventure's College, *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* vol. 5 (St. John's: Harry Cuff Publications Ltd. 1994), 11.

¹⁸¹ School registers for the period after 1875 are currently held by the Irish Christian Brothers at Mount St. Francis Monastery, Merrymeeting Road, St. John's, Newfoundland.

¹⁸² Michael James Childs, *Labour's Apprentices: Working Class Lads in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 78.

¹⁸³ Bill Gillespie, *A Class Act*, 20.

and curfews. Some young men who did not want to be bound to their employers would stow away on ships and leave Newfoundland rather than face jail for breaking the contract of apprenticeship.¹⁸⁴ Writing about the artisans and apprentices in Saint John, New Brunswick, T. W. Acheson notes that despite the discipline, for a youth who would begin his apprenticeship in early adolescence, “Not only did it provide a critical form of educational and skills development, but it instilled the pride, confidence, and sense of apartness that distinguished the training of professionals.”¹⁸⁵ With White’s father being a blacksmith, this path would have been a natural one. According to Sonya Rose, artisans passed down their trade to their sons. This could mean the son inherited the father’s shop or it could mean, as would have been the case with T. M., the father ensuring that the son apprenticed with another tradesman.¹⁸⁶

T. M. White lived his life in the heart of old St. John’s on the hill descending from the Roman Catholic Basilica: Victoria Street; Cathedral Street; Gower Street; Duckworth Street at the TAB building;¹⁸⁷ Water Street at the Mechanics’ Society building by the current National War Memorial; and Queen’s Road for the BIS theatre. Only briefly did he venture outside this tight central downtown district to live on a street that was in the area now housing Mile One Stadium and office buildings on the west end of New Gower Street.

¹⁸⁴ *I Can Mind the Time, With Tom and William Coady (Blacksmiths).*

¹⁸⁵ T. W. Acheson, “Bone and Sinew: The Artisans and the Social Order,” in *Labour and Working-Class History in Atlantic Canada: A Reader*, eds. David Frank and Gregory S. Kealey (St. John’s: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1995), 73.

¹⁸⁶ Sonya O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth Century England* (London: Routledge, 1992), 140-141; ProQuest Ebook Central, docID= 167923.

¹⁸⁷ This is the site of the derelict CBC radio building which was originally built by the TAB as its third building. It opened in 1950. Robert Mellin, *Newfoundland Modern: Architecture in the Smallwood Years 1949-1972* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 29.

White's story is very much a story of a man making his way in old St. John's. His story is one that has much in common with the lives of men making their way and finding their place in a changing world with changing expectations of class and gender as new opportunities arose in England, America and Canada.

3.2 Artisan and Businessman

One can imagine that T. M. White was a liminal man, somewhat like Andrew McIlwraith in *More than a Man*. He would have had a conscious awareness of himself and his abilities in relation to his society and its opportunities and limitations. As a young man in his early twenties, he would have been looking for a place in his society. White was an ambitious, energetic and impulsive man. These characteristics are evident in all of his endeavours and entanglements. It is as a young man of business that White's ambitious personality becomes evident. He likely had limited formal education but he had his trade and an imagination. He was not going to be content working for a wage in someone else's shop with no prospects of advancement. David Burley, in his study of a small town in Ontario in the mid-1800s, notes that it was important for men of the nineteenth century to be independent, to be one's own master. Burley says that this distinguished a person as a "mature and manly individual." It denoted mastery of one's trade and the ability to provide for one's family.¹⁸⁸ Burley also suggests persistence in self-employment could be viewed as a precondition for entering the middle class.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ David Burley, *A Particular Condition in Life* (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 65.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 11.

There is no record of where White learned his trade and no evidence to indicate where he might have accumulated capital or investor confidence to enable him to start a business rather than remain a wage earning wheelwright employed in someone else's shop. Yet through good fortune or hard work, or a combination of both, he found a way to get established in his own business. In December 1883, at the age of twenty-two, T. M. White and John J. McGrath announced the beginning of a business partnership, McGrath & White, Carriage & Sleigh Builders, that would open its doors for business on January 2, 1884.¹⁹⁰ Birth records and death notices reveal that John J. McGrath was the son of Thomas McGrath, wheelwright and carriage maker.¹⁹¹ In 1881, two years before the establishment of McGrath & White, Thomas McGrath died at age fifty-one. His estate was insolvent, his Duckworth Street carriage making business was gone, and its assets were sold on public auction.¹⁹² White and John J. McGrath were the same age. It is possible that they had apprenticed and worked together at Thomas McGrath's carriage factory on Duckworth Street.

Whatever their history together, their actions on entering a business partnership show optimism and impatience. McGrath & White operated out of 124 Gower Street near British Square. The building was either inadequate for their operations or their aspirations, or perhaps their business grew more quickly than anticipated. Also, White and McGrath must have had a source of money or credit that they were not shy about

¹⁹⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, December 13, 1883.

¹⁹¹ TRPAD, Basilica of St. John the Baptist records Box 6, May 1861- December 1862, Entry 514; *The Evening Telegram*, January 17, 1912

¹⁹² Ancestry.com. *Newfoundland, Canada, Index of Birth, Marriage & Death Notices from Newspapers, 1810-1890* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014; *The Evening Telegram*, June 19, 1882.

using. Shortly after opening, they excavated,¹⁹³ enlarged their space,¹⁹⁴ and even advertised for a man or boy to manage a horse.¹⁹⁵ The young wheelwrights were obviously ambitious and impatient to grow and be successful in business. By May of 1885 they announced to “the Public of St. John’s and the Outports that having enlarged their Factory – they are now prepared better than ever before to manufacture- CARRIAGES, PHEATONS, WAGGONS, BUGGIES, &c.”¹⁹⁶ These businessmen were eager to make their mark. They were one of nine carriage makers and undertakers listed in the 1885-1886 Directory for St. John’s.¹⁹⁷ They operated like any other businessmen. They advertised prominently and frequently in *The Evening Telegram* and they took legal action against customers who failed to pay their bills.¹⁹⁸

Two years later in 1887, T. M. White married “Hannah, second daughter of James Sullivan, cooper.”¹⁹⁹ White married laterally within his social group but the wedding announcement indicates pride of business ownership. He married the daughter of a cooper. In contrast to his father in law, James Sullivan, however, White does not list his trade; instead he is described as “of the firm McGrath and White, carriage builders.” He was an independent businessman, a partner in a firm. Burley notes that being married and assuming the responsibility of a family was part of a Victorian notion of a mature and

¹⁹³ *The Evening Telegram*, December 20, 1884.

¹⁹⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, May 19, 1885.

¹⁹⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, July 22, 1885.

¹⁹⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, May 19, 1885.

¹⁹⁷ John Sharpe, *Directory for the Towns of St. John’s, Harbor Grace and Carbonear, Newfoundland for 1885-86*. St. John’s: Water Street, 1885.

¹⁹⁸ TRPAD, McGrath & White v. Samuel Walsh, Supreme Court, April 27, 1885, 18 December 1885, GN 170, [reel 139, frames 815-819].

¹⁹⁹ *The Evening Telegram*, April 29, 1887.

independent man who was credit worthy.²⁰⁰ Similarly, Holman notes that the duality of public figure and family man were key to the Victorian definition of masculinity.²⁰¹ With his marriage, White had achieved another status marker of a successful businessman of his era.

There are few references to his wife Johanna (Hannah). There is nothing known about her except that she cared for White's ailing mother for seven years;²⁰² she attended a reception for a papal delegate;²⁰³ she supported a local charity;²⁰⁴ she was thanked for kindness to an terminally ill friend;²⁰⁵ she went on at least one trip by the coastal boat and train;²⁰⁶ and that White was concerned about supporting her and his children when he encountered financial hardship later in life.²⁰⁷ In his marriage White demonstrated the ability of a respectable man to maintain a wife and family at home – separate and apart from the world of men and business.

Despite White's pride in the business, it did not last. In 1890, the partnership was dissolved and "all of the Stock in trade" was sold on public auction.²⁰⁸ It is not clear if the partnership was forced to liquidate due to insolvency, or if it was a voluntary dissolution due to other reasons such as partner incompatibility. According to Burley, it was not unusual for trade partnerships to dissolve. Burley notes the transitory nature of many of the business partnerships in his study of Brantford, Ontario and speculates that these

²⁰⁰ Burley, *Particular Condition*, 106-107.

²⁰¹ Holman, 153.

²⁰² T. M. White, letter to John F. McDonough, 1915.

²⁰³ *The Evening Telegram*, July 25, 1911.

²⁰⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, January 10, 1921.

²⁰⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, August 31, 1922.

²⁰⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, August 8, 1921.

²⁰⁷ TRPAD, Reid Newfoundland Company Papers MG 17, Box 12, File 272, Michael Gibbs letter to R. G. Reid August 23, 1905.

²⁰⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, January 23, 1890.

dissolutions could have been as a result of economic conditions or due to human factors such as personal conflict. He also remarks on the challenges involved in a carriage making business, which demanded competencies in several trades and a heavy investment in inventory.²⁰⁹ The dissolution of a business partnership was just part of the economic life of a community. The variety of skilled trades required in carriage making and the range of inventory that needed to be carried can be seen in the McGrath & White auction list. It consisted of “all the necessary tools and implements in connection with the blacksmith, painting, wheelwright and undertaking departments. Also, a large quantity of goods, viz.: rims, spokes, hubs, steel, carriages, sleighs, catamarans, hearses.”²¹⁰ The defunct business of McGrath & White was certainly well stocked. A month later, each of the former partners opened a business almost across the street from the other: McGrath at 131 Gower,²¹¹ and White briefly at 124 Gower, the premises of the dissolved McGrath & White.²¹² It is likely that each purchased back inventory from the dissolved partnership.

A year later in 1891, McGrath’s business was insolvent and again his goods were sold on public auction.²¹³ White managed to stay in operation and moved his business to Notre Dame Street, Lion’s Square, which is also listed as his place of residence.²¹⁴ He now advertised his business as an “Undertaker Importer and Manufacturer of Caskets, Coffins, Silver Mountings, and trimmings of all kinds. Even funeral clothing can be furnished on reasonable terms.”²¹⁵ He seems to have scaled back his business to focus on

²⁰⁹ Burley, *Particular Condition*, 31.

²¹⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, January 23, 1890.

²¹¹ *The Evening Telegram*, February 26, 1890.

²¹² *The Evening Telegram*, March 4, 1890.

²¹³ *The Evening Telegram*, February 18, 1891.

²¹⁴ *Might & Company’s Directory, St. John’s, Harbour Grace and Carbonear, Newfoundland, 1890.*

²¹⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, July 29, 1890.

funeral provisions; carriage making was not advertised. This omission attests to the greater financial requirements for the inventory and the varied skills required in carriage making.

White must have experienced some level of financial success in his new business, for in June 1892 he purchased the building on Notre Dame Street, Lion Square for four hundred dollars.²¹⁶ This housed his business and his family. White was fortunate to have moved his business and residence to Lion's Square. A month later, the Great Fire of 1892 ravaged much of St. John's but White's premises were outside of the devastated area. It is likely, though, that White was not completely content with his new location. Notre Dame St., Lion's Square was in the area of the present day Mile One Stadium, west of Adelaide Street. This area had also been outside the zone of the fire of 1846, and therefore many hastily built houses accommodated large numbers of people in the area. Until the neighbourhood was demolished in the 1950s, it had been viewed as a "slum" area for seventy years.²¹⁷ Mannion notes that class, not ethnicity, defined St. John's neighbourhoods. He singles out the area between Springdale Street and Carter's Hill as being particularly odious even in the early years of the 20th century where between four to five thousand people had no sewage system.²¹⁸ Items in the contemporary papers show public dissatisfaction with the unsanitary conditions of the lanes and streets on the steep hill. Heightening citizens' fear of diphtheria, raw sewerage daily ran down the sides of the streets and lanes that were too steep and in too poor condition for the council wagons

²¹⁶ Registry of Deeds, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador conveyance Elizabeth Q. Pynn to Thomas M. White, June 9, 1892, dated January 22, 1896, vol. 12. p. 207

²¹⁷ Keith Collier, St. John's and the Central Slum, Newfoundland and Labrador Heritage Website, 2011. Accessed Dec. 8, 2017. <http://www.heritage.nf.ca/articles/society/st-johns-slum.php>.

²¹⁸ Mannion, *Land of Dreams*, 20.

to be able to collect the “night soil”.²¹⁹ In addition to the filth running down the ragged lanes, at times citizens complained about the “rookeries” or dilapidated slum-like houses.²²⁰ St. John’s had many pockets of poverty and poor quality housing but this area was particularly notable for its squalor. We do not know White’s thoughts about his new neighborhood but he was likely restless to get back to the center of St. John’s, for the area of Lion’s Square off of the west end of New Gower Street was not a desirable part of town for the upwardly mobile.

Opportunity to move came after the Great Fire of 1892. Land became available in the area directly below the Roman Catholic cathedral and east of the Anglican cathedral. Facilitated by access to credit and the sudden availability of land, White moved to 18 Cathedral Street at the corner of Bond Street.²²¹ In terms of social mobility for T. M. White, this was a move to a better neighborhood. Mortgage documents reveal that he acquired the corner property in 1893.²²² On this piece of land White had room for two additional smaller dwellings to be constructed, one of these by his father at 16 Cathedral. The McAlpine Directory for 1894 lists T. M. White’s residence and carriage and

²¹⁹ *The Evening Telegram*, May 13, 1891.

²²⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, May 14, 1890.

²²¹ The structure on the corner of Cathedral and Bond streets still stands today. Fortunately for me, the house recently sold and was unoccupied. The new owner took me through the house. It is an unremarkable and plain three-story house. Like many homes of the period in St. John’s, the structure consists of an unfinished earth floor basement or cellar. The old coal chute outside is a testament that the basement’s prime function was coal storage. The first floor has a small porch facing the street and an attractive original interior door with coloured glass. A hallway separates the staircase, with its perfectly preserved wooden bannister and newel post, from two rooms currently functioning as a kitchen and dining room with a pass through for food. The second floor also has two rooms, each with original fireplaces, and divided by two large solid pocket doors. In the center of each room is a very old hand turned metal light fixture. Could they date back to T. M. White? A bathroom contains the original claw foot tub. The third floor has had some walls and flooring removed revealing it once contained three and possibly four rooms. Today the house carries its age well. It is solid and straight indicating that it was well built. It was a plain and functional house with high ceilings and little ornamentation. This house could have accommodated White’s show room but it is unlikely it could have been used as a workshop.

²²² Registry of Deeds, Newfoundland and Labrador, mortgage document Thomas M. White to James D. Lockyer January 22, 1896, vol. 12, p. 205.

undertaking business at the corner of Bond and Cathedral.²²³ It is not clear what he used the Lion's Square building for at this time. He could have rented all or part of it or used it as a workshop.

White seems to have had a measure of success as an undertaker. He provided caskets and organized arrangements for a variety of funerals. One funeral is particularly telling of White's status in the funeral business. A description of the high profile funeral of prominent citizen Moses Monroe stated that T. M. White organized the funeral arrangements and "managed the funeral very creditably."²²⁴ This is interesting for Monroe was a prominent businessman, a Protestant and a Mason. White was a Roman Catholic. That White would manage Monroe's funeral arrangements could lend some credence to Carolyn Lambert's suggestion that there was less animosity between people of different religions than was assumed by many historians. However, it will also be shown later that White was a political supporter of Monroe and the Conservatives. So perhaps politics trumped religion.

Since purchasing property on Cathedral and Bond in 1893, White had been carrying two properties, it and the one on Lion's Square. This combined with maintaining inventory and managing the demands of a business would have been a financial challenge for an individual with no other source of income. According to Burley in his small town Ontario study, the assumption of mortgages for the self-employed was a strategy to maintain business viability.²²⁵ He notes that for the younger

²²³ *McAlpine's Newfoundland Directory 1894-1897* St. John, New Brunswick: The Telegraph Steam Book and Job Print, 1894, p. 387.

²²⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, May 22, 1895.

²²⁵ Burley, *Particular Condition*, 120.

and the poorer businessmen, it was the business demands of self-employment combined with property ownership that created debt.²²⁶ In 1895, White's premises at Notre Dame Street on Lion's Square were advertised for sale as "A Chance of a Lifetime. For sale at a bargain." It was described as a three story house with the lower flat outfitted for carriage making but adaptable for other uses of other trades or even as a grocery store. The upper flats contained "6 fine rooms."²²⁷ The advertisement noted that there was "no better locality in the city for a grocery business." The property did not sell.

In January of 1896, White tidied up his legal affairs with respect to his properties. He conveyed the property on Lion's Square and all of his furniture, both the pieces contained in his residential home on the corner of Bond and Cathedral and other items listed in a Schedule A to his wife's name.²²⁸ He also mortgaged 18 Cathedral Street for \$600.²²⁹ The transfer of chattels is interesting for it indicates that he had a substantial amount of furniture in a time when people had very little; half of the town's residents would have lost everything just four years previous in the 1892 fire. Perhaps the furniture listed in Schedule A was left in the Lion's Square property. It consisted of one ... "table, 6 tables, 3 carpets, 2 doze (sic), ... 2 bedroom suites, 4 bedsteads bedding, 1 sewing machine, lamps and glassware, 2 suites walnut furniture."²³⁰ Was the furniture accumulated from estates for resale? Or did White acquire new furniture for his move to

²²⁶ Ibid. 121.

²²⁷ *The Evening Telegram*, August 20, 1895.

²²⁸ Registry of Deeds Newfoundland and Labrador, conveyance Thomas M. White to Johanna White, January 22, 1896, vol. 12, p. 208; From 1876 in Newfoundland, women could hold property and it would be protected from the husband's creditors. For a discussion of the law applying to the property of married women see Trudi Dale Johnson "Matrimonial Property Law in Newfoundland to the end of the Nineteenth Century," (Ph.D thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1998), 224-233.

²²⁹ Registry of Deeds, Newfoundland and Labrador, White to Lockyer, vol. 12, p. 205.

²³⁰ Registry of Deeds, Newfoundland and Labrador, Thomas M. White to Johanna White.

Cathedral Street? Regardless, it seems White was engaged in protecting his assets from creditors before entering a new business partnership.

Approximately six months after placing the Lion's Square property for sale, shortly after Christmas in 1896, White was in a new business partnership of White & Jocelyn. White had a showroom and residence on the corner of Bond and Cathedral Streets, and William Jocelyn had a workshop and residence at Notre Dame Street, Lion's Square.²³¹ A short note in *The Evening Telegram* stated that Jocelyn had been employed by the late John Carnell and that White had been in the carriage making and undertaking business for 14 years, first as a partner in McGrath & White and the last five as a sole proprietor.²³² It does not indicate where White got his start in the trade. White and Jocelyn re-emphasized the carriage building aspect of the business. They advertised aggressively and frequently with bold advertisements in *The Evening Telegram*, but only eight months later, in August 1896, the advertising abruptly stopped. There was no more mention of the partnership. Six months after the sudden advertising silence, a newspaper notice announced that William Jocelyn assumed a post with the carriage making business of S.G. Collier after returning from Boston where he learned the latest techniques in carriage building.²³³ So between mid-August and the following February, Jocelyn spent time in Boston and returned ready to return to work as a wage earner for a new employer.

When exactly and why the White & Jocelyn partnership dissolved is not clear. We also do not know whether the business was financially viable. White again

²³¹ *The Evening Telegram*, February 20, 1896.

²³² *The Evening Telegram*, February 10, 1896.

²³³ *The Evening Telegram*, February 1, 1897.

mortgaged his house on Cathedral Street in February 1899 for six hundred dollars.²³⁴

What is obvious from White's activities in the late 1890s is that he was becoming distracted from his business. In addition to his work with the TAB, the Mechanics' Society and his theatre commitments, White began to turn his eye toward politics. Finally, in March of 1900, White secured a position at the Supreme Court as sub-sheriff; he then sold the workshop premises on Lion Square for seven hundred dollars.²³⁵ Like McIlwraith, he was no longer an artisan who made a living with his hands. He had evolved from being the son of a wage-earning tradesman to a proprietor of his own carriage making and undertaking business. Ultimately, perhaps seeking a different level of status and security, White entered the 20th century as a civil servant.

²³⁴ Registry of Deeds, Newfoundland and Labrador, mortgage Thomas M. White to The Reliance Loan and Savings Co. of Toronto, February 15, 1899, vol. 16, p. 447.

²³⁵ Registry of Deeds, Newfoundland and Labrador, conveyance, Johanna White to James Whelan, March 8, 1900, vol. 19, p. 400.

Chapter 4 Education by Association

Through the 1880s and 90s when T. M. White was establishing his business, he was a busy man. In addition to undertaking and carriage making, like Andrew McIlwraith in *More of a Man*, he was actively involved in local associations. Participation in voluntary associations dedicated to causes such as temperance or charity was seen as an essential component of the duties of a respectable man in the mid to late 1800s, not only in Newfoundland, but also in England, North America and Australia. According to Davidoff and Hall in *Family Fortunes*, these organizations redefined “civil society” and contributed to the establishment of a base of middle class men.²³⁶ O’Leary, writing about the Irish in South Wales, notes these organizations promoted “respectable values,” notably temperance and independence, and also developed an individual’s organizational skills.²³⁷ Similarly Matthew Allen writing about the Irish in Australia notes the link between temperance associations and respectability.²³⁸

The TAB and the Mechanics’ Society were formidable and dominant forces in T. M. White’s life. He was not simply a member of these associations; he often assumed leadership roles on committees and on the executives. In addition to his association work, he was constantly producing, directing and acting in plays. In the midst of all this he was even involved as treasurer of one of the local cricket clubs.²³⁹ White must have been out every night at rehearsals or meetings. He was a man of business and community life. His

²³⁶ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 416.

²³⁷ O’Leary, “Networking Respectability,” 260 261

²³⁸ Allen, “Sectarianism, Respectability and Cultural Identity,” 374.

²³⁹ *The Daily Colonist*, April 25, 1888.

life exemplified the doctrine of separate spheres articulated by Davidoff and Hall.²⁴⁰ His public life was lived in a society dominated and controlled by men. An overview of White's extracurricular activities provides insight into the societal institutions that enabled a young working class man to develop the skills to advance in business, exercise political ambition and secure a civil service position.

White joined the TAB and the Mechanics' Society as a young man. Carolyn Lambert in her research on Irish Catholics in St. John's notes the establishment of associations by Roman Catholics was part of the drive toward respectability.²⁴¹ Lambert says that the TAB and the Mechanics' Society were both largely working class and Catholic. She states the Mechanic's Society was primarily founded by and comprised of Catholics because Catholics dominated the lower class.²⁴² Both societies were benefit organizations. The Mechanics' Society, a fraternal organization, provided injury and death benefits to members.²⁴³ The TAB promoted temperance but also provided its members financial relief for illness and death.²⁴⁴ The secondary purpose of the Mechanics' Society was to "improve the moral and social status of tradesmen in the city."²⁴⁵ Through temperance, the TAB aimed to elevate the characters of its members.²⁴⁶

These and other service organizations in St. John's promoted the self-education of their members. The Mechanics' Society established a library and reading room in 1846. This must have fallen into disuse, for in the 1880s the Mechanics' Society was once again

²⁴⁰ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*.

²⁴¹ Lambert, "Far From the Homes," 191.

²⁴² Ibid., 189.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 194.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 191.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 194.

furnishing such a facility.²⁴⁷ The TAB's first Literary and Dramatic club provided a reading room and engaged in dramatic performances.²⁴⁸

Like other associations in St. John's, both the Mechanics' and the TAB hosted many social occasions such as excursions out of town to communities around Conception Bay or up the Southern Shore, picnics at Octagon Pond, and dances and dinners at local halls. Through his membership in these organizations, White attended many dinners. Both the TAB and the Mechanics' organizations hosted dinners for numerous special occasions such as significant society anniversaries or on the conclusion of a billiards tournament. These dinners involved a degree of formality where a young man could learn appropriate table manners and social etiquette. Often guests were invited from the local clerical and political spheres.

A detailed newspaper account of a Mechanics' billiards dinner attended by White in 1892 provides an interesting social commentary and a description of the dinner. The newspaper described the dinner as a "complete and unqualified" success and said that it was unlike similar events because of the positive energy around it. The writer said that, "[U]sually events of this kind are characterized by a certain amount of friction in some part of its machinery or arrangement; and it not infrequently happens that, for days after, we hear fault-finding by those who attended."²⁴⁹ Through this description one gets a picture of small town backbiting and petty criticisms of people's volunteer efforts in organizing events.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 196.

²⁴⁸ TAB, *Jubilee Volume*, 19.

²⁴⁹ *The Evening Telegram*, January 26, 1892.

The writer gave a vivid description of the room and the fare on offer. The tables were arranged in a three-sided square and were decorated with artificial flowers, fairy lights and tall fruit stands. Dinner was served at 10:30 pm. The menu comprised turkey, veal, ham and beef with mashed potatoes, peas and cabbage and a wide selection of sweets, pastries, raspberry and strawberry tarts, wines, jellies, blanc-mange, pineapples and plums. Beverages included lemonade, ginger ale, tea and coffee. Through the meal the caterer and his waiters attended the needs of the guests with attentiveness and efficiency.²⁵⁰

At such dinners, the men proposed formal toasts. This dinner toasted the Queen, the Governor, the Judges of the Supreme Court, the Clergy, the Mechanics' Society, the tournament Winner and Losers, the Societies and Clubs of the City, the Guests (proposed by T. M. White), the Legislature, the Trade and Manufacturers, the health of the Ladies, the Press, the health of the President of the Society, and the health of the oldest member. Each toast had a responder. The toasts were interspersed with songs and there was also an address by the President. This involved much listening by the attendees. The evening culminated with all joining hands and singing Auld Lang Syne. At these dinners, a young man like White could learn manners and social protocol and gain confidence in the presence of invited guests and senior members.²⁵¹

In addition to dinners and social events, the different associations of St. John's such as the Mechanics' Society and the TAB provided a variety of learning opportunities for their members. Whether it was at meetings, lectures, plays, parades, sports events or

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

charitable projects, White gained skills and opportunities from his involvement in each organization.

4.1 Total Abstinence Society

T. M. White joined the Total Abstinence and Benefit Society at the age of fifteen, the minimum age for becoming a member. There are no records of his inaugural membership, but his obituary and other articles refer to his lifetime membership. Also, he received a special Blessing by Pope Pius XI shortly before his death in 1938 in recognition of an “unbroken period of sixty-two years” of active membership in the TAB.²⁵²

An examination of the activities of T. M. White reveals the role of working-class service organizations in fostering the development of a middle class in St. John’s. The members were inculcated in the value of temperance. The TAB had available personal Catechisms dedicated to lessons on total abstinence. The tiny pocket sized booklets were portable and could easily fit into the pocket of a man’s trousers or jacket. These were educational resources and it is not clear whether the TAB provided these only to junior members or to all members. Nevertheless, the content of the Catechisms illustrates the value system the TAB was disseminating. The booklet was formatted in a series of questions and answers. One question asked “Why is it shameful and unmanly to drink excessively?” The answer discusses the loss of a man’s reason to alcohol and concludes

²⁵² “Special Blessing From the Holy Father Sent to Mr. T. M. White,” *The Monitor*, December 1938.

that self-denial, not self-indulgence, is the test of manliness.²⁵³ The TAB promoted masculinity associated with restraint and temperance.

But the education offered at the TAB was more far reaching than simply inculcating the value of temperance. Local people and visiting guests delivered lectures on various subjects. For example, during the summer of 1877, the Total Abstinence Hall featured a series of dramatic recitals by an elocution instructor from McGill University.²⁵⁴ The following winter in 1878, one of the lectures at the Hall was entitled “Shakespeare and the English Drama.”²⁵⁵ It is likely that T. M. White and his peers who were interested in theatre attended such recitals and lectures that were hosted at their own club and hall.²⁵⁶ A young man of limited education and means was able to develop social, communication, leadership and other life skills through participation in these organizations. Davidoff and Hall in *Family Fortunes* note that it was in associations that “men learned to converse, argue, communicate ideas and knowledge with social inferiors and superiors.”²⁵⁷ The development of these skills facilitated individuals and their families to become middle class.

In *The Christmas Review* of 1901, a long time member of the TAB recounted the early days and contributions of the TAB’s literary and dramatic branch, which originated in 1873. The author stated that the Literary club gave many prominent local men their start and he chastised many of these men for not continuing to support the TAB when the

²⁵³ *Temperance Catechism and Total Abstinence Manual*, (Dublin: Cahill & Co. 1891).

²⁵⁴ *The Newfoundlander*, July 13, 1877.

²⁵⁵ *The Newfoundlander*, January 29, 1878.

²⁵⁶ See Appendix 1 for images of the TAB Buildings.

²⁵⁷ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, 446.

organization was in difficult times.²⁵⁸ Others, like T. M. White, he credited with continued support. He also credited the T. A. Club with playing a role in the establishment of the more literary Academia Club in the city, claiming that many men who promoted the Academia made their first speeches at the TAB.²⁵⁹ He noted that after the fire of 1892 when the Academia Club was destroyed, most of its members gravitated to the BIS. This suggests that some men, as they rose into the ranks of the middle or professional classes, did not maintain their connection with the more working class TAB.

Carolyn Lambert describes the TAB as a predominantly working class society. This working class identity is also highlighted by the reminiscence of the TAB member in the *Christmas Review*.²⁶⁰ The writer recalled that the members of the Literary Club were preparing to put on a performance. A delegation was appointed to visit the Governor to request his patronage and attendance. In anticipation of the meeting, the Chairman of the TAB advised the men who were assigned to meet with the Governor to wear proper dress clothes, which included a “high” hat. This caused consternation among some of the men. How could they wear a top hat on a weekday? This was only appropriate to wear to funerals. On the day of the appointed meeting, the Chairperson took stock of his delegation and found he was waiting on two members. Shortly thereafter these men made quite an appearance. They arrived at the clubrooms with funeral crape two yards long streaming from their hats.²⁶¹ They explained to the chairman that they did not want their neighbours to see them wearing top hats on a weekday because they were afraid that it

²⁵⁸ J. P. M. “The First Literary Club,” *The Christmas Review*, 1901, 19-20.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. “First Literary,” 20.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 19.

²⁶¹ Crape or crepe is black silk formerly used in mourning clothes. Oxford Dictionary.

would be thought they were “becoming hightoned.” The wearing of the crape streamers would signal to the neighbours that the men were on the way to a funeral. The men detached the funeral regalia for the official visit but after the meeting with the Governor, they returned to the TAB rooms and donned the funeral crape for their return home.²⁶² These working-class men would not want to be thought by their neighbours as reaching above their station. Their clothing was obviously part of their identity and reflected their aspirations.

It is likely that White was not one of the members who would have been loath to be seen in the upwardly mobile attire of the aspiring middle classes. His activities indicate that he was a man looking to better his place in society. Also, his occupation as an undertaker would have occasioned him to frequently wear more formal attire, giving him a level of comfort in such clothing. A photograph of the TAB executive circa 1890 shows an unidentified White standing in his suit and top hat outside of Government House.²⁶³

White was involved with the TAB as more than just a member. He had a lifetime involvement with theatre but over the years he was also on the Boat Committee for the TAB entry in the annual St. John’s Regatta,²⁶⁴ the Father Matthew Committee celebrations,²⁶⁵ the Board of Management,²⁶⁶ the literary and drama society, and the executive of the TAB. Although White had long, deep and varied involvement with the TAB and was known as a total abstainer, there is no record of his personal views on

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ See Appendix 2.

²⁶⁴ TAB, *Jubilee Volume*, 129.

²⁶⁵ See Appendix 3 for a photograph of the Father Matthew Celebration Committee. Father Matthew was the Irish founder of the Total Abstinence Society; TAB, *Jubilee Volume*, 107.

²⁶⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, December 6, 1906.

alcohol and society. Despite being a frequent public speaker, he does not appear to have given speeches promulgating temperance or prohibition.

The TAB annual report of 1886 shows T.M. White was Vice president. He continued in this position until 1890²⁶⁷. In 1890 he did not put his name forward for re-election. Perhaps this was because he was becoming more involved in the Mechanics' Society, of which he later served as president for over a decade. Also in this period, he became involved in running the BIS theatre company.

By 1891, T.M. White is listed as Manager of the BIS Dramatic Company.²⁶⁸ The BIS wanted to equip the stage and form a theatre group and they contracted T. M. White.²⁶⁹ The use of the term “contracted” suggests he was paid for his services. He remained active with the TAB but his involvement with the BIS is curious. Carolyn Lambert says the BIS was a means for upwardly mobile men to advance in society. She notes that there was an overlap in membership between the BIS, the Mechanics' Association and the TAB. The BIS was definitely higher on the social ladder and it would be natural for an ambitious man to be a member of more than one of these organizations. White does not appear to have advanced on any committees or been elected to the executive of the BIS. Except for his theatre activities, the evidence available shows a limited involvement of short duration. In 1893, he is listed among the members from whom one could purchase tickets to attend social events such as the picnic,²⁷⁰ the excursion to Harbor Grace²⁷¹ and the Moonlight Excursion.²⁷² Then he

²⁶⁷ *The Evening Telegram*, November 15, 1890.

²⁶⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, July 21, 1891.

²⁶⁹ Thomas Mitchell, letter to the Editor, *The Evening Telegram*, February 3, 1892.

²⁷⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, August 12, 1893.

appears to have had no more involvement at the BIS except to appear on its stage or attend a dinner. During this period, his involvement at the Mechanics' increased. From the mid 1890s, White took on leadership of the Mechanics' Society and attempted to launch a career in politics.

Through all of this period between 1890 and 1905 when White was busy advancing with the Mechanics' and exercising political ambitions, he continued his involvement with the TAB. He remained actively involved with the TAB throughout his life and assumed the role of president in 1928, a position he held until just before his death a decade later.²⁷³

4.2 Mechanics' Society

There is no evidence to show when T. M. White joined the Mechanics' Society, but by the age of 21 he was active on committees. He was secretary of the committee for the annual picnic in the summer of 1882.²⁷⁴ He was elected second treasurer in 1886.²⁷⁵ By 1895, he was elected President.²⁷⁶ The Mechanics' Society was a benefit organization that provided monetary benefits for its members in case of illness or death. It also organized social events; but more importantly, it provided a forum to discuss issues of

²⁷¹ *The Evening Telegram*, July 8, 1893.

²⁷² *The Evening Telegram*, May 24, 1893.

²⁷³ *The Daily News*, December 13, 1938.

²⁷⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, August 7, 1882.

²⁷⁵ *The Colonist*, March 12, 1886.

²⁷⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, March 11, 1895; See Appendix 4 for a photograph of the Executive of the Mechanics' Society.

common interest to trades people. Under White's leadership, it advocated and lobbied for better working conditions and legislation to protect workers.²⁷⁷

In the tradition of the societies of the day, the members of the Mechanics' Society would assemble in their best clothes and societal regalia and parade annually. *The Colonist* commented on the class composition of the parading members: "To judge from the representation of the Society present in yesterday's celebration it must be composed of many of the middle class of the city, the class that contribute the most to the welfare of our country and the stability of our public institutions."²⁷⁸ The writer seemed to include at least some of the mechanics who participated in the parade among the middle class. The article continued to say that they were smartly dressed and intelligent looking and could compare favourably with their counterparts in other countries. The writer lamented how few mechanics turned out for the parade and urged those absent to join the organization as it advocated for the interests "of skilled hands" and upheld "the dignity of labor." He said that it was through the activities of such a society that the "vice of drunkenness is best combatted."²⁷⁹ The writer saw the Mechanics' Society as a vehicle to enhance the respectability of the citizens of St. John's.

No papers of the Mechanics' Society remain, but fortunately the reports of their meetings were published in the local newspapers. These reports follow a set pattern regardless of who was president. They report on the finances, the activities, and the membership. There are no accounts of debates on any issues.

²⁷⁷ Bill Gillespie, "Trade Unionism in Pre-Confederation St. John's," in *Workingmen's St. John's: Aspects of Social History in the early 1900s*. St. John's: Harry Cuff Publications, 1982.

²⁷⁸ *The Colonist*, June 4, 1886

²⁷⁹ *The Colonist*, June 4, 1887.

In July of 1892, the Mechanics' premises were destroyed in the fire. White became active in organizing and tendering for a new building. In December of that year, a special ceremony accompanied the laying of the cornerstone for the new hall on the north side of Water Street adjoining the west side of the present day National War Memorial.²⁸⁰ The clergy and politicians were well represented at the event. *The Evening Telegram* praised the contributions of the Mechanics' to society but was condescending and classist in its comments observing some of the members were "unassuming in their demeanor, and careless in what is termed *literary distinction*. But they are *great* men in their respective callings, notwithstanding this *drawback*."²⁸¹ White and another Mechanics' member were noted to have spoken "remarkably well" and that: "they seemed to feel what they were saying and to impart their feelings to those who listened to them and who endorsed their sentiments."²⁸² Again there is a sense of surprise and condescension. This also suggests that White at this point in his career is very much outside of polite society in St. John's.

The new Hall opened, but misfortune followed. Newfoundland experienced a bank crash in 1894.²⁸³ The Mechanics' Society had its money deposited at the Commercial Bank and the Commercial Bank failed.²⁸⁴ Through this period of crisis, White was gaining prominence in the Mechanics' organization and assumed the presidency in 1895.²⁸⁵ On behalf of the Society, he undertook the challenge of paying

²⁸⁰ See Appendix 5 for photographs of the Mechanics' Society Building.

²⁸¹ *The Evening Telegram*, December 27, 1892.

²⁸² *Ibid*.

²⁸³ James K. Hiller, "The Nineteenth Century, 1815-1914," in *A Short History of Newfoundland and Labrador* (Portugal Cove-St. Phillips: Boulder Publications, 2008), 102.

²⁸⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, March 11, 1895.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*.

down the debt of the organization. One year later the annual report was optimistic about the progress being made in the organization's finances.²⁸⁶ A decision was made to erect a stage in the hall so that it could be rented to generate revenue. Finally, "a scheme" was devised to raise more revenue to tackle the remaining portion of the organization's debt. In 1902, the Mechanics' created a lottery, which was quite successful, until the government legislated against it in 1904.²⁸⁷

The TAB might have been instrumental in developing White's speaking and organizational skills through theatre, but it was likely his leadership in the Mechanics' Society that attracted the attention of the local political elite who, we shall see, were seeking to respond to a changed political reality where the votes of the workingmen counted. Bill Gillespie notes that White was instrumental in forming the Affiliations Movement.²⁸⁸ This meant that each individual trade union maintained a separate identity but all were united under the umbrella of the Mechanics' Society. The Mechanics' became the face and voice of labour's interests to government. It also organized new unions, strove to improve the public image of labour and enabled the discussion of common issues and interests.²⁸⁹

Under the leadership of T.M. White, in 1897 the Mechanics' Society, together with the other unions, organized the first Labour Day Parade. This was more than a procession with marchers and bands; it was a full-fledged parade with decorated floats and tradesmen dressed in appropriate costumes demonstrating the various trades for the

²⁸⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, March 7, 1896.

²⁸⁷ *The Evening Telegram*, March 4, 1902; *The Evening Telegram*, March 4, 1903; *The Evening Telegram*, March 4, 1904.

²⁸⁸ Bill Gillespie, *A Class Act*, 22.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

public.²⁹⁰ The parade suited the inclinations of a leader predisposed to theatre and spectacle. It was a successful display of labour and *The Evening Telegram* said, “We congratulate our busy, bright and intelligent tradesmen on the complete success of their parade yesterday. It was the most brilliant demonstration ever made by skilled labour in this city, and will, we are certain, be fruitful of good results to the mechanical industries of the colony.”²⁹¹

Despite the slight sense of condescension referring to “our busy, bright and intelligent tradesmen,” the paper was sincerely impressed with the parade. In an editorial brimming with pride in the British empire and with a hint of melodrama in cadence and tone, it said: “the Trade’s procession is more truly symbolic of England’s greatness than all the military and naval grandeur which gather round our Queen on Jubilee Day.”²⁹² The writer celebrated the superiority of British goods and skills and said that the Newfoundland British mechanic is part of that tradition and inheritance. Manliness, the stalwart working class and the British heritage are intertwined and interdependent in the article. The writer ended with a call to action to support struggling local industries through tariff protection but also by the actions of individual citizens “and what Newfoundlanders make – as Newfoundlanders being Britons can make – there will always be Newfoundlanders to buy.”²⁹³

²⁹⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, July 15, 1897.

²⁹¹ *The Evening Telegram*, July 16, 1897.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ *The Evening Telegram*, July 16, 1897.

White was elected President of the Mechanics' Society for ten consecutive years.²⁹⁴ Under his leadership, the organization paid down its debt,²⁹⁵ lobbied for tariff protection for local industries,²⁹⁶ advocated for the government to create a boiler inspector position as a means of improving safe working conditions for mechanics,²⁹⁷ organized an affiliations movement,²⁹⁸ and established an apprentice branch,²⁹⁹ among other activities and initiatives. White expressed concern that the reading room with its wide selections of papers and magazines was underutilized but, even so, he hoped they would establish a library.³⁰⁰ Two years later he noted with satisfaction that attendance at the reading room had increased, describing the facility as "fitted up" and "second to none in the city."³⁰¹ Before the end of his tenure as President, the Mechanics' Society presented him with "a massive gold chain and pendant."³⁰² Undoubtedly on receiving this token of appreciation, White gave another of his speeches when "he thanked the Society in suitable terms."³⁰³

White's involvements in the TAB and the Mechanics' Society reveal a young man who was not afraid to step up, take charge and be the center of attention. Also, he was somewhat of a risk taker. Both organizations were essential in cultivating in White the skills needed to assume leadership roles in the organizations and in society at large.

Where the Mechanics' Society would provide a natural grooming ground for politics, it

²⁹⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, March 4, 1904.

²⁹⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, March 4, 1903.

²⁹⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, March 7, 1899.

²⁹⁷ *The Evening Telegram*, March 6, 1900.

²⁹⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, February 2, 1897.

²⁹⁹ *The Evening Telegram*, July 22, 1898.

³⁰⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, March 7, 1899.

³⁰¹ *The Evening Telegram*, March 5, 1901.

³⁰² *The Evening Telegram*, March 10, 1903.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

was at the TAB where White honed his theatre talents. Organizations such as the Mechanics' Society and the TAB gave White and other men like him opportunities to develop speaking, leadership and organizational skills. These volunteer organizations complemented the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church and other institutions to foster temperance and to create a culture of respectability among the working people. Class awareness was evident in the very existence of such groups, which operated within the stratifications of St. John's society, each offering their members a path to self-improvement and advancement.

Chapter 5 “His hour upon the Stage”

T. M. White was a natural fit for theatre and he was fortunate that he was in the right place and the right time to join a newly formed dramatic club at the TAB.³⁰⁴ It was also the era of melodrama, a genre with great working-class appeal but one that was embraced by the middle classes; this was a genre where the societal and class concerns of the audiences were reflected in the dramas. For White, the tradesman whose activities reveal a man straddling working class roots and middle class aspirations, this was a perfect fit. In this era, when expectations of class and gender were being redefined, White claimed for himself the role of the quintessential male villain and played it for over half a century on stage. White’s life on the local stage reveals aspects both of his character and of the amateur theatre scene in St. John’s. His theatre activities also add to our understanding of class, gender and melodrama in that time and place.

White, the wheelwright, a young man with a passion for acting, was fortunate to be in St. John’s. In the second half of the 19th century the city had an active theatre culture. Paul O’Neill calls the period after the fire of 1846, the Golden Age of Professional Theatricals in St. John’s.³⁰⁵ Its location may appear isolated but several professional theatre companies from New York, Boston, Halifax and England regularly visited and performed on their way elsewhere.

T. H. O’Neill in *The Book of Newfoundland* said that the professional theatre companies that performed in St. John’s in the 1860s and 70s “inspired local performers to

³⁰⁴ See Appendix 6 for a photograph of the stage and seating in the TAB building built after the Great Fire of 1892.

³⁰⁵ O’Neill, *The Oldest City*, 249.

emulate the success of the professionals.”³⁰⁶ At different times in its operation, the TAB not only showcased the productions of travelling companies, but also leased its theatre to outside companies to manage. For example, in 1879 for a brief period the Hall was leased and managed by the Nannary Company of Halifax.³⁰⁷ In that year alone, White would have witnessed many plays of varying genres produced by a professional theatre company. How exciting it must have been for a young man with a passion for theatre to watch professionals from England, the United States and Canada not only performing plays, but perhaps also rehearsing and managing the back stage preparations!

White began his participation in theatre through the TAB as a teenager. An article by a former club member in *The Christmas Review* of 1901 discussed the early days and contributions of the TAB’s literary and dramatic branch. The author listed the founding members and their contributions but he said he did not forget the “theatrically inclined Youngsters.” Included in this list was T. M. White.³⁰⁸ T. H. O’Neill described White as the “Dean of St. John’s Drama” for his work producing, directing and performing in plays.³⁰⁹ Another account in *The Book of Newfoundland* says that White managed dramatic performances at the TAB from 1873 to the 1930s.³¹⁰ White was only twelve years old in 1873 when the TAB Literary and Dramatic Club was formed and he is not mentioned in any of the available cast listings. It is, therefore, unlikely that he had an official or leadership role if, in fact, he was involved at all in 1873. This does show,

³⁰⁶ T. H. O’Neill, “Old-Time Theatricals in St. John’s,” *The Book of Newfoundland*, vol. 2, ed. J. R. Smallwood (St. John’s: Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1931) 62.

³⁰⁷ *The Evening Telegram*, April 11, 1879.

³⁰⁸ J.P.M., “The First Literary Club,” *The Christmas Review* (1901): 18.

³⁰⁹ O’Neill, “Old Time Theatricals in St. John’s,” 62.

³¹⁰ James J. Spratt, The Total Abstinence Society, *The Book of Newfoundland* vol. 2, ed. J. R. Smallwood (St. John’s: Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1937), 191.

however, that White was associated with drama from the very early days of the club, if not actually at the very beginning. There are indications that he was involved soon after, producing theatre at least from the age of 16. The Jubilee Volume of the TAB states that in 1877 the St. John's branch of the TAB refused the Harbour Grace branch the use of the Hall. Many members of the St. John's TAB Dramatic Club resigned from the club over this decision. White and others remained and "gave a few dramatic performances."³¹¹

The TAB provided young men like White with an informal version of continuing education. Participation in theatrical productions alone gave opportunities to develop a stage presence and vocal delivery skills. The reading and delivery of scripts demanded critical reading and thinking skills in the analysis of character and motivation and interpretation. Beyond acting, the theatre gave young men such as White an opportunity to develop organizational and leadership skills. Plays had to be produced, actors had to be selected and directed, and revenue had to be generated to cover production costs.

In the short period that the Nannary Company from Halifax managed the T. A. Hall, White would have seen *Macbeth*, *Othello* and *Hamlet* produced by travelling professional actors.³¹² Would it be possible that he performed minor roles in these plays? Many years later, looking back on the early days of the theatre at the TAB, a former member said, "the youthful players, who first appeared on the T. A. stage, aimed rather high, and nothing smaller than "Hamlet" or "Othello" would at first satisfy their histrionic

³¹¹ TAB, *Jubilee Volume*, 121-122.

³¹² *The Evening Telegram*, October 7, 1879; September 25, 1879; April 25, 1879.

aspirations. But in time they found their strength lay in melodrama, wherein they scored success after success.”³¹³

Nothing remains of the productions or the actors that enlivened the stages of late 19th century St. John’s except advertisements and reviews in the contemporary newspapers. These surviving remnants in the press allow a glimpse into White’s life in amateur theatre, which encompassed over fifty years as an actor, director, stage manager and producer. His involvement illuminates aspects of amateur theatre in late 19th century St. John’s.

5.1 The Plays

One might assume that the dramatic society of a temperance association would produce mostly temperance dramas. The TAB Jubilee Volume states that the repertoire of the early days of the TAB dramatic club under the management of P.J. O’Neill and direction of W.J. Myler consisted primarily of temperance drama. The article specifically lists three plays: *Ten-Night’s in a Bar-Room*, *The Drunkard’s Warning*, and *The Social Glass*.³¹⁴ There is no mention of later plays. However, the publication noted that revenue from plays and entertainments went towards paying off the debt on the TAB Hall and that the club helped a variety of charitable and religious causes. A survey of later plays mounted by the TAB Dramatic Society through the 1880s and 90s reveals the subjects and themes of the plays were not limited to the temperance message.

White was a man in tune with the popular artistic temperament of his era. Melodrama was the most popular form of theatre in the Victorian era and White’s

³¹³ J. P. M., “The First Literary Club,” 20.

³¹⁴ TAB, *Jubilee Volume*, 121.

productions were in keeping with the current taste. Melodrama's appeal crossed class lines to both the working and the middle classes.³¹⁵ It was also a genre suited to the temperance message. White produced and acted in temperance dramas. He is listed as Stage manager of *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* at the Star of the Sea Hall in 1883,³¹⁶ and as a cast member in later productions.³¹⁷

Advertisements in the contemporary newspapers reveal that under the direction of T.M. White, the TAB club's forte was melodrama and the productions were not limited to those with a temperance message. White produced and acted in melodramas covering a wide range of subjects, plots and themes: nautical, domestic, urban, rural, foreign and familiar. The plays performed in St. John's were plays that were popular throughout England and North America in the mid and late 19th century. St. John's audiences would have been familiar with many of these productions as they were performed in the city by a number of travelling professional theatre companies as well as local drama clubs. Local companies often revisited a familiar repertoire of plays remounting audience favourites through the 1880s and 90s.

The Irish dramas were a staple and were often featured on or around St. Patrick's night in March: *Rory O'More*, *Pike O'Calligan*, *Colleen Bawn*, *Robert Emmett*, *Brian Boru*, *Peep O'Day*, *My Geraldine*, *Kerry Gow*, and the most frequently performed Irish drama in St. John's, *The Shaugraun*. In 1919, the Old Favourites Dramatic Company came together under White for their 32nd performance of *The Shaugraun*. This was a

³¹⁵ Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), 150-151.

³¹⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, February 2, 1883.

³¹⁷ *The Evening Telegram*, February 6, 1890.

play by the renowned and prolific playwright of 19th century melodrama, Dion Boucicault. Set in the Irish countryside, it involved young love, the wrongful seizure of land, a deportation to Australia of a Fenian, an escape, hiding, trickery, conspiracy to murder, betrayal, vindication, a wedding and the ultimate demise of the villain, Harvey Duff.³¹⁸ White, who made his reputation on the stage as villain, played Duff.

Fortunately for researchers today, in the 1880s the amateur theatre groups in St. John's started to advertise not only the time and place of plays but also included a listing of the cast. The audience members would bring the advertisement with them to the theatre to serve as a programme.³¹⁹ In the twenty-year period between 1882 and 1902, White is listed in advertisements as a cast member in over forty plays. It is not possible to determine in how many more plays he actually performed, for not all of the advertisements list cast members. He was a member of the T. A. Dramatic Club, The St. John's Dramatic Combination, The T. A. Dramatic Combination, The Old Favourites Dramatic Troupe, the BIS Dramatic Company and later the T.M. White Company.

In the 1880s, the plays were often double billed. The first or major billing was usually a serious drama, followed by a "laughable" or "screaming" farce. Sometimes the break between the productions was filled with a musical interlude such as "Songs and Clog Dance"³²⁰ or "Stilt Dance."³²¹ More often the advertisements highlighted the attraction of a band or orchestra. Professor Bennett's String Band and the Star of the Sea Band were frequently named attractions.

³¹⁸ *The Shaughraun*: "A Synopsis of the Play by Dion Boucicault"
<http://www.theatrehistory.com/irish/shaughraun.html> accessed on March 21, 2019.

³¹⁹ *The Evening Telegram*, April 15, 1884.

³²⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, April 21, 1882.

³²¹ *The Evening Telegram*, September 8, 1882.

The scenery created for the dramatic productions was also highlighted as an attraction. As plays were often remounted over the years, occasionally the advertisements would highlight “New Scenery” or “New Costumes.”³²² The 1882 production of *British Born* announced “new scenery and effects by A. Pindikowsky.”³²³ The advertisement for *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* mounted at the Star of the Sea Hall in the cold month of February boldly touted “**Hall well seated & heated.**”³²⁴ Also in February, a show at the T. A. Hall advertised the hall as “comfortably heated.”³²⁵ Obviously, a warm place to gather was another incentive to attract audience members, many of whom lived in crowded and cold houses. Warnings, or perhaps reassurance, were also sometimes contained in the advertisements. Advertisements for two plays that were performed by the St. John’s Dramatic Combination in 1885, *Wenlock of Wenlock* at the SOS and *Pike O’Calligan* at the TA Hall stated: “Police will be in attendance to enforce order.”³²⁶ This indicates that members of the audience could be unruly, behaving in a manner that was not respectable.

The titles of the acts and scenes in a play were sometimes listed in the advertisements as, for example, was the case with all five acts and over twenty-five scenes of *The Octoroon*.³²⁷ However, a later production of *The Octoroon* with White playing the role of the villainous overseer McClosky, dispensed with the list of scenes

³²² *The Evening Telegram*, September 22, 1882.

³²³ *The Evening Telegram*, April 21, 1882; Pindikowsky was the famed Polish plasterer who resided in St. John’s in that period and was imprisoned for forgery. While serving his sentence, he painted the ceiling frescoes at Government House, the Colonial Building, the Athenaeum and the Presentation Convent. “Alexander Pindikowsky,” *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland*, vol. 4, p. 302.

³²⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, February 2, 1883.

³²⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, February 12, 1885.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *The Evening Telegram*, March 1, 1886.

and simply announced, “Exciting bowie knife fight, between Wahonotee and McClosky.”³²⁸ Frequently, the advertisements featured selected highlights as enticements for the audience. For example, the notice for *British Born* melodramatically highlighted the progression of the plot: “Marking the Prey;” “Showing the Fangs;” “Drawing the Sting;” and “Crushing the Viper.”³²⁹ A wonderfully graphic promotion of a scene is found in the advertisement for *Joan of Arc*. In addition to listing “grand” costumes and scenery and “Exciting Sword Combat,” the advertisement proclaimed, “The Thrilling Scene, **Joan Burning at the Stake**.”³³⁰ This irreverent sensationalism was a ploy to get people to buy tickets – serving the same purpose as movie trailers of today.

The villain in melodrama became a signature role for White, one that he played throughout his life. His characters sometimes engaged in physical combat such as knife and sword fights. Reviews often note White’s skill in sustaining the villainous roles such as Warrington, a wealthy man who stoops to crime, in *Fraud and Its Victims*;³³¹ the scoundrel and ship owner Labron Brood in *British Born*;³³² the money lender Dan Mugatroyd in *Not Such a Fool as He Looks*;³³³ the bar keeper Sam Slade in *Ten Nights in the Bar-Room*;³³⁴ and the villainous coward, plantation overseer Jacob McClosky in *The Octoroon*.³³⁵ He played this type of role in comedy and farce as well, playing the leader of a counterfeit gang in the popular farce of the day *The Yankee Detective*³³⁶ and the part

³²⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, September 22, 1891.

³²⁹ *The Evening Telegram*, September 1, 1887.

³³⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, January 18, 1897.

³³¹ *The Evening Telegram*, February 9, 1887.

³³² *The Colonist*, September 1, 1887.

³³³ *The Colonist*, January 11, 1889.

³³⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, February 8, 1890.

³³⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, September 22, 1891.

³³⁶ *The Colonist*, October 1, 1889.

of a coward and a hypocrite in the humourous *Rory O'More*.³³⁷ The villains portrayed by White may not have been admirable or likable but they were characteristic of a type of man who took charge, who schemed, who would resort to violence and who would use or misuse his power all for his own advantage.

In an era when the ideals of masculinity were changing to value and celebrate the hardworking community-minded family man of the growing middle classes, the villain presented a foil to the new manly ideal. Booth notes that a sense of class injustice permeated melodrama regardless of the social context and the relationship between villain and victim.³³⁸ The villain was always in a position of advantage whatever his class. But the dishonourable and duplicitous villain, although fascinating, was never the victor. According to Booth, “he embodied a positive, active force for evil, to be hated and respected simultaneously, both repellant and attractive, frightening and magnetizing.”³³⁹ It seems White the actor was drawn to the hyper-masculinity of the villain. In real life, however, White would find things were not so clearly demarcated: the roles of villain and victim were not always distinctly defined; and respectable masculinity was not manifested in large, histrionic gestures, but was instead marked by the mundane demands of family, work and community.

5.2 Women in Theatre

White's life reflected the division of separate spheres for men and women. His wife took care of the home and White engaged with men in his work and volunteer

³³⁷ *The Colonist*, December 10, 1889.

³³⁸ Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, 164.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

associations. It was only in the world of local theatre that White worked with women. When White began acting at the TAB as a teenager, it is likely that males played most of the roles.³⁴⁰ Paul O'Neill notes that in the first half of the 19th century, prior to the 1841 appearance of a touring female child celebrity, Miss Davenport, no females appeared on the local stage.³⁴¹ It was not respectable. O'Neill notes this changed in the second half of the century as more touring groups brought females actors.

Booth also notes the negative attitudes toward women on the stage persisted through the 19th century in England. Actresses were not perceived to fit the moral ideals of the middle class family in society.³⁴² An examination of the advertisements and reviews of White's amateur theatre reveals the evolving status of women in St. John's amateur theatre in the late 19th century. An advertisement for the 1884 production of *A Sea of Ice* stated, "The Company has gone to extra pains in procuring Ladies of theatrical ability to take part in this play."³⁴³ A news article promoting the show commented, "It is gratifying to learn that the part of the heroine will be taken by a lady."³⁴⁴

Even as late as 1887, an article promoting *The Two Orphans* found it worth remarking that ten of the roles in the play were female and that all but one were played by women. The article stated, "nearly all are versatile actresses."³⁴⁵ It is obvious that some local women wanted to act and that the public wanted women to play female roles but it was not taken for granted that it would be the case.

³⁴⁰ T. H. O'Neill, "Old Time Theatricals in St. John's," *The Book of Newfoundland*, vol. 2, 63.

³⁴¹ Paul O'Neill, 246.

³⁴² Booth, 113.

³⁴³ *The Evening Telegram*, October 3, 1884.

³⁴⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, October 4, 1884.

³⁴⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, April 28, 1887.

Just because women took part in dramatic productions, did not mean they were recognized as equals with the male actors. An examination of White's plays shows that women were not identified equally on the cast lists or in the reviews. Two plays performed in 1884 and one in early 1885 that advertised the cast members list only the male actors. The actors performing female roles are listed as "Miss ____" or even with simply the first and last letter of the surname listed with a blank in between such as "Miss C ____ w".³⁴⁶ This indicates that acting in a stage production was of questionable respectability for women. By the fall season of 1885 the full surnames of women playing female roles are sometimes listed in the playbill, but their status as individual female actors is still undermined. The men are listed with their first two initials followed by their surname. The women are simply listed by surnames such as "Miss McGrath."³⁴⁷ This is evident in concert programs as well. The suppression of the identity of individual women on the stage is comparable to women being identified by their husbands' full names rather than their own given names. Some of the theatrical reviews name and briefly comment on the male players but skim over the female actors: "The ladies sustained their parts admirably also."³⁴⁸ In another review, four men are singled out for specific remarks but the ladies' efforts are handled as a unit and described as being "surprisingly fine."³⁴⁹ It is as if the reviewer did not expect the women to be able to carry off the parts. Even as late as 1890, an advertisement for *Ten Night's in a Bar-Room* simply leaves blanks for the female actors and the subsequent review of the show stated, "The ladies charmed

³⁴⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, April 15, 1884; *The Evening Telegram*, September 13, 1884.

³⁴⁷ *The Evening Telegram*, November 9, 1885.

³⁴⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, February 4, 1885.

³⁴⁹ *The Evening Telegram*, October 3, 1887.

everyone with graceful and sympathetic definitions of woman's noblest traits."³⁵⁰ In the *Yankee Detective* there were only three female roles. One of these, Granny Whizzle, was played by a man, Frank Walsh. The two women who played the other female roles were unnamed in both the advertisement and the review. The review stated, "The two young ladies are not full-voiced enough, and some of the lines were indistinct, but they are improving, and, with time, will do much better." One male actor playing a male role was criticized for his voice because it was more suited to female roles.³⁵¹ This suggests that the reviewer was used to this actor playing female roles. As women were more commonly taking their places "on the boards", as they called the stage, this man would have fewer chances to play those parts. In most of the plays, the majority of the characters were male. Regardless of how many women were in the plays and regardless of the importance of a particular female role, the women were listed at the end of the cast list.

This changed around 1890 and coincided with the first women's suffrage movement in Newfoundland.³⁵² It was not consistent, but more regularly the female characters were interspersed with the male characters in the cast list. The play that T. M. White was involved with that made the largest and most obvious breakthrough in attitudes towards female casting and status was *By Force of Impulse*. Three women received top billing. The lead role was taken by Miss Bridget Jordan who a few years later in 1895 took over from T.M. White as manager of the BIS Dramatic Co. when White went back as manager at the TAB producing and directing plays.

³⁵⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, February 8, 1890.

³⁵¹ *The Colonist*, October 8, 1889.

³⁵² Margot Duley, *Where Once Our Mothers Stood We Stand: Women's Suffrage in Newfoundland 1890-1925* (Charlottetown: Gynergy Books, 1993.)

Why White left the management of the BIS theatre is unknown. That period at the BIS saw the advancement of women on the stage with Bridget Jordan as director and manager. Whether by accident or intention, Jordan and White went head to head, pitting their skills against each other by mounting the same show, *My Geraldine*, on St. Patrick's night in 1898. *The Evening Telegram* reviewed both, obviously with different reviewers who were not named. White's review was favourable but not effusive.³⁵³ The reviewer of Jordan's production was ecstatic about the show describing it as "the best amateur performance ever seen in the city."³⁵⁴ The audience "went wild" and the show had two curtain calls. White was likely disappointed as by comparison his show was damned with faint praise. However, White must have had respect for Bridget Jordan for two years later he appeared in the play *Galley Slave* under her management at St. Patrick's Hall.³⁵⁵

White frequently advertised for female actors. The ads stated that the women actors would be given a wardrobe and a salary.³⁵⁶ There was no elaboration about the specific amount of money paid to actresses or what was meant by a wardrobe. Did wardrobe refer to the costumes in a particular production or to general personal clothing? One advertisement White placed for women stated, "salary no object to a competent person, and no other need apply."³⁵⁷ Compensation for women raises the question of whether the men received any compensation for their roles in the plays? There is nothing to indicate that this was so. The status of women actors of the era in relation to their male peers is further illuminated in the next section. A conflict between two rival theatre

³⁵³ *The Evening Telegram*, March 18, 1898.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, April 20, 1900.

³⁵⁶ *The Colonist*, April 5, 1887.

³⁵⁷ *The Evening Telegram*, September 12, 1889.

companies indicates that female actors were regarded as paid “help” or “assistants,” not as partners with the male actors in producing a show.

5.3 Local Rivalries

The temperament of T. M. White and the melodramatic sensibility of the era are revealed in an interesting squabble between the St. John’s Dramatic Combination (SJDC) and the Total Abstinence Dramatic Company (TADC) concerning female actors. White had been an actor with the SJDC up to 1884. In 1886, *The Evening Telegram* said the SJDC had reassembled after a two-year hiatus.³⁵⁸ This newly formed SJDC asked why the TADC would prevent “the ladies who assist in their entertainments” from participating in the SJDC charity production.³⁵⁹ John Wilcox, the manager of the SJDC, did not call the women “actresses” but termed them “lady assistants.”³⁶⁰

This issue concerning the free and voluntary participation of the women sparked an exchange of emotional and insulting letters in the newspaper between the two companies. The Chairman of the TADC who did not give his name (P.J. O’Neill) denied the suggestion that they prevented their female actors from performing in a production by a competing company. Unfortunately, he did not leave it there. He insulted the integrity and artistic ability of the members of the SJDC.³⁶¹

The public squabble became about more than just the freedom of the female actors to move between companies. It became about artistic quality and ability of both the companies at large and of their individual members. In a melodramatic show of literary

³⁵⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, February 26, 1886.

³⁵⁹ *The Evening Telegram*, April 1, 1886.

³⁶⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, April 10, 1886.

³⁶¹ *The Evening Telegram*, April 3, 1886.

sophistication, John Wilcox opened his letter with a lengthy quotation from Mark Antony's funeral oration in *Julius Caesar* followed by an array of rhetorical questions accusing O'Neill of lying and of threatening not to hire any woman who worked for the SJDC.³⁶² Wilcox stated that the goals of the SJDC were to "assist their fellow-man, and keep themselves employed during these long winter months by improving their minds and assisting the poor."³⁶³ Wilcox accused the TADC of wanting to crush the SJDC because they did not want their previously held monopoly threatened. He also made reference to the quality of the plays produced, asserting that the talent of the SJDC was superior claiming that they produced dramas while the TADC mounted burlesques.

O'Neill rallied with his own selection of literary quotations and melodramatic affectations alleging that Wilcox was angry because he did not have the lead role in the TADC production. He continued to insult Wilcox and the company but concluded with a postscript that he would have nothing more to say on the matter.³⁶⁴ Wilcox, however, did have more to say. He replied to O'Neill, quoting more Shakespeare, and said that he did not want to play the role but was urged to by his "friend, Mr. White."³⁶⁵

T. M. White then wrote a letter weighing in on the argument to correct what he saw as errors.³⁶⁶ He claimed that he did offer Mr. Wilcox the opportunity to play a particular role for one night but was overruled by the rest of the company. He obviously acted impulsively in making this offer without consulting the company. White did not let the dispute rest with the explanation of what happened with respect to Mr. Wilcox and the

³⁶² *The Evening Telegram*, April 10, 1886.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, April 19, 1886.

³⁶⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, April 30, 1886.

³⁶⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, May 6, 1886.

role in question. He could not resist commenting on the dispute regarding the women. He said there was “no coercion, nor was it required” because the women of the TADC knew that the SJDC was unpopular and that they would be “*wasting* their time for *nothing*, as some of the ladies *already know*.” His tone became more inflammatory and accusatory as the letter unfolded. Referring to the SJDC, he said, “They were unpopular enough through the stupidity of some of their members, and the carelessness of others, without making themselves more so. I am surprised that their *tragedian* (save the mark!) does not show them some of *his ideas*. But his ideas are better where they are, within his cranium.”³⁶⁷

Mr. Wilcox referred to White as a friend. White had previously performed in the SJDC along with Mr. Wilcox who was also listed as Stage Manager.³⁶⁸ After this disagreement, their names did not appear together on theatre bills. White’s response to Wilcox shows that he was impulsive and given to emotional and melodramatic rhetoric. He also demonstrated a fierce loyalty to O’Neill and the TADC. The whole exchange as it played out in the newspapers over the period of a month revealed small town rivalry, the place of women on the amateur stage and the permeation of melodramatic sensibilities and rhetoric into real life relationships and disputes.

5.4 Reviews and Audiences

The reviews of the day generally praise the efforts of the amateur actors. White is mentioned often and he is rarely criticized. As Danny Mann in *The Colleen Bawn*, he was “splendid;”³⁶⁹ and as McClosky in *The Octoroon*, he “was such a consummate villain that

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, February 12, 1885.

³⁶⁹ *The Colonist*, May 19, 1886.

one could hardly believe him to be really the affable man that he is.”³⁷⁰ The role of Captain Kyd was described as “his masterpiece”³⁷¹ and a reviewer of *The Shaughraun* said White “passed the almost imperceptible boundary line that divides the amateur from the professional.”³⁷² In a letter to the paper that offered suggestions to improve some of the amateur actors, the writer said that in *The Celebrated Case*, White “in his favourite part of the villain, succeeded as usual to perfection.”³⁷³ In the comedy *Yankee Detective* as the leader of a gang of counterfeiters, he was described as being as usual “in good form... however... to much better advantage in a heavier role.”³⁷⁴

White was praised not only as an actor but also as a manager. The newspapers of the day used the term loosely to mean producer, manager or director. In praising the mechanical effects and stage arrangements in a production, *The Evening Telegram* commented that manager White possessed “a higher skill than that of a mere amateur.”³⁷⁵

Who went to the plays produced by White and his colleagues? Was White producing plays for a working class clientele? Carolyn Lambert suggests that even though the TAB was a working-class organization, people of all classes attended its dramatic productions.³⁷⁶ This can be gleaned from reviews and newspaper articles of the day that commented on the size and nature of the audiences at a particular show. Even so, it is difficult to determine the social class composition of the audiences in 19th century St. John’s. One can only make inferences from the available evidence. Michael Booth

³⁷⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, October 1, 1891.

³⁷¹ *The Colonist*, March 20, 1886.

³⁷² *The Daily Colonist*, February 19, 1887.

³⁷³ *The Evening Telegram*, December 12, 1891.

³⁷⁴ *The Daily Colonist*, October 8, 1889.

³⁷⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, September 29, 1891.

³⁷⁶ Lambert, “Far From the Homes,” 243.

writing about Victorian theatre in England urges caution when making generalizations about audience composition and public taste in light of the limited evidence available.³⁷⁷ He does note though that in provincial theatres outside London, the audience in the less expensive pit and gallery was dependable and constant. This appears to apply as well to some of White's productions at the TAB in the latter part of the 1890s. The reviewers of five productions in these years note that the "pit" or the "parquet" and gallery were well attended but that the reserved seats were "scant."³⁷⁸ Does this indicate that the plays were not to the taste of people who could afford reserved seats? Were those people less likely to attend theatre at the TAB, going instead to the BIS or elsewhere? These questions merit and invite further investigation beyond the scope of this paper involving analysis of the plays, the cast members and the reviewers' comments on the TAB productions and those of the local competition.

Theatre was a constant throughout all stages of White's life. It was obviously a passion. Even though the demand for a constant supply of local plays decreased after the arrival of moving picture shows in the twentieth century, White continued to produce plays until he was in his seventies. These were generally remounts of earlier productions often as benefits for local causes and popular entertainments at Christmas and St. Patrick's Day.

White's lifetime involvement in theatre shows he was a man with great performance and organizational skills, whose time was divided between the demands of theatre and the commitments of his business and his volunteer associations. He was a man

³⁷⁷ Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, 10.

³⁷⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, January 27, 1897; February 20, 1897; March 2, 1897; December 10, 1898; December 19, 1899.

who was somewhat impetuous and naive in his dealings with his theatre colleagues.

White was a man of his time who associated with men both at work and in his association obligations at the TAB and the Mechanics' societies. In the theatre, however, he recruited and worked with women. Through the scant evidence available, the second-class status of women in the theatre is evident. In addition to illuminating gender roles of the era, the examination of White's life in amateur theatre highlights the melodramatic sensibility of the era, not only in the selection of plays performed on the local stage but in the rhetoric exchanged in the disagreement between rival theatre companies. White as a director, a producer, and as an actor in the role of the villain, obviously enjoyed being the center of attention and wanted to be in charge. It is no wonder that while he was a man in the prime of his life, enjoying a small measure of public attention and success both in theatre and in the Mechanics' Society, that he stepped from the make believe of the stage to the harsh reality of the political arena.

Amateur theatre honed White's skills, enhanced his public profile, and made him attractive to the political and business elites who were seeking a candidate, a working-class hero, to play to the sensibilities of the working-class voter. White appeared to be a natural for the role. Politics, then and now, is steeped in melodrama - a world of villains and victims. Once on the political stage, we shall see conflict and melodramatic political rhetoric obscured White's status as a manly hero. Some of his contemporaries might have regarded him as villain for his political and social ambition. Yet in his relationship with the Reid family and the backroom political power brokers, he can also be viewed as a victim. His real life political melodrama not only provides a window into the local

political scene of St. John's, but mirrors aspects of popular 19th century stage melodrama that portrayed the realities and the inequitable power balance of industrial capitalism.

Chapter 6 Real Life Melodrama: Political Debut, Deals and Downfall

Just as T. M. White was in the right place at the right time for a young tradesman to develop theatrical skills in St. John's, so was the timing good for a tradesman to enter politics. Kurt Korneski notes that changes in the colony's laws governing elections made it necessary for political parties to target working people.³⁷⁹ In 1887, Newfoundland introduced the secret ballot and in 1890, the franchise was extended to all males aged 21 who were resident in the colony for a minimum of a year.³⁸⁰ All political parties began courting the vote of the ordinary workingman. What better way to woo this vote than to present a workingman's candidate. They were casting for a man who could play the role of the workingman's champion. White was such a candidate. As a leader of the Mechanics' Society, he was a champion of the interests of workers. Although he was a small business owner, he could portray himself as plebian born because his wage-earning father struggled financially.

White entered politics at a time when his stock was high based on his prominence in the theatre and his success as a leader of the Mechanics' Society. As noted earlier, he spearheaded getting a new building after the fire of 1892, he tackled the debt after the Bank Crash of 1894, and in 1897 he led the labour affiliations movement. If this part of his life is viewed as a melodrama, he could be seen as a hero. However, in the period from the fall of 1897 until the spring of 1906, White's political period, the role he played became ambiguous. Depending on one's perspective and the scene being played out, he could be seen as a villain or a victim.

³⁷⁹ Korneski, "Railway Development," 103-14.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

T.M. White was on the periphery of politics before he sought elected office. The evidence is scant but there are indications that in 1893 he was a supporter of the Conservative party led by Walter Grieve and Moses Monroe.³⁸¹ He is recorded as being on the platform at a public meeting in St. John's West in support of James Callanan (mechanic), Patrick J. Scott and Moses Monroe in St. John's West.³⁸² *The Evening Telegram*, strong in its support of the opposing Liberal Whiteway party, described the meeting as a "fizzle." Because the press of the day was extremely partisan, such an unflattering account of a Conservative rally by a Liberal paper cannot be accepted on its face value. The *Telegram* did note, however, that White proposed three cheers and then "sat down and said nothing."³⁸³ It was noteworthy that he is reported as having not made a speech. Something must have been out of kilter if White had an opportunity to speak and did not.

By the late 1890s, White was enjoying a high profile. The labour affiliations movement that he spearheaded was a success and the Labour Day parade of 1897 that he organized was a grand spectacle. That summer he was appointed to the Tariff Commission together with prominent local businessmen J.H. Monroe, John Harvey and John Anderson.³⁸⁴ This would have been quite an honour for the blacksmith's son. The Conservatives had their eye on him. In the fall of 1897, White ran as a Conservative candidate under the leadership of James Winter in St. John's West against Liberal Edward

³⁸¹ The Grieve-Monroe party was named for its leaders, Walter Baine Grieve and Moses Monroe. Melvin Baker, "Moses Monroe" *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* vol. XII http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/monroe_moses_12E.html accessed April 4, 2019.

³⁸² *The Evening Telegram*, October 30, 1893.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, May 7, 1897.

Morris and lost.³⁸⁵ Fortunately for him, the Winter Conservatives won the election.³⁸⁶ A few weeks later, White received an appointment to the Board of Revenue.³⁸⁷ In early 1898, the Winter government suspended regular municipal elections and appointed a commission of three men to run the affairs of St. John's.³⁸⁸ White was one of those appointed along with fellow Board of Revenue member John V. O'Dea.³⁸⁹

6.1 1899 By-Election

Soon White was running again for the Conservatives. He resigned his appointed council position and ran as a candidate in the by-election of November 1899, which he lost by 439 votes.³⁹⁰ *The Daily News* commented on the “manly way” he accepted defeat.³⁹¹ This campaign received much coverage in the St. John's papers. Because it was a by-election, White received attention that he would not garner in a general election. The partisan newspapers were not subtle in showing their favour of one party over the other. They disparaged not only the opposing party and candidates but also the other newspapers. For example, *The Evening Telegram* referred to *The Daily News* as “feeble-minded.”³⁹² *The Daily News* accused *The Evening Telegram* of attempting to make trouble by misrepresenting events at a meeting and said the *Telegram's* coverage was “an

³⁸⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, November 1, 1897; Edward Patrick Morris was a popular Roman Catholic lawyer of humble beginnings who won the district of St. John's West ten times and later became Prime Minister of Newfoundland. James Hiller, “Edward Patrick Morris” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* vol. xi, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/morris_edward_patrick_16E.html accessed April 3, 2019.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ *The Evening Telegram*, November 18, 1897.

³⁸⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, May 5, 1898.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ White won 1075 votes and his opponent John Dwyer won 1514. *The Daily News*, November 13, 1899.

³⁹¹ *The Daily News*, November 13, 1899.

³⁹² *The Evening Telegram*, November 2, 1899.

insult to the intelligence of the people of St. John's;³⁹³ *The Evening Herald* hurled similar accusations at the *Telegram* even accusing the paper of robbing the people.³⁹⁴ The *News* and the *Herald* supported White and the Winter Conservatives; the *Telegram* supported Robert Bond and the Liberals.³⁹⁵ The central issue dividing the parties was the railway deal with R. G. Reid.³⁹⁶ The rhetoric in the media during the campaign was often charged with a melodramatic tone. Headlines screamed, "Will You Be Slaves;"³⁹⁷ "Crack of Doom;"³⁹⁸ "Decide Your Fate,"³⁹⁹ and even "Prove Your Manhood."⁴⁰⁰

Throughout the campaign White was touted as the "workingman's candidate" and his leadership of the Mechanics' Society was highlighted. In his campaign address, White said that he was "reluctant to enter the turmoil of a bye-election and its attendant hardships, yet on consideration I thought that mayhap I would be doing an injustice to my fellow workingmen were I to refuse, it being so seldom that a workingman is accorded such a privilege."⁴⁰¹ This indicates White was approached to run (as is often the case) and that he saw it as a privilege. Perhaps he was even flattered. His address made it clear that he was targeting the working classes of St. John's, a population that Korneski notes was

³⁹³ *The Daily News*, November 9, 1899.

³⁹⁴ *The Evening Herald*, November 4, 1899.

³⁹⁵ Robert Bond was premier of Newfoundland from 1900 to 1909. He opposed the railway contract R. G. Reid. Melvin Baker and Peter Neary, "Sir Robert Bond," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* vol. xv, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/bond_robert_15E.html accessed April 3,

³⁹⁶ Robert Gillespie Reid was born in Scotland and achieved success in the United States and Canada as bridge and railway contractor. He is also known for his construction of the Newfoundland railway. Robert Cuff, "Robert Gillespie Reid" *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* vol. xiii, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/reid_robert_gillespie_13E.html accessed April 3, 2019.

³⁹⁷ *The Evening Herald*, November 4, 1899.

³⁹⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, November 20, 1899.

³⁹⁹ *The Daily News*, November 7, 1899.

⁴⁰⁰ *The Evening Herald*, November 9, 1899.

⁴⁰¹ *The Evening Herald*, October 31, 1899.

heavily in favour of the railway seeing it as a means to a profitable future.⁴⁰² White repeated throughout that he was one of the workingmen, concluding, “I am plebian born, proud to call myself a workingman.”⁴⁰³

White’s characterization of himself as “plebian born” and one of the workingmen has to be viewed in the light of the political rhetoric appropriate to the role he was playing. He was the workingmen’s candidate and he wanted the workingmen to vote for him and the Conservative party. He had to identify with the working class as an election strategy. As a self-employed artisan, he would have been higher on the social ladder than many of the workingmen whose interests he claimed to represent. Lynne Marks, writing about 19th century Ontario, places self-employed artisans in the middle class, and wage-earning skilled workers in the working class.⁴⁰⁴ White’s father was a skilled wage earner but, as discussed earlier, he had periods where he could not find consistent full-time employment and his earnings were similar to those of a labourer. The senior White might not have been plebian by virtue of his trade, but he was a workingman of uncertain means. Therefore, despite being an artisan and sole proprietor, T. M. White had credibility in his claim to be born into the plebian level of the working class. Considering the small size of St. John’s at the time, it is likely that many of the voting workingmen were aware of White’s background.

White’s election address emphasized the benefits of all aspects of the Reid Railway deal including the dockyard, telegraph and coastal boat provisions. He proclaimed that R. G. Reid brought employment and security for the workingman.

⁴⁰² Korneski, *Conflicted Colony*, 100.

⁴⁰³ *The Evening Herald*, October 31, 1899.

⁴⁰⁴ Lynne, Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*,

Implied is that Reid and the Winter government brought dignity to workingmen because now these men could provide for their families so their “thrifty wives and mothers” could prepare for winter with “cheerful spirit.”⁴⁰⁵ A reading of White’s speech provides affirmation for Korneski’s assertion that the railway was seen as a means by which the working man could live “according to the ideals of masculinity central to the prevailing definitions of Britishness.”⁴⁰⁶ With Reid’s vision and business development, the ordinary workingman, whether he be fisherman, labourer or mechanic, could live according to the standard of a masculine provider for his family.

Throughout the campaign all three papers reported on White making speeches. *The Evening Herald* noted, “many present were agreeably surprised at the fluency and command of language that flowed from the lips of one known to them as a hard-working mechanic without the experience usually accredited to gentlemen of the legal profession.”⁴⁰⁷ There was surprise that a tradesman could excel at public speaking. These comments by the Conservative paper might have been intentional in order to further emphasize White’s working class background, or on the other hand, the paper might have been attempting to make this workingmen’s candidate more palatable to the more genteel portion of the electorate. Also, perhaps some of those Conservative sympathizers who were present were from a sector of St. John’s society that did not frequent the dramatic entertainments on offer at the TAB and the BIS, and so would not have been familiar with T. M. White, the actor. White had undoubtedly benefited from more than twenty years of experience on the stage.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Korneski, “Railway Development,” 81.

⁴⁰⁷ *The Evening Herald*, October 31, 1899.

The Daily News was a strong supporter of T. M. White. This is not surprising as it was a paper affiliated with the Reids. Despite supporting White, the paper noted that the campaign was “conducted on gentlemanly lines,” and that “both candidates, as men, bear good characters.”⁴⁰⁸ However, the paper stated that the people wanted the “best man, i.e. the one who will be most useful to the district and whose public experience and dealings with men in everyday life suggests his special fitness.” The editorial determined that the prevailing feeling was that White was the best man because he was “in the prime of life,” had “considerable experience in society work,” was “intelligent, industrious and painstaking,” and, of course the tipping factor, he was on the government side. White’s supporters on the hustings also included the renowned sealing captain Abram Kean and lawyer Michael Gibbs.⁴⁰⁹

The Evening Telegram was firmly against White and the Winter Conservatives. It was disdainful of White and his claim to represent the working people and suggested he was only invited to run because George Shea, a prominent and respected local politician, had declined: “The workingman realizes that at last his chance has come. Of course he is too thick-headed or to ‘green’ to realize that his taxes are greater than ever before, that if Shea had accepted the call on him the present glorious representative of the mechanics would not have risen up, a heaven-chosen champion. None of these things occur to the great foolish Newfoundland workingman.”⁴¹⁰ They sarcastically cast White in the

⁴⁰⁸ *The Daily News*, November 6, 1899.

⁴⁰⁹ *The Daily News*, November 4, 1899; Captain Abram Kean was a prominent mariner and politician. “Abram Kean,” *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland & Labrador* vol. 3 (St. John’s: J.R. Smallwood Heritage Foundation Inc.) 155; Michael P. Gibbs was a trade union lawyer, labour organizer and politician. He was elected mayor of St. John’s in 1906. Michael P. Gibbs, *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* vol. 2 (St. John’s: J.R. Smallwood Heritage Foundation Inc. 1988), 520.

⁴¹⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, November 2, 1899.

melodramatic position of a messiah figure. *The Evening Telegram* asked, “What employment does Mr. White give our people that he, and he alone, should be looked upon as their representative?”⁴¹¹ There is the assumption by the paper that working people need business people to represent them. The paper also undermined White’s theatre background saying, “It is very well to figure in a drama; but, our word for it, there is nothing like rigorous reality.”⁴¹² As we shall see, these words were prophetic.

The Evening Telegram hammered away at White, publishing letters questioning his organizational ability, experience and motivations. Of course, this is common fare for all parties and levels of supporters in any election at any time. It is valuable, however, to look at the letters to see the dominant criticisms. One letter writer claimed White did not have business leadership experience because he only ran a small owner operated business and was not an employer.⁴¹³ The writer suggested that White was “tired - very tired - working at his bench” and was seeking a government job, a better job than the part time appointed St. John’s council position that he resigned in order to run.⁴¹⁴ The letter writer drew on melodrama, casting White as a villain, a duplicitous and deceptive role where the individual is not what they seem. He suggested that had White secured a government job he would not be playing the stage villain on the political stage championing the workingman.⁴¹⁵ Another letter writer criticized some of White’s associates from the Mechanics’ Society, such as P. J. O’Neill, who secured government jobs after the 1897

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ A Mentor, Letter to the Editor, *The Evening Telegram*, November 6, 1899.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

election.⁴¹⁶ The letters might have touched on some truth here. White might have been weary of his “workbench” and been hoping for a white-collar position. Another letter signed “Mechanic” made a similar accusation regarding the self-interest of White and his friends. This writer went further and said that the membership in the Mechanics’ Society had declined since its surge in 1897, and asked why White did not have a Labour Day parade in the summer of 1899. He suggested the Mechanics’ were losing faith in White as a leader.⁴¹⁷ The *Herald* published letters countering this accusation stating that the Mechanics’ Society had faith in Mr. White for he was unanimously elected president.⁴¹⁸ The *Herald* did not deal with the issue of diminution in membership. Also, the published report of the Mechanics’ Annual General Meeting for that year did not give any indication of the numbers of members in the organization. It noted that 400 people took part in the Labour Day picnic.⁴¹⁹ This likely would have included spouses and guests so it may suggest that the numbers involved in the Society in 1899 had dropped off from the previous two years when the Society had actually grown.

When White lost his bid in the 1899 by-election, the Conservative party again rewarded him for his efforts. He became sub-sheriff at the Supreme Court of Newfoundland in January 1900.⁴²⁰ This position paid a salary of \$800 per annum.⁴²¹ This was a good salary.⁴²² According to White, a journeyman in the wheelwright trade made

⁴¹⁶ A Mechanic, letter to the Editor, *The Evening Telegram*, November 6, 1899.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ *The Evening Herald*, November 9, 1899.

⁴¹⁹ *The Evening Telegram*, March 6, 1900.

⁴²⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, January 3, 1900.

⁴²¹ *The Evening Telegram*, December 14, 1905.

⁴²² Workers constructing the Reid Newfoundland Railway line made \$1.00 a day for ten hours of work, six days a week. See www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Railway/en/p.php?id=55. According to a editorial in

\$1.50 a day and worked long hours. The sheriff's salary was almost double the amount and the hours were easier.⁴²³ White does not specify the number of hours required in the sheriff's position, nor does he state his income as a sole proprietor wheelwright and undertaker, but it is obvious that both the hours and the salary of the sheriff's position worked in his favour, giving him more income, security, and leisure. On receiving this position, White got out of the undertaking business, finally sold his premises on Lion's Square⁴²⁴ and was now in a white-collar job. The personal and social significance of this appointment and its attendant financial security for White can be gleaned from the position of his name on a donors' list. In the December 1899 List of Contributors to the Christian Brothers, White gave \$4.00. While this sum did not look ostentatious it was sufficiently substantial to set him apart from the majority of donors who gave \$2.00 or less.⁴²⁵

White's appointment to the sheriff's office generated a negative reaction from some members of the public. This was to be expected as similar appointments then and now generate a degree of public indignation. An outraged letter to *The Evening Telegram* stated that his appointment was one of political expediency and would only last until the next election was called. The enraged writer signed his name as "Armageddon."⁴²⁶ This is another example of the prevailing hyperbolic and melodramatic rhetoric found in the newspapers of the day. Armageddon's view was prescient for White resigned as sub-

the Conservative sympathizing *Daily News*, White had "fought to get a dollar per day for the laborers." *The Daily News*, November 9, 1899.

⁴²³ *The Evening Telegram*, December 14, 1905.

⁴²⁴ Registry of Deeds, Newfoundland and Labrador, Johanna White to James Whelan, March 8, 1900, vol. 20, p. 400

⁴²⁵ *The Daily News*, December 11, 1899.

⁴²⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, January 3, 1900.

sheriff and ran again in the general election of 1900. The earlier prediction in the 1899 campaign that White would not run again if he secured a government job was proven wrong. But White's timing was unfortunate. It was the beginning of the Bond era and White went down to defeat again, but this time so did the Conservative party. White found himself on the street, an unsuccessful candidate and now out of work.

Unfortunately for White, the Conservative government was not in power to fill the void with a government job.

So what did White do in this period? He continued his involvements in theatre, and in the TAB and the Mechanics' Associations, the latter as president. But what was his day job? He was no longer a carriage maker and undertaker. It would take a large infusion of capital to re-open his business. At some point in that period between the election of 1900 and the printing of the 1904 McAlpine Directory, White found financial security through his Conservative connections. The directory lists White as a printer with *The Daily News*.⁴²⁷ This was a paper associated with Robert Reid, a principal of the Reid Newfoundland Company, and a supporter of the Conservative party. This relationship with the Reids and the position at *The Daily News* would later prove to be complicated and not at all what it initially appeared.

6.2 1902 Municipal Election

Despite his failure to obtain a seat in the Legislature of the Colony, White still had not given up on a political career. St. John's was holding its first election for a mayor of the city. In the spring of 1902, White offered himself as a candidate. His opponent was

⁴²⁷ *McAlpine's*, 1904, 350.

George Shea, an older man from a family with a mercantile and political pedigree.⁴²⁸

According to *The Evening Telegram*, Shea was the man who chose not to run in the by-election of 1899. A local favourite, John Anderson, considered running for mayor but ultimately decided to run for a seat on council.⁴²⁹ For the mayoralty Anderson supported White.⁴³⁰

White campaigned for municipal efficiency as well as water and sewer hook up throughout St. John's. *The Daily News* profiled the potential candidates and determined they both had the experience and ability befitting the office of mayor. The editorial called White a "special nominee of the working man."⁴³¹ His terms as a councilor and as head of the Mechanics' Society were listed as assets. Oddly, with reference to White's current occupation, the writer said "not being engaged in an extensive business, he has abundant time to attend to civic affairs, and this, with his well known energy, seem to guarantee that if elected he will make an excellent mayor."⁴³²

Shea was the establishment candidate. He had previously served in the legislature and he did not put forth any specific platforms except to say that he was for "Honest, Economic and Clean Government."⁴³³ White was the workingman's candidate again. The editorials in the newspapers leaned a little toward a particular candidate, but there was no overt praise of one and condemnation of another. Yet, an interesting satirical piece on the election printed in *The Daily News* suggests the writer of the article, and perhaps

⁴²⁸ *The Daily News*, May 10, 1902

⁴²⁹ *The Daily News*, May 17, 1902.

⁴³⁰ *The Daily News*, June 20, 1902.

⁴³¹ *The Daily News*, May 10, 1902.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ *The Evening Telegram*, May 21, 1902.

even the paper, were not in support of White.⁴³⁴ This is intriguing considering White's previous support of the Reid interests. There is a strong class bias in the piece. The writer adopted the dialect of a Scotsman and wrote about the candidates in the election. He suggested that many were looking to buy from him the mayor's suit of clothes but says he would be the "Workin Mans" candidate. He poked fun at the temperance stand saying he was a teetotaler and only imbibed a new type of herbal medicinal beverage that tasted as good as whiskey. He said he did not know "the coffin man", a reference to White's background as an undertaker, but he would check him out by pretending to price a coffin for a relative.

In his adopted persona as candidate Mr. McFadgen, the writer outlined his stand for the working man where he would reduce taxes, extend "water pipes that will gae plenty o' water on th hilly pairts o' the toon – plant trees in front o' ye'r houses...an' ony man that haes tae gang mair than fifty yeards yae hiswark will get a free pass on the caurs tae gang au' come tae his meals."⁴³⁵ He continued to say that he would give every man, woman and child a vote so that when they (the working people) get power they would be able to keep it. This is clearly mocking White and the idea of a candidate courting the working people. McFadgen continued to say that he did not want to say anything against the coffin-man but that the thought of electing someone who is associated with the business of death and dying was "scumbersome."

Regarding the other candidate, George Shea, the writer said he would say nothing, and then proceeded to say Shea was well-spoken and hardworking but not a "laborinman

⁴³⁴ "Mr. McFadgen Runs for Mayor," column, *The Daily News*, May 19, 1902.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

as we inderstann it.” Turning the conversation back to himself as a workingman’s candidate, McFadgen said if he were elected, “there will be no need to go away in search of work.”⁴³⁶ These were all digs at White. This satirical piece seems to indicate that there was a section of St. John’s society who did not want a candidate for the working man elected and who did not want the working people to have more power. This piece suggests that there were clear limits to the amount of political support the business elite were willing to give the working people. They might use class-based rhetoric to win election votes, but it is likely they did not want a mobilized, independent body of working people. Also, considering that this was a paper affiliated with the Reid family and that R. G. Reid was a Scotsman, it suggests that the paper and the Reids might not have been supporters of White for the Mayoralty. White states in a letter to the Editor that R. G.’s son, W. D. Reid, did not support him in his bid for the Mayoralty and that W. D. Reid actually voted against him and let it be known publically.⁴³⁷

The Evening Telegram reported on a meeting White held at the Mechanics’ Hall and noted that only about 170 people attended.⁴³⁸ Considering White was president of the organization, they expected a larger following from the membership.⁴³⁹ They concluded that White would not get the support of all of the mechanics.⁴⁴⁰ They also noted that the key to winning would be who would gain the support of the “big vote north of ‘Middle

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ T. M. White, letter to the Editor, *The Daily News*, December 21, 1905.

⁴³⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, May 20, 1902.

⁴³⁹ It is possible that the turnout was not poor but that *The Evening Telegram* wanted it to appear so to its readers to lend support to the other candidate. One would have to compare turnouts at the various meeting to know for certain.

⁴⁴⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, May 20, 1902.

Street,”⁴⁴¹ referring to the row housing on the northern slope of the city north of Duckworth Street.

A letter writer, targeting White, wrote: “Every candidate for municipal office ought to be entirely independent of the pittance provided for such office, and ought to be qualified in every respect for the duties and services imposed on him. We must have a Mayor for this city qualified in every way for the important functions of his office.”⁴⁴²

This is an obvious reference to White’s underemployment that he was experiencing at this point in his life and to the fact that he was not independently wealthy but was dependent on wages or a salary. Implied is the suggestion that leadership roles such as the office of mayor should be above the ambitions of ordinary, labouring men.

The contemporary press noted that the campaign was conducted with general decency and courtesy.⁴⁴³ Even voting day went without a skirmish.⁴⁴⁴ Election day was a half-holiday. The big rush of voters was immediately after work. The election officers could not accommodate them all in that half hour and many who left to catch the train did not come back to vote.⁴⁴⁵ *The Evening Telegram* noted that the intended candidates of those workers who left to catch the train lost their votes.⁴⁴⁶ It also noted that a large number of “West End workmen” arrived at the polling booths too late to vote.⁴⁴⁷ No reason was given for this.

⁴⁴¹ *The Evening Telegram*, June 5, 1902.

⁴⁴² Voter, Letter to the Editor *The Evening Telegram* June 12, 1902.

⁴⁴³ *The Evening Telegram*, June 19, 1902; *The Daily News*, June 11, 1902; *Evening Herald*, June 19, 1902.

⁴⁴⁴ *The Evening Herald*, June 19, 1902.

⁴⁴⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, June 19, 1902.

⁴⁴⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, June 19, 1902.

⁴⁴⁷ *The Evening Telegram* June 20, 1902

Illustrating that dishonesty in reporting is not a new phenomenon, a journalistic mishap occurred which might have affected the result of the election. On the day of the election, *The Evening Herald* reported that John Anderson, a prominent White supporter, attended and spoke at a Shea rally on the previous evening.⁴⁴⁸ The next day, Anderson wrote to *The Daily News* correcting the error in the *Herald* and reaffirming his support of White. He said that he doubted that it was a mistake and said it seemed “intended simply to prejudice either Mr. White or myself, or both, on the day of the election with voters.”⁴⁴⁹ The *Herald* gave a rather backhanded apology saying they regretted the “contretemps” declaring it was a mistake and that the mistake must have helped Anderson rather than hurt him.⁴⁵⁰ Conversely, one could assume then that their mistake likely cost T.M. White votes, as Anderson was a prominent and respected supporter.

Before the votes were tallied, according to *The Evening Herald*, the White camp knew it was in trouble. The paper noted that White did not get enough votes from the uneducated working people saying that White did not capture the “illiterate vote.”⁴⁵¹ How would the paper have known that? Were they assuming that the elites would vote for Shea so White was dependent upon the votes of uneducated labour? White lost the campaign by 240 votes with 1303 votes to Shea’s 1543.⁴⁵² This was a close race. Who knows what the verdict might have been had workers frustrated with waiting to vote not headed out of town by train on their half holiday, had some west end workers not arrived

⁴⁴⁸ *The Evening Herald*, June 19, 1902.

⁴⁴⁹ *The Daily News*, June 20, 1902.

⁴⁵⁰ *The Evening Herald*, June 20, 1902.

⁴⁵¹ *The Evening Herald*, June 20, 1902.

⁴⁵² *The Evening Herald*, June 21, 1902.

late, and had John Anderson not been falsely portrayed at the last minute as giving his support to Shea. Nevertheless, White polled a respectable vote.

T. M. White seemed to have been undaunted by electoral defeat. He again put his name forward for the Conservatives in the 1904 General Election in St. John's West.⁴⁵³ Bond and the Liberals were still in ascendency. White ran against the popular Roman Catholic Sir Edward Morris who had a huge and loyal following in the district. This attempt to get elected appears to be an act of desperation. It defies logic why he would have run in this election. It could have been simply an act of party loyalty. White went down to defeat once again.

White's contemporaries might have wondered where White was getting the money to run in an election. Since resigning as sub-sheriff to run in the election of 1900, White had no obvious form of lucrative employment. *The Daily News* referenced the amount of free time White would have available to give to the mayor's office due to his lack of engagement in business. Yet White appeared to have an income for he was spending money. One month after his defeat in the general election when he had no obvious source of employment, *The Evening Telegram* reported that Mr. T.M. White had returned from his trip to Boston where he met hundreds of Newfoundlanders. They said he looked "jolly."⁴⁵⁴ This trip would have cost money. In December 1902, White went to Montreal for surgery for "face trouble" (perhaps dental surgery) where he spent a number of weeks.⁴⁵⁵ In an era with no social support for medical treatment, this would have been a substantial expenditure considering the medical and travel costs. We shall see it was

⁴⁵³ *The Evening Telegram*, November 2, 1904.

⁴⁵⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, December 26, 1900.

⁴⁵⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, January 20, 1893.

White's connections to the business elite who "hired" him to play the part of the workingman's candidate that enabled him to live beyond his apparent means.

In this period between 1897 and 1904, in addition to running in elections, White was active and visible in the community. Even though the Conservatives were in the opposition, in 1901 White was appointed to a special sub-committee on processions for the Royal reception of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York (later King George V).⁴⁵⁶ This committee was a natural fit for White with his experience organizing theatrical productions and parades. He must have enjoyed being included in the company of St. John's elite. Despite his workingman's political stance, he seemed to be chasing acceptance in other social and political circles.

In 1904, Newfoundland hosted Old Home Week celebrations. The large planning committee for the event included the presidents of the local societies. White, as president of the Mechanics' Society, was once again on a committee with prominent citizens. The Old Home Week Committee decided to hold the two holidays, Labour Day and Regatta Day, during Old Home Week. One of the holidays had to occur first. The Regatta Committee objected to holding the Regatta on the Wednesday, the second holiday as "it would be impossible to get crews together, and they would not be in proper condition for rowing."⁴⁵⁷ White, on behalf of the Mechanics' Society, then objected to the Old Home Week Committee's plan to schedule the Labor Day parade for the day after the Regatta. It was reported that he said to do so would "be madness."⁴⁵⁸ He did not clarify why this would be madness but one would assume it had to do with reasons similar to those

⁴⁵⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, August 26, 1901.

⁴⁵⁷ *The Evening Telegram*, May 27, 1904.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

articulated by the Regatta Committee. It would be difficult to get parade participants as they would not be “in condition.” In other words they would be suffering from the after effects of the festivities of the day before. The next day the paper issued a statement from White saying he favoured withdrawing the parade from the Old Home Week Celebration because the Parade Committee did not want it to “interfere with the Regatta – a more important event.”⁴⁵⁹ Obviously they could not be held on the same day and neither group wanted its event compromised on the second day by post holiday ill effects. It is likely that White irritated some of the Old Home Week committee members by pulling the parade out of the celebrations. It appeared to be a grand gesture of non-co-operation but perhaps White and his fellow executive members of the Mechanics’ Society knew they would not be able to rally the number of Mechanics’ Society members necessary for a successful spectacle.

White had a public profile as a labour leader and political hopeful in the decade after 1895. Whether he should be viewed as a villain or victim through this period would depend on how members of the public construed his motivations. If he were viewed as purely a self-interested political ego, he was likely seen as a villain. For some people, in his loss in the Mayor’s election of 1902, he might have been regarded sympathetically as a victim of odd and possibly malicious circumstances with respect to the incorrect reporting in the paper around Anderson’s support. Perhaps he was even punished for pursuing politics independently and without the sanction of the political elite. Regardless of how he was perceived by the public up to 1902, soon the St. John’s audience would watch another scene in White’s melodrama played out in the local media. White’s

⁴⁵⁹ *The Evening Telegram*, May 28, 1904.

financial and social situation changed for the worse in 1904, but it was not clear why until a year later when White sued R. G. Reid resulting in all of the dirty laundry being aired in public. White's financial situation and political alliances were laid out for all to see.

6.3 Court case: T. M. White vs. R. G. Reid

Like elections, court cases are real life dramas with the general public as an audience. White in this drama cast himself as the victim and R. G. Reid as the villain. Perhaps the public saw things differently. Could one villain simply have gotten the better of another villain? In December of 1905, White sued Robert G. Reid in the Supreme Court for breach of an agreement entered into on October 10, 1900. It was set down before Chief Justice Horwood and heard before a special jury.⁴⁶⁰ The case was reported in detail in the St. John's papers.

The witnesses Horace Morine of *The Daily News* and his brother A.B. Morine, Reid's solicitor at the time of the alleged agreement, corroborated White's case.⁴⁶¹ White was approached by A.B. Morine to run for the Conservatives in the General Election in the fall of 1900 but he was hesitant to accept and expressed concerns about his long-term financial stability in the event of losing. He said (referring to his sub-sheriff position) that he had a "a good job and meant to keep it." He referred to his "easy hours" and testified that he told Morine he would need a guarantee of \$1000 a year to

⁴⁶⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, December 14, 1905; *The Evening Herald*, December 14, 1905; *The Daily News*, December 15, 1905.

⁴⁶¹ A. B. Morine was a politician, journalist and lawyer. As a member of the Conservative government, he negotiated the 1898 railway deal with R. G. Reid while at the same time acting as solicitor for the Reids; "Alfred Bishop Morine," *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland and Labrador* vol. 3, 618-619.

compensate for the sub-sheriff salary of \$800 that he would be giving up.⁴⁶² When Morine agreed, White said he had to consult his wife.⁴⁶³ White resigned his post as sub-sheriff and ran for the Conservatives. The court case revealed to the public at large White's source of wealth and the terms attached to it.

It was agreed that if White lost in the election and the Conservatives were successful, the party would give him a job. If White and the party were both unsuccessful, R.G. Reid would give him a position. The amount agreed on was \$1000 per year. This agreement was verbal, not written.⁴⁶⁴ White and the Conservatives lost the election so White turned to Reid to fulfill his part of the bargain. Despite initially receiving payment of the agreed amount, no position was forthcoming and White persisted to ask Morine about employment.

White was restless. It would have been humiliating and emasculating for a man in his era to have no source of active employment. In February of 1903, Morine told White to go to work at *The Daily News* office.⁴⁶⁵ White continued to be paid the same way and he thought that the Reids had sanctioned the position because he thought they were owners of the *News*. On September 6, 1904, W. D. Reid, R. G.'s son, saw Morine in the Reid office and told him that the agreement with White was to be terminated. On September 21, Morine gave White two months' salary and informed him this would be the final payment.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶² *The Evening Herald*, December 15, 1905; *The Daily News*, December 15, 1905.

⁴⁶³ *The Evening Herald*, December 15, 1905.

⁴⁶⁴ *The Evening Herald*, December 14, 1905; *The Evening Telegram*, December 14, 1905.

⁴⁶⁵ There is no official record of the duties White performed at *The Daily News*. McAlpine's 1904 Directory lists him as a printer.

⁴⁶⁶ *The Daily News*, December 15, 1905; *The Evening Telegram*, December 15, 1905.

What was White to do now? Go back to being a wheelwright? White said that he thought his only resort was public life and, therefore, he threw his hat into the election of 1904, again for the Conservatives. After his defeat, he approached Morine who told him to go back to work at the *News* and if things went well for Reid on an unrelated arbitration, something might be done for him. Amazingly, White went back to *The Daily News* and stayed there without being paid until June 3, 1905.⁴⁶⁷ This demonstrates great, if perhaps naive, faith in the Reids, even though R. G. Reid's lack of action in providing an employment opportunity did not merit it. White's financial situation was worsening. He needed money. That month he asked Morine to take a mortgage out on his property but Morine refused.⁴⁶⁸ White then threatened Reid with legal action. Morine countered with an offer to settle for \$600 and a position at the *News* for \$10 a week.⁴⁶⁹ White refused and sued for \$20,000.

Notably, R.G. Reid was not called to testify at the trial and neither was his son W. D. Reid. After White and all of the witnesses testified, Chief Justice Horwood found that White did not have a case because under the *Statute of Frauds* a contract for longer than one year must be in writing. White's case was dismissed with costs against him.⁴⁷⁰ He was now clearly in a worse position than when he started the lawsuit.

The testimony of the witnesses and the plaintiff in the court reveals certain interesting details about the power culture of the era and about White's temperament.

⁴⁶⁷ *The Evening Herald*, December 15, 1905.

⁴⁶⁸ *The Daily News*, December 15, 1905.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, December 15, 1905.

Morine was a solicitor for R.G. Reid, a member of the legislature and a back room powerbroker of the era. In this case, Reid had Morine pay White from Morine's own funds and Reid later reimbursed Morine. Reid did not pay White directly. There was no paper trail. Morine acted as a shield between the powerful businessman Reid and job-seeking White, who at that time was of no further use to Reid. White's political capital had been spent.

In his testimony, White noted that when he was in hospital in Montreal around Christmas of 1902 "all of the Reids behaved handsomely" towards him.⁴⁷¹ He did not elaborate on what that entailed. *The Evening Herald* reported that White testified that R. G. Reid, Jr., and H. D. Reid visited him frequently while he was in hospital and that on returning to Newfoundland, White wrote R.G. Reid, Sr., "thanking him for all his kindness."⁴⁷² What was this kindness? Just visits from his sons? In White's statement of claim, he said that as part of the \$600 settlement offered by H. D. Reid through Morine, R. G. Reid would "call off the amount for the operation in Montreal" as well.⁴⁷³ This seems to indicate that Reid loaned White the money for the medical care in Montreal. This is not mentioned in the reporting of the case in the newspaper.

White bemoaned his financial situation. He found that at age 44, with his business gone, as a journeyman he would only be paid \$1.50 a day and there were no positions in the wheel shops. In his colourful way he said: "There is nothing left for me but to work

⁴⁷¹ *The Evening Telegram*, December 15, 1905.

⁴⁷² *The Evening Herald*, December 15, 1905.

⁴⁷³ TRPAD, Reid Newfoundland Company Papers, MG 17, Box 12, File 272, T. M. White, Statement of Claim, July 8, 1905.

on the wharves or go out the narrows.”⁴⁷⁴ He testified that he told Morine that he thought he was “dealing with gentlemen.” A gentleman would live up to his word. Instead because he trusted a man’s word he would be melodramatically “thrown on the parish,” losing his manly independence. The belief that one could trust the word of “gentlemen” and not put a contract in writing demonstrates great naiveté on White’s part. It is also a real life reflection of dominant late 19th century themes in melodrama articulated earlier by Kristen Guest, Christina Burr and Michael Booth where ordinary people felt threatened by the forces of modern capitalism.

An editorial in *The Evening Telegram* noted this incredible naiveté that caused White not to demand the contract be put in writing or to question it, saying White was not a “doubting Thomas or peeping Tom.” *The Daily News* called out *The Evening Telegram* for not condemning Reid’s betrayal of the trust White had in him and for resorting to the *Statute of Frauds*, calling it the “rogue’s plea.”⁴⁷⁵ That a legal technicality could usurp a gentleman’s agreement in a real life court drama mirrored the villainous world of business and finance as portrayed on the melodramatic stage.

The few documents pertaining to this case among the Reid Newfoundland papers show R. G. Reid’s impatience with his son H. D. Reid and with A. B. Morine for not settling the case for \$650. He told his son to engage lawyer Sir James Winter to defend

⁴⁷⁴ *The Evening Herald*, December 15, 1905.

⁴⁷⁵ *The Daily News*, December 21, 1905.

it.⁴⁷⁶ R. G. Reid also consulted a lawyer in Montreal who told him that based on the facts sworn by White, White appeared to have a case of uncertain value against Reid.⁴⁷⁷

Also in the file is a copy of a letter to Sir James Winter from W. D. Reid who wrote that he was present when Morine made the arrangement with White to give up the sub-sheriff position.⁴⁷⁸ W. D. Reid did not elaborate on what this arrangement entailed. He also said that his father gave his personal payment for the last amount paid to White but concluded that his father knew nothing of the arrangement made by Morine until the fall of 1904.

White might have been portrayed as a victim of Reid due to his naiveté and political ambition, but *The Evening Telegram* saw conflict of interest and compromised integrity.⁴⁷⁹ The newspaper noted that White had been receiving payments from Reid while he was running for mayor in 1902. The paper drew attention to the conflict of interest that would have existed between the Reid Newfoundland Company and the municipality of St. John's regarding contracts for water, lights, sewerage and snow removal if White had been elected mayor. They declared that representatives of Reid Newfoundland Company and the City of St. John's should be at arms' length.⁴⁸⁰

White was obviously bothered by the suggestion that he entered the mayoralty race to further Reid's interests. He was moved to write a letter to *The Daily News* explaining his rationale for running for mayor.⁴⁸¹ He claimed he realized that he made a

⁴⁷⁶ TRPAD, Reid Newfoundland Company Papers, MG 17, Box 12, File 272, R. G. Reid, letter to H. D. Reid, October 27, 1905.

⁴⁷⁷ TRPAD, Reid Newfoundland Company Papers MG 17, Box 12, File 272, C. S. Campbell, letter to R. G. Reid, November 6, 1905.

⁴⁷⁸ TRPAD, Reid Newfoundland Company Papers MG 17, Box 12, File 272, W. D. Reid, letter to Sir James Winter, October 27, 1905.

⁴⁷⁹ *The Evening Telegram*, December 16, 1905.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ *The Daily News*, December 21, 1905

mistake in resigning as sub-sheriff to run in the general election of 1900 and that Reid was not going to keep his side of the bargain by providing him with employment. He said he wanted to be mayor so that the salary he would receive would assist him in setting himself up in business again and that by the end of the term he should be sufficiently established to make a living from it. It would enable him “to shake” himself “clear” of Reid. He also said Reid openly opposed him in the municipal election and voted against him. He claimed it was Reid who made it public that White was receiving pay from him.⁴⁸² This is odd for the municipal election occurred prior to White’s hospitalization in December of 1902 when he said the Reids treated him well and visited often. The Reids seemed to have advanced him a loan for the operation as well.

White was disturbed by the attack on his integrity, but he displayed incredible naiveté in thinking that the public could be assuaged by the idea that he sought to be mayor in order to build a personal business on the side. Whatever the state of the relationship between Reid and White was at the time of the election, White was receiving money from Reid. His letter was unconvincing.

In the early days of 1906, White was not in good financial shape and his reputation was sullied. He had a family to support and neither position, nor prospects. Fortunately, White did not have to throw himself on the parish, work on the wharves or go out the narrows. He attempted for a brief time to re-enter the undertaking business. Once again he advertised his business. In sharp contrast to the proud, bold newspaper advertisements of his youth, he posted a simple note of few words stating he was engaged

⁴⁸² Ibid.

in the undertaking business from his home at the corner of Bond and Cathedral.⁴⁸³ He was beginning all over again. But the story was not over. As luck or amused gods who love irony would have it, the melodramatic plot took another twist.

The Reid Newfoundland Company sued A. B. Morine and others over an unregistered mortgage.⁴⁸⁴ What was at stake was the ownership of *The Daily News* and whether Morine perceived the Reids as having an ownership interest in the paper. The real question was whether monies advanced by the Reid interests were for an ownership stake in the newspaper, or simply for continued editorial support. White was called in to testify at the trial on behalf of Reid. He corroborated testimony given earlier by Morine's law partner Michael Gibb that at a meeting attended by White, Morine, Gibb and other Conservatives, Gibb suggested to Morine and the group that the paper should take a stronger anti-Reid position, but that Morine dismissed this suggestion with the query, "Are you prepared to pay the Reids off?"⁴⁸⁵ This testimony appeared to support the plaintiffs' position that the Reid interests were owed money and that Morine knew this.

It seems that White had not entirely shaken himself of the Reids. Later that year he became an assistant accountant at the Reid Newfoundland Company. This would be a white collar, middle class position, but obviously not at the level to which White aspired.⁴⁸⁶

When White stepped onto the political stage, he was an independent tradesman; in return for his failed attempt at politics, he was rewarded with the financial security of a

⁴⁸³ *The Evening Telegram*, May 4, 1906.

⁴⁸⁴ *The Evening Telegram*, February 2, 1906.

⁴⁸⁵ *The Daily News*, February 19, 1906.

⁴⁸⁶ In the files of the Reid Newfoundland Company at The Rooms Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador there is no record of his salary or any similar payroll records from the period.

sub-sheriff position. He naively failed to realize that he jeopardized this security when he again resigned to run for the Conservatives. He understood that in payment for resigning his sub-sheriff position and running for election, he would receive a paid position of \$1000 per year provided by the Reids in the event of a loss for both him and the Conservative Party. He relied on that understanding. In addition to rendering himself and his family into a precarious financial position, worsening their social standing and diminishing his independence and stature as a man, he had become a subject of public melodrama through the elections and the court case. He had played or been played as a villainous victim. White's life could almost be seen as a perfect example of the confluence of the forces of class, masculinity and melodrama that enabled individual men to better their circumstances and achieve upward social mobility. Unfortunately despite the social and political forces for upward mobility being in White's favour, individual choices and relationships were also at play and these limited his advancement. Ultimately, for a man seeking respectability and security, it must have been with a measure of relief, but with some regret, that White accepted the position of assistant accountant for the Reid Newfoundland Company – a position bereft of power and drama.

Chapter 7 The Final Act 1906-1938

Things went quiet for T. M. White from 1906 to 1916. Like other men, he would have gone to work each day, socialized with his family and friends, and managed the affairs of his household. White's parents passed away, his father in 1908 and his mother in 1914.⁴⁸⁷ The only existing piece of personal correspondence written by White comes from this period. After his mother's death, his sister in the United States made inquiries through a lawyer regarding the status of her parents' estate. Whites' reply to the lawyer gives insight into his colourful personality, his conversational style of writing and his penchant for use of a melodramatic turn of phrase as he described his parent's house and situation.⁴⁸⁸ As shown earlier, he also provided details on blacksmith wages, fire insurance and public compensation for losses incurred in the fire of 1892.

White's description of his parent's home is vivid, with sarcastic overtones. In 1893, he leased land to them for a ground rent of twenty-two dollars per year. The lot was only 15 feet by 29 feet and he said, "so you can judge from this measurement what an extensive building was contemplated." He said that for many years his father could only obtain three-quarter time employment at \$1.12 per day, "or in other words, not enough to keep body and soul together." In that period from 1893 to 1908, all his father could do was erect a shell with three rooms finished, "the rest of it being without partitions, ceiling, doors etc." He said that the house was uninhabitable when his father died. At times his father had been unemployed and White "had to keep them." White also noted he had to

⁴⁸⁷ Newfoundland and Labrador Vital Statistics, Registry of Deaths, Book 5, 1907-1908, page 24, St. John's City accessed on line <http://ngb.chebucto.org/Vstats/death-reg-bk-5-1907-1908-21-30-sjc.shtml>; Newfoundland and Labrador Vital Statistics, Registry of Deaths, Book 6, page 98 1915-1915, St. John's City accessed on line ngb.chebucto.org/Vstats/death-reg-bk-6-1914-1915-9-103-sjc.shtml.

⁴⁸⁸ T. M. White, letter to J. F. McDonough, October 20, 1915.

look after his sister and her family when she visited, but he doubted she would recall that, because “eaten bread is soon forgotten.” On his father’s death, T.M. took his mother to live with his family as she had “neither money or marbles.” At that point the house “was not fit to live in for want of repairs.” The chimney was split and unsafe and the roof leaked “like a basket.” He said that his parents had refused his offers to post security for them to borrow money to repair the house “as they always had a terrible dread of owing a cent to anybody.”⁴⁸⁹

White explained in great detail his handling of the house and its expenses after his mother came to live with him. He urged his mother to repair the house and rent it. She refused, “the fear of dying in debt being uppermost.” The house continued to deteriorate. White had to pay to clapboard and paint the house, as it was “a public nuisance in appearance, and a disgrace to the surrounding neighbourhood.” Soon after repairing the exterior, the cellar fell in. This was a public hazard and White again had to repair the property. Then a portion the roof sheathing gave way “and with every breeze of wind it would make an awful noise,” and so the house gained a reputation of being haunted. Through this period, White’s wife and daughters took care of his mother through a long illness, and White said that she “was quite a care I assure you, none of which care had the lady who is now so anxious about the ESTATE.”⁴⁹⁰ The cause of his mother’s death is listed as senility.⁴⁹¹ Her funeral expenses were covered by forty dollars through the Mechanics’ Society of which his father was a member. This was sufficient to “give her a

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Newfoundland and Labrador Vital Statistics, Registry of Deaths, 1915-1915, Book 6, page 98.

coffin, dig grave and pay bell toll for funeral.”⁴⁹² White paid for the doctor’s bill and drugs. He then said he enclosed a bill for the work he had done on the house since it came into his possession including paying outstanding city water taxes and the outstanding ground rent. Unfortunately he did not itemize the amounts or state the total in the letter. The house was valued at four hundred dollars.

White buried his parents at Belvedere Cemetery. There is some evidence that there was a class difference in the two Roman Catholic Cemeteries. Plots at Belvedere had to be purchased and the elite (and many more ordinary others) of the Catholic community were buried there. Mount Carmel Cemetery on the north side of Quidi Vidi lake was originally developed so that poor Catholics who could not afford to purchase a piece of ground would have a resting place.⁴⁹³ It is interesting that White buried his parents, who had no financial means, at Belvedere. This is perhaps another example of White’s consciousness of class and respectability. For his working-class parents who had no money, he was able to ensure they at least met the minimum standard of working-class respectability: they had their basic needs met; they did not need to resort to relief for the poor; and they each had a respectable funeral. This is evident in the melodramatically phrased challenge with which White closed the letter to his sister’s attorney:

In conclusion I will say that my conscience is at rest with regard to my treatment of my parents. I always did the best I could for them, and thank God they were never hungry or cold even though I had my own share of trials and troubles but still I managed to

⁴⁹² White, letter to J. F. McDonough, 1915.

⁴⁹³ According to Archival Moments, land for Mount Carmel Cemetery was purchased July 1849 and was consecrated on July 3, 1859; it is said it became popularly known as “the fishermen’s cemetery.” <http://archivalmoments.ca/2016/07/03/new-cemetery-for-st-johns/> accessed March 4, 2019; “A Friend of Order” Letter to the Editor, *The Morning Courier*, July 18, 1849.

keep them out of the Poor House and see that they had as good a bite and sup as myself [sic] all through my [sic] that is all I have to say on the matter [sic] Now if your client wish to unearth them drag them from the grave so to speak and ventilate the foregoing before the public I am prepared.⁴⁹⁴

Fortunately the family dispute between White and his sister did not go to court. Except for being listed as foreman on a Grand Jury,⁴⁹⁵ as supporting local causes such as the acquisition of the parade grounds for a sports field,⁴⁹⁶ and in advertisements or reviews of theatrical productions, White's name remained out of the press. The number of theatrical productions was fewer and more of these were remounts of plays performed in earlier years. That there were fewer plays is not surprising as moving pictures arrived in St. John's in 1907.⁴⁹⁷ Even so, White was still busy acting, directing and managing theatrical productions. His son, George, and occasionally his daughter Margaret, were listed among the casts in minor roles.⁴⁹⁸ He also assisted the Catholic Cadet Corps in forming a dramatic club, directing and coaching at least one of their productions.⁴⁹⁹

It is not clear in the years from 1907 to 1912 whether White actually formed his own theatre company but the promotional articles, reviews and advertisements often refer to the T. M. White Company.⁵⁰⁰ Unlike many of the shows by the other companies with which he was associated, these productions are not listed as benefits. Was he attempting to run a profit-based company? In the same period, a benefit production for the Church Lads Brigade was mounted under the name of the Old Favourite's Dramatic Company

⁴⁹⁴ White, letter to J. F. McDonough, 1915.

⁴⁹⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, April 1, 1912.

⁴⁹⁶ *The Evening Telegram*, July 13, 1906.

⁴⁹⁷ Paul Moore, "Early Picture Shows at the Fulcrum of Modern and Parochial St. John's," *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* vol. 22, no. 2, Fall 2007, 447.

⁴⁹⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, September 16, 1910.

⁴⁹⁹ *The Evening Telegram*, November 25, 1908.

⁵⁰⁰ *The Evening Telegram*, March 16, 1909.

managed by T.M. White. White was obviously an energetic person who enjoyed attention and who liked to be in charge. Theatre gave him the attention and the ability to exercise his creative and management skills that an assistant accountant position at Reid Newfoundland Company would not. Even though it was a white-collar position, for someone with White's inclinations such an entry-level position might even have been emasculating.

Sometime between 1914 and 1915, another career opportunity presented itself and White could free himself from the Reids. White took a position as municipal appraiser with the City of St. John's. This was a period of transition at City Hall. In 1914, municipal elections were again suspended and an appointed commission once again ran the city for two years. It might have been simply coincidence, but his friend John Anderson was on the Commission at that time. The City has not preserved any payroll records for T. M. White from this period; however, existing St. John's Council minutes indicate that this was a respectable paying position. White received one thousand dollars for conducting a triennial review of properties.⁵⁰¹ But White was still restless. Incredibly, in June 1916, he dared to show his head politically and run in the municipal election. His candidacy announcement included a letter signed by over one hundred "ratepayers" requesting him to contest a council position and pledging him their support.⁵⁰² Their support was not enough. White placed ninth out of eleven candidates and did not win one

⁵⁰¹ City of St. John's Archives, Special Council Minutes, January 26, 1916; The minutes also note payments of other amounts being approved for appraisers for additional or special work. For example, \$325.00 for a special appraisal on the South Side. Council Minutes 1915 -1917.

⁵⁰² *The Evening Telegram*, June 17, 1916.

of the six seats on council.⁵⁰³ Following his loss, he returned to his position as appraiser. Fortunately, the councilors approved rehiring him in a vote of 4-2.⁵⁰⁴

The first few years of White's employment as municipal appraiser for St. John's coincided with World War I. There is no evidence or record of whether he had any particular role on the home front of the war except for organizing theatrical productions to raise money in aid of the war effort. Also of note is that he does not appear to have been a voice speaking in favour of the 1915 campaign for prohibition.

White's restlessness persisted. In 1917, a group of metal workers at the Reid Newfoundland Company formed the Newfoundland Industrial Workers Association (NIWA).⁵⁰⁵ It quickly expanded to include workers in a variety of sectors.⁵⁰⁶ Today the NIWA is remembered for the three-week Reid Newfoundland Strike of 1918 where the union won concessions from the largest employer in Newfoundland.⁵⁰⁷ According to Peter McInnis, the NIWA sought to redress the subservient and exploitative working conditions of Newfoundland workers - conditions that were exacerbated by wartime shortages and price inflation.⁵⁰⁸ This attracted T. M. White's attention. Even though White was no longer in the trades, he could join the NIWA as it opened its membership to a broad range of workers: trades-workers, employees who worked in white-collar desk jobs, and even small employers with fewer than twelve employees.⁵⁰⁹ The opportunity to take part in a real life drama and take a leading role championing the interests of workers

⁵⁰³ *The Evening Telegram*, July 6, 1916.

⁵⁰⁴ City of St. John's Archives, Minute Book of the St. John's Municipal Council, 1915-1917, September 7, 1916, p. 315.

⁵⁰⁵ Gillespie, 28.

⁵⁰⁶ McInnis, 101-102.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid*,

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid*.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

likely drew White to the union. It also once again pitted White against the Reids. This must have given White some satisfaction. He became involved and began speaking at meetings. Again his natural speaking ability was noted.⁵¹⁰ He spoke at many meetings but notably he gave a speech at the meeting forming the women's branch of the NIWA.⁵¹¹ By December 1918, White was elected NIWA president.⁵¹² As president, White lobbied for better housing for working people,⁵¹³ for the establishment of a department of labour,⁵¹⁴ and for minimum wage laws.⁵¹⁵ He also became involved as a director in supporting a housing project led by his long time associate John Anderson.⁵¹⁶

After the Reid strike of 1918, members of the NIWA and other labour organizations turned to politics to effect the changes needed to improve the standard of living and employment for working people. They established the Workingmen's Party.⁵¹⁷ This party was independent of the NIWA. Where White stood in relation to the newly created labour party is not clear. A note in *The Evening Telegram* said it was rumoured that White would run as an independent labour candidate opposing the candidates for the Workingmen.⁵¹⁸ White did not run in that capacity.

The paths of A. B. Morine and White also intersected again. On behalf of the NIWA, White spoke at a meeting of the St. John's Amalgamated Fishermen at the LSPU

⁵¹⁰ *The St. John's Daily Star*, February 2, 1918.

⁵¹¹ *The St. John's Daily Star*, August 9, 1918.

⁵¹² *The St. John's Daily Star*, December 7, 1918.

⁵¹³ *The St. John's Daily Star*, March 29, 1919.

⁵¹⁴ *The St. John's Daily Star*, April 1, 1919.

⁵¹⁵ *The St. John's Daily Star*, May 3, 1918.

⁵¹⁶ *The St. John's Daily Star*, June 26, 1919; June 27, 1919.

⁵¹⁷ McInnis, 208.

⁵¹⁸ *The Evening Telegram*, September 20, 1919.

Hall.⁵¹⁹ He refuted any insinuations that he had political interests. He insisted he was speaking as a concerned citizen and was independent of any political organization.⁵²⁰

Nevertheless, the credibility of his assertion is weakened somewhat for he was followed on the dais by A. B. Morine who also insisted there were no partisan politics attached to the meeting.

The political stage continued to beckon White even if only as a background player on the fringes. The evidence seems to indicate he did not support the Workingmen's Party. In 1919, he attended a rally comprising members of a broad spectrum of society, from prominent merchants to labourers, opposing the Liberal government and he joined an organizational committee to work against the incumbents.⁵²¹ In 1920 he attended a large victory rally for the Liberal Reform Party of Richard Squires at the Casino theatre.⁵²² One wonders at the motivations underlying his political choices as he seemed to support mainstream political parties rather than the Workingmen's Party. Perhaps self-interest once again ruled the day. It is also in keeping with a type of labour aristocrat who favoured and benefited from the existing political economic system. After this period, White's political leanings and activities are unknown.

White was now sixty years old. He did not run for politics again. He maintained his involvement in the TAB and was President of that organization until shortly before his death in 1938. In the last decades of his life White oversaw the TAB meetings as they

⁵¹⁹ *The St. John's Daily Star*, March 27, 1919.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵²¹ *The St. John's Daily Star*, April 5, 1919.

⁵²² *The St. John's Daily Star*, January 22, 1920; Sir Richard Squires was a lawyer, politician and Prime Minister of Newfoundland, Jim Hiller "Sir Richard Anderson Squires," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* vol. xvi http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/squires_richard_anderson_16E.html accessed April 8, 2019.

made lists of illegal shebeens⁵²³ in the city and grappled with the costs of a new heating system for their building.⁵²⁴ Despite the popularity of moving pictures and that the TA Hall was more often booked for movies, as late as 1933, at the age of 72, White once again directed his longtime theatre associates. The Old Favourites remounted the Five Act melodrama *By Force of Impulse*.⁵²⁵ A sell out house was anticipated.

The Daily News reported on White's 50th wedding anniversary celebration held at his home, attended by family and friends from his drama and TAB associations.⁵²⁶ No political or labour associates were mentioned. White was presented with gifts from his former associates and the evening ended with stories and song with piano accompaniment. White evidently owned the piece of furniture that epitomized middle class aspirations - a piano. A year later he died with no debt, leaving three houses on the site he purchased after the fire of 1892, one to each of his children.⁵²⁷ His position as City Appraiser had given him financial security. *The Daily News* published an obituary summarizing the activities of his life. The article noted that at the end of his life White received a papal blessing for his lifetime of service to the TAB.⁵²⁸ We do not know what this blessing meant to him. We cannot discount the power and place of religion in the lives of people of that era in St. John's; however, there is no evidence to show the place of religion in White's personal life. Nevertheless, perhaps the blessing gave him some

⁵²³ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "shebeen" as an unlicensed establishment or private house selling alcohol and typically regarded as slightly disreputable.

<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/shebeen> accessed March 7, 2019.

⁵²⁴ Archives and Records Office of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. John's, TAB Fonds.

⁵²⁵ *The Public Bureau Christmas Number*, 1933.

⁵²⁶ *The Daily News*, April 27, 1937.

⁵²⁷ Supreme Court of Newfoundland, Probated Last Will and Testament of Thomas M. White, St. John's, vol. 9, folio 0590.

⁵²⁸ *The Daily News*, December 13, 1938.

validation for his life's efforts. It could be viewed as a declaration that though White played the villain on stage, he was not a villain in life. Instead he was just a man from humble beginnings who was ambitious, impetuous and naive living in a time when social change and enfranchisement offered opportunity for the working people. Ultimately, this blessing can be seen as a public affirmation of respectability. This value placed on respectability is a unifying and underlying theme in the forces of class, masculinity, and melodrama that pervaded both White's life and that era in St. John's.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

T. M White - the wheelwright, businessman, actor, labour leader, political hopeful, and civil servant - was a man of his times. He was an ordinary man with extraordinary energy and ability who, though well known in St. John's in his day, has been forgotten by history. Yet his life in St. John's was emblematic of the lives of similar tradesmen in England, North America and Australia. Although personal historical sources pertaining directly to him are few, White was involved in so many public activities through his business affairs, his life in the theatre, his volunteer activities and his forays into politics, that it is possible to trace his life through the contemporary newspapers and the few other available documents. Ultimately in reconstructing White's life one sees a picture of more than the man himself; one gets a glimpse into the society and culture in which he lived. His story becomes a vehicle for a microhistory of aspects of St. John's in the late 19th century.

White resided in this borderland colony of Newfoundland in a port town that was the seat of colonial government. Through the 19th century St. John's transformed from a fishing outpost to a town with aspirations – aspirations that were political, cultural and social. White's life reflected these aspirations. He lived in a borderland place in a borderland time – a period when the middle class was forming. In these physical and temporal borderlands, White was caught in the landwash waiting for his tide to come in. He was a workingman striving to rise to middle class respectability.

White began his life as a workingman living in a time of social change and upward mobility. Manifest in him were the aspirations to “middle class” respectability

that were evident in the emerging middle classes examined by Stuart Blumin, Andrew C. Holman and David Burley. Intertwined with the realization of these aspirations were changing perceptions of masculinity. Society had expectations of how a respectable man would demonstrate manliness. Like Andrew McIlwraith, the young White was a liminal man searching for a place in the world. In his journey, White engaged with the individuals, institutions and ideals prominent in his community. His story is illustrative of a man navigating his way into an emerging middle class.

But White's story, whether viewed as biography or microhistory, can also be viewed through the lens of melodrama. Melodrama, with its grand gestures, predictable roles of heroes, villains and victims, and the polarization of good and evil, was the most popular theatre genre of the Victorian era and it was the genre of choice for White and his contemporaries. Rohan McWilliam suggests an understanding of melodrama may enhance one's understanding of the actions and attitudes of people in the late 19th century. On stage White adopted the villain as his signature role. An analysis of White's life through the lens of melodrama, while highlighting behaviors and relationships characteristic of villains and victims, also reveals the challenges inherent in using the melodramatic lens. People are more than one-dimensional stage characters and their motivations may be complex and for the most part are unknown to others. That said, the parallels to melodrama in plot, characterization and themes are all evident in the life of T.M. White.

White's life can be seen as a pursuit of respectability through the attainment of greater social and financial position. His father was a blacksmith and wage earner who did not achieve financial security. As a young man White demonstrated his desire to

achieve a status higher than his father's. He obviously wanted to be his own master and to be independent. He became a self-employed artisan in the carriage making business, a proprietor – not a wage earner. In keeping with the status and responsibilities of a man of business, White married and had a family and elderly parents that he provided for in his private sphere of home and he was actively engaged in community organizations in the public sphere. His life reflected the division of responsibilities of public and private spheres of Victorian men and women articulated by Davidoff and Hall.

Late 19th century society placed a great value and emphasis on respectability. Fortunately, respectability could be acquired. Inherent in being respectable was the ability of an individual to exercise temperance with respect to alcohol. Organized religion and volunteer organizations combined to promulgate the temperance message for the respectable man. Organizations like the Mechanics' Society and the Total Abstinence and Benefit Society advocated for temperance and provided benefits for their members but they also provided opportunities for education. Through involvements in these types of local associations, men like White developed organizational, leadership and speaking skills; they were exposed to ideas at lectures and in reading rooms; and they learned social etiquette and protocol. They learned to be respectable.

White's endeavors in his work, in the theatre and at the TAB and the Mechanics' Society brought him respectability and enhanced status. He was a leader in his organizations. Typical of many successful leaders in local associations and labour unions, then and now, White attempted to launch a career in politics. He became active in politics shortly after the franchise had been extended to men of all classes. No longer would the reins of power be the exclusive purview of lawyers and merchants. Politicians

needed to court the working-class vote and White appeared to be a natural candidate to do so. White aligned himself with voices supporting the development of the railway and with the interests supporting the Reid railway contract. As Kurt Korneski demonstrates, the railway development was viewed by many St. John's workingmen as a means of achieving the prosperity, security and respectability of proper British men. It was White's close alliance with the Reids that likely undermined him in the eyes of the working people of St. John's whose interests he purported to champion. His brief foray into politics gives a glimpse into the wheeling and dealing of backroom politicians and businessmen of the era. The relationships, interactions and dealings with his political associates cost White his reputation. Perhaps his reputation never fully recovered as evidenced by his poor showing in the St. John's City Council election of 1916. White's last attempt to gain a political seat, coupled with his NIWA involvement, suggest that even late in life White was still unsettled, still seeking something he had not achieved. Perhaps he was still liminal, still hoping and reaching for what he might have perceived to be a better place in society.

White appeared to acquire the trappings of respectability early on in his career, but it was quickly lost – at least for a while. It is safe to say that White did not achieve the social status he aspired to in his youth when he appeared to be seeking public profile, position and power. Ultimately, like Andrew McIlwraith in Ontario and many thousands of others, T. M. White attained an office position, a white-collar job. His story is the story of many men of his era – men who seized new opportunities, who adapted to new expectations of manliness, and who aspired to a place in an emerging and growing

stratum of society. For in the end T. M. White, the man who claimed to be plebian born, joined the ranks of the middle class.

Appendices

Appendix 1



Sketch of the first TAB Hall, Duckworth Street, built 1873. *TAB Jubilee Volume*.



Street view of the second TAB Hall, built after the fire of 1892. *TAB Jubilee Volume*.

Appendix 2



Photograph of Executive of the Total Abstinence and Benefit Society Visiting Government House, circa 1890, A22-149, TRPAD. Individuals are not identified but T. M. White is second from the left.

Appendix 3



Father Matthew Committee. T.M. White back row center (six from left). TAB *Jubilee Volume*

Appendix 4



Officers of the Mechanics' Society (undated) T.M. White seated center.
TRPAD, NF-57-20.

Appendix 5

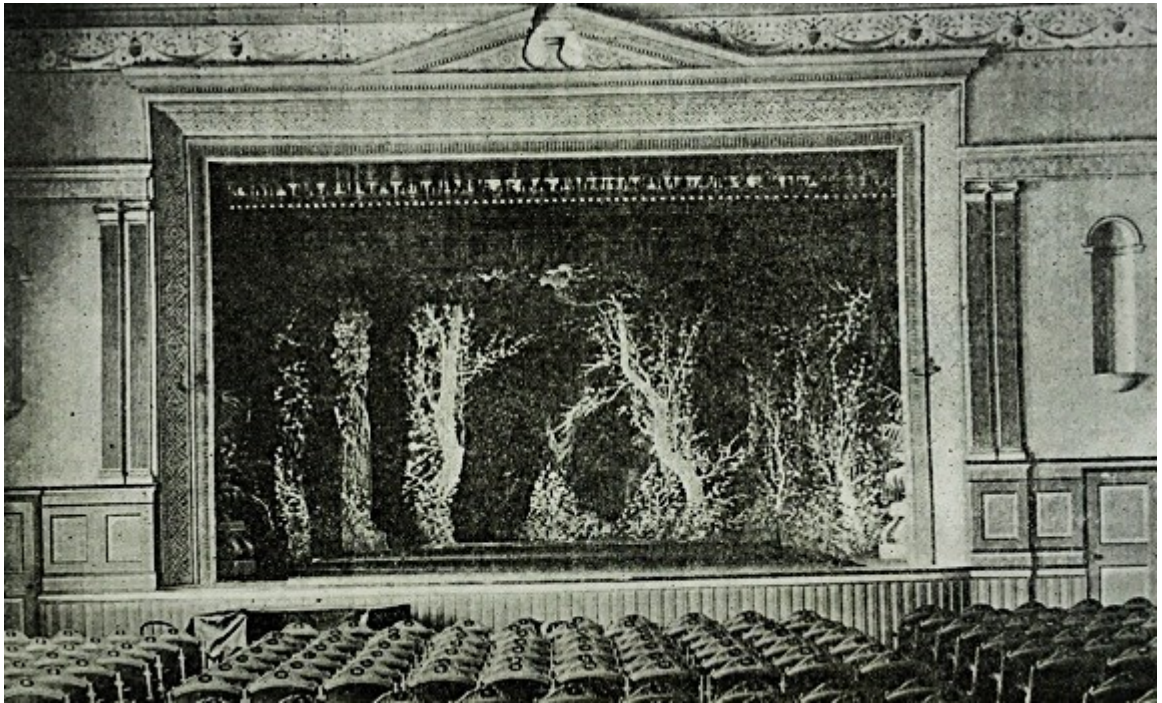


Mechanics' Society building, Water Street (1977). The City of St. John's Archives, 126-01-037



Mechanics' Society building, Water Street, next to south-west corner of the National War Memorial (1982). The City of St. John's Archives, 01-37-088.

Appendix 6



Stage and seating in the TAB building built after the fire of 1892. TAB *Jubilee Volume*.

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The Monitor

Other

Thomas, M. White letter to John F. McDonough October, 1915. (unpublished copy given to Margo Connors from Nella Foley granddaughter of T. M. White in 2014)

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