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CORPORATE PROGRESSIVISM:
THE RISE OF THE AMERICAN STATE

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Abstract

Examining urban-rural history around the turn of the twentieth century is integral to understanding the contemporary legacy of corporations, labor, and the American State today. Much history about the period has been written about the effects of capitalism and the reformers of the period, but the entire story remains incomplete and heavily one-sided. Corporations during the period actively engaged in progressive processes as they transformed the American industrial economy to unforeseen levels of unchecked capitalism, yet historians traditionally label the reformers of the effects of that unchecked economic system "progressive." Progressive transformations of the United States economy reverberated throughout society affecting both the social and political spheres. The socioeconomic transformations wrought by corporate progressives changing the economy from 1870-1930 provided the impetus for the sociopolitical reforms of the Progressive Era. Through a comparative study of the farming community of Spring Valley, WI, and the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company that began there in the 1890s, the progressivism that characterizes the period can be examined more holistically in an urban-rural context. By loosening boundaries between the social, political, economic, and the urban and rural spheres, a better understanding of corporate progressivism and the progressive characterization of the time period can be achieved.

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Introduction

> In ways we often overlook, Americans today are heirs to the late nineteenth century.
> –Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits*

As the fight between unions and corporations resurface with force on the contemporary political agenda in 2011, these words could never be more accurate. People of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed first-hand the formations of a truly industrial America. Struggles between labor and employer characterized much of the period as a currency reliant industrial capitalist system cemented its hold on the American economy. At the heart of this struggle sat the American government, viewed by some progressives as a potential mediator to the disruptive system but by others such as corporations, an obstacle to the rewards of material progress. The government during the nineteenth century had mostly been perceived an obstacle, but "By the end of the century…many Americans looked to the national government to mitigate the negative effects of industrial capitalism."[1] This shift in American political ideology, the shift in the American character that claimed the political could now interact with the society in order to promote the country's well-being, fundamentally transformed the modern American State.[2] Scholars must revisit progressive transformations during this period, from roughly 1860-1930, to more holistically understand modern conflicts and the corporate progressive's role in causing that shift. This can be accomplished by deconstructing rural-urban history in Spring Valley, WI.

Spring Valley today is a community in the northeast corner of Pierce County: one of Wisconsin's westernmost counties at the confluence of the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers. The

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[1] Stephen Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 46.

[2] "American State" here will refer to the United States as a central political unit (national government), as well as the much broader condition of *being* in America. The term will always mean this throughout the paper.

term Spring Valley, for research purposes, will be used to denote the immediate region surrounding the present day town of Spring Valley, not just the town. In this sense it refers more to a geographic locale sprawled across the corners of the townships Gilman, Eau Galle, Cady, and Spring Lake.[3] Spring Valley has a strong farming tradition dating back to its first settlers, and during the 1890s an iron furnace began producing iron for America's booming population and the burgeoning steel industry.[4] Due to Spring Valley's mixed economy of industry and agriculture, both terms associated with the urban and rural within the context of the capitalist system, Spring Valley provides the perfect locale to examine the transformations that caused reform. This can be seen by focusing on how urban industry affected rural agrarian space.

Historians often overlook the presence of industry in rural space, focusing their attention instead on less personal and concrete mechanisms of change (such as the negative effects of the broader industrial capitalist system). In addition, corporations—the main agents of industry—have generally been examined in their traditional urban settings in a strongly capitalist environment. By not examining the industrial presence in rural America, this provides scholars today an incomplete understanding of industry's function in the progressive transformations that reshaped the American State during the period. By examining the relations between the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company, and agrarian Spring Valley, the corporation's role in the progressive transformations during the period can be examined in an environment not altogether connected to the everyday workings of an urban-industrial middle-class capitalist complex.[5]

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[3] See Appendix B for Map.

[4] For a general background of the steel industry see William T. Hogan, *Economic History of the Iron and Steel Industry in the United States* (D.C. Heath and Company, 1971).

[5] A complex where the corporate entity (and business organization) has been thoroughly examined in relation to its role in the urbanization of the urban, the "rise in transportation and communications…the processes of secularization, bureaucratization, and professionalism." Quote in, Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 5.

Breaking down that "modern" complex suggests that corporations propounded a progressive form of capitalism that affected both the urban and the rural at a fundamental level; and that the corporation enabled for intense transformations of society by saturating the social and political spheres with a new form of industrial capitalism. Industrial capitalism's hegemonic character transformed and loosened social, economic, and political boundaries, which reconfigured rural and agrarian spaces to fit into urban middle-class conceptions of society during the time. Responsible for that progressive transformation of the time, corporations provided the impetus for "The Progressives…who worked to purify politics, regulate and restrict the extraordinary power of big business, and fight poverty and other social and economic injustice."[6] Their ("The Progressives") form of *progressivism* primarily transformed social and political discourses and practices of American society during the Progressive Era, but the corporation's form of *progressivism* primarily transformed the economic discourses and practices of society. Hence corporations too were progressive, and in many respects Rebecca Edwards rightfully insinuates that the Gilded Age should be labeled the Early Progressive Era.

Historiography

Scholars of urban-rural history during the Gilded and Progressive eras focus on any number of subjects, but industrial capitalism constitutes the salient principle among all of their work. The economic system has been a peripheral or core element to almost every discussion from 1860-1930; whether historians examine the meaning of democracy, Americanism, progressivism, or any other category of study, the effects of capitalism usually lurks in the background as one of the era's major instigators of change. Industrial capitalism during the time supplanted agrarian capitalism as the premier economic system of the era. The transformations

[6] Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the "Gilded Age" 1865-1905* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

of the era brought changes to society that resonate today in the form of the modern environmental movement, military-industrial complex, and increased government activism.[7] To better understand the effects of the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company on the farm, and the corporation's role in reform, it is imperative to first be grounded within the broader literature of America during the Gilded and Progressive eras.

Sources examining the time period portray it as one of both discontent and optimism. Rebecca Edwards, in *New Spirits: Americans in the 'Gilded Age' 1865-1905*, examines the time period as if it were a new horizon in American history. She provides a fresh analysis that covers the influences of increased immigration in urban areas, growing youth culture, money, sex, religion, and scientific reasoning; surprisingly with an uncharacteristically pessimistic and provoking change in tone in the conclusion that relates all of those transforming American phenomena to the formation of one interlinked economy, government, and state.[8] Other historians, such as Maureen Flanagan, illustrate how Americans reorganized their lives around the era's discourse, attempting to show what democracy meant to various groups of people during the period.[9]

Despite their nuances these historians paint the picture of 1860-1930's America as one of tumultuous upheaval and change, of the Knights of Labor and the Carnegies and Rockefellers, the beginnings of major class and social conflicts. They follow a model that Stephen Diner utilized in *A Very Different Age*, where he examined the social separately from the political, but

[7] Edwards, *New Spirits*, 5.

[8] Edwards, *New Spirits*.

[9] Maureen Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms 1890s-1920s* (University of Oxford Press, 2007).

not altogether unconnected.[10] These historians paint the image of the era as a beginning of sorts, a transformative era of political and social reform that set the modern framework for America today. More importantly to the discussion of urban and rural transformations in Spring Valley, historians paint this general image due to historians' conflicting interpretations of progressivism, industry and the urban, the rural and agriculture, liberalism, and modernity to name just a few subjects historians have examined since at least the 1950s.

Richard Hofstadter provided the first great analysis of the intense transformations that characterized the period. Contending that the "populist and progressive movements took place during a rapid and sometimes turbulent transition from the conditions of an agrarian society to those of modern urban life," Hofstadter asserted that a loss of social and economic standing pushed reformers towards activism.[11] Early scholars of the period, like Hofstadter, downplayed the role of the farm and the importance of America's agrarian past. They overdramatized the impact of urban capitalism and its virtues, probably as a result of the Soviet undertones of their own time in the 1950s and 60s. Nevertheless they are important due to the mostly urban-industrial perspective of history that they portray, and the questions they produced about subjects such as progressive, populist, and other reform movements.

Continuing the urban-industrial narration of the period, Robert H. Wiebe's contribution in *The Search for Order: 1870-1920* highlighted another question about the time period. Contending that American values fundamentally shifted from a small town local ideal to those of a growing national middle class, he argued that the rationality and managerial skills of the organizing middle class provided a booming industrial America with a sense of order in the early

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[10] Stephen Diner, A *Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).

[11] Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1955): 7. Hofstadter cements his status thesis further 134-137.

twentieth century.[12] The middle class provided the basis for progressive ideals that helped society to handle the disruptions associated with capitalism during the time. The search for order, some organizing principle of life, became another theme of study for this period where industrial capitalism's hegemonic nature began to influence human activity in all spheres of social life (some of the more prominent include the political, economic, religious, ethnic, and gender spheres). Historians following him from the 1970s examine these spheres more closely.

Historians such as David P. Thelen in the 1970s contended that economic depressions created inequality, forcing some to advocate change.[13] In many respects Thelen's interpretation can be likened to the thesis expounded by Hofstadter, but it is not the same by any means. Similarly to the 1970s, scholars in the 1980s focused on the economic processes during the time period. Alan Trachtenberg's *The Incorporation of America* focused less on business and the middle-class as did historians that preceded him, and instead focused on the ambiguities of cultural conceptions during the time. Contending that "economic incorporation wrenched American society from the moorings of familiar values" through a process of contradiction and conflict, Trachtenberg offered a very neo-Marxian view of the time that focused on the socioeconomic-political relationships of society.[14] Trachtenberg does what historians before him did not do, and that is he focused on the effects of state-capitalism on cultural values and

[12] Wiebe has a masterful analysis of the time period, albeit it outdated and rooted in industrially biased conceptions of modernity. In Wiebe's own words, "the heart of progressivism was the ambition of the new middle class to fulfill its destiny through bureaucratic means," in Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 166.

[13] David P. Thelen, *The New Citizenship: Origins of Progressivism in Wisconsin, 1885-1900*, (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1972).

[14] Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America.* The easiest way to conceptualize the term "economic incorporation" would be to think of it as a process that centralizes power in a hierarchical and geographic sense. The industrial system provided a mechanism to reign in disparate aspects of American society (ethnicities, religions, agricultural economies, etc.) to be ordered by a central power, usually a State capitalist government.

perceptions—very difficult and fluid subjects that contemporary historians commonly attempt to portray in their social histories of various facets of American society.

Similar to Diner's work, social historians of the 1990s can again be said to be a product of their times due to their focus on the social transformations that characterized the Gilded and Progressive eras.[15] Many rejected the urban focus of the histories and a neo-rural history began. Their literature inflated the role of the farm during the period, shifting the scholarship of the period from 1870-1930 to a discussion focused on rural space rather than a discussion centered on urban space. Considering the literature from the 1960s and 1970s that focused on labor, the middle-class, and urban spaces, this had the effect of including the rural perspective into the mainstream historical discussion, smashing long held assumptions and stereotypes about rural peoples. Historian Jane Pederson provides an example of this in her work, *Between Memory and Reality*.[16] The resurgence of rural history has sparked historians to focus on the cultural aspects of a new history with the agricultural perspective as its focus rather than the industrial, challenging the belief that rural communities have been developing "a poorer and less sophisticated version of the larger urban culture."[17]

Historians such as Susan Sessions Rugh delved into subjects such as the origin of the family farm culture, its relation to the national market, and the effects on it from a developing broader national culture to better understand the origins of this rural perspective. Her work contends that local families and farms lost control of the local economy due to market-driven

[15] As opposed to previous historians such as Hofstadter who focused on the political and urban sphere because of political undertones of the 1950s and 1960s, and historians such as Wiebe who focused on the economic and urban sphere because of the class conflict in America during the 1960s and 1970s.

[16] Jane Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality: Family and Community in Rural Wisconsin, 1870-1970* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

[17] Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality*, 232.

capitalism by the end of the nineteenth century.[18] Other rural historians such as Mary Neth examined family farm culture as an agricultural socioeconomic system that capitalism industrialized; she shows the origins of Agribusiness and how the industrial system altered social boundaries on the farm (such as gender boundaries).[19] Some of the best rural histories have used gender and sexuality as central analytical tools.

Others rural scholars, such as political scientist Elizabeth Sanders, examined the farms' role in constructing the modern state, claiming that "the dynamic stimulus for Populist and Progressive Era state expansion was the periphery agrarians' drive to establish public control over rampaging capitalism."[20] Hence by the year 2000, Wiebe's analysis that progressive ideals originated from a growing middle-class has been harshly challenged, but the search for order characterizing the period remained. With Sanders contribution, the historiography of the period has thus developed two major schemas to conceive of the transformations occurring during the period: the urban and the rural.

Spring Valley inherited this era's legacy, for good or bad, similar to Americans today. It is a legacy that must be fully understood in both an urban and rural context, because it is the urban and rural context that rested at the heart of the era's broad social discourse across political and economic boundaries. For this reason, an analysis of the transformations occurring in Spring Valley must be conducted, because Spring Valley has a uniquely Midwestern history associated with both agriculture and industry. Understanding these transformations will provide a more

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[18] Susan Sessions Rugh, *Our Common Country: Family Farming, Culture, and Community in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2001).

[19] Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). In so doing, communications between rural communities about poor conditions provided the impetus for rural political organization, see 270-271.

[20] Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State 1877-1917*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 3-4.

complete picture of the corporate relationship to reform of the progressive transformation wrought by corporations: industrial capitalism. Examining Spring Valley in this urban-rural context will loosen the boundaries between these two spheres, and bridge the barriers of the political, economic, and social spheres that historians have constructed to examine the period. This will provide a better understanding of the progressive changes that formed the modern American State during the time as well as corporate progressivism.

Family and Farm in Early Spring Valley

Family Farming epitomized the way of life in Spring Valley during the post-Civil War period leading up to the 1890s. Family Farming in Spring Valley represented more than a means to earn a living and raise a family prior to the rise of the industrial economy. It represented the ability to make a living and raise a family on one's own terms.[21] The success or failure of the farm rested on the internal dynamics of the family, and the humble beginnings of America's capitalist system actually benefited the farm before corporate industrialism intensified the system to the point it practically controlled them. When the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company came to Spring Valley in the 1890's, it came as an outsider to a strongly agricultural society that had a sizeable Norwegian minority and a land-oriented Jeffersonian yeomanry tradition.

Norwegian immigrants Martin and Anna Maria Madsen emigrated from Norway on April 30, 1868 with two children, Ole and Bertha. Their story illustrated a common way of life in the area. The family, had planned to live with Martin's brother Nils in Spring Valley. After a long journey across the North Sea, and down the St. Lawrence Seaway, the Madsen's finally reached Prescott, WI: a small river and farming community located directly at the confluence of the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers. From Prescott they walked approximately twenty miles north

[21] The historical literature is rich on the subject, the best being Rugh, *Our Common Country,* 57-104*;* but others include, Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality*; and Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*.

along the telegraph lines to River Falls, only to then turn east and follow the lines another twenty miles to Spring Valley. Upon reaching a crossroads, the Madsen family had no idea which way to continue, so they chose a path and soon came across a house. At the house the Madsen family met the Haugs, who from Anna Maria's account, "were glad to see them and invited them in for dinner on a white tablecloth!" The Haugs helped the Madson's move to Nils Madson's house on August 2, just "in time to help with the harvest of wheat." A story such as this typified many journeys to the region during the time as well as a way of life for many.[22]

Having no railroad to Spring Valley during the post-Civil War period meant, that for many, that walking constituted the only mode of transportation to Spring Valley. Norwegian migrants particularly fell into this model, because many made the voyage to America with little more than a suitcase full of their personal items. To have a horse or cart would have been a luxury for many. What is interesting about the Madson's journey, not to discount their arduous journey across the ocean, is evident in Anna Maria's account of finally reaching Nils' house. Immediately the Martin family began to help with the source of livelihood for most early frontier people in the region. They began, as Anna Maria's claimed, to harvest wheat at Nils' farm.[23]

After helping Nils with the harvests, as well as taking a job in Menomonie, WI, in 1873 Martin moved from Nils' house. He had in five years repaid Nils for paying Martin's family's passage to America. Martin continued to walk every day to Nils' farm to help, while he, Anna Maria, and their two children created their own niche in the local farming community. The family lived in a small "log hut," and "were so happy to have…a few animals [and] a cow."

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[22]Arnold Madson Papers, River Falls Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-River Falls, River Falls, WI; similar comparisons can be drawn relating the Madsons' extensive walking to Upton Sinclair's account of how a Lithuanian family journeyed to Chicago's meat packing district, see, Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle*, (New York: Doubleday Page & Co., 1906): 23-34.

[23] Arnold Madson Papers, River Falls Area Research Center.

Anna Maria would often lock the animals up for fear that a bear might get at them.[24] The Madsen's story illustrated how Spring Valley in the post-Civil War period did not resemble the small town that it would become with the advent of the iron corporation. Another Norwegian immigrant, Anders Jenson Stortroen, described a similar picture of Spring Valley's origins.

To describe the vision of society Stortroen painted of the Spring Valley region, one might have to travel back in time to Puritan New England in the middle to late 17th century, and imagine the traditional puritan family living in the processes and discourses of 19th century America. Family and Godly power governed communities during that period of time in American history.[25] Not coincidentally, the many non-Norwegian individuals that settled Spring Valley from about 1865-1890 came from Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New England heritages.[26] Stortroen claimed the opportunity existed to raise a family on the land's bounty in "good Christian, God fearing ways," if one so wished.[27] Stortroen's account of the area may only indicate a particular way of living in the rural Spring Valley region, but Stortoen provides a medium to link the Madson's anecdotal account of the area to the broader agricultural system operating in society.

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[24] Arnold Madson Papers, River Falls Area Research Center.

[25] To read some important literature on the subject see, Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, "The Godly Family in New England and Its Transformation," in *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1988); for a more literary read of the Puritan time period, family, and religious order, see Nathanial Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical, Historical, and Cultural Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Contemporary Critical Perspectives,* ed. By Ross Murfin (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006).

[26] See U.S. Census in bibliography; Historian Susan Sessions Rugh finds similar demography trends in, Rugh, *Our Common Country,* 79-86.

[27] Anders Jensen Stortroen to Family, 1858-1862, Stortoen Letters, River Falls Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-River Falls, River Falls, WI. He also discussed prospects of house-building and described the general conditions of the area.

The implications of Stortoen's account highlight many aspects of the emerging community. The most blatant implication has to do with religion and order. Stortroen made it very clear that in Spring Valley one could raise a family off of the land; that this family could be religious or not, they had the choice. Reflecting the broader image of the area, Stortroen created an image of the region focused on a cluster of family farms, some religious, some not as religious. Here they could build a community centered on family and religion as the sources of authority in their lives. In this regard Stortroen supports historian Jane Pederson's contention that "immigrants and migrants left behind them worlds based on kinship, local community, and church, and these would long be the primary institutions of rural Trempealeau."[28] They "brought a way of life deeply rooted in a very distant past, which they adapted to the opportunities and demands" of their time.[29] Stortroen called for fellow Norwegians to settle in the Spring Valley region of Pierce County, just northwest of the rural Trempealeau that Pederson studied. They, as well as Americans from the east, brought their traditions and institutions with them making agriculture and family the salient principles around which rural peoples created community.

The most salient principle, the family, provided a mechanism to create order in Spring Valley; the family represented the highest point of authority in the local region that lacked a broader authoritative doctrine such as religion, a strong industrialist market, or a strong formal local government not based on informal rites, ceremonies, and practices.[30] Relating this back to the Madsen family, Martin's kinship with Nils allowed for Martin's passage to America with his family. The familial bond between the two brothers then continued as Martin helped Nils on his farm after moving away to begin his own small farm. In a society absent of an entrenched

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[28] Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality*, 116.

[29] Pederson, *Between Memory and* Reality, 228-229.

[30] Even those public local institutions reflected the privatize principle of the family, as will be shown.

market economy centralized by money, when someone needed help they could not simply pay for someone to help them. Instead they asked someone of their own kin, and whatever project needed doing would be done.[31]

In the absence of kin, or in situations where kin could not provide enough labor, this situation could have been translated to apply to a large section of the community. If a barn needed to be raised, one called on their neighbors and together they quickly raised the barn. It became a truly social event where friends and neighbors socialized with each other. "Simply to assure farm operations over time required cooperation among family members," and many farming communities provided for legal mechanisms to ensure continued cooperation.[32] The family's cooperative nature extended to govern developing communities. It is this type of social thinking that separated farming communities from their urban counterparts and may also have served as a model for urban unionization efforts. It is also this kind of thinking that helped exacerbate urban-rural tensions in Spring Valley evident in the 1890s, when the village became incorporated, and industry and banking established a larger presence in the rural agrarian community—subtly eroding that privatized form of sociopolitical regulation with a more public form.

From Farming Frontier to Rural Community

The Madson and Stortroen records show through settler's eyes that farming dominated the social landscape of the Spring Valley region by about 1880. Farming gained preeminence in the region as settlers such as Madson trickled in after the lumber crews moved through the area.

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[31] Arnold Madson Papers, River Falls Area Research Center.

[32] Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 101. Legal mechanisms in Spring Valley will be discussed later in the paper, but Mintz and Kellogg provide a good discussion of them more broadly. Pederson's discussion of the rural way of life does as well, as the theme of family is intricately woven into her narrative, in Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality*.

To see lumber lazily floating down the Eau Galle on its way to the greater Mississippi would not have been an uncommon sight in the early post-Civil War days of Spring Valley.[33] When the timber flow dried and farming remained as the mode to make a living, agrarianism fully took root in the valley. Farming families became the economic and social force of power in the region. Not surprisingly, the traditional forms of social control associated with an agrarian lifestyle during the time governed the emerging community. When Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company began its operations in 1895, an agrarian way of life truly dominated Spring Valley.

Spring Valley became part of the "new butter region" by 1895 as the wheat growing frontier economy came to a close.[34] Spring Valley produced almost one-half of the total butter production for Pierce County; this represented almost six times more butter than the next closest town, which had the benefit of a creamery (see Figure 1). Spring Valley would not get a creamery cooperative until sometime between 1895 and 1905 according to the census records. Most farms produced butter for local and domestic uses, because as Pederson shows, butter had little economic value.[35]

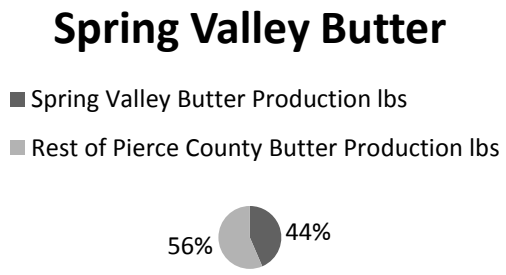

Figure 1. Data from Department of State, *Tabular Statements of the Census Enumeration and the Agricultural, Mineral, and Manufacturing Interests of the State of Wisconsin*, (Madison: State Printer, 1895), 521.

[33] Harvey Mason Preston to Spring Valley Sun, 1896, Harvey Mason Preston Letter, River Falls Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-River Falls, River Falls, WI.

[34] Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality*, 79.

[35] Pederson, *Between Memory and* Reality, 79.

Extensive butter production suggested that, in combination with the other crops and livestock raised, Spring Valley had an insignificant reliance on a capitalist economy. Some historians, such as Susan Rugh, claim the strong presence of the capitalist market in northern Illinois after the Civil War "eroded local control." That it eroded local control of the family, its institutions, and traditional socioeconomic conceptions of gender. [36] Assuming the accuracy of Rugh's findings, it can be stated even more firmly that by 1895 the community in Spring Valley as a whole accurately reflected its frontier farming legacy told by Stortroen and the Madson family in previous generations, and fit into the model many historians make about rural Midwestern agrarianism: small family farms dominated the agricultural sector of the Midwest.[37]

Family and kinships dominated the area because wages were not prevalent enough to exert influence over small farmers able to provide for their own living, and the relative absence of wages and strong industrial capitalism kept socioeconomic gender boundaries more open and fluid. As Mintz and Kellogg add, "the commercial revolution…actually strengthened family bonds and obligations," the forms of local control that Rugh suggests it eroded. "Family cohesion stemmed in large measure from the marginal economic existence of many working-class families."[38] The discrepancy between Rugh, and Mintz and Kellogg, could very well be the degree to which capitalism influenced rural America.

Some capitalism probably benefited farms because it allowed them to purchase items on the side that helped farm operations, but the conversion of the economic system to a strong form of industrial capitalism made the family farm reliant on the system for their success, rather than

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[36] Rugh, *Our Common Country*, 130. Given Rugh's interpretation, this meant that with the absence of a strong industrially oriented economy in Spring Valley, industrial capitalism could not erode the power of the family.

[37] Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 7.

[38] Mintz and Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions*, 104.

reliant on the family and local forms of control. This becomes particularly evident when industrial capitalism based on currency, with a standardized and common value, replaced traditional forms of capitalism such as exchanging a gun for a piece of land.[39] Essentially farms became employees of the system, rather than self-employed.[40] This accomplishment of the industrial system is reflected in the masculinization of farming space during the time.

In 1905 a new category, "farmer," appeared in the Wisconsin State Census (which had a much more industrial tone).[41] Rather than measuring total farms as had always been done in the past, by additionally measuring the "farmer" as an occupation, the government (acting due to the progressive transformations of the corporate economy) reified conceptions of masculinity among the populace; this having the effect to construct rigid conceptions of gender boundaries in society. Previous examples from Spring Valley, such as the Madson letters, show much looser boundaries in that Anna Maria rejoiced that they had arrived in Spring Valley in time to help with the wheat harvest—women included.[42] Despite these developing forces of masculinization, traditional forms of local control rooted with the family farming ideology, not wage employment and conceptions of and idealistic conceptions of the urban-middle class, provided order in rural Spring Valley.

Figure 1's shows that produce in the area had little connection to wage-employment or an industrial economy due to butter's low economic value. The degree of wage employment is

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[39] Harvey Mason Preston to Spring Valley Sun, River Falls Area Research Center.

[40] The term "farms" is used here *in lieu* of "farmers," because the term "farmers" has a masculine connotation and inaccurately characterizes the labor dynamics of the farm.

[41] Department of State, *Tabular Statements of the Census Enumeration and the Agricultural, Dairying and Manufacturing Interests of the State of Wisconsin*, (Madison: State Printer, 1905); for a good general analysis of the masculinization of the farm see Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 214-244.

[42] For a good discussion of gender and the rural economy see Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality*, 157-184; for another discussion that questioningly challenges separate sphere ideology see Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 25.

evident in Figure 2, which compares the number of agricultural wage-earners and manufacturing wage-earners. Relative total wages of each are shown in Figure 3. These figures provide data from all of Pierce County, because specific data to the Spring Valley locale is not available in the census records. Spring Valley had such a negligible manufacturing base that the 1895 census left that category blank in the table. This suggested Spring Valley had a negligible wage-based economy, both in the agricultural sector as well as industrial. Figure 2 and Figure 3 does show, however, that there were more agrarian laborers before the advent of industry in the region. A comparison of the two also shows that manufacturers were paid more relative to agricultural laborers, and thus were more valuable positions in relation to the growing currency economy. Their wages were a full six percent higher than the proportion of the economy that they constituted.

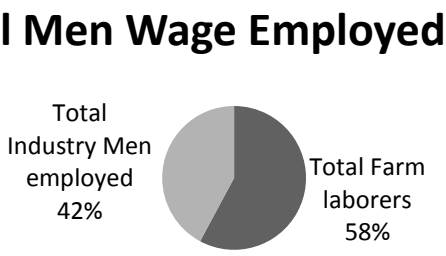

Figure 2: Data from Department of State, *Tabular Statements 1895*, 511.

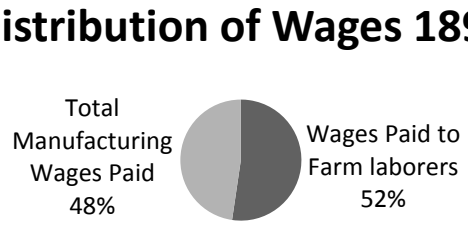

Figure 3: Data from Department of State, *Tabular Statements 1895*, 987; and 1014.

The currency market surely existed in Spring Valley as data from Pierce County shows, but a market reliant on currency had little power or authority there. As historian Jane Pederson

stated, "Although farmers produced wheat for a national market, much of the work nonetheless related to a household economy and was local in orientation."[43] Farmers did not need to possess money to accomplish work, because they could rely on traditional kinship networks and a reciprocal relationship with their neighbors. "A farmer would rely first on his sons and other male relatives before spending cash for expensive labor."[44] The market as a secondary function to those networks increased the strength of kinship ties.

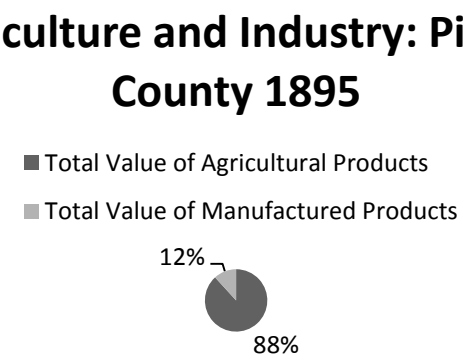

Figure 4: Data from Department of State, *Tabular Statements 1895*, 1021.

Just before the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company began, Pierce County ranked 13th in total farms among all Wisconsin counties, and the separation between the value of agricultural products and the value of manufactured products represented an enormous disparity even by 2011 standards: $2,301,109 to $308,130 (See Figure 4). This disparity reflected larger facets of the US economy during the time, and highlights Figure 3 that suggested the growing currency economy in the region valued manufacturing labor more; manufacturing laborers had higher wages despite their disproportionately fewer numbers. These incredible disparities in the Midwest and across the nation, however, set the stage for political struggles over the meaning of America; as industry and manufacturing became preeminent, the closing of the disparity between

[43] Pederson, *Between Memory and* Reality, 11.

[44] Rugh, *Our Common* Country, 16.

the total value of farming and manufactured goods signified one aspect of urbanizing processes transforming rural America to fit middle-class conceptions of modernity, and the devaluation of the farming economy began.[45]

Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company

While farming by the 1860s dominated most of Wisconsin, including Spring Valley, as the way of life for most, iron mining and smelting emerged as a growing industry. Although lead mining in Wisconsin's southwest corner, and iron mining near Michigan's Upper Peninsula predate Wisconsin State history, between the years 1860 and 1880 Wisconsin's total iron production exploded. By 1880 Wisconsin ranked sixth among all states in total iron production, whereas ten years earlier it had ranked twelfth. With a net production of 178,935 tons of iron by 1880, in twenty short years Wisconsin's net iron production exploded from 2,500 tons in 1860.[46] Smelting of the mined ore began to increase in the late 1850's, as three furnaces began operation in south central Wisconsin. The smallest of the three furnaces operated in Black River Falls.[47] It is the furnace from Black River Falls that brought a piece of Wisconsin's industrial history to rural Spring Valley in the form of the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company.

The Spring Valley Iron Ore Company began with the entrepreneurship of two individuals who brought to Spring Valley the blast furnace from Black River Falls, Frank S. Eagle and Fred Wright. Eagle and Wright moved the furnace from Black River Falls because it had been abandoned; the iron "schists [ore deposits] occurred in great abundance" in Black River Falls,

[45] See Appendix A. Appendix A consists of various statistical graphs portraying the devaluation of farming goods opposed to manufactured goods across time. It also shows the changes in the labor composition in 1905 Spring Valley to one based on manufacturing labor.

[46] Hogan. *Economic History of the Iron and Steel*.

[47] T. C. Chamberlain, *Geology of Wisconsin: Survey of 1873-1879,* (Commissioners of Public Printing, 1883), 613.

"but no one at all conversant with iron ores or iron smelting" would have based an enterprise on them.[48] Their high sulfur content detracted much from their value and limited their uses. Due to this, the furnace in Black River Falls failed numerous times, so new owners, Eagle and Wright, used the abandoned furnace for their company in Spring Valley—which had the same schists as Black River Falls. To start the company, Wright provided the cash while Eagle provided the experience and "a lot of old stuff."[49] Eagle provided engines, pumps, scrap sheet iron, etc., from his family's furnaces in Ohio. To strengthen Eagle and Wright's iron furnace they formed a Consolidated Company.

To consolidate their company, Eagle and Wright essentially connected to their company every resource industry necessary towards operating a successful iron furnace. "With them joined as Stockholders in a Consolidated Company called Wisconsin Mining and Lumber Co., Mr. Sabin and Mr. Buffington of Stillwater [MN], another party from St. Paul, and Mr. A Brennamen of Boston." The stockholder from Boston owned the major railroad in the Spring Valley region. Among the other stockholders, Sabin owned a brickyard, the Cady Mines, a stone quarry, and all the "wood and timber within 6 to 10 miles around Spring Valley," while little is known of Mr. Buffington other than his connection to Sabin. "It was stipulated amongst them" that the others would "mine and furnish the Ore, and Limestone and Charcoal and do all the freight hauling."[50] In this manner, Eagle and Wright created an interlocking network of other industries with direct interests in the success of their furnace business. This provided insurance that the Spring Valley Iron Ore Company could get its raw materials and ship its finished

[48] T.C. Chamberlain, *Geology of Wisconsin*, 613.

[49] Henry B. Fiedler to Son, February 14, 1922, Henry B. Fiedler Collection, River Falls Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-River Falls, River Falls, WI, 3.

[50] Henry B. Fiedler to Son, February 14, 1922, Henry B. Fiedler Collection, River Falls Area Research Center, 3.

product. When workers finished erecting the furnace in March of 1893 and the company started production, economic depression forced the company to lay off all but a few employees.[51]

Throughout the early years of the company, workers would frequently be laid off and operations shut down. In February 1894 the furnace started again and ran until the fall of 1895. It shut down for the second time because of fighting between "the two factions," Eagle and Wright on one side, and "Sabin and his crowd" on the other side. The furnace sat idle until May of 1896 where it ran again until December, before shutting down for a third time. Throughout all of this the owners only kept a handful of people hired, including Henry B. Fiedler as the superintendent. In 1896 Fiedler leased out the machine shop and did all the machine work for the local sawmills in the area until 1898. With no prospects of the Iron furnace re-opening, he left Spring Valley for Milwaukee that same year.[52]

The consistent failing of the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company during the 1890's probably resulted from the various booms and busts of the U.S. economy during the decade.[53] The years 1893-1894 saw a huge drop in total iron output, as well as in 1896.[54] These drops in production correspond to the dates the furnace laid people off. Fiedler did not return to Spring Valley from Milwaukee until the demand for pig iron returned and the furnace re-opened in the spring of 1899, probably as a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898—which he noted in passing as an issue of the time.[55] By 1900 "the combined output of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois,

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[51] Henry B. Fiedler to Son, River Falls Area Research Center; a brief overview of the resources necessary for a blast furnace can be found in Hogan, *Economic History of the Iron and Steel,* 391.

[52] Henry B. Fiedler to Son, River Falls Area Research Center.

[53] A good overview can be seen in Edwards, *New Spirits*; or Diner, *A Very Different Age*; these booms and busts are also integral to the theses of Hofstadter. They characterized much of the 1890s economy.

[54] Hogan, *Economic History of Iron and Steel,* 184.

[55] Henry B. Fiedler to Son, River Falls Area Research Center, 4.

Wisconsin, West Virginia, and Indiana accounted for 85% of the country's iron and steel production."[56] This increased interest in the region brought new management from the traditionally more productive iron and steel states.

The furnace became very profitable during these years, and in 1900 the "old crowd" who still controlled the quarries, rails, and mines became "jealous." In 1900 Mr. Bremann, the owner of the railroad, tripled freight charges and ultimately ran the new management out of the furnace, whereby he replaced management with one of his own, Frank Kernan of Pennsylvania. Kernan believed he could produce iron at $13 a ton if Sabin and Bremann would permit him to make repairs costing upwards of $8,000. Previous management could only produce iron at $15 to the ton, so the owners went along with it, only to be dismayed that repairs cost roughly $18,000 and iron could not be produced much cheaper. In fact, under Kernan's management the iron cost about $20 to the ton, and he had been selling it at $15 a ton. In total, Kernan cost the company about $40,000 and the furnace shut down again for over a year. Having to salvage the company, longtime owner Frank Wright stepped-in and paid $46,000 to bring it back from bankruptcy, only to sell the company shortly thereafter.[57]

According to Fiedler, who as superintendent oversaw the company throughout all of the turmoil for roughly its first decade, the new owner Wallace Foote bought the company in 1901 for $75,000. Foote visited the Gilman and Cady Mines as an expert for a group from Chicago looking to invest in the Spring Valley operations. He must have found something that he like about the ore, because he circumvented the Chicago group and personally bought the Spring Valley Iron Ore Company. Fiedler briefly stayed on to operate the furnace for Foote as it intermittently shut down and reopened like it had under previous management. From 1892 to

[56] Hogan, *Economic History of Steel and Iron*, 184.

[57] Henry B. Fiedler to Son, River Falls Area Research Center, 5.

1907 the furnace "was in blast" for a total of seven years, but by 1907 the furnace began to steadily produce pig iron as rural agrarian Spring Valley continued to transform.[58]

Operations ran relatively smoothly after 1907, with the furnace only shutting down a handful of times until it closed in the 1930's. During this period the furnace in Spring Valley became a cog in the powerful United States Steel Corporation.[59] The furnace sold pig and wrought iron, but it also served as the medium to the larger steel conglomerates by sending pig iron to be refined to feed America's appetite for steel. One of Fiedler's last duties with Spring Valley's furnace (before Foote dismissed him) involved hiring twenty to thirty new men, and a foreman, for the mines and quarry. Foote also charged Fiedler with getting the "Bulgarians" to keep working, as well as the men that their "new boarding house keeper speaks of." Boarding houses during the time were not uncommon during the time, and neither were eastern European laborers.[60] Foote brought to Spring Valley what he knew from his family's connections to the management of the Illinois Steel Company in Chicago. Thus the furnace in Spring Valley operated no differently than the larger steel furnaces in Chicago, Milwaukee, and western Pennsylvania.

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[58] Pig Iron is a brittle iron due to its high carbon content, which reflects Spring Valley's ore schists because of their many impurities. During the time, pig iron would have been made into wrought or caste iron such as the iron used to make stoves, heaters, fences or house decorations, or shipped as ingots for further refinement into steel. In this sense, the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company sold goods that were used to build anything from lawn statues to Victorian houses to skyscrapers.

[59] The United States Steel Corporation was created in 1901, creating one large and overarching producer that altered the "character of the [steel] industry," in Hogan, *Economic History of Steel and Iron*, 443.

[60] For dismissal see Henry B. Fiedler to Son, River Falls Area Research Center; for last few duties see Frederick Foote to Henry B. Fiedler, in folder *Correspondence June 20, 1907 to December 27, 1912,* in Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934*, River Falls Area Research Center, University of River Falls Wisconsin, River Falls, WI. For an interesting piece of muckraking literature painting a picture of eastern European immigrants and urban industry, read Sinclair Lewis's *The Jungle*. The best historical characterization of the sudden growth of Eastern European migration can be seen in Diner, *A Very Different Age*, 76-102.

The nature of Foote's iron furnace, in the process of transforming rural spaces, supports historian Elizabeth Sanders' account of the mixed political economic nature of Chicago.[61] The furnace had local rural connections as well as national urban ones, and the discourse between the furnace and its connections played out through political practices—to be evidenced shortly. The Spring Valley Iron Company's connection to America's industrial sector of the economy included such connections to Standard Oil, Milwaukee Gas and Coke Co., the First National Bank of Chicago, and the Omaha railways. Larger sums of money went to these places than the much more numerous rural connections to the company, although letters from these connections more frequently inhabit records of the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company.[62] The interactive forces at play between industry and agriculture during the time, Spring Valley Iron and Farms respectively, dictated much of the transformations that occurred as a result of that presence.

Transformations, Tensions, and Tribulations

"…The Americanism we need," puts me in mind of old Abr. Lincoln—Yes we need one even stronger now for Capitalism is going to keep on until this Country will see the biggest Revolution ever known.

—Henry B. Fiedler, *Letter 1922*

Henry B. Fiedler illustrated nicely the effects of capitalism sweeping the country by 1922. Not only did he characterize capitalism, but by invoking Americanism and Abraham Lincoln he inadvertently shows how the economy permeated the social and political spheres. It

[61] Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 19. Unfortunately due to this mix of industrial and agricultural influence on the state, Sanders asserts that the Midwestern region generally had less influence than southern or western regions on the construction of the national regulatory state. This is where Sander's well-done analysis is incomplete, because it was precisely in the Midwest region that the transformative interactions between all of the forces that participated in "rampaging" capitalism collided and formed modern America.

[62] Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934.*

seemed for Fiedler that the sudden intensification of the industrial economy and the resulting transformative changes occurring across social, ethnic, religious, and political boundaries eroded whatever he perceived to be the American way of life. By conducting a comparative analysis of chapters two and three, generally speaking farming and industry in rural America, the changes occurring in Spring Valley can be shown to compliment a study of Spring Valley from 1910 to 1930 that highlights tensions that brewed in rural America. The Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company represented a corporation that provided for the hegemonic power of industrial capitalism to subtly reconfigure rural agrarian spaces, causing tension as it brought disparate forms of being under one overarching economic system.[63] Rural America adapted to the new industrial system by incorporating it into their traditional ways of living, but they did so while playing the corporation's game.

In much ethnographic and social history, as well as anthropology, kinship systems have been heavily studied across cultures and societies. The presence of the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company did not supplant traditional kinship systems in rural America that settler's brought with them, but it did transpose a contrasting impersonal networking system onto rural America, effectively eroding paternalistic forms of control. When Eagle and Wright established the company, they created a consolidated company of other industries that had begun around Spring Valley and extended into western Minnesota. They tied local lumber businesses (legacy to the area's frontier lumbering), limestone quarries, and the railroad to establish the furnace and ensure its success in the growing economy.[64]

[63] The term "forms of being" is meant here to represent ways of existence, cultures if one will. Common ways of life are German, Irish, Catholic, elderly, youthful, male, female, i.e., identities.

[64] Henry B. Fiedler to Son, River Falls Area Research Center, 3.

This network differed from the family farm culture that, like Nils Madsen, relied on his brother Martin and the community members to harvest the fields. Anthropologists Paul Shackel and Mathew Palus found in their study of an industrial community during the period that paternalistic forms of control shifted to absentee forms of ownership.[65] These findings from an urban industrial community can be applied to urbanizing rural Spring Valley. Without the presence of the corporation, this impersonal network might never have been established even though the effects of the intensified capitalist system certainly would have extended over agrarian America. The network provided an example of the generation of absentee forms of ownership in rural Spring Valley; the owners (such as Eagle or Foote) rarely visited Spring Valley, but they oversaw and controlled much of what the laborer could economically do in Spring Valley by virtue of writing their paychecks—not the personal paternal figure.[66] The transformation of the family farm into a stronger business enterprise also had direct connections to the Iron business.

Synthesizing some of the major themes discussed through this paper, family in rural America had just as much importance as family from urban America during the time. When Frederick Foote bought the company, he brought in his son and brother to operate the furnace. Questioning their expertise, former superintendent Fiedler wrote to his son "how well those Expert[s] succeeded old Jake Bauer can tell you better than I can."[67] The point is, strong kinship existed in both the urban and the rural, but the corporation brought to Spring Valley an impersonal business network that fit into the emerging industrial system much better than more

[65] Paul A. Shackel and Mathew M. Paulus, "The Gilded Age and Working-Class Industrial Communities," *American Anthropologist* 108 no., 4 (Dec. 2006): 828-841.

[66] See Correspondence Folders, Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934.* This form of ownership and control is broadly outlined in an urban setting in Diner, *A Very Different Age,* 30-49.

[67] Henry B. Fiedler to Son, River Falls Area Research Center, 5.

personal rural economic connections and forms of control.[68] Familial relations were too personal for the increasing amount of transactions between actors in the economy and were thus depersonalized by the emerging corporate dogma. Combined with a dominant capital economy, this network gave Spring Valley an urban aura that meshed with entrenched agrarian ways of living, often causing tensions as the boundaries associated with the urban and rural shifted. The erosion of paternal forms of control by the hegemonic character of the economy did not, however, mean that traditional conceptions of family and kinship eroded as well. Instead the erosion of paternal forms of control (replaced by impersonal ones) highlighted the disruptive nature of the economic system, and how the system reordered how the family interacted with society at-large. The farm reflected this as well.

If the farm during the time constituted an extension of the family, as the literature suggests, then it represented the economic sphere of the family. The larger industrial system brought the wage system to Spring Valley, as a comprehensive analysis of the charts from the previous sections shows in combination with appendix material. This changed how the farm, synonymous with the family, made a living. Now families earned a living according to the industrial system. Laborers increased drastically in Spring Valley, particularly non-agricultural laborers associated with the area's largest industrial operation—the manufacturing of pig iron from the furnace. In theory industrial capitalism and the influx of this labor reshaped the gender structures associated with the family farm by masculinizing farming space; it reified social boundaries by developing conceptions of the gendered domestic-public sphere doctrine of the

[68] For examples see, Anders Jensen Stortroen to family, River Falls Area Research Center; or Henry B. Fiedler to Son, River Falls Area Research Center, 5; or see Rugh, *Our Common Country*, 150.

industrial household onto the farm. The reality of farming, however, proved this to be generally inaccurate and an incompatible conception for agricultural work in an industrial economy.[69]

Family farms before the advent of industry had fairly loose socioeconomic gender boundaries, as women often worked alongside men to conduct farm operations. What work they did depended largely on the availability of labor and the amount of work needing to be done.[70] With the advent of corporate driven industrial capitalism, however, the farmer became emphasized in public spaces of society and the private socioeconomic space of the farm became masculinized. The once looser gender boundaries conceptually became more rigid as the separate sphere ideology of women's domestic work and men's public work took root. In reality, however, women that lived on Spring Valley farms continued to work outside of the growing conceptual domestic sphere ideal.[71] The fact that women and children performed now masculinized farm operations probably resulted from the local people adapting kinship networks to resituate the economic system in their lives more than anything.[72]

By reaching into the family tree for labor, family members provided labor without having to go and hire someone that could be very expensive in a society that many began working for

[69] Really the type of agricultural work cannot be separated from industrial work during this time, labor was labor. The processes that changed the farm urbanized and industrialized farm operations in order to incorporate it into the national economy. At the same time this process created a tension because the agrarian tradition remained despite the new industrial orientation of the farm. Farms had a dual identity of sorts.

[70] See Anna Maria in, Arnold Madson Papers, River Falls Area Research Center. Sources are often mixed on gender roles on the farm. Although most agree women did more work on the farm than historians attribute them, how they did work is contested due to those who follow a separate sphere doctrine and those who question the utility of the separate sphere doctrine as little more than an ideal (and rightfully so too). For a more rigid example of the separate spheres doctrine see Rugh, *Our Common Country,* 143-147; for somewhat of a disillusionment of it in reality see, Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 25-31.

[71] Arnold Madson Papers, River Falls Area Research Center.

[72] In a study of rural kinship networks among retirees, those sixty five and over, Lorraine Dorfman and Carol Mertens build from existing studies conducted in the 1960s that found similar results to their findings. Generally Dorman and Mertens' findings concluded that rural retirees aged 65 and over were "well integrated into kinship networks." In Lorraine T. Dorfman and Carol E. Mertens, "Kinship Relations in Retired Rural Men and Women, *Family Relations* 39, no. 2 (April 1990): 171.

manufacturers because of better financial opportunities and the allure of big cities. Simultaneously the permeation of the industrial economy into other spheres reified society's value of the individual rather than the nuclear family. Lineage and kinship systems persisted in the United States, but they increasingly faded in public importance as the private individual assumed the central role in political and civil society. The corporate vision of capitalism created this version of the American State today.[73] Realistically the industrialization of the farm and surrounding community further loosened gender roles on the farm, because it triggered instances where cheap labor had to be sought in order to survive a new world ordered by the industrial economy and the privatized public sphere.[74] Acting as an agent of industrial capitalism, the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company brought and represented the instigator of these changes to Spring Valley.

By bringing laborers to Spring Valley from places like Chicago, the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company changed the demography of the area. Mostly Eastern Europeans, such as the Bulgarians referenced earlier, changed the composition of a town of traditional immigrants of Norwegian and northeastern American ancestry. During the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company's early days in 1896, Spring Valley resident Harvey Mason Preston wrote: "the result of the iron business had built up quite a village."[75] Preston's letter indicated the physical-urban

[73] Political and civil society is meant here to refer to subsets of the more general public sphere. Corporate Capitalism provided a new major mechanism other than democracy—which itself underwent changes during the time both in how people participated in and how they conceived of democracy—where the private sphere could influence the public.

[74] Historian Joan Jenson finds that at the end of the nineteenth century "concern over sexuality" increased "as rural industry and agricultural became intermixed and more commercial farming replaced" early lumbering and subsistence frontier farming. Her findings would also indicate by implication, that if concerns about sexuality rose, gender norm constructs of the time probably shifted. In Joan Jenson, "Sexuality on a Northern Frontier: The Gendering and Disciplining of Rural Wisconsin Women, 1850-1920." *Agricultural History Society* 73, no. 2 (spring, 1999): 142-143.

[75] Harvey Mason Preston Letter, River Falls Area Research Center.

transformation of Spring Valley into a village due to population growth and infrastructure growth.[76] The Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company brought with it broad transformations to Spring Valley. It created different flows of migration, and modes of socioeconomic organization, that both transformed rural Spring Valley; as paternal forms of control in the area decreased, simultaneous forces of masculinization altered social conceptions and masculinized the farm. The iron furnace not only created the physical urban village as Preston suggested, but it also established an urban presence in rural America for local inhabitants to grapple with and resituate in their lives. These transformations caused tensions between 1910 and 1930 that were fought over at the local level between corporations and laborers.

1910-1930

"Most farmers may not have been aware of the dichotomy between farming as a way of life and farming as a business or means to a living," but the effects of the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company surely created great tension between farms and expanding industry in Spring Valley as farms underwent the transformative processes of private and public urbanization.[77] The individual at once existed in both agriculture and industry, both a rural and urban world—this tense existence remains today. Tensions between the two dichotomies revolved around two major subjects. From about 1905-1915 the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company's records indicate numerous laborer-company disputes, reflected most readily in lawsuits; and from about 1915 to the beginning of the Great Depression era tensions played-out over land, taxes, and finances.

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[76] The physical use of land in Spring Valley changed as Foote purchased land for the furnace and other forms of industry associated with villages arose to occupy traditional agricultural space. See *Register of Deeds*, in folder *Legal Documents 1902-1924* in Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1904*, River Falls Area Research Center.

[77] Pederson, *Between Memory and* Reality, 229.

Of the lawsuits mentioned in the correspondence between Frederick Foote and his manager Charles Brown (who replaced Fiedler), George Van Delist's provides the most detailed account.[78] George Van Delist worked for the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company under Foote's ownership. While performing his job for the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company, he sustained an injury when a train started and he became trapped between two railway cars. Hoping for compensation he filed a lawsuit against the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railway Company, and the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company. The lawsuit eventually worked its way through the court system to the State Supreme Court. Through the plaintiff's address to the jury in the circuit court for Pierce County, the tensions caused by corporate progressivism can be shown by highlighting labor-corporate tension.[79]

The plaintiff's major point stipulated that: "Men have told me during the progress of this trial that from a jury composed largely of farmers, I need not expect anything but that a verdict would be rendered against the corporation and in favor of the individual, especially when he had been hurt."[80] The lawyer continued his address for many pages along this subject, highlighting not only industrial-agricultural tensions in Spring Valley, but across the nation. Of course, these tensions were represented spatially in the urban-rural context, and temporally in the industrialization processes occurring on farms across rural America. Considering the court and jury served the Pierce County region, the plaintiff made it clear tensions existed in the region that

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[78] General statement of lawsuits evidenced in folder *Correspondence June 20, 1907-December 12,* 1912 in Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934,* River Falls Area Research Center; for specific examples of the most discussed lawsuits see Frederick Foote to Wallace Foote, Februrary 20, 1908, in folder *Correspondence June 20, 1907-December 12, 1912*, in Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934*, River Falls Area Research Center; also see Frederick Foote to Wallace Foote, March 16, 1908 in same.

[79] Folder, *Legal Documents 1902-1904,* in Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934*, River Falls Area Research Center.

[80] Folder, *Legal Documents 1902-1924* in Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934*, River Falls Area Research Center.

to win the case for the furnace he would have to surmount. In attempting to win the case, the lawyer's rhetoric masculinized and individualized the farmer, as well as personified the corporations that he defended. These were three competing themes that transformed America during the time, and were integral to the tensions being mediated in a legal and political setting.

The significance of the Van Delist case rests in the fact that the dispute between labor and employer took place in a legal setting influenced by agrarian tradition. The agrarian tradition resituated the industrial presence of the corporation in rural America, because rural America retained control over, in this particular case, local courts. Local courts and other local institutions provided a means for the agrarian tradition to reconfigure for themselves the transformative actors of industrial capitalism in rural America.[81] Unfortunately for rural agrarians, the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company brought urban middle-class conceptions of land to the area. This forever shifted the traditional ideology of land in the America psyche.[82]

Traditional ideologies of land shifted with the rise of corporate capitalism from one built on an agrarian *social* character to one built on an industrial *economic* character. The historical significance over a piece of earth predates United States history, but in many respects the American ideology of the right to pursue happiness is very tied to land. Land before the industrial system represented one of the most valuable goods, something currency for the most part replaced. Shown most notably through the campaigning of William Jennings Bryan and the

[81] Surely instances such as this at the local State level provided an example of a precursor to the national regulatory State. This was a local approach to mediate changing social conditions through local politics. For the national regulatory state and agrarians see, Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform*.

[82] A part of the agrarian myth, the idea that the American foundations were built on a landed and innocent yeoman citizenry, shifted to a degree. However inaccurate the agrarian myth may be, modern America's foundation seemed to now be built on urban industrial middle-class conceptions of land. For a good overview of the agrarian myth see Hofstader, *The Age of Reform,* 23-59; or Joyce Appleby, "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History* 68, (1982): 833-849; or Rugh, *Our Common Country*.

Democratic Party, the currency debates of the time showed how potent the shift from land to currency became. By transforming traditional ideology associated with land, progressive corporations monetized land as a commodity, just like any other material good fueling the growth of America's growing urban middle-class driven State. Land no longer represented the means to the pursuit of economic stability and happiness as money did in land's stead. This transformation is evident in that Spring Valley farming morphed into a currency-reliant system of wages and labor, which remains to this day; some farms also came to rely on the iron corporation itself during the time.

When the company began in Spring Valley they instantly starting capitalizing on land in ways that Spring Valley had never really capitalized land before. The iron company limited the amount of farm and pasture land available by instead using it for smelting and mining. In a letter addressed to the manager of the company, a local resident wished to pay fifteen dollars to fix a wire fence that someone had taken apart on the edge of the company's property, in exchange for five months of pasturage on that property. The manager responded by increasing the price to $17.50, wanting it up-front. In a letter from April 1913, the manager asked the owner Foote to sign a lease to rent the property for the "moral effect it will have on that 'squatter.'" Brown thought that the "squatter" did not think he had "the authority in the matter," indicative of growing tensions due to this transition to land as a commodity rather than a means to a good living.[83] These tensions came to surface again in the numerous tax and financial records, which are more indicative of how the economic system transformed more broadly.

[83] Chas Brown to Frederick H. Foote, May 10, 1913, in folder *Correspondence 1913-1919*, in Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934*, River Falls Area Research Center.

The greater economic system in the area changed as the company moved capital among its network to many non-traditional rural connections (relative to pre-industrial Spring Valley). These places included the mines, quarries, Bank of Spring Valley, workers, and other places of general expense.[84] Spring Valley Iron Ore had by far more connections to the rural sector of the American economy than the industrial sector simply due to its location in rural America, but the bulk of the capital flowed to a few minor industrial areas.[85] As capital flowed for the company across the region, increasingly the company paid fewer in taxes to help build infrastructure in the region.

The iron industry burgeoned throughout the pre and post WWI period, but even though economic conditions were relatively good, the local property taxes of the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company steadily decreased. The corporation's taxes fell from $1710.13 in 1910 to $697.06 by 1921 not factoring inflation. This meant that local governments had less capital to conduct infrastructure growth, or provide social services, possibly suggestive of the massive public works projects undertaken a decade later under New Deal legislation of the federal government that could command increased resources. When taxes spiked in 1931, Foote cared for nothing else from his new Superintendent but to sell most of the property the company held in the area.[86] This

[84] All financial data collected from folder *Journal Entries 1904-1906*, in Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934*, River Falls Area Research Center.

[85] Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934*, River Falls Area Research Center.

[86] Folder *Taxes 1910-1921 and 1931*, in Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934,* River Falls Area Research Center; for Foote's preoccupation with taxes and land sales see folder *Correspondence 1930-1934*, in Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934,* River Falls Area Research Center.

effectively began the process to end the company, and Spring Valley entered a state of economic depression like the rest of the country during the 1930s.[87]

In the final years of the company's operation, during the early 1930s, correspondence records show that the company always thought taxes were too high, even as the iron industry boomed before the system collapsed. Foote consistently reminded his manager not to keep the company's financial assets in the Bank of Spring Valley, except for the worker's payrolls, but instead wire them to be kept in Chicago.[88] By the time the company finally ceased operations in 1934, the last few years being relatively unproductive, little capital flowed within Spring Valley from taxes or finances stored in the local bank—they had successfully lowered those— and the system that the corporation built in the area collapsed.

The capitalist system that had once been characterized by a farm's total economic value equaling the total labor put into it, allowing for goods to be exchanged in a market for equal production value, became a capitalist system characterized in a different vein. Now the farm's total value equaled the cost of labor going into the farm plus the resulting fictitious profit generated by that labor. As those profits stopped flowing from one economic entity (farm, corporation, cooperative), the system stunted.[89] When the company started in 1895 it spurred a rural butter producing community's urban development in a State-capitalist society driven by a growing industrial middle-class—the most blatant creation of the progressive corporation other

[87] Shortly after the company stopped producing iron and closed, a local aid group developed to help those in need of socioeconomic aid. See, Gilman Relief Workers, *Records 1932-1964*, River Falls Area Research Center, University of River Falls-Wisconsin, River Falls, WI.

[88] Folder *Correspondence 1930-1934*, in Spring Valley Iron and Ore Co., *Records 1902-1934,* River Falls Area Research Center.

[89] For the best characterization of capital flow in rural America in the late 1920s through the depression, see Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 267-273.

than the industrial capitalist system generally. The rural family farm by the Spring Valley Iron Company's close had been transformed into economic milking machines that belonged in that regard to the middle-class; they all were economically dependent on the flow of currency between them. Not even cooperatives could lower production costs enough to counter falling profits before the Great Depression of the 1930s; even the cooperative, however, provided an example of the hegemony of industrial capitalism as the farmer played the corporate game. Rural Spring Valley forever changed as a result of the progressive character of the Spring Valley Iron and Ore Company, and the numerous other corporations of the time, that transformed the American economy.

CONCLUSION

> Of the men in the industry few, if any, survive, and none of them will ever write the human story of the period. That story—12 hours a day, seven days a week, heat, gas, accidents, breakdowns, fights, jealousies, mismanagement, thefts, deaths, tremendous noise, smoke, salamanders, Polacks, shirking, fire—and, yes, that story contains also its elements of satisfaction, happiness, and humor—that story will never be told.
>
> --Theodore Vanassee.

Corporations during the Gilded and Progressive eras actively engaged in progressive reform as they transformed the American economy to unforeseen levels of industrial capitalism; they proved integral to the sociopolitical progressive transformations of the time. Historians cannot reserve traditional labels of progressivism to specifically peripheral agrarians, an urban-middle class, the laboring masses, or prominent figures among others, but instead they must also include corporations. Their socioeconomic progressivism provided the impetus for the traditional progressives of the period. Effectively corporations created and perpetuated a system that fundamentally affected the American State, and they must not remain clouded by the general industrial system that has been seen as both virtue and vice by historians. Capitalism would not

have been as transformative a force in its less corporate character, and none of the technological, social, and ideological transformations and reform efforts of the time would have occurred without them. The expansion of the regulatory state, new to the American State, and the crusade against social vices would have been a nonissue.

The study of Spring Valley has shown how corporations created and perpetuated an industrial system that affected areas not relatively integrated into the urban-industrial middle-class system, causing tensions as those areas resisted some of the changes using traditional techniques. Agrarian America participated, however, in the industrial system nonetheless. Corporate progressivism reshaped the economy, and the reverberations transformed traditional social and political practices and discourses, fundamentally transforming both the urban and rural condition during the formative years of the contemporary United States. To borrow from Diner: "like workers in urban factories and mills, they [rural people] held on to traditional values, resisted loss of local control…and embraced change only when it served their economic and cultural goals."[90] How much of this change resulted from the farmers' consent, as Diner seems to suggest, or resulted from the coercive force of the industrial state system remains for debate and further research despite Diner's masterful grasp of the period. Even the farming cooperative provides a subtle reminder today that farms during the time played the corporation's game, and that the boundaries constituting modern 'rural' and 'urban' spaces drastically transformed.

The corporation, however, perhaps the most integral actor in the progressive transformations that characterized the act of *being* a progressive, must not be overlooked at the expense of the much broader industrial capitalist system and the reformers of that system. The

[90] Diner, *A Very Different Age*, 124.

progressive changes wrought by corporations during the age changed the face of American capitalism, forcing even the most remote areas of rural America to undergo changes in response to the hegemonic power of the industrial capitalist State that they helped create. With all the changes to the public and private realms of society, unrest and reform ensued. When corporations enabled those changes, through progressive changes to the economy, they inextricably became linked to the same progressive processes that characterized the traditional progressives: farmers, laborers, the middle-class, and prominent individuals to name a few. This relationship between corporations and reform efforts during the Early Progressive and Progressive Eras remains today clouded by the shadow of capitalism and the global force that it has become today.

APPENDIX A

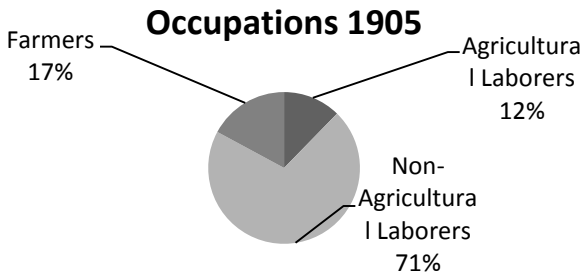

Figure 5: Data from Department of State, *Tabular Statements 1905*, 477-482.

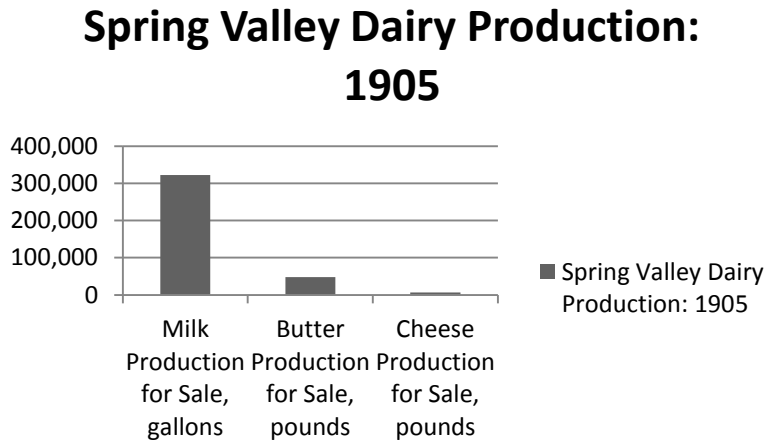

Figure 6: Data from Department of State, *Tabular Statements 1905*, 309.

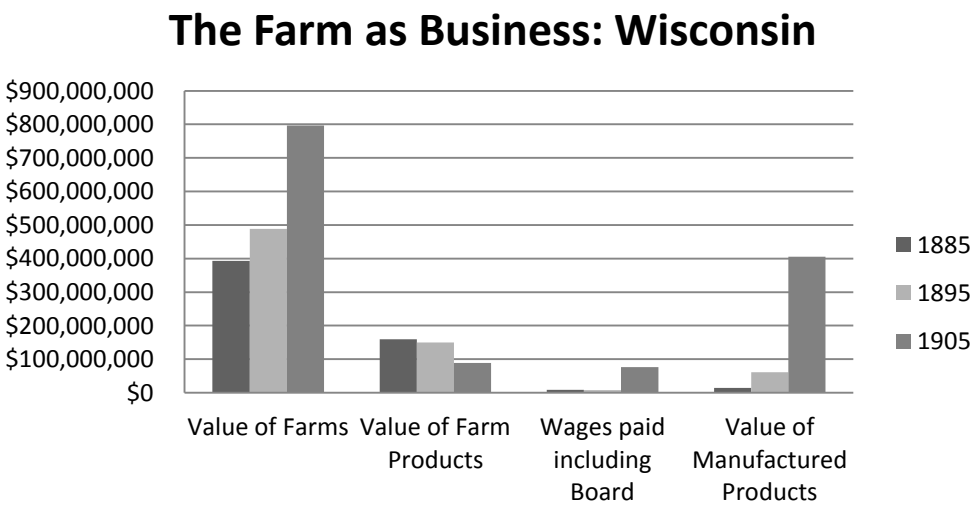

Figure 7: Data collected for 1885 and 1895 from Department of State, *Tabular Statements 1895*, 1022-1028; Data collected for 1905 from Department of State, *Tabular Statements 1905*, 358-359; and 40.

APPENDIX B

Figure 8: Map of Pierce County, *Standard Atlas of Pierce County Wisconsin*, (Chicago: George A. Ogle & Co., 1905), 7.

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