

“We Won’t Work with the Jews”: The 1891 Millville Strike

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By day and by night,
the fires burn on in Millville
and bid the sand let in the light

—Carl Sandburg, “Millville”*

In September 1891, newspapers across the United States carried reports of an attack by a mob on the Jewish inhabitants of Millville, New Jersey. Likening it to the persecution of Jews in Russia, the papers described how the refusal of boy laborers in a glass factory to work with newly hired Jewish immigrants led to their subsequent strike, and then to an attack on the Jews of Millville, ending with hundreds of them being driven from the town.

The Millville strike was a unique event in the history of Jews and antisemitism in America, just as the later blood libel in Massena, Massachusetts in 1928 would prove to be an exceptional occurrence. First, the site of the strike was unusual. While many Eastern European Jewish immigrants were involved in clothing manufacture and cigar making, few were involved with glass blowing, which, like steel making, coal mining, and railroad working, demanded not just long working hours like the sweatshops but hard and dangerous physical labor as well. Moreover, while thousands of labor strikes would take place throughout America in the closing decades of the nineteenth century—over 1,500 in 1886 alone, involving 610,000 workers—*not one*, except for Millville, would involve a strike of industrial workers devoted

specifically to protest having Jews in their workplace.¹ Finally, although there had been national newspaper coverage of antisemitic incidents in America, such as the Seligmann (1877) and Corbin (1879) affairs, only the Millville strike involved highly exaggerated and sensationalized accounts of the event. Such exaggerated accounts of antisemitic incidents did not occur in the years that followed, either.

Although it was a unique event, the 1891 Millville strike nonetheless provides the opportunity for a detailed examination on a small scale of the complex national dynamics that would unfold in the decades to follow, as newly arrived Jewish immigrants searched for a livelihood, as industrialists needed cheap labor, and as nativist American workers feared that they would be displaced. While the reaction that occurred in Millville as a result of this convergence was largely a response to “competition for places,” as American historian Oscar Handlin suggested, it was more than merely the expression of “hostile sentiments.”² At work was a deeper, persistent antisemitism that now came to the surface.

Whitall Tatum

Millville, in Cumberland County, New Jersey is located forty miles south of Philadelphia. It was, in 1891, an industrial town with a population of approximately ten thousand.³ Since the area was rich in silica-

1 *Epigraph from Charles A. Sandburg, *In Reckless Ecstasy* (Galesburg, IL: Asgard Press, 1904), 25. My thanks to Britt Tevis at Syracuse University, who first called this episode to my attention; John Burlage, Chapter Historian of the West Jersey Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society, for his detailed information on New Jersey train lines and stations in the 1890s; Mannat Khurana for her creation of the agricultural colonies train map; Sandra Keirse, Millville, New Jersey library and Adam Rosenthal, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles library, for their research assistance; and Nancy Green for her helpful suggestions on an earlier draft of this article.

Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 89. See also, *The Encyclopedia of Strikes in American History*, ed. Aaron Brenner et al. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2009).

2 Oscar Handlin, “American Views of the Jew at the Opening of the Twentieth Century,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 40 (1951): 323–324.

3 “Millville,” *Boyd’s Cumberland County, N.J. Directory 1889–90* (Washington, DC: W.

based sand, several glass factories were in operation there, including Whitall, Tatum & Co., started in 1857 when John M. Whitall, the owner of an existing glass factory in Millville, was joined in business by his brother-in-law, Edward Tatum. The company manufactured flint and green glass jars, bottles, and vials, specializing in prescription bottles and apothecary jars for pharmacies across the country. It had two major plants in Millville: Schetterville in the south and Glasstown in the north, about a mile apart. The two plants operated a total of twelve furnaces and employed over 1,500 workers, making Whitall, Tatum one of the largest glass companies in America.⁴

As with other glass companies of this time, Whitall, Tatum employed boys from ages twelve to nineteen, known collectively as “tending-boys.” There were “cracker-off” boys who broke the cooling glass from the end of the blowpipe, “holding-mold” boys who opened or shut the molds, “sticker-up” boys who took the vessel from the mold and held up its mouth to the furnace opening so it could be reheated for further shaping, and “carry-in” boys who took the finished product away to the annealing oven. Although it was illegal, Whitall, Tatum, like other glass companies, also employed boys under the age of twelve, sometimes as young as eight or nine, since their small size was critical to the operations of the factory—this was especially true in the case of the holding-mold boys, who were needed to sit at the feet of the blowers—and because their labor was cheaper than hiring men (see Figure 1).⁵

Andrew Boyd and George S. Boudinot, 1890), 167; “Millville,” *Boyd’s Cumberland County, N.J. Directory 1891–’92* (Philadelphia: C. E. Howe Co., 1892), 215.

4 “At South Millville,” *News of Cumberland County* (Bridgeton, NJ), 11 September 1891, 4; “For Equal Taxation,” *Bridgeton Pioneer* (NJ), 2 July 1891, 4; Virgil S. Johnson, *Millville Glass: The Early Days* (Millville, NJ: Delaware Bay Trading Co., Inc., 1971), 22, 40, 42; “Millville Industry,” *Millville, N.J. Centennial Souvenir 1866–1966* (Millville, NJ: Millville Centennial Corporation, 1966); Adeline Pepper, *The Glass Gaffers of New Jersey and Their Creations From 1739 to the Present* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 225–230; Hannah W. Smith, *John M. Whitall: The Story of His Life* (Philadelphia: pub. by author, 1879), 197–199; “The Strike at Millville,” *Bridgeton Pioneer*, 24 September 1891, 1.

5 This was not unique to the glass industry. In 1890, 1.5 million children between ten and fourteen were working in American factories, mines, and fields. Hugh D. Hindman, *Child Labor: An American History* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), 31, 130–135; Johnson,



Figure 1. Section from Lewis Wickes Hine, *Noon Hour, Millville Bottle Works*, Millville, NJ, 1909, Lot 7478, National Child Labor Committee Collection, Library of Congress.

As an incentive for families to send their children to work in the factory, men seeking employment were often given preferential treatment if they had young children who could be hired as well. Given that glass blowers at Whitall, Tatum made good wages—five to twenty dollars a day—and that tending boys who worked in the factory could become glass-working apprentices at age sixteen for a five-year term while earning half wages, parents were willing to have their children work in the factory from an early age.⁶ The extra family income that the boys could bring in, ranging from \$2.76–\$5 a week, was also welcome.⁷

The Jewish Boys

In July 1891, as was usual, a committee of the green bottle blowers met with John Mickel, the superintendent of the firm, to negotiate their salaries for the forthcoming season that was set to commence on 1 September. It was expected that “undoubtedly all differences will be amicably adjusted.”⁸ Negotiations with the flint-glass grinders took longer but were resolved by 4 September.⁹ Both the Whitall and Tatum families

Millville Glass, 115–116; Owen R. Lovejoy, “Child Labor in the Glass Industry,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 27 (March 1906): 43, 46–47; Sandburg, *In Reckless Ecstasy*, 25; “Youthful Czars,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 September 1891, 2.

6 Hindman, *Child Labor*, 136; Johnson, *Millville Glass*, 56, 64–65; Sandburg, *In Reckless Ecstasy*, 25; “Youthful Czars.”

7 S. S. Huber, “Our New York Letter,” *Lebanon Courier and Semi-Weekly Report* (Lebanon, PA), 21 October 1891, 2; Sandburg, *In Reckless Ecstasy*, 25; “Youthful Czars.”

8 “The Local Committee,” *News of Cumberland County*, 29 July 1891, 4.

9 “Whitall, Tatum & Co.,” *Murfreesboro Index* (TN), 4 September 1891, 1.

were devout Quakers, who “did not believe in war, nor in litigation,” and it is likely that their values were continued by the company when it came to negotiations with workers.¹⁰ Indeed, in August of that year, a short editorial in a local paper remarked: “How pleasantly Whitall, Tatum & Co. settle with their blowers, while some other manufacturers are in a wrangle almost continually. Whitall, Tatum & Co. go right along, pay the prices demanded and make lots of money.”¹¹

The factory started up three of the furnaces on 2 September, and the company anticipated a busy season.¹² One issue facing them, however, was a scarcity of boys. The company had difficulty in hiring enough boys during their last season, and so they advertised in June and July for additional boys to work in the glassworks (see Figure 2).¹³ At the beginning of September, fourteen Jewish boys were hired by the company. Several papers stated that they came from Philadelphia.¹⁴ Although the West Jersey Railroad Company had a station in Millville that connected it with Philadelphia, this does not seem likely (see Figure 3). The morning train from Philadelphia would not have arrived in Millville until 8:30 a.m., far too late for the boys to have begun work.¹⁵

10 Bill Lockhart et al., “Whitall Tatum—Part I—Whitall, Tatum & Co.” (August 2020), 88, Historic Glass Bottle Identification & Information Website, Society for Historical Archaeology, <https://sha.org/bottle/pdffiles/WhitallTatum1.pdf>; Smith, *John M. Whitall*, 192.

11 “How Pleasantly,” *News of Cumberland County*, 14 August 1891, 4.

12 “Whitall, Tatum & Co.,” *Baltimore Sun*, 2 September 1891, 1; “Whitall, Tatum & Co.,” *News of Cumberland County*, 3 September 1891, 4.

13 “Factories Closed,” *News of Cumberland County*, 18 September 1891, 1; “New Glass Patents at Millville,” *Streator Free Press* (Streator, IL), 24 July 1891, 2. The 1890s were the beginning of a steady decline of boy workers in the glass industry that resulted in manufacturers hiring Black Americans and immigrants at low wages to fill their places. Hindman, *Child Labor*, 138–141. See also, John Spargo, *The Bitter Cry of the Children* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1906), 161.

14 “Factories Closed,” 1; “Strike at Millville,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 19 September 1891, 2.

15 It is unlikely the company would have accommodated late arrivals since the limited train service to and from Philadelphia would have resulted in only an eight-hour workday instead of the usual ten to twelve hours. “Pennsylvania Railroad System: West Jersey Railroad,” in *Travelers’ Official Railway Guide for the United States and Canada: Railway Time Schedules, Connections, and Distances*, ed. W. F. Allen (Washington, DC: National Railway Publications Company, September 1892), 329; “Transportation,” *Millville, N.J. Centennial Souvenir*.

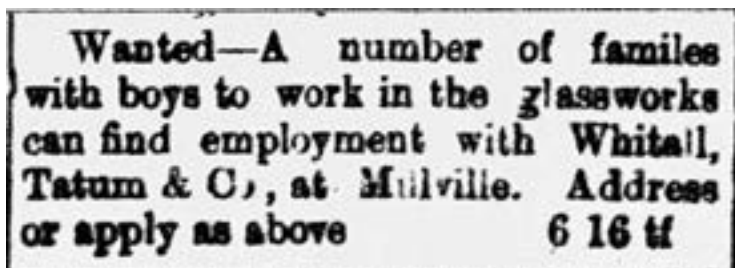


Figure 2. Whitall, Tatum & Co. want ad, News of Cumberland County, 24 June 1891.

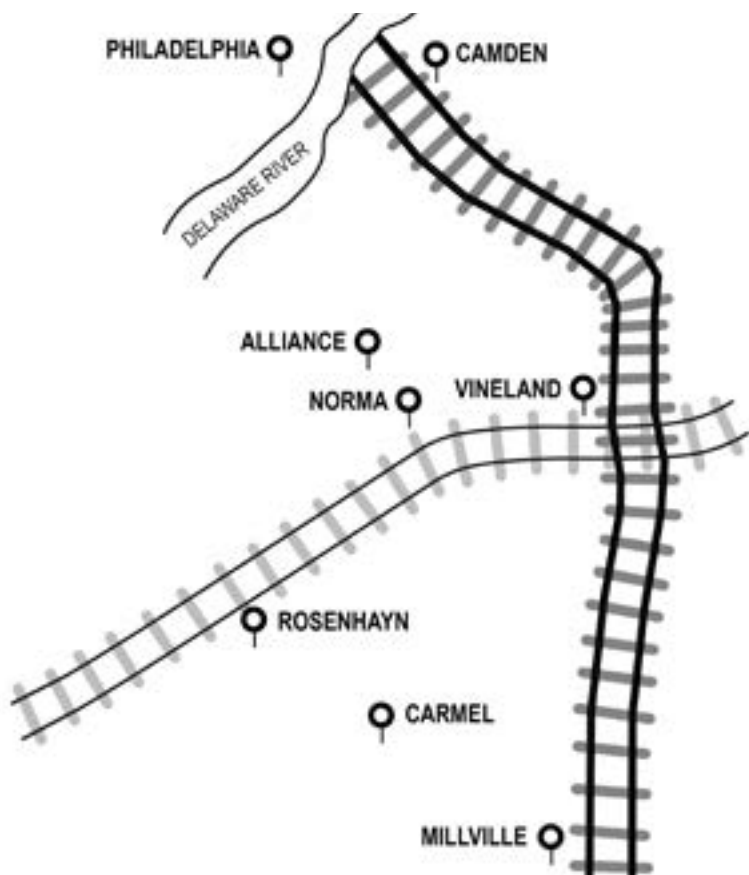


Figure 3. New Jersey Jewish Colonies Near Vineland and Millville. Garton Road colony, not shown on the map, was along the tracks just to the west of Rosenhayn.

A number of papers assumed that the boys came from Millville, although there was no organized Jewish community in Millville when the 1891 strike took place.¹⁶ In fact, there were almost no Jews living in Millville at all. A Jewish clothing store owner, Abraham Weinberg, lived there in 1880, but he left Millville before the 1891 strike and moved to Philadelphia.¹⁷ In 1891, among its ten thousand inhabitants, Millville had only three identifiable Jewish families.¹⁸ The first was Jacob Haas, originally from Germany, who had served briefly in the Civil War. He was living in Millville by 1880, where he worked in a glass factory, as did his two teenage sons.¹⁹ The second Jewish resident in 1891–1892 was Nathan Braunstein, a clothier, who lived there with his wife and family.²⁰ The third Jewish resident, Harry Sheffer, arrived in Millville in late 1890 or early 1891 and worked as a peddler for Braunstein.²¹ Haas's sons were adults, Sheffer had only girls, and one of Braunstein's two sons was just seven—that meant that the fourteen boys did not come from Millville.²²

16 A synagogue is absent from the listing of churches in the 1891–1892 city directory. “Churches,” *Boyd’s Cumberland County, N.J. Directory 1891–’92* (Philadelphia: C. E. Howe Co., 1892), 297. For the absence of Jewish life in Millville before this time, see J. H. Nixon, “Sketch of Millville of the Long Ago,” *Millville Republican*, 2 January 1864, and “Religion in Millville,” *Millville, N.J. Centennial Souvenir*.

17 “Abraham Weinberg” and “Fannie Weinberg,” 1880 US Census, Millville, New Jersey, Ancestry.com; “Fannie Wineberg,” 1900 US Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Ancestry.com. He is not found in the 1889–1890 Millville City Directory.

18 “Millville,” *Boyd’s Cumberland County, N.J. Directory 1889–1890*, 167–234; “Millville,” *Boyd’s Cumberland County, N.J. Directory 1891–’92*, 215–295.

19 “George Haas,” “Jacob Haas,” and “Levi Haas,” 1880 US Census, Millville, New Jersey; “Jacob Haas” and “Levi Haas,” *Boyd’s Cumberland County, N.J. Directory, 1889–90* (Washington, DC: W. Andrew Boyd and George S. Boudinot, 1890), 191.

20 “Nathan Braunstein,” *Boyd’s Cumberland County, N.J. Directory 1891–’92* (Philadelphia: C. E. Howe Co., 1892), 407; “Nathan Braunstein,” 1900 US Census, Millville, New Jersey.

21 “Harry Schaefer,” *Boyd’s Cumberland County, N.J. Directory 1891–’92* (Philadelphia: C. E. Howe Co., 1892), 276; “Harry Sheffer Died at His Home,” *Millville Daily*, 2 May 1927, 1.

22 “Nathan Braunstein,” 1900 US Census, Millville, New Jersey; “George Haas,” “Jacob Haas,” and “Levi Haas,” 1880 US Census, Millville, New Jersey; “Harry Sheffer,” 1900 US Census, Millville, New Jersey.

Other papers proposed that the fourteen boys came from the nearby Jewish colonies of “Russian Hebrews.”²³ These would have been the Jewish agricultural settlements funded by the already settled German Jews of America for the newly arrived Eastern European Jewish immigrants, beginning in 1882. Fearing (rightly) that the influx of these “unwashed hordes” into America and their concomitant concentration in urban centers such as New York would lead to antisemitism among long established Americans, they formed groups, such as the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society, to help settle these new immigrants on farmland outside the cities. By 1889, the Alliance colony in New Jersey had 529 settlers, Carmel had 286, Garton Road 145, Norma around 100, and Rosenhayn 294.²⁴

Yet it would have taken over three hours by foot to cover the distance between Alliance, Norma, Garton Road, or Rosenhayn and the Whitall, Tatum plants in Millville.²⁵ Although all four of these colonies were walking distance to the Vineland station, the earliest train from Vineland was the one coming from Philadelphia, and it arrived too late for work in Millville. Rosenhayn and Norma did have train stations on the Southern Division Line of the Central Railroad Company that would have allowed the boys to transfer at the Vineland station, but the earliest train was still the one from Philadelphia that arrived late (see Figure 3).²⁶ Carmel, however, was only four miles away from Millville,

23 “Boys on Strike,” *Jersey City News*, 19 September 1891, 1; “Youthful Czars.”

24 Population figures are for 1889. Joseph Brandes, *Immigrants to Freedom: Jewish Communities in Rural New Jersey since 1882* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971), 51, 55, 60–62, 67; Ellen Eisenberg, *Jewish Agricultural Colonies in New Jersey, 1882–1920* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 69, 106, 124, 139; Jacob G. Lipman, “Eastern States: The South Jersey Colonies,” in *The Russian Jew in the United States: Studies of Social Conditions in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, with a Description of Rural Settlements*, ed. Charles S. Bernheimer [1905] (New York: A.M. Kelley, 1971), 377, 382–383. For an overview of the colonies, see also Deborah E. Popper, “‘Great Opportunities for the Many of Small Means’: New Jersey’s Agricultural Colonies,” *Geographical Review* 96, no. 1 (1931): 24–49.

25 Alliance was 11 miles away; Norma, 10 miles; and Rosenhayn, 7 miles.

26 “Pennsylvania Railroad System,” 329; “South Jersey Rails 1891,” West Jersey and South Jersey Heritage, <https://westjersey.org/rr/wjt1891.htm>; “Reading Railroad System: Central

a little over one hour by foot. Although initially established as a farming community, some of its colonists worked either part time or full time as industrial laborers to supplement their income. It is thus possible that boys from Carmel were the ones briefly employed at Whitall, Tatum.²⁷

Two weeks later, on 15 September, a small group of boy workers complained to the company that the Jews who had been hired would soon be joined by others who would “run them out of their situations.”²⁸ It is more than likely that some men in one or both plants encouraged them to present this complaint. The *Evening Journal* from nearby Vineland stated at the outset of the strike that it was caused by “the blowers and yard men, many of whom are members of the Order of American Mechanics.”²⁹ As Jewish immigration to the United States increased—between 1881 and 1889 it was averaging 22,700 a year, while in 1890 it increased to 40,700—New Jersey papers carried articles expressing concern about the influx of Russia’s Jews into the United States.³⁰ In December of 1890, for example, a headline from the *Evening Journal* stated: “Driven from Russia—England Overrun with Hebrew Immigrants—Workmen Greatly Alarmed—Efforts Will Likely be Made to Unload on the United States.”³¹ In August of 1891, the *Evening Journal* reported that labor organizations in Baltimore “have started

Railroad of New Jersey,” *Travelers’ Official Railway Guide for the United States and Canada: Railway Time Schedules, Connections, and Distances*, ed. W. F. Allen (Washington, DC: National Railway Publications Company, September 1892), 277.

27 “A Russian from Carmel,” *Evening Journal* (Vineland, NJ), 5 June 1891, 1; Eisenberg, *Jewish Agricultural Colonies*, 138–139. Four miles would have been a comfortable walking distance. *Evening Journal*, 5 August 1882, 5.

28 “The Strike in Millville,” *News of Cumberland County* (Bridgeton, NJ), 19 September 1891, 4.

29 “The Millville Strike,” *Evening Journal*, 18 September 1891, 1. Founded in 1844, the Order of United American Mechanics was a nativist society opposed to the hiring of foreign labor. Albert C. Stevens, *The Cyclopaedia of Fraternities* (New York: E. B. Treat and Co., 1907), 290–292.

30 Eisenberg, *Jewish Agricultural Colonies*, 77–78. In addition to New Jersey, newspapers and journals across the United States also printed concerns about Russian Jewish immigration. Louise A. Mayo, *The Ambivalent Image: Nineteenth-Century America’s Perception of the Jew* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988), 154–160.

31 “Driven From Russia,” *Evening Journal*, 16 December 1890, 1.

an agitation” against accepting any additional Russian Hebrew immigrants.³² Just a few days before the strike, the *Evening Journal's* front page article “Only to Our Shores” reported that no more Russian Jews would be sent to British territories; instead, they would be sent to the United States where “all expected to get rich.”³³

Up to this time, the residents of Cumberland County had been welcoming, overall, to the Jewish colonists upon their initial settlement and in the years that followed.³⁴ The *Evening Journal*, for example, in December 1890, lauded the prosperity of Rosenhayn, Carmel, and Alliance and the plans for future settlement of “thrifty” immigrants in new colonies. But it is likely that once there was fear that the Jewish immigrants would leave their colonies and compete with laborers in the local towns, there was trouble.³⁵ Seeing this first contingent of Russian Jewish boys employed in the factory, the adult men would have understood and feared what most of the boys did not: that the arrival of these Jewish boys was the harbinger of their own employment woes to come. Accordingly, they goaded the boys who worked with them into action. The American poet, Carl Sandburg, who visited Millville, said of the boys (who were middle school and high school dropouts): “Their education has consisted mainly of the thoughts, emotions and experiences that resulted from contact with [adult] ‘blowers’ and ‘gaffers.’”³⁶ Indeed, on the first day of the strike, three adult glassworkers (who were subsequently discharged) did not allow their boys who had entered the plant to work that day.³⁷ Although the strike in Millville was a strike solely by the tender boys, it is more than likely that there were adult influences behind the scenes.³⁸

32 “A Despatch from Baltimore,” *Evening Journal*, 25 August 1891, 4.

33 “Only to Our Shores,” *Evening Journal*, 14 September 1891, 1.

34 For the few examples of hostility toward the colonists during these years, see Brandes, *Immigrants to Freedom*, 179.

35 “The Prosperity of the Foreign Colonies,” *Evening Journal*, 24 December 1890, 3.

36 Sandburg, *In Reckless Ecstasy*, 26.

37 “Strike in Millville.”

38 See also “One of the Greatest Misfortunes,” *American Israelite* (Cincinnati, OH), 15 October 1891, 1; “The Writer,” *Courier-Post* (Camden, NJ), 21 September 1891, 2.

The Strike

At 7 a.m. on Friday morning, 18 September, as Whitall, Tatum's Schetterville plant opened for work, a group of tending boys gathered at the entrance, each said to be holding "a club, barrel stave or broomstick," which they used to threaten the other boys, discouraging them from entering the plant and compelling them to join their ranks. Most did so. (One boy, Ambrose Parr, refused to go out on strike and was labeled a "scab," resulting in his tragic decision to hang himself a week later.)³⁹ Several hundred of the tender boys then marched into downtown Millville, where they were met by the other boys coming from the Glasstown plant, evidence that this was a planned walkout. The crowd of boys then marched to the Wheaton & Co. glass works to call on the tending boys there to join them in their protest, but they left after they were informed that no Jews were employed there. This is not surprising, since Wheaton & Co. was a small operation, employing only two dozen boys.⁴⁰

There are conflicting reports about what happened next. At the end of the day, the *News of Cumberland County* reported that the crowd that morning marched to the train station and set upon six Jews who had just arrived from Philadelphia, severely beating four of them. The *Evening Journal*, also at the end of the day, reported that the crowd chased Jews to the train station and into the train cars. It also mentioned that the crowd approached a group of Italians working on the Presbyterian church and advised them to leave. But the only violence it reported was that an Irish fruit and grocery driver had his wagon overturned, and that a piece of watermelon from his goods struck a policeman.⁴¹ The next day, the *Courier-Post* in Camden stated that the crowd marched to the station to meet the morning train from Cape May, based on a rumor that additional Jews were arriving from Halbertstown "to take their places." The crowd chased three Jews from the train car who then took refuge in the station while the railroad men drove off the tender

39 "Suicide of a Boy," *Tribune* (Scranton, PA), 28 September 1891, 1.

40 "Millville Imitates Russia," *Courier-Post*, 19 September 1891, 1; Pepper, *Glass Gaffers*, 247.

41 "Factories Closed"; "Millville Strike."

boys. Next, the paper stated, the crowd encountered “a party of Jews” who had driven into town. Their horses’ heads were turned around, and they were given three minutes to leave town. Finally, several of the “Jew tending boys” were “roughly handled” by the strikers.⁴² Again, this account made no mention of a serious violent encounter. All three accounts agree that some sort of confrontation took place between the crowd and some Jews at the rail depot. Whether they were the Jewish boys who had been working in the plants or new Jewish workers who were now arriving is not clear. What is clear is that the tender boys opposed the hiring of Jews by Whitall, Tatum.

In the early afternoon, the tending boys gathered and, guided by Dr. William Newell, a distinguished resident of Millville who offered his assistance in mediating, drafted a resolution to be presented to the company. Newell, who understood the labor requisites of the company, guided the boys to soften the resolution’s early language. Rather than demand that “all Jews be removed from the works,” the resolution now “respectfully asked” that employment preference be given to American boys. Newell was clearly more interested in Whitall, Tatum’s employment needs—thus his desire not to have the tending boys antagonize the company—than the Jews, since the resolution went on to request that, “given the peculiar character of the Jewish nationality,” other nationalities be given employment preference before them. The resolution also asked for ten cents a day raise, and that the men who had been fired for preventing some of the boys from working that morning be reinstated.⁴³ When the resolution was brought by a committee from the tending boys to the superintendent of Whitall, Tatum, he rejected their demand for a pay increase and stated that the Jews would be discharged only if more

42 “Millville Imitates Russia.” Halbertstown (Alborton) was a short-lived Jewish agricultural-industrial colony, established just a few months before, about eight miles south of Millville, near the Manumuskin train station. It consisted of approximately seventy-five inhabitants. William Stainsby, *The Jewish Colonies of South Jersey: Historical Sketch of Their Establishment and Growth* (Camden, NJ: S. Chew & Sons, 1901), 28.

43 “Millville Imitates Russia”; “Millville Strike,” 5; “The Strike at an End,” *News of Cumberland County*, 23 September 1891, 4; “Strike in Millville.”

boys could be found to fill their places.⁴⁴

For Whitall, Tatum, this was, first and foremost, a human resources issue. Boys were needed to help keep the factory running; who they were was immaterial. Until such time as the Jewish workers could be replaced, they would stay. In addition, although Whitall, Tatum had a reputation for paying their workers well, the company policy was to settle on their wages at the start of the season. It may have seemed an unwise precedent for them to allow salaries to be renegotiated. Therefore, the boy tenders' demands were rejected. That night, the boys held a street parade in Millville with banners and drums, shouting out: "No, no, no more Jews."⁴⁵

On Saturday, Whitall, Tatum closed their gates, locking out all three thousand of its workers. This was probably less a tactic to pressure the strikers than a practical decision, since the blowers could not do their tasks without the boys' help, and without the blowers, other workers, such as pressers, grinders, and mold makers were also unable to perform their tasks.⁴⁶ The company gave the strikers a deadline to return to work, stating that if they did not do so, half of the furnaces would need to be shut down.⁴⁷ Whitall, Tatum needed to proceed cautiously here, since it was dependent on its workers, especially its highly skilled glass blowers. Thus, when the company issued their demand that the strikers return to work, it was with the warning not that they would be replaced by others but that the company would be forced to cut down production, resulting in loss of work for its laborers.

On Saturday night, the boys held a second parade, setting off firecrackers, waving colored lights, and shouting out: "We don't care whether we work or not, we won't work with the Jews." (It is interesting that

44 "Millville Strike."

45 "Strike in Millville"; "The Striking Glass-House Boys," *News of Cumberland County*, 19 September 1891, 4.

46 Sandburg stated that the boys who were employed outnumbered the adult workers. "Millville Strike," 3; "Glass Works Closed Down," *Savannah Morning News* (Savannah, GA), 20 September 1891, 1; "Hundreds Are Idle," *Patriot-News* (Harrisburg, PA), 19 September 1891, 1; Sandburg, *In Reckless Ecstasy*, 25; "Strike at Millville," *Bridgeton Pioneer*.

47 "The Strike at Millville," *Evening Journal*, 22 September 1891, 3.

they did not also call out for the salary increase they had demanded.) While both the Friday and Saturday parades did nothing to influence the decision made by Whitall, Tatum, they no doubt strengthened the resolve of the tender boy strikers. Indeed, the second chant on Saturday night was "We'll stand the storm, it won't be very long."⁴⁸ By Monday, however, as it became clear that the heads of Whitall, Tatum were not going to change their minds, a number of parties did care that the boys went back to work and were privately pressuring them to do so. If Whitall, Tatum needed the workers, so, too, did the workers need Whitall, Tatum. About one-third of the town depended on the company for their income. First were the adult factory employees who were missing work, especially since the average working season was only ten months out of the year. Second were the boys' families, "sisters and mothers dependent upon their earnings for their support." Third were Millville's merchants who relied on the workers' purchases.⁴⁹

The boys' chant thus came to pass: the storm, indeed, was not very long. On Tuesday, no doubt because of the private pressure they were receiving, about two hundred of the striking boys returned to work (along with an unspecified number of adult workers) at the Schetterville plant. The fact that their furnaces needed, on average, about twenty-seven hours to fire up suggests that Whitall, Tatum was confident on Monday that at least some of the strikers would be returning to work the next day and so restarted the furnaces then.⁵⁰ By Thursday, the strike was entirely over; all the boys were back at work together with the full

48 "The Lock Out," *Evening Journal*, 21 September 1891, 3. New Jersey glass factories were known to import boys from orphan asylums and reformatories, place them in laborers' families, and compensate the families for their room and board. These boys were "wholly without control" when they were not working and were often in the streets in gangs. Spargo, *Bitter Cry*, 162.

49 "Lock Out"; Lovejoy, "Child Labor," 43; "Strike at an End," 4 (quote); "Strike at Millville," *Evening Journal*; "Strike at Millville," *Bridgeton Pioneer*. For the dependency of town inhabitants on glass factories in their midst, see Spargo, *Bitter Cry*, 155.

50 Since the "batch" (sand, soda ash, and limestone mix) needed to be heated to 3,090 degrees Fahrenheit to create glass, it took some time to reach that temperature using coal. "Extremely High Heat Needed to Turn Sand into Glass," *Daily Herald* (Chicago, IL), 6 November 2012; Johnson, *Millville Glass*, 47.

force of adult workers.⁵¹ Whether the fourteen Jewish boys returned to work at the plants or any Jewish boys worked there in the future is unknown but does not seem likely.

The Millville strike also influenced a brief protest by the tending boys at the Cumberland Glass Mfg. Co. in Bridgeton, about nine miles away, which employed three hundred workers. On Monday morning, while the Millville strike was still underway, the boys gathered to rail against the employment of Russian Jews and “American colored boys.” The foreman immediately discharged six Jewish boys who had been hired (probably from either the Rosenhayn or Norma colonies that were fifteen minutes away by train), and the strikers went back to work. The company then issued a statement that they had already planned to dismiss the “Jew boys” since their work was unreliable.⁵²

Sensational Reports

In the days that followed, news of the Millville strike was printed in papers throughout the United States and reached as far as London.⁵³ The events of the first day (which were not entirely accurate to begin with) were blown out of proportion the further from Millville they were reported. Many of the papers, in presenting these exaggerated and sensational accounts, likened the treatment of the Jews in Millville to the harsh treatment that Jews had been receiving in Russia. They bore headlines such as: “As Bad as Russia,” “Bad as Darkest Russia,” “Much Like Russia,” and “Youthful Czars.”⁵⁴

51 “About Two Hundred of the Striking Tending Boys,” *Evening Journal*, 23 September 1891, 3; “The Boys Lacked Backbone,” *Buffalo Enquirer*, 25 September 1891, 2; “Strike at an End”; “The Strike of the Boys,” *News of Cumberland County*, 23 September 1891, 4; “The Strike of the Glass Factory Boys,” *Courier-News* (Bridgewater, NJ), 25 September 1891, 1. Hindman, *Child Labor*, 132 notes that, among boy laborers in the glass industry, “brief, spontaneous job actions and ‘spring fever’ strikes were not uncommon, from which the boys gained very little.”

52 “The Boys Say No,” *News of Cumberland County*, 21 September 1891, 1; Pepper, *Glass Gaffers*, 217; “Reading Railroad System”; “Strike at Home,” *Bridgeton Pioneer*, 24 September 1891, 1.

53 “Three Thousand Hands,” *American Settler* (London), 26 September 1891, 4.

54 “As Bad as Russia,” *South Omaha Daily Stockman*, 23 September 1891, 3; “Bad as

In one version, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that the boys marched into downtown Millville, gathering up clubs. There they set upon “a quiet and inoffensive Hebrew citizen” and beat him severely. They then “hooked a stick in his long, flowing beard, and twisted it until the hair was yanked from his face.”⁵⁵ The *Kansas City Star* added to the account that, although the Hebrew citizen “shrieked for mercy...scores of people stood calmly by and made no attempt to rescue the old man.”⁵⁶

Other accounts increased the number of Jews that were attacked. The *Republican and Herald* in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, stated that two Hebrew peddlers with their packs got off the train sometime on Friday morning and were hammered with tin cans and brickbats, dragged back to the train, and warned never to set foot in Millville again. Furthermore, “Whenever a Hebrew was encountered he was beaten nearly into insensibility and ordered to clear out at once.”⁵⁷ The *Evening Journal* in Vineland reported that a number of Hebrews were assaulted in the streets on Saturday night, forcing a number of them to leave town, and that the mob left notices at houses where “Hebrews were in hiding, to leave at once under penalty of a severe flogging.”⁵⁸ The *Daily Advocate* of Ironwood, Michigan, stated that all the Hebrews in Millville, about one hundred, were driven from the town by the boys. Many were severely beaten.⁵⁹

The reports reached their crescendo with a Missouri paper reporting that out of a thousand or more Hebrews living in Millville, not a half a dozen now remained, and that most of them, not having the means to pay for transportation, left the town on foot.⁶⁰ The *Kansas City Star* provided even more pathetic details:

Darkest Russia,” *Kansas City Star*, 21 September 1891, 5; “Much Like Russia,” *Republican and Herald* (Pottsville, PA), 21 September 1891, 3; “Youthful Czars.”

55 “Youthful Czars.”

56 “Bad as Darkest Russia.”

57 “Much Like Russia.”

58 “Strike at Millville,” *Evening Journal*.

59 “Drove Hebrews Out,” *Daily Advocate* (Ironwood, MI), 22 September 1891, 2; “Glass Works Closed Down.”

60 “Still Being Persecuted,” *Hamilton News-Graphic* (Hamilton, MO), 2 October 1891, 2.

It was a sorrowful sight to see the procession of terror-stricken men and women, with their few possessions tied up in bundles, stealthily creeping through the back streets to the depot and roadways, not daring to show themselves on the principal highways for fear of encountering the wrath of their persecutors.⁶¹

A week after the incident, the New Jersey governor, Leon Abbett, a strong supporter of labor rights, instructed the prosecuting attorney of Cumberland County to investigate the matter. Abbett had been directly involved in calming down Newark's volatile Clark Thread Mills strike a few months earlier, and it is likely that he acted now less out of concern for the Jews than on hearing reports of mob violence.⁶² The mayor of Millville, however, seeking to refute the melodramatic stories, wrote to inform him that "he had no knowledge of any Hebrew being assaulted or violently handled by the strikers," and that "the sensational reports published about Hebrew outrages in Millville are false."⁶³

The mayor's insistence that there had been no violence is supported by the fact, presented above, that the two local papers carried no reports of violence when the walkout first occurred, and the fact that none of the three Jewish families living at this time in Millville departed the town as a result of the strike. Haas continued living in Millville until his death in 1893, and his son, George, was still there in 1895.⁶⁴ Braunstein and his family continued to live in Millville through 1900.⁶⁵ Sheffer remained there until his death in 1927, when he was lauded as "one of Millville's leading and most highly respected and esteemed merchants."⁶⁶

61 "Bad as Darkest Russia." The events at the Cumberland Glassworks were also sensationalized. It was reported that the tending boys gathered at the factory gate, placed iron bars across it, and, armed with stones and clubs, informed "Jews and colored boys" that they would be stoned to death if they attempted to enter." "Strike at Home."

62 "Governor Abbett Inquiring into Alleged Violence Towards the Hebrews," *News of Cumberland County*, 26 September 1891, 5; Richard A. Hogarty, *Leon Abbett's New Jersey: The Emergence of the Modern Governor* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2001), 292 n. 95.

63 "Governor Abbett."

64 "George Haas," 1895 New Jersey State Census, Ancestry.com; "Jacob Haas," New Jersey, U.S., Death and Burials Index, 1798–1971, Ancestry.com.

65 "Nathan Braunstein," 1900 US Census, Millville, New Jersey.

66 "Harry Sheffer," 1900 US Census, Millville, New Jersey; "Harry Sheffer Died at His Home."

Millville in Perspective

The Millville strike needs to be seen in context as a pushback by (adult) nativist skilled and semiskilled industrial workers against the entry of recently arrived immigrants into their workplace. As noted above, some of these workers may have belonged to the anti-immigration Order of United American Mechanics. Not only Jews but Italians and Black Americans (who had migrated from the South) were included in the efforts of the Whitall, Tatum strikers to remove them from the town. The Millville strike was a forerunner of the conflicts to come. In the years that immediately followed, these new workers would be increasingly seen by nativists, especially through the lens of racial theory, as inimical to White Protestant American society. Anti-immigration sentiment, which the Millville strike displayed, would result in the passage of the 1891 Immigration Act, which allowed for the rejection of immigrants who were likely to become a public charge. The creation of the Immigration Restriction League in 1894 followed, and in 1896, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge proposed a bill for a literacy test to limit immigration to America.⁶⁷

The strike in Millville, however, demonstrated more than a generalized hostility toward immigrant workers; rather, its animus was directed specifically toward Jews. After all, even the modified and softened strikers' resolution that was presented to Whitall, Tatum clearly proclaimed, in essence, "any workers but Jews," and the chants that filled the air during the nighttime parades were directed specifically against them. Moreover, this strike was not for better wages, reduced working hours, or workplace safety; rather, it took place specifically in opposition to the hiring of Jews. If the historian Bertram Korn observed that the Jewish community, thirty years earlier, was not sure how much anti-Jewish prejudice "lay latent under the smooth appearance of equality," the Millville strike suggests that it was hovering right beneath the surface, ready to erupt when economic uncertainties entered the lives of American nativist workers.⁶⁸

67 John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1869–1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 69, 71, 99–101.

68 Bertram Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 13.

Yet the antisemitic outbreak that occurred in Millville was short-lived, and its consequences mild overall, since Whitall, Tatum refused to fire its Jewish workers, the nearby Jewish agricultural colonies continued their agricultural and light-industrial pursuits, and, more significantly, the Jews living in Millville remained as residents. In addition, although a number of newspapers across the United States had presented the growing number of Jewish immigrants as an economic threat, they now also wrote sympathetically about the Jews of Millville as a group in need of compassion for the conditions that drove them from Russia.

The story of the events in Millville thus adds to the history of antisemitism in America and underscores that this history is a complex one, involving both animus toward and support of Jews. The Millville strike also serves as a reminder that the sensationalizing of antisemitic incidents may sometimes grossly overstate what actually occurred. Just as “there was no joy in Mudville” after mighty Casey’s strike-out in 1888, so, too, “there were no Jews in Millville”—not thousands, hundreds, nor even tens—who were driven away during the 1891 strike.⁶⁹

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69 “There is no joy in Mudville,” from Ernest Lawrence Thayer, “Casey at the Bat: A Ballad of the Republic, Sung in the Year 1888” (1888), in Phineas Thayer, *Casey at the Bat* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1912).