



MORE THAN MINES

Industrial Decline, Gender, and the Iron Range's Cluett, Peabody, and Company Arrow Factories, 1946–1979

David LaVigne

IN JANUARY 1962, an Iron Range newspaper—the *Mesabi Daily News*—published an annual feature entitled “Horizons Unlimited.” The issue assessed the economic status of northern Minnesota’s iron mining district. While historically the nation’s most important producer of iron ore, the region had fallen on hard times in recent decades. Laborsaving technologies and the Great Depres-

sion reduced the mining workforce from 12,000 to 4,500 employees over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, when unemployment in all sectors across the region reached upwards of 10,000 people. Massive iron ore production during and immediately after World War II temporarily restored jobs, but it also spurred a new crisis in the late 1950s. As high-grade ore reserves neared exhaustion, the

worst effects of deindustrialization confronted the Iron Range. Mines shut down. Forty percent of the mining workforce lost their jobs. Out-migration swelled. Municipal governments struggled to function with dwindling tax revenues.¹

“Horizons Unlimited” was a rejoinder to these troubles. The newspaper proclaimed that “the future offers great potentialities,” and cited two industries in particular as fulfilling that promise. One was taconite mining. Taconite was a rock with a low iron content, but the Iron Range contained vast reserves of it capable of sustaining mining

for decades. “Horizons Unlimited” heralded modern technologies that could extract the iron component and called taconite “a cheering omen” and “the principal hope of the area.” The second industry was apparel manufacturing. A leading national producer of menswear, Cluett, Peabody, and Company, operated factories in the Iron Range cities of Eveleth, Virginia, and Gilbert. These plants made the company’s signature Arrow brand dress shirts and underwear, and later added a pajamas line. The newspaper described Cluett, Peabody as “an asset in the Range economy” and pronounced that diversified industry helped “to sustain the lifeblood of the area.”²

“Horizons Unlimited” justifiably linked taconite mining and apparel manufacturing. Both engaged ongoing problems associated with industrial change during the second half of the twentieth century. Yet even as the two industries intersected in meaningful ways, they also differed. Cluett, Peabody’s Arrow factories injected new energy into the Iron Range economy; the prolonged decline of mining—the taconite boom notwithstanding—bred sentiments of despair that overshadowed “Rust Belt” towns across the Upper Midwest. The Arrow factories employed predominantly women and had an empowering impact on gender dynamics; mining was an exclusively male domain, and job losses threatened masculine roles and identities. In those areas where the two industries diverged, historians have focused almost entirely on variations of the mining narrative. The significance that “Horizons Unlimited” attributed to Cluett, Peabody’s operations does not figure into historical understandings of the region or era.³

This article reestablishes the importance of the Arrow factories and traces their development on the Iron Range after 1945. Three biographical sketches recreate the history. Frank Mancina, the subject of the first biography, served as Cluett, Peabody’s Minnesota divisional manager from 1949 to 1963. His story reveals how job opportunities directed at women helped to revive the region’s economy. Emma Petrick, the focus of the second account, worked for 25 years as a sewing machine operator. Her experiences provide a window into the impact of factory work on gender roles. Catherine Rukavina, the final individual, packaged shirts from 1947 to 1979 and was president of a local branch of the clothing workers’ union. Her tale explains how women came to form an active part of the labor movement. Taken together, the three profiles highlight the ways in which responses to deindustrialization were deeply gendered. Iron Range men and women experienced industrial change in different ways.

THE MANAGER: Frank Mancina

No person played a larger role in the Arrow factories’ history than Frank Mancina, the “father and builder” of the Iron Range plants. Mancina was born in Eveleth on July 26, 1913, the son of Italian immigrants. His father was a blast man at the mines. The family were devout Roman Catholics, and, later in life, Frank became state head of the Knights of Columbus. After graduating from Eveleth Junior College in 1934, Mancina earned BA and MBA degrees at the University of Chicago, which subsequently hired him as a professor of economics and director of the Institute of Statistics. In 1940, Mancina married fellow business school graduate Alexia Harter. The couple would have five children.



The manager: Frank Mancina

When the United States entered World War II, Mancina became an economist for the War Labor Board in Chicago. He returned to Minnesota in 1944 to fill a wartime position at the A. O. Smith Corporation’s propeller plant in St. Paul. He and another plant manager named L. J. Parrish became friends at this time.⁴

Mancina’s association with Cluett, Peabody began soon after the war. With the apparel industry experiencing rapid growth, the company sought to extend operations beyond its bases in Troy, New York, and Atlanta, Georgia. L. J. Parrish, now Cluett, Peabody’s vice president of manufacturing, led the initiative. Mancina suggested to Parrish the potential of Minnesota’s iron mining district. Mancina admitted that operating and transportation costs might be lower in other parts of the country, but he believed that the industry “would be helpful to the economy of an area which had known ups and downs.” To sell the region, he promised minimal startup costs. Cluett, Peabody would not have to build new factories; instead it could repurpose a vacant school building and community recreational centers that had fallen out of use. Municipal

governments agreed to bear the costs to refurbish the facilities and extended lease agreements with low rental rates. (See sidebar, page 60.) A state government agency provided funds for vocational training.⁵

workforce than in returning profits to its New York headquarters. In 1957, for example, Mancina lobbied against a state proposal extending unemployment benefits to women who took leave for a pregnancy or to attend to

what was already a problem with high employee turnover. He warned lawmakers: "Enactment of this legislation will force us to leave the state." On other occasions, company executives sought property tax reductions or allowances to pay new employees below the state's minimum wage rate. During periods of low consumer demand, factories were subject to shutdowns or workweeks reduced to four days.⁷

The focus on employing women raised concerns as well, for it did not address the region's most pressing problem—a lack of jobs in the mining industry. Men filled almost all

What made the factories truly novel was that they created jobs primarily for women.

Four Arrow factories opened on the Iron Range between 1946 and 1947, bringing new life and new ways of thinking to the region. The factories notably reduced dependence on mining. A Chisholm newspaper described the operations as "the realization of a dream . . . to add to the payroll of the mines which up to this time has been the only industry here." Mancina supervised a plant in Eveleth making men's underwear. Facilities in Virginia, Gilbert, and Chisholm produced men's dress shirts. What made the factories truly novel, though, was that they created jobs primarily for women. While Iron Range women had always performed unpaid labor in the home, they rarely had worked for wages. Elmi Gozdanovich, an employee at the Gilbert plant, remarked, "there were no jobs [for women] until the shirt factory." Mancina identified "an untapped reservoir of female . . . help." Cluett, Peabody, for its part, preferred locating in areas without alternative employment options. The labor surplus allowed it to pay lower starting wages.⁶

For some Iron Range residents, the prospective value of such changes merited skepticism. Economic diversification benefited the region, but there also was evidence that Cluett, Peabody had less interest in the local

household duties. Speaking as manager of Cluett, Peabody's Minnesota Division—a post that he assumed in 1949—Mancina argued that loopholes in the measure exacerbated

Registration Daily at Eveleth City Hall
Mornings: 9 to 12 Afternoons: 1 to 5 Evenings: 7 to 9

2,000 WOMEN WANTED!

AGES 16 TO 55

TO REGISTER IN

(The Cluett, Peabody & Company, Inc. - Manufacturers of Arrow Shirts)

SHIRT FACTORY

LABOR SURVEY

If you are a woman 16 to 55 years of age...and if you are looking for good employment at good wages...then opportunity may be knocking at your door.

EVELETH--is out to get a Shirt Factory that will provide a good job for you--

We must have your registration for work before Monday, May 27th

Come to the Eveleth City Hall and fill out Labor Survey Forms--

DO IT TODAY!

We invite our neighbors from all of Eveleth's nearby communities to register in this survey . . . whether you live on a nearby farm or in or near Aurora, Biwabik, Gilbert, Mt. Iron, or Virginia, you are eligible.

THIS SAMPLE FORM SHOULD NOT BE SENT THROUGH THE MAIL. YOU MUST APPLY IN PERSON AT THE CITY HALL IN EVELETH--BUT, YOU MAY FILL OUT THIS BLANK AND BRING IT WITH YOU.

SURVEY OF PERSONS DESIRING JOBS

NAME _____ DATE _____

ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

V. OF P. NO. _____ SEX _____

CHECK ONE: ☐ SINGLE ☐ MARRIED ☐ DIVORCED

CHILDREN: YES _____ NO _____

EDUCATION: _____

EMPLOYMENT: _____

REASON FOR SURVEY: _____

REMARKS: _____

DATE: _____

INITIALS: _____

PRINTED NAME: _____

PRINTED ADDRESS: _____

PRINTED PHONE: _____

PRINTED CITY: _____

PRINTED STATE: _____

PRINTED ZIP: _____

PRINTED COUNTRY: _____

This advertisement sponsored as a public service by the following Eveleth Business Institutions:

THE GOLDEN RULE
J. C. PENNEY CO.
NATIONAL TEA CO.
CITY DRUG STORE
RUSSELL'S MEN'S WEAR
W. M. KARTER CO.

THE FAIR DEPT. STORE
GILSON CUT-DATE DRUG
HENDERSON'S BAKERY
THE PACIOTTI COMPANY
EVELETH NEWS-CLARION
THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK

SEIGEL'S FURNITURE & HOME
THE MINERS NATIONAL BANK
MINNESOTA POWER & LIGHT CO.
PRIMOZICH'S BETTER FOODS MARKET
LESTER SACEN FURNITURE & HOME
PLUM MOTOR SERVICE

2,000 Women Wanted! ad from Eveleth News-Clarion, May 16, 1946.



ARROW...

**"GOOD NEIGHBOR"
TO
NORTHERN MINNESOTA!**

Since 1946 Cluett, Peabody and Company has been an active citizen of the Iron Range communities. As good neighbors should, we would like to believe that we have made some contributions to the economic well-being of the area in which we operate.

In our three plants in Virginia, Eveleth and Gilbert, we presently employ almost 650 persons with an annual expenditure of approximately two million dollars. During the past sixteen years amounts approaching this figure have been expended annually in payroll dollars. This must have been an economic asset to the Range.

We believe that any relationship between industry and the community must be mutually beneficial. We, at The Arrow Company, think this is true of our relationship with our good neighbors, the people of northern Minnesota.

The ARROW Company
A DIVISION OF CLUETT, PEABODY & CO., INC.
MANUFACTURERS OF ARROW PRODUCTS

VIRGINIA EVELETH GILBERT

Cluett, Peabody promotional advertisement from the Mesabi Daily News's annual industrial issue, January 22, 1963.

community choice of occupation, makes for better working conditions all around, and gives the community the additional economic security and economic freedom that makes for a free people." Recognition of the factories' impact reached the level of state politics. During a tour of the Arrow plants in 1955, Minnesota governor Orville Freeman cast them as an embodiment of new investments in the region. "I like to come to the Range," he declared, affirming, "In this area is development which augurs well for the future." Mancina welcomed three Minnesota governors to the Arrow factories, and two others visited after his tenure.⁹

Mancina could point to two primary benefits created by the factories. First, women's wages became an important source of household income. As an active Republican Party member, Mancina believed that economic growth occurred through job creation by private industry rather than by government spending. The Committee for Bigger and Better Virginia, a group of local businesspeople, in fact directly asked, "Do we want payrolls or relief rolls?" During labor strikes or seasonal shutdowns at the mines or in households with no male presence, women's paychecks could be the sole source of earnings. The factories collectively employed between 700 and 800 workers on average. In other situations, factory jobs provided supplemental income that allowed families to attain a higher standard of living. Frank Mancina's sister-in-law, Mary Mancina, recalled earning \$1.50 per hour at the Eveleth factory during the 1950s. She explained, "It [the pay] wasn't too bad. . . . We bought our house with that."¹⁰

of Cluett, Peabody's management positions and most of the jobs in the factories' cutting and mechanical departments. These were the highest paying posts, but they constituted less than 20 percent of all jobs at the plants. A former mayor of Virginia, Herman Eaton, consequently wondered, "How are we to solve male unemployment by hiring women?" Even proponents of the factories had difficulty conceptualizing "work" as something other than men's jobs. Gilbert businessman Joseph Leoni described the Arrow plants as the first step in a regional economic revival. He believed, however, that future

prosperity depended on attracting additional industries, such as iron ore smelting. According to Leoni, it was smelting, not garment manufacturing, that represented "the answer to our labor and production problems."⁸

That said, most Iron Range residents lauded Mancina for establishing new job opportunities. When the Eveleth plant opened in 1946, city attorney M. H. Greenberg called it "the best thing that's happened here in 40 years." Mancina himself characterized the factory as transforming Eveleth into "a City of Hope." He asserted that diversified industry "gives to the residents of a

Gov. Orville Freeman (second from right) observes sewing machine operator Albena Repar at the Eveleth factory, 1955.

Second, the Arrow factories generated secondary spending in Iron Range communities. During lease negotiations with the Chisholm city council in 1950, Mancina argued that the half million dollars that Chisholm's Arrow plant paid each year in wages vastly expanded purchasing power in the city. When employees spent those earnings at local businesses, the actual economic impact exceeded one million dollars. "This is not tax money, which you take from the people and it comes back to you [as government relief]," Mancina maintained, reasoning, "If the plant were not here it would mean a great loss." Virginia resident Francine Gunderson credited that city's factory with energizing Main Street commerce. Workers had a 45-minute lunch break and frequently used the time to make quick purchases at nearby shops. Gunderson's own business exemplified how the factories supported local enterprise. She contracted with Cluett, Peabody and ran the employee cafeteria at the Virginia factory.¹¹

Frank Mancina died from cancer on April 4, 1963, at age 49. In a touching remembrance, the *Mesabi Daily News* grieved the loss for his family, church, and employees. The newspaper opined: "To the wide circle of those who labored day to day with him in business, providing the Range with an important segment of industry, his loss will be felt keenly." Mancina's economic legacy was indeed significant. Most immediately, Cluett, Peabody opened its fifth and final Iron Range factory in 1964. It manufactured men's pajamas at a second site in Eveleth. More broadly, Mancina introduced an alternative approach for dealing with the prob-



lems of post-1945 industrial decline. Whereas most efforts for economic recovery aimed at putting men back to work, new job opportunities targeting women challenged the gendered assumptions underlying those strategies. Effectively responding to changes in industries like mining required expanding the family economy and combining wages from both men and women.¹²

THE MACHINE OPERATOR: Emma Petrick

If Frank Mancina deserves recognition for bringing Cluett, Peabody's manufacturing line to the Iron Range, it was the thousands of employees who made Arrow shirts, underwear, and pajamas that kept the plants operating for more than three decades. Emma Petrick was one of those employees. Born on August 22, 1911, Petrick grew up in a family of 11 children. Her father, Marco Prebich, was an immigrant from Serbia, and her mother, Mary, immigrated from Slovenia. The family ran a boarding-house close to the city of Hibbing and

later managed a farm in the nearby countryside. Emma married Anthony Petrick, a postal service worker, in 1930, and then stayed at home for a decade and a half raising the couple's three children. A World War II labor shortage disrupted this life, when she took a job in 1944 hauling and laying railroad ties for the Duluth, Missabe and Iron Range Railway. Petrick balanced the work with her



The machine operator: Emma Petrick

family responsibilities by filling the night shift. After the war ended, she returned home.¹³

In 1948, Petrick reentered the wage-earning workforce, this time as a sewing machine operator at Cluett, Peabody's Chisholm factory. Although the plant opened in 1947, she waited until her youngest child began school. She transferred to Virginia in 1952 after corporate restructuring closed the Chisholm site. For women like Petrick, the factory jobs were a welcome opportunity. Mary Rainaldi, an Eveleth resident, could hardly contain her enthusiasm about that city's plant opening. "I jump up, I was so happy," she recalled in a broken Italian accent, "We ladies don't go no other place to work." Factory employees were a varied lot: young and old, single and married, divorcées and widows, with and without children. The women also represented a melting pot of ethnic backgrounds. Eveleth employee Nancy Oksanen

Cluett, Peabody clockwatcher card, aimed at increasing trainees' production rate.

specific skill—took over. They joined the front and back of shirts, sewed sleeves, collars, or cuffs, attached pockets, anchored buttons, and cut buttonholes. Operators received shirt parts in a one-dozen stack called a "bundle," and their earnings depended on the number of bundles completed. After assembly, another group of workers pressed the shirts before an inspector evaluated them for quality. Inspectors returned shirts that did not meet the company's exacting standards, and workers had to rip out the stitches and start over. When approved, a shirt moved on to the packaging and shipping departments.¹⁵

Petrick enjoyed the work and became highly proficient at her job. She indicated that it "was nothing" to complete the daily production quota set for each employee. Petrick's mas-

LEARN TO BE A
CLOCKWATCHER

MY SCHEDULE
For the week ending: 195

After one hour,	_____ dozens
After two hours,	_____ dozens
After three hours,	_____ dozens
After four hours,	_____ dozens
After five hours,	_____ dozens
After six hours,	_____ dozens
After seven hours,	_____ dozens
After eight hours,	_____ dozens

Whew! I'm tired —
I wonder how my repairs were today!

	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	WEEK
Hrs.						
Doz.						

Name _____ Resp. No. _____ Trg. Wk. _____
Operation _____
Prepared By _____ (Instructor)

Supervisors tried to speed up production by piping polka music over the steady hum of machinery.

Barnett's maiden name earned her a work assignment next to a Finnish immigrant. As it turned out, Barnett did not speak Finnish and the immigrant woman did not speak English.¹⁴

Once on the shop floor, employees encountered a fine-tuned operation. "It was a big deal," Petrick commented, "It was quite a busy place." Petrick's job involved shirt making. The process began when bolts of fabric arrived from out of state. The cutting department measured and cut the fabric and distributed parts within the factory. From there, an assembly line of sewing machine operators—each having mastered a

tery of the work, however, belied the difficulty of the job. The piecework system of pay created an intense, fast-paced work environment. Another sewing machine operator, Cecile Lakin, worked only a year before quitting for health reasons. "It's just push, push, push, push," she remembered, "and I found I almost passed out one day and I thought, 'Oh, dear, better leave!'" The assembly line setup meant that the work was repetitive. Betty Pond, who stitched collars at the Gilbert factory, noted, "I sewed the same seam every day, all day long. It was tedious." And the physical surroundings of the plants

were hot, dusty, and noisy. Windows stayed sealed in summer to keep out birds, workers became sick from dust particles in the air, and supervisors tried to speed up production by piping polka music over the steady hum of machinery.¹⁶

Away from the shop floor, women faced additional pressures. Petrick's decision to work stood in stark contrast to contemporary gender norms that saw breadwinning as a man's responsibility. Giovanna Serra Gentilini, a pocket attacher in Eveleth, acknowledged that when she took a job with Cluett, Peabody, her first husband "thought that it was a dishonor for him, that it wasn't nice, that he couldn't support you." She excitedly added: "He says, 'What the people say?'" Virginia Kirby observed similar attitudes in her role as a personnel supervisor at the Virginia plant. "I found that men still thought that women's place was in the home," she stated, "and a lot of the women had to quit after they worked for a couple of weeks or a month because their

THE FACTORIES

Cluett, Peabody, and Company was headquartered in Troy, New York, and had holdings across the United States and around the world. Between 1946 and 1979, it operated five apparel factories on Minnesota's Iron Range. Each site repurposed existing, publicly owned buildings.

The first Iron Range factory opened in Eveleth in November 1946 and made men's underwear. The plant was located in the city's Recreational Building, which when inaugurated in 1919 was northern Minnesota's premier venue for hockey games and curling matches. By the 1940s, a more modern sports complex had replaced the building and it stood vacant. Manufacturing operations continued at the factory through March 1979. Today, the location serves as a storage warehouse.

The Virginia factory opened in July 1947 in the city's Memorial Recreation Building. It produced men's dress shirts. Built in 1923, the Recreation Building was still in use during the 1940s, and a municipal referendum was required to relocate the recreation program to another facility. After the factory closed in March 1979, developers transformed the structure into an office building. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982, but as of spring 2018 was slated for demolition.

The Gilbert plant specialized in making shirt collars and cuffs. It opened in July 1947 in a vacant primary school building. Dating to 1908, the structure was popularly known as the Old Red School. The Gilbert School Board owned the facility, making it the only site where Cluett, Peabody did not negotiate its lease with a city council. The company shuttered the plant in November 1977, and employees transferred to Eveleth. The school board demolished the outdated building in 1982.

The Chisholm factory opened in August 1947 and closed in May 1952. It manufactured dress shirts in the Chisholm Community Building, a structure formerly containing skating and curling rinks. Chisholm was rela-

tively far from the other factory sites, and Cluett, Peabody's negotiations with the city council were more fraught. Workers transferred to Virginia after the plant closed. Built in 1923, the Community Building today houses Ironbound Studios, a film and television production company.

The last of the Iron Range factories opened in April 1964 in Eveleth. It was known as Eveleth Plant No. 2. Located in the former municipal auditorium, Plant No. 2 made men's pajamas. Due to this factory's poor sales volume, Cluett, Peabody discontinued the operations after only five years and reconfigured the facility to package underwear. In 2017, the City of Eveleth completed renovations restoring the building to its original 1912 designation as a community center and performing arts space.

LOOKING FORWARD
with Confidence
in
1966

We are proud of the contribution we have made to the economic stability of the Iron Range since we opened our first plant here twenty years ago. In this period of time our payroll to here to our employees has increased \$900,000.00. At a rate of \$1.00 per hour, our payroll has increased 42% in the past seven years work and was \$5,350,000 in 1965.

THE CHISHOLM PLANT

THE VIRGINIA PLANT

THE EVELETH PLANT NO. 1

THE EVELETH PLANT NO. 2

A DIVISION OF
CLUETT, PEABODY & CO., INC.
Manufacturers of
ARROW PRODUCTS

THE ARROW COMPANY
VIRGINIA EVELETH GILBERT

By 1966, four plants were still operating, two in Eveleth, and one each in Gilbert and Virginia. Ad from Mesabi Daily News, Jan. 29, 1966.

husband didn't like to come home and not have dinner ready." Those concerned about women's employment feared children running wild in the streets. They longed to impose traditional gender roles that, as Kirby remarked, kept women "pregnant and barefooted."¹⁷

Emma Petrick was not and had no intention of being such a woman. She refused to let male supervisors or corporate "bigshots" intimidate her. After company executives introduced a new training regimen in the 1970s, Petrick expressed skepticism. "I told 'em it wasn't gonna work," she recalled, "'cause I know what you go through. [They] didn't know." The system did prove faulty, and Petrick balked when the corporate men asked her to resolve the problems. She replied, "'That's what you're supposed to do!' . . . They didn't like that one bit." Esther Brunfelt, an inspector at the Virginia plant, called out the company on its safety measures. Brunfelt found that supervisors discouraged theft by keeping the factory doors locked. She compared the situation to the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, where in 1911 a fire took the lives of 146 trapped New York City garment workers. Brunfelt decided, "That ain't gonna happen to me," and secretly reported the infraction to the fire commissioner.¹⁸

Petrick handled the constant strain to speed up production as well. She exclaimed, "A lotta people would say, 'Oh, ish, it's slave labor.' I don't care! If you're a worker, you're gonna work. . . . I wasn't afraid of work." Petrick became an effective machine operator by developing a set routine. When one supervisor asked her to clean her workstation, Petrick responded, "I don't pick up [scrap] papers until noon. . . . [If] you want me to produce, you just better let those papers go." The factories' most experienced employees repeat-

edly stressed these values of work ethic and discipline to account for their longevity. Gloria Folman sewed sleeves at the Virginia factory from the day the plant opened to the day it closed. While she admitted that the job was difficult, she found it interesting and echoed Petrick's assessment of the industrial work environment. "You have to work at a shirt factory first to see how the world operates," Folman observed, averring, "You don't sit around. If you want to make money, you do your work."¹⁹

Employees developed other strategies to maximize earnings. Many women learned how to repair their sewing machines when they broke down. Helen MacInnis, who made shirt cuffs at the Gilbert plant, noted that operators lacking this ability went home without pay if there were no mechanics on duty. Another tactic was what Petrick referred to as "saving." Each bundle of garments was identified by a ticket, and a sewing machine operator tracked her progress by pasting the tickets from completed bundles on a tally sheet. If the output on a particular day was especially good, a worker might save the final ticket and submit it the next morning to gain a head start for that day's minimum quota. Perhaps the most contentious way to increase output was to monopolize smaller shirt and underwear sizes. Because smaller-sized garments could be sewn more quickly, operators rushed to grab those bundles when the cutting department made its deliveries. Sharp arguments sometimes broke out on the shop floor between coworkers.²⁰

Emma Petrick retired in 1973 after 25 years of sewing shirt pockets at the Arrow factories. For much of that time, she also served as a trainer, which was a testament to her skill. Petrick later reflected on her shirt-making career with fondness, saying, "I always loved working at

the factory." Her workplace expertise and attitude pointed to shifting expectations for Iron Range women during the latter half of the twentieth century. Although few of the women employed at the Arrow factories identified themselves as feminists—a concept too narrowly associated with the women's liberation movement—their work lives did much to expand gender equality. Factory jobs challenged cultural norms limiting women's place to the home and allowed working-class women to achieve economic independence. The impact of such changes was most recognizable in households headed exclusively by women. The experiences of workers like Petrick demonstrate that adjustments to gender roles affected women broadly.²¹

THE UNION HEAD: Catherine Rukavina

One of Emma Petrick's coworkers at the Virginia plant was a packaging department employee named Catherine Rukavina. Like Petrick, she played a significant role in the Arrow factories' history and in the activities of the union representing the workers especially. Catherine "Katie" Rukavina was born in Virginia on May 29, 1920. Her parents were Croatian immigrants, and her father was a miner. When Rukavina was nine years old, her mother died, and for the next few years, a succession of housekeepers cared for her and her four siblings. The Great Depression made it too difficult to continue paying for help, though, and Rukavina quit school midway through ninth grade to take up the housekeeping duties. For the next 12 years, her full-time responsibility—apart from two brief stints working as a shop assistant at five-and-dime stores—was caring for the home and family. Rukavina's siblings continued their

schooling, and all went on to college. She remained with her father and never married.²²

Like all Cluett, Peabody employees, Rukavina automatically became a member of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America when she joined the company in 1947. The union represented workers in the men's apparel industry. Rukavina cared about labor issues, and in time she became president of the Virginia branch of Amalgamated Local 512. Admittedly, the union's structure was not always to her liking. Amalgamated executives eschewed direct action strategies, like strikes, and pursued their objectives through collective bargaining agreements. Rukavina felt that the top-down approach minimized her role. "It really wasn't much that you could do," she said, explaining, "You really couldn't say, 'Well, I want this, or I want that.' . . . You could say it, but it didn't work because that isn't the way that it was working [at Amalgamated headquarters] in New York." Rukavina described the activities of Local 512 as too often amounting to little more than reading the minutes of previous meetings.²³

Gender dynamics compounded the constraints that Rukavina wrestled with as a leader of the local. Union women faced challenges that union men did not. Rukavina suggested, for instance, that low attendance at Local 512 business meetings was partly attributable to the fact that the sessions took place at night. At the end of the workday, many women rushed home to attend to household duties or children returning from school. Some women lacked the private transportation needed to attend evening meetings. In other cases, it was the patriarchy of the American labor movement that inhibited women's activism. In 1975, 300 Arrow factory employees gathered in Virginia to discuss organizing a strike. The president



The union head: Catherine Rukavina.

of the local's Gilbert branch, Mayme Coombe, commented, "The girls were in the mood." But before the women reached a consensus, Amalgamated executives snubbed out the demonstration. "It's a hard thing to do," Coombe reflected after the workers backed down, adding, "Women don't carry a lot of clout."²⁴

In spite of these limitations, Rukavina worked hard to build support for Local 512. Various motivations inspired Iron Range women's labor activism. For Rukavina, the main reason to become involved in union endeavors was a commitment to progressive politics. "I've always been union-minded and politically minded," the lifelong Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party member declared, expounding, "Vote all the time, no matter if it's school, national, city, or state." Rukavina bristled when coworkers' pragmatism super-

Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, "Union Label" campaign.

seded ideology. Starting in 1948, one of the Amalgamated's main initiatives was a "union label" campaign. The strategy asked consumers of men's apparel—the majority being women shopping for their families—to buy only goods made in union-organized factories. Rukavina called out members of Local 512 who purchased nonunion clothing labels: "I'd preach 'em and tell 'em, 'Don't do that, don't do that,'" she lamented. "They didn't care. They'd do it anyway . . . because it was cheaper."²⁵

More commonly, women backed the labor movement because of "bread and butter" issues. The Amalgamated fought for fair wages, paid vacation time, and medical, life insurance, and pension plan benefits. Angie Lautigar, president of Local 512's Eveleth branch, noted, "Everybody complains about wages if they're good or not." During the aborted strike of 1975, she advocated for a pay raise, arguing, "Women who are sole supporters of their families especially need it." In Gilbert, Mayme Coombe applauded the Amalgamated for negotiating improved maternity benefits but criticized its failure to secure a piece rate increase for specialized fabrics. The extra time required to sew difficult patterns cut into earnings. Rukavina involved the union in a pension dispute. Upon retiring, she anticipated monthly pension checks of \$150. She contacted Amalgamated headquarters after a technicality reduced her pay-



Going-away party for Minnesota divisional manager William Conley, 1971. The scrapbook where this photo was found jokingly describes the women as "The Harem."

ments to only \$70 per month. "That's what I got for thirty-one-and-a-half years," she protested to no avail, "Oh, was I mad!"²⁶

Union involvement did not necessarily have to set workers and employer against one another. For many members, Local 512 was as much a social organization as it was a political unit. Rukavina's counterpart in Gilbert, Mayme Coombe, recalled, "I tell you, I never made any money there [at the factories], but a lot of good friends." Local 512 coordinated with Cluett, Peabody to host Halloween and Christmas parties, to organize picnics, to contribute to community fund-raisers and bond drives, and to field teams in bowling, softball, and curling leagues. Despite occasional tensions, labor-management relations were generally cordial. Factory cafeterias offered spaces for socializing, and factory stores built goodwill by selling Arrow apparel at discounted prices. During lax production periods, workers and



plant was older, and Lautigar tied the branch's strength to the women's fears that their age made opportunities for reemployment difficult. In the 1970s when market pressures from inexpensive foreign-made apparel threatened jobs as a whole, workers at all of the Iron Range factories relied on the union. Amalgamated executives lobbied for tariffs on clothing imports from Hong Kong, Japan, and other parts of East Asia. Goods manufactured in those areas, they claimed,

two years later. Workers rejected announcements by the company linking the shutdowns to high turnover rates and the plants' remoteness from Cluett, Peabody's East Coast centers of operation. Rukavina asked in disbelief: "How could they say that after being here 32 years? And all of a sudden?" From the perspective of Local 512, corporate greed was to blame. "I'm angry," Virginia employee Lillian Beauduy vented upon hearing of the shutdown, avowing, "Just to close for profit I think is terrible." Amalgamated executive Burton Genis added, "Maximization of profits has taken precedence over anything else." He called the exodus "cold-blooded" and "immoral." Per Cluett, Peabody's union contract, reduced domestic production—which occurred when the plants closed—allowed the company to increase its reliance on lower-cost imports.²⁹

Catherine Rukavina pursued other interests after Cluett, Peabody left the Iron Range. A Milwaukee-based manufacturer of women's apparel, the Jack Winter Company, took over the Arrow buildings, but Rukavina did not obtain work with the company. She found a new job at a community

For many members, Local 512 was as much a social organization as it was a political unit.

supervisors filled time by making gag items, like an oversized pair of underwear. Catherine Rukavina was one of many employees honored at annual banquets for years of service or exemplary safety records.²⁷

The greatest impetus for women's union participation was job security. While Rukavina agonized over sparse attendance at Local 512 meetings, Eveleth's Angie Lautigar boasted, "We had a very good union." The average age of employees at the underwear

were a product of "unfair competition based on sweatshop wage levels." Local 512 issued similar statements favoring government action to protect the apparel industry against a "flood" of imports. It contended, "Jobs are being placed in jeopardy" due to "an unfair game."²⁸

For Rukavina and her union sisters, these responses did not save their jobs. Cluett, Peabody shuttered its Gilbert plant in 1977. The Eveleth and Virginia sites closed less than

action agency until retiring in 1983. Rukavina's experiences over some 31 years in the apparel industry highlight working-class women's involvement in the modern American labor movement. An institutional approach to labor history, emphasizing union leaders and policies, does not adequately explain her participation. In its official capacities, the Amalgamated was decidedly male-dominated. Yet union membership was still meaningful to women like Rukavina. It created new associations that extended beyond the traditional bonds of family, ethnicity, and religion. Local 512 members exhibited a potent form of agency when they determined whether to toe or defy the union lines informing those attachments.³⁰

THE HISTORY of the Iron Range's Arrow factories complicates standard accounts of industrial decline in the United States after 1945. It

challenges gendered perspectives conflating economic and labor union vitality with men's employment. The 8,000 workers hired while Cluett, Peabody operated on the Iron Range provide powerful evidence that the region's past involved much more than mines. Indeed, during an inspection of Cluett, Peabody's facilities in 1948, Minnesota governor Luther Youngdahl described the plants "as dispelling the idea that the Range is synonymous with iron ore." More than a decade later, Finland's president Urho Kekkonen received gifts of a miner's helmet and an Arrow shirt during a tour of the region. In 1969, the *Mesabi Daily News* celebrated both "Iron Ore and White Shirts" in its annual "Horizons Unlimited" feature. For a place whose very name—the Iron Range—asserts mining's primacy, the Arrow factories test fundamental assumptions about the region's identity.³¹

Ultimately, the factories' history encourages us to consider that pro-

cesses of industrial decline are as much about change as they are loss. The story of the Arrow factories lacks the romance underlying tales of Iron Range women taking over mining jobs during World War II. It has received nowhere near the publicity devoted to women's groundbreaking stand against sexual harassment at Iron Range taconite mines during the 1980s and 1990s. Nonetheless, the Arrow factories reshaped gender relations in enduring ways. To draw attention to these changes does not diminish the disruptive impact caused by mining's struggles, nor overlook how men's fractured sense of self formed in conjunction with new roles for women. It does, however, underscore the extent to which most histories of deindustrialization privilege a masculine point of view. The experiences of Frank Mancina, Emma Petrick, and Catherine Rukavina broaden this narrative by showing the significance of industrial change for Iron Range women.³² ▣

Notes

This article was made possible by a special gift from longtime Minnesota Historical Society member Frank C. Dowding.

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