

The Preserve of Childhood

Adult Artifice and Construction:
Images of Late-Nineteenth Century American Childhood



University Art Gallery

University Center at Binghamton
State University of New York

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Adelphi Archive and Conservation
Images of Late-Nineteenth Century
American Childhood



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The Presence of Childhood

Adult Aesthetics and Conventions
Images of Late-Nineteenth Century
American Childhood



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Preface

The Preserve of Childhood is a title which plays on the word preserve, in the sense of a nature preserve, or area set aside for the protection of small, wildlife creatures. Childhood has been, and still is for that matter, similarly perceived as a separate and protected enclosure of life. It is a powerful concept which pervades our view of history even when it obviously contravenes the fact.

Figuring out ways of challenging this concept of childhood became an organizing principle of the exhibition, and a departure point for the catalog essays. The three essays, "Baby Is King: Photographic Images in Small-Town America," "Living Pictures and Still Images: Child's Play and the Creation of Social Identities in Shoetown (1890-1920)," and "From Household to Cemetery: Representing the Death of the Child"—corresponding to the three separate sections of the exhibition—define new areas of study and raise new issues for debate. Broadly speaking, the essays discuss the use of late 19th and early 20th century American images and rituals of childhood. The material for the exhibition is drawn predominantly from the cities, towns, and rural areas of central New York state, but we are confident that the implications of our conclusions will be of interest to art historians, historians of the Victorian era, and historians of the family. The "Baby Is King" section of the exhibit brings together high art as well as examples of popular culture which illustrate late 19th century baby worship; the "Baby Is King" catalog essay focuses on baby photos, made for families in Cortland and nearby McGraw, and discusses the photo-portraits as images empowering the families and mothers for whom they were made. "Living Pictures and Still Images" weighs a corporate family's use of child's play and child's play imagery in Johnson City (Shoetown). "From Household to Cemetery" interprets the significance of the denial of death in child mourning imagery made largely for bereaved families in central New York.

Acknowledgements

Catalogs, in addition to publishing essays and checklists of objects uniquely assembled for the purpose of the exhibition, also provide the organizing institution with an occasion to thank lenders for their generosity in making available their materials and objects. We are delighted to have this opportunity to record our thanks to the following institutions for lending so generously to the exhibition, *The Preserve of Childhood*—and for opening their research resources to us. We are also indebted to the staff, librarians, archivists, historians, and curators of these institutions who gave their time freely in answering our questions.

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Broome County Historical Society
Cornell University Libraries
Cortland County Historical Society
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George F. Johnson Memorial Library
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New York Historical Society
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SUNY-Binghamton, Glenn G. Bartle Library, Special Collections
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Figure 1. Cabinet photograph of Kyle Parsons, born after c.1900, taken in Cortland, New York. Cortland County Historical Society.

“Baby Is King”

Photographic Images in Small-Town America

Josephine Gear

IN 1897, *THE American Agriculturist*, a bimonthly journal for farmers, small-town, and rural residents, had the idea of tying their subscription drive to a baby contest. The journal announced the contest in August, calling for readers to send photos of their babies to the *Agriculturist*'s offices by December 1897; the *Agriculturist* would award prizes to the “nicest” babies.¹ The idea of promoting the journal through a baby contest seemed an enterprising one, since the baby enjoyed great popularity with the general public at the time—as the journal's editors knew.

The journal's women's page regularly published sentimental poems and verses, small odes of worship to the baby, written by readers themselves. Thus, the arrival of hundreds of baby photos within the first weeks of the contest surprised the editors, but did not alarm them. Although the public had responded more enthusiastically than anticipated, the journal welcomed the numbers of baby photos as a sign of the project's success. However, as the weeks went by and baby photos continued to arrive in the mail in great numbers, editorial pleasure turned to anxiety. Fear grew that the journal had burdened itself with something larger than it could handle since, early in the contest, the *Agriculturist* had committed itself to inviting readers to judge the baby photos. Readers were to choose the prizewinners from groups of finalists' photos the journal would publish in a small number of issues. Because of the contest's popularity, the journal published not a few finalists as planned, but over two hundred.

How many readers sent baby photos is not known, but the journal admitted receiving thousands of votes, many annotated with sentiments inspired by the cherubic images of other readers' offspring.² Vote counting became a protracted affair, a nightmare in fact for the office, and it was not finally until June, 1898, that the *Agriculturist* was able to publish the prizewinners' names. Ruefully, the journal had discovered that the sentimental truism, “Baby Is King,” or baby worship, packed an extremely strong punch with its readers. The staff time and effort had far outweighed, in the final reckoning, the increased subscriptions gained through the baby contest.

The *Agriculturist* had unwittingly become involved with a period cultural phenomenon, baby worship, whose nature the journal could not have been expected to have gauged accurately. Baby worship—and the adulation of the mother—were complementary forms of turn-of-the-century American culture, as well as western European cultures. The infant and the mother received a new emphasis wherever advancing industrialization reorganized family life, introducing specialized role playing into the family circle. In the generally accepted schema, the man, going outside the home to work, became head of the household and its sole source of support, while the woman, remaining at home, became wife, household manager and—preeminently—mother. In this situation the infant rose to prominence as a subject in high art as well as in popular culture; the infant contributed most frequently to defining mother and motherhood, as in the work of Mary Cassatt and Auguste Renoir.

The historian who looks to high art images of infancy and maternity as guides to attitudes in a given culture and a given period must deal with a central issue: those images provide views which are interpretations of infancy from *outside* the family. Conversely, the value of the humble baby photo is that its image is shaped with the active approval of the mother and

father, *within* the family. Moreover, while the baby photo appealed universally in all industrialized countries in the late nineteenth century, it enjoyed perhaps its greatest popularity in this country; particularly is it typical of small town and rural American culture, as the baby contest's popularity with the *Agriculturist's* readers indicates. Not least, the baby photo is a repository, as yet untapped, of the familial attitudes of small town and rural America.³ Many letters, diaries, and journals kept by small-town women are only now being published.⁴ The baby photo, then, constitutes an important source of information on familial attitudes toward the infant held by these social groups hitherto regarded as inarticulate.

We must carry our beautiful baby to town
Some day when the weather is fair, we said,
We must dress him up in his prettiest gown,
And wave his hair on top of his head;
For all his cousins, and all his aunts,
And both his grandmothers proud and dear,
Declare it is shameful and every way blameful
To have no picture of him this year.

"The Baby's Picture," 1879.⁵

The demand for baby photos continued unabated through the end of the century, even as the fascination of adult Americans with their own photo portraits was cooling. Many turn-of-the-century studio photographers on Main Street would not have survived had they not cannily adapted to the baby photo business. Babies were either driven to the studio from outlying areas and villages, or wheeled in wicker baby carriages through the streets of their town. In the studio, the ambitious photographer had prepared for his infant clientele with a "variety of toys, plenty of help [and] lots of plates, all ready."⁶ Toward the century's end, the baby also became a popular subject for the home photographer, as many amateur enthusiasts enjoyed the challenge of "stealing" a likeness from the "lively little Fellow".⁷

Baby photos were made according to one or two basic portrait types for the infant; within those types, conventions were followed with remarkably little variation during the two or three decades of the baby photo's popularity, the eighties, nineties, and early 1900s. The textual analysis employed in this essay works on the assumption that the studio and home photographers' portrait conventions embodied within them the families' fundamental attitudes toward the infant. This essay discusses two types of baby photos believed to correspond to the two basic family types which coexisted in small town and rural America at the turn of the century. One type was organized along lines reminiscent of the rural preindustrial family, while the other, more bourgeois, family type had adapted to the rapid modernization of small town life.

In light of this thesis, knowing the way in which a baby photo was received in its time is of considerable importance. Written views on the reception of the baby's portrait are rare, as mentioned above.⁸ A small genre in the sentimental verse of the period dealt with the "Baby's Picture,"⁹ but does not provide a reliable notion of the intimate and complex role which the baby's portrait assumed in family life. And, though professional photographers' journals lamented the pitfalls of taking the baby's portrait, and catalogued the studio resources needed to take one small baby's likeness, these accounts reveal little of the patrons' mind and motives.¹⁰ This, then, leaves the baby photos themselves. There are many thousands of photographs now in the collections of museums and historical societies, but the majority of these are of diminished use to the historian since they have been separated from their family histories.¹¹

To narrow the scope of this study, only documented baby photos of small town and rural families who lived in a region of upstate New York were studied; the subject of this discussion

are the photographs made for three different families. Two of the families for whom the portraits were made lived in the same town, Cortland, New York, at the turn of the century, and patronized local photographers' studios. The third family, the Parsons, contemporaneous with the first two, lived outside the town in a nearby village, McGraw. One of their infants, Kyle Parsons, just as the baby in the verse, was carried to town to have his formal portrait taken, while his brother, Ruel Mornay Parsons, was photographed at home.

Kyle Parsons, an infant of a few months, was taken in 1899 to a professional photographer's studio in Cortland to have his photo-portrait taken (fig. 1).¹³ Crowded into the portrait's small oval frame is the diminutive figure of the baby, its robe and two studio props—a wicker screen and a sheepskin rug. Although the arrangement appears haphazard, we should not assume the absence of attempted order or of a meaningful structure.

The single most important feature of baby photos of the period—and the most obvious feature of Kyle's portrait—was that the infant sat alone before the camera. Rarely was another family member, even the mother, included in the photograph.¹⁴ The second important element of Kyle's photo-image is the upright pose. Kyle, too young to maintain an upright position alone and unaided, was supported by props hidden from view by the sheepskin rug. The photographer further emphasized the portrait's formality by using a simple technique: he centered the infant in front of the camera. The robe, donned especially for the portrait sitting, further dignifies his small figure. Kyle, like other infants under six months, would ordinarily have worn a long robe, a linen garment twice his natural length. The gown he wore to have his photograph taken was "dress wear," with its embroidered frills and flounces, a double embroidered flounce at the hem and a single flounce at the yoke.¹⁵ Someone in the studio crimped and puckered the robe's long skirt, arranging as much of it as possible within the portrait frame. The bold design of the wicker screen behind the child, fanning out like a peacock tail and suggesting a throne-like setting for the infant, compounds the fussy effect of the robe in the portrait's small oval format.¹⁶ It works with the drapery folds to inscribe the infant figure within a system of surface patterning. Then too, the linen gown, the sheepskin rug, the wicker screen, and the soft flesh of baby face and fists make a textured web across the portrait's surface. The cumulative effect of the portrait's composition and tactile patterning is to situate Kyle's figure firmly within an intricate formal structure.

A formal or semi-formal upright posture was generally required for all infant portraits of the period. This happily disregarded the fact that the most relaxed and natural position for an infant under six months is either on the stomach or back.¹⁷ In part, the upright pose was a reminder of earlier studio practices in the 1860s and 1870s, when sitters had to be braced or firmly supported for the long exposures the plates required.¹⁸ However, Kyle's pose retains a stiff formality no longer demanded by either the photographic processes or the social etiquette of the period. The infant and the long robe had to be displayed to equal advantage. This required a formal full-length likeness which obviated placing his little figure in the foreground of the picture space. Positioning Kyle in the middle ground does not give quite the close-up, intimate portrait then preferred by many parents of the period. This is not to say that Kyle's picture is bereft of any personal charm. The portrait's formal emphasis is lightened in Kyle's glance away from the camera. Someone standing at the photographer's side had attracted Kyle's attention, and the photographer captured the infant's response in his smiling, full-cheeked profile. While his "cute" baby looks ("cute" was an adjective frequently used to describe the baby portraits of the period) relieve the portrait's severity, they do not release Kyle's little figure from the portrait's formal system.¹⁹

Kyle's portrait style represents a series of choices that ran counter to the fashionable demand for a simpler, more relaxed portrait. Presumably, the fussy formality offered Kyle's parents something that pleased or satisfied them, which the newer style of infant portrait could not. A clue to the image's pleasing quality lies in studio photography's claim to the painted portrait tradition. Photo-portraits of the 1860s and 1870s were small, primitive images

which served their public primarily as “cards of identity,” “tokens of remembrance,” or simply as genealogical documents.²⁰ To increase the dignity and importance of the early portrait, photographers borrowed conventional poses and accessories from the established styles of the past, particularly the baroque.²¹ Although many studios in the late 1890s still claimed a descendancy from the painted tradition by emblazoning an artist’s palette and brushes on their cards, few continued to borrow heavily from a specific tradition. Again, slightly out of step with fashionable taste, Kyle’s portrait recalls an older, even archaic, portrait tradition. The pose, centered positioning, and surface patterning of Kyle’s picture resemble the system of representation of the icon-portrait. In this portrait type, the figure, its clothing, jewelry, and other attributes were intended as emblems of power.²² The icon-portrait made a statement of a public, and not an intimate, nature. In a sense then, Kyle’s portrait can be read as a simulacrum of infant majesty; a visual formula, a guise or a means by which Kyle was transformed and regalized from a diminutive, appealing little form into a figure well able to represent his family. What I am suggesting is that Kyle’s cabinet picture is a public document, one intended to make statements about the family’s position and socio-cultural status. To this end, its potential as an endearing, private-use image was downplayed. The baby’s cute smile was of secondary importance in this context.

Kyle’s elder brother, Ruel Mornay Parsons, had been photographed in 1897 when he was about two months old.²³ The amateur photographer who made this portrait was also observant of correct form. The setting was not a studio, but possibly the front parlor of the home. In the original photograph, the reflection of the newly introduced magnesium flashlight, which allowed amateur photography in the home, is seen hanging like a globe above the infant’s head.²⁴ Not even the subdued flash of an infant smile, however, lightens Ruel’s portrait. No baby fist waves in the air, no kicked feet are allowed to disturb the order of the long gown. Ruel Parsons, a solitary and tiny bundle, overwhelmed by the scale of the rocking chair in which he had been placed, also had to be supported into a semi-sitting position. Around the rocking chair, part of the parlor and its furnishings are visible—on the left a framed print, a wall lamp, a side table with a crocheted cover, a silk and beaded lampshade; on the right an upright piano, draped by a fringed silk shawl.

Lorenzo and Etta Parsons, the parents of Ruel and Kyle, lived in the village of McGraw, five miles east of Cortland. The 1900 census listed Lorenzo Parsons’ primary occupation as



Figure 2. Amateur photograph of Ruel Mornay Parsons, born May, 1897, taken in McGraw, New York. Cortland County Historical Society.

farming, and the Parsons' dwelling on McGraw's Main Street as a rented farm.²⁵ The interior in which Ruel was photographed does not seem to answer to a description typical of a farm interior. The Parsons, as was common practice among small farmers, supplemented their main income by working at related trades. Their living was derived from three additional businesses, all conducted from the same premises. The census lists Lorenzo's secondary occupation as undertaking. And in the Directory for Cortland and neighboring villages, Parsons advertised as a furniture dealer and upholsterer.²⁶ Thus it seems reasonable to assume that the site of Ruel's portrait was his parents' front parlor. The furnishings which surround him, in a fashion similar to the studio props in his brother's portrait, were either personal furnishings or the stock of the family business. In view of the number and kind of furnishings edged into the portrait frame, and the sober manner with which the camera took stock of both them and the first born, the portrait suggests itself as a kind of double celebration. A few additional facts about the Parsons may make this point clearer.

At the time of Ruel Mornay's birth, his father, Lorenzo Parsons, was forty-three and his mother, Etta, thirty-three. By the standards of the period, both parents were old for a first child. Moreover, the couple had been married thirteen childless years before Ruel's birth. Though a tragic series of stillbirths could account for their married years without children, the couple might have practiced some form of birth control.²⁷ Childlessness would have enabled the Parsons to build up their businesses and achieve a good standard of living, one capable of supporting a young family quite comfortably. In this light, the portrait reads as a kind of commemorative picture of achievements, one which honored the thirteen hard-working and productive years and, at the same time, the awaited arrival of the first born.

Thus far it has been assumed that the Parsons had partially adopted the standards and values of the modernizing world. In the last two decades of the 19th century, as mass communications had rapidly developed to include rural regions, it became increasingly difficult for residents of these areas to avoid exposure to new attitudes toward the family.²⁸ Notwithstanding, the photographs of their sons reveal an old-fashioned taste for infant imagery, and familial attitudes toward children no longer commonly practiced. The Parsons, farmers, and small-trades people domiciled in villages, did not live in the kind of conditions which generated rapid social and cultural change. This was so even for McGraw, a village which had acquired some light industry by the late 1890s.²⁹ Although the arrival of industry in McGraw might have generated more trade for the Parsons, it would not have altered their economic base. This survived from an older, pre-industrial economy.

The Parsons ran a farm, and two or three business as well: undertaking, furniture dealing, and upholstering. Although they managed a comfortable standard of living from their combined incomes, they were not affluent; they did not own their farm, but rented it. In a family of this kind, modest but not affluent, hard-working and ambitious, it was essential for the woman to contribute her labor and her skills to the family income. She probably performed the traditional woman's tasks about the farm, tending the young animals and chickens, and making the dairy products. In all probability, she worked with her husband in their other businesses, performing such services as selling, bookkeeping, and ordering new merchandise and materials. The need for her productive labor might have curbed the acceptance of progressive attitudes toward the children. For example, in the bourgeois family life, the woman was separated from direct family-income production and functioned more exclusively as mother, bearing the major responsibility for the care and upbringing of the children.³⁰ These conditions fostered a close emotional bonding between mother and infant—of a kind less likely to grow in the more hectic family life where the mother contributed directly to the family livelihood.

I am arguing that the Parsons' diverse ways of making a living predicate the existence of their traditional attitudes toward the family. Both Lorenzo and Etta Parsons would have spent most of their time at home, since the business premises, farm, and home were one.

Parenting would thus have been more a shared familial duty, a pattern typical of the pre-industrial family life, not of the bourgeois family. In this family pattern, children were not viewed as so exclusively a part of the wife's domain, but as part of the network of relationships which made up the family as a whole. At the bottom it is these kinds of material and cultural concerns—and not some abstract category like “taste”—that explain the kinds of decision making which attend the creation and production of any visual work. At the experiential level, the simpler fashionable form of baby picture may have struck the Parsons family as too bare or uninteresting. Whether or not they could articulate it, they sought a picture image of their sons which would deliver a message about the family to their community, relatives, friends, and neighbors—and which eventually would find its place in the album of family photographs.

At this point, I would like to return to an anomaly in Ruel's portrait which, though passed over before, assumes an added significance in the light of these recent remarks. It is the rocking chair in which Ruel was placed and supported by pillows. There is something out of place, if not out of character about this wooden chair. After all, a plush-covered chair would not only refer to upholstery, one of the family businesses, but would also match the other parlor furniture. The presence of a rocking chair therefore suggests a choice. After all, the portrait was no ordinary amateur attempt, but a photograph of a son who broke the interregnum of thirteen years of marriage. I propose that the rocking chair works as a symbol, a symbol which displaced the bourgeois order (the piano, the framed print, the silk-fringed shawl) with a genealogical referencing of the family.³¹ The rocking chair hints at past generations, triggers notions of inheritance, and conjures up visions of Ruel in the future. Ruel seated in the same chair. Ruel in adulthood. Ruel assuming the responsibilities of farm and business. The portrait collapses the past, present, and future time into one: a potent image-

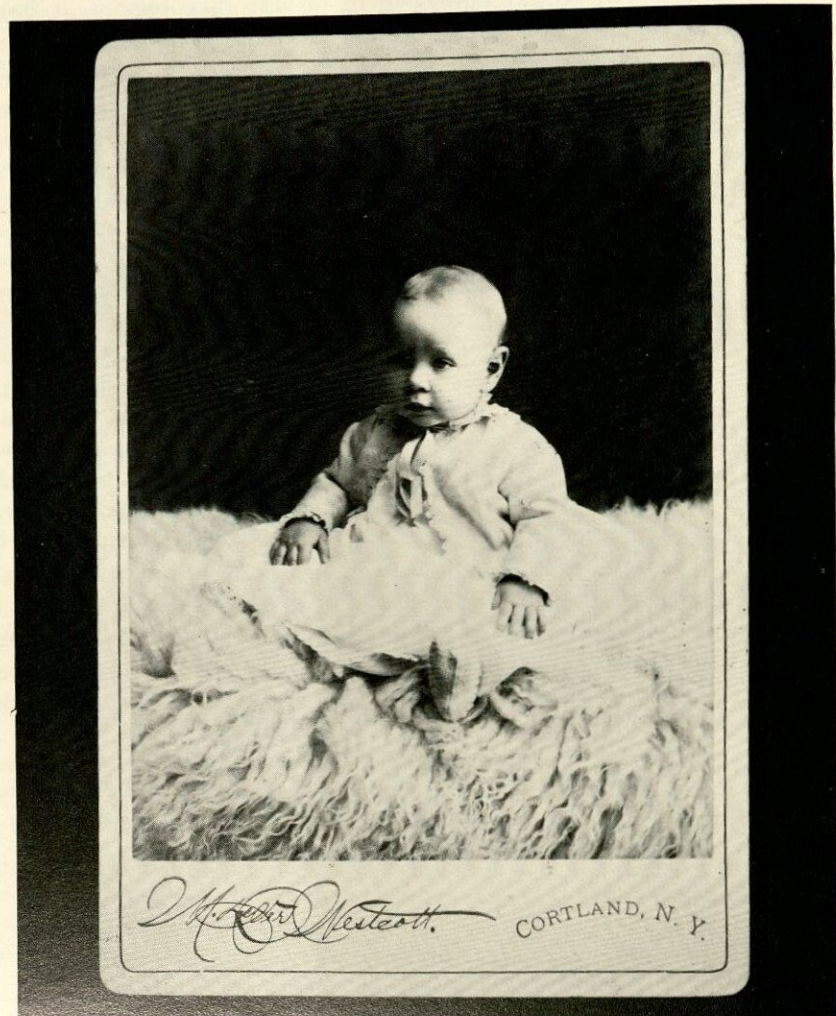


Figure 3. Cabinet photograph of Helen Etheridge Jewett, born June, 1891, taken in Cortland, New York. Cortland County Historical Society.

likeness celebrating past achievement, present happy state, and the hope for the family's future. It was the kind of photo-image which could mobilize the parents' spirits, and supplement their experience of the infant in actuality.

AN INFANT GIRL, aged about eight months, daughter of a family who owned a jewelry store and who lived in Cortland, sat for her portrait in a photographer's studio in 1891 (fig. 3).³² Like Kyle, the infant girl was posed alone, while the relatives accompanying her waited out of sight. Unlike in Kyle's portrait, however, the camera was dropped to the eye level of the baby, and a decision was made to use only one studio prop, a sheepskin rug. Yet the baby's solitary pose, neat little outfit, and serious demeanor still endow the portrait with formality. The lower and closer camera angle and simpler setting focus attention on the infant's face. The soft, appealing looks and vulnerability of infancy are apparent in her prominent, rounded cheeks. Through such details, the photo testifies to an appreciation of the infant's emerging personality.

In another infant picture (fig. 4), the subject, a baby boy born in 1910, displays similar characteristics and qualities, as the appeal of his infantness merges with the outlines of a distinctive infant character. This child, the son of a second generation industrial family of Cortland, was also taken to a professional studio in the same town.³³ He too faced the camera alone; there is no parent on view. And he also, because of his age, had to be propped into position for the camera study. The sheepskin, the only accessory, served a double duty: to enhance the soft infant qualities, as well as to hide the necessary props and supports of the very young subject.

The scant, though informative, data available on the Parsons family has no equivalent in



Figure 4. Cabinet photograph of Charles Wickwire, Jr., born 1910, taken in Cortland, New York. Cortland County Historical Society.

the histories of the two bourgeois families of the Cortland infants. One document, a journal of a kind, does offer some corollary material.³⁴ Kept by a woman from a contemporary Cortland family, also part of the town's bourgeoisie, it can help us reconstruct some of the attitudes toward the infant shared by this class.

The document, compiled by the wife of Cortland's quality boot and shoe store proprietor, is a scrapbook of social events which also contains information about two infant sons. In one half of the book, she pasted clippings of newspaper reports of the activities of the social set to which she and her husband belonged, such as accounts of weddings, parties, and whist games they frequently attended. Reversed, the other half of the book records the progress of their two sons born eighteen months apart in the closing years of the century. It had become a common practice, beginning in the eighties, for mothers to record the changing weight, height, and other statistics and observations on the growing infant.³⁵ This mother kept faithful records for the first eighteen months of her sons' lives. In among the pages on which she noted their developments, she also carefully drew the outlines of two small outspread hands.

This kind of personalized record-keeping seems closely related to the kind of personalized visual record that the Cortland studios made of the jewelry store owner's daughter and the industrialist's son. The desires to keep such detailed written and visual records grew out of family and social life in the small-town environment. "In early days," mused one inhabitant of Cortland whose life spanned the end and beginning of the two centuries, "people had more leisure and would spend the day with friends and relatives. I well remember when Cousin Editha Stephens would come to spend the day, have dinner and supper, and a long afternoon of visiting."³⁶ The social columns of the local newspaper, *The Cortland Gazette*, oral reminiscences of old inhabitants, and written records delineate a small-town social life which revolved around the family.³⁷ Rituals specifically centered on the family featured prominently in local life as significant social occasions. Weddings, engagements, anniversaries, and christening parties were the big events, and the suppers, parties, and balls which celebrated them were not just for the immediate and extended family but included a whole network of families, a social set in other words. Then too, there were picnics, "nutting" parties, skating parties, and "the spelling bees, the apple bees, the quilting bees, sleigh rides"—events which were not specifically family events but were family centered since participation was invited because of the family's membership in a social set.³⁸

Photography centered on the family and its rituals.³⁹ Most photographs were kept in the family photograph album, a volume with an embellished and often ornately designed cover; and some portraits were framed and grouped as a collection on the parlor mantel. Viewing the family photographs fostered the sense of collective and individual identities. Over the open pages of the photo album, family reminiscences were aired and gossip was exchanged. The photo album would be brought out for the visits of the family's Cousin Editha. On long afternoons the discourse of the family would be reshaped and redefined, sustaining the family's sense of social and historical place in a period of rapid change and adjustment. The advent of a new infant in the family—and the addition of a new infant portrait to the family album—played a key role in this process.

A baby can make the commonest home the brightest spot on earth. It can lighten the burdens of a loving mother's life by adding to them. It can flatten its dirty little face against the window pane in such a way that the tired father can see it as a picture, before he rounds the corner. Yes, babies are great insitutions particularly one's own.

"What Baby Can Do," *The Owego Gazette*, 1885.⁴⁰

What this passage says is that the family knows itself to be a family through the baby. At

his birth (rarely her birth in the period's popular literature), the family comes into being, and the roles of mother, father, grandmother, aunt, and cousin are created. Thus the family welcomes "Baby's Picture" ("it is blameful/ To have no picture of him this year") as a reminder of their new roles, and for the sense of belonging they receive. The baby, like some benign centrifugal force, draws the family to his center. At the same time, he renews and sustains all social life. Of course, none of this can be adduced directly from the "personalized" infant portrait itself, but from the photograph and the reconstructed historical context for which it was made.

Thus far, I have suggested that the Parsons' baby photos were images in which the sons represented the family. I have also tried to demonstrate that they gave Lorenzo and Etta Parsons a sense of their history, and embodied their desire for the family's future. By contrast, I believe that the photos made for the Cortland families belong to a different cultural generation, and served different social purposes. The newer style baby portrait's most important use may have been reserved for the mothers of the infants, mothers who belonged to the bourgeois class of a small town.

In the lexicon of the times, the mother was more significant than the childless wife. Mothering had become the chief occupation and, on a more ideal level, the destiny of the bourgeois women in the post-Civil War decades. With every birth, the baby quintessentially and poignantly affirmed the mother's worth. Motherhood was especially the small-town bourgeois woman's card of identity, her port of entry into the social set.

In the closing years of the century, the single middle-class woman achieved some independence and recognition; somewhat mockingly the popular press named the period the 'Age of the New Woman.' Not so well-known is that during those same years a kind of sorority consciousness existed among married women, especially the younger married mothers of the community. These women were active in church circles, performed charity work, sat on library committees, or formed societies to beautify their communities. As members of their groups or clubs, they also recruited new women for membership in the social set. The quality of a woman's house and housekeeping were judged. And, needless to say, her peers scrutinized the appearance of her babies and children.

An apocryphal story published in a professional photographer's journal of the period points to the kind of pressures under which the mother visited the studio. It tells how a photographer was driven to distraction by a mother's demands for a portrait which would meet her standards of "perfection more perfect." Desperate to get the baby to hold the perfect pose, the photographer administered it a fatal dose of a "few grains of cyanide of potass." The baby was immediately still and the overjoyed photographer went on to take a "magnificent set of pictures of four sizes." The bereaved mother, thrown into a state of shock at first, was soon consoled by the sight of the images, which showed "every piece of lace and embroidery."⁴¹ The story cynically plays on the weakness of mothers who relied too heavily on their offspring's appearance to give them the necessary social credibility.

When accelerating modernization released the bourgeois woman from the rigors of housework, it gave her time, time which enabled her to make her social life more challenging. But it had also increased the pressures upon her. Along with her newly professional husband, the ambitious married woman strove to excel in her realm.⁴² Keeping records of baby's measurements documented the late 19th century woman's increased sense of her mothering responsibilities as well as her ambition to be a superior mother. The baby photo which was more perfect than perfect became then an emblem of her maternal pride and sense of achievement, an emblem which validated her place in her social world.⁴³

The question of power within the home also bears on this situation. In the transition from income-producing member to non-income contributor, the bourgeois woman both lost and gained certain powers. She acquired her specialization as mother and the power that went along with that role. However, her effectiveness was still determined by her individual

relationship to the dominant partner in the marriage. In a family structure where the father remained the ostensible head, the woman often needed to wield power without seeming to threaten the husband. The infant provided her with a means of doing this. Through the baby the woman exercised her power in indirect ways rather than by direct decree. Her daily negotiations for domestic power took the form of pleas on his behalf. Appealing to the family's love of the baby, the mother brought all family members into line, without even the necessity of raising her voice.

A rose-curtain cradle, where nestled within
Soft cambric and flannel lie pounds seventeen
Is the throne of a tyrant; that pink little thing
Is an autocrat ruler for baby is king.

"Baby Is King", *Our Baby*, 1872.⁴⁴

With the "tyrant king," the "absolute ruler" as her agent, she could effectively quell the unruly older child, banish the meddlesome grandmother, and bring into submission the father himself:

Papa, wise and mighty, just home from the house,
Grows meek on the threshold and moves like a mouse.⁴⁵

The mother was the kingmaker behind the infant throne but, in the tradition of kingmakers, her power was disguised. The baby, a figure totally without power, became a vehicle for her power within the family and the social milieu. In this context, the popularity of the infant photo-portrait and the women's patronage of the Main Street studio take on added meaning. The photo-portrait and its role in those long afternoon discussions may be read as an endorsement of her power and position. This power was at its apex when the young child was most dependent on her, in its infancy.

The new emphasis on motherhood and infancy created its own special set of anxieties. The record books about baby and the cabinet pictures paradoxically both fed and attempted to allay those anxieties. Many mothers grew anxious as their children grew older. What was really threatened, of course, was the mother's identity and power. Depending on the degree of her investment in motherhood, her social identity was diminished or taken away with every passing year. Even more, mothers feared the possible death of their babies. The death of a baby compounded two tragedies: the loss of the infant itself, and the loss of the mother's social being. One of the two infant subjects of the scrapbook mentioned above died in his second year; the pages recording the data of his short life are followed by sympathy cards addressed to the bereaved mother. Clearly, infant records could become memorials. Like insurance against the unavoidable and the feared, the written record and, more especially, the portrait's image likeness could kindle the mother's memory and sustain her in her mourning.

The more modern style of baby photo favored by Cortland's middle class (figs. 3, 4) with its uncluttered focus on the infant subject, created a special "non-world" in which the baby image could be preserved or immortalized. The newer portrait style lightened the social responsibilities which had so stiffened the Parsons' infants. It did away with the sole need for the baby photo to function as an infant card of identity or token of remembrance. New needs dismantled the older symbolic portrait conventions and introduced informal and relaxed possibilities into the infant portrait. Slight and seemingly insignificant as these formal differences are between the McGraw and Cortland infants' portraits, they are indicative of the changes which had taken place in the mechanisms of domestic power. Welcomed by all family members, the personalized infant portraits were, however, of the greatest significance to the mother, and it was above all her needs that shaped them.

Notes

1. *American Agriculturist*, 60,9, August 28, 1897, 213, announced the contest and the closing date of December 31, 1897.
2. The winners were chosen by readers from a selection of 214 baby photos which the journal published over several months. Readers had responded with "thousands of votes . . . many accompanied by comments . . . that would please parents and readers alike if we had space to print them. . . ." (61,25, June 18, 1898, 782).
3. Even general histories of photography, which discuss at length the popular card and cabinet photograph for the adult, do not mention the baby photo. See Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene* (New York, 1964; first publication, 1938), and George Gilbert, *Photography: the Early Years* (New York, 1980). Historians of American studies and art are now studying posthumous—not live—infant portraits as part of the current interest in American mourning practices and imagery. See Martha V. Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong, *A Time To Mourn, Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth-Century America* (The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), and Lynne Kirby, "From Household to Cemetery: Representing the Death of the Child," in this catalog.
4. See, for example, Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself, the Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910* (Bloomington, 1982). My thanks to Sarah Elbert for this reference.
5. The first verse of Margaret E. Sangster's poem, "The Baby's Picture," reproduced in its entirety in *Practical Photographer*, 3,12, December 1879, 882.
6. These instructions were given by an independent photographer who specialized in baby photos. He advised that photographers charge more for children's portraits than for adults, "as they cost more to produce." *Practical Photographer*, 3,11, November 1879, 850.
7. From, "The Photographing of Baby Lawrence," a poem by Clara Doty Bates in *Wide Awake*, 30,2, January 1890, 101.
8. In lieu of small-town and rural women's published letters and journals, occasional letters to the editors of journals—the *American Agriculturist*, for example—are a source on this subject. Wrote "A.C.L." to the *American Agriculturist*, "Baby is growing fast. It seems sometimes as if his roguish majesty changes perceptibly from day to day. Soon he will no longer be the baby save in his mother's heart. . . . Again the camera to our aid. Baby caught in all his cute ways will still live when the youth has become a man." (74,27, December 13, 1904, 620).
9. This small genre was often used as filler material in regional newspapers, and in magazines read by the family. Another example of the type is Margaret Stewart Sibley's "Grandma Gets Baby's Picture," *American Agriculturist*, 69,12, March 22, 1902, 450.
10. An exception to this is the story of "Baby Mine! Baby Mine!" *Practical Photographer*, 2,10, October 1878, 329-330. For the story's highlight, see 16 below in the text.
11. The collections of the Cortland County Historical Society contain many photographs which are an exception to this general observation.
12. The idea that, "mother must have training of infancy and childhood," was such a given of the middle-class family that the question of the father and very young infant relationship was rarely raised; *The Household*, I, 1868, in Norton Juster, *So Sweet to Labor, Rural Women in America 1865-1895* (New York, 1979), p. 55. In this light, it is no surprise to learn that few fathers and very young infants sat for a formal portrait together.
13. The Butler Studio of Cortland took Kyle Parsons' photograph (9 x 5 1/4"), Cortland County Historical Society. Inscription on the reverse, "Etta Parsons youngest boy"; no date.
14. Mother and baby posed cheek by jowl, a double portrait type which gained brief popularity circa 1900. Probably made mostly with the father in mind, it never achieved the widespread appeal of "Baby's Picture."
15. Babies traditionally wore long gowns until they reached the age of six months, at which time they were graduated to short clothes. The embroidered flounces, not the length of the gown Kyle wore, indicates that it was a robe for a special occasion.
16. Traveling salesmen kept small-town photographers abreast of changing fashions in studio props. For information on studio practices of the period, I am indebted to Robert Bretz of the Visual Studies Workshop, Rochester. See also n. 18.
17. "When a lady sitting for a picture would compose her mouth to a bland and serene character, she should just upon entering the room say, 'Bosom' . . .", *The Fam Journal*, May 1877, 22. Throughout the period a sober face and posture were generally required not only for the adult but for the child as well. The farmer's wife was as aware of this structure as was the small-town mother. I thank Christine Kleinegger for this reference.
18. The outstretched supporting arm of a mother or studio assistant are frequently seen in the early infant photo portraits.
19. See n. 8 above on the use of the word "cute" in conjunction with infant photography.
20. Early photo-portraits continued the tradition of American naive portraits in this regard. On the latter see Stephen Brobeck, "Images of the Family: Portrait Paintings as Indices of American Family Culture, Structure and Behavior, 1730-1860," in *The Journal of Psychohistory*, 5,1, summer 1977, 81-99. See also n. 22 below.
21. Ruel Mornay Parsons, Kyle's elder brother, whose amateur photographic portrait is discussed in the text below, was also photographed as a toddler in a Cortland studio. The full baroque mode, a pedestal, urn, heavy fabric drape, and tassel, was employed, transforming small Ruel into a miniaturized adult. The photograph is in the Cortland County Historical Society.
22. The icon-portrait also functioned as a genealogical, family-tree portrait. See the Tasburgh Group portrait, circa 1605, *The Elizabethan Image*, Tate Gallery, 1970, 59, 123, as an example of this type.
23. The inscription on the reverse of the photograph reads, "Ruel Mornay Parsons, born May 20, 1897. Weight 8 lbs. 2 weeks old." Card size 5 x 5"; Cortland County Historical Society.
24. The magnesium flashlight enabled the increased use of the photograph as a document of family life and activities. "Nothing has contributed so much toward the satisfactory photographing of domestic scenes as the magnesium flashlight, which gives its puff of intensely white illumination and takes in a second a picture

- which must otherwise occupy a great deal more time. Those picturesquely disposed groups at the hearth-side, gay card parties at the center table, and all the animation of wedding festivals and artistic high-teas are now possible to the camera," (Alexander Black, "Confessions of an Amateur Photographer," II, *Wide Awake*, 30,2 100-101.) The 1897 Sears, Roebuck Catalog listed 19 cameras, 473-476. One of the more popular models, the "New Model Camera," began at a price of \$8.50 (prices increased per size), which included a lens, a tripod, one plate holder and a carrying case. This price was competitive even to the inexpensive cabinet card portrait. The small-town studio, in the same period, generally charged \$3.50 per dozen, from one negative, or four different portraits for \$2 (Gilbert, 101).
25. The United States Federal Census for Cortland County; Village, McGrawville in the township of Cortlandville, district 11, district no. 85, sheet 5.
 26. In the *Parsons' Directory of the City of Cortland*, 1900, Lorenzo Parsons advertises himself as a funeral director, and dealer in furniture and upholstering, listing sewing machines, lawn swings, and picture frames.
 27. Discreet advertisements for Marriage Guides, containing information on birth control practices, began to appear at least by the early 1870s in some newspapers in the region. See *The Owego Gazette*, March 2, 1871. (*The Owego Gazette* was more accessible at the time of research than *The Cortland Gazette* or *Cortland Democrat*. Owego, a small town some forty miles from Cortland and its nearest neighbor, had in the *Gazette* a newspaper representative of its kind in the region). On the relationship between occupations and fertility, see *Family and Population in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. by Tamara K. Hareven and Maria A. Vinovskis (Princeton, 1978).
 28. The improved distribution of newspapers, journals, and advertising (free rural delivery in 1897) were major factors in this. Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism* (New York, 1962), pp. 478-494; John Tebell, *The American Magazine, A Compact History* (New York, 1969), pp. 195-212, and Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York, 1983), pp. 112-183.
 29. McGraw was connected to Cortland, five miles distant, by an hourly, electrified trolley service, completed 1895; Irene A. Jennings, "Railroads of Cortland County," *Cortland County Chronicles*, II (New York, 1958), p. 123. This service brought workers from Cortland to the corset manufactory in McGraw and, later, to the paper box factory, established in 1897. My thanks to Shirley Heppel, historian of Homer and McGraw, Cortland County Historical Society, for this information.
 30. The bibliography on motherhood has grown so enormously in recent years that I have chosen to cite only one source that I found particularly helpful for this study. Oneida County, the seat of the study cited, is in Central New York State. Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class, the Family in Oneida County*, New York, 1790-1865 (Cambridge, 1981), p. 239, writes: "The wives of the leading merchants were perhaps the first group in Oneida County to experience a major change in family organization. By the second decade of the nineteenth century most of them saw the family's economic base transferred to the offices, counting houses, and stores run by their husbands and their household chores delegated to domestic servants. . . . A change in upper-class sex roles in the 1810s was felt by middle- and lower-class families a half century later." The changes Ryan describes I do not believe had been implemented in the Parsons family in their sons' infancies.
 31. The chair would have had an added significance if it were the one in which Etta Parsons nursed her first born.
 32. Helen Etheridge Jewett, eight months old, sat for her portrait in the studio of M. de Ver Westcott, Cortland; card size, 6½" x 4¼", Cortland County Historical Society. Her parents were Alden and Clara Jewett. Her father owned a jewelry store, 26 Main Street, Cortland. Unlike the Parsons family, the Jewetts did not live on the same premises as the business; they lived at 58 North Main Street, Cortland; *Boyd's Directory of Cortland, Homer, Marathon and McGrawville, 1891/1892*.
 33. The child subject was Charles Wickwire, Jr., born 1910, photographed in the Harris studio, Cortland; card size, 6¼" x 4¼"; Cortland County Historical Society. His parents were Charles Chester and Mabel Fitzgerald Wickwire. His father was the vice-president of Wickwire Brothers, a major industrial concern in Cortland.
 34. The document is a scrapbook kept by Mrs. Lelia Warren Angell of Cortland; Cortland County Historical Society. I am grateful to Anita Wright of the Society for supplying information on the Angell family.
 35. Mothers of the period were urged to "Keep a Diary for the Baby." *The Owego Gazette*, quoting the *Ladies' Home Journal*, stated, "One of the dainty books provided for the purpose makes the keeping of the record an easy task and preserves it for reference without difficulty". 100,5, July 26, 1900.
 36. Cora Edgcomb Higgins, *Growing Up in Cortland* (Cortland, 1981), p. 25.
 37. Dr. Leslie O'Malley, Cortland County Historical Society, was kind enough to share her knowledge of Cortland family life of the period with me.
 38. Higgins, p. 25.
 39. Susan Sontag makes this point in *On Photography* (New York, 1977), p. 78: "Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait-chronicle of itself. . ."
 40. *The Owego Gazette*, 73,2, July 23, 1885, 2.
 41. *Practical Photographer*, 2,10, October 1878, p. 330. The story is savagely critical of mothers who patronized the photographers' studios. Many dead babies were propped into a sitting position for a portrait for the grieving mother to remember them by. Yet, the mother of the story was so easily consoled by the sight of her dead infant's pretty gown.
 42. In 1909, the *American Agriculturist* published an "Alphabet for the Farmer's wife" by Mattie W. Baker, 83,18; May 1, 1909, p. 575.
 "A's the ambition you should bring to your work.
 A practical housewife cannot be a shirk.

 F is the farmer, true Lord of the land,
 And his wife's the true lady, so the Almighty planned.

 O is for order, the first law of Heaven;
 It helps lighten your burdens, every day of the seven.

T is for "time," which must not go to waste,
Used wisely 'twill save you both trouble and haste.

X is for 'Xcellence' toward which you aim;
If you don't always reach it, the motive's the same."

"If you don't always reach it, the motive's the same." A Taylorism of the household (thank you, Lynne Kirby, for this observation) helped the ambitious woman toward 'Xcellence'.

43. The emblematic function intrinsic to the baby photo was recognized, though it was not named as such, by mothers of the period. See the letter in n. 8 above, "Baby caught in all his cute ways will still live when youth has become a man." The grand emblematic tradition had run itself down by the time of the 19th-century edition of *Quarles' Emblems* (London, 1861). Illustrated by Charles Bennett and W. Harry Rogers, chubby cherubs represented, as emblems, the various states of the human spirit. It is rather fitting that the emblematic tradition, using the individual infant image, should be revived at the end of the century, and pressed into personalized service.
44. *Our Baby* was an anthology published by the American Tract Society, (New York, 1872). "Baby Is King" features the manipulative charms of King Baby for six verses; 52; Cortland County Historical Society, 68, 63, 5. Inside, on the flyleaf is written in pencil, "Grace C. Walrad, 1885." The book is typical of the kind of the god-fearing bourgeoisie liked to see in their children's small libraries. Grace Walrad was the daughter of Calvin P. and Grace Chamberlain Walrad. Her father was the president of the Cortland Savings Bank, her mother a faithful member of the First Presbyterian Church and a charter member of the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.
45. A rhyming couplet from verse three, "Baby is King," 52. "Home from the house" is, of course, a reference to the counting house, the bank.



Figure 1a. *Float of the Nations*, 1920.
Lent by George F. Johnson Memorial
Library, Endicott, NY.

Living Pictures and Still Images:

Child's Play and the Creation of Social Identities in Shoetown (1890-1920)

Randy Kritkauskay

SHOETOWN PRESENTS an intriguing historical paradox: its social order was both constituted and transformed through the agency of children, who are generally viewed as the least influential group in society.¹ The paradox is made all the more dramatic since Shoetown's children achieved their prominence not by becoming precocious or grave little citizens, but by playing, as children often do, in public places.

While the broad relationship between playing and social order has been explored in both theoretical and historical studies, the suggestion that children's play directly contributes to social life has usually remained on the very fringes of these discussions.² The work of political scientists is typical in this regard, as it emphasizes the long term effects of early childhood political socialization, and considers only later adult activity to be of direct political consequence.³ Even European social historians who have examined the political and social consequences of adolescent youth groups⁴ rarely suggest that younger children make a critical and direct contribution to political or social life. Thus, Shoetown's early history is both theoretically and historically significant, as it clearly documents children directly participating in the most fundamental aspect of civic life: the creation of social identity.

The social history of Shoetown, and the prominent role of children in that history, are best approached through the highly visual imagery of public behavior. While this perspective of behavioral history may be only one of many methodological options available to the historian, in the case of Shoetown it is particularly appropriate, as its emphasis of the visual and behavioral approximates the highly visual mentality of Shoetown's own founders. Like the behavioral historian who wends his way into the past by analyzing gestural vocabularies and public behavior, Shoetown's predominantly immigrant residents oriented themselves to their new social surroundings by carefully observing and constructing behavioral images and models.

Linguistic and cultural barriers severely diminished the power of the printed and spoken word in Shoetown's network of social communications. Consequently, residents often turned to what they called "living pictures" as a form of social interaction. These living tableaux depicted group identity, patterns of authority, institutional loyalties, and movements for social change, by organizing public behavior into visual statements which served as behavioral role models for the community. For example, as Shoetown's residents turned farm fields into settlements,⁵ they constructed ethnic neighborhood boundaries by having their children publicly demonstrate the boundaries of national, municipal, and corporate influence by indicating where it was appropriate to "dance American," wear American clothing, or defer to company authority.

Shoetown's living pictures were an ephemeral public art form. Today, they survive as still fragments, verbal and photographic images frozen in time and removed from their context. This fragmentation of Shoetown's living pictures hinders the understanding of how the rich texture of the weekly public presentations and park programs may have appeared in its entirety to participants and viewers. But significantly, this very same process of fragmentation

preserves other valuable historical information, since the process of freezing moving images was not random, but highly selective and revealing of social aspirations. Thus, it was with particular ends in mind that Shoetown's living pictures were purposefully disassembled and disassociated into a set of individual still images. These fragments were verbally or photographically reassembled and reproduced by distinct social groups, who sought to use living picture fragments to help create and affirm their own social identities, or even to express competing images of social order.

For example, a photo entitled "Float of the Nations" in an ethnic neighborhood community center's photo album (Fig. 1a)* and a slightly altered version of this same photographic image in a company-controlled magazine (Fig. 1b) are derived from the same "living picture." But each expresses competing loyalties which were themselves minor themes submerged in the original living picture. The original living picture had been a float in a 1920 "George F." Day parade which honored Shoetown's industrial magnate, George F. Johnson.⁶ This annual public celebration had affirmed corporate loyalty. The altered image on the cover of the workers' magazine was derived from the community center photo. With flags imposed upon the background and the flag of the United States predominant, it suggests that the Float of the Nations affirmed national loyalty and unity rather than separateness. In this way patriotism and assimilation, two dominant themes of the workers' magazine, were linked to corporate loyalty. Thus the altered image on the workers' magazine cover represents a complementary variation on the parade theme of corporate loyalty.

In contrast, the original photo from the community center's album suggests that the costumed young people had affirmed their separate national loyalties during the celebration honoring George F. Johnson. Perhaps on the downtown side of Shoetown's proverbial railroad tracks, their Float of the Nations had been subsumed within a larger living picture

*"Figures" are illustrations reproduced in this text; "Exhibits" refer to items used in the exhibit but not reproduced here. However, an annotated list of exhibits appears following the footnote section and explains how each image was used in the exhibit.



Figure 1b. *E-J Workers Review*, Vol. 2, No. 8, October 1920. Lent by SUNY-Binghamton, Glenn G. Bartle Library, Special Collections.

primarily affirming corporate solidarity. But the photo image is carefully removed from its parade context. A caption on the photo's back notes that each participant was born in the nation which he or she represented, and suggests that these young people were not simply obedient citizens, but proud ambassadors. Within the homey setting of a photo studio set, visible in the unaltered background, the young ambassadors proudly surround the portrayal of Liberty. The pose implies that Liberty would stand alone in the New York Harbor as guardian of an underpopulated land without her foreign nations to provide workers; Shoetown would have remained the fields and forests from which it had arisen. The statement challenges the image of children as acculturated little citizens so often depicted in corporate propaganda. Thus, this photographic recreation of a civic event attempted to transform a living picture, and perhaps also historical memory, into a still image which better served its community.

These two photographic images illustrate that, as with Shoetown's original living pictures, the meaning of Shoetown's surviving still-image fragments derives not only from their content, but also from the specific social frame or context in which they were presented. The purpose of this study is to analyze how these fragments constitute a vocabulary of child play images, and how they were used in the social interaction of Shoetown's different groups.

Shoetown's Social System

"We are nothing but children grown up."

George F. Johnson

"Shoetown? Where is Shoetown?" The question must have been asked thousands of times by immigrant greenhorns when they first discovered references to Shoetown printed in the English language newspapers of Johnson City, Endicott, and Binghamton, New York. Shoetown's mostly Central and South European immigrant residents were familiar with the dozens of Endicott-Johnson Company (E-J) buildings, the E-J factories, where thousands came to work during the first quarter of the 20th century. Indeed, familiarity with the factories even preceded employment, as many of the future shoe workers arrived at New York's Ellis Island purportedly knowing only enough English to ask "Which way E-J?" However, the word Shoetown was not printed on any sign near these factories, nor was it ever found on any map.

In fact, Shoetown was a familiar and highly localized term for a social experience which transcended the carefully maintained municipal boundaries of Johnson City, Endicott, and Binghamton. Shoetown was a sometimes ambiguous social reality which its creators and supporters would come to understand slowly and intuitively, partly by reading about it, but mostly by participating in it. They would rarely use the term Shoetown; the label itself seems to have been coined by, or at least popularized by, the local company-influenced newspapers, such as *The Johnson City-Endicott Record*. But no matter how propagandistic the term, it circumscribed a reality familiar to many newspaper readers. This reality was a complicated set of paternalistic relationships which effectively transcended the divisions of religious, class, neighborhood, ethnic, and municipal loyalties by functioning as a network of artificial kinship⁷ and clientage⁸ obligations.

Children were the focus of kinship obligations through which both parents and their offspring were effectively bonded to the shoe company and its ruling Johnson family. These obligations were established as soon as a Shoetown newborn baby was delivered at no cost in one of E-J's maternity clinics. He or she was then considered to be a "future shoe worker," a member of the "E-J Family." (Exhibits 59 and 60) Each child of a shoeworker received gifts from Mr. and Mrs. George F. Johnson immediately after birth: a savings account worth ten

dollars and a first pair of shoes. Such gifts acknowledged the godparent function assumed by members of Shoetown's ruling family.⁹ (Fig. 1c) The adoptive nature of this bonding is reflected by the fact that "Mr. George" was considered to be the spiritual father of E-J newborns and, as is customary in godparent relationships, children were named after him.¹⁰ George F. Johnson's godparent role was visually represented in the 1920s when the company produced a composite photo of a proud Mr. George F. Johnson surrounded by all the E-J newborns of that year. (Exhibit 62) The impression is that of a parent posing with his descendants.

Many aspects of these paternalistic relationships in Shoetown must have seemed familiar to the large numbers of East European immigrants who had grown up in rural agricultural villages where feudal-like social relationships still persisted.¹¹ On the other hand, Shoetown's paternalism had quite different father-type images, which might have been more acceptable to long-time residents who considered themselves to be natives. For these people, George F. Johnson, the founding father of Shoetown, occasionally resembled another founding father named George. For example, during one Shoetown celebration banners proclaimed, "George Washington was the father of his country, George F. Johnson is the father of Johnson City."¹² When he purchased and then donated Ideal Park to the people, it was reported that he removed the "Keep Off the Grass" signs by cutting them down with an axe. The many cherry trees that adorned the park fortunately escaped a more literal interpretation of the Washington myth.

George F. Johnson hagiography finally resulted in a unprecedented visual representation which pushed his paternal image well beyond associations with a founding father. In 1944, while George F. Johnson was still alive, his family had designed and financed a large stained glass window of the business-suited industrial magnate, surrounded by a group of children and set in a garden of paradise.¹³ Tactfully, the children numbered eleven and not twelve. But here the modesty ended, for the enormous and brilliant window was installed for nearly a decade over the altar of one of Shoetown's most prestigious Methodist churches, where it dwarfed a smaller representation of Christ in resurrection.

At the dedication of the window, Mr. Johnson sat on the altar, before his own image, surrounded by children just as in the window; living picture and still image resonated in one another. The audience was filled with second generation Shoetown children, many of whom were graduating from shoe manufacturing to work in a new business growing in the shadows of the E-J factories. This new enterprise was International Business Machines Corporation, whose manufacturing and training headquarters had been recently located in Endicott, New York at the direction of Thomas J. Watson. Watson publicly acknowledged his admiration for George F. Johnson and often sat beside him on the church altar when Mr. Johnson was honored annually. While Watson was absent from the window dedication ceremony, the speeches of his representatives made it abundantly clear that IBM was indebted to Mr.

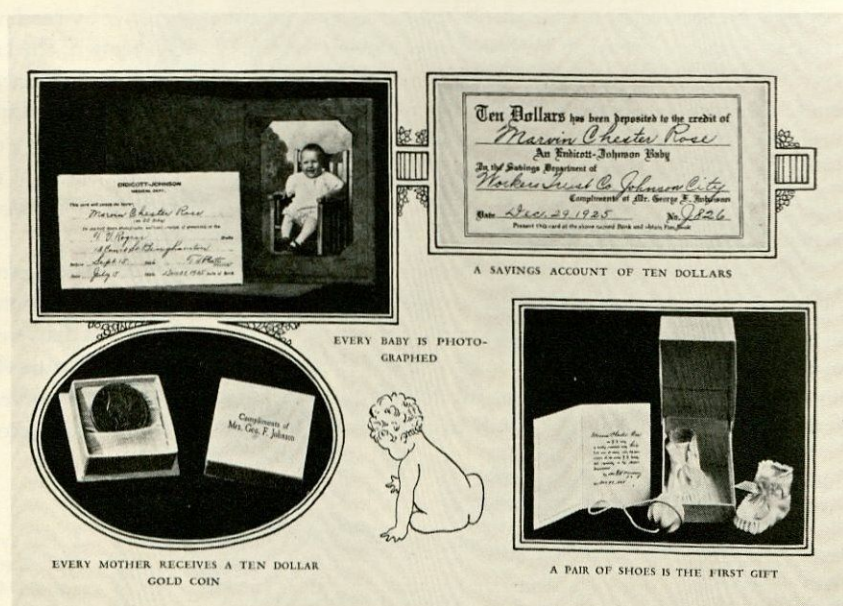


Figure 1c. Gifts to Child. E-J Medical Service. Lent by SUNY-Binghamton. Glenn G. Bartle Library, Special Collections.

Johnson's achievements. Speeches comparing George F.'s work to that of Christ, and the imagery, size, and location of the window left no question that Mr. Johnson was to be taken as an awesome example of the ultimate significance of corporate paternalism in Shoetown's two major industries.

The persistence of Shoetown's paternalism and kinship bonding is further documented in a newspaper account of a conversation between George F. Johnson and a worker:

Mister George, what's the matter with E-J not have it square deal anymore. I come for this company 15 year. Every time I take it the free medicine, all family too. Every day go for the 15-cent meal. My wife now got it five kids from Mr. George F., no cost nothing. This time come from the old country three brother and wife. Powell no give it job. Powell no good for E-J. Just good for tricks. Better he find the trick for give everybody job. What's matter no can. My brother he like it too for Mr. George F. be their father and he give it their wife free baby just same like me.¹⁴

The worker notes that his five kids were "from Mr. George." His brother hopes to be adopted into the E-J family so that Mr. George F. would "be their [his] father" and bestow upon him the benefits of family membership.

The explicit paternalism of these relationships does not seem to have troubled either the worker or Mr. Johnson. Indeed, the company printed this conversation on oaktag and probably posted the notices on company bulletin boards. After all, the message of this conversation is that Shoetown's paternalism was not a one-way street; it obligated the father as well as the workers. At the time of this conversation, George F. Johnson had retired from the presidency of the corporation, but he clearly could not escape his obligations in the E-J family. As company propaganda had suggested, workers and owners were "bound by ties which money cannot bind and which money cannot break"; owners were "flesh and blood of the people."¹⁵

Indeed, Shoetown's corporate-kinship ties were of a nature that money alone could not bind. For two generations, company owners enjoyed prosperity that enabled them to avoid situations which might have revealed if those ties were also of a type that "money cannot break," as a continual and generous flow of corporate patronage reinforced kinship obligations. Housing, medical care, recreation, religious worship, and food were all partly or wholly subsidized by the company. Most importantly, such services were not provided at the level of mere subsistence or simply in lieu of wages. The E-J company cafeteria-restaurants were models for their time, as were the luxurious parks and company-built homes. Significantly, Mr. Johnson received personal credit for much of the shoe company patronage. The front pages of local newspapers constantly proclaimed his generosity. One "Letter of Thanks to Mr. Johnson" was displayed in the column reserved for major news stories:

Mr. Dear Mr. Johnson

It is with a deep feeling of appreciation that on behalf of myself and the Italian colony in Endicott, I endeavor to convey to you our thanks for your gift of \$2,000 to our new church. . . .

You may be sure that the prayers of the Italians of Endicott will ever include you and that you will have no more loyal supporters than the members of this church.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Rocco Mocchiarverne¹⁶

With many of his loyal client-workers praying for him and others restrained by artificial kinship obligations, George F. Johnson conducted business in a social environment where workers were obliged to place personal relationships before economic interests. Workers could not in good faith strike against a generous patron or an adopted father. Most importantly, entire worker families were obligated by the double bond of a godparent relationship with Mr.

Johnson. In such a relationship, not only godparent and godchild are bonded; parents of godchildren and the godparents as well became obligated by a web of fraternal ties.¹⁷ Children were the agents for creating Shoetown's social solidarity, becoming at times an exchange commodity in a commerce of human affect which mutually obligated owners and workers, cutting across class, familial, and generational boundaries.

Children were not passive agents in an invisible network of affective relationships; they were a highly visible representation of these realities. The Endicott-Johnson Shoe Company constantly publicized images and produced living pictures of happy playground children as evidence of their fulfillment of obligations to the E-J family. Groups seeking social change in Shoetown defined and publicly represented their issues in terms of child welfare. Immigrant communities used their playing children to affirm their loyalty to the nation, company, and municipality. They also used their playing children to affirm their separate identities. Consequently, where Shoetown's children played, what they played, and what they wore when they played all assumed social significance. Shoetown's paternalism focused public attention as much on the child as on "the father."

Containment of the Lilliputians: Combating the Disorder of Youth

Thus saith the Lord . . . And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girl playing.

(Zechariah 8:4-5)

No person shall fly a kite, or play football, baseball or any other game, on any public street, avenue or sidewalk in the Village of Johnson City, except in such streets or avenues, or parts thereof, as may be designated by the Board of Trustees as playground streets.

(Ordinances of the Village of Johnson City, New York, 1918)

While Shoetown's residents were largely successful in attempting to organize and control their children and youths, they were not unaware that their offspring had the potential to organize themselves into groups that could disrupt social order. The portrayal of youth as disorder was a common image in contemporary national magazine engravings, and served as an ominous reminder to Shoetown's readers that their orderly children, depicted in living pictures, were contained only with considerable effort. In big cities not far from Shoetown, children and youth were often disruptive when they grew old enough to organize themselves into groups and escape family controls. At this age, they became the focus of intense public concern and organizational efforts. Shoetown's images of child's play can only be fully understood against this contrasting background.

Unsupervised street children were the focus of national public attention and concern, which was expressed in a variety of popular magazine illustrations. In "Snowball of the Season," playing children have usurped a city sidewalk with a giant snowball which blocks the passage of adult pedestrians. (Exhibit 63) In the engraving, the disruptive play world of children's street life is divided from the decorous world where a policeman and well-dressed middle class pedestrians dominate the sidewalk through the use of strong vertical line in the form of a U.S. mailbox. The result, a suggestion of class as well as generational confrontation, is a dominant theme in many images of children's street play. It is unusual to find such sympathetic representations as the festive "A Summer Night on the Asphalt". (Exhibit 64) The text accompanying this illustration depicts the busy street life of a lower-class New York City immigrant neighborhood:

I never saw such swarms of children . . . there was not room enough on the flagging (sidewalk) for all of them, and so they sat down in the street. . . . I made my way through them gingerly, as would the performer of a *pas seul* in an egg-dance, fearful of treading on a hand or a foot."¹⁸

Here the author rises above the disorientation caused by the density of urban life, and is concerned not with its disruptions, but with the safety of children's little hands. This is the notable exception. Children's little hands were likely to be portrayed in a threatening manner, as in "Spoiling the Slide" (Exhibit 65) where the hands of little ghouls are about to unleash a bombard of snowballs upon a merchant who has spoiled their snowy sledding street with his ashes.

Overwhelmed by the Lilliputians of the street, adults collectively responded by imposing institutional constraints upon their offspring. Public schools helped by keeping the young off the streets for much of the day. But, as the flood of youths sweeping down a city street in "Let Loose from School" (Exhibit 66) suggests, there was need for additional control. In response, after-school supervised play programs were proposed in many crowded cities to fill the gap. There was optimism that street congestion and disorder would be relieved. However, while these programs and playgrounds responded in part to the very real spatial constraints of urban life, the ambitious application of similar programs in Shoetown, where playgrounds and open fields are in the same vista (Exhibit 67), indicates that the concern with organized play was very clearly more than a simple response to the limitations of crowded city space. It was a response to broad social concerns about controlling and socializing the young. The primacy of such social concerns is further suggested by national magazines oriented specifically toward rural life, which nevertheless extolled the benefits of "country playgrounds" as structured play spaces.¹⁹

In the final analysis, Victorian social norms governing children's play seem to have exercised a centripetal effect, forcing youngsters together into dense spaces and groups. For example, when Johnson City, one of the municipal governments in Shoetown, passed its ordinance banning the street play of children,²⁰ it did not drive them into the farm fields and open land that bordered their neighborhoods. It forced them onto playgrounds or other enclosed play spaces in the densely populated heart of the city. Utica, another upstate New York municipality, went to even greater pains to create public play spaces where its children could be assembled and supervised: its citizens dug up 3,000 of their dead and converted a cemetery into a playground.²¹

Attempts to control the public play behavior of children must be viewed as part of an even broader concern with the public behavior of the working class in general. While the specter of bands of disruptive working class children running through the streets created anxiety, the specter of their parents publicly creating living pictures with a socially disruptive message generated horror for factory owners. A review in *The New York Times* of the International Workers of the World (I.W.W.) "Pageant of the Paterson Strike" presented at Madison Square Garden in June 1907, while the strike was in progress, reveals this fear:

Under the direction of a destructive organization opposed in spirit and antagonistic in action to all the forces which have upbuilt this republic, a series of pictures in action were shown with the design of stimulating mad passion against law and order and promulgating a gospel of discontent.²²

The controversial I.W.W. pageant climaxed with a scene in which Paterson workers sent their children away to be cared for in safer cities while they prepared for a new level of struggle. The image of tearful and determined mothers handing over their babies to "strike mothers" in other cities reflected the grim historical realities of conflict-ridden Paterson in 1907. These workers could not afford the luxury of Shoetown's workers, who gave up their children to relatively benevolent corporate godparents. Instead, the Paterson workers formed

"subversive" defensive alliances with other workers by exchanging their flesh and blood. While this growing solidarity of a working class would have concerned all factory owners, the workers' use of "pictures in action" to provoke "mad passion" would be the focus of their general concern. The remedy which factory owners proposed was national in scope: to teach working class children forms of public behavior that would generate loyalties transcending class interests.

The Play Movement

In 1904 a nationwide organization, the Playground Association and Recreation Association of America, was created. Ostensibly dedicated to the use of playgrounds as play centers, the leaders of the movement did not attempt to disguise their more pragmatic interests. Very clearly, promoting fun was not their top priority; play was serious business. Play was a social control mechanism.²³ The play movement leaders eclectically employed contemporary education theories, including some improbable borrowings from G. Stanley Hall, who had generally favored a *laissez-faire* attitude toward adolescent child rearing. Although the play movement leaders ground out an intellectual justification for their sometimes heavy-handed socialization activities, they did not often publicly engage in such intellectual sophistry, and generally preferred to be blunt. As the leader of the movement, Joseph Lee, so eloquently states: "The boy without a playground is father to the man without a job; and the boy with a bad playground is apt to be father to a man with a job that had better have been left undone."²⁴

Other leaders of the play movement, such as Sadie American, argued that playground programs could have broader social goals and "would help to build up men to make good citizens."²⁵ A superintendent of New York's Department of Education confirmed these hopes by observing the success of one park:

Thompkins Park illustrates the difference made by a play center. The rally to the red flag years ago always occurred here, and thence rioters marched with anarchy in their train, but now this park is often the scene of games by boys and girls in flag drills and other forms of patriotic play.²⁶

The Playground Association offered its programs as a viable alternative to those of groups like the I.W.W.

The limited play strategies of the Playground Association were further developed by other national organizations with similar but broader goals. The Pageant Movement, sharing some of the leaders of the play movement, successfully promoted and popularized civic theater throughout the United States.²⁷ Their ambitious formal pageants often involved tens of thousands of participants in the re-enactment of patriotic and historical events. As did the Playground Association, the Pageant Movement gave particular attention to children. In 1911, Myra Emmons extolled the successes of the Pageant Movement by declaring that, "A wave of play is sweeping over this country . . . teaching children how to play intelligently."²⁸

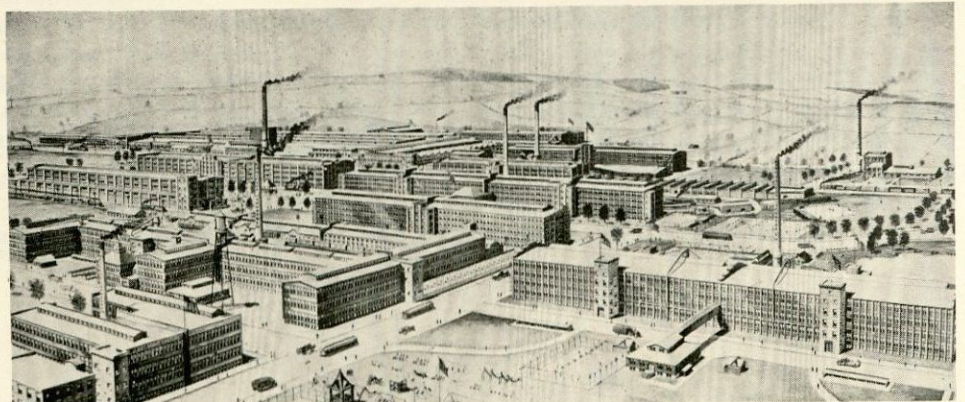


Figure 2. Playgrounds and Factories. A Family Affair. Courtesy of SUNY-Binghamton, Glenn G. Bartle Library, Special Collections.

She defined "intelligently" in clearly behavioral terms by reporting upon the success of the Brooklyn Prospect Park "Pageant of Patriotism":

One organized gang, sometimes locally mentioned as the 'Terrors of Brooklyn' showed at first a slight disposition to be lawless, but as the rehearsals progressed and their activities were turned into channels of intelligent interest, they became thoroughly obedient . . . and even helped to keep the younger urchins in order. During the several weeks of rehearsal all of these children were kept away from the streets . . . and useless ebullition of undirected youthful activities.²⁹

Shoetown's residents were well aware of these national movements. Local papers carried stories headlining playground association news, such as "Playground President Tells Boys How They Can Help."³⁰ Shoetown editorials asserted that, "In every city in the country where playgrounds have been established, delinquencies of children have decreased . . . it builds moral fiber . . . children who play in public make better citizens."³¹ Identifying with the national development, the newspaper exclaimed that "George F. Johnson's playground ideas are bearing fruit in the molding of better men and women right here around us."³²

Playgrounds were the focus of Shoetown's civic life and checkered both neighborhoods and work spaces. The Endicott-Johnson Shoe Company controlled many of these public areas. Company influence was manifested indirectly in attempts to contain spontaneous street play through legal restraints,³³ and directly through company sponsorship of programming on local playgrounds. The fact that many playgrounds were literally framed by Endicott-Johnson shoe factory buildings served as a continual visible reminder of company influence (Fig. 2).

Not surprisingly, Endicott-Johnson invested heavily in its playground programs, and

EXTRA! **JOHNSON CITY-ENDICOTT RECORD** **EXTRA!**
WEEK ENDING OCTOBER 14, 1916

Eight-Hour Day, Ten-Hour Pay For Entire Endicott, Johnson & Company's Great System

**48-HOUR WEEK FOR
11,000 SHOEWORKERS
EFFECTIVE NOV. 1**

**Announcement of Far-Reaching Importance Made
Friday—Company Says in Formal Notices
That the Reasonable Demand for Shorter Work
ing Day is Gladly Recognized.**

**THE MEN WHO WORK WITH AND FOR THE
PEOPLE WHO WORK FOR AND WITH THEM**

HENRY B. ENDICOTT

GEORGE F. JOHNSON

**SENATOR HILL
ANNOUNCES
8-HOUR DAY
IN HIS PLANT**

**NATIONAL MAGAZINE
LAUDS FAIRCHILD
AND HIS RECORD**

**"We Are Glad to Respond With a
48-hour Weekly Schedule"**

ENDICOTT, JOHNSON & CO.

**MAKERS OF LEATHER
AND LEATHER SHOES**

NEW YORK

SHOES FOR THE PEOPLE

TANNERIES AND FACTORIES—ENDICOTT AND JOHNSON CITY, N. Y.

PLAYGROUNDS

AT ENDICOTT AND JOHNSON CITY, N. Y., FOR OUR WORK-
ING PARTNERS, THEIR FAMILIES AND THEIR FRIENDS

Open Day and Night—All Are Welcome

**With the "DRESS
UP" CROWD--**
Our Fine Welts
Have Found
Great Favor.

**Fresh Air, Sunshine
and Exercise
That Is Play
Promote
Health and Contentment**

**That's Why We
Built the Playgrounds**

"Five Toe Shoes"
FOR THE MAN WHO IS ON
HIS FEET ALL DAY
MADE IN OUR OWN
FACILITIES FROM
LEATHER THE
PRODUCT OF
OUR OWN
TANNERIES

ASK YOUR
DEALER

"MORE WEAR PER PAIR"

ENDICOTT, JOHNSON & CO.

**MAKERS OF LEATHER
AND LEATHER SHOES**

ENDICOTT, NEW YORK

Figure 3a, 3b. Johnson City-Endicott Record, October 14, 1916. Courtesy of George F. Johnson Memorial Library, Endicott, NY.

playgrounds became part of the corporate identity. A special edition of a Shoetown newspaper in 1916, celebrating the advent of E-J's eight-hour work day on its front page (Fig. 3a), proclaims in bold face type "Shoes for the People — Playgrounds" on its second page (Fig. 3b).³⁴ The entire news sheet alternately describes the company product, shoes, and the company concern for recreation as demonstrated in its playground facilities.

Play areas outside of the realm of direct company influence existed in Shoetown in the form of community centers, church recreation centers, and athletic clubs. But just like the E-J subsidized playgrounds, these were not open spaces where children engaged in free play and exploration, safe from the intrusions of the adult world. On the contrary, these play areas were highly structured spaces with carefully orchestrated programs of play, most likely bracketed by formal opening and closing ceremonies. Actual play time was at least partly filled with adult-directed lessons and highly formal presentations. While idyllic and timeless days of fishing and daydreaming may have been part of a Shoetown child's play world, a great deal of each child's play time was spent in structured activity designed to make political and social statements in the adult world.

Children playing in the shadows of Endicott-Johnson's factory buildings preserved their past in community center and church pageants. They created the present in patriotic civic ceremonies. But most importantly, they guaranteed Shoetown's future by learning the skills of a dependable working class, since order and punctuality were behavioral forms encouraged on all Shoetown playgrounds. Indeed, order was imprinted upon the very physical structure of parks. "Keep Off the Grass" signs had been conspicuously removed to encourage free movement in Ideal Park, Shoetown's uncontested focus of civic life. However, its carefully laid out meandering pathways, tended gardens, and narrow bridges programmed orderly movements. (Exhibit 68) In such spaces, small well-mannered family groups could assemble for picnics, but large and disorderly mobs could not easily gather.

The playtime of Shoetown's children was filled with membership in a wide variety of voluntary social organizations, such as athletic clubs, gymnastic societies, youth bands, and choruses, each of which generally recruited a particular ethnic group. Typical of such organizations was Endicott's Hillside Community Center, which provided supervised after-school and summer programs where the neighborhood's immigrant children were tutored in English, introduced to American literature and myth in the center's library, and taught American cooking and manners. The Hillside Center also sponsored classes in folk dancing (Exhibit 69), an activity practiced more often on playgrounds on the north side of Endicott's railroad tracks than in downtown parks where American dancing was preferred.

Church affiliated recreational centers provided even more ethnically oriented programs. While they emphasized religious training, they invested considerable effort in maintaining the



Figure 4. *Independence Day*.
Signed painting by John Califano,
20¼" × 28". *Antiques Magazine*,
April 1982.

language and customs of the old country. Besides frequent ethnic pageants put on by the children of the Church, there were solemn processions on Saints' Days, and lighter holiday street processions, as when young Russian children dressed as the Magi kings celebrated Epiphany (January 6) by knocking at the doors of members of their parish and asking for treats.

Shoetown's organized play programs underscore the fundamental assumptions of the national play movements; structure is not inimical to play. Indeed, despite our modern ideologically charged notions of free play, play is essentially the manipulation of or experimentation with social structures or forms. Even in its most imaginative forms, play is not an escape from but rather an escape into highly structured time and space.

The affinity between children's play and the highly structured models of adult formal life is documented in John Califano's painting, "Independence Day," dated 1900 (Fig. 4). At one level, the painting records the successes of Fourth of July reform movements which were concerned with the safety and social disruptions which plagued many Fourth of July celebrations. These organizations promoted peaceful and orderly patriotic celebrations as a socially useful alternative. Certainly Califano's painting reflects the attainment of this immediate goal; twelve little street urchins have imposed upon themselves the strictest discipline in their mock Fourth of July celebration. But most importantly, the painting reveals a much more fundamental relationship, the affinity between adult formal behavior and forms of child's play. The young celebrants, presumably engaged in free and unsupervised play, have acted out adult social forms in the abstract, without assuming any particular social identity. They have donned paper caps signifying membership, but do not reveal the group. They have created a leader with red insignia, but in so doing represent leadership and not a specific social status. Similarly, the old curtain flag, the dishpan music, and the unspecified weapons all provide access to the pageant forms of civic life, without limiting the imagination of the young players to a particular type of celebration. These young children have assumed the discipline and behavioral forms of adult public life in order to organize their own play world.

It would appear that they assumed the solemn attitudes appropriate to such forms. But, in fact, they are similar to the young players in "A Holiday Reception Among the Juveniles," where poor children imitate the manners of an upperclass fête without necessarily accepting the convictions of their roles. (Exhibit 70) Califano's characters have learned body language as a prelude to wedding affect and public action in adult life. Consequently, these young men would, as adults, be predisposed toward the attitudes whose behavioral forms are familiar to their bodies. This is the logic of behavioral modification that lay beneath the strategies of the play movement, and it is the logic of Shoetown's programs of structured play.

Competing Identities in Shoetown

The pervasive imposition of organization upon Shoetown's play world belies an extraordinary fluidity in social structure. As individually powerful as the Endicott-Johnson patriarchs were, they could not individually mandate order even among Shoetown's children. Rather, social order in Shoetown was a consensual creation, contingent upon the active cooperation of dozens of social groups and the respectful maintenance of highly visible social boundaries and distinctions. The extraordinarily consistent involvement of Shoetown's children in this process is demonstrated by a brief but important period in Shoetown's history: February 1916 to May 1917. All of the major civic events in the period include children in prominent roles; some were led by children.

In February of 1916 Shoetown's immigrant children celebrated Lincoln's and Washington's birthdays in a colorful patriotic pageant. The program was covered in detail in the local press which reported, "Foreign Born Citizens Render Fine Program."

A stringed orchestra composed of 11 boys, all under 15 years of age, played several very good selections under the direction of Prof. Dgrini. The boys all played mandolins. The children of the Sunday School of the Greek-Orthodox Church gave a very pleasing exercise with American flags. They sang patriotic songs and the three leaders who were cunningly dressed in flag costumes proudly announced that they were American citizens.³⁵

Like the Float of the Nations discussed previously, this performance by children contains elements, such as the mandolin orchestra, that allowed the ethnic communities to affirm their heritages. Such celebrations were, however, invariably represented in the press as attempts by immigrants to honor their adopted nation. This one-sided emphasis did not necessarily do any disservice to the ethnic residents of Shoetown. As the various transformations imposed upon the image of the Float of the Nations indicates, immigrants were capable of salvaging their own self-serving images. In fact, the one-sided emphasis of patriotic themes by the press provided the immigrants with a defense against the suspicions and resentment frequently directed against Shoetown's "foreigners."³⁶ In 1910 Rev. W. A. Davis had delivered a public address denouncing immigrants and winning "a storm of applause" when he suggested that "if there are foreigners here and you don't like our institutions, our free schools, and our Bible, pack up your trunk and go back to where you came from."³⁷

Shoetown's Slovak population attempted an even more direct attack against anti-immigrant hostility when it marshalled its children to affirm Slovak loyalty on its Lincoln's Birthday celebration. The celebration's formal announcement is itself a revealing declaration of faith, not only in the "holy" men of their new nation but also in the ability of their children to effect the salvation of the Slovak community's reputation.

Dear Citizens: You best know what Lincoln was to you; but you do not know in what light he is looked upon by us. You do not know us well enough to comprehend the impression your great men bear upon our minds. But we want to prove to you that what is holy and great to you, is loved and honored by us.³⁸

The announcement then describes a Lincoln's Birthday pageant that featured Slovak youth and children who would "prove to (you) that we are worthy to live in this land." The performance was to climax with the "Apotheosis of Abraham Lincoln — by (a) Slovak school children living picture."³⁹

The Italian community publicly proclaimed its loyalty to George F. Johnson in the fall of 1916 by sending its little ambassadors to honor their patron. A "... delegation of little girls arranged in Italian and American costumes waited upon Mr. Johnson. . ." and presented him with a loving cup in celebration of the company's new policy of an eight-hour work day.⁴⁰ The event was reported as "Italian Workers Present Beautiful Loving Cup to Their Friend Geo. F. Johnson." But in fact Shoetown's Italian children, and not their working parents, had performed the ceremony that acknowledged, honored, and submitted to Mr. George's authority. Perhaps this was a careful strategy, designed to resolve the conflict between the bonds of kinship and the need for independence inherent in all paternal relationships. In any case, the adult Italian immigrant population, like its Slovak counterpart, preserved some of its autonomy and identity by remaining at some distance from corporate and municipal authority. At the same time it established its legitimacy through the agency of its children.

While the music, pageants, and plays of Shoetown's children could be used both to acknowledge and delicately contain corporate and municipal authorities, they could also be used to prod vigorously and petition reluctant authorities. A good example of the strategy is a chant proclaimed by the young people's branch of the Women's Christian Temperance Union as they met in Ideal Park in September of 1916. They yelled:

"Ideal Park,
Ideal Park,
George F.
George F."(41)

The company-influenced *Johnson City-Endicott Record* reported this fact alone, creating the impression that this event was just one of the many public acknowledgments of George F. Johnson's parks program. In fact, the adult sponsors of this WCTU group were probably using children to solicit George F.'s support of their efforts to prevent alcohol from being licensed in Shoetown.

Under New York State law, each municipality decided whether to allow liquor, and in 1916 much of Shoetown remained dry despite repeated and nearly successful attempts by license advocates. A November referendum on the license issue was being discussed, and uncertainty was in the air. George F. seems to have remained publicly silent on this issue, as was his habit with many divisive local issues.⁴² The WCTU cleverly capitalized on the equivocation, creating the appearance of Johnson support by honoring George F. as if he were supporting their cause. The "Ideal Park-George F." chant of the WCTU also implied that the godparent of Shoetown's children, who had provided healthful playgrounds, would not let his children down. It was, after all, children who were at stake, they argued. Indeed, the anti-liquor faction graphically portrayed the liquor threat to children in a half-page newspaper cartoon (Fig. 5). This E-J worker's drawing depicts a good father clubbing a threatening liquor-serpent with a bat entitled "ballot," while his wife protects the helpless children and pleads, "Our babies! John! O kill it! Don't let it harm our babies!"⁴³ It could just as easily have read, "Our babies! John(son)! Don't let it harm (Johnson) babies!"



Figure 5. Cartoon, *Johnson City-Endicott Record*, November 4, 1916.
Courtesy of George F. Johnson
Memorial Library, Endicott, NY.

The chant of the WCTU youth branch children on the Ideal playground may have been, to them, a subjectively inconsequential part of their activities that day. Or, it may have been the climax of a highly formalized program that was carefully staged in Shoetown's most visible park. In either case, what remains significant is that an uncomplicated chant of playing children was transformed into two different images of social alliance by separate social groups.

The liquor license issue was not the primary concern of Shoetown's residents in the autumn of 1916. The liquor debate, and even Woodrow Wilson's brief visit to Shoetown, were eclipsed by Shoetown's celebration of the advent of the eight-hour work day in E-J factories in October. For this, a holiday was declared, and thousands of E-J workers marched behind their factory workshop banners in a mammoth parade. George F. Johnson marched with the children beside a banner which declared that there were 398 children in the E-J family in 1892. (Exhibit 71) Another banner declared that there were 12,000 "children" in 1916.⁴⁴ In the context of Shoetown's paternalism, this living picture represents more than hyperbolic metaphor. It is the visual portrayal of one of Shoetown's fundamental civic myths, as it recognizes the affective relationship between the corporate father and his loyal working dependents.⁴⁵ This portrayal documents the critical role of children in representing the identity of Shoetown, in this case the affective underpinnings of its authority relationships.

While the eight-hour day freed workers from some of the demands of the work place, it did not necessarily free them from the influence of the company. No sooner had the shortened work week been introduced than George F. announced a new project to fill the time. Both adults and children were invited to participate in a musical expression of community solidarity: a community chorus of 800 was to be organized permanently, with company money, and was to meet in converted factory space under the supervision of a full-time company-paid director. While the community chorus was certainly not a youth-dominated group as were so many in Shoetown, its first production, a choral presentation of "Joan of Arc," bears the imprint of Shoetown's ever-present youth emphasis. The local press extolled the virtues of Joan, and viewed the production as a reflection of the war in Europe. There is no mention of Joan's unusual historical role as a young girl leading a nation of adults. In Shoetown, this was not worthy of special comment, as children's prominence was a common fact of social life.

Shoetown's children functioned not only internally, as representatives of constituent communities and broader civic or corporate loyalties. They were also Shoetown's representatives in external relationships. When plans were made in January 1917 to send a group of 300 people in Pullman railway cars to Woodrow Wilson's inauguration, children were to be a large part of this delegation. Little ambassadors were not only worthy of standing before George F. Johnson, but also before the President.

In the spring of 1917, Shoetown's young men began to march off to war. While the war effort brought business to Endicott-Johnson factories, it also brought food shortages to the local community. When President Wilson called for "Thrift Gardens" as a nation-wide effort to combat hunger, Shoetown responded by mobilizing its children first. Just weeks before the community chorus presented the triumphs of young Joan of Arc, a local newspaper printed: "Call to Service for Boys and Girls — They can do nearly as much for the cause as men in khaki." Included in the same headline, as if to warn a population grown too dependent upon its children, there is a reminder: "Work is not confined to children."⁴⁶ Despite its own warning however, the entire article describes the heroic achievements of New Orleans children, and the possibilities for local children. With a typical Shoetown metaphor, the article likens children's efforts to "win" at gardening to playground games, concluding that "the boy who shovels the most bushels of potatoes into his father's cellar next fall will know he has won a game worth while." Here Shoetown is introducing a new form of child's play, not to affirm civic identity, but to win the war and save the country.⁴⁷ Lacking only a child prophet to complete a modern application of Joan of Arc to Shoetown, the newspapers obliged by reporting: