

Debunking the Public Health Myth: Municipal Politics and Class Conflict During the Galt, Ontario Waterworks Campaigns, 1888-1890

John S. Hagopian

Volume 39, 1997

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt39art02>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Hagopian, J. S. (1997). Debunking the Public Health Myth: Municipal Politics and Class Conflict During the Galt, Ontario Waterworks Campaigns, 1888-1890. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 39, 39-68.

Article abstract

This article refutes the assertion that the Galt, Ontario waterworks was built for public health reasons. The two Galt waterworks campaigns (1888 and 1890) are studied in the context of other contemporaneous local events, the most important of which was a moulders' strike in 1889. Popular resistance to businessmen's wants and public support for the striking moulders prompted the formation of a local board of trade and the threat of an industrial exodus from town. The waterworks authorization of 1890 resulted from the victory by businessmen in this overt class struggle. The development of Galt's waterworks reflected economic and political interests far more than public health concerns. The findings refute McLaughlin, and illustrate a novel connection between urban politics, infrastructure development, labour relations, and industrial capitalism.

Debunking the Public Health Myth: Municipal Politics and Class Conflict During the Galt, Ontario Waterworks Campaigns, 1888-1890

John S. Hagopian

Introduction

IN HIS STUDY OF GALT, historian Kenneth McLaughlin writes that the consolidation of industry in the 1920s “led to the first stirrings of industrial unionism and the beginnings of labour discontent.”¹ However, the history of labour strife in Galt goes back at least as far as 1889, when a bitter strike by the town’s iron moulders caused a crisis in local politics, and indeed divided the town into pro- and anti-labour factions. Among the civic issues upon which the strike had a determinative effect was that of waterworks construction. The ratepayers had voted overwhelmingly against building a municipal waterworks system in 1888, but in 1890 they voted even more overwhelmingly for it. The voters were not fickle, as it was the intervening strike, and more particularly the threats of the struck employers to leave town, which explain voter behaviour. In 1888, the voters were responding to the issue of waterworks alone. But in 1890, waterworks had become a vital plank in an upper-class agenda, upon the success of which the survival of the town was said to depend.

McLaughlin does not discuss the political context within which the Galt waterworks developed. He does not mention the moulders’ strike, or the upheaval in local politics, or that waterworks had earlier been rejected by the ratepayers. Instead, he describes the waterworks as a progressive measure which was under-

¹Kenneth McLaughlin, *Cambridge: The Making of a Canadian City* (Burlington, ON 1987), 95.

John S. Hagopian, “Debunking the Public Health Myth: Municipal Politics and Class Conflict During the Galt, Ontario Waterworks Campaigns, 1888-1890,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 39 (Spring 1997), 39-68.

40 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

taken in order to reduce the incidence of disease. His account contributes to the persistent popular myth that Canadian waterworks systems were usually built for public health reasons. McLaughlin describes in detail the cholera epidemics in Galt in the 1830s, then links awareness of the germ theory to the construction of waterworks, a hospital, and a sewer system:

The frightening finality of cholera had left its mark in Galt, Dumfries, and neighbouring Waterloo. Yet it would not be until the 1880s that the theory of disease spreading by germs would be commonly accepted, persuading either the public or the scientific community of the need for sanitary reforms. When this information was known, however, the citizens of Galt were quick to take action. Despite the expensive costs of blasting through the limestone shale encompassing much of Galt's business district, sewers and a separate waterworks system were laid throughout the town in the 1890s. The Galt Hospital Trust, formed in 1888, erected a General Hospital in 1891 A program for improved public health had at last become recognized as a civic responsibility.²

This uncomplicated depiction of an immediate popular response to new public health information is problematic. First, there was no comprehensive sewer system built in Galt in the 1890s. By 1905, two small sewers serviced industrial areas, but a provincial health inspector reported "there is no general sewerage system at the present time."³ Second, there was opposition to the hospital which was built in 1891, details of which will be discussed in this study. Third, Galt's citizens were not quick to adopt waterworks, as they voted against it in 1888. Meanwhile, waterworks had been completed in nearby municipalities such as Brantford in 1870, Guelph in 1880, Dundas in 1883, Paris in 1884, and Berlin (Kitchener) in 1888.⁴ Fourth, any suggestion that cholera may have been the driving force behind waterworks is unfounded, as the last epidemic anywhere in Ontario occurred in 1866.⁵ The present study of Galt's waterworks provides more evidence that the public health and social improvement movements during this "Progressive" era were mythologized, and that the major force at work was, as always, class struggle.

Others have expressed a similarly cynical view of the motives of progressives. It has been found that reformers directed health regulations against those who did not own property so as to further the interests of those who did.⁶ Reformers were often organized in boards of trade and showed great concern for local business matters, but little for problems such as "housing, poverty, congestion and public

²McLaughlin, *Cambridge*, 58-60.

³Ontario, Board of Health, *23rd Annual Report* (Toronto 1904), 167.

⁴M.N. Baker, ed., *The Manual of American Waterworks* (New York 1897), 595-609.

⁵Charles M. Godfrey, *The Cholera Epidemics in Upper Canada 1832-1866* (Toronto and Montréal 1968), 62.

⁶John C. Weaver, *Shaping the Canadian City: Essays on Urban Politics and Policy, 1890-1920* (Toronto 1977), 74.

health.”⁷ Doctors embarked on public health campaigns not to better society, but to elevate the status of their profession.⁸ Some health professionals became eugenicists, and used public health issues to justify compulsory sterilization. These eugenicists were “anxious to intervene in the lives of the poor and ill,” and “were preoccupied by issues of race and class.”⁹ Reformers used public health measures to assimilate immigrants to “an American middle-class norm of moderation, cleanliness and order.”¹⁰

Waterworks promoters were businessmen concerned about the high cost of fire insurance in unserved municipalities.¹¹ Property insurers granted significant discounts to owners of property in municipalities which had waterworks. Other researchers have also noted the intimate relation between businessmen’s fire concerns and waterworks.¹² Municipal councils’ decisions to build waterworks had little to do with popular demand for water service. In fact, in some cities the number of domestic water subscribers was so low that councils, seeking to better defray costs, made water subscription compulsory.¹³ Meanwhile, in Winnipeg, where lower-class neighbourhoods did require a clean water supply, council gave priority to fire protection needs in other parts of the city.¹⁴

Bloomfield, Bloomfield, and McCaskell, too, assert that fire protection was the main reason for waterworks construction until the 1880s. However, they note a change in the 1890s, as the acceptance of the germ theory of disease became an

⁷Elizabeth Bloomfield, “Boards of Trade and Canadian Urban Development,” *Urban History Review*, 12, 2 (October 1983), 86.

⁸Alan I. Marcus, “Professional Revolution and Reform in the Progressive Era,” *Journal of Urban History*, 5, 2 (February 1979), 183-203.

⁹Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945* (Toronto 1990), 166-71.

¹⁰Judith Walzer Leavitt, *The Healthiest City: Milwaukee and the Politics of Health Reform* (Princeton 1983), 263.

¹¹John C. Weaver and Peter De Lottinville, “The Conflagration and the City: Disaster and Progress in British North America during the Nineteenth Century,” *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 13, 26 (November 1980), 444.

¹²Alan F.J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914* (Montréal 1975); Chris Warfe, “The Search for Pure Water in Ottawa: 1910-1915,” *Urban History Review*, 8, 1 (June 1979), 90-112; Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, *Monopoly’s Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830-1930* (Toronto 1986), 11-33; John S. Hagopian, “The Political Geography of Water Provision in Paris, Ontario, 1882-1924,” *Urban History Review*, 23, 1 (November 1994), 32-51.

¹³This was the case in Québec, Montréal, Hamilton, and Toronto. See William James and Evelyn James, *A Sufficient Quantity of Pure and Wholesome Water* (London, ON 1978), 59; and Elwood Jones and Douglas McCalla, “Toronto Waterworks, 1840-77: Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Toronto Politics,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 40, 3 (1979), 321.

¹⁴Artibise, *Winnipeg*, 217.

42 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

increasingly important factor in water provision.¹⁵ McLaughlin contends this was the major factor in Galt, but a 1902 publication states that Galt's waterworks was built because "the necessity for improved fire protection became more urgent."¹⁶ This essay will assess these conflicting positions by examining other events which happened in Galt at the time in question. But first, a short description of Galt will provide the necessary background for this case study.

Nineteenth-Century Galt

The settlement of Galt began shortly after William Dickson purchased what are now the townships of North and South Dumfries on 3 July 1816. Dickson was born in Dumfries, Scotland in 1769, and came to Canada in 1785. He was a lawyer and a member of the Legislative Council of Upper Canada, and was living in Niagara-on-the-Lake at the time of his purchase. Less than two weeks later, he set out with his general agent Absalom Shade to explore his lands, and selected the confluence of the Grand River and Mill Creek as his settlement site. The water power here was the chief attraction. The settlement was first called Shade's Mills, but in 1827 it was renamed Galt in honour of John Galt, commissioner of the Canada Company, who visited in that year.¹⁷ Most of the settlers who arrived before 1825 were Scottish families from New York state, where Shade had lived. Dickson hired an agent to go to Scotland to entice emigrants, and many Lowlanders arrived after 1825.¹⁸

In 1850, Galt was an incorporated village of over 2,000 people. Located in the middle of a rich agricultural district, it became an important milling centre. In the days before the railways, "much of the wheat grown as far west as Stratford was then either sold in Galt, or passed through the village as flour," to be forwarded along the macadamized road to Dundas. The 1850s were prosperous years for Galt, as it also became a prominent industrial centre, known even before it became a town in 1857 as the "Manchester of Canada." Skilled workmen crafted award-winning products, and Galt enjoyed "a reputation for the excellence of the work done, second to none in the Province."¹⁹ Among the factories was the Dumfries Foundry, which began operation in 1844. In 1859 it was bought out by John Goldie and Hugh McCulloch, both of whom became prominent men locally.²⁰ Foundries and ma-

¹⁵Elizabeth Bloomfield, Gerald Bloomfield, and Peter McCaskell, *Urban Growth and Local Services: The Development of Ontario Municipalities to 1981* (Guelph 1983), 102-4.

¹⁶*Picturesque and Industrial Galt* (Galt 1902), 26.

¹⁷James Young, *Reminiscences of the Early History of Galt and the Settlement of Dumfries* (Toronto 1880), 9-29.

¹⁸Jean Truss and Katherine Hebblethwaite, "A Short History of Galt, 1816-1916," unpublished manuscript, Galt Public Library, 1967, 1-2.

¹⁹Young, *Reminiscences*, 207-8, 229-34. See also Truss and Hebblethwaite, "A Short History of Galt," 9-10.

²⁰Jim Quantrell, *Time Frames* (Cambridge, ON 1993).

chine works were major employers in the South Waterloo census district, within which Galt was the principal municipality. The 8 such establishments in this district employed 324 hands in 1881, which was many more than were so employed in most other districts.²¹ By 1890, the 4 largest foundries in Galt employed 525 hands.²² In 1891, 1,698 hands were employed in all of Galt's factories, and the town's population of 7,535 made it the 31st largest municipality in Canada.²³ The importance of Galt as a municipality and as an industrial centre was reflected in the excellent rail service it received. The Great Western Railway entered Galt in 1855, followed by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1872, and the Credit Valley Railway in 1875.²⁴

Galt's "businesses enjoyed larger profits" during the 1880s and 1890s, which were years of "opulent living, fine homes, beautiful carriages, and courtliness."²⁵ Stone had been used for Galt's dwellings even before the 1840s since large amounts of limestone lay close to the ground surface. Granite field stones were also plentiful, and Galt would in fact become known as "The Granite City."²⁶ By the 1870s, brick became fashionable among the elite. Parcels of land on the hills overlooking the town "were considered the choicest building sites."²⁷ Many valuable dwellings were located on Wentworth, Lansdowne, Blair, Brant, Park, Rose, Oak, and McNaughton Streets, all of which were on hills.²⁸ Some of these homes featured "exotic towers, verandahs, bay windows, and even sunrooms," and many had large gardens.²⁹

The extensive use of stone and brick in 19th-century Galt was not limited to dwellings, as most churches, schools, and the town hall were also made of stone. When fires destroyed many of Main Street's wooden buildings in the 1850s, stone ones replaced them. Though individual buildings made of any material would still burn after the 1860s, there were no major blazes involving a number of buildings.³⁰ By 1900, Galt's population was only 7,746, but it was still recognized as "one of the busy manufacturing towns of the Province."³¹

²¹ *Census of Canada 1881*, volume 3 (Ottawa 1883), 368.

²² Ontario, Bureau of Industries, *11th Annual Report* (Toronto 1892), 38.

²³ *Census of Canada 1891*, volume 1 (Ottawa 1893), 368-70.

²⁴ Truss and Hebblethwaite, "A Short History of Galt," 11.

²⁵ Bill Moyer, *This Unique Heritage: The Story of Waterloo County* (Kitchener 1971), 125.

²⁶ Heritage Cambridge, *Our Heritage in Stone* (Cambridge 1978).

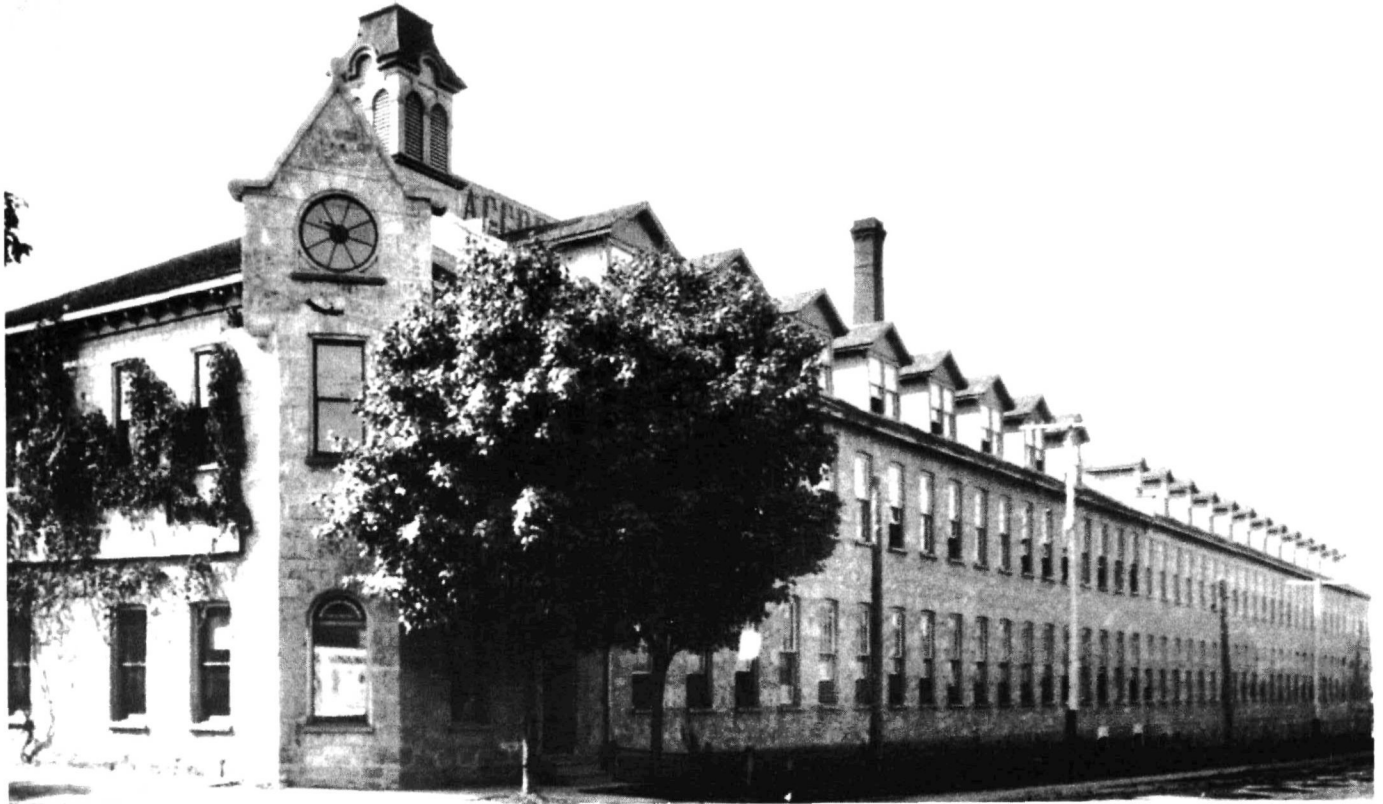
²⁷ Truss and Hebblethwaite, "A Short History of Galt," 14.

²⁸ City of Cambridge Archives (CCA), City of Galt (CG), Treasury Department (TD), Assessment and Taxation Records — Assessment Rolls, 107.04.05, 1890 Tax Assessment Records of the Town of Galt.

²⁹ Truss and Hebblethwaite, "A Short History of Galt," 15.

³⁰ For details on the fire history of Galt, see Jim Quantrell, *Time Frames*; and Jim Quantrell, *The History of the Cambridge Fire Department* (Cambridge, ON 1992).

³¹ W.A. McLean, "Waterworks, Street Improvements, Sewerage and Street Lighting in the Town of Galt," *Municipal World*, 12, 3 (March 1902).



The MacGregor, Gourlay & Co. factory of Concession Street in Galt, circa 1895, produced iron and woodworking machine tools. Photo courtesy of City of Cambridge Archives (CCA, PH 3848; NAC, PA 32487).

The First Galt Waterworks Campaign: March 1887 — January 1888

On 14 March 1887, Galt's town council created a special committee on waterworks, "to review all information received by previous councils."³² W.H. Lutz, a local druggist and town council member, chaired this committee, which served during the campaign not only as an information-gathering body, but also as the chief promoter of waterworks.³³ The committee did its work from March until 28 November 1887, when town council passed on second reading a debt bylaw to raise \$100,000 for waterworks construction. It was Lutz who had submitted the bylaw to council, and who had moved the bylaw through both readings.³⁴ Provincial legislation required that the assent of the ratepayers be obtained before council could give the bylaw third reading.³⁵ This public vote took place on 2 January 1888, the same time as the annual municipal council elections. Waterworks was rejected by a vote of 462 to 200.³⁶ Only ratepayers were eligible for this vote. These were defined by provincial legislation as those town residents (excepting married women) who were British subjects, at least 21 years old, owning property within the municipality assessed at a value of at least \$300. Tenants who were required by their leases to pay the taxes owing on such property could also vote, providing their leases extended for the full period of time within which the debt incurred by the bylaw was to be repaid.³⁷ As waterworks debts usually ran for periods of 20 or 30 years, very few tenants would have been eligible to vote on these bylaws. However, tenants occupying properties assessed at a minimum of \$300 were eligible to vote in municipal council elections even if they did not pay property taxes.

The *Galt Reporter* surmised that financial circumstances explained the vote.³⁸ In fact, in previous editorials, the paper had advised readers to reject the bylaw on the basis of the town's finances. Specifically, the town had large debenture debts in respect of the Grand Trunk and Credit Valley Railways which would be fully paid by 1893. This would free up \$5,000 or \$6,000 per year, while the \$100,000 waterworks debt would have required annual payments of \$6,788. Then would be the time to build waterworks, which the *Galt Reporter* supported in principle, writing "We only ask for delay; waterworks for the town are bound to come, but at a more auspicious season than the present."³⁹

³²CCA, CG, Clerk's Department (CD), Council Records, Minutes, 101.03.02, minutes of the Town of Galt Council, 14 March 1887.

³³*Galt Reporter*, 15 August 1887.

³⁴CCA, CG, CD, Council Records, Minutes, 101.03.02, minutes of the Town of Galt Council, 26 September 1887, 28 November 1887.

³⁵Consolidated Municipal Act, 1883, *Statutes of Ontario*, 46 Vic., c. 18, s. 346.

³⁶*Galt Reporter*, 6 January 1888.

³⁷Consolidated Municipal Act, 1883, *Statutes of Ontario*, 46 Vic., c. 18, ss. 80, 309-11.

³⁸*Galt Reporter*, 6 January 1888.

³⁹*Galt Reporter*, 16 December 1887 to 30 December 1887.

This "delay theory" may seem to explain ratepayer behaviour during the 1888 vote, but it has shortcomings. While the *Galt Reporter* was silent on the matter, the *Dumfries Reformer* reported many arguments offered by local ratepayers for voting against waterworks. These arguments suggest that ratepayers were opposed to the scheme presented to them, as much or more than they opposed the cost. Opponents complained that the scheme was not definite; that the distribution system did not cover the whole town; that it made little sense to install waterworks without a sewer system; that the town did not need waterworks; that the estimated cost of the system was unrealistically low; that the local promoters of the scheme were young and inexperienced; and that the expenditure was more than the town could afford.⁴⁰ Thus the timing of the scheme was just one of many expressed reasons for opposition to waterworks.

Moreover some of these reasons for opposition had a solid factual basis. The scheme was not definite in that it was not clear whether the source of supply should be Hogg's Springs near Glenmorris Road in the southwest portion of the town, or Sudden's Lake which was three and a half miles south of the town. It was also uncertain whether the distribution system would be one using direct pressure from a Holly pump, or one using an elevated reservoir with gravity driving the water through the mains. In July 1887, engineer W.L. McKenzie, who had been retained by the waterworks committee, advised the adoption of a direct pressure system based at the springs.⁴¹ In November 1887, another retained engineer, Alan Macdougall, advised instead a gravity system based at Sudden's Lake.⁴² Before the January 1888 vote, the committee appeared to have committed itself to the direct pressure system drawing from Hogg's Springs.⁴³ However, the matter was still an issue even during the successful vote in 1890.

It is also true that the proposed distribution system did not cover the whole town with water service mains.⁴⁴ Indeed, when the original system was eventually completed in 1892, only eleven miles of mains had been laid. By 1902, a total of

⁴⁰See "The Question of Waterworks," (an editorial), and "Water Works," (a letter to the editor), both of which refute these complaints, in the *Dumfries Reformer*, 15 December 1887. Regarding the inexperience of the promoters, one waterworks opponent said at a public meeting that "too many men had developed into 'experts' in connection with the present scheme." *Dumfries Reformer*, 5 January 1888.

⁴¹CCA, CG, CD, Council Records, Minutes, 101.03.02, minutes of the Town of Galt Council, 18 July 1887.

⁴²*Dumfries Reformer*, 10 November 1887.

⁴³CCA, CG, CD, Council Records, Minutes, 101.03.02, minutes of the Town of Galt Council, 28 November 1887. It has been written that the council of 1887 submitted the waterworks bylaw for approval, "but the electorate was given no data as to the source of supply." This is an exaggeration, as some information was provided, but it illustrates the uncertainty which existed on the matter of the supply source. See, *Picturesque and Industrial Galt*, 26.

⁴⁴*Galt Reporter*, 16 December 1887.

23 miles of mains were in place.⁴⁵ As for the accuracy of the \$100,000 cost estimate, by the 1890 campaign this figure was revised to \$125,000. But this larger figure did not include enough mains to cover the town, thus the actual waterworks expenditure during the 1890s was still greater. By 1897, debenture debt totalling \$157,000 had been incurred respecting the original system and subsequent extensions.⁴⁶ By 1901, \$182,357 had been expended. The cost of laying mains in Galt was "made somewhat great by the large amount of rock excavation in opening trenches for laying pipe."⁴⁷

Thus, opponents of waterworks expressed concerns not only about the timing of the scheme, but as to the nature of the scheme itself, and as to the claims of the promoters. More significantly, this opposition was not tempered by any expressed need for pure water for public health reasons. A number of people opposed waterworks for a number of reasons, and obviously were not so strongly impressed by the discovery of bacteria that they zealously sought waterworks.

Public health was one of the reasons offered by waterworks promoters in support of their scheme, but there was no mention of any particular illness plaguing the town, nor of any which posed a threat. Typically, promoters would say waterworks were needed simply "because the public health demands it."⁴⁸ The "well-known citizen" who wrote this letter said nothing more on the health issue than these quoted words, but he wrote at length to explain four other reasons to build the works. He argued that the elevated portions of the town had no fire protection; that as a public works project it would stimulate the local economy; that the rate of fire insurance would be reduced; and that manufacturers would be induced to locate in town.⁴⁹ This citizen said that catering to the needs of manufacturers was necessary to the survival of the town, and for progress:

In this advanced age it is a struggle for supremacy both by individuals and corporations, and we must do something or we will be left in the shade. Waterworks is a firm and solid step in the right direction, and let us go in with it and put our town in such a shape that we will not have to offer bonuses or anything else to attract merchants, manufacturers and men of leisure to come to us. So let every woman and man ... cast her or his ballot for progress and WATERWORKS.

A waterworks editorial repeated this paradigm of a municipal "race for supremacy" in "an age of progress."⁵⁰

⁴⁵ *Picturesque and Industrial Galt*, 30.

⁴⁶ Baker, *The Manual of American Waterworks*, 599.

⁴⁷ W. A. McLean, "Waterworks, Street Improvements, Sewerage and Street Lighting," 6.

⁴⁸ *Dumfries Reformer*, 8 December 1887.

⁴⁹ For more evidence of the need for fire protection on the hills of Galt, see the letter signed "Fire Protection," in the *Dumfries Reformer*, 29 December 1887.

⁵⁰ *Dumfries Reformer*, 5 January 1888.

A lengthy letter to the editor from George Laird, a local grocer, is notable in two respects. First, he drew attention to Berlin's recent decision to grant industrial tax reductions, as well as \$80,000 for a railway connection, and \$3,200 annually to a private waterworks company for fire protection. Laird argued that Galt needed to adopt waterworks to keep pace with such "neighboring enterprise." Second, Laird lamented the local opposition that had been generated against waterworks and "every other improvement" the town had initiated in the past. This would later prove ironic, in view of Laird's opposition to the hospital, which would have cost the town far less money than waterworks did.

In summary, the ineffective waterworks campaign of 1887-88 was coolly received by local papers, and skeptically viewed by the ratepayers. The promoters seemed to be loosely organized around the waterworks committee, which undermined its own credibility by obtaining conflicting opinions from two engineers, and by having no good reason for favouring the scheme it apparently preferred. Though efforts were taken to make waterworks appear a necessary part of a greater question (the race for supremacy), few believed it, and the merits of waterworks were assessed on their own. There is little evidence to suggest that there was a class basis for opposition to waterworks, but some of the promoters were businessmen who supported the scheme for business reasons.⁵¹

*The 1888-89 Interlude: Civic Politics, Labour Unrest,
and the Galt Board of Trade*

The interlude between the two waterworks campaigns was significant in that local businessmen would find some resistance to another initiative, namely a new hospital. When this issue was at its peak of contention, a larger civic crisis erupted when the town's moulders went on strike on 6 July 1889. Coincident with these two movements were efforts by businessmen to organize the first Galt Board of Trade. The impetus for this board was the recognition by businessmen of their ineffective control over civic affairs. Though town council was generally agreeable to the business perspective, there were notable exceptions, and the citizenry was far from malleable. This overt class conflict continued during the municipal election of 1890, when a slate of anti-labour candidates prevailed over a slate of labour candidates, largely as a result of threats by local manufacturers to leave town. The second waterworks vote of August 1890 should be understood in this context, as the perception and behaviour of the ratepayers was recreated in the cauldron of conflict that preceded the 1890 waterworks campaign.

The campaign to raise debenture funds for a new hospital in Galt was not a popularly-supported movement addressing a universally-recognized need. One

⁵¹The only significant evidence in this regard is a letter to the editor signed "Ratepayer" which states of the tax increase prompted by waterworks: "to the majority of our working classes it means adding to a burden which is already almost too heavy to bear." See, *Galt Reporter*, 9 December 1887.

councillor argued that “the town could not well afford the hospital and there were many things needed more.”⁵² The first superintendent of the hospital would in later years recall that many believed “it was a needless and useless expense for Galt to build and support a Hospital.”⁵³ A smallpox hospital had operated just outside of town, but it had been “little used” before it burned in September 1883, and was not replaced.⁵⁴ Yet affluent promoters (organized in a body called the Hospital Trust) agitated for the construction of a new hospital above the complaints of others who believed that taxpayers as a whole should not be forced to finance it. Indeed, the issue of public or private financing was more central to the hospital debate than issues of need. It was a political issue from the start, not a medical one.

The promoters of the hospital were motivated by a desire for regional supremacy. The town had lost a struggle for regional supremacy in 1851 when Berlin was chosen the county seat for Waterloo by the provincial government. That decision had caused “much chagrin” amongst local residents for decades.⁵⁵ Some local boosters seem to have wanted Galt to acquire the characteristics of a county seat. Nearby Guelph, for example, was the county seat for Wellington and had both waterworks and a hospital. A *Galt Reporter* editorial stated that the rejection of Galt’s waterworks bylaw in 1888 was a defeat for those who favoured civic “enterprise and energy,” but viewed the hospital as an opportunity to recover regional prominence: “There will be a Hospital established in Waterloo County. The agitation in Galt has set others thinking, and if not established here it will be elsewhere. The opportunity is with us.”⁵⁶

The hospital opponents argued that the debenture bylaw which the voters had authorized in May 1888 had been passed under false pretences. Led by George Laird, they demanded that a second public vote be taken, and they commenced a lawsuit seeking to declare the bylaw invalid.⁵⁷ Rather than conduct a second vote, council took the unusual step in March 1889 of persuading the provincial government to pass a special act which declared the bylaw legal for all purposes.⁵⁸ There were two significant results from the hospital saga. First, Laird’s emergence as the leader of the objectors made him a marked man in the eyes of the local elite. Second, the opposition which was expressed during both the waterworks and hospital

⁵²*Galt Reporter*, 19 July 1889.

⁵³The quote is by Miss Gibson, in *The Galt Hospital, Ontario: golden jubilee, 1890-1940* (Galt 1940).

⁵⁴*Galt Reporter*, 7 September 1883.

⁵⁵Young, *Reminiscences*, 220-1.

⁵⁶*Galt Reporter*, 27 April 1888.

⁵⁷*Galt Reporter*, 24 August 1888, 14 September 1888, and 7 December 1888.

⁵⁸An Act to legalize a By-law of the Town of Galt and for other purposes, 1889, *Statutes of Ontario*, 52 Vic., c. 60. The *Dumfries Reformer* reported on 6 December 1888 that council had recently “taken steps to procure a special act at the approaching session of the legislature, removing all doubts as to the validity of the bylaw.”

50 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

campaigns caused the elite great concern. Indeed, they realized they had to change their approach to local politics. The *Dumfries Reformer* reported that at the

close of the meeting of the Hospital Trust held on Friday evening [28 June 1889], an informal discussion took place in regard to the advisability of establishing a board of trade in town. The idea met with general acceptance, and it was decided to hold a preliminary meeting in the council chamber on Friday of this week, to which all businessmen and others interested are invited.⁵⁹

The *Reformer* heartily approved of the planned board, repeating an earlier refrain: "Galt cannot afford to be behind her neighbors in utilizing every agency calculated to keep the town well to the front in the race for supremacy."

But during the summer of 1889, the hospital mess would prove to be the lesser of the local businessmen's troubles. Galt's unionized moulders became discontented with their lot in the foundries of the Manchester of Canada. A strike they began in July and which lasted until the following spring was significant in a number of respects. First, public sympathy for the strikers would divide the town along class lines, and this division would be represented in the two slates of candidates that ran for municipal council in 1890. It would be that council that would deal with the waterworks issue — and help promote it — the second time around. Second, the hospital affair had prompted an awareness of class interests and a subtle class struggle. But the strike converted this tension into an overt class conflict which peaked during the physical clashes between the strikers and replacement workers, and during the ideological battles between council candidates in December of 1889. Third, the moulders union was the only trade union in town, and the Galt local had been organized only two years earlier. The strike was likely viewed as a test case that would determine the success of future efforts to unionize other local trades. Fourth, the struck factories were among the largest in town, and the moulding function was essential to the production process. The strike thus had implications for many more people than the moulders themselves and their employers.

The moulders made a conspicuous display in the well-attended Trades Procession on Dominion Day, 1889. The Procession was both a parade and a trade show of myriad works, and had wide appeal. Indeed, "it was the largest gathering ever seen in Galt."⁶⁰ The moulders held a prestigious position, as they were second — behind Goldie & McCulloch — in the procession of manufacturers, merchants, and societies. The large crowd assembled that day witnessed the following display:

Iron Moulders Union, about 45 strong, with their banner bearing the inscription I.M.U. of N.A., No. 102, Galt, organized August 1887: 'United we stand, divided we fall. Help one

⁵⁹*Dumfries Reformer*, 4 July 1889.

⁶⁰*Galt Reporter*, 5 July 1889.



A group of workers outside the Goldie & McCulloch Foundry circa 1890. Photo courtesy of City of Cambridge Archives (CCA, PH 3020).

52 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

another.' The members all wore badges and white gloves and presented a very creditable appearance.⁶¹

The 1880s was a particularly notable period for labour activity among the Knights of Labor and trade unionists, and moulders were among the most active.⁶² On 4 July 1889, just three days after the parade, the moulders gave written notice to four local foundries that they would strike on 6 July unless they received wages commensurate with those received by moulders in other towns. The four employers were Goldie & McCulloch, Cowan & Co., MacGregor, Gourlay & Co., and R. McDougall & Co. Specifically, the moulders asked for a 25¢ per day raise, to \$2.⁶³ Galt's moulders were at this time receiving \$11.42 per week on average, which was near the average (\$11.73 per week, by one estimate) paid to Ontario moulders generally. Moulders in Brantford, Oshawa, and Toronto received the highest rates (in excess of \$14 per week), while those in nearby Preston and Waterloo received the lowest (less than \$9 per week).⁶⁴

The day after notice of the strike was served, local businessmen met for their first Board of Trade meeting, as had been planned after the Hospital Trust meeting of the previous week. During the next six months, an alliance would form between the Board, town council, and businessmen which would attack the union and labour sympathizers. The alliance would also gather more data for use in the next waterworks campaign.

The striking moulders held the upper hand in the dispute during the summer of 1889, largely because public opinion was on their side, and because they were able to thwart their employers' attempts to hire replacement workers. Goldie & McCulloch quickly placed ads in the Toronto *Globe* offering work for iron moulders, with the proviso "only non-union men need apply."⁶⁵ This stipulation was in keeping with the employers' contention that they did not oppose the strikers' wage demand, but instead they "refused to treat with or in any way recognize the Union in the conduct of their business."⁶⁶ This ad was undermined by a union ad placed just beneath it which read "MOULDERS — KEEP AWAY FROM GALT — strike on." Later versions of this moulders' ad had the added words, "By order, I.M.U., No. 102, Galt."⁶⁷ The strikers were also assisted by allowances granted to them during the strike by their union (\$2,000), and by neighbouring societies (\$1,500).⁶⁸

⁶¹ *Galt Reporter*, 5 July 1889. For more on the significance of the positioning of participants in parades, see Peter G. Goheen, "Symbols in the Streets: Parades in Victorian Urban Canada," *Urban History Review*, 18, 3 (February 1990), 237-43.

⁶² Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto 1992), 120, 144-5.

⁶³ *Galt Reporter*, 12 July 1889.

⁶⁴ Ontario, Bureau of Industries, *8th Annual Report* (Toronto 1889), 36, 38.

⁶⁵ *The Globe* (Toronto), 9 July 1889.

⁶⁶ *Dumfries Reformer*, 11 July 1889.

⁶⁷ *The Globe* (Toronto), 10 January 1890.

⁶⁸ Ontario, Bureau of Industries, *8th Annual Report*, 43.

The war of words took a novel twist on 27 July when a sunny promotion of the Town of Galt appeared on the first four pages of the *Toronto Globe*. No doubt designed to attract scabs and defend the reputation of the employers against boycotts, this feature article painted an especially rosy picture of industry and industrial relations in town:

The stability of the enterprises has secured skilled workmen and led to the policy of producing nothing unless it is stamped with the signs of perfect skill and durability. It is to this as much as to the wise surveillance of the heads of the manufacturing concerns that Galt has become famous as an industrial centre. The town at large is under this influence and stimulated on its onward career. The mechanics feel it, for in no other place in Canada are such classes so comfortable and so well to do. They live in their own houses, and hundreds of them have a large account to their credit in the banks.

This war of words was matched by unrest in the streets. Many of the replacement workers brought to town by the employers left once they understood the extent of the conflict. The employers sought to shelter the replacements in lodgings on their own property, but even this was not safe. The strikers harassed the replacements with impunity since public opinion was firmly on the moulders' side. In August 1889, one observer complained "many thoughtless people in Galt have shown their sympathy with the malcontents, and given encouragement in the hostile demonstrations that have taken place against the moulders who have been engaged to take the places of the strikers." This intimidation was said to have led to "mob rule." An editorial in the *Dumfries Reformer* urged that "no sentimental considerations must be allowed to prevent the authorities" from protecting the replacements. The strikers' actions were popularly supported, as an observer wrote "it remains to be seen whether the municipal authorities have the necessary nerve to do their duty and punish lawbreaking." Council had the nerve, as they hired an extra staff of constables shortly after this call was made.⁶⁹

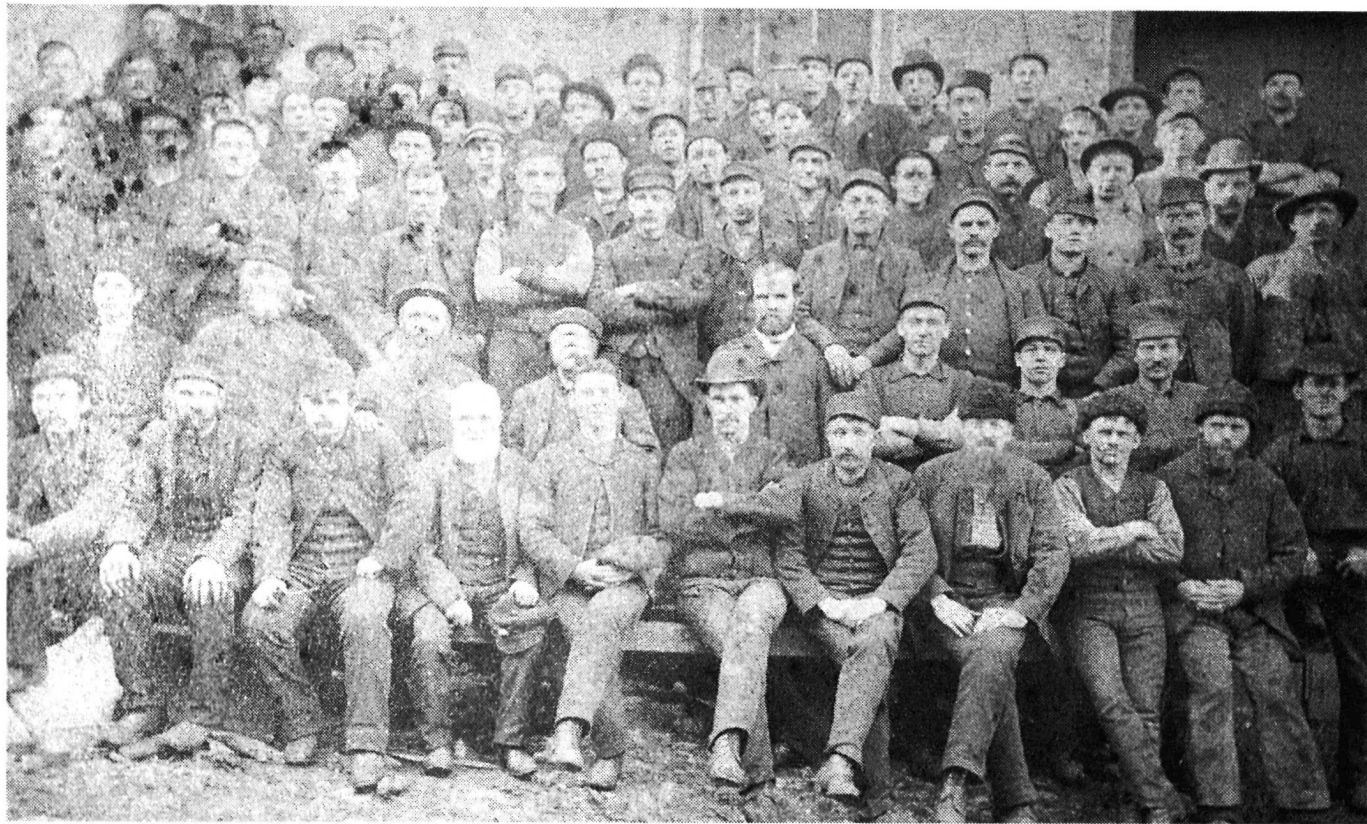
The strike was viewed by those opposed to the moulders as a serious threat to the town and its manufacturers. It was estimated that there were 700 employees at the struck factories, and their work was

brought almost to a standstill ... only about seven per cent of the workmen are moulders but their capacity for mischief is unbounded, as the work of the moulders lies at the root of the whole industry.⁷⁰

The strike also raised the class consciousness of Galt's workers. Two public meetings were organized during the summer of 1889 "to discuss the Labor Question and the Moulders Strike." One of these was a "largely attended mass meeting" held

⁶⁹For all of the matters discussed in the paragraph, see the *Dumfries Reformer*, 15 August 1889 and 22 August 1889.

⁷⁰*Dumfries Reformer*, 22 August 1889.



The workers of Cowan & Co. produced engines, boilers, and a variety of machinery. Photo courtesy of City of Cambridge Archives (CCA, PH 2055).

in the town hall, at which speeches about capital and labour generally were given. One speaker said that the

men had as much right to combine for the protection of their labor as the manufacturers had to form their associations to protect their interests. He respected capital in the hands of honest possessors, but capital was only the product of labor. People could not eat capital.⁷¹

Not surprisingly, the employers were not passive during the summer of 1889. In addition to allegedly hiring detectives to spy on the workers,⁷² and to convincing the local newspapers to either support them or keep their mouths closed on strike issues,⁷³ local employers were establishing their own organization. On 5 July 1889, the elite group (including James Young,⁷⁴ W.H. Lutz, and Hugh McCulloch) who had gathered on the eve of the moulders' strike decided that they should "take steps to get the proposed board of trade incorporated."⁷⁵ On 18 July 1889, officers were elected, with Lutz filling the vice-president post, and McCulloch sitting on the eight-member executive council. Committees were formed to deal with railways, manufactures, local improvements, and mercantile matters.⁷⁶ McCulloch was not the only owner of a recently-struck foundry to assume a prominent position on the new Board. Thomas Cowan and A.G. Gourlay both sat on the manufactures committee. Cowan was an effective committee member; considered by some to be "one of the best platform speakers in the country," he served as president of the Canadian Manufacturers Association in 1886-87.

The Board of Trade quickly made waterworks a high priority on its agenda. At a special meeting called on 15 August 1889

it was decided that the local improvement committee, the council of the board, and the town council should meet at a time to be appointed and consider all the plans and other means of information within their reach and endeavor to decide upon some practicable scheme to be submitted.⁷⁷

⁷¹*Dumfries Reformer*, 15 August 1889.

⁷²*Dumfries Reformer*, 22 and 15 August 1889. See also the speech by Mr. Collie in the *Dumfries Reformer*, 2 January 1890, in which he alleges that informants "hobnobbed" with labour activists and reported back to "a very sympathetic audience at the board of trade."

⁷³*Dumfries Reformer*, 15 August 1889.

⁷⁴Young once owned the *Dumfries Reformer*, was the riding's MP from Confederation until 1879, served as president of the Gore Mutual Insurance Company, and was treasurer of Ontario for several months. He was president of the Hospital Trust, which sought to establish the hospital in Galt, and he also wrote the useful history of Galt to which reference has been made earlier.

⁷⁵*Dumfries Reformer*, 11 July 1889.

⁷⁶*Dumfries Reformer*, 25 July 1889.

⁷⁷*Dumfries Reformer*, 22 August 1889.

56 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

This planned meeting did occur on 2 September 1889, and it “was a large and representative one and the feeling was unanimous that the time had arrived when the waterworks project should be carried to a successful issue.”⁷⁸ Sudden’s Lake was the source of supply preferred by the local improvement committee, but some members feared the ratepayers would reject such a scheme as the quantity of water available might be too low. It was decided to defer the decision as to the source of supply. The Board was clearly leading the town council at their joint meetings, rather than the other way around. On 31 October 1889, in accordance with a request received from the Board’s local improvement committee, town council decided to advertise for tenders to supply the town with waterworks for fire protection and domestic use.⁷⁹

During the summer and autumn of 1889, capital and labour were polarized. The elite had managed to avoid a second public vote on the hospital issue, and were gearing up for the struggle anticipated during the next waterworks vote. In December 1889, the immediate issue at hand, though, was the municipal election, as that body would have to deal with the continuing strike, and with the submission of the waterworks bylaw to the ratepayers next summer.

The Climax: The Municipal Election and the Waterworks Campaign of 1890

The Galt council election of 1890 was a contest between two slates of candidates. The anti-labour slate trounced the pro-labour slate due to an effective scare campaign. Rumours were spread that a pro-labour victory would prompt the exodus of the town’s manufacturers, throwing the labourers out of work. Most of the victorious anti-labour candidates were political novices, but experienced businessmen. The mayor was W.H. Lutz. After the election, it was alleged that municipal politics in Galt had become a matter of coercion and intimidation, with a powerful clique seeking absolute control over all industrial and public matters. The election was a foreboding sign of the inevitable defeat of the moulders. Their strike, which was “unsuccessful in every respect,” dissipated rather than ended in the spring of 1890. By December 1889, half of the strikers had “either left town or have gone into something else.” By May 1890, the strikers had all left town, and were “scattered all over.”⁸⁰ The foundries instituted a policy of having no union men in their employ, and when it was discovered in May of 1890 that four of the replacement workers hired in February were members of a union, they were discharged. The summer waterworks campaign was conducted in the aftermath of this turmoil.

One of the most significant developments of December 1889 was the presentation to council of the annual report of Galt’s medical health officer, doctor G.F.

⁷⁸ *Dumfries Reformer*, 5 September 1889.

⁷⁹ *Dumfries Reformer*, 7 November 1889.

⁸⁰ Ontario, Bureau of Industries, *8th Annual Report*, 22; and *11th Annual Report*, 41, 43.

Sylvester.⁸¹ His report stated that Galt had the lowest death rate in the province, and that the incidence of contagious diseases was very low. There had been eleven cases of scarlet fever, five of typhoid fever, two of diphtheria, and none of whooping cough. Most of these cases "were very mild in character," and only one death resulted. Dr. Sylvester concluded:

At this point it occurs to me whether we as a [Board of Health] should take any action in regard to water works when we have such a good report to present. If we look at towns on all sides of us with their average and waterworks, and still not able to show as low a death rate as the town of Galt, we should consider well before making any change.⁸²

This report, which goes far in debunking the public health theory as the basis of waterworks development in Galt, received little attention. The public was more concerned with rumours that two manufacturers were considering leaving town. Labour problems lay at the root of the threatened exodus, according to one board of trade member, who charged that

men holding responsible public positions had fostered that feeling of opposition and distrust in the minds of the mechanical classes which existed at the present time, to the detriment of the manufacturers.⁸³

The board of trade resolved to form a special committee to determine what grievances local manufacturers held, "with the object of having such grievances, if any, speedily removed." Mayoral candidate Lutz was appointed to this committee.

The 30 December 1889 council nomination meeting was notable in three respects. First, though many candidates, especially anti-labour candidates, denied they were part of a slate or "ticket," other candidates said, "the troubles between the moulders and the manufacturers had been imported into this contest," and that tickets had been brought out for the election. Second, the major issues addressed at the meeting related to class or labour issues, such as industrial bonusing, and differential tax assessment practices between property owned by the rich and property owned by mechanics. Third, the discussion clearly indicates that Laird was aligned with the workers, and that his personal credibility was at issue. One speaker asked, "Why had Mr. Laird the support of the workingman in this contest?" To which a voice in the hall answered, "Because he is an honest man." But the speaker continued, "It was because he was prepared to do what they wanted him to do." Other speakers criticized Laird for his opposition to the hospital, while another alleged that the public statements by Laird and his supporters "were very

⁸¹Dr. Sylvester was a gold medalist upon graduation from Trinity University, Toronto, according to an advertisement he placed in the *Galt Reporter*, 28 April 1876.

⁸²*Dumfries Reformer*, 19 December 1889.

⁸³*Dumfries Reformer*, 26 December 1889.

different from those to which they gave utterance when surrounded by their friends and at their own meetings." Laird denied being an enemy of the manufacturers, and denied claims that he intended to increase industrial taxation levels.⁸⁴

The *Galt Reporter's* pre-election editorial did not mince words. It lauded Lutz and Gilholm, and lambasted their opponents Mayor Lumsden and especially Laird. It noted a conflict between the public Laird, acting as an elected representative, and the private Laird, acting on his own initiative. The *Reporter* said a more conscientious man would have realized "no man can have two masters." (Perhaps the incongruity of Laird's boosterism during the first waterworks campaign and his opposition during the hospital debate can be explained by this "two masters" observation.) The *Reporter* also castigated Laird who, by supporting the striking moulders, "went over to the enemies of the town."⁸⁵

The election itself on 6 January 1890 was "the most exciting which has taken place in Galt for many years," and voter turnout was the highest in the town's history. Nine of the fifteen elected members were new to council, and the *Dumfries Reformer* spoke favourably of the ability and business experience of the group. Regarding waterworks, the *Reformer* wrote, "From the personnel of this year's council, we expect to see something tangible accomplished."⁸⁶ The *Galt Reporter* rejoiced that "the citizens' ticket was elected in every case but one," and asked

can we not all now join hand in hand, forgetting past differences, undoing any schisms which may have been aroused, and go forward energetically and unitedly to do the best we can for the community and the prosperity of each individual?⁸⁷

In a revealing editorial, the *Reformer* said the election result "was a surprise to both parties," thereby acknowledging that two slates of candidates had been fielded. The result was explained as follows:

The recent labor troubles appear to have entered very largely into the contest, and the report so industriously circulated that the return of certain candidates would lead to the removal of one or more of our manufacturing establishments, was a very powerful factor in the campaign.⁸⁸

Walter Cavers, a labourer, was reported to be the only successful candidate on the pro-labour ticket. No moulders ran for council, though a machinist named Thomas Smith lost in his bid for a ward five seat. George Laird also lost. The *Dumfries Reformer* believed Laird was handicapped by his opposition to the hospital, and "for having presided at two public meetings called by the striking moulders last

⁸⁴ *Dumfries Reformer*, 2 January 1890.

⁸⁵ *Galt Reporter*, 3 January 1890.

⁸⁶ *Dumfries Reformer*, 16 January 1890.

⁸⁷ *Galt Reporter*, 10 January 1890.

⁸⁸ *Dumfries Reformer*, 9 January 1890.

summer." The election was "the most bitter which has been fought in Galt for many years," and "the manner in which some men 'knifed' their best friends would have done credit to an African Zulu."⁸⁹ The *Reformer* acknowledged that "great efforts were put forth to defeat Mr. Laird."⁹⁰

A curious occurrence on 4 January 1890 — just two days before the council vote — also affected the result. Toronto newspapers reported that at a meeting of the Toronto Trades and Labour Council it had been alleged that a flywheel produced in a Galt foundry during the strike was defective. It had been sold to the provincial government for use in Toronto's Central Prison. Tests indicated that the flywheel was satisfactory, but one or more affidavits from undisclosed sources attested to the flaws.⁹¹ It was not known on voting day who had signed the affidavit, but the news reports were viewed as a discreditable attempt by the moulders "to injure the reputation of Galt manufacturers abroad." The *Dumfries Reformer* wrote that this development

operated very strongly against those believed to have 'labor' sympathies. As a consequence, of all the gentlemen alleged to have the endorsement of the labor party, only one — Mr. Walter Cavers, Councillor elect for Ward No. 5 — was returned.⁹²

The Trades and Labour Congress refused to divulge the identity of the person who signed the affidavit, though reports in the Toronto dailies suggested it was a Galt moulder.⁹³ The president of the I.M.U. local in Galt claimed to have no knowledge of the affidavit.⁹⁴

A similar mystery occurred in late January 1890, when an article was published in Toronto's *Labor Reformer* which commented on the recent Galt election.⁹⁵ Titled "Terrorism in Galt," it alleged that Galt's manufacturers and their capitalistic friends were using boycotts and terrorism to suppress honest opinion, to control employees' voting behaviour, and to "secure absolute dictation in all industrial and public matters." Supporters of labour candidates were "boycotted and ostracized in business and social life." It noted that the Galt Board of Trade had "a conspicuous animus against Labor," and that the town's newspaper editors were sycophants. As wage earners must vote "at the dictation of a clique of narrow-minded and purse-proud money-grubbers," the I.M.U.'s advice was repeated: "Keep away from Galt." No sources were given for the information it contained.

⁸⁹*Dumfries Reformer*, 9 January 1890. For occupations of candidates, see the 1889 tax assessment records for the Town of Galt.

⁹⁰*Dumfries Reformer*, 30 January 1890.

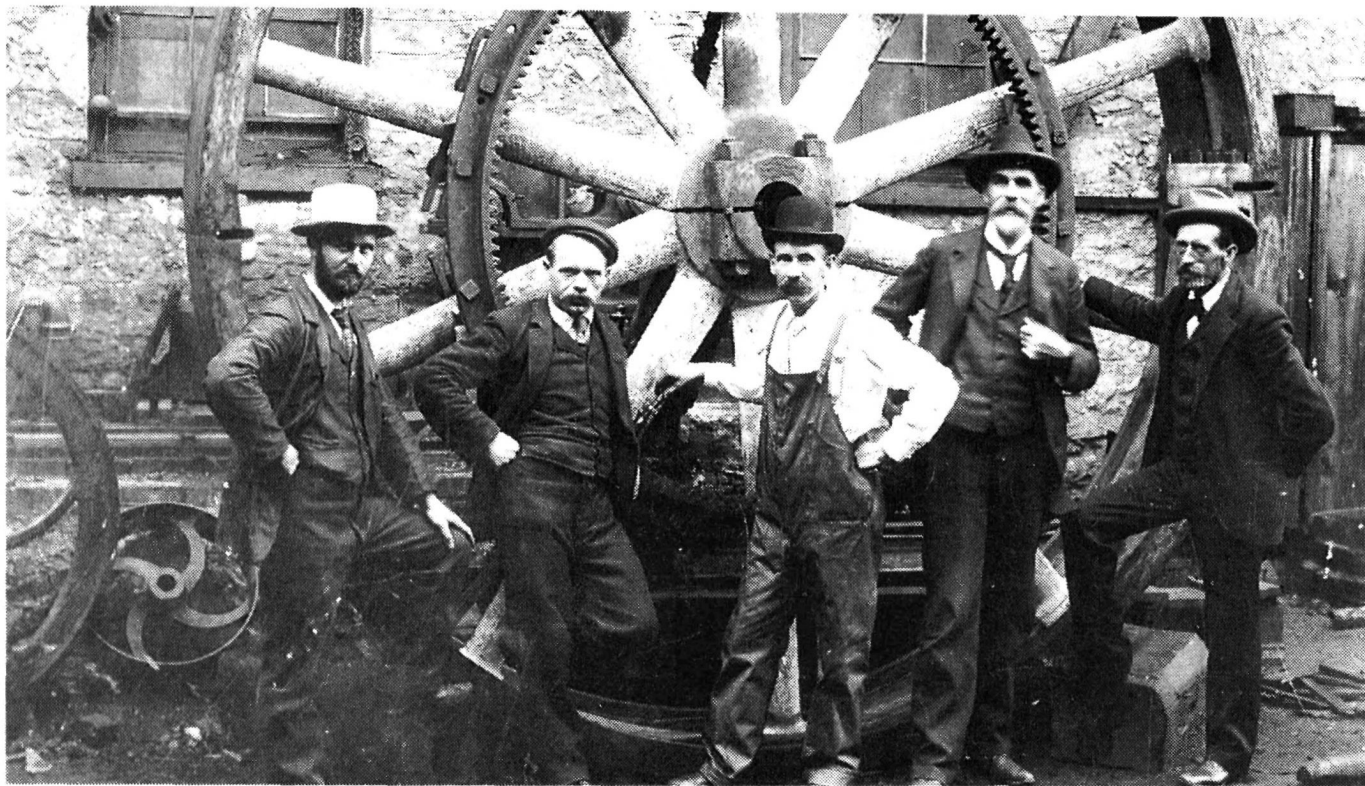
⁹¹*The Globe* (Toronto), 4 January 1890. A similar report appeared in the *Toronto Mail* on the same day.

⁹²*Dumfries Reformer*, 9 January 1890.

⁹³*Galt Reporter*, 24 January 1890.

⁹⁴*Dumfries Reformer*, 23 January 1890.

⁹⁵This article was reprinted in the *Galt Reporter* on 31 January 1890.



William Cowan, president of Cowan & Co., (second from right) poses with four of his formally dressed workers and one of their products. Cowan joined the family-owned company in 1893, and his brother Thomas assisted in its management. Photo courtesy of City of Cambridge Archives (CCA, PH 2056).

Local refutations of this article were quick to follow, and the Galt Assembly of the Knights of Labor denied authorship of the piece, though it did re-assert one of the allegations it contained:

As to the coercion and threats spoken of, we do not think it was very glaring, as the game is not played that way, but an employer comes into a shop with his employees, and with a requisition in his hand asks them to sign it, and if any of them happen to be manly enough to refuse, they know they are marked men, as an employer that would try to influence his men in that way is quite willing to go further.⁹⁶

The requisition that was circulated by the employers was in favour of Robert Gilholm, who was running for the reeveship against Laird.⁹⁷ The coercive power of employers has been noted by historian Ben Forster, who found that in Canada in the 1870s, "there were strong elements of paternalism and deference in many employer/employee relationships." During elections, employees "could be persuaded that their interests were as one with their employers."⁹⁸ However, an editorial in the *Dumfries Reformer* provided a refutation of the "terrorism" allegations, arguing that a secret ballot made it impossible for employers to control their workers' votes. It stated that Galt's mechanics were "possessed of too much manhood" to be bullied. It also denied that supporters of labour candidates were persecuted, claiming that though the *Reformer* was known to have supported Laird, "yet we have not been 'boycotted and ostracized in business and social life,' and have not felt the 'pressure' to any considerable extent, and we do not know of anyone who has."⁹⁹

The *Galt Reporter* reprinted the "Terrorism" article in full so that Galt's citizens "may know the utterly reckless and perfectly untruthful charge which is made against them." While the *Reporter* demanded to know "Who is the man who so maligns our people," it did confirm that there had been requisitions circulated by employers. "In but two instances was the requisition to Mr. Gilholm laid before the employees in our various establishments, and those who signed it in those works did so cheerfully and of their own free will ..."¹⁰⁰

The new council was responsive to the Board of Trade. The Board was concerned by the impression out-of-towners were getting from the Toronto newspapers. Particularly distressing were the moulders' "Keep away from Galt" ads that appeared on a daily basis. These ads prompted many to believe that the town's foundries were closed, and created "a very false and injurious impression as to the

⁹⁶*The Globe* (Toronto), 15 February 1890.

⁹⁷*Dumfries Reformer*, 30 January 1890.

⁹⁸Ben Forster, *A Conjunction of Interests: Business, Politics and Tariffs, 1825-1879* (Toronto 1986), 170-1.

⁹⁹*Dumfries Reformer*, 30 January 1890.

¹⁰⁰*Galt Reporter*, 31 January 1890.

62 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

position of our large businesses.”¹⁰¹ The Board approached council on the matter, and council referred the matter to its executive committee, “with power to act as they see proper, considering the bad effects such advertising as ‘Keep away from Galt,’ etc., is doing to our town generally.”¹⁰² The possibility of obtaining an injunction prohibiting publication of the ads was explored, but one does not appear to have been issued. Instead, with the support of council, Lutz placed an announcement in the *Globe*

to dispel the idea that may have been caused, especially at a distance, by these advertisements and other less creditable means that are being employed, that business is in any way impeded by the action of the unionists and that work cannot be supplied with the usual promptness.¹⁰³

The last moulders’ ad in the *Globe* appeared on 7 April 1890, about the time that the strike was over.

Busy as the new council was, it wasted little time in dealing with waterworks. It resolved at its first meeting that the contemplated system should be municipally owned.¹⁰⁴ Another item on the Board of Trade agenda would also be addressed. The Board had urged the adoption of a local improvement scheme based on a frontage tax.¹⁰⁵ This scheme would be embraced by council, even though some members did not know how it worked.¹⁰⁶ The scheme would be submitted to the ratepayers for approval together with the waterworks bylaw on 7 August 1890.

The council of 1890 had little use for Dr. Sylvester, who had questioned the need for waterworks. The Board of Health recommended that Dr. Sylvester serve as the town’s medical health officer for another year, but council replaced him with Dr. Wardlaw.¹⁰⁷ This prompted the resignation of most of the Board, but council stood firm and accepted their resignations.¹⁰⁸

The second Galt waterworks campaign began in earnest in June 1890, when the esteemed engineer retained by council, Willis Chipman, presented his report.¹⁰⁹ Chipman recommended Sudden’s Lake as the source, as it would be adequate for domestic use and, with the aid of a steam fire engine attached to the hydrants,

¹⁰¹ *Galt Reporter*, 17 January 1890.

¹⁰² *Galt Reporter*, 24 January 1890.

¹⁰³ *The Globe* (Toronto), 15 February 1890.

¹⁰⁴ CCA, CG, CD, Council Records, Minutes, 101.03.02, minutes of the Town of Galt Council, 13 January 1890.

¹⁰⁵ *Dumfries Reformer*, 12 December 1889 and 17 July 1890.

¹⁰⁶ *Dumfries Reformer*, 10 July 1890; see also *Dumfries Reformer*, 17 July 1890.

¹⁰⁷ CCA, CG, CD, Council Records, Minutes, 101.03.02, minutes of the Town of Galt Council, 10 February 1890.

¹⁰⁸ *Dumfries Reformer*, 6 July 1890, and *Galt Reporter*, 7 March 1890.

¹⁰⁹ For more information about Willis Chipman, see Bloomfield, Bloomfield, and McCaskell, *Urban Growth and Local Services*, 105; and Tom Davey, “Environmental Pioneers,” *Environment Ontario Legacy*, 11, 1 (July 1982), 32.

sufficient pressure could be raised to fight fires. The *Dumfries Reformer* greeted the report with its boosterist best. It counselled acceptance of the scheme, claiming the “engineering difficulties were not serious,”¹¹⁰ when in fact it would later prove necessary to blast through bedrock to lay half the mains.¹¹¹ Seemingly trying to find consistency in the recommendations of the proponents, it added that Sudden’s Lake had also been the source touted during the first waterworks campaign, which was untrue.

Council was not receptive to the report. A majority preferred Hogg’s Springs as the source, as it was feared that Sudden’s Lake “would not give a sufficient fire pressure in the higher portions of the town.” More important than the decision to reverse Chipman, though, was the manner in which the decision was reached. One councillor argued that more information was needed in advance of a decision, as Chipman’s report did not list the cost of the various systems, or the water pressure that each would provide. Though the report was indeed deficient in these regards, Mayor Lutz defended it as “very complete.” Several other councillors thought a public meeting should first be held to determine which source the ratepayers favoured, but this too was rejected. Councillor Radford thought there was “too great a diversity of opinion” to hold a public meeting, and that the report should be accepted outright to “show that we mean business.” Reeve Gilholm agreed, saying “it is a sign of weakness to go to the people; let us decide.”¹¹²

Criticism of council’s decision soon followed. The *Dumfries Reformer* thought that the “diversity of opinion” around town was the best reason for calling a public meeting, not cancelling one. It was suggested that waterworks promoters feared that a public meeting “might lead to opposition being organized to defeat the bylaw.” An anonymous writer saw no sense in council’s decision to hire an engineer only to reverse his recommendation.¹¹³ Another argued that neither public health nor fire was a problem in town, and that “waterworks without sewerage is an injury instead of a benefit to any town.” Others complained that they had not been given enough information “as to what the present scheme will do and what it will not do.”¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, the *Galt Reporter* supported the scheme “which has been so carefully prepared and adopted by the Council only after the most thorough examination of all our requirements.”¹¹⁵ A public meeting to discuss waterworks was eventually called by Mayor Lutz on 1 August 1890. Many of the speakers were councillors, but all who spoke supported waterworks. There was considerable

¹¹⁰*Dumfries Reformer*, 19 June 1890 and 26 June 1890.

¹¹¹*Picturesque and Industrial Galt*, 29. Chipman himself took note of the stratified limestone “very near the surface of the ground,” but did not comment on any implications for watermain placement.

¹¹²*Dumfries Reformer*, 10 July 1890.

¹¹³*Dumfries Reformer*, 10 July 1890 and 17 July 1890.

¹¹⁴*Galt Reporter*, 25 July 1890.

¹¹⁵*Galt Reporter*, 11 July 1890.

disagreement, though, as to whether the source of supply should be Mill Creek, Sudden's Lake, or Hogg's Springs.¹¹⁶

The scattered criticism of council's bylaw did not manifest itself in the form of opposition on voting day, 7 August 1890. All five wards voted solidly in favour, with the composite vote being 514 to 158. Even the poorly-understood local improvement or "frontage tax" bylaw passed, albeit by a narrow 313 to 306 count. The *Galt Reporter* wrote that the voting "passed off very quietly, although a good deal of activity was shown by those in favour of waterworks. The frontage tax Bylaw was left to take its chances." The *Dumfries Reformer* wrote "Hurrah for Galt," and complimented the citizens for their common sense.¹¹⁷

Council passed the waterworks bylaw on third reading on 18 August 1890,¹¹⁸ and on 20 November 1890 the St. Catharines firm of Garson and Purser was awarded the bulk of the construction contract (\$99,850), with Goldie & McCulloch getting a \$13,435 contract for the erection of a water tower, an engine, pumps, boilers, and hydrants.¹¹⁹ Construction was completed in 1892, with the system drawing water from Hogg's Springs.

In the years immediately preceding the construction of the system, the town was healthy and water was pure. A provincial factory inspector wrote in 1889 that Galt's workers were in good health, and that the drinking water in their workplaces "is good and there is plenty of it."¹²⁰ In his year-end report for 1890, Dr. Wardlaw confirmed that "the town has been exceptionally free from sickness, especially from contagious diseases, due, no doubt, in a great measure to the cleanliness of the town." He did not object to the construction of waterworks, but asserted that sewers would now also be required, "or the health of the citizens will be endangered more than at present."¹²¹ By 1893, when the waterworks was complete, 24 of 50 wells tested for water purity were found unfit and were closed. Dr. Wardlaw advised

the necessity of a proper sewerage system for the town as soon as possible. It is a well known fact that when waterworks are introduced into a town proper drainage becomes imperative owing to the increased contamination of soil and air without drainage.¹²²

By 1895, Galt's death rate rose to over 12 per 1000 population, up from 7.27 per 1000 population in 1893. The number of typhoid cases rose to 70, which was 59 more than in 1894. Dr. Wardlaw lamented that the ratepayers had still seen fit

¹¹⁶ *Dumfries Reformer*, 7 August 1890 and *Galt Reporter*, 8 August 1890.

¹¹⁷ *Dumfries Reformer*, 14 August 1890 and *Galt Reporter*, 15 August 1890.

¹¹⁸ CCA, CG, CD, Bylaw Records, 101.06, Town of Galt Bylaw #451.

¹¹⁹ CCA, CG, CD, Council Records, Minutes, 101.03.02, minutes of the Town of Galt Council, 20 November 1890.

¹²⁰ Ontario, Bureau of Industries, *8th Annual Report*, 11.

¹²¹ *Dumfries Reformer*, 20 November 1890.

¹²² *Dumfries Reformer*, 24 November 1893.

to reject a sewer bylaw that year.¹²³ He wrote that without sewers, "it is almost impossible to carry out the requirements of the Health and Factory Acts, particularly on Main Street." The Factories Act required, among other things, that factories "be kept in a cleanly state and free from effluvia arising from any drain, privy or any other nuisance."¹²⁴ A small section of sewer would be laid on Main Street in 1896, but a major sewer system would not be built until after 1905.¹²⁵

Lutz was re-elected as mayor in 1891, but did not seek office in 1892. By then, he was facing accusations that "important matters were brought in as if cut and dried, and passed through the council without proper discussion." His council's election of a waterworks supervisor by a secret ballot so as to "keep things on the quiet" was criticized as "cowardly."¹²⁶ Lutz denied charges of "log-rolling" and "wire-pulling," and claimed everything had been "fair and above-board." Public opinion had certainly changed in the two years since Lutz's slate had been elected. Of the two men who vied for the mayoralty in 1892, it was said of the one who would lose that his "natural affinity for rings and cliques is a great bar to his usefulness in a public position."¹²⁷

Conclusion

The period of time between the two waterworks votes was not marked by a crisis in public health, but rather by a crisis in local politics. Waterworks was not needed by the populace generally, but merely wanted by a portion of it. Businessmen initiated the scheme, and had little regard for the public will or interest. Before 1890, Galt was clean and healthy enough for both the majority of the citizens and for the medical health officer. After waterworks was constructed, however, private wells became contaminated, and the typhoid rate soared. Sewers were made necessary due to waterworks, and waterworks had been desired for business reasons. Industrial capitalism more than public health determined the infrastructural development of 19th-century Galt.

Businessmen were likely motivated by three of their expressed concerns: reduced fire insurance costs, fire protection, and household convenience. The public health argument served to give a cloak of public concern to their self-serving movement. This was just one of many calculated tactics used by waterworks promoters. Whenever possible, they sought to limit the amount of information available on the scheme, and to inhibit public discussion and scrutiny. The charade

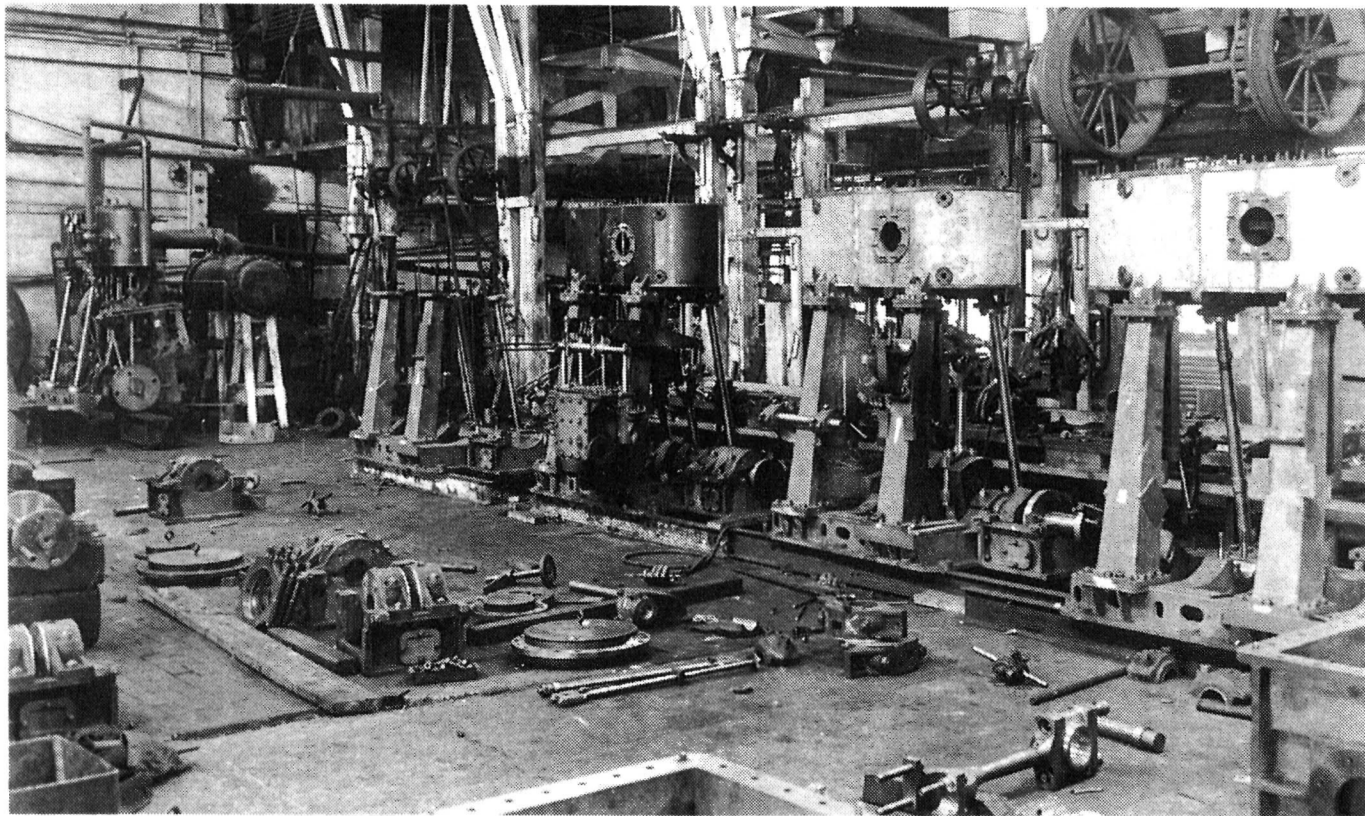
¹²³CCA, CG, CD, Council Records, Minutes, 101.03.02, minutes of the Town of Galt Council, 2 December 1895.

¹²⁴Factories Act, *Revised Statutes of Ontario*, 1897, c. 256, s. 15. This provision had been in effect since at least 1887.

¹²⁵CCA, CG, CD, Council Records, Minutes, 101.03.02, minutes of the Town of Galt Council, 16 November 1896.

¹²⁶*Dumfries Reformer*, 17 December 1891.

¹²⁷*Dumfries Reformer*, 31 December 1891.



The Goldie & McCulloch erecting shop and test floor for compound marine engines in 1915. Photo courtesy of City of Cambridge Archives (CCA, PH 3865; NAC, PA 24539).

of waterworks campaigns was bothered with only because provincial legislation required ratepayers' assent. To promoters, it did not matter how that assent was obtained. This was the case, too, in Paris, Ontario.¹²⁸

This was unfortunate, since waterworks were major issues in the 19th century. In Galt, it was recognized that the waterworks question was "probably the most important which the ratepayers have been called upon to consider, and it is only by a free and full discussion that a proper understanding of the scheme can be arrived at."¹²⁹ Waterworks were usually the most expensive municipal projects.¹³⁰ In fact, before Galt issued its \$125,000 waterworks debenture in 1890, the total existing debt of the town was only \$107,560.¹³¹

The ratepayers voted against waterworks in 1888 because they saw little need for it, and had little faith in the scheme proposed. By 1890, the local political scene had become dominated by businessmen who, as a result of the moulders' strike, knew which buttons to push. They successfully instilled in the minds of the voters their ideology of a struggle for supremacy among municipalities which was won by favouring local industries. All local decisions were politicized in this way, including the election of council members, and waterworks, which was a major item on the businessmen's agenda. The local newspapers assisted in spreading this ideology, which was so effective as to result in the passage of even the poorly-understood local improvement bylaw. The crushing of the moulders' strike and the coercion, mild or strong, described in "Terrorism in Galt" further dissuaded ratepayers from opposing the business agenda.

It is not here suggested that hospitals or waterworks would never have been built if the generality of ratepayers had controlled Galt's political life, or at least been free of the elite's manipulation. It is submitted that the majority of ratepayers were not ideologically opposed to waterworks or the hospital, but simply did not want to pay for items they did not need. Had the elite planned to finance these projects with private funds instead of municipal debentures, then much of the opposition would likely have been removed. The elite could have satisfied their own needs or wants at their own expense, but they preferred to receive what amounted to subsidies for each project. It is submitted that the majority of ratepayers would have more willingly paid for both projects at such time as they saw a compelling need — such as public health — for them. But by 1890, that time had not yet arrived.

In 19th-century Canada, boards of trade were instrumental in enabling businessmen to determine councils' agendas and to define councils' positions, but it is

¹²⁸John S. Hagopian, "Would the Benefits Trickle Down? An Examination of the Paris, Ontario Waterworks Campaign of 1882," *Ontario History*, 87, 2 (June 1995), 129-53.

¹²⁹*Dumfries Reformer*, 15 December 1887.

¹³⁰Joel A. Tarr, "Infrastructure and City-Building in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in Samuel P. Hays, ed., *City at the Point* (Pittsburg 1989), 238.

¹³¹CCA, CG, CD, Bylaw Records, 101.06, Town of Galt Bylaw #451.

important not to forget that such boards were merely agents. The principals behind these political associations were merchants and especially industrialists who were motivated by concerns for their workplaces. The case of Galt suggests a connection between industrialists, labour relations, local politics, and waterworks development. Industrial strife led to the election of a pro-industry council, which wanted very much to develop the waterworks that was very much sought by the elite. In Canada, there is a dearth of research on topics such as the industrial use of piped water, the impact of waterworks on fire insurance ratings of specific industries, the financial terms of water provision by specific municipalities to their local industries, and the impact of industrial waste disposal legislation on the development of sewer systems. Such studies would foster a better understanding of the reasons why municipally-financed infrastructure was created, who benefited by it, and what that benefit was. The case of Galt suggests that this focus on industry — on the needs in the realm of production — will benefit urban historians more than would a focus on public health. Such an emphasis is appropriate, since 19th-century communities themselves recognized the primacy of the workplace. The motto on Galt's coat of arms — *Res Secundae ab Industria* (Prosperity Follows from Industry) — expressed a widespread belief, but one which was particularly pertinent in the Manchester of Canada.¹³²

I would like to thank Jim Quantrell and Lynn Rams of the City of Cambridge Archives for assisting my research. Doreen Dassen, Dr. Ken Cruikshank and three anonymous reviewers provided valuable comments on previous drafts. Thanks also are due to me for funding this research.

¹³²For a short history of Galt's coat of arms and a translation of the Latin motto therein, see M. Hulet, "Origin of the Corporate Seal of Galt," *Waterloo Historical Society*, 56 (1968), 51.