

Martin Butler, Masculinity, and the North American Sole Leather Tanning Industry: 1871-1889

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Introduction

AT THE CLOSE of approximately a decade spent labouring in the tanning factories of eastern Maine, New Brunswick worker Martin Butler wrote, "the workingman is a man, and the equal of the capitalist." He was arguing, in the newspaper he had recently established, that since the two were equals the former was entitled to at least a living wage.¹ What being a man meant, in the mid to late 19th century, which in contemporaneous terms is often referred to as masculine identity, or masculinity, was, in Butler's view, integrally connected to the relations of class that divided the (male) worker from the (also male) capitalist. But beyond this division, what did working-class masculinity look like, and how, if at all, did it change over time? Was working-class masculinity more of a man's own making, or was it more the result of factors beyond his control?²

¹ *Butler's Journal* (Fredericton), July 1890. In the Introduction to his 1889 volume of poetry, *Maple Leaves and Hemlock Branches* (Fredericton 1889) Butler revealed that he had spent "ten years of my life" working in the industry in Maine, experiences he covered extensively in the section of his book subtitled "Hemlock Branches."

² *Masculinity* is defined in this study as a gender concept that "refers to those aspects of men's behaviour that fluctuate over time" and can be seen to have characteristics in the collective as well as individual senses, characteristics related to the ways in which the male sex or gender has been expressed, identified, and constructed, and subject also to change over time. Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (Oxford 1989), 3-19. While I have drawn significantly from Brittan's work to define both masculinity and identity, masculinity should not be viewed as reducible to behaviour alone. Rather, the term is recognized as a means to talk about, organize, analyze, interpret and theorize from evidence from the past that refers

These questions will be addressed through an examination of Martin Butler's experiences in and writings on the North American sole leather tanning industry. Within this milieu, it will be argued, a particular, though by no means unique gender identity coalesced, one that was male, rurally oriented, and working class — and as ephemeral as the industry which spawned it. One description, by Butler, of his fellow tannery workers as "not bad. They were what the ordinary logging, mill or tannery crew generally are," provides a place to begin: these were men who, according to Butler, were "[w]ithout sufficient malice to do you a downright injury, and not enough principle or manhood to keep from continually annoying, tormenting or playing tricks upon any one who could not defend himself or who had no friends." Yet, they were the same men Butler continued to argue the rights of and identify with, years after he first worked, lived, and associated with them. What constituted "manhood" was often articulated as a concern in Butler's writings, and how he expressed and to whom he directed this concern suggests something of both the observer and the observed. That he consistently identified himself as a "workingman" makes it possible to view his writings as key textual evidence in the problem of rural, working-class masculinity, and it is through Martin Butler and the North American sole leather tanning industry that this gender identity will be explored.³

Martin Butler was born in New Brunswick colony around 1857. A child and grandchild of yeoman farmers also trained in the art and craft of tanning,⁴ Martin

in some fashion, overtly or otherwise, to how historical subjects saw themselves and others with respect to their gender (and sometimes the other gender). This relationship would encompass not only men's actions or behaviours but also the language used, the ideas expressed about what being a man meant, both individually and societally, at any particular point in time. Michael S. Kimmel, "The Contemporary 'Crisis' of Masculinity in Historical Perspective," in Harry Brod, ed., *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies* (Boston 1987), 121-54.

³Butler's *Journal*, June 1900. In distinguishing "manliness" from "manhood" David Montgomery's observation, that "Manliness was embedded in a mutualistic ethical code," and was synonymous with patterns of behaviour exercised by workers both toward their fellow workers and owners, is most useful, I think, in considering either earlier social relations or specific trades social relations, both of which appear to have given way as a result of the dominating social and psychic reality of industrial capitalism and the factory. Butler, incidentally, never used the term "manliness," only manhood. Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge 1979), 11-5. Even as late as a few months before his death, Butler characterized himself in the pages of *Butler's Journal* as a hand labourer who also published a newspaper. See *Butler's Journal*, February 1915.

⁴Butler's *Journal*, October 1890. See also Deborah Stiles, "Martin Butler, Poet, Printer's Apprentice, Boy? The Gendered Class Dimensions of a Rural Childhood," paper presented at the Association for Canadian Studies in the United States (ACSUS) Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, November 1993.

Butler's own experience with leathermaking came inside rural factories. He and the male members of his family all joined the workforce engaged for sole leather production along the Maine-New Brunswick border, a workforce of local but also migrant men assembled in the final decades of the 19th century.⁵ As far as can be traced, Butler worked in at least four of the tanneries established in the region.⁶ These four tanneries, part of a much larger, indeed, North American industrial development, were located in isolated Maine townships. Grand Lake Stream and Jackson Brook Plantation, or Brookton, were both in Washington County; Kingman, in Penobscot County; and Thirty-Nine Tannery was located (where else?) in Thirty-Nine Township in Hancock County, Maine. All were within a day's journey by foot and/or wagon from each other and all were in close proximity to the New Brunswick border.⁷

Butler worked in the tanneries for four or five seasons before an accident in the Grand Lake Stream tannery resulted in the loss of his right arm. He began after

⁵The *Calais Times* reported, for example, that "The Shaw Bros. have been importing bark peelers from Canada. A large number arrived by boat last week. They are nearly all Frenchmen, and work at a reduced price." *Calais Times*, (Calais, Maine) 24 May 1878. For some discussion of the migrant and rural aspects of this industry, see J. Ferland and C. Wright, "Rural and Urban Labour Process: A Comparative Analysis of Australian and Canadian Development," *Labour/Le Travail*, 38 (1996), 142-70.

⁶Butler made 15 extended references to the tannery towns on the Maine side of the border in the ten extant years of *Butler's Journal* (July 1890-June 1895; July 1898-June 1903). On occasion, brief references also cropped up elsewhere in these and also the other odd and sometimes, incomplete issues that exist for the other years of the paper for 1896-97, 1904-08, and 1915. These references provided the basis upon which were constructed Butler's chronology and experience of the sole leather tanning industry. See *Butler's Journal*, November 1890, December 1890, January 1891, July 1891, January 1892, February 1892, December 1892, November 1893, May 1899, July 1899, August 1899, November 1899, February 1900, March 1900, and June 1900, from which the majority of evidence presented here was drawn, together with twenty-two brief "correspondences," written by Martin Butler and published in the *Calais Times* from 16 November 1877 to 8 June 1883. For further details on *Butler's life*, see also Gerald H. Allaby, "New Brunswick Prophets of Radicalism: 1890-1914," MA Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1972.

⁷*Carleton Sentinel* (Woodstock, New Brunswick), 18 September 1880, 27 November 1880; *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier* (Bangor, Maine) 1 December 1880, 24 December 1880, 8 January 1881, 13 January 1881, and esp. 2 March 1881, which notes the recent discovery of a piece of "scrip" issued by the Shaw Bros. tanners on the date of 20 November 1862, forwarded from Maine to the firm's Boston headquarters. For an overview of the tanneries development in this region, during the first decade, see J. Ferland, "Solidarity and Estrangement Among Canadian Leather Workers: Sole Leather Tanning at Grand Lake Stream, Maine, 1871-1880," paper presented at the Australian-Canadian Labour History Conference, University of Sydney, December 1988; for details on the North American context, see also J. Ferland, "Evolution des rapports sociaux dans l'industrie canadienne du cuir au tournant du 20e siècle," PhD thesis, McGill University, 1985.

this to pursue other occupations, most notably peddling, in both New Brunswick and Maine, while continuing to work occasionally in the tanneries during the winter months. He laboured in the tanneries intermittently over the course of the years 1871 to 1889. He also launched a more visible career as a journalist and correspondent. Writing about his, his family members', and his co-workers' experiences in the tannery towns, Butler had these writings published in several Maine and New Brunswick borderlands newspapers. The most complete set of this correspondence can be found from 1877 to 1883 in the Washington county based *Calais Times*. (Calais is the closest town of any size to Grand Lake Stream, and is on the St. Croix river, just opposite St. Stephen, New Brunswick.)⁸

Butler left tannery work and settled permanently in Fredericton, New Brunswick sometime between 1889 and 1890. Once in Fredericton, however, he elaborated still further on the men of the tanneries and his experiences, through essays and memoirs that he wrote and published in the newspaper he established there in July 1890. With *Butler's Journal*, Butler had secured the means to become a "brainworker";⁹ at his death in 1915, he concluded twenty-five years as a working-class and class-conscious editor, publisher, printer, poet, reformer and radical, one who helped found the Fredericton Socialist League in 1902. Yet as an individual he was never far removed from the physical realities determining a working-class man's life, both because of what he chose to write about in *Butler's Journal*, as

⁸I have identified as definitively Butler's the 22 writings bylined under "Martin Butler," "M.B.," and "Mart," plus one unbylined report situated chronologically between two other bylined Butler reports, which was headed off with "Our Grand Lake Stream Correspondent ..." in the *Calais Times*, 19 September 1879. The 22 correspondences appeared in the following issues: *Calais Times*, 16 November 1877, 22 March 1878, 6 December 1878, 31 January 1879, 3 April 1879, 2 May 1879, 15 August 1879, 5 December 1879, 9 January 1880, 16 January 1880, 7 January 1881, 4 February 1881, 24 June 1881, 22 July 1881, 3 February 1882, 10 March 1882, 7 April 1882, 14 July 1882, 4 August 1882, 25 May 1883, 8 June 1883. All of these concern Grand Lake Stream, with the exception of 9 January 1880, 16 January 1880, and 4 February 1881, which are about Thirty-Nine Township primarily, but may have been written when Butler was at either place (they were linked by sleigh/sled/wagon road). Based on other corroborating evidence (the issues of *Butler's Journal* cited above), Butler was also most likely the correspondents "Citizen" and "Ab Stract" who wrote from Kingman and Grand Lake Stream. There were 9 pieces published under these pseudonyms and corresponding to Butler's time at those tanneries; for "Citizen" accounts (all from Grand Lake Stream), see *Calais Times*, 7 December 1877, 14 December 1877, 28 December 1877, 25 January 1878; for "Ab Stract" accounts, see *Calais Times*, 14 May 1880 (on Grand Lake Stream), 21 May 1880 (on Grand Lake Stream), 28 May 1880 (on Grand Lake Stream), 4 June 1880 (on Kingman), and 25 June 1880 (on Kingman).

⁹Butler is identified as a "brainworker" of the movement culture of this period in Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Re-Thinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (2nd ed.) (Toronto 1992), 132-5.

well as the fact that he remained his entire life a hand labourer as well as brainworker.¹⁰

Both the earlier correspondence and later essays provide clues as to how social formation in the tannery communities was connected to changes induced by this particular form of industrialization. They are suggestive as well of how these alterations in the social fabric helped shape a rural, working-class, male identity. The second set of sources also reveals, upon close reading, how Martin Butler articulated and negotiated this masculinity. What being a man meant — to him, and perhaps to others in this industry — is thus the subject of this paper.¹¹

¹⁰David Frank and Nolan Reilly, "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in the Maritimes, 1899-1916," in Robert J. Brym and R. James Sacouman, eds., *Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Atlantic Canada* (Toronto 1979), 81-106. *Butler's Journal*, May 1903. According to Butler in this issue, he was making a living by working at a Fredericton sawmill, while the paper was barely paying for itself. By 1915, Butler appears to have held a newspaper agency in addition to his newspaper business, but was no better off financially. *Butler's Journal*, February 1915, April 1915.

¹¹This paper seeks to engage the existing literature on masculinity. See, for example, Valerie Burton, "The Myth of Bachelor Jack: Masculinity, Patriarchy, and Seafaring Labour," in Colin Howell and Richard J. Twomey, eds., *Jack Tar in History: Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour* (Fredericton 1991), 179-98; see also in the same volume, Margaret S. Creighton, "American Mariners and the Rites of Manhood, 1830-1870," 143-63. See also Steven Maynard's review article, "'Rough Work and Rugged Men': The Social Construct of Masculinity in Working-Class History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 23 (1989), 159-69, in which several very useful questions were asked that served to shape both this paper and the thesis from which it is drawn. Stiles, "Contexts and Identities: Martin Butler, Masculinity, Class and Rural Identity, the Maine-New Brunswick Borderlands, 1857-1915," PhD thesis, University of Maine, 1997.

Predictably, the historiography on middle-class masculinity has focused a great deal on the individual; see, by way of example, J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940* (New York 1987); Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago 1990); and Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds., *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800* (London 1991), although this latter collection also contains the important work by Keith McClelland, which detailed the ways in which working-class masculine identity was used in Britain "as a key figure in the resolution of social and political instability," through an idealization of the workingman's supposed attributes. McClelland, "Masculinity and the 'Representative Artisan' in Britain, 1850-80," *Manful Assertions*, 74-91. A notable exception to the representations focused more on the collective, rather than individual, working-class male, is Marilyn Lake's examination of the writings of Australian socialist William Lane and their "preoccupation with manhood" at about the same period. She argues that the "socialist beliefs and commitment of many working men arose from an anxiety about their gender status as well as a consciousness of class." Lake, "Socialism and Manhood: The Case of William Lane," *Labour History*, 50 (1986), 54-62, esp. 54-5. Two important studies highlighting the role of gender in mediating historical change in the Canadian, working-class context, are Bettina

From the brief sketch of Butler's life, above, it is clear that the matter of Butler's representativeness needs to be addressed in order to be able to more broadly interpret the evidence in terms of the problem of rural, working-class masculinity. The questions I have posed need to be grounded in the context of Butler's experiences, but at the same time, conscious linkages need to be made between the structural and the discursive terrain upon which ideas about what it meant to be a man were advanced, acknowledged, shaped and changed. The nature of the sources (memoir and autobiography, in particular) necessitates an interpretive and analytical framework that will accommodate both experience *and* articulations of experience.¹² Such a dual framework as is employed here seeks to comprehend the structural determinants underpinning class, gender, and rurality, and as well to collect, note, and interpret less tangible aspects of identity. What can be charted here in what was written about, and how, on these identities in the past, builds upon the work of feminist, marxist, and feminist-marxist historians of the working class. At the same time, this analysis posits a reflexivity in comprehending the problem of rural, working-class masculinity via Butler's experience and articulations, through recourse to interpretive paths laid down by historians using Foucauldian methods and theory.¹³

Foucault's tracing from the 17th to the late 19th century the formulation of a discourse on sex ("an apparatus for producing an ever greater quantity of discourse about sex"¹⁴) has suggested to historians several possibilities. These possibilities

Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto 1993), and Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto 1990). These studies, however, do not problematize rurality. A collection that does address rurality as well as class and takes steps toward full consideration of gender in the Atlantic Canadian context can be found in Daniel Samson, ed., *Contested Countryside: Rural Workers and Modern Society in Atlantic Canada, 1800-1950* (Fredericton 1994).

¹²David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge & Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography* (London 1981). Because of the different temporal development of the working class in England compared to Canada, this work naturally covers an earlier period, but does deal with the interpretive issues surrounding the use of autobiography and memoir. For a more recent and Canadian work that attends to some of the theoretical challenges posed by attempting to address both both discourse and events, see Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto 1991).

¹³What I take most directly from Foucault is this reflexivity, in terms of analyzing the construction of Butler's discourses on "manhood" and masculinity. M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, vol. I, An Introduction*, Robert Hurley, trans. (New York 1978). More specifically, the approach parallels Jonathan Ned Katz's Foucauldian exploration of "the history, power, and social uses of language" in a history dealing with the codification of heterosexual practice and identity. J. N. Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (New York 1996), 2, 170-82.

¹⁴Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 23.

have centred not only on how the exact opposite of a “repressive” attitude toward sex likely occurred, but also how ideas about gender, including its relationship to identity, may have served to help shape historical change.¹⁵ The discourse or discourses generated about gender and sex — relations, roles, identifications — have had, arguably, through their communication, transmission, and transformation, various and diverse impacts upon historical subjects across time. A framework that seeks to “account for the fact” that something was written or “spoken about,” as Foucault’s interpretive framework does, is useful in this instance. “To discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions ... which store and distribute the things that are said” permits, in the study of masculinity, the simultaneous consideration of both the structural, and tangible, and discursive, and less tangible, components of an identity. Butler expressed a set of ideas about what it was like to be a man in this period, in this particular context; this identity can be recognized, analyzed, and interpreted through acknowledgment of both the “discursive fact” of this identity and the structural determinants configuring the context.¹⁶

To address first the structural and cultural determinants of Butler’s experience, Part I of this paper will briefly describe the North American sole leather tanning industry as Butler encountered it, in order to demonstrate how social formation in what became the borderlands tannery towns was connected to changes wrought by this development. How rural dwellers shaped a response to this development is seen in the matrix of individual, household, and community interactions, which, in turn, fostered a rural, working-class, male identity. For the purposes of analysis, this gendered identity is one I have isolated from the range of female and other male identities operative in this same period. It should be stressed here that I have termed this identity rural, working-class masculinity, for it was around these three aspects of identity — rurality, class, and male gender — that Butler constructed these discourses on what he considered and identified as “manhood,” of what he and other tannery men were doing, and what it felt like to be in these situations, as a man, experiencing the sole leather tanning industry. This identity is representative of Butler’s individual experience, but to some degree is representative as well of the countless unnamed and unknowable New Brunswick (and other Canadian) men who went to the tannery towns in this period. There were structural and cultural factors related to the formation of rural, working-class masculinity in this historical context; these factors were related to the manner in which class, gender, and rurality were written about in the texts Butler constructed on his experience and the experience of others. While these material realities were central to the formation (and, in effect, the dissolution) of this identity, they cannot be severed analytically

¹⁵See, for example, Christina Simmons, “Modern Sexuality and the Myth of Victorian Repression,” in Barbara Melosh, ed., *Gender and American History Since 1890* (London 1993), 17-42.

¹⁶Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, “We ‘Other Victorians,’” 1-13.

or interpretively from the discursive aspects of this identity, when considering Butler's individual experience and articulations of it.

In the second and final section of the paper, the experiential and discursive aspects of the identity are more fully described. Attention will be paid to how the identity was formed, what shaped it, and how the identity was expressed and negotiated. Butler's writings, his revelations of both his experience and that of others in the industry, will be drawn upon more explicitly in this section to give what amounts to a typology of this particular rural, working-class masculine identity. This identity was one intimately connected to the sole leather tanning industry, but in both the structural, and collective, as well as the discursive, and individual realms; it was also connected to a subject's own conceptions of class and rurality, and, centrally, to conceptions of gender. Butler's writings reveal that rural, working-class masculinity was an identity rooted in the contingencies *and* determinants of the North American sole leather tanning industry, and an identity that could also be located within the discourses Butler constructed on his and other men's experiences.

I

THE TANNERIES and extract works at which Butler and his family members and others were employed were all owned and operated by F. Shaw & Bros. of Boston/F. Shaw & Cassils of Montréal. The "Shaw Bros.," as they were referred to in the *Calais Times* and other area newspapers, went into business in Massachusetts in the 1850s and the firm mushroomed in the post-Civil War years of industrial and financial expansion. Sole leather was an international commodity; according to one report, the Shaws' major markets were based in London, England, while their financial ties were to the heartland of North American capital.¹⁷ The firm, like others in the industry, eventually amassed holdings across northern and eastern North America, including rural and remote parts of New Brunswick, Québec, Maine, Michigan, and New York. In 1883 the Shaws' house-of-cards asset-to-debt ratio collapsed and their tanning business in the northeast failed, but most of the borderlands tanneries continued to operate through the 1880s.¹⁸

¹⁷See *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*, 2 March 1881 for an overview of and background on the Shaw Bros., including the reference to London markets. See also McMartin, *Hides*, 6-7, 30-2.

¹⁸The Shaw Brothers tanneries were covered extensively by Butler and other correspondents in the *Calais Times*, on a weekly basis, from 2 November 1877 to 7 October 1884, when this researcher ceased examination of the paper. For details of the Shaw "failure" as it was described in the *Calais Times*, see *Calais Times*, 3 August 1883 to 28 September 1883, especially 13 September, 21 September, 28 September, 1883; see also 14 December, 21 December, 28 December, 1883, 11 January and 1 February 1884. In *Butler's Journal*, December 1890 Butler reported after a trip to visit the remainder of his family in Brookton, Maine, that Mr. Smith Robbins, a local preacher, was also working at the tannery, scrubbing

Before this financial day of reckoning, a changeover had been made from oak to hemlock bark, as bark supplies closer to urban centres became exhausted and the need for larger quantities of bark was felt. Because the amount of hemlock bark required to supply the necessary "tannin" was large but indeterminate until further refinement of the extraction process at the end of the century, it was less expensive to bring the hides to the hemlock bark rather than the other way around. Consequently, as the sole leather tanning industry made the transition from artisanal to factory scale, and from oak to hemlock bark use, production in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s became more rurally-situated than ever before. This rural industrial development as it took place in Maine drew many Canadians into its workforce. In this regard, Butler's and other Canadian workers' involvement in the industry was part of a key transition in the North American economy, one that involved the countryside and engaged its inhabitants, permanent and transient. Rural industrialization at this stage also passed through the changeover from competitive to consolidating on its way to monopoly capitalism.¹⁹

The quicksilver capitalist enterprise engaged in by the Shaw Bros., with their sole leather tanneries in rural and remote areas, comprised the circumstances under which Martin Butler would encounter the industry. The phenomenon of outmigration, exhaustively studied by historians of Québec and Atlantic Canada,²⁰ was the Butler family's fairly typical response to a process of proletarianization in the twilight years of New Brunswick's timber industry. Scarce and ill-paying work in the woods camps and several removals to more and more substandard farms across the province of New Brunswick brought the Butlers to Grand Lake Stream, Maine. Hearing that good wages were to be had in the tannery under construction at Grand Lake Stream, Benjamin Butler and his two older sons moved there in the fall of

leather; the tannery in Thirty-Nine was still operating as late as 1900, according to one local study. G.W. and M.L. Baker, *Munsungun to the Sea* (New York 1972). The Grand Lake Stream tannery ceased operations sooner, however. M. Atkinson, *Hinckley Township or Grand Lake Stream Plantation* (Newburyport 1921).

¹⁹Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism 1890-1916: The Market, Law, and Politics* (Cambridge 1988), 14-5; Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds., *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America* (Chapel Hill 1985); Samson, Introduction, *Contested Countryside*, 8-21.

²⁰See, for example, Bruno Ramirez, *On the Move: French Canadians and the Italian Migrants in the North Atlantic Economy, 1871-1914* (Toronto 1991); Patricia Thornton, "The Problem of Outmigration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1921: A New Look," *Acadiensis*, 15, 1 (Autumn 1985), 3-34; Alan A. Brookes, "Outmigration from the Maritime Provinces, 1860-1900: Some Preliminary Considerations," *Acadiensis*, 5.2 (Spring 1976), 26-55; Raymond Breton and Pierre Savard, eds., *The Quebec and Acadian Diaspora in North America* (Toronto 1982), esp. the story of Félix Albert, who first migrated from Québec to rural Maine, before going further afield to Massachusetts: Frances H. Early, "The Rise and Fall of Félix Albert: Some Reflections on the Aspirations of Habitant Immigrants to Lowell, Massachusetts in the Late Nineteenth Century," 25-38.

1870. Martin Butler and his mother followed the next spring. At the time he and his family went to Maine, Butler was between eleven and fourteen years of age;²¹ his years in the sole leather tanning industry also corresponded to the industry's period of greatest growth, as measured by the number of workers employed, capital invested, productive output, and scale of production. By 1880, the industry employed from 1000 to 3500 men in the Maine-New Brunswick borderlands alone. Maine, incidentally, of all leather-producing states, garnered the greatest percentage of increased rate of growth in leather manufacturing between 1870 and 1880. The Maine-New Brunswick borderlands tanning factories were able to attract an international workforce, just by being located where they were, and access to hemlock bark on both sides of the border proved another crucial factor in the expansion of the industry.²²

The context was industrial; the Grand Lake Stream tannery, where the Butlers were first employed, was at its completion a towering, eight-stories-high edifice in the middle of seemingly unbroken wilderness. Yet, the tanneries and other buildings associated with them were "cheaply constructed buildings."²³ Tanneries were the site of many fires and accidents. And the "tannery towns" that went up around the tanneries were rurally-oriented and remained so, despite this industrial development in their midst. That rurality cannot be elided when considering what forms identity took in the context of communities that remained, despite the incursion of capital, on the margins of civilization.²⁴ Butler's descriptions of the rural environ-

²¹ *Butler's Journal*, July 1890, October 1890. For the relation of some of these movements to the timber industry, see Graeme Wynn, *Timber Colony: A Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick* (Toronto 1981).

²² *Calais Times*, 1 March 1878. Although in terms of actual dollar value of leather produced Maine went from fourth in 1870 to fifth place in 1880, no other state in the nation showed such a phenomenal rate of growth during this decade. George A. Riley, "A History of Tanning in the State of Maine," MA Thesis [Economics], University of Maine, 1935, 51-7. One industry insider, recording the history of hemlock-based tanning and the procedures and equipment employed, recorded that sole leather tanning's structural components as regards labour absolutely depended on "the newest immigrants to the country" — even if that country's immigrants were only a stone's throw away — and on men who had "practical experience" in tanning, rather than "rules and definite knowledge." Turner, Vaughn, and Rood Companies (Peabody, Massachusetts 1917) Book A, 11, and Book B, 1-2. See also *Carleton Sentinel*, 27 November 1880.

²³ *Butler's Journal*, November 1890, December 1890. The size of the Grand Lake Stream tannery is given in *Calais Times*, 15 June 1883. Quote about the cheapness of the construction of tanning factories, is from Turner, Book A, 2. Only a small sample of accidents and fires can be listed here: in *Calais Times* 20 January 1882, an engineer was killed at Brookton; *Calais Times* 3 March 1882 report that Forest City bark mill and leach room destroyed by fire; *Calais Times* 26 May 1882 reported that Benjamin Matatall of New Brunswick had fallen into one of the boiling vats at Brookton, and was badly burned.

²⁴ Rural is defined by the parameters of low population (less than 100 persons per square mile, and 2500 or less for any tannery town); occupational plurality engaged in by the

ment suggest that he, at least, kept this fact clearly in mind. For example, in describing Grand Lake Stream, where the town and tannery were located at the nexus of Grand Lake and the Stream which flowed from the lake, Butler wrote,

... how often have I been sung to sleep by [Grand Lake's] angry surges, or, lingering awake of a [moonlit] night looking out of my window I have watched its clear calm surface, undisturbed by even a ripple, reflected in the moonlight like a sea of molten gold, and saw the white spray dashing over the dam and surging into the eddy below, while here [a]nd there the lanterns of the night men employed around the tannery would gleam like fitful will-o'-wisp, and the broad smoky volume issuing from the capacious mouth of the tannery chimney would wreath itself in fantastic curls and vanish into air.²⁵

It was this mixture — the juxtaposition of natural beauty and industrial activity — which, from Butler's standpoint, and perhaps from the standpoint of others, led to identifications with a rurality that can be distinguished from industrialization occurring on a similar or larger scale, but in an urban context. Butler recalled with respect to Thirty-Nine Tannery, where he worked during the 1880s, "I possessed then as I do now a lingering love for its rugged hills and weird forest grandeur." If no other New Brunswick tannery workers expressed this same sentiment, they nevertheless entered into work situations fairly readily in the eastern Maine tanneries. In 1870, New Brunswick-born tanners, engineers, tannery clerks, labourers, carpenters and others associated with the sole leather tannery made up nearly 20 per cent of the *male* population in Brookton (females another half to one per cent); there, Butler worked the summer of 1876 and occasionally throughout the 1880s.²⁶

inhabitants; an economy based not just on agriculture, but various forms of raw resource production and subsistence; a milieu subject to change, but at a different rate than in urban or urbanizing areas. Daniel Samson, "Introduction," *Contested Countryside*, 22-7. Each of the borderlands tannery towns discussed here experienced a rapid increase in population at the incursion of the tanneries development, and experienced either gradual or steep population decline once the tanneries had closed at the turn of the century. Jackson Brook/Brookton, for example, had a population of 93 in 1860, 206 in 1870, 335 in 1880, 429 in 1890, and 285 in 1900; a decline in population continued from that point on as well. Dawn Lacadie, Comp, *U.S. Census of Population: Totals for Maine Counties and Minor Civil Divisions, 1790-1990* (Orono, ME 1994); *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States* (1860) Roll 455, Maine, Vol 15; *Population Schedules of the Ninth Census of the United States* (1870) Roll 563, Maine, Vol. 14.

²⁵ *Butler's Journal*, December 1890.

²⁶ *Butler's Journal*, December 1890, January 1891, November 1893, March 1900. In 1860, prior to the tannery's arrival in Jackson Brook, there were among the settlement's inhabitants a total of six persons born in New Brunswick, five males and one female, all connected to farming (either farmers or domestic in farm household). In 1870, labourers, carpenters, teamsters, engineers, tanners, and others associated with the tanning industry filled the houses and boarding establishments of Jackson Brook; there were a total of 40 males and 3

The initial entry of tanneries into the region also excited the local imagination. This optimism was expressed in the newspaper correspondence of editorialists, wherein visions of industrially-engendered prosperity prevailed. In 1877, an "Outdoors Meeting" held in Kingman, Maine, discussed work options for the unemployed. The good news arising out of the meeting was that William Shaw (one of the Shaw Bros.) wanted "to employ from two hundred to three hundred men to peel bark for the tanneries."²⁷ In autumn of that same year, the Shaw Bros. tannery at Grand Lake Stream was, according to one reporter, "turning out more hides and doing more business than it has anytime during the past five years."²⁸

Although the potential for successful industrialization was articulated frequently in these newspaper accounts, that potential was never realized. Various forms of associational life, whether educational, fraternal, religious and reform oriented, were established, with great difficulty, if at all, where given the size of the tanneries and the scale upon which the towns were planned a normative trajectory of "progress" probably seemed a foregone conclusion.²⁹ By the end of the 1870s Butler's correspondence began to highlight the civic shortcomings accompanying industrial capitalism in this rural context. Reporting from Grand Lake Stream in 1878, Butler complained that "smugglers have been doing a thriving business up here during the holidays and since ... and the 'authorities' of this place have taken no step to stop the traffic. That seems to be the only thing that men can get money to purchase." He also acknowledged the difficulty with which a Reform Club was established there that same year. *Several of the men elected to the offices of the club apparently refused to serve in their elected positions.*³⁰

There are two distinct strands in the late 1870s-early 1880s discourses Butler constructed and then submitted for publication in the *Calais Times*. The first

females of the total population of 206 who noted a birthplace of New Brunswick. *Eighth U.S. Census* (1860) Roll 455, Maine, Volume 15; *Ninth U.S. Census* (1870), Roll 563, Maine, Vol. 14.

²⁷ *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*, 17 May 1877.

²⁸ *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*, 22 September 1877.

²⁹ *Calais Times*, 5 January 1883, 18 July 1884.

³⁰ *Calais Times*, 11 January 1878. In border town Brookton, a raid and arrest of liquor sellers made the news the week after the Scott Act was declared constitutional by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*, 20 March 1877. This news was accompanied by the announcement that the Canada Temperance Act was going to be strictly enforced in New Brunswick. While Maine was not "dry" at this particular time, it had been and was shortly going to be again. For background on the "Maine Law," (temperance) see Edward O. Shriver and Stanley R. Howe, "The Republican Ascendancy: Politics & Reform," in Richard W. Judd, Edwin A. Churchill, Joel W. Eastman, eds., *Maine: The Pine Tree State From Prehistory to the Present* (Orono 1995), 388. Final Butler quote is from *Calais Times*, 22 March 1878. See also *Butler's Journal*, August 1899, November 1899, February 1900, June 1900, and J. Ferland, "Solidarity and Estrangement," *passim*.

revolves around increasing criticism Butler expressed with regard to the economic, physical, and social structures whereby lives were constrained in the tannery towns. The second focuses on the tannery workers themselves. Of these, the latter discourses over time do not change, in the sense that they continue to make prominent the positive aspects of the men's work in the tanneries — and sometimes outside the workplace as well. The men featured appear to occupy centre stage for Butler. "The new bark mill and leach house are finished," Butler announced in one report; "The job has been well and quickly done, and reflects credit on the workmen."³¹ What these strands taken together appear to suggest is that, while Butler was charting the dissolution of communal ties — ties which were, in effect, undermined at the outset by the unstable foundations of capitalism itself — Butler was simultaneously predisposed to catalogue the activities, achievements, and/or failings of workers, his fellow tannery workers. They were presented as integral to the town; they were seemingly central to his awareness of what was key or important or worthy of reporting — in other words, they did not escape his notice.³² While other commentators waxed eloquent on the possibilities of industrialization, Butler's correspondence criticized its realities and detailed the men's leisure and work activities, as well as the rurally-inscribed, seasonal patterns of harvest and use viscerally connected to the sole leather tanning industry. In winter, there was the waiting for snow in order to be able to transport by sleigh the spring-peeled bark; Butler would comment, for example, on a lack of snow, or the need for a solidly-frozen track over which to transport bark to the tanneries.³³

Documenting the lack of safety in the tanneries, the inattention to the needs of community, and the calamitous consequences when tannery men were provided money for liquor but not enough with which to survive and prosper, Butler continued to maintain a focus on the male workers and their activities. "Much land is being 'cropped' this year," Butler reported in one springtime entry. Self-sufficiency could probably not be fully realized, but if a measure of it could be attained by the workers through their growing a part of their own food, this was something Butler found noteworthy. Fishing and logging were also regular activities in the tannery towns, a part of the subsistence and raw resource production economy in practice.³⁴ "The ability to exploit the land," even if one did not own it, consequently

³¹*Calais Times*, 11 January 1878; 9 June 1882; see also *Calais Times*, 22 March 1878; 31 January 1879; 3 April 1879; 2 May 1879; 15 August 1879; 9 January 1880; 16 January 1880; 14 May 1880; 24 June 1881; 28 July 1882; 25 May 1883.

³²See "M.B."s report in *Calais Times* about a Princeton "cop" who had to come to settle "a quarrel between two ladies in Hog Alley and a row in the tannery," *Calais Times*, 4 August 1882; see also *Calais Times*, 22 March 1878; 30 June 1882; 7 July 1882. See Butler's positive reflections on the men engaged in the industry, for example, in *Calais Times*, 16 November 1877, and his reminiscences in *Butler's Journal*, December 1892.

³³*Calais Times*, 28 December 1877; 11 January 1878; 25 January 1878.

³⁴*Calais Times*, 21 May 1880; see also similar promotions in *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*, 26 May 1877; 10 July 1877, 17 July 1877; see also *Calais Times*, 21 June 1878, 4 June 1880.

figured in both cash and non-cash ways for these individuals and their families, in both their old and the new places of residence.³⁵ Still, Butler's final statement on the tannery town of Grand Lake Stream in 1889 was a poem, in which he described the place in such a way as to make quite transparent his views. As an industrial context over which capital claimed control, where capitalist social relations had begun by offering attractive wages and a promise of community "development" and had then erected a structure that extracted all possible benefit from labour and gave little in return to individual or community, Grand Lake Stream, minus its natural beauty, was a dismal place: "The Streets are narrow ... and dark and unlit ... [and] the business done, is tanning hides,/you work here by the day,/If you can but subsist upon/the very scanty pay."³⁶

The fact that Butler and other workers made numerous efforts to maintain ties with their former New Brunswick places of residence may be interpreted as an additional expression of their connection to a rurality that shaped their individual as well as collective identities. Rural, short-term migrations between New Brunswick and Maine were a part of the pattern; this can be seen in the migrating movements as well as in the continuance of certain rurally-specific patterns of subsistence — fishing, hunting, berry-picking, trapping, etc. — which continued to take place in spite of, or rather in tandem with, their industrial waged work in the rural tanning factories. As Butler expressed it, theirs was an identity very much rooted in these subsistence and migratory patterns, and vestiges of similarity between what had been left behind in New Brunswick and what was being experienced in Maine made the rural context on either side of the border a grounding element in the workers' day-to-day lives. Butler himself made frequent trips to New Brunswick when he began peddling in 1877. He later made many references to men who returned to the home farm or village in New Brunswick, temporarily or permanently, whenever tannery work was slow. By going "back home" when possible, as well as by putting down roots in these industrial but still rural places, it appears there was an attempt to replicate some parts of the rural lives lived prior to entrance to this rural industrial context. The short distance of the migrations helped along this possibility of remaining connected. Proximity, then, of "home" may have been a key determinant in the making of this rural male identity.³⁷

³⁵Samson, "Introduction," *Contested Countryside*, 26.

³⁶"The City of Grand Lake Stream" in Martin Butler, *Maple Leaves and Hemlock Branches*, (Fredericton 1889), 42-3. After a fire occurred in the furnace room of the Grand Lake Stream tannery, an anonymous report, very likely written by Butler, noted "it was fortunate that the tannery was not consumed, as not even suitable ladders are attached to the buildings for use in case of fire." *Calais Times*, 28 May 1880; see also *Calais Times*, 21 June 1881; 4 August 1882; 25 May 1883; *Butler's Journal*, December 1890.

³⁷*Calais Times*, 2 May 1879; 4 June 1880; *Butler's Journal*, December 1890, January 1891, July 1891. Those who landed in rural eastern Maine tannery towns were obviously of an "industrial age" in a "resource economy" still undergoing major transformations in the 1870s; the destruction or creation of "village life," however, was a long and slow process,

Butler's attentions to these rurally-identified men reflected the changing demographic reality of the tanneries development, and, too, it was what concerned him directly — what was happening to him and his fellow tannery town inhabitants, in the community, at the workplace, or in the household. The latter site, the household, for those times when Butler worked at Kingman, Thirty-Nine, and Brookton (Brookton, that is, until his parents moved to Brookton from Grand Lake Stream in the mid-1880s), was the boarding house. The tannery worker's household, particularly if it was a boarding situation, was shaped by a distinctively male culture in which gender relations, and corresponding identities, were rooted in the realities of place and space. For example, at Thirty-Nine Tannery, there was a choice of only two large boarding houses for lodging. Butler's memoir on his experiences there were that it was, in the early 1880s, "roughly managed"

There were a crew of perhaps 50 men, including bosses and teamsters 30 of whom slept in a big berth upstairs ... the room was warm, but the berth contained many more occupants than its human tenants, whose business it was to work by night, and as a consequence there was much turning over and scratching among the men ... I might have been enabled to have gone to sleep between the bites, were it not for the discordant notes of the nasal proboscises of fully three quarters of the men, which rose like so many fog horns and then died away like distant thunder. Occasionally one would strike a note like a pot of pudding boiling and another a squeak like a rat in a trap, but the before mentioned process was the prevailing one, and when it rose to its highest pitch I could notice the shingles lifting on the roof, to settle and rise again with the next upheaval.³⁸

The above reminiscence by Butler contains humour and hyperbole and was no doubt intended to be entertaining. When excerpted in this fashion, with a large portion of the text left intact, it reads as a funny story of "night life" after work hours in a tannery town's boardinghouse. But it also is suggestive of how men in the sole leather tanning industry were shaped by the circumstances in which they found themselves. The boarding house was clearly not the residence of choice for Butler, and it stands to reason it was not for many of the men. Further, it put the men into close proximity with each other beyond the temporal confines of the workplace. Census records indicate that "bosses and teamsters" often resided alongside the other men working in the tanneries, and so the hierarchy and physical divisions that might have been a means to avoid sites of conflict (though hierarchies in housing could set into motion other kinds of conflict) were not available in the

in whichever direction it went. See Robert Babcock, *et al.*, "Work & Workers in the Industrial Age, 1865-1930," in *Maine: The Pine Tree State*, 448-53; in the same volume, see also Babcock and Frenette, "Workers and Community Control," 461-2; Scontras and Frenette, "Control at the Workplace," 462-4; Lawrence C. Allin and Richard W. Judd, "Creating Maine's Resource Economy, 1783-1861," 262-88; and James B. Vickery, *et al.*, "Maine Agriculture, 1783-1861," 242-61.

³⁸ Butler's *Journal*, February 1900.

rural tannery town. Conflict was the most familiar outgrowth of this proximity. Butler recalled "kicking" about having been made to sleep with "old Billy Elliott" a Crimean War veteran, while working in Kingman; at Brookton, Butler wrote how he "went to board at the house of a Mrs. Lovely, a woman whose name sadly belied her character and appearance," and here again, unfortunately, his bed mates were the same as his work mates at the tannery.³⁹

In all four of the tannery towns at which Butler worked, there were marked increases in population between 1870 and 1880, and, generally speaking, the increases came in the numbers of men put into boarding situations. There were also, as a rule, fewer women in residence. In Brookton in 1870 there were only half as many adult females as adult males in the community. By contrast, in 1860 Brookton had a female population that came closer to being half the population (84 per cent of the total adult male population). A salient feature of all the tannery towns was this skewed gender ratio, and that gender imbalance may be interpreted as indicative of some of the structural determinants shaping working-class male identity in this context.⁴⁰

In addition to the proliferation and centrality of the boarding house, household composition, as it broke down by gender, may have been a factor in families' decisions to go to the tanneries in the first place. Once in residence there, gender roles may have proved another shaper of rural, working-class masculinity, in an environment which provided paid work, generally speaking, only for males, but used female labour in a particular way. Additional research and tracing of a larger sample of the tanneries workforce is necessary in order to confirm any pattern in this regard. But if we consider the gender balance/imbalance of the tannery towns and note the specifics of the Butler family experience, it is possible to formulate the beginnings of a hypothesis with respect to the ways in which the change from rural subsistence to industrial wage earning and yet a *rurally-based* wage earning may have shaped this male identity.

At the level of the household, work roles became more differentiated with the Butler family's removal to a place where full time, daily factory work, as opposed to farming and seasonal woods work, became available to the men.⁴¹ In their new location, Butler's mother, the sole female in the household following the death of Butler's only sister in New Brunswick in 1870, had virtually the same responsibilities as before. But now she alone took on the preparation of meals, securing of fuel, housekeeping and clothes maintenance for four male wage earners. Women had

³⁹ *Butler's Journal*, August 1899, June 1900; *Ninth U.S. Census*, 1870 Roll 562 Vol. 14 Hinckley Township (Grand Lake Stream), Roll 563, Vol. 14, Jackson Brook.

⁴⁰ *Eighth U.S. Census*, (1860) Roll 455 (Maine) Vol 15; *Ninth U.S. Census*, (1870) Roll 562 Vol. 14 Hinckley Township (Grand Lake Stream), Roll 563, Vol. 14, Jackson Brook; *U.S. Census of Population: Totals for Maine Counties*.

⁴¹ Butler's discussions of the work in New Brunswick compared to the family's experiences in Maine confirms this point. *Butler's Journal*, July 1890, September 1890, October 1890, December 1890. See also Stiles, "Contexts and Identities," 77-154.

subsidiary and tangential roles in this economy, primarily as cook's helpers and boarding house keepers (or the spouses of boarding house keepers).⁴² However, the work Sarah Butler and other women performed within the tannery workers' households was vitally important. It facilitated "the reproduction of conditions necessary for the creation of capital — primarily, in keeping the paid labor force alive and tractable from day to day, year to year, and generation to generation."⁴³ Yet, it was no more visible, in the rural industrial context, despite its importance, than that same or similar work performed by women in the context of a rural agricultural household.

The cash incomes from tannery work of Butler, his father, and his brothers, on the other hand, resulted in a very visible financial power. This power was exercised in their ability to purchase a lot and construct a house fairly soon after their arrival in *Grand Lake Stream*.⁴⁴ To some degree, the initial material benefit gained by having so many male wage-earners may have contributed to the creation of a sharper gender division of labour than had existed previously in the household. Certainly, it precipitated a great change in initial circumstances, as the wage earners together were able to finally (or so it seemed) have the financial security of their own house. Butler's revelations that he was able to buy books and also go to one term (boarding) at a more advanced school in a farming village near to Kingman suggests that as an economic unit, because of Butler's mother's competence in her role and the males' reasonably-well-paid efficacy in theirs, the household did fairly well for a time. This was presented in his accounts in contrast to their experience in New Brunswick, where they had gone from subsistence farming to the more straitened circumstances of itinerant woods and farm labouring.⁴⁵

In the final analysis, however, the structural confines of capitalism brought neither the tannery towns nor the Butler household any measure of prosperity or security. Butler's disabling accident, a less serious but nonetheless debilitating one suffered by his father (a fall at work), and a fire that reduced their home to ashes

⁴²See Butler's reminiscence of women's roles and work in the tannery town of Jackson Brook/Brookton in 1876, in *Butler's Journal*, June 1900; see also *Butler's Journal*, August 1899, November 1899. For other North American sole leather tanning industry town descriptions, which compare to Butler's accounts, see Barbara McMartin's collection of memoirs of women from New York (Adirondacks) tannery towns, in *Hides*, 251-3.

⁴³See the Preface (which deals with the mid-19th century) to Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York 1990), ix-xiii. See also Ian McKay's recognition of the importance of women's labor in Nova Scotian coal mining communities in McKay, "The Realm of Uncertainty: The Experience of Work in the Cumberland Coal Mines, 1873-1927" *Acadiensis*, 16, 1 (Autumn, 1986), 3-57. For sorting out this particular point in my analysis, I am indebted to Professor Valerie Burton, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

⁴⁴*Butler's Journal*, December 1890; November 1893.

⁴⁵*Butler's Journal*, July 1890, August 1890, September 1890, October 1890, November 1890.

were the physical realities shaping the Butlers' experience in sole leather tanning. By the mid-1870s, the loss of two of the four wage earners meant a slim economic margin of waged living. Because their house was uninsured it was a total loss after a chimney fire. The family was thus transported from a brief period of relative comfort into one of unremitting poverty. The structures of capitalism had created a rural working class; in the process of labour expropriation, gender relations and gender identity were also implicated. As Butler explained,

... it happened in this way that an unfair advantage was often taken of many ... a man striking the town dead broke would apply for employment. The boss would tell him: — 'No, we have more men than we want; we intend to discharge some.' Then he would ask him in the next breath: — 'What wages do you want? — are you a married man and do you intend to bring your family here?' The man would reply \$1.25 per diem. Oh no! we can't give you that — we have plenty of men working for \$1.00 and many for 75 and 80cts. If the man had a family and was hard up and intended moving there they would after considerable debate compromise on \$1.00, and if room had to be made for him some young man getting higher wages would be set adrift. If the [applicant were single, and someone else] had to be turned off to make room for him he would have to come down to 75 or 80 cents, and would work until he got money to take him somewhere else.⁴⁶

Butler's perception of the constraints facing his male working-class contemporaries points to some awareness on his part of their agency as not only workers, but also as men, with specific roles in and responsibilities to their families relative to their gender. In a collective and communal sense, the men were pitted against one another for better wages or even for the opportunity to work at all. In a localized and restricted labour market made all the more volatile by the global constraints of the sole leather industry, not to mention the isolated character of the borderlands tanning factories, these social pressures were used by foremen or agents under capitalists' direction to secure labour in a manipulative manner. In this fashion, class and gender identity were intertwined in the rural context. This led, it may be argued, to the creation of a specifically rural identity: a rural, working-class masculine identity.

From this abbreviated overview of the sole leather tanning industry, it can be seen that Butler's experience was not atypical. Neither his experience nor the patterns inherent in the industry exhibit characteristics uncommon to mid-to-late 19th century industrialization as it engaged rural dwellers. What is unique is the degree to which Butler articulated his experience of being male in this environment and time. But his capacity to relate and record should not render invalid his words as they speak to other rural, working-class men's experience in this industry. As one historian has noted, it is sometimes the "articulate" to whom historians of the working class must turn, in order to make fuller sense of the whole of working-class

⁴⁶ *Butler's Journal*, November 1899.

experience.⁴⁷ Butler's uniqueness, as an articulate spokesperson, does not overshadow two facts. First, that his contemporaneous reportage, as well as the memoirs that followed, charted class, gender, and rural dimensions in common with other men's experience in the North American sole leather tanning industry. Second, that he was directing, or appears to have directed, both the earlier correspondence and the later essays towards an audience that was largely made up of men like himself — rural, and working-class oriented, if not industrially engaged.⁴⁸ Through Butler's articulations of his experience, particularly the essays published in *Butler's Journal*, which will be more fully dealt with in the next part of this paper, a rural, working-class masculinity was thus both constructed and shaped within this rural industrial milieu. Butler's experience, especially as he reflected on it in the discourses he constructed about this identity, documents the discursive terrain upon which were formulated ideas of what it meant to be a man in this historical context.

II

ONCE WITHIN the rural industrial context, class became more of a factor in shaping male gender identity, and class was expressed not only in terms of class formation, but also in perceptions of identity connected to age, skill, ability, and experience. When Butler entered the workforce relatively soon after the family's removal to Grand Lake Stream, he was, arguably, still a boy; and the transition from boyhood to manhood was a critical factor in the making of this rural, working-class masculine identity. The gendered distinctions drawn between men and boys were meaningful. The appellation of one or the other in this context signalled a transitional stage in the patterns linking fathers to sons, and older men to younger in the sole leather tanning industry. Consider Truman Hayes, a worker in the 1880s New York-Québec borderlands sole leather tanning industry, who recalled this experience while working on a bark peeling crew during this particular life-stage transition:

The spring I was 16 I was working in the barkwoods for Mr. Ross ... there were twenty men, five crews, four men to a crew. Each crew had to keep count of the trees he peeled during the day. There was one always more or less racing to see which crew peeled the most trees. From sixty to one hundred trees was a good day's work ... There was one crew that was supposed to be the best crew in the woods ... big, husky men ... There was no other crew expected to be able to peel as many trees as his crew could. But — they overlooked [our] crew. The crew I was in was made up of all Hayes: Ed Hayes chopped down the trees. (He was a cousin of mine ...) I chopped the limbs off the trees, and next to me was my cousin,

⁴⁷Satu Repo, "Rosvall and Voutilainen: Two Union Men Who Never Died," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 8/9 (Autumn/Spring 1981/82), 79-102.

⁴⁸Arguably, the *Calais Times* had a more diverse readership, which I have only assessed in an impressionistic manner. However, for *Butler's Journal*, I have reconstructed a portion of the readership through subscription lists. See Stiles, "Contexts and Identities," 155-225.

Eugene Hayes, who fixed the bark for the spudder. My brother Charlie spudded the bark ... They were all good men but with a boy of 16 along to do the trimming, which was a man's job, we weren't supposed to have a ghost of a show ... When the bark peeling was over (about six weeks) Mr. Ross reckoned up the number of trees each crew had peeled, and to the surprise of all the men it was found that the Hayes crew had peeled 30 more trees than the [other crews]. WHOOPS!(sic) Didn't the Hayes crew do some yelling!! Mr. Ross gave us all five dollars a piece, and he placed his hand on my shoulder and said, "Truman, you are a boy in years, but you surely did a big man's work."⁴⁹

Masculine identity in the rural but also industrial context (barkpeeling was an integral part of the industry) rested less upon chronological or biological criteria and more on the demonstration of specific abilities. Butler's days while a boy in the early 1870s were similarly structured; he recalled that he "felt proud at taking [his] place beside the older workmen" when he began working at the Grand Lake Stream tannery in a capacity beyond that of errand runner or "gopher."⁵⁰

The contradictions of capitalism at the level of community were described in the previous section. But the individual, identity-related consequences of those contradictions were articulated most prominently in Butler's discourses on the lack of potential a waged existence harboured for a young man's future. His mother, his chief advisor, was apparently at a loss to explain these contradictions.

I was nineteen years old, the turning point in the lives of most young men, and had no one to look to for advice or council but my good old mother; and she, poor woman, little versed in the ways of the world, had no information or an[y] encouragement to give me that was of any practical value. She could only advice (sic) me to trust in God, bear up as best I might, do the best I could under the circumstances and not to leave her.⁵¹

The transition from boyhood to manhood was a key one, and how it was formulated related to the class experience of work and perceptions of that experience. The movement from a childhood of relative powerlessness but also autonomy, to an adulthood where the "boy" could take up his share of communally held burdens (or not), was noteworthy in class terms in that it occurred at the workplace, rather than within the household, seemingly the site of the parallel middle-class male transition.⁵²

⁴⁹McMartin, *Hides*, 177-8. To compare Butler's experience, see *Butler's Journal*, November 1890.

⁵⁰*Butler's Journal*, November 1890.

⁵¹*Butler's Journal*, January 1891, June 1900.

⁵²As Mark Carnes put it, "An important question in the history of nineteenth century masculinity — and capitalism — remains unanswered: Did middle-class sons internalize and retain as young men the values and emotional identifications they had learned at their mothers' knees?" Carnes, Carnes and Griffen, *Meanings for Manhood*, 38.

While ability, successfully demonstrated, signalled the transition from working-class boy to working-class man, skill and the strength to accomplish some specific thing at the workplace comprised a part of this male identity even once adulthood was attained. The process involved workers' shared experience. These men defined their masculinity, at least in part, through their ability to do especially demanding tasks, and strength augmented by experience marked certain jobs in particular. As New York worker Truman Hayes explained,

No one except an experienced man could pull hide out of a vat and throw it over one of these poles that was as high as a man's head. If you were to stand and watch one of these Irishmen pull one of those wet heavy hides out of this hot liquor you would say that there was nothing to it. But let someone try it who did not know how. He wouldn't be able to throw a hide over the pole in half an hour and ... would give up trying. Yet the men who were doing the work would throw one over every three or four minutes.⁵³

Like the steelmaker and the coal miner, the tannery worker was defined by skills specific to the craft, which lay poised between artisanal and industrial relations of production in terms of what was demanded. There were essentially three male (and multi-ethnic) workforces associated with the sole leather tanning industry. These workforces consisted of bark peelers, haulers, and tannery crews. Bark peelers, as the name indicates, and as indicated by Truman Hayes' memoir, above, were those who hired to go into the woods to cut down the hemlock, peel, and retrieve the hemlock bark needed to produce the tannin for tanning hides into leather. Haulers or "teamsters" transported the hemlock bark from the plank roads (where it had been deposited by the woods crews) to the tanneries, and picked up raw hides at the rail heads, delivering it to these rural outpost tanneries. They also delivered the finished leather to the various transportation link-points. Those who worked within the confines of the tanning factory itself, doing such tasks as barkgrinding, beaming, and the transfer of hides from one vat to the other, from one part of the process to the other, were for all intents and purposes the tannery workers. These were the beamsters, if working "on the beam" (also spelled "beam"; see below), working the handlers, or plunging the liquor junks.⁵⁴ Butler worked at least briefly as a bark peeler before his accident, and both before and after the accident at a number of jobs in the tannery. He also frequently reported on the activities of the teamsters in his newspaper correspondence.⁵⁵

⁵³McMartin, *Hides*, 148.

⁵⁴*Butler's Journal*, March 1900; McMartin, *Hides*, 12-25.

⁵⁵McMartin, *Hides*, 143-8, 165-70, 177-8, and 220-2; see also *Calais Times*, 14 December 1877, 25 January 1878, 15 March 1878, 5 April 1878, 3 May 1878, 24 May 1878, 15 August 1879, 16 January 1880, 4 August 1882, 25 May 1883. See also *Butler's Journal*, November 1899, February 1900, March 1900, June 1900.

The workforce for barkpeeling as well as tanning was comprised of both local men and also migrants like Butler and his male family members.⁵⁶ The hauler-teamster workforce was most often local farmers and petty capitalist-lumberers, who fit in hauling jobs with farm work. The latter were generally all male, with the occasional female exception, like "... Emeline Brace. ... She had a family of five children and no one to help her take care of them. ... What did she do? She hauled bark all winter — several winters in fact."⁵⁷

Beyond the exceptionality of the female teamster, in general tannery "men" with the strength and experience to do certain tasks were working at the tannery complex itself, performing any number of jobs, including the handling of hides in and out of the tanning "liquors," as illustrated above. The tannery complex contained numerous specific jobs and some non-specific tasks needing to be accomplished in order to tan hides; hides after being brought in had to be soaked, beamed, and then cleaned of flesh and hair, for example, and they were also plumped in preparation for tanning. Tanned hides (leather) had to be rolled and beaten, and of course there were the transfers of hides through all these steps of the process.⁵⁸

The ways in which some of these tasks were carried out were in some sense reminiscent of pre-industrial leather-making days. Yet, at the same time, there were important differences in the factory setting. "Beaming," for instance, was a communal task at the factory, whereas in the days of artisanal tanning it had been more likely a solitary one, carried out by the individual artisan. Beaming consisted of removing the decaying, fatty flesh from hides with a sharp, knife-like blade in preparation for tanning, and in contrast to artisanal, individual production (at least in the North American context), beaming occupied many workers simultaneously at the tannery. The sheer scale of production made this job especially unpleasant. But the job did bring those males engaged in it back to a more artisanal mode of production than any others in the tannery of the 1870s and '80s. Nevertheless, while workers had an unusual degree of control over the quality of production, beaming, as practised in the tanneries Butler worked in during this period, was on the scale of factory, and was in that sense alienating.⁵⁹

Bark grinding, or milling, was a job Butler frequently held, particularly after his accident, since unlike beaming, it could be done one-handed. Bark grinding, the

⁵⁶ *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier*, 5 March 1877 reported bark being peeled in the borderlands town of Canterbury (York County), New Brunswick, for export and use in Maine tanneries; but not only the bark was coming to Maine from New Brunswick, so were the workers: *Calais Times*, 24 May 1878.

⁵⁷ *McMartin, Hides*, 145.

⁵⁸ *McMartin, Hides*, 12-25.

⁵⁹ *Turner, Book B*, 1-6; *Turner, Book C*, 1-4. See also Peter C. Welsh, "A Craft That Resisted Change: American Tanning Practices to 1850," *Technology and Culture*, 4 (1963), 299-317. For Butler's account of his experience beaming hides, see *Butler's Journal*, November 1893; August 1899; June 1900.

process by which slabs of hemlock bark were chipped or shaved (grinding is a misnomer), required that the worker lift and/or shovel the slabs of tree bark into the bark mill. The grinding was necessary so that the tannic acid or "tannin" in the bark could leach fully into water and thus become tanning vat solution. It was the most mechanized process in the industry, but was also one of its most solitary tasks, since one man per shift grinding bark could, with the proper machinery, meet the tannery's entire needs for ground bark at any one time.⁶⁰

Depending on the task with which a worker was engaged, a certain degree of skill and ultimately of control remained within the tannery worker's grasp. But in the larger sense, control over one's destiny ultimately remained with capital and capitalists.⁶¹ There is evidence of how some men sought to reclaim some measure of the resources appropriated under that control. One man was brought before the *local justice of the peace on charges of "stealing small articles"* from the company store in Grand Lake Stream; two men "employed on the beam" in the tannery there stole three sides of green (raw) hide and then left town in order to avoid prosecution.⁶² Butler's characterization of his fellow workers at the Jackson Brook/Brookton tannery as "not bad," and "ordinary," with which I began this paper, provides not only one worker's view of what was lacking, in general, in these men — "principle," which, was equated with "manhood," in Butler's opinion their major deficit — but also supplies a schematic of working-class masculine identity at and beyond the workplace:

They would also play practical jokes upon each other. It was the habit for the men to change their old clothes at noon and night for good ones so as to make a presentable appearance at table and not to knock the people down with the perfume that was emitted from their working clothes. These good clothes would be put on in the hose house, where they would leave their old ones and the first ones that got down to change [after the meal] would cut and disfigure the clothes of the others in such a manner that they were often unfit to [w]ear altogether — I have often seen the men working on the yard, the beam and the handlers in their shirt tails and often with nothing more than a cloth around their loins. Others I have seen absolutely nude, their clothes having been entirely destroyed. But this did not bother them in the least. No ladies visited that tannery and any strange man, be he minister, lawyer or agent, when entering the beam-house was deluged with a shower of fleshings and forced to beat a hasty retreat.⁶³

⁶⁰ Butler mentioned working alone at grinding bark in the following reminiscences: *Butler's Journal*, December 1890; January 1891. The tech manuals previously cited did not specify whether this was generally the case or not, however. See also Allen Rogers, *Practical Tanning: A Handbook of Modern Practice and Processes as Applied in the Manufacture of Leather and Allied Products* (New York 1922), esp. 526-7.

⁶¹ Montgomery, *Workers' Control*, 13-5.

⁶² *Calais Times*, 11 January 1878, 16 January 1880.

⁶³ *Butler's Journal*, June 1900.

Some of the main attributes of the working-class men one encountered in the tanneries can be discerned from this account, with which a typology of rural, working-class masculinity may be constructed. Working-class men in this setting conceived of their own identities, and acted upon them in the course of their day-to-day work lives by playing jokes, doing the necessary labour, and laying claim to their work space. Butler articulated what he perceived to be universal codes of modesty, which the men within the tannery were in the habit of suspending. The subtleties Butler's standpoint addresses in his critique of the men's behaviour toward one another makes it necessary to underscore how he saw them as "not bad," yet also lacking in "manhood" because they did not act in ways Butler apparently conceived of as appropriate for males. There were applied, too, several universalisms in his text: in referring to the men, they were "what the ordinary ... tannery crew generally are," meaning, it may be suggested, that Butler saw them in the same light as he had observed others at other points in his labouring life. Still, he also believed in (or believed in promoting) a universal standard of male behaviour that was in one sense irrespective of class, and in another was very much aware of the working-class context within which such expressions of masculine identity were negotiated.

Butler constructed this narrative with a seeming eye and ear to details that would provide entertainment. But in the process he recorded that "No ladies visited that tannery and any strange man, be he minister, lawyer or agent, when entering the beam-house was deluged with a shower of fleshings and forced to beat a hasty retreat." That this was the response non-tannery workers would get, according to him, appears to suggest that Butler was cognizant of how the rural, working-class man in the sole leather tanning industry was, in the collectivity of the workplace, fully capable of traversing certain societal boundaries. At the same time, delineating the parameters of a masculine identity could give a class distinction to certain behaviours, such as working in the nude, playing continual pranks, and asserting oneself if any "strange man" made his appearance.

A factor that must be taken into account is that this particular piece was published, and perhaps written, in 1900, ten years after Butler had last worked in any tannery. In comparing the discourses Butler constructed on the men contemporaneously with what he later recorded, it would appear at first glance that his views on what it was to be a man in the sole leather tanneries had changed. But, in fact, his perspective on working-class men stayed virtually the same; what had changed was a particular focus of one of the strands of Butler's discourses on these men. While in the 1870s and 1880s he had documented more the destructiveness of capitalist social formation and also recognized in positive ways the experience of rural, working-class men (including himself), in 1890 and beyond his perspective on his experience and that of other men was more focused specifically on the men themselves, as men. Now, this difference in communication emphasis is certainly due in part to the change in medium; as a correspondent to the *Calais Times*, Butler

was somewhat constrained by the strictures of the format. Limited space, and an editor, not he, would decide what went in, and on at least one occasion he may not have been given space because he chose to elaborate too lengthily on an issue.⁶⁴ When he had control over production, however, he could go on at length; and in that length he continued to recognize in positive terms "the workingman" — a category for him that included factory and woods workers, farmers, artisans, even petty merchants, if they were rurally situated, and small entrepreneurs, although the focus in his memoirs were the tanning factory workers.⁶⁵ In these later accounts on the tanneries experience he was able to provide more nuanced accounts, focused less on the community context and more on the household and workplace settings within which this identity was articulated and negotiated.

The change in focus of one of the strands of Butler's discourses suggests, on analysis, two things. First, that beyond the differences in discursive production (correspondence writer to writer and controller of production), Butler's perspective on what it was to be a man in the sole leather milieu had not changed all that much, despite the lapse in time between his construction of the two sets of writings. Second, what is also suggested is that between the 1870s and 1880s and the later period in which Butler wrote (1890-1900), a shift had occurred in male gender identity — a shift that encompassed, at least in Butler's view, the rural, working-class, masculine identity he had both experienced and written about. It is beyond the scope of this paper to speculate as to the changes at play between how, in general, men of North America of the working class saw themselves as men, in the 1870s-80s period, and how those self-perceptions might have changed, and why, in the period beyond, from the 1890s to the early 1900s. But that a change might have occurred points to the need for further scrutiny of the ways in which male gender identity has changed over time in specific historical contexts.⁶⁶

Self-perceptions of "manhood" involved a class-rooted male identity, articulated in the manner in which working-class males interacted with each other, as well as the ways in which they interacted with capital's representatives and within

⁶⁴*Calais Times*, 7 September 1877.

⁶⁵In Butler's view those at fault in capitalist society were, in order of culpability, capitalists themselves (those heading up huge corporations), capital's agents (bosses, foremen, agents), and, to a limited extent, workers who did not resist the exploitative process in the sense of turning against their fellow workers (competing, backbiting, etc.) *Butler's Journal*, July 1890, August 1890, September 1890, esp. December 1890, where he publishes the letter he had sent to the Shaw Bros. in Massachusetts asking for compensation for his injury, and their refusal letter to him, and also charts favorably the efforts of a local entrepreneur in Brookton, Maine; see also *Butler's Journal*, March 1891, in which he describes in positive terms local Marysville petty capitalist Alexander "Boss" Gibson.

⁶⁶One aspect of change in male gender I have explored in this later period (although incompletely, to date) is the meaning of friendship between men. See Stiles, "Contexts and Identities," 305-30.

the constraints posed by rural industrial capitalism. For example, these workers tended to not always defer to capitalist authority, indicative of, perhaps, their ties to prior modes of work in which they were the final authority — a farmer or woodworker, without the need or compunction to be respectful of capital's claims to a higher authority. There were also at least times when, in a playful way, the men insisted that their workplace not be intruded upon by others. A group "rowdiness" was expressed at work, and continued on into the household if the household was one consisting of a boardinghouse full of co-workers — in other words, if there was continuity between where and with whom one worked, ate, and slept.⁶⁷

As represented by its construction in Butler's writings, what remained a rural constant of both Maine and New Brunswick as these men experienced it was an environment of both greater and lesser occupational and associational latitude. It was an environment in which one might enjoy certain realities — the possibility of doing a bit of farming and hunting along with waged labour, the capacity to return home without too much effort or expense, and temporary reprieves by going from the oppressive factory atmosphere to the woods surrounding the tanneries. Yet, the reality of the constraints of industrial capital, of a waged existence, meant that becoming a tannery worker resulted in a different productive relationship for these men. From Butler's vantage point the rurality of the context within which the productive relationship changed provided some accompanying benefits to what was otherwise, perhaps, a poorer choice of poor choices. Nonetheless, from Butler's own experience, nature⁶⁸ could also prove the counterpoise of human misery. In one essay, he recalled making his way through the woods from Grand Lake Stream to Thirty-Nine Tannery, during which he saw deer and other wildlife. He reflected on the natural beauty of the region, but added, as he remembered the deer taking flight as he approached, "It was comforting at least to know that even if the denizens of the forest had not learned to love and trust me they at least had no disposition to crush, crowd or insult and abuse me, as several of my fellow workmen did."⁶⁹

The violent and negative aspects of this masculine identity were continually expressed through Butler's lamenting the tannery workers' lack of "manhood." This concern was most often linked discursively to the reality that less powerful, more vulnerable (physically and/or socially-personally) members of crews were attacked by the more powerful among a group of male workers. "I am sorry to say for the manhood of the crew," Butler wrote, in reference to the men with whom he

⁶⁷ *Calais Times*, 6 December 1878, 2 May 1879, 9 January 1880, 14 May 1880, 28 May 1880, 25 June 1880, 4 February 1881, 25 May 1883; *Butler's Journal*, November 1893, June 1900.

⁶⁸ A natural beauty Butler attributed to the totality of the rural, and industrial landscape; see, for example, Martin Butler's poem "The Hancock County Hills," in which he counted both "forest glade" and "smoke-stack" as valued aspects of the scenery. "Here," Butler wrote, "within this forest fort, [is where] we can enjoy our life." Butler, *Maple Leaves and Hemlock Branches* (Fredericton 1889), 44.

⁶⁹ *Butler's Journal*, March 1900.

worked at Thirty-Nine Tannery, "there were several who render[ed] my life miserable, and not one in the boarding house ... among those who took no part in persecuting me stood up in my defense."⁷⁰ What is also noteworthy from Butler's perspective was the way in which individual, masculine behaviour was connected to class, and sectionalism within the ranks of the working-class men. This dynamic is illustrated to some extent in one Butler memoir in which he relates his story and the story of a "companion in misery" at the Kingman tannery, "young Pelky [Pelletier], a Frenchman." The anecdote tells how the two young men suffered as a result of another worker, an

OLD BOB BA—EY (sic) ... a man without one redeeming feature, thoroughly servile towards the boss and tyrannical and overbearing toward his fellow workmen ... He never had a good word for anyone, and was always trying to ingratiate himself with the boss and to depreciate everyone else ... The boss knew him and took him at his face value, and would POKE FUN AT HIM BEHIND HIS BACK, but the "sucker" business always has such a demoralizing effect upon the average boss, that he would nevertheless listen to his stories and often turn away much better men on account of some trumped up charge.⁷¹

How "manhood" was expressed and negotiated by tannery workers reveals an identity not wholly constructed by industrial capitalism, but certainly very much influenced by it. Neither was it constructed by the more hegemonic representations of masculine ideals promulgated by the middle class in this period.⁷² Working-class men themselves were in part the shapers of their own class-specific and rurally-contingent masculine identities, although the processes by which this identity was formulated are not easily catalogued nor analyzed.

We can see, however, in the discourses that Butler constructed about his experiences that class was *paramount in the later representations*, a function perhaps of his own burgeoning class consciousness. At the Kingman tannery, where Butler was under the supervision of foreman Alexander England, a fellow New Brunswicker, he recalled, for example, that compared to being at Grand Lake Stream, here he and his fellow workers had "a harder time, as one of the firm, William Shaw resided in the place and as [England] was always under [Shaw's] eye it was a continual course of devil-driving toward the men." Butler wrote "there were so many who could not help themselves that they had to put up with it [as] so many 'suckers' [were] ready to inform [Shaw, the capitalist] of any lapse of duty on the

⁷⁰ Butler's *Journal*, March 1900.

⁷¹ Butler's *Journal*, November 1899.

⁷² See, for example, the editorial "I WISH I HAD CAPITAL," *Calais Times*, 10 August 1883; Maynard, "Rough Work and Rugged Men," 160; Kimmel, "The Contemporary 'Crisis' of Masculinity," 125-50; G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes Toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York 1976), 13; Roberta J. Park, "Biological Thought, Athletics and the Formation of a 'Man of Character': 1830-1900," in Mangan and Walvin, *Manliness and Morality*, 7-34.

part of a fellow workman." The "sucker" business was bad at Thirty-Nine Tannery, as well, so bad that Butler confessed he had received in one winter there more "abuse and insult" than he had received the whole time spent living in New Brunswick.⁷³ Violence involving tannery workers also made the news. In one *Calais Times* issue, "Two tannery employes (sic) had a dispute at Kingman ... George Bolter of Fredericton, drew a pocket knife and stabbed his opponent, Fred Crawford of St. John [New Brunswick]. Crawford is in a critical condition. Bolter was arrested and taken to Bangor."⁷⁴

The social dysfunction of the tannery towns was a masculine site of conflict, although its gendered nature was not always explicit. But one late account, from April 1888, illustrates this, as an anonymous correspondent, "E.L.I." had disagreed with a nearby Lowell, Maine (another tannery but also farm village) correspondent, who in the previous week's paper had written that "riots occur in all such places [referring to Thirty-Nine]." "E.L.I.," in his report, wrote that Thirty-Nine Tannery was in a "flourishing condition" and that he "must differ with the old citizen of Lowell where he says 'riots occur in all such places' for we can assure him that in this large crew, forty boarding at one house, not a cross word has been spoken for six months."⁷⁵ Perhaps a silent truce was called shortly after Butler departed — he was there for at least the winter of 1887 — but from his accounts, it is clear that as these rural, working-class men negotiated their working lives in this environment capital had created the social interaction was largely acrimonious. But in at least one instance Butler did not record negative experiences of the men and their respective "manhood" at Thirty-Nine. In an essay he published in 1892, he recalled an experience from one of his first winters at Thirty-Nine, most likely 1882. Remembering the death of another worker, Butler reminisced, "We were on the whole a rough crowd, but the presence of death cast a gloom over all. We felt beside the loss of a 'good fellow' and boon companion that indefinable dread ... of death; that change ... from lusty red-cheeked manhood to marble whiteness."⁷⁶

⁷³ *Butler's Journal*, November 1899, March 1900.

⁷⁴ *Calais Times*, 15 April 1881.

⁷⁵ *Up River News* (Lincoln, Maine), 20 April 1888; see also *Calais Times*, 9 January 1880, 16 January 1880, 4 February 1881.

⁷⁶ *Butler's Journal*, February 1892. The last record of his actually working in a tannery was at Thirty-Nine Tannery, in the spring of 1888. See *Butler's Journal*, May 1903. His last visit to Grand Lake Stream (it may have been only to visit, not work) was April, 1890; see *Butler's Journal*, August 1904. *The Reporter and Fredericton Advertiser*, reprinting the news from the *St. Croix Courier*, reported that Martin Butler had "come back to Charlotte County after an absence of two years ..." on 7 May 1890. He may have worked in Jackson Brook/Brookton, where his parents then lived, prior to this, or in Forest City.

Conclusion

BUTLER'S EXPERIENCE and his articulations of it suggest that when the assumption is made that "industrial" equates with "urban," masculinity, with its class dimensions laid out against the backdrop of a rural landscape, becomes even more difficult to grasp. Analysis of the multiple and peripheral contexts of class, gender, and rurality through a focus on an individual is one method by which such liminal masculinities may be recognized and analyzed. Butler's experience provides a vantage point from which can be seen such a rural, working-class masculine identity, one that, while historically marginalized, is not necessarily insignificant in light of its connection to both industrialization and the rural landscape within which most of the social history of 19th century North America may be situated.

The proletarianizing group of males in the sole leather tanning industry, Butler among them, may have deemed the inhospitable tannery conditions in the rural borderlands a more viable alternative than a removal to a more distant urban factory milieu. And the rural setting fostered a measure of community and associational life; unfortunately, in structural terms the rural context could not provide all that communities needed in order to sustain themselves once their singular "boom" industries went "bust." But the rural environment of the tannery towns provided a measure of subsistence benefits and minor cultural continuity. The fleeting appearance of permanence inherent in the rural industrial development may have served to mute other, perhaps more critical differences, but at the same time it shaped a specific rural identity. Within this context, however, as Butler revealed in his reminiscences, gendered expectations were used by capital in order to secure labour by manipulative means. In the realm of competing ideologies, manipulations of working-class male gender identity served the purpose of class control through attempts at using that identity and its role expectations to expropriate labour.⁷⁷

What rural, working-class masculinity looked like in this period was a collection of attributes referred to in Butler's writings as he both experienced and constructed experience relative to his time in the sole leather tanning industry. These attributes included strength augmented by previous experience, dexterity, agility, and a camaraderie that often featured teasing and pranksterism, operative within a sometimes harmonious, sometimes fractious workplace, community and household. Attached to the quicksilver capitalism of the sole leather tanning industry, this particular male identity, in this region, did not exist beyond the 1880s. But it is worth noting that in *Butler's Journal* Butler published letters that he had received from male "friends" with whom he had worked at the tannery towns of eastern Maine. These letters were received sometimes upwards of twenty years or more since the last face-to-face meeting of the correspondents. The longevity of these ties, implicit in such communications, suggests that, despite the lack of unity and harmony spawned by industrial capitalism in these rural settings, the males of

⁷⁷ *Butler's Journal*, November 1899.

these households, workforces, and communities were in some measure a cohesive group. They shared experience that resulted in lengthy friendships, for Butler and his associates, at least.⁷⁸

What was also shared was a class- and rurally-specific sense of what it meant to be men in this milieu — an identity affecting, to some degree, these men's agency and their choices. Conflict between working-class males may have undercut any hope for "solidarity" of the working class against the capitalist class, particularly in a rural setting where so few opportunities existed for organizing, but where also familiarity worked against dramatic change or rebellion.⁷⁹ It was in this vein that gendered strategies had their lasting impact. Gendered, intra-class conflict, as well as the conflict inherent in differing classes' interests, muted possibilities for change in the terms of work — and the larger terms needing negotiation at the levels of *community and society*. By choosing hostility and competitiveness over cooperation and amity in their behaviour towards one another, male workers at the hidehouse and the boarding house, in the bark woods and on the "beem," exercised their individual agency as males. In so doing, however, their capacity to act collectively as a class was significantly diminished. This gendered dynamic of power and powerlessness was subsequently negotiated, it may be argued, outward into larger spheres — from workplace to homeplace/household, to the community — and felt in the interplay of public-work and private-household relationships.

Butler's contention, that the "workingman is a man, and the equal of the capitalist"⁸⁰ illustrates aphoristically the key dimension of the dilemma. Quite literally, the male working class was in need of rescuing its humanity *and* its manhood from the ruthlessness of capitalist social relations. A part of that struggle was contained in the personal and subjective realms of gender, and in the ever-shifting discursive ground upon which the contexts of identity were expressed, operated, and shaped by class, gender, and rurality.

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⁷⁸ Butler's Journal, December 1890; May 1891; July 1891; September 1904.

⁷⁹ This is not to suggest that rural areas did not experience their share of organized protest elsewhere, but to argue that, in the case of the tanneries, the tannery towns and their rurality as well as their proximity to the Maritimes meant that organizing against capital did not occur. Furthermore, it is not that much of a surprise, given these considerations and the exacting nature of the industry itself.

⁸⁰ Butler's Journal, July 1890.