Italic type indicates original building site or function.

1. Camden Station
2. *Railroad worker housing*
3. *Fifth Regiment Armory*, now Maryland General Hospital
4. *Route of march from Fifth Regiment Armory to Camden Station*
5. *Battle at Eutaw and Lombard Streets*
6. *Sixth Regiment Armory*, now new Post Office Building
7. *Central battle at Baltimore and Holliday Streets*

The Baltimore Book

New Views of Local History

Edited by Elizabeth Fee, Linda Shopes,

Linda Zeidman

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In July 1877, as the Sixth Regiment of the Maryland National Guard marched from their armory to Camden Station, soldiers opened fire on the crowds at the corner of Frederick and Baltimore Streets.

apter 1 C

Camden Yards and the Strike of 1877

SYLVIA GILLETT

The feeling not only in Baltimore but all over Maryland was intensely bitter, and the sympathy of the greater part of the working people was with the strikers.
—Charles Malloy, Maryland National Guard, 1877

Clearly within view from the corner of Sharp and Camden Streets—former site of the old Camden Station (*site 1*)—are signs of the new Baltimore. Festival Hall stands just across Camden Street. Farther to the east, shoppers fill the boutiques, booths, and restaurants of the Inner Harbor.

Yet, a little over a century ago, in the summer of 1877, crowds gathered here to challenge the power of the nineteenth-century railroads. Here began a protest that signaled the start of one of the most significant strikes in U.S. history, an event that was to bring Baltimore and the country as close as they have ever come to a breakdown of the social order.

Hard Times

In 1877 the people of the United States found themselves in the midst of a severe depression. Hard times had come in the wake of the stock market collapse and the closing of the stock exchange in 1873—events caused at least partly by speculation in railroad stock. Industry sought to weather the storm by cutting wages for workers by 25 percent (below subsistence in many cases) and by throwing an estimated 1 million people out of work.

In many key industries—furniture, millinery, shoe making, cake and cracker making—the introduction of machinery reduced the need for skilled workers and enabled owners to control more closely the terms of daily work. Such changes encountered fierce resistance from workers. Their opposition, however, was no match for management's determination. Throughout the 1870s, more and more skilled workers lost their jobs to machines or found themselves forced to labor at unskilled, low-paying jobs.

Working-class people grew increasingly desperate and angry, and nowhere more so than in Baltimore. Here, in the early summer of 1877, about 150 box makers and 700 can makers in the city's second-largest industry had gone out on strike. Their protest followed a severe winter in which numerous groups of workers demanded that Mayor Ferdinand Latrobe provide employment because their families lacked even bare necessities. Investigators confirmed that more than 200 families in northeastern Baltimore had little or no fuel and food. Worse yet, nearly 400 of the city's homeless sought shelter each night at the Baltimore Police Station. An uprising seemed almost

Camden Station was mobbed and burned during clashes between protesters and the police and soldiers.

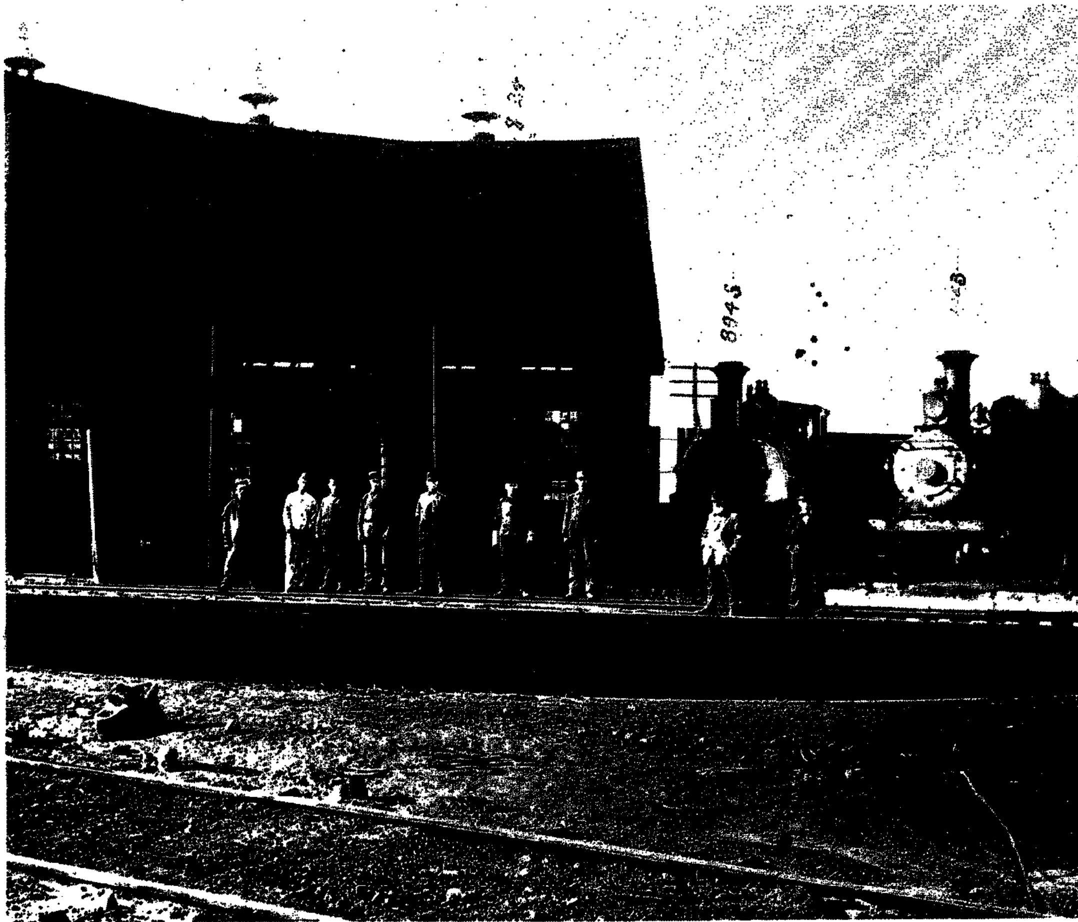
inevitable, since the families of workers as well as the unemployed suffered the effects of hard times.

Baltimore's citizens were no strangers to protest. Throughout the nineteenth century—in 1812, 1835, 1839, 1856, and 1861—there were riots in the city, some connected with local political developments, some with the larger issues of the Civil War. These unruly demonstrations earned the city a reputation as a "mob town."

Trouble on the Railroad

One of the city's and the nation's preeminent industries, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, was an obvious target for the resentments deepening in 1877. Working conditions on the line were bad, even by industry (and depression) standards.

Wages for B & O workers averaged $400 a year, $200 less than the wages for workers on other railroads. Many workers received only two or three days' work per week, while short-handed crews handled the extra cars. Overtime pay had been eliminated. Furthermore, the railroad refused to allow workers who had ridden out as part of the train's crew to return home at the railroad's expense. Instead, they were forced to pay their own way back or remain many miles from home—also at their own expense—until they could find a job on a returning train.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Railroad cars were built at the Mt. Clare Shops on Pratt Street, one of the largest railroad shops in the world and one of the largest employers in Maryland in the nineteenth century.

Workers at the Mt. Clare Shops of the B & O Railroad. pre-1900.

Safety conditions on the B & O were woefully inadequate. The job of brakeman, for example, posed danger to life and limb. A worker running along the roof of a freight train in order to turn the brakes, car by car, might find his life suddenly ended by a low bridge, or he might catch his foot in a switch frog or in the open rail end of a switch and be drawn into the turning wheels of the train. So difficult were the link and pin couplings between cars that a brakeman was considered either exceptionally skillful or extremely lucky to keep both hands and all ten fingers for very long.

The Railroad Men

Who were the men who faced the difficulties of life on the railroads in the 1870s? Typically, they were men young enough to "bear fatigue and exposure," to quote John Work Garrett, president of the B & O. Doubtless some may have been young roustabouts attracted by the rootlessness and adventure of railway life. But married men constituted the majority because railroad managers believed family responsibilities made workers more likely to be stable, hardworking, and loyal.

Railroad men lived near their place of work. In Baltimore they clustered around the Camden Yards and Mt. Clare Shops in the area of South Poppleton, James, Ramsey, Amity, McHenry, Herkimer, and Glyndon Streets (*site 2*). They dominated their communities, socializing almost exclusively with one another, worshipping in the same churches, shopping in the same neighborhood stores, marrying each other's daughters, helping one another in times of need.

The saloon was the center of the railroader's social life. Railway men "would drink to soothe their grievances and demonstrate mutual sympathy; drink evil and bad luck to some obnoxious and tyrannical official and drink long life and continued prosperity to themselves," claimed an anonymous worker in the *Locomotive Engineer's Journal* in 1869. He maintained that, during their trips, "the fever of excitement was kept up by the influence of strong drink; and many a man had gained the reputation of being a swift runner, and making almost impossible time when he was half drunk." Later, "they would congregate in grog shops and beer saloons to recount over their wonderful adventures on the road."

In more sober moments, however, the rigors of railway life frequently caused psychological problems and deep depression. A Baltimore newspaper account in the summer of 1877 made the following report: "In two instances, it is said, brakemen, after the loss of rest and under the depression of reduced wages, etc., have purposely thrown themselves under the wheels. Nearly all the men talked with said at one time and another when melancholy, they had meditated about stepping over the bumpers and meeting instant death."

The problems besetting the railroad men inevitably caused disruption to their families. The temporary consolation of drink, for example, frequently led to chronic alcoholism with its attendant domestic difficulties. Long trips away from home required wives to shoulder the burdens of the household alone. Periods of irregular employment or prolonged unemployment resulting from hiring conditions, illness, or accidents proved disastrous to family finances. Forced transfers meant dislocating entire households. In other cases, married men had to leave their families in search of work.

Sparking the Protest

As the economic situation worsened during the 1870s, problems of railroad workers and their families became increasingly acute. By 1877, only a spark was needed to ignite their grievances into protest. It came in July when John Garrett, B & O president, simultaneously increased stockholders' dividends 10 percent while cutting workers' wages by 10 percent—the second such cut within eight months. At the time, Baltimore's newspapers published glowing accounts of the railroad's actions, noting Garrett's hopes that workers would "cheerfully recognize the necessity of the reduction."

But workers' reactions failed to justify Garrett's optimism. On July 16, the day the pay reduction was to take effect, trainmen in Martinsburg, West Virginia, went out on strike, refusing to allow trains to leave their stations until Garrett rescinded the pay cut.

Almost the entire populace of this one-industry

town rallied to defy first the local strikebreakers, then the state militiamen from the Wheeling and Berkeley Light Brigades. Garrett responded by urging West Virginia's governor Henry M. Mathews to send for federal troops.

On Thursday, July 19, 300 federal soldiers arrived in Martinsburg to quell what the secretary of war had called an "insurrection." They enabled strikebreakers from Baltimore to get the freight trains out. In the meantime, however, the populace in communities along the line rallied in support of the Martinsburg action. The "communistic madness," as Allan Pinkerton, whose detective agency investigated the uprising, called it, was spreading.

In Cumberland, Maryland, a crowd of strikers and sympathizers—disgruntled miners, Chesapeake & Ohio canal men, unemployed and migrant workers, and young boys—gathered in support of the Martinsburg strike. Numbering 500 or 600 and allegedly armed with rude and improvised weapons, they succeeded in stopping virtually all trains en route to Baltimore.

Confronted with the growing success of the protest, President Garrett met with Governor John Carroll of Maryland at the Camden Street Station on Friday, July 20. Throughout the events of the next few hours and days, Garrett and Carroll were to act with a unanimity of purpose that demonstrated how state government served and protected private railroad interests.

Indeed, both the city and state governments had a financial stake in the B & O's success. Recognizing the railroad as key to the economic life of the region, both had given considerable amounts of public money and land to the railroad in an effort to encourage the development of Baltimore City. In addition, Mt. Clare Station and the Mt. Clare Shops just west of Camden Station were built on land that was part of the Carroll estate and was initially donated to the B & O by the Carroll family.

Thus, when the Cumberland blockade disrupted operation of the B & O, Governor Carroll needed little urging to call up the Fifth and Sixth Regiments of the Maryland National Guard in Baltimore under the command of General James R. Herbert. In issuing the call, Carroll seemed to anticipate citizen disagreement with his view that what was good for private entrepreneurship was also good for the general public. In an interview in the *Baltimore Sun* in 1927, Charles Malloy, a former guardsman with the Fifth Regiment, recalled, "It had been easy to see that violence might and probably would grow out of the strike. The feeling not only in Baltimore but all over Maryland was intensely bitter and the sympathy of the greater part of the working people was with the strikers."

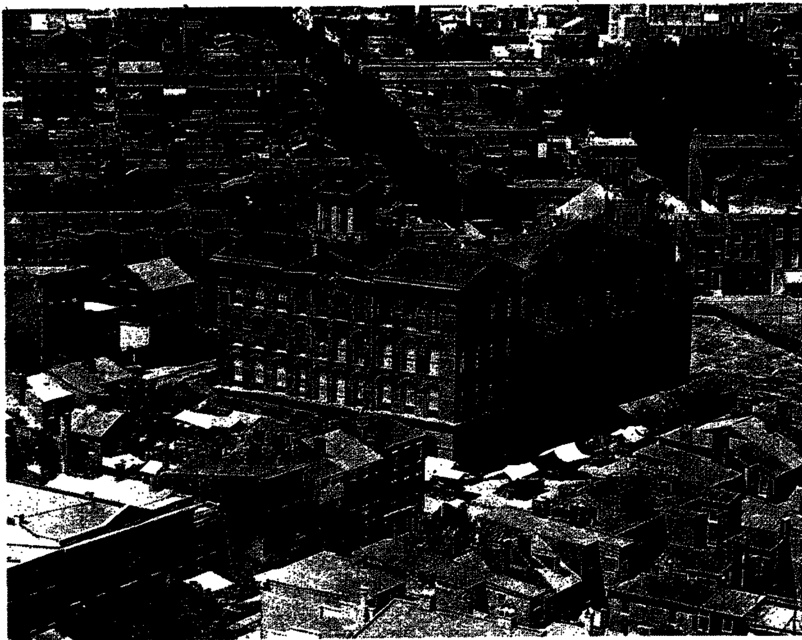
The Crowd Gathers

The mood was tense when Big Sam, a new riot alarm, sounded to call the troops to their armories at 6:35 P.M. on Friday, July 20. Governor Carroll had at first insisted that the alarm not be used for fear that it might incite the crowd to riot. But General Herbert, eager to try out the alarm and concerned that not enough militiamen could be summoned by courier, finally had his way.

When the 1-5-1 signal rang out at 6:35 P.M., the time could hardly have been more propitious for a spontaneous demonstration. City streets, the setting for much of working-class life during any hour of the day, were especially crowded in the early evening because many workers were just leaving the factories.

About an hour earlier, the evening newspapers had heralded the news of Governor Carroll's call-up, and a small crowd of strikers and sympathizers had already begun to gather at Camden Station. Within 15 minutes, thousands more joined them. Others gathered outside the Fifth and Sixth Regiment armories.

Among the throngs of angry and curious spectators were many of the railroad men's families and neighbors, who lived in the area around the station. The Mt. Clare Yards to the west also housed many railroad workers, particularly the Irish, whose homes lined Pratt and Lombard Streets. The staunch support of wives and mothers is described in this report from the *Baltimore Sun*: "They look famished and wild, and declare for starvation rather than have their people work the reduced wages. Better to starve outright, they say, than to die by slow starvation."



Women sympathetic to the striking railroad workers lead the crowd in a confrontation with the police. Note the emphasis on the fierceness of the women rioters, to the point of making them appear bestial.

In 1877, the armory of the Fifth Regiment of the Maryland National Guard was located on the second floor of the old Richmond Market, Linden and Read Streets. The militiamen gathered here before setting off for Camden Station.

Also among the crowds gathered in the streets on this balmy July evening were many of the neighborhood's small shopkeepers, as well as workers who hauled goods between the Baltimore port and the B & O lines. They, too, had grievances to express about the railroad.

Doubtless there were also others on the scene who fit the *Baltimore Evening Bulletin*'s description of "a rough element eager for disturbance; a proportion of mechanics either out of work or upon inadequate pay, whose sullen hearts rankled; and muttering and murmuring gangs of boys, almost outlaws, and ripe for any sort of disturbance."

In 1877 the Fifth Regiment Armory was located on the second floor of the old Richmond Market between Linden and Read Streets, current site of the buildings belonging to the Maryland General Hospital (*site 3*). Just across the street, present-day shoppers in the area peruse the many small stores of Howard Street's Antique Row.

On this summer evening in 1877, however, several thousand men, women, and children gathered in a spirit of excitement that at first appeared almost festive as troops from the armory began to march south on Eutaw Street toward the station. Some in the crowd broke into applause. But soon their good cheer changed to insults and verbal abuse.

Anger Deepens, Then Explodes

Today's Eutaw Street offers access to Lexington Market with its bright orange and red awnings and to a major Metro stop. It makes a gentle descent toward old Camden Station and the harbor area (*site 4*). Militiamen of the Fifth Regiment, beginning that descent, must have felt a simultaneous descent into the crowd's deepening anger.

When they got to the corner of Eutaw and Lombard Streets, they were bombarded with bricks and stones, many thrown from windows overhead (*site 5*). Even though 25 militiamen were injured by the crowd, the regiment maintained discipline until it arrived at its destination.

Meanwhile, the Sixth Regiment gathered at its armory on the second floor of a large building at the corner of Fayette and Front Streets (*site 6*). On that corner today stands the mammoth Central Post

A Letter to the Editor, July 21, 1877

The following letter to the editor appeared in the Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser *on July 21, 1877, in response to an editorial two days before. While sympathetic to the plight of the railroad workers, the editorial had argued that the B & O's primary responsibility was to its stockholders, not its employees. Given the overall depressed state of the economy, the railroad was, according to the editorial, doing the best it could for its workers.*

Messers Editors of *The American*:

In your editorial in yesterday's paper, you say you see no reason for charging the Company with a disposition to oppress its employees. Please allow me to point out a few. You say it has tried to do something in the way of philanthropy by cutting down wages and dividing up the work of moving its trains among a great many people. I agree with you; they do employ a great many people, but it seems to me you should have left the philanthropy out. But before I proceed to tell you why, I will tell you something perhaps you did not know. They saw it would not do to cut and slash at the wages in a wholesale manner again, so they devised a plan that they thought would work—cutting the different positions up into classes—engineers four classes, conductors three, firemen and brakemen two each. The classes were all made, but there were no men to go into them, nearly all conductors and engineers being first-class men. Now, if there is any philanthropy about their mode of working, it may come in here. When a man's engine would go into the shop for repairs he would not be allowed to get on another one and run extra, if there was a chance, but a new man would be hired, of course into the lowest class, while the first-class man would often have to remain idle three and four weeks at a time, still always holding himself in readiness in case of emergency. When the new fireman gets out on the road, the engineer, as a general thing, either has to get down off his engine and fire it himself (and in doing so he is violating one of the Company's orders by leaving his throttle-valve) or get stalled on all the grades, throwing himself behind time, to be made up at double the speed required by book, or else back off for some other train, while if he meets with the slightest accident he is held personally responsible, taken before a court composed of five officers, given a poor man's trial (all law and no justice). The sentence of this court is never less than ten days' banishment, and sometimes thirty, or final discharge, with the privilege of coming back on fourth-class pay. Was it philanthropy and a desire to do what was just and fair, when they without any public notice, cut all train men in their service fifty cents per day regardless of rates received, and in a few weeks publicly announced in the papers that Mr. T. R. Sharp and J. C. Davis would be raised a couple of thousand per annum. Or, perhaps, it is upon those broad principles of justice they keep men lying in Martinsburg, Virginia, all night in hot and cold weather watching their engines, and tell them in the morning they are not wanted, and give them no pay for it? But they must be ready to take the first train down in the morning. I could cite you many instances of such philanthropy, but the reckoning would disgust you. But allow me to say, in conclusion, if the directors are in earnest about retrenchment, I think I can suggest to them a plan which would harmonize their men and save many dollars to the Company—let the Company look about then, and see the many little bosses and supervisors, who get large pay for little work, and discharge every man whose service could be done without.

Engineer, 1st Div. B. & O. R. R.

Office Building, across the street from the historic Baltimore Shot Tower. Not too much farther west, Baltimore's poorer citizens crowd into low-income housing in a neighborhood of squat brick buildings and littered sidewalks. To the east lies Baltimore Street with its strip joints and sex stores, next door to the Baltimore City Police Station.

Into this area in 1877 jammed an angry crowd of thousands. By coincidence, the streets were filled with loose bricks and cobblestones torn up for the laying of some gas pipe as part of a public works project. The crowd began to stone the armory, shouting "Hurray for the strikers!" By 8:00 P.M., they had broken every windowpane on the Front Street side of the armory.

Inside, officers made a fateful decision to lead separate companies out piecemeal along different routes toward the station. As three of the companies, fully armed and with bayonets fixed, left the armory, they were pelted with stones, brickbats, and pieces of iron. The soldiers fired into the air and then directly into the crowd. One man was killed and the crowd temporarily dispersed.

Troops marching toward Baltimore and Holliday Streets faced still further assaults, and the frightened militiamen began to fire indiscriminately into

Crowds gather outside Camden Station as flames shoot from the south end of the passenger platform.

the crowd (*site 7*). Nine civilians were killed and more than 20 were seriously injured. As the crowd continued its resistance, many of the troops fled from the scene in panic and changed to civilian clothing. Of the original 120 who set out from the armory, only 59 actually arrived at the station.

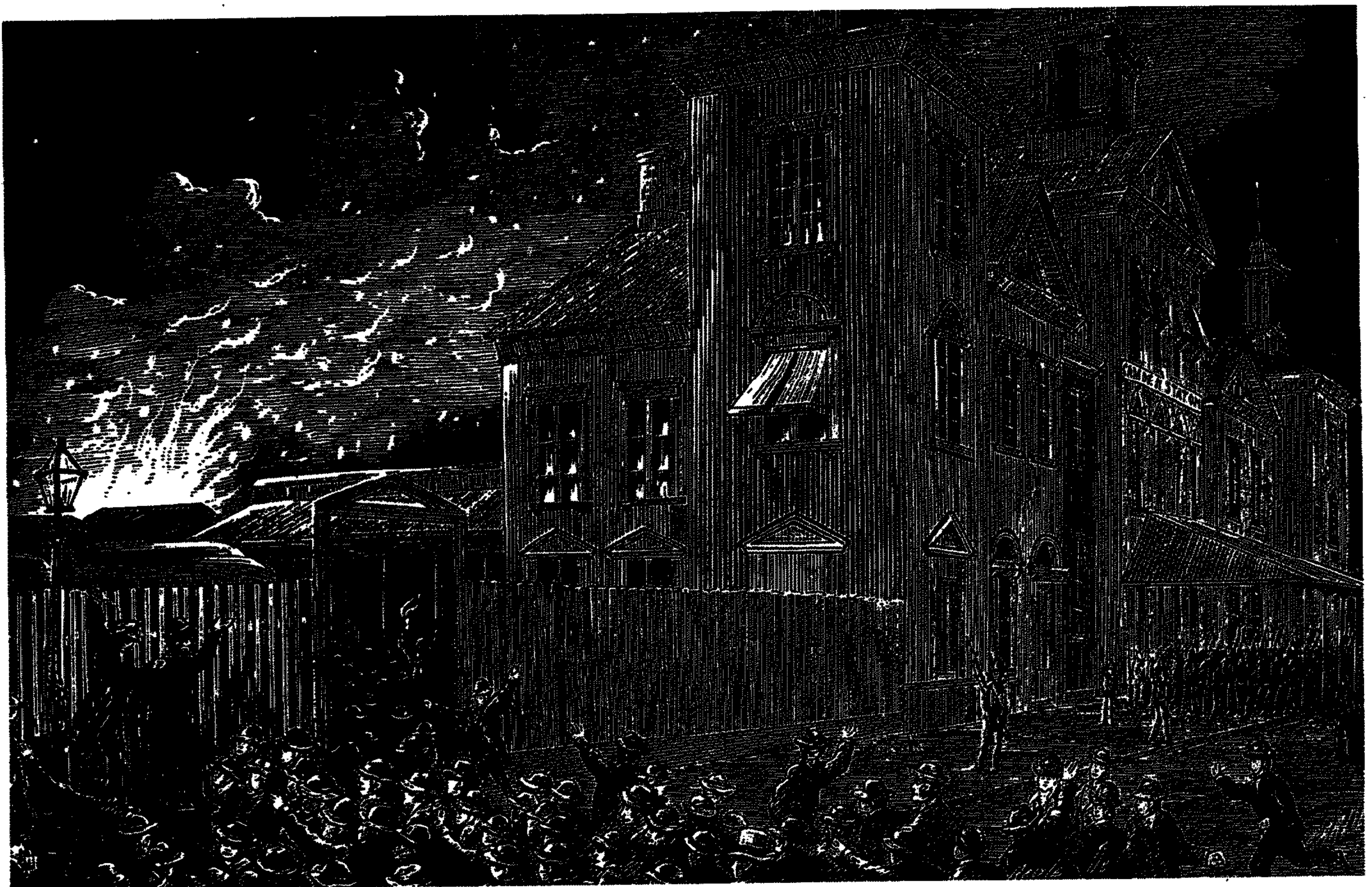
At the depot, a major confrontation was brewing. Inside the station were between 300 and 350 militiamen, city policemen, and a number of officials—among them General Herbert, Governor Carroll, Mayor Ferdinand Latrobe, members of the Board of Police Commissioners, and a vice-president of the railroad, John King, Jr. Outside stood a crowd estimated at 15,000, reaching from Camden Street on the north to Lee Street on the south.

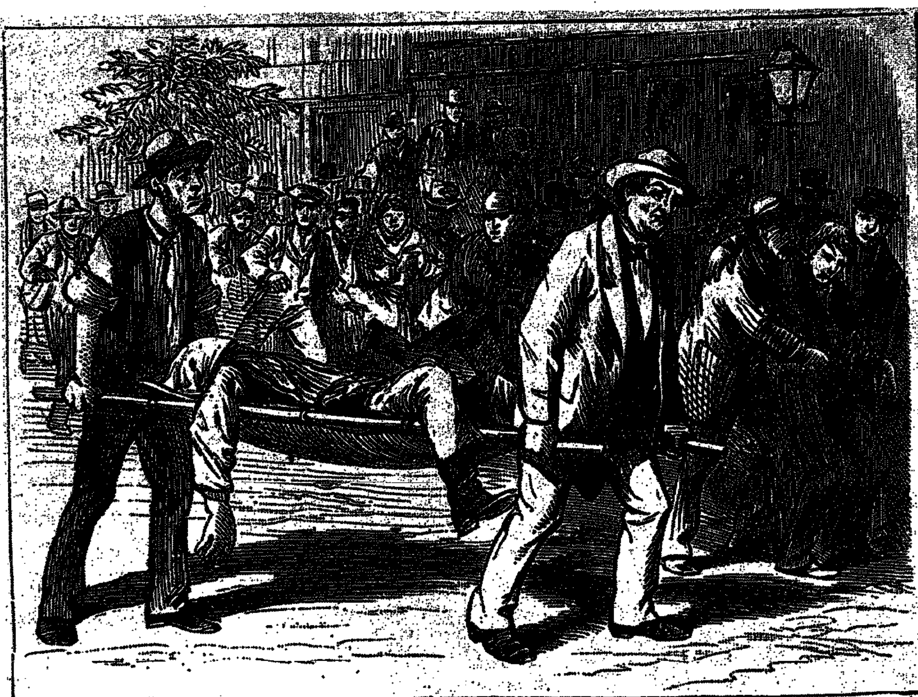
The troops could not embark for Cumberland because the crowd had driven away the troop train's engineer and firemen. They had also torn up tracks. Three passenger cars and the south end of the passenger platform were in flames. Firemen arriving at the scene were mobbed by the crowd—"the fiercest mob ever known in Baltimore," King called it.

Governor Carroll responded to events at the station by wiring President Rutherford B. Hayes to send the U.S. Army. He claimed that the rioters had "taken possession of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad depot, set fire to the same, and driven off all firemen who attempted to extinguish flames."

Accounts by the press and eyewitnesses tell a different story. The press claimed that the militia and policemen "awed" the crowd and that firemen had, in fact, been able to put out the flames. By 3:00 A.M., less than five hours after the governor had appealed for federal troops, most of the mob had dispersed and order had been declared.

By this time, however, federal troops were already being summoned from Fort McHenry and from stations in the New York harbor. Carroll let his order





Baltimore City policemen battle angry protesters.

More than 100 people were killed and scores were wounded in the confrontations that took place in communities all along the nation's railroad lines.

stand, a decision no doubt reflecting a belief that federal troops were more reliable than the local militiamen who, as workingmen themselves, might harbor sympathies for the strikers. On Saturday afternoon President Hayes declared Maryland under martial law.

Saturday evening, July 21, brought another confrontation between strike supporters, the militiamen, and police. Militiaman Malloy described the scene as follows:

Late Saturday it was determined to make an effort to disperse the mob. We were thrown into formation at the corner of Camden and Eutaw Streets. Then we received and executed the command to load our guns. Scarcely were our pieces thus loaded when our ranks opened smartly, and a cordon of city police marched through toward the mob. They carried drawn pistols, and fired one volley into the air. Then each policeman charged the mob, seized the first man his hands came to and hauled him onto the station waiting room.

As soon as one rioter was secured, the policeman returned for another, until the station was packed with them. Had it not been for the militia, standing with loaded weapons ready for the command to fire, it is doubtful whether the police could have carried out the plan, for I don't think there were more than twenty-five of them.

But the plan was carried out and the backbone of the riot was broken, then and there.

The Battle Ends, the Protest Spreads

By Sunday, between 1,200 and 2,000 federal troops were stationed in the vicinity. The agitation in Baltimore had been quelled by a show of force designed to discourage further insurrections by workers. Sensing perhaps that events in Martinsburg and Baltimore might lead to widespread violence, public officials brought the full force of the government to bear against the strikers.

But despite Garrett's apparent victory in Baltimore, the protest spread to other cities and towns and to other railroad lines, as workers united in a struggle for better working conditions and higher wages. In some cases, their anger was fueled when frightened troops fired indiscriminately into the assembled crowds, killing more than 100 civilians and wounding scores of others. In other cases, local troops and police refused to oppose the protesters but instead disbanded and joined them.

In Pittsburgh, for example, members of the local militia and city police force joined the crowds in destroying locomotives, train cars, and railroad buildings and in routing the troops from Philadelphia who had fired on the crowd.

In the neighboring town of Allegheny, workers briefly took over management of the railroad line. Similar events occurred in Buffalo, Chicago, Scranton, Harrisburg, and Philadelphia, as well as dozens of smaller communities.

Perhaps the most successful strike took place in St. Louis, where workers from many industries formed an executive committee that closed down almost all the city's manufacturing operations. The strikers had the strength inherent in their numbers and in the fervor of their anger. Ultimately, however, they lacked the sustained organization to prevail against powerful companies backed by the state. By August, less than three weeks after it began, the largest single industrial uprising in U.S. history had ended.

The Strike's Legacy

The protest had forced public awareness of the grievances of railroad workers and the intransigence of Garrett's railroad. In Baltimore and elsewhere, an aroused public pleaded for reform of the industry and for government supervision. Perhaps in response to the strike and this public outcry, the B & O instituted a program of relief for its employees. In 1880, the company established the Baltimore and Ohio Employees' Relief Association.

Under this program, the B & O provided a large initial endowment and assumed all administrative costs. Employees were required to pay monthly premiums equivalent to a day's wages and, in return, received benefits commensurate with their contributions. Coverage included 52 weeks of sickness and indefinite time for recovery from accidents. In addition, employees were eligible for death benefits.

In 1884, the B & O also established the nation's first pension plan, which permitted men at the age

Joseph Thompson: Workingmen's Party Candidate for Mayor

One result of the railroad strike in Baltimore was the formation of a Workingmen's party that spoke to the interests of working people and waged a fall electoral campaign challenging local politicians and businessmen. Meeting on July 30 in Rechabite Hall only eight days after the strike was quelled, workers from around the city unanimously adopted a resolution that began with this accusation: "The authorities of the United States and several of the States have arrayed themselves on the side of capital against labor."

At a subsequent meeting on August 6 at the Maryland Institute, those present adopted an 11-point platform that included most of the labor demands of the late nineteenth century: the eight-hour day, improved living and working conditions, and the abolition of child labor. It concluded with the radical demand that all industrial enterprises "be placed under the control of the government as fast as practicable, and operated by free-cooperative trades unions for the good of the whole people."

Leading spokesman for the Workingmen's party and its candidate for mayor was Joseph Thompson, popularly known as the "Blacksmith of Old Town." A native Baltimorean, son of Irish immigrants, he and two of his brothers had formed the firm of Thompson Brothers on Centre Street to carry on the work of their father, a wheelwright and blacksmith.

Thompson had already achieved some prominence as one of the principal speakers at a labor meeting held by B & O railroad employees at Hollis Hall during the July strike. He was also recognized throughout the city as "a prominent champion of the working people," in the words of the Sun papers, particularly known for his opposition to prison contract labor.

Nominated as candidate for mayor by acclamation at the Workingmen's party meeting at Raine's Hall on September 6, Thompson opposed the powerful and corrupt Democratic machine. In the previous mayoral election of 1875, bossism and corruption had caused some Democrats to ally with the Republicans under a banner of reform. Their candidate, Henry Warfield, had run a strong but unsuccessful campaign against the Democratic candidate, Ferdinand C. Latrobe.

Warfield was again a candidate in 1877. Mayor Latrobe, however, had angered some of the party bosses, and this time around the party chose George P. Kane as their mayoral candidate. The choice was a shrewd one because Kane had played a leading role in an earlier reform movement in 1860. In addition, he had become well respected as police marshal.

Thompson proved himself a formidable opponent to both candidates. He spoke frequently in almost every ward in the city to large and enthusiastic crowds. A speech given on September 14 at Hiawatha Hall is typical:

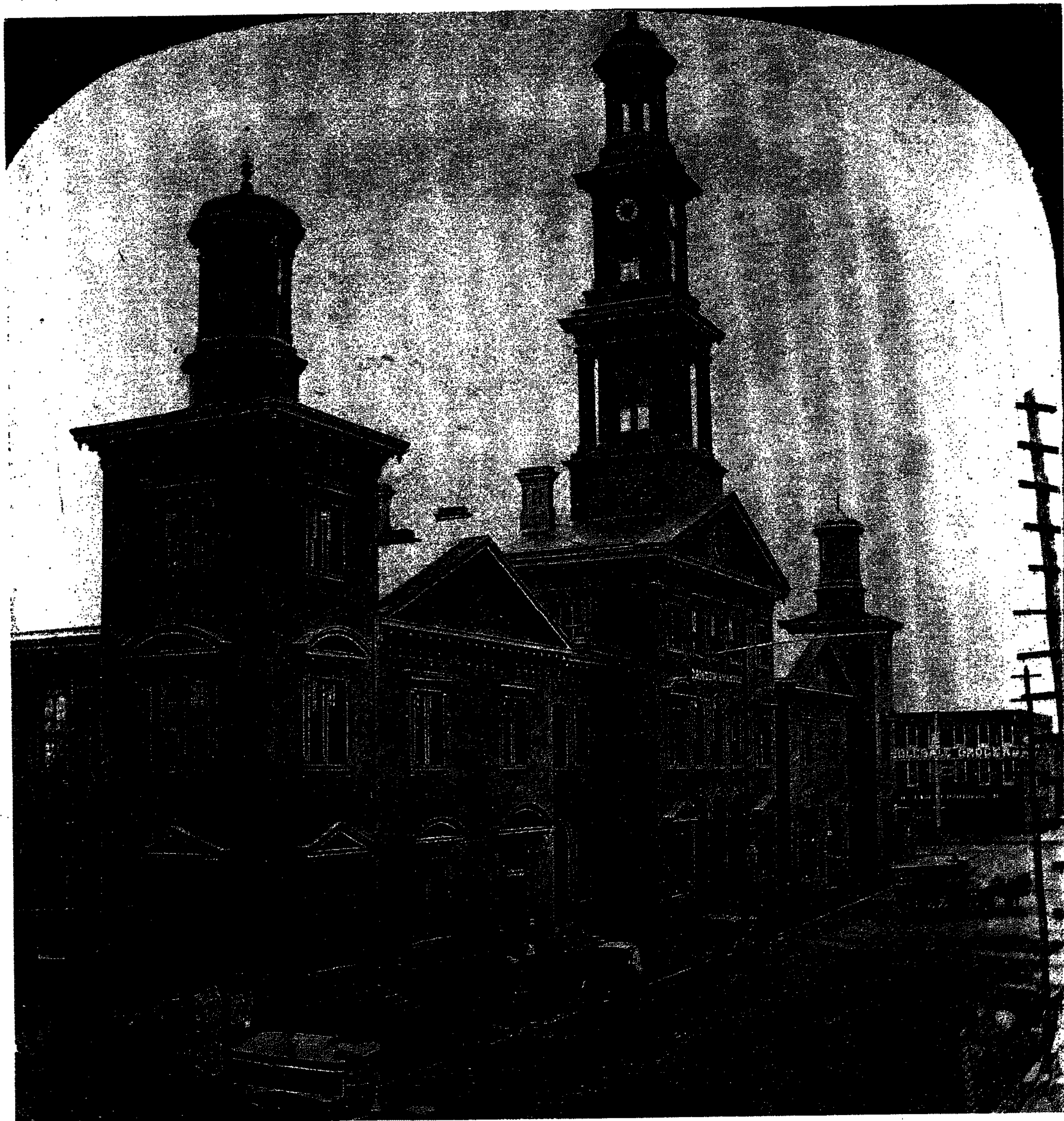
The principles upon which the workingmen's party is based . . . are enduring and vital. They are opposed to all class distinctions or class legislation. Whatsoever tends to make the rich man richer and the poor man poorer is wrong, and must be, if possible, blocked in its action. Land grants to corporations, subsidies and favoritism to railroad and steamship companies are not, except under extraordinary circumstances, conducive to the interests of the poorer classes, and it is impossible to decide when they should be permitted and when not. Therefore it is better to err on the side of safety, and allow none.

Desperate to discredit the popular candidate, his opposition labeled Thompson and the Workingmen's party communistic. Though disavowing communism, Thompson did believe, as he told an audience on October 15, in "law and property being respected, even to the extent of punishing the Mortons and Gilmans of society, where they defraud people of millions, as promptly and by the same mode as poor wretches who steal five dollars."

Despite his tireless efforts and evident popularity, Thompson finished second to Kane in the October 25 election. Official results gave Kane 33,188 votes, Thompson 17,367, and Warfield a mere 536.

Workingmen's party members and supporters around the city immediately cried fraud, claiming that Thompson's votes had been wrongly counted for Kane. Thompson himself said that he could not understand the small vote he received in some wards, given the extraordinary size of the turnouts for his speeches. Many citizens at the time and later historians as well have called the count fraudulent, but Thompson and his party lacked the funds to contest the results.

Although Thompson failed to bring the Workingmen's party to power in Baltimore, his campaign had gained working people's support for radical reforms and strengthened their class consciousness.



Built in 1856, the B & O Camden Station was the site of some of the worst rioting during the railroad strike of 1877.

of 65 who had worked for the railroad for at least 10 years to retire and receive benefits ranging from 20 to 35 percent of daily earnings. Both programs served as models for the industry.

In the broader political arena, agitation for reform led to significant public support throughout the country for reform and workingmen's candidates in the years following the strike. In Baltimore, for example, the Workingmen's party, formed as a result of the strike, received a third of the popular vote in the October 1877 mayoral election.

Even more important, the strike revealed the deep divisions between labor and capital and signaled a new era in labor–management relationships. The spontaneous uprising demonstrated labor's determination to say no to management and revealed labor's potential strength. Aware of that strength, Garrett showed his readiness to call for military force to crush the workers' protest. When it ended, he and others appealed to public officials for even more regiments and more armories to quell future disturbances.

Workers, too, had seen the strength inherent in a joining together of workers, the unemployed, and the community at large to express a shared sense of outrage. As a leader in the Baltimore strike declared,

The working people everywhere are with us. They know what it is to bring up a family on ninety cents a day, to live on beans and corn meal week in and week out, to run in debt at the stores until you cannot get trusted any longer, to see the wife breaking down under privation and distress and the children growing up sharp and fierce like wolves day after day because they don't get enough to eat.

In the years ahead, the site of the old Camden Station will be occupied by twin athletic stadiums. But the sense of class consciousness and potential for concerted action will live on as the greatest legacy of those who gathered there in 1877 to challenge the financial empire of the nineteenth-century railroads.

Acknowledgment: The author wishes to thank Ellen Smith for her assistance in preparing this chapter.