

Mob Work: Anarchists in Grand Rapids is a four volume exploration of the history of anarchists in Grand Rapids, Michigan. While a mid-sized town with a reputation for conservative views, below the surface Grand Rapids has a history of radicalism that has largely gone unexplored. Part of that history includes the presence of anarchists active in a number of different ways since the 1880s. Anarchist activity has often connected to what anarchists have been doing in the larger U.S. context and as such this history situates Grand Rapids anarchists in larger national trends.

In this first volume of *Mob Work*, topics include the German anarchist movement in Grand Rapids during the 1880s and its connections to Chicago and the International Workingpeople's Association (IWPA), the famous anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre who lived in Grand Rapids for a few years, Jo Labadie and his visits to Grand Rapids, and the repression following the assassination of President William McKinley.



...from the occupied territory currently known as grand rapids, michigan
for more zines and correspondence, visit www.sproutdistro.com

MOB WORK

ANARCHISTS IN GRAND RAPIDS, VOL. 1



That they will not resign their privileges voluntarily we know; that they will not make any concessions to us we likewise know. Since we must then rely upon the kindness of our masters for whatever redress we have, and knowing that from them no good may be expected, there remains but one recourse - FORCE!

*—Founding Manifesto of
the International Workingpeople's Association*



Anarchism and anarchy mean different things to different people and as such universal statements about it are difficult. Moreover, anarchism has a rich theoretical and historical tradition with many different tendencies. For the most part, this publication assumes the reader has at least a basic understanding of anarchism. However, for those never exposed to the ideas, the following excerpt from Peter Gelderloos' *Anarchy Works* identifies the basic concepts in anarchism:

Autonomy and Horizontality: All people deserve the freedom to define and organize themselves on their own terms. Decision-making structures should be horizontal rather than vertical, so no one dominates anyone else; they should foster power to act freely rather than power over others. Anarchism opposes all coercive hierarchies, including capitalism, the state, white supremacy, and patriarchy.

Mutual Aid: People should help one another voluntarily; bonds of solidarity and generosity form a stronger social glue than the fear inspired by laws, borders, prisons, and armies. Mutual aid is neither a form of charity nor of zero-sum exchange; both giver and receiver are equal and interchangeable. Since neither holds power over the other, they increase their collective power by creating opportunities to work together.

Voluntary Association: People should be free to cooperate with whomever they want, however they see fit; likewise, they should be free to refuse any relationship or arrangement they do not judge to be in their interest. Everyone should be able to move freely, both physically and socially. Anarchists oppose borders of all kinds and involuntary categorization by citizenship, gender, or race.

Direct Action: It is more empowering and effective to accomplish goals directly than to rely on authorities or representatives. Free people do not request the changes they want to see in the world; they make those changes.

Throughout this publication, we explore various facets of anarchist history as it relates to Grand Rapids, Michigan and try to situate it within its larger historical context. The purpose is not to make a case for anarchy—that has been made better elsewhere by others far more eloquent than us.

- 228 Scott Miller, *The President and the Assassin: McKinley, Terror, and Empire at the Dawn of the American Century*, (New York: Random House, 2011), 59-60.
- 229 Miller, 77.
- 230 Miller, 274-275.
- 231 Miller, 282-283.
- 232 Miller, 283-284.
- 233 Miller, 286-287.
- 234 Miller, 304.
- 235 Sidney Fine, "Anarchism and the Assassination of McKinley," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. LX, No. 4, (1955), 794-795.
- 236 Emma Goldman, *Living My Life, Vol. 1*, (1931; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 312-313.
- 237 Giuseppe Ciancabilla, *Fired by the Ideal: Italian-American Anarchist Responses to Czolgosz's Killing of McKinley*, (London: Kate Sharpley Library, 2002), 1.
- 238 Voltairine de Cleyre, "McKinley's Assassination from the Anarchist Standpoint," *Mother Earth*, #8, October 1907, Accessed at <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/voltairine-de-cleyre-mckinley-s-assassination-from-the-anarchist-standpoint>
- 239 Paul Avrich and Karen Avrich, *Sasha and Emma: The Anarchist Odyssey of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 162-165.
- 240 Miller, 306.
- 241 Miller, 309.
- 242 Fine, 785.
- 243 Fine, 785.
- 244 Fine, 786-787.
- 245 Miller, 305-306.
- 246 Eric Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley: The Making of Theodore Roosevelt's America*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 97.
- 247 Miller, 326.
- 248 "Close Watch Kept," *The Evening Press*, September 7, 1901, 2.
- 249 W.E. Besseyhed, "Exterminate the Breed," *The Evening Press*, September 7, 1901, 14.
- 250 "Anarchy on the Stage," *The Evening Press*, September 21, 1901, 4.
- 251 "Grand Haven Citizens Passed Ringing Resolutions Last Night," *The Evening Press*, September 21, 1901, 1.
- 252 "Suppressing the Anarchists," *The Evening Press*, September 18, 1901, 2.
- 253 "Are Far Apart," *The Evening Press*, October 14, 1901, 2.
- 254 Avrich and Avrich, 167-168.
- 255 Avrich and Avrich, 167.
- 256 William Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933*, (1963; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 27-28.
- 257 Fine, 792.
- 258 Kathy E. Ferguson, *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 229.
- 259 Miller, 342.
- 260 Preston, 33.

MOB WORK: ANARCHISTS IN GRAND RAPIDS, VOL. 1

This version published in April of 2014.

MOB WORK is a four volume set of zines documenting anarchy in Grand Rapids, Michigan from the 1880s to the 1990s.

For more information, please visit <http://www.sproutdistro.com>

INTRODUCTION

This is the story of some anarchists—that is proponents of anarchy—who have been active at various points in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area from roughly 1885 to 2000. It is a series of stories and fragments of an anarchist space in Grand Rapids. In most cases, there is no clear line of continuity from one particular person, event, or group to the next. Rather, there is a series of experiences and events that share in common only the same general goal: the pursuit of a stateless society organized along egalitarian lines. Given these limits, this is by no means a comprehensive history, if there is ever such a thing. Please consider it as an invitation to discussion and exploration.

Assembling these stories was not an easy task: anarchism is not a popular topic—either as a contemporary or historical subject. Newspapers publish sensational accounts, histories ignore them, and much of anarchist activity is ephemeral in nature. A group comes together around a specific issue or project, a newspaper is published for a few issues, a handbill is circulated—often to be lost to what we call “history.”

Further complicating the matter is the fact that the anarchist space is far from monolithic. The term “anarchist space” is used to describe the area where anarchist ideas circulate; because there has never been a single movement, rather there has always been a series of different anarchisms. Different tactical, theoretical, and strategic approaches have manifested themselves at different times. Moreover, beyond their core beliefs there is a considerable variety of thought within the anarchist milieu. For example, some organizational philosophies advocate temporary groups while others favor mass organizations. As a historian, one is considerably easier to discuss, making it easy to over emphasize those currents. Similarly, what the anarchists of the 1890s believed is a lot different than what the anarchists of the 1990s believed.

Anarchism in the United States has gone through a series of shifts over the years, with increases in visibility and popular attention, as well as periods when it seemingly fell off the radar. However, it has retained a constant presence. Between 1870 and 1980, four hundred periodicals were issued in a dozen languages. Some of these ran for decades while others were more temporary in nature.¹ Along with this, massive amounts of literature—from pamphlets to leaflets were distributed. Especially in the pre-World War I period, lecture tours also were a critical part of the movement with prominent anarchists regularly touring the country to lecture on anarchism, spread ideas, facilitate organization, and form connections. European anarchists also visited the country, often catalyzing an increase in activity due to

- 185 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 45-46.
- 186 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 49.
- 187 Voltairine de Cleyre, “The Eleventh of November, 1887,” in *The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 177.
- 188 Voltairine de Cleyre, “The Making of An Anarchist,” in *The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader*, 106.
- 189 “Haymarket Atheists” in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, 107.
- 190 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 96.
- 191 Gaylor, 357.
- 192 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 39.
- 193 Delamotte, 19.
- 194 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 153.
- 195 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 79, 94.
- 196 Marsh, 135.
- 197 Marsh, 76-78.
- 198 Marsh, 48-49.
- 199 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 192.
- 200 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 234.
- 201 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 95-97.
- 202 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 133-135.
- 203 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 162.
- 204 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 228.
- 205 Carlotta Anderson, *All-American Anarchist: Joseph A. Labadie*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 92.
- 206 Anderson, 94.
- 207 Anderson, 13-14.
- 208 Avrich, *Haymarket Tragedy*, 71.
- 209 Anderson, 139-140.
- 210 Anderson, 165-166.
- 211 Anderson, 196.
- 212 Carl Nold, “Joseph Labadie,” in *MAN! An Anthology of Anarchist Ideas, Essays, Poetry, and Commentaries*, (Cienfuegos Press, 1974), 535.
- 213 Anderson, 195.
- 214 Anderson, 183.
- 215 Anderson, 208.
- 216 Anderson, 184.
- 217 Anderson, 185.
- 218 Anderson, 79.
- 219 Anderson, 167.
- 220 “An Eight Hour Labor Meeting,” *Grand Rapids Daily Democrat*, February 23, 1890, 2.
- 221 “Advantages of Organization,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, February 27, 1890, 4.
- 222 “Advantages of Organization,” 4.
- 223 “Labadie’s Logic,” *Grand Rapids Daily Democrat*, Feb. 27, 1890, 5.
- 224 “Labadie’s Logic,” 5.
- 225 “Labadie’s Logic,” 5.
- 226 Paul Avrich, “Kropotkin in America,” 8.
- 227 Anderson, 212.

- 149 “Michael Schwab was Mild,” *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, February 1, 1897, 3.
- 150 Paul Avrich, *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Cleyre*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 94.
- 151 Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Gates of Freedom: Voltairine de Cleyre and the Revolution of the Mind*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 80.
- 152 DeLamotte, 13.
- 153 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 236.
- 154 Alexander Berkman, ed., *Selected Works of Voltairine de Cleyre*, (Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1914), 17.
- 155 Emma Goldman, “Voltairine de Cleyre,” in *Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine de Cleyre—Feminist, Anarchist, Genius*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 44.
- 156 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 38.
- 157 Delamotte, 4.
- 158 Annie Laurie Gaylor, ed., *Women Without Superstition: “No Gods—No Masters,”* (Madison: Freedom From Religion Foundation, 1997), 9.
- 159 Delamotte, p. 34
- 160 Sharon Presley in *Exquisite Rebel*, 161-162.
- 161 Voltairine de Cleyre, “Selling Their Bodies,” in *Gates of Freedom*, 219.
- 162 Margaret Marsh, *Anarchist Women: 1870-1920*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 128.
- 163 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 40.
- 164 Albert Baxter, *History of the City of Grand Rapids Michigan*, (New York and Grand Rapids: Munsell & Company, 1891), 271.
- 165 P. Brynberg Porter, ed., *Gaillard’s Medical Journal*, Vol. XLII, (M.E. Gaillard, 1886), accessed online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=S8NXAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA688&ots=GBNhwySTjJ&dq>
- 166 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 40.
- 167 Delamotte, 34.
- 168 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 44.
- 169 “Voltairine de Cleyre: Woman Versus Orthodoxy,” in *Women Without Superstition*, 357.
- 170 Alexander Berkman, ed., *Selected Works of Voltairine de Cleyre*, (Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1914), 17.
- 171 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 40.
- 172 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 40.
- 173 Voltairine de Cleyre, “Secular Education” in *Exquisite Rebel*, 183.
- 174 Voltairine de Cleyre, “Secular Education” in *Exquisite Rebel*, 187.
- 175 Sharon Presley, “The Exquisite Rebel: The Anarchist Life of Voltairine de Cleyre,” in *Exquisite Rebel*, 19.
- 176 Catherine Helen Palczewski, “Voltairine de Cleyre,” in *Women Public Speakers in the United States, 1800-1925*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1993), 152.
- 177 Crispin Sartwell, “Priestess of Pity and Vengeance,” in *Exquisite Rebel*, 5.
- 178 Palczewski, 150.
- 179 Palczewski, 148.
- 180 Sartwell, 5.
- 181 Delamotte, 134.
- 182 Avrich, *An American Anarchist*, 40.
- 183 Voltairine de Cleyre, “New and Strange Ideas,” in *Gates of Freedom*, 165.
- 184 Delamotte, 156.

their lecture tours.² During the heyday of classical anarchism in the United States, Margaret Marsh estimated that during any year from 1880 to 1920 “there were at least fifteen- to twenty-thousand committed anarchists in the United States, and perhaps an additional thirty- to fifty-thousand sympathizers.”³ As new strands of anarchism emerged in the 1960s into the 1980s, hostility to and skepticism of organizations became more common, making it even more difficult to gauge the numbers of anarchists. At the same time, the proliferation of anarchist ideas during that period within the anti-nuclear movement, the punk rock counter-culture, and the building of counter-institutions, showed that anarchism had significantly increased its presence over the previous decades, even if the goal was no longer to unite the entirety of the working class.

Anarchy in Grand Rapids?

As strange as it may seem to some, anarchy has a long history in Grand Rapids. Going back to the famous Haymarket events of 1885, anarchy had a presence. In the months before Haymarket, German immigrants circulated anarchist newspapers, hosted some of the future “Haymarket martyrs” as speakers, and organized armed groups to prepare for the revolution. A few years later, the famous anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre made Grand Rapids her home, editing a newspaper and becoming a prominent lecturer in the free thought movement, while developing her early anarcho-feminist ideas. Following the example of the Haymarket repression across the country, anarchists were targeted following the assassination of McKinley in 1901. In 1906, the first branch of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) in Grand Rapids was organized. Around the same time, Hendrik Meijer—of Meijer grocery store fame—immigrated to the United States, bringing with him the Dutch anarchism of Nieuwenhuis. In 1910, another branch of the I.W.W. was organized, which would intervene in the famous furniture workers strike of 1911, advocating for the destruction of the wage system and for anarchy against the conservatism of the unions.

In the 1910s, Emma Goldman would visit Grand Rapids on several occasions, delivering lectures critiquing marriage, Christianity, and advocating for anarchy. Goldman was a friend and frequent guest of William Buwalda, a decorated former soldier who after being inspired by Goldman, renounced his role in the imperialist Spanish-American War. Another man, Charles Bergman—collaborated with Buwalda on organizing Goldman’s lectures, while also publishing several thousand copies of a pamphlet intended to introduce anarchist ideas to a wide audience. Following the United States entry into World War I, there was a significant crackdown on radical political ideas, with anarchism often being equated with Bolshevism and largely going under the radar

By the 1960s, anarchist ideas were back, manifesting themselves in the anti-war and counter-cultural movements that emerged in the United States. This took

place both on the national level, and locally. What was collectively known as “the movement” was organized largely along decentralized, anti-authoritarian lines. Confrontational anti-war protests, co-operative institutions, and underground newspapers flourished in Grand Rapids. Into the 1980s, those roots grew, with anarchism appearing within the punk scene, anarchists taking the streets, and specifically anarchist projects emerging. Moreover, anarchism moved in new directions, activity was no longer focused primarily on the working class, but anarchists in Grand Rapids fed the homeless in Veterans Park as Food Not Bombs, fought fascists as Anti-Racist Action, and organized against the police as Michigan Anarchist Black Cross.

At various points in this history, the anarchist activity that happened in Grand Rapids paralleled what anarchists were doing elsewhere. Still, owing to the particularities of Grand Rapids, the history is somewhat unique. This anarchist history is part of a larger history of resistance in Grand Rapids that has largely gone unexplored.

A Statement on Sources

Unfortunately, a history like this is not easy to write. There are few primary sources (newspapers, flyers, handbills, etc.) that have been preserved over the years, there are few (if any) people to share their experiences, and there are no anarchist organizations with long history. Moreover, the particular values of some strands of anarchist thought—hostility to formal organizations, individualism, and illegalism—mean that many would be likely be excluded even if better sources existed. At the same time, the lack of sources creates problems for an anarchist understanding of history. In many cases, this work focuses on groups and individuals, rather than a collective mass or social force of some kind. This is not done to advocate for a political stance in favor of formal organizations or to create revolutionary heroes, but rather it is a reflection of the limited sources available. Similarly, the stories of men and white folks may be over-represented.

In the absence of specifically anarchist sources, newspapers have been used to try to locate anarchist activity in the Grand Rapids area. The problems with this are obvious, as the media—as defenders of the status quo—have a vested interest in opposing anarchist ideas. And indeed, this project has shown that the media repeatedly distorts, sensationalizes, and dismisses anarchist views. There is also a tendency to only “discover” anarchist activity in response to some national event—an assassination, a bombing, an arrest, etc.

The anti-anarchist bias in the media has a history as long as anarchism in the United States. Even before the Haymarket incident, anarchists were regularly slandered and portrayed as “poor, ugly, unwashed, animal-like, mentally deranged and dangerously violent foreigners” all of whom of course had one or more bombs tucked into their pockets.⁴ These representations increased after

- 109 Untitled, *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, May 10, 1886, 2.
- 110 “Anarchy”, *Grand Rapids Telegram-Herald*, May 6, 1886, 6.
- 111 “They Are Not Socialists,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, May 12, 1886, 4.
- 112 Ashbaugh, 90.
- 113 “A ‘Bomb’ on the River Bank,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, May 15, 1886, 4.
- 114 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 240.
- 115 “Where Is He?”, *Grand Rapids Daily Democrat*, May 13, 1886, 1.
- 116 “A ‘Bomb’ on the River Bank,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, May 15, 1886, 4.
- 117 “The Day Before,” *Grand Rapids Telegram-Herald*, November 11, 1887, 1.
- 118 “The News In The City,” *Grand Rapids Telegram-Herald*, November 11, 1887, 1.
- 119 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 245.
- 120 Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Trial of the Haymarket Anarchists: Terrorism and Justice in the Gilded Age*, (New York: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2011), 66.
- 121 “Testimony of Luther V. Moulton, 1886 July 19,” *Illinois vs. August Spies et al. trial transcript no. 1*, <http://www.chicagohistory.org/hadc/transcript/volumei/251-300/1275-283.htm>
- 122 “Testimony of George W. Shook, 1886 July 19,” *Illinois vs. August Spies et al. trial transcript no. 1*, <http://www.chicagohistory.org/hadc/transcript/volumei/251-300/1283-288.htm>
- 123 Messer-Kruse, *The Trial*, 142.
- 124 “He Warned Spies,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, November 11, 1887, 1.
- 125 “Where The Knights Stand,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, May 6, 1886, 4.
- 126 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 220.
- 127 Untitled, *Muskegon Daily Chronicle*, Jul. 6, 1886, 2.
- 128 “Powderly’s Circular,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, Mar. 29, 1886, 2.
- 129 “State Assembly, K. of L.,” *Muskegon Daily Chronicle*, Aug. 4, 1887, 3.
- 130 “Chicago Knights,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, December 24, 1886, 1.
- 131 “Endorsed,” *Grand Rapids Daily Democrat*, May 30, 1886, 5.
- 132 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 301.
- 133 Ashbaugh, 105-106.
- 134 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 94-95.
- 135 “They Will Protest,” *Grand Rapids Telegram-Herald*, October 15, 1887, 2.
- 136 Untitled, *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, October. 17, 1887, 4.
- 137 Rolf Wagner, “Turner Societies and the Socialist Tradition,” in Hartmut Keil, ed., *German Workers’ Culture in the United States, 1850 to 1920*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1988), 235.
- 138 “Paul Grottkau,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, October 17, 1887, 1.
- 139 “Grottkau’s Effort”, *Grand Rapids Telegram-Herald*, October 17, 1887, 5.
- 140 Messer-Kruse, *The Trial*, 168.
- 141 Untitled, *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, November 8, 1887, 4.
- 142 “How Local Labor Feels,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, October 17, 1887, 4.
- 143 “Why It Was Laid On The Table,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, October 24, 1887, 1.
- 144 Ashbaugh, 127-128.
- 145 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 446.
- 146 “Michael Schwab” in Dave Roediger & Franklin Rosemont, *Haymarket Scrapbook*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1986), p. 65.
- 147 “Wipe Out Profits,” *Grand Rapids Herald*, February 1, 1897, 3.
- 148 “The Anarchists in Court,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, June 1, 1886, 1.

- 69 “The Socialists,” *Grand Rapids Daily Democrat*, May 9, 1886, 2.
- 70 “The Socialists,” 2.
- 71 “Organized Groups of the International Working People’s Association,” *The Alarm*, October 17, 1885.
- 72 “Comrade August Spies...”, *The Alarm*, March 6, 1886, 2.
- 73 “Receipts of Money to Aid in Publishing ‘The Alarm,’” *The Alarm*, Oct. 31, 1885, 3.
- 74 Hartmut Keil, “Immigrant Workers and Social Democratic Tradition,” in Hartmut Keil, ed., *German Workers’ Culture in the United States, 1850 to 1920*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988), 16.
- 75 “Semi-Annual Report – Propaganda of the International Working People’s Association,” *The Alarm*, November 28, 1885, 1.
- 76 Goyens, 148.
- 77 Goyens, 34.
- 78 Goyens, 42.
- 79 Goyens, 149.
- 80 Goyens, 152.
- 81 Goyens, 158-159.
- 82 Goyens, 146.
- 83 Goyens, 215.
- 84 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 45.
- 85 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 45.
- 86 “The Socialists,” *Grand Rapids Daily Democrat*, May 6, 1886, 2.
- 87 “The International Working People’s Association,” in Dave Roediger & Franklin Rosemont, *Haymarket Scrapbook*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1986), 84.
- 88 “More Eight Hour Men,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, March 23, 1886, 4.
- 89 “The Furniture Workers,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, April 15, 1886, 4.
- 90 “May Day 2010!”, February 11, 2010, <http://grsbuxunion.blogspot.com/2010/02/mayday-2010.html>
- 91 Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!*, (1972; reprint, Boston: South End Press, 1997), 43.
- 92 “Western Labor Parades,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1886, Accessed online at <http://www.marxists.org/subject/mayday/articles/times.html>
- 93 “The Only Disturbance,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, May 1, 1886, 4.
- 94 “Grand Rapids’ Anarchists,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, May 8, 1886, 4.
- 95 “Doings of Idlers,” *Grand Rapids Daily Democrat*, May 6, 1886, 5.
- 96 “The Alleged Intimidators,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, May 8, 1886, 1.
- 97 Messer-Krause, *The Haymarket Conspiracy*, 166.
- 98 “The Socialists,” *Grand Rapids Daily Democrat*, May 9, 1886, 2.
- 99 “Gaining Valuable Pointers,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, May 11, 1886, 2.
- 100 “Paul Grottkau Talks,” *Grand Rapids Daily Eagle*, Oct. 17, 1887, 2.
- 101 “Anarchists,” *Grand Rapids Telegram-Herald*, May 6, 1886, 1.
- 102 “Down With The Commune,” *Grand Rapids Telegram-Herald*, May 9, 1886, 4.
- 103 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 213.
- 104 Untitled, *Muskegon Daily Chronicle*, June 6, 1886, 2.
- 105 Untitled, *Muskegon Daily Chronicle*, May 22, 1886, 2.
- 106 “Bring Out The Gatling Guns,” *Grand Rapids Telegram-Herald*, May 4, 1886, 2.
- 107 “Anarchy,” *Grand Rapids Telegram-Herald*, May 6, 1886, 6.
- 108 “Spies was a Ladies’ Man”, *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, Nov. 16, 1887, 1.

Haymarket and remain popular caricatures. In discussing anarchism, the media generally dismisses anarchists and places their allegiance with the state and capitalism. This was never lost on anarchists, who were quite aware of the media’s role. For example, the anarchist newspaper *The Blast*, wrote about reporters who manufactured interviews⁵ and how the newspapers mirrored capitalist values.⁶

The Goals

The primary purpose of this exploration is to tell a story that has not been told elsewhere. The history of anarchism in Grand Rapids is largely unknown. It provides a challenge to the all too common idea that Grand Rapids is a place dominated exclusively by conservative politics and religious views. While these have been important influences and systems of control over the years in Grand Rapids, on the margins other forms of living have been explored and more egalitarian dreams have been pursued. The fact that anarchist currents—one of the most radical of all oppositional forces in U.S. history—have had a relatively consistent presence in the city provides a challenge to the dominant narrative of Grand Rapids as a conservative city. Moreover, anarchist activity is part of a larger area of study that has largely gone ignored. Left-wing oppositional movements as a whole in Grand Rapids have received little attention.

For anarchists, the reasons for this history are perhaps a bit more clear. They provide stories of our past involvement and unique tradition. This can help situate anarchist activity in the present as part of an ongoing trajectory, challenging the notion that anarchists are perpetually the outsiders or an anomaly. Moreover, this history can help anarchists ground our practice in our own traditions. If we see contemporary anarchist activity within the context of a broader anarchist history, it changes our orientation. No longer must we view ourselves as participants on the margins of social movements or leftist thought, but instead we can recognize that we occupy a distinct trajectory and body of thought.

Finally, there are a few specific points which must be raised in terms of what this history does not offer. Most importantly, its goal is not to provide a blueprint for the future. There is nothing that can be specifically taken from this history and transposed onto the present. There are lessons to be learned, but much of that analysis and evaluation is left to the reader. Furthermore, there is no integrated narrative in this history. There are unfortunately few links between the anarchists of each generation (or even of just a few years prior), so there is little ability to present this history as a unified whole. Lastly, this is not intended to be the final word on the subject—it is just a start. There are no doubt unknown sources, unfound clues, and leads that have yet to be uncovered.

BEFORE

This history is about anarchists—advocates of the theory of anarchism—or proponents of anarchy. By and large, those individuals and groups discussed within find affinity with a European concept of “anarchy” that desires a stateless society. This theory has an associated body of thought, a historical narrative, and a common set of basic principles.

However, it is worth remembering that while the anarchists of the European tradition have been largely unsuccessful in achieving anarchy, for most of human existence we lived as anarchists in a practical sense. That is, we lived in a state of “anarchy,” without states, without coercion, and without work.⁷ In the United States, the various peoples that inhabited the land before the European invasion by and large lived in classless and communitarian societies. They made decisions using consensus and discussions amongst those involved. They lived within the land and developed cultures dependent on the land.⁸

The area that is currently known as Grand Rapids was (and is) home to a variety of indigenous groups. A group that anthropologists call “The Hopewell” built a series of mounds in the Grand Rapids area, including several that were removed in what is now downtown Grand Rapids and seventeen that still exist south of the city. “The Hopewell” refers to a vast number of inter-related groups connected via trade networks and shared cultural expressions, existing from roughly 500 B.C.E. and 500 C.E. and stretching across much of the Midwest.⁹ Not much is specifically known about Hopewell governance or how they structure their societies. In what is now Michigan, other groups co-existed with the Hopewell.¹⁰ Following the Hopewell, for almost a thousand years prior indigenous people lived in semi-permanent villages where they engaged in hunting and gathering and small-scale cultivation.¹¹

By 1600 C.E. when Europeans came to the area, most natives living in what is now Michigan would have described themselves as “Anishnabeg.” They were a group of Algonquian speakers organized into kin groups and bands.¹² At the time, concepts of “tribes” and other political configurations were not particularly important, although the later day Ottawa were descendants of these groups.¹³ Kinship obligations were of primary importance with the nuclear family being the minimal unit of social organization, without which nobody could survive.¹⁴ Villages were ten to twenty households, comprising between 75 and 150 people.¹⁵ They grew crops (corn, beans and squash), with the addition of hunted and foraged foods.¹⁶ Their lives were tied to the land and each person had intimate knowledge of it.¹⁷ Cooperative giving was a key feature in society, in part based

- 32 Jacob McKean, “A Fury for Justice: Lucy Parsons And The Revolutionary Anarchist Movement in Chicago,” <http://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/jacob-mckean-a-fury-for-justice-lucy-parsons-and-the-revolutionary-anarchist-movement-in-chicag>
- 33 Ashbaugh, 34.
- 34 Ashbaugh, 53 and 63.
- 35 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 72.
- 36 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 72.
- 37 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 73.
- 38 Timothy Messer-Krause, *The Haymarket Conspiracy: Transatlantic Anarchist Networks*, (University of Illinois Press, 2012), 141-143.
- 39 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 91-92.
- 40 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 161.
- 41 Messer-Krause, *Haymarket Conspiracy*, 144.
- 42 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 150.
- 43 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 151.
- 44 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 156.
- 45 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 83-84.
- 46 Ashbaugh, 67.
- 47 Goyens, 108.
- 48 Goyens, 147.
- 49 Michael Johnston, “Heyday! The Labor Movement in 19th Century Grand Rapids”, *Grand River Valley History*, Vol. 22, 11.
- 50 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 123.
- 51 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 181-185.
- 52 Messer-Krause, *Haymarket Conspiracy*, 159.
- 53 Messer-Krause, *Haymarket Conspiracy*, 155-156.
- 54 Messer-Krause, *Haymarket Conspiracy*, 164.
- 55 “Eight Hours,” *Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, February 23, 1885, 4.
- 56 “Mr. August Spies,” *The Morning Telegram*, February 23, 1885, 2.
- 57 “Mr. August Spies,” 2.
- 58 Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870 to 1920*, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1983), 7.
- 59 “Grand Rapids – The Assemblies of the Knights of Labor Addressed by a Member of the International,” *The Alarm*, February 21, 1885, 5.
- 60 “Testimony of Luther V. Moulton, 1886 July 19,” <http://www.chicagohistory.org/hadc/transcript/volumei/251-300/1275-283.htm>
- 61 Timothy Messer-Krause, “The Haymarket Martyrs Guilty! So What?”, *Fifth Estate*, Spring 2011, 10.
- 62 “The Socialists,” *Grand Rapids Daily Democrat*, May 9, 1886, 2.
- 63 “Who Are the Anarchists?”, *Grand Rapids Daily Eagle*, October 15, 1886, 1.
- 64 Richard Oestreicher, “Robert Reitzel, Der Arme Teufel”, in Elliott Shore, et al., eds., *The German-American Radical Press: The Shaping of a Left Political Culture, 1850-1940*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 157.
- 65 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 55.
- 66 Albert Parsons, “What is Anarchism?” in Dave Roediger & Franklin Rosemont, *Haymarket Scrapbook*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1986), 27.
- 67 “The Socialists,” *Grand Rapids Daily Democrat*, May 9, 1886, 2.
- 68 “Bullet Not Ballot,” *Telegram Herald*, May 6, 1886, 1.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 319.
- 2 Paul Avrich, “Kropotkin in America,” *International Review of Social History*, 1980, 1.
- 3 Terence Kissack, *Free Comrades: Anarchism and Homosexuality in the United States 1895-1917*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2008), 22.
- 4 “A Bomb-Toting, Long-Haired, Wild-Eyed Fiend: The Image of the Anarchist in Popular Culture,” in Dave Roediger & Franklin Rosemont, eds., *Haymarket Scrapbook*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1986), 204.
- 5 “Press Fakes” in *The Blast: Complete Collection of the Incendiary San Francisco Bi-Monthly Anarchist Newspaper*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2005), 61.
- 6 Elias Sang, “Destroyers of Idols” in *The Blast*, 200.
- 7 Kevin Tucker, “Unintended Consequences,” in *For Wildness and Anarchy*, (Milwaukee: F.C. Press, 2010), 2.
- 8 Gord Hill, *500 Years of Indigenous Resistance*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2009), 7, 10.
- 9 Robert Silverberg, *The Mound Builders*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986), 222-223.
- 10 Charles E. Cleland, *Rites of Conquest: The History of Michigan’s Native Americans*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, Press, 1992), 21.
- 11 Cleland, 27.
- 12 Cleland, 39.
- 13 Cleland, 40.
- 14 Cleland, 42-44.
- 15 Cleland, 47.
- 16 Cleland, 47-48.
- 17 Cleland, 43.
- 18 Cleland, 56-57.
- 19 Cleland, 59-61.
- 20 Cleland, 86.
- 21 Cleland, 93.
- 22 James M. McClurken, “The Ottawa,” in *The People of the Three Fires: The Ottawa, Potawatomi and Ojibway of Michigan* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Inter-Tribal Council, 1986), 5-6.
- 23 McClurken, 5.
- 24 “May Day 2010!”, last modified February 11, 2010, <http://grsbuxunion.blogspot.com/2010/02/mayday-2010.html>
- 25 For more on the Chicago anarchists, see Bruce C. Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs: A Social History of Chicago’s Anarchists, 1870-1900*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988).
- 26 Frederic Trautmann, *The Voice of Terror: A Biography of Johann Most*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), 118-121.
- 27 Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 79.
- 28 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 85.
- 29 Avrich, *Haymarket*, 81.
- 30 Tom Goyens, *Beer and Revolution: The German Anarchist Movement in New York City, 1880-1914*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 152
- 31 Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary*, (Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1976), 87-88.

on the knowledge that the individual could not survive without the group.¹⁸ Group decisions were made on the basis of consensus with each individual knowing those who were making the decisions. Leaders offered advice, with all members of society having the occasion to be a “leader” depending on the specific skill in question.¹⁹

After European contact, various Algonquian-speaking groups moved into what is now Michigan from further east. Among these was the O-dah-wah or Adawa (Ottawa in French) who would eventually settle in the vicinity of Grand Rapids.²⁰ As a consequence of the “Iroquois Wars” and the experience of displacement, stronger collective identities emerged, with Anishnabeg peoples of Lower Michigan merging with recent refugees and becoming the larger groups that are now known as the Ottawa, Ojibway, and Potawatomi tribes.²¹

The values of kinship remained important to the Ottawa, as did respect for the individual, the belief in sharing material wealth, labor, and food, and the interconnected relationship of life.²² Each family in the village was represented by a leader—responsible for expressing the opinions of the family—were chosen by the family, taking into consideration their ability to deal with outsiders and their generosity. In turn, these leaders would select one individual to represent their needs to outsiders. Leaders would often assemble as a council to make important decisions, seeking a course of action on which all could agree (and frequently all the families). Leaders could not command anyone, but because the decisions were the product of intense consultation, typically they were carried out. Villages were also allowed to freely associate, coming together as needed.²³

The intent here is not to apply the labels of “anarchist” or “anarchism” to the indigenous peoples of what is now Michigan, but rather to raise questions and perhaps reorient our perspective a bit. If European anarchism—which for the most part seeks to retain many of the features of modern life (mass production, technology, etc.)—has failed thus far and indigenous societies functioned for hundreds of years in a state of relative equality, how does that influence our perspective? Is there perhaps something we could learn from these traditions about actual anarchy, as opposed to utopian ideals?

HAYMARKET & GRAND RAPIDS

One of the most famous episodes in anarchist history in the United States is what is referred to as “the Haymarket Affair.” Many books discuss Haymarket as a defining moment, one in which anarchist associations with violence were cemented, when anarchism lost its mass base, and when the public was forever

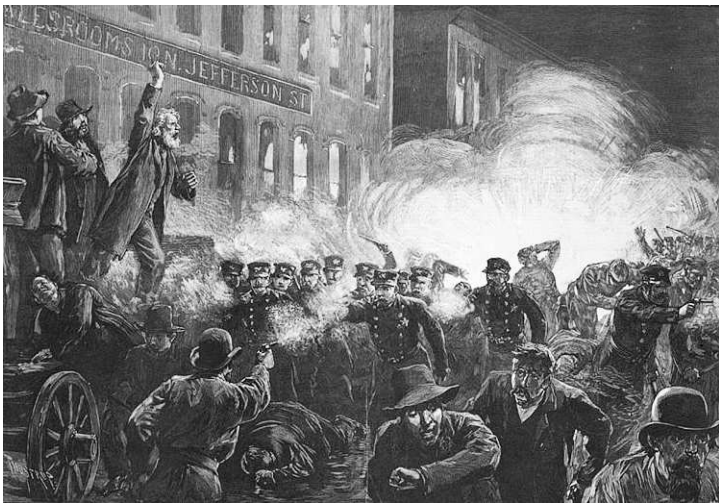
soured on anarchism. In anarchist circles, it is a mythical event, giving way to anarchism's most famous martyrs and revolutionary heroes who have been remembered for over one-hundred years.

Across the United States in 1886, May Day—May 1st—had been designated as a day for protests in support of the eight-hour work day. In countless cities, thousands of workers took to the street—including 7,000 workers with the Knights of Labor here in Grand Rapids.²⁴ In Chicago, some 30,000 to 40,000 workers participated in a General Strike. At a demonstration on May 3rd in solidarity with union workers locked out of the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, police opened fire on the demonstrators and killed two.

In response to this, anarchists—among them August Spies who spoke that day at the McCormick plant—called for a “mass meeting” at Haymarket Square. The first batch of fliers for the meeting called on workers to come armed. At the meeting, several prominent anarchists in Chicago spoke to a crowd that ranged from 600-3,000. As the speeches were nearing their end, several police officers marched up the street and their commander ordered the crowd to disperse. Almost immediately after this, a bomb was thrown at the police officers—killing one immediately and mortally wounding six others. There was an exchange of gun fire and four civilians were killed and dozens wounded on each side.

In the ensuing days, police launched a massive investigation, rounding up anarchists across the city of Chicago. Eventually, nine prominent anarchists were charged—the eight “Haymarket Martyrs” (Albert Parsons, August Spies, Louis Lingg, George Engel, Adolph Fischer—all of whom were killed, along with Michael Schwab and Samuel Fielden) and a man named Rudolph Schnaubelt

were targeted and was yet another time—like Haymarket or World War I—when anarchists lost ground and suffered temporary setbacks.



Newspaper Illustration of Haymarket Incident

was suspicious of the play, saying that it was disrespectful and dangerous as it could inspire more people to become anarchists and act as Czolgosz did.²⁵⁰ In nearby Grand Haven, a meeting was convened on the threat of anarchy with those in attendance passing resolutions “...that expressed their condemnation of anarchy and its doctrines” and asking Congress to pass anti-anarchist resolutions.²⁵¹ *The Evening Press* in Grand Rapids denounced some of the anti-anarchist activity—expressing doubts at its effectiveness—but also editorialized that the nation’s police departments must keep a close eye on anarchists and use spies to gather information.²⁵² Beyond this, radicals appeared to distance themselves from the assassination as well, with a local socialist writing into *The Evening Press* to denounce anarchism and those who confuse it with socialism (which the author argues is orderly and organized compared with the chaos and disorganization of anarchism).²⁵³

Anti-Anarchist Legislation

On the national level, President Theodore Roosevelt spoke out against anarchists when he delivered his first message to Congress in December of 1901. He described anarchists as “...the enemy of humanity, the enemy of all mankind, and his is a deeper degree of criminality than any other.”²⁵⁴ Roosevelt called for anarchists to be removed from the United States and barred from entering the country.²⁵⁵ Roosevelt’s rhetoric mixed with public anti-anarchist sentiment and coalesced into a broad push for anti-anarchist legislation. While in many ways this wasn’t new, Czolgosz’s act and recent anarchist assassinations in Europe helped push the legislation through. In the years before McKinley’s assassination, there had been various attempts to use federal legislation to target anarchists. Proposed laws in 1888 sought to remove “dangerous aliens” from the United States and specifically targeted anyone who was an “avowed anarchist or nihilist.” In the 1890s various immigration laws sought to exclude anarchists.²⁵⁶ However, these were never passed, owing to various political factors. Yet in the wake of McKinley’s assassination, such bills were popular. The federal legislature passed a bill adding “anarchists, or persons who believe in or advocate the overthrow by force of violence of all governments, or of all forms of law, or the assassination of public officials” to the list of excluded immigrants.²⁵⁷ The law remained on the books until 1990.²⁵⁸ At the state level, anarchist writings and speeches were banned in New York, New Jersey, and Wisconsin.²⁵⁹

The legislation had little effect on anarchist activity and few anarchists were excluded from the country: the actual number of anarchists excluded from 1903 to 1921 was only 38.²⁶⁰ However, the McKinley era repression made anarchist organizing all the more difficult as they were consistently denied spaces, harassed, and targeted by the government. Anarchists continued to publish, meet, and network—thereby continuing their struggle. The repression that followed the assassination of McKinley was one of the many periods in which anarchists

whom the police believed threw the bomb (he was arrested twice but let go each time by the police and went into hiding for the rest of his life). Over the course of a lengthy trial, the eight were eventually convicted and five of the men were hung. Since that time, they have been remembered in a number of different ways ranging from martyrs to the anarchist cause to victims of a state-sponsored judicial witch-hunt. There has been a fair amount of sanitizing of the anarchists’ views, with many reducing the event down to a simple fight for the eight-hour day rather than an event in the history of a revolutionary current that sought the destruction of the state.

At the time of the Haymarket rally, Chicago’s anarchists had a powerful presence. They had built a multi-faceted movement that consisted of multiple labor unions, newspapers, meeting halls, bars, publishing houses, and the like. There were social opportunities—ranging from dances to picnics—along with plentiful opportunities to talk politics and organize. Many anarchists in Chicago—including some of the Haymarket Martyrs—had affiliated with the International Working People’s Association (occasionally known as “The Black International”), an effort to build an international anarchist organization. A prominent current amongst the Chicago anarchists believed that the state and capitalism would not fall by peaceful means and as such the anarchists organized numerous armed groups. Militias like the Lehr und Wehr Verein held regular exercises and target practice. Still other groups experimented with the use of dynamite and the building of bombs.²⁵



This context—a revolutionary anarchist movement that was to some degree preparing for a confrontation with capital—is important to understanding the Haymarket Affair. This fact was not lost on the prosecution in the case, who did not need to show that the men on trial threw the bomb, but rather that they were part of a general conspiracy that furthered this act. Over the course of the trial, they presented numerous witnesses—including anarchists who became informants—who shed light on an armed movement that had taken some steps towards confrontation with the state (for example, in advance of the meeting Louis Lingg rushed to make several bombs—fragments of which were found at the site).

As a large industrial city near Chicago with visible radical currents, Grand Rapids had several interesting connections to the Haymarket incident. Grand Rapids had a local affiliate of the International Working People’s Association, regularly hosted anarchist speakers, and was even an alleged hideout for Albert Parsons after the Haymarket incident.

The Chicago Background

Much of Chicago's anarchist space was centered on the International Working People's Association (IWPA). The IWPA was a relatively loose federation of anarchist groups that circulated propaganda and organized for the revolution. Johann Most—the notorious anarchist whose name would forever be associated with the advocacy of terrorism—had laid much of the ground work for the establishment of the IWPA by touring the United States in 1882. The tour led to an increasing circulation of his newspaper *Freiheit* and the proliferation of anarchist groups in the cities where he spoke.²⁶ These initial contacts and new groups would form the basis of the IWPA.

The IWPA—which operated as a loose federation of groups—grew rapidly with its base in Chicago.²⁷ Chicago was “the principle stronghold of the movement” according to historian Paul Avrich, with the largest number of anarchists, groups, publications, etc.²⁸ Anarchists had an easy time recruiting new members in light of the economic recession. IWPA affiliated speakers frequently toured the country speaking in labor halls parks, and other such places. They clearly articulated their revolutionary politics and spoke to thousands of people during the years 1883 to 1886.²⁹ Additionally, they published extensively, circulating thousands of pamphlets and publishing a number of newspapers. Unlike many other radical groups of the period, the IWPA welcomed women into the group (although this varied from city to city and it was still male-dominated on the whole).³⁰ Lucy Parsons and Lizzie Swank (later Holmes) were among the most radical and militant members of the group.³¹ Parsons routinely pushed against the boundaries of the anarchist theory of the time, exploring race, strategies for insurrection, and the limits of western “civilization.”³² Parsons had fought against the male dominance of the socialist movement in the 1870s³³ and played an important role in the IWPA, become an assistant editor and contributor to *The Alarm*, and a frequent lecturer.³⁴

Two of the Haymarket defendants—August Spies and Albert Parsons—were prominent participants at the conference that founded the IWPA.³⁵ They were labor activists, believing that labor was a vehicle for anarchism. In their home city of Chicago, anarchist-dominated unions provided a constant challenge to the reformism that characterizes trade unionism. However, within the IWPA a debate



Masthead of Johann Most's *Freiheit*

owing to the fact that Czolgosz had approached them.²⁴⁰ In Pittsburgh, a mob attempted to lynch a friend of Emma Goldman's; in New York, a man tried to enlist men to travel to Patterson, NJ to kill as many of that town's anarchists as they could find; also in New York, a mob attacked the offices of the anarchist newspaper *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*; and in Guffery Hollow, Pennsylvania, armed men intimidated an anarchist colony and forced them to flee.²⁴¹ The Home Colony anarchist community in Washington was also targeted, with several sensational news reports criticizing Home Colony accompanied by government efforts to suppress their publications.²⁴² In the town of Spring Valley, Illinois, residents were outraged by the town's Italian anarchist community and their defense of Czolgosz, leading a campaign that resulted in the government shutting down the anarchist newspaper *L'Aurora*.²⁴³ Additionally, public meetings of anarchists were suppressed in Cleveland and outlawed outright in Newark.²⁴⁴ Direct government repression largely centered on attempts to prove that there was a conspiracy, but they found no such evidence.²⁴⁵ The federal government pursued anarchists for evidence of a conspiracy into 1902, hunting down acquaintances and relatives of Czolgosz in Detroit and Chicago.²⁴⁶ In the end, all of the government investigations mirrored Czolgosz's repeated declarations that he acted alone.²⁴⁷

Anarchists Targeted in Grand Rapids

This anti-anarchist activity reached into Grand Rapids, Michigan, just as the anti-anarchist repression following Haymarket had. On the day after President McKinley was shot, an article in a local newspaper reported that in local law enforcement officials affiliated with the federal government kept close tabs on anarchists in the area.²⁴⁸ This reveals that there was an anarchist presence in the city and that to some degree anarchists were still seen as a threat. As was the case in the popular reaction to McKinley's assassination, much the anti-anarchist sentiment in Grand Rapids was directed by area residents and not the government. A letter to *The Evening Press* suggested that “the pack of human wolves” known as anarchists should be “exterminated,” just as early settlers of the western United States exterminated wolves and Native Americans.²⁴⁹ Ironically, a few weeks after McKinley's assassination a play was performed at a local theater that had an anarchist for a hero. In the play, the anarchist repeatedly expresses support for killing tyrants and rulers. A local newspaper



Newspaper Graphic Blaming Goldman

reform clubs and workers' groups during the 1890s while working in factories.²²⁸ His interest in social issues eventually led him to anarchism and socialism and he regularly attended meetings on both in Cleveland.²²⁹ In May of 1901, Czolgosz attended a lecture by Emma Goldman in Cleveland and became more inspired to follow an anarchist path.²³⁰ Following the lecture, he consulted an anarchist named Emil Schilling that he knew in the Cleveland area and expressed that he was fed up with socialists and left with a book on the Haymarket anarchists.²³¹ At this time, Czolgosz clumsily inquired about anarchist "secret societies" that might be planning assassinations, which gained suspicion from Schilling.²³² A few weeks later, Czolgosz went to Chicago to track down Emma Goldman and the editors of *Free Society*—the major English language anarchist newspaper at the time. He again inquired about anarchist "secret meetings" and once again his request was rebuked and raised suspicion. Following Czolgosz's departure from town, *Free Society* published a warning that Czolgosz was a spy.²³³ A few days later, Czolgosz shot McKinley and in his confession declared that he was an anarchist who didn't "...believe we should have any rulers. It is right to kill them."²³⁴

As would be expected, there was no monolithic anarchist reaction to the assassination, instead anarchists held differing views ranging from support, outright opposition, and opposition on tactical grounds.²³⁵ Among Czolgosz's most prominent defenders was Emma Goldman who tried to organize meetings about the assassination (the police wouldn't allow them) and who wrote an article in *Free Society* defending the act.²³⁶ However, many anarchists maintained their distance. Italian anarchists criticized this approach, saying that such acts should be welcomed.²³⁷ A few years after his execution, Voltairine de Cleyre wrote an essay saying that it was the state who created such assassins and that one should hardly be surprised that in response to the "hells of capitalism" that there would "be some who would rise up and strike back."²³⁸

Anti-Anarchist Repression

Following the McKinley assassination, anti-anarchist repression was widespread making it difficult to organize. Prominent anarchists such as Emma Goldman and Johann Most were imprisoned, anarchists limited public activities, and vigilantes in numerous towns campaigned against them.²³⁹ Several members of the group that published the anarchist newspaper *Free Society* in Chicago were arrested,

emerged early on in which anarchists associated with Johann Most rejected labor unions, arguing that they pacified workers and were too large and bureaucratic.³⁶ In opposition to this, Spies and Parsons articulated a view that rejected electoral politics but remained supportive of unions, believing that they shouldn't be used for short term gains but rather as an instrument of social revolution that challenged the existing order. Parsons saw them as "an autonomous commune in the process of incubation" with the unions becoming the basic structures of a new social system that would replace capitalism.³⁷ Essentially, the IWPA adopted a strategy of "boring from within" where they participated—perhaps grudgingly—in unions while trying to radicalize workers.³⁸ Chicago's Central Labor Union was a coalition of unions closely associated with the IWPA that advocated revolutionary views, eventually growing into the largest union coalition in the city.³⁹ In combination with creating revolutionary unions, the IWPA encouraged workers to arm themselves and took steps to do so in Chicago and across the country.⁴⁰ The IWPA was also fiercely hostile towards "reformist" unions and frequently confronted them in print and in public and challenged their politics.⁴¹

It is also worth pointing out that neither the Haymarket Martyrs, the Chicago anarchist space, nor the IWPA were monolithic. There was extensive debate over politics and strategy. One tendency was the "autonomist" tendency that grew in opposition to Johann Most. Paul Avrich describes them as "anarchists of an implacable and ultra-militant stamp" who rejected even the slightest hint of compromise.⁴² Of the Haymarket anarchists, Engel and Fischer were associated with this wing of the movement. They embraced decentralization, spontaneity, and individual action.⁴³ They had their own publication called *Der Anarchist* with the tagline "We Hate Authority."⁴⁴ With the IWPA's loose structure, debates such as these took place in publications and across its networks.

Despite internal differences, the IWPA grew quickly. At its height in the fall of 1885, the IWPA had around 100 groups. They were in the obvious places—New York, St. Louis, Philadelphia, etc.—but also nearby cities like Grand Rapids and Muskegon.⁴⁵ August Spies estimated that the IWPA had 10,000-12,000 members in the period of July 1885 to July 1886 and its newspapers were read by around 21,000 people.⁴⁶ Other estimates vary, giving the IWPA 3,000 members and 4,000 sympathizers immediately after the Pittsburgh Proclamation⁴⁷ or 10,000 anarchists by 1886.⁴⁸

Grand Rapids' Chicago Anarchist Connection

As a large nearby city with a rapidly industrializing economy, Chicago anarchists frequently traveled to Grand Rapids.⁴⁹ August Spies spoke regularly across the country, doing on either behalf of the IWPA or the Knights of Labor (he was briefly a member).⁵⁰ He visited Grand Rapids on February 22, 1885 to speak on the movement for the eight-hour day. As a prominent component of the labor



A PERIODICAL OF ANARCHIST THOUGHT, WORK, AND LITERATURE.

movement, the Chicago anarchists had taken a major role in the struggle.⁵¹ They became involved after being pressured by workers in the Central Labor Union, although much of the IWPA leadership was critical of the eight-hour movement.⁵² They remained critical up until May 1, 1886, but held out hope that it would result in a direct conflict with capital and continued their calls for workers to take up arms.⁵³ In the days before May 1, they framed it as a temporary move on the path towards revolution.⁵⁴



August Spies

Spies delivered multiple lectures in English and German while in Grand Rapids. According to *The Grand Rapids Evening Leader*, his main focus was the struggle for the 8-hour day, which he said would eliminate many of “the labor ills” in the country.⁵⁵ However, another newspaper reported Spies’ having a more aggressive tone that was more consistent with his anarchist beliefs. Speaking to a “large audience” in German and an audience of more than two-hundred in English, Spies delivered an address that rejected the state’s ability to deliver on the demand for eight-hour day.⁵⁶ He was “applauded frequently” during an address that harshly criticized the press and the priests for justifying labor’s exploitation. Spies argued for direct action by workers on their own behalf, stating:

“You may talk about legislation. The state cannot help us. An eight-hour labor law cannot be enforced. It would be evaded with the present condition of society. When the people want to work eight hours or five hours then they won’t work but five hours, and no law will be needed. Necessity will yet (and soon) compel the wage-workers to take back a part of that which has been taken from them.”⁵⁷

For the purposes of this history, the fact that Spies found a receptive audience speaks to the presence of anarchist and radical ideas within the labor movement in Grand Rapids. Grand Rapids was one of many cities that had a strong culture of German immigrants who advocated socialist ideas.⁵⁸ Spies stated in *The Alarm* that the “labor movement was quite active and intelligent in Grand Rapids and that workingmen there have decided to arm and prepare for the social revolution.”⁵⁹ While little was reported on who hosted his talk, testimony in the Haymarket case indicates that it was a man named “Tandler”—who was associated with a group of armed German socialists.⁶⁰

Jumping ahead a bit in the story, what’s almost as interesting as what Spies said in public that night is what he is alleged to have said in private. According to Luther Moulton—who introduced him at the talk—Spies told him that the anarchists were preparing plans for generalized insurrection and were arming themselves to that end.⁶¹

That newspaper would eventually become the statewide organ of the Michigan Federation of Labor (of which Labadie was president) and as such was host to many written debates over the direction of the group, including a several month argument across several issues in which Labadie argued an anarchist anti-political case regarding political debates and participation in electoral politics.

In 1890, Labadie spoke in Grand Rapids at the invitation of the Furniture Workers’ Protective Association. While the talk was billed as a discussion on the eight-hour day, based on newspaper coverage it seems to have been a basic articulation of Labadie’s anarchist views.²²⁰ To a crowd of 500 to 600 people, Labadie encouraged the crowd to join unions – and in characteristic fashion – encouraged them to do so not for the benefit of other workers, but for their own individual gain in terms of shorter hours and higher wages.²²¹ He stressed that workers must act together without politicians to secure these demands, an anarchist view. He also heaped scorn on landlords whom he said profit off workers’ misery, while doing nothing to help society. He encouraged people to “circulate views antagonistic to landlords”²²² and also to seize vacant lots and build homes on them.²²³

Labadie advocated non-violent means during the talk, with a newspaper stating that “he would not make the changes proposed by force or smash anyone’s head, or blow them up with dynamite.”²²⁴ Instead, he encouraged workers in Grand Rapids to join together to form unions following a three-part plan beginning with organization, then education, and finally action. As part of this, public meetings and discussions were considered to be of utmost importance.²²⁵

Throughout his life, Labadie contributed to the anarchist press and continued to undertake efforts aimed at promoting anarchist ideas. He hosted speakers such as Emma Goldman and Peter Kropotkin in Detroit²²⁶ and opened his own print shop that he used to publish anarchist propaganda and revolutionary poetry.²²⁷ During his life Labadie also saved his correspondence and amassed a huge collection of anarchist pamphlets, publications, and related materials, which he eventually donated to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. It’s housed there as the Labadie Collection and is one of the foremost collections of anarchist materials in North America.

MCKINLEY'S ASSASSINATION

In 1901, an anarchist named Leon Czolsoz—a native of Michigan—assassinated President William McKinley. Despite government efforts to prove a conspiracy, Czolsoz was a solitary individual who acted of his own accord in assassinating McKinley. In the years before the assassination, Czolsoz participated in various

via the Michigan Federation of Labor.²¹⁰ In his labor activism, Labadie took many respectable stances against participation in electoral politics and most importantly, opposed the racism that characterized the labor movement of the day.²¹¹

Labadie embraced a wide-range of efforts over the years, often times taking seemingly contradictory stances or articulating views that gained him strong rebukes from his anarchist comrades. Labadie believed that various causes—”the Trade Unionists, Single Taxers, Socialists, I.W.W., Communists, etc., etc., all help”—in the effort towards anarchism, although he admitted that “some use better weapons than others.”²¹²



Jo Labadie in 1890

For example, he supported Grover Cleveland for president in 1888, arguing that Cleveland’s plan to reduce tariffs promoted free trade which was “anarchy in the exchange of products.”²¹³ During the Homestead Strike, he attacked strikers for resorting to violence against the hired Pinkerton Detectives, saying that the armed resistance was simply a riot and not a legitimate expression of resistance (he even went so far as to say that industrialist Henry Clay Frick had the right to hire whomever he wanted). At the same time, he declared his support for Alexander Berkman’s attempt to assassinate Frick.²¹⁴ In 1901, he went to great lengths to try to prove that Leon Czolozogz—the declared anarchist assassin of President William McKinley—wasn’t an anarchist.²¹⁵ His proof? Czolozogz was a registered Republican in Cleveland and had voted in Republican primaries. Despite his occasionally bizarre views, Labadie advocated anarchism for years, becoming a somewhat well-regarded figure in Detroit.²¹⁶ Whereas other cities were characterized by anti-anarchist repression, Detroit had Jo Labadie, a quirky anarchist who the press repeatedly portrayed as “mild-mannered.”²¹⁷

Labadie in Grand Rapids

As a prominent labor organizer in Michigan, Labadie regularly traveled around the state to give talks on a wide range of subjects. In addition, he also wrote extensively for the labor and radical press in the state. Labadie was a regular contributor to at least two Grand Rapids-based labor papers. His writings appeared in *The Grand Rapids Daily Democrat* in the 1880s²¹⁸ and in the later part of that decade and into the 1890s, he wrote for *The Workman*, a Knights of Labor newspaper that continued publishing even after that organization’s decline.²¹⁹

The Grand Rapids Anarchists

While the rhetoric of anarchism and socialism in Grand Rapids seems to be tamer than what was being uttered in Chicago, the radicals maintained a presence and continued their agitation. Reports in newspapers indicate that anarchists and socialists (a term used interchangeably and without nuance in the local press) had been around for some time in the city.⁶² Even critics who bemoaned the presence of advocates of “anarchy, murder and robbery” were forced to acknowledge that there were anarchists in the city and that their publications had circulated for years.⁶³ Among these were likely IWPA newspapers, but also *Der Arme Teufel* out of Detroit which had a substantial circulation across Michigan.⁶⁴ Adding to the confusion of identifying specifically anarchist currents is the fact that many anarchists continued to use the “socialist” label until the mid-1880s, even as their “socialism” referred to a specific “anti-statist, anti-parliamentarian, and anti-reformist” view.⁶⁵ Albert Parsons explained:

“There are two distinct phases of socialism in the labor movement throughout the world today. One is known as anarchism, without political government or authority, the other is known as state socialism or paternalism, or governmental control of everything. The state socialist seeks to ameliorate and emancipate the wage laborers by means of law, by legislative enactments. The state socialists demand the right to choose their own rulers. Anarchists would have neither rulers nor law-makers of any kind. The anarchists seek the same ends by the abrogation of law, by the abolition of all government, leaving the people free to unite or disunite as fancy or interest may dictate; coercing no one, driving no party.”⁶⁶

According to the newspapers of the time, there was at least one formally organized socialist group in Grand Rapids.⁶⁷ The group met weekly on the west side of Grand Rapids at Koch’s Hall. The group was dismissed in the press as being mainly for people of “foreign birth,” but at the time anarchism and socialism were the strongest in German communities. Estimates of participants vary, with newspaper accounts ranging from 40 to 300.⁶⁸ According to a press report citing one of the members, the organization kept no records of its members. A name that came up in the aftermath of Haymarket is Joseph Tandler. He seems to have been a leading figure in the group and organized the speaking engagement here in Grand Rapids for August Spies in 1885.⁶⁹ He described it as a “debating club” that discussed labor issues while also practicing their shooting skills on the outskirts of town.⁷⁰ Apparently, the local reporter missed the fact that the group was affiliated with the International Working People’s Association, the very group to which many associated with the Haymarket incident belonged.

In the year leading up to Haymarket, an IWPA local met monthly at Koch’s Hall at

THE ALARM.

Masthead of The Alarm, English Language Newspaper of the IWPA

123 Stocking Street in Grand Rapids. Ed. Wiedmaan severed as secretary.⁷¹ Their contact information is reprinted until *The Alarm* was suppressed after which point not much is known about them. As mentioned earlier, the Grand Rapids Group was involved in bringing August Spies to speak in Grand Rapids in 1885 and 1886.⁷² In addition, it was a regular contributor to the general fund of the IWPA, with both individual and group contributions being made. For example, in October of 1885, the Grand Rapids Group gave \$3.00 directly to publishing *The Alarm*, one of highest contributions listed.⁷³ Knowing that their views were often isolated within a radical German immigrant subculture, German anarchists placed great importance on the publication of English language literature.⁷⁴ Contributions such as these were used to continue propaganda on behalf anarchism, with the IWPA's "Bureau of Information" circulating some 387,527 books, pamphlets, and circulars during the six months preceding November 1885.⁷⁵ Money was also used to fund newspapers and agitational tours.

According to research into other German anarchist groups, it is possible to generalize a bit about how the Grand Rapids IWPA was organized. Groups were required to have a minimum of nine members, often splitting into multiple groups as they grew in order to maintain their autonomy. Groups had chairperson, corresponding and recording secretaries, a treasurer, and sometimes a librarian/archivist. Many also had a contact person who coordinated the distribution of Johann Most's *Freiheit*.⁷⁶ Groups organized weekly meetings which were the cornerstone of the movement.⁷⁷ It was at these meetings that members developed camaraderie, coordinated projects, and made plans. Meetings tended to a split between "business" meetings devoted to internal affairs and "public" meetings that hosted topical discussions.⁷⁸ Lectures were important ways to reach new people and develop members' collective knowledge,⁷⁹ while fundraising and propaganda were other important tasks.⁸⁰ The shooting clubs—aside from the ideological and practical motivations—also were valuable for socializing and political discussions.⁸¹ The groups had regularity with a consistent address and schedule so that interested workers could find them.⁸²

Their basic political beliefs were summarized in the Pittsburgh Proclamation to which all groups adhered:

First: Destruction of the existing class rule, by all means, i.e., by energetic, relentless, revolutionary, and international action.

Second: Establishment of a free society based upon cooperative organization of production.

the repression that followed President McKinley's assassination by the anarchist Leon Czolgosz—she remained an uncompromising advocate of anarchy, even as others left the anarchist movement out of fear.²⁰² Moreover, she argued against those who advocated shedding the "anarchist" label for something friendlier—such as "libertarian"—arguing that anarchism was the only word that has the power to "stir the moral pulses of the world."²⁰³ Even in declining health near the end of her life and with increasing doubt that she would see the anarchist future she dedicated her life to, de Cleyre continued to busy herself with political work, raising awareness and money for the anarchists in the Mexican Revolution.²⁰⁴

JO LABADIE

Over the years, many prominent anarchists passed through Grand Rapids on speaking tours aimed at spreading anarchist ideas and strengthening the movement that existed in Grand Rapids. Among those who passed through town was Joseph "Jo" Labadie, a well-known Detroit anarchist who was active in the labor movement in the 1800s and a proponent of individualist anarchism.

Background

Labadie was born in Paw Paw in Michigan in 1850. Unlike much of the anarchist movement in the United States, Labadie was born in the United States, challenging the prevailing myth that anarchism was a menacing foreign ideology. Labadie started his political career as a socialist before becoming involved with the Knights of Labor and eventually becoming an anarchist in the early 1880s. He was an advocate of individualist anarchism, a view popularized by Benjamin Tucker and his long-running newspaper *Liberty*, of which Labadie was a contributor. Essentially, it advocated "a utopia where each individual was sovereign, free to live in any manner that did not infringe on the rights of others, so long as others were granted that right equally."²⁰⁵ They did not articulate a specific vision for the future, instead believing that individuals should be free to work out the system they wanted to participate in without being compelled to join anything against their will.²⁰⁶

Unlike many proponents of individualist anarchism, Labadie was an active participant in the organized labor movement and various other movements aimed at reform and/or revolution.²⁰⁷ For example, he was present at the founding congress of the International Workingpeople's Association (IWA).²⁰⁸ He organized with the Knights of Labor before parting ways with the organization as it came to repudiate radicals and in particular refused to support the Haymarket anarchists.²⁰⁹ He went on to work with the American Federation of Labor (AFL)

people of the world together. You lifted out of the obscurity of the common man five names, and set them as beacons upon a hill. You sent the word Anarchy ringing through every workshop.”¹⁹⁰

De Cleyre took up the work of popularizing her new-found anarchist belief at a fever pitch, making it her life’s work. While she remained a free-thinker, she criticized some of the freethought movement’s views, especially its belief in small reforms which she referred to as “folly.”¹⁹¹ She also made efforts to convince the freethought movement that its logical progression was anarchism and that the pursuit of the anarchist ideal must be the focus of the movement. There had long been an overlap between the movements and de Cleyre’s work sought to increase this affinity.¹⁹² As she would with the anarchist space, de Cleyre also criticized the freethought movement for not focusing more attention on gender and patriarchy.¹⁹³

After moving to Philadelphia in 1889, de Cleyre’s work was devoted to developing anarchist ideas. She advocated for a synthesis approach to anarchism, whereby she rejected economic labels—such as “communist” or “individualist”—and instead argued for a united approach that would limit factional quarreling.¹⁹⁴ Much of her work revolved around this theme and she was a prolific contributor to the anarchist press, writing for publications including *Lucifer*, *Free Society*, *Mother Earth*, and the *Fraye Arbeter Shtime*.¹⁹⁵ During the 1890s, de Cleyre also spent considerable effort trying to convince liberals to become anarchists by participating in debates and reform group discussions.¹⁹⁶ She took up several important topics: confronting sexism and the subservient position of women in society, exploring the popular myth that anarchism was a foreign ideology (see “Anarchism and American Traditions”), and developing the theory of anarchist direct action. De Cleyre continued to theorize anarcho-feminist ideas and while there was no formal anarcho-feminist organization or effort, the debates took place across various anarchist papers in the 1880s and 1890s.¹⁹⁷ While the “mainstream” feminist movement pursued legal arguments, limited its criticism of social and family structures, and emphasized the superiority of women, anarcho-feminists like de Cleyre continued to present a deeper critique of marriage, the family, and gender.¹⁹⁸ Her most popular works—“Anarchism and American Traditions,” “Direct Action,” and “The Dominant Idea”—were re-published as pamphlets by *Mother Earth* and were sold by the thousands at lectures and meetings across the country.¹⁹⁹ She also helped Alexander Berkman edit his *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*.²⁰⁰

Aside from her writing, Voltairine de Cleyre engaged in the nuts-and-bolts work that was essential to making anarchism a force during her lifetime. She organized meetings, groups, lecture tours, book clubs, defense funds, and the like to expose people to anarchist ideas.²⁰¹ She believed in the importance of this work and was active in it throughout her life. Even in difficult periods—such as

Third: Free exchange of equivalent products by and between the productive organizations without commerce and profit-mongery.

Fourth: Organization of education on a secular, scientific, and equal basis for both sexes.

Fifth: Equal rights for all without distinction of sex or race.

Sixth: Regulation of all public affairs by free contract between the autonomous (independent) communes and associations, resting on a federalistic basis.

This proclamation was made available by the IWPA and was easy to order in multiple languages for distribution by local groups.⁸³

From the limited amount revealed in newspaper accounts from the time, the activities of the Grand Rapids Group seem similar to other armed groups that grew across the country. In the 1870s many of these groups formed, with one of the earliest forming in Chicago in 1875 and becoming known as the Lehr-und-Wehr Verein (Education and Defense Society).⁸⁴ The groups formed specifically in response to the brutality of the police during the great strike of 1877 when police regularly broke up socialist meetings, arrested socialists, and used weapons against workers. Numerous groups in Chicago—the Bohemian Sharpshooters, Jaeger Verein, Irish Labor Guards, and the aforementioned Lehr-und-Wehr Verein trained with and stockpiled weapons.⁸⁵ Within the larger context of the International Working People’s Association, armed groups proliferated quickly. This is consistent with reports of the armed socialists in Grand Rapids.⁸⁶ Moreover, the advocacy of armed groups—along with the rejection of the ballot as a means for social change—was enthusiastically taken up by many recent German immigrants, many of whom had come to the United States seeking refuge from anti-socialist laws in Germany.⁸⁷

May 1, 1886 in Grand Rapids

As anarchists and others faced off in Chicago, Grand Rapids’ anarchists and socialists may have played a minimal role in the May 1 demonstrations in support of the eight-hour day. For months in advance of May 1, there had been a struggle between workers and factory owners over the issue. Local unions met regularly on the topic⁸⁸ and eventually demanded that the bosses give them an eight-hour workday.⁸⁹ Much of the local organizing was done via the Knights of Labor which supported the movement while maintaining a generally conservative stance as opposed to the revolutionary anarchism espoused by significant portions of the Chicago movement and the Grand Rapids Group.

In Grand Rapids, some 7,000 Knights of Labor held an impromptu march in

downtown on May 1.⁹⁰ The majority of industries acquiesced to the demand⁹¹ and *The New York Times* included Grand Rapids in its round-up of May 1st news stating that there was “no difficulty” in the city.⁹² However, things weren’t all quiet. The press reported that there was a group of workers—sometimes described as “socialists”—who took independent action and agitated for workers to stay away from work. According reports, the workers attempted to overturn wagons, convince workers to walk off the job, and gave “socialistic speeches.”⁹³ Similar actions occurred several days later, causing the police to intervene and the press to denounce the actions as those of “anarchists”⁹⁴ and “unorganized hoodlums.”⁹⁵ Several men were arrested, but in subsequent press reports nothing of substance is ever reported to verify that the actions were indeed those of socialists.⁹⁶ Perhaps this was the work of IWPA anarchists acting—as they had in Chicago—to escalate demands once 8-hour demands were met.⁹⁷

Anti-Anarchist Repression in Grand Rapids

In the aftermath of Haymarket, anarchists in Grand Rapids were faced with repression and scrutiny. A few days after the incident, it was reported that the anarchists were denied their regular meeting spot at Koch’s Hall. According to Koch, the socialists—about 25—had been regularly meeting at the Hall for “a long time,” but he decided to deny them their meeting place once he found out their beliefs.⁹⁸ Grand Rapids’ mayor at the time accepted citizen tips on leading socialists and was quoted saying that he was compiling all the tips in a “handy notebook.” He further said that he “shall use every effort” to make sure that they couldn’t organize, drill, or give speeches within the city limits.⁹⁹ Presumably, some form of repression carried on for over a year, as a speech given in support of the Haymarket Martyrs in October of 1887 was attended by several uniformed and undercover police officers.¹⁰⁰

Predictably, the local press was happy to feed the anti-anarchist hype and let loose with all manner of insults aimed at anarchists. Headlines reading “ANARCHISTS” and referring to their efforts as “The Reign of Terror” were commonplace.¹⁰¹ *The Telegram-Herald*—while billing itself as “the true friend” of workers—denounced anarchists, whom they described as a “commune.”¹⁰² This was consistent with what appeared elsewhere across the country.¹⁰³ In West Michigan, anarchists were denounced as “reptiles,”¹⁰⁴ while numerous punishments were recommended including dynamite¹⁰⁵, Gatling guns¹⁰⁶, and hanging them from lampposts for all to see.¹⁰⁷ This continued for over a year; a week after the anarchists’ executions the press was still at it, running a story claiming that August Spies only real goal in life was the “conquest” of female lovers, not socialism.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, anarchists were almost universally denounced as foreigners with an ideology contrary to “American” values.¹⁰⁹ One particularly vile example was printed in the *Grand Rapids Telegram-Herald*:



Masthead of Liberty, One Of The Newspapers de Cleyre Read

changes in her life. While always skeptical of organized religion—she formally cast aside religion for good during this period. She also adopted a series of name changes, going by “Voltairine De Claire” to “Voltairine de Claire” and eventually “Voltairine de Cleyre.”¹⁸²

A letter written from de Cleyre in Grand Rapids to her mother on December 18, 1887, speaks to the rapid changes she was going through. In it, de Cleyre wrote “if I advocate new and strange ideas it is because I think them right” stating that she had “the same thoughts for more than two years.”¹⁸³ While de Cleyre wrote that she is neither a socialist or an anarchist, she defends anarchy, asking what it is that makes murder by anarchists (if it was even so in the case of Haymarket) worse than the murder by corporations. The letter was written just a few days after de Cleyre’s first exposure to socialism at a lecture by Clarence Darrow and a month before her turn to anarchism.¹⁸⁴ She briefly adopted the socialist label and worked to incorporate socialist ideas into her freethought writings and lectures.¹⁸⁵ However, this was a short-lived conversion, as de Cleyre quickly became an anarchist after encountering Benjamin Tucker’s individualist anarchist newspaper *Liberty*.¹⁸⁶

Moreover, like many anarchists of her generation, Voltairine de Cleyre was profoundly impacted by the Haymarket anarchists. De Cleyre originally denounced their actions and called for their execution, believing “the newspapers” and possessing an ignorance of anarchist ideas.¹⁸⁷ Yet when she investigated anarchist ideas, she concluded that they were not much different than her own and she came to view the executions as state-sponsored murder. She wrote that while freethought laid the foundation for her anarchism, it was the Haymarket incident that convinced her to become an anarchist.¹⁸⁸ It’s also worth noting that the Haymarket incident was covered extensively and sympathetically in the freethought press, unlike its coverage in major newspapers.¹⁸⁹ From the time she became an anarchist to her death; she would speak annually at Haymarket memorials and never ceased upholding their memory. She wrote that:

“...for every drop of blood you spilled on that November day you made an Anarchist. You sent their words on wings of flame in many tongues and many lands... You struck a welding blow that beat the hearts of the working

I consecrate my service to the world!

Perish the old love, welcome to the new—

Broad as the space-aisles where the stars are whirled!”¹⁷⁰

On the Lecture Circuit

Building off her experience with *The Progressive Age*, Voltairine de Cleyre became a freethought lecturer.¹⁷¹ She got her start lecturing in Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, and other cities in Michigan.¹⁷² Owing to her time spent in a convent and her experiences within the shackles of religion, de Cleyre was an effective advocate for freethought. One of her lectures—“Secular Education”—was reprinted in *The Truth Seeker* in 1887 and is typical of the message she shared at the time. In it, de Cleyre writes about how the Catholic Church has worked its teachings into education and that it uses education as a tool to “teach of dark and damnable doctrines of ignorance.”¹⁷³ She criticizes the church for doing this, but also criticizes secularists who she says are not aggressive enough in challenging the spread of religion. She argued that secularists need to make a commitment to teaching the young the importance of independent thought.¹⁷⁴ Her skill as a lecturer gained her increasing renown, and she soon toured on behalf of the American Secular Union, traveling as far west as Topeka and as far east as Boston. It was as a lecturer that she first made her mark in radical circles.¹⁷⁵

Her early experience on the freethought lecture circuit served her well, as she remained a frequent lecturer throughout her life. De Cleyre—whether lecturing on freethought or anarchism—developed a reputation as an eloquent lecturer, infusing her lectures with the same expressive prose and poetry that found a place in her literary works.¹⁷⁶ De Cleyre’s rhetorical style was praised by those who experienced it. Contemporary Jay Fox wrote, “The even delivery, the subdued enthusiasm of her voice, the abundance of information, thought and argument, and the logical sequence of the same made a deep impression on me.”¹⁷⁷ De Cleyre’s lectures and writings blended personal experience and emotional language to create passionate arguments.¹⁷⁸ She believed that too much of anarchist propaganda was focused on rationality and reason—arguing that feeling and emotion was just as important as logical appeals.¹⁷⁹ Whereas other anarchist orators were characterized by their “fiery” rhetoric, de Cleyre’s style was described as more of a “slow burn.”¹⁸⁰ Her speeches were highly organized and intentional—she was a meticulous reviser who made conscious and specific use of each literary device and word.¹⁸¹

The Anarchist Turn

Voltairine de Cleyre resided in Grand Rapids during a period of radical

“It does not matter whether it be the flannel mouth with his dynamite, the dirty German with his blunderbuss, the vermin-covered Italian with his stiletto, the Black Russian Nihilist with his bomb; it is no matter whether their names are spelled with an “ski” or an “etti,” whether it be Stein or McBrien. This is America, we are Americans and free.”¹¹⁰

The anti-foreign hatred was apparently strong enough to convince some ethnic organizations to distance themselves from the anarchists. One Polish society felt the need to declare to the press that they were not socialists.¹¹¹

Across the country, few stood up for the Haymarket anarchists. The labor unions who had been so involved in the eight-hour movement immediately disassociated themselves from the Chicago anarchists and even the labor press—quite a force at the time—generally blamed the anarchists for what happened and refused to defend them.¹¹²

A Bomb In Grand Rapids?

For the most part, Haymarket through the eyes of Grand Rapids was like anywhere else. Anarchists faced increased scrutiny, newspapers attacked anarchists more aggressively than usual, and labor unions sought to distance themselves from radicalism. However, there were a few things that set Grand Rapids apart.

One local newspaper reported that “an alleged anarchist” told them that there was a bomb placed near police station. According to the anarchist, it was intended to “liberate the downtrodden” who were engaged within the prison. The anarchist claimed that there were “dozens” and “hundreds” of socialists in Grand Rapids who were “ardent followers” of Johann Most.

The story was untrue—the “bomb” was a small package of dynamite dropped near the river by accident. There was no mention in any other newspapers of the incident.¹¹³

The Nationwide Hunt for Parsons Comes to Grand Rapids

As anarchists were rounded up across Chicago in the aftermath of Haymarket, one prominent anarchist—Albert Parsons—fled the city. Reports of his whereabouts ranged from Florida to Texas.¹¹⁴

A rumor soon circulated that Parsons was in Grand Rapids. According to an article in *The Grand Rapids Daily Democrat*, Parsons was holed up in the city wearing a disguise. A reporter wrote that he heard various groups of socialists talking about how best to shield Parsons from the local police—who were reported to be looking for him.¹¹⁵ Nothing much ever came of the report and indeed its veracity was challenged when an article appeared a few days later in a rival newspaper

from an anarchist claiming that a bomb was placed outside of the local police station. That same anarchist hinted that the Parsons story was a fake and that *The Democrat* “believed it.”¹¹⁶

Whether the Parsons story was circulated by anarchists as a way to poke fun at the repression or a story cooked up by the press to sell newspapers is unknown. Haymarket and anarchists were a big story for the newspapers; one local paper sent correspondents to Chicago to cover the execution¹¹⁷ and admitted that the issue containing their reporting on the Haymarket anarchists’ final hours was their best-selling issue ever.¹¹⁸ However, it is known that Parsons was nowhere near Grand Rapids; he hid out in Waukesha, Wisconsin with a subscriber to *The Alarm*.¹¹⁹

Grand Rapids Provides a Key Witness

In order to convict the Haymarket anarchists, the prosecution in the case had to establish that there was a conspiracy to violently overthrow the government and concrete steps were taken to actualize it. It was no secret that the Chicago anarchists advocated dynamite and the use of force, but had they done anything to actualize their plans for social revolution?

For the prosecution, two witnesses from Grand Rapids were key to their argument.¹²⁰ Luther Moulton and George Shook testified on behalf of the state. They both testified that they received transportation from the Grand Rapids Police Department the police about August Spies’ February 1885 speech. According to his testimony, Moulton—a member of the Knights of Labor—was called upon by a man named “Tandler” who sought to have Moulton introduce Spies at his lecture that night.¹²¹ Moulton claimed to ask Spies about his views generally, who was described by Tandler as a socialist. Moulton asked Spies if he believed in the ballot box and Spies reportedly told him that he did not. Instead, Spies advocated for “force and arms” and said that the Chicago anarchists had organized 3,000 armed individuals and had a general plan to take over the city during a time of crisis. According to Moulton, Spies identified the upcoming 8-hour demonstrations as a possible time for this insurrection. The general sense of what Moulton testified to was corroborated by a boarder at his home, George Shook, who also testified.¹²² This testimony was important in establishing that the defendants had taken a concrete revolutionary turn by 1885 where they designated a time for a revolutionary confrontation—the May 1, 1886 demonstrations—and began to take practical steps towards developing the force necessary to accomplish their goals.¹²³

One local newspaper ran a story on Moulton’s testimony on the day the Haymarket anarchists were executed. Moulton said he was “sorry” the anarchists were going to hang. He claimed that he warned Spies about his views and called him a “crank” who lacked common sense. Moulton said he was unable to convince

a rejection of biblical miracles and the divinity of Jesus; an aggressive, activist commitment to separation of church and state; and an insistence that human progress depends on the exercise of each individual’s reason with regard even to subjects held most sacred.”¹⁵⁷

de Cleyre was among many women who made significant contributions to the free-thought movement.¹⁵⁸ While the freethought movement was never large, it had a long history in the United States and sadly the contributions of women—of whom Voltairine de Cleyre was arguably one of the most radical¹⁵⁹—have been largely ignored in the histories of the movement.¹⁶⁰

As she became more deeply involved in the freethought movement, de Cleyre moved to Grand Rapids, renting a room at 54 Kent St. She wrote that while she was “happier than I’ve ever been since I have been in this city,” she also saw enough “every day misery to make one’s heart ache.”¹⁶¹ De Cleyre became involved in the city’s small radical circle and throughout her time here she experimented with various radical and reform movements popular at the time.¹⁶² While living in Grand Rapids, de Cleyre contributed to a freethought publication called *The Progressive Age*.¹⁶³ She published some of her first articles and stories in the paper, writing under the pseudonym “Fanny Fern.”

Unfortunately, no copies of *The Progressive Age* seem to exist and little is known about the paper. In Albert Baxter’s *History of the City Of Grand Rapids Michigan*, there is a brief description of the paper:

“Progressive Age. – Successor to the German American. A radical and aggressive free-thought paper, published weekly. Hermann Hammerschlag, Proprietor and Editor.”¹⁶⁴

Elsewhere, the newspaper is referred to as “a blatant and sacrilegious sheet.”¹⁶⁵

De Cleyre eventually became the editor of the paper and continued to contribute throughout her time in Grand Rapids.¹⁶⁶ A friend and lover, James Elliott, wrote that the issues he had seen featured de Cleyre’s writings on convent life and her hatred of the Catholic Church.¹⁶⁷ During the same period, de Cleyre contributed to several other freethought publications including *The Boston Investigator*, *The Freethinkers’ Magazine*, *The Truth Seeker*, and *Freethought*.¹⁶⁸

While in Grand Rapids, de Cleyre published one of her most famous freethought poems, “The Freethinker’s Plea,”¹⁶⁹ as well as the auto-biographical “The Burial of My Past Self” in which she says goodbye to her old life and embraces her new free-thinking ideology:

“And Now, Humanity, I turn to you;

difficult life—frequently in poverty and ill-health—dying at the age of 46. When she died in 1912, two-thousand mourners came out to her funeral at Waldheim Cemetery where she was buried near the Haymarket monument.¹⁵³

In a posthumous collection of her works published by Hippolyte Havel and Alexander Berkman, Havel wrote of de Cleyre:

“Voltairine de Cleyre was one of the most remarkable personalities of our time. She was a born iconoclast; her spirit was too free, her taste too refined, to accept any idea that has the slightest degree of limitation. A great sadness, a knowledge that there is a universal pain, filled her heart. Through her own suffering and through the suffering of others she reached the highest exaltation of mind; she was conscious of all the vanities of life. In the service of the poor and oppressed she found her life mission.”¹⁵⁴

Similarly, Emma Goldman described her as:

“...the wonderful spirit that was born in some obscure town in the State of Michigan, and who lived in poverty all her life, but who by sheer force of will pulled herself out of a living grave, cleared her mind from the darkness of superstition, –turned her face to the sun, perceived a great ideal and determinedly carried it to every corner of her native land.”¹⁵⁵

The Freethought Movement, The Progressive Age, and Grand Rapids

De Cleyre moved to the Grand Rapids area around 1885, first moving to Greenville to live with an aunt. De Cleyre had previously spent time in a convent, which had given her little practical training. She earned money by providing private lessons in “music, French, and fancy penmanship.¹⁵⁶” Breaking from her convent life, de Cleyre became an active “free thinker” involve in the freethought movement. Freethought was an:

“...eclectic movement that included atheists, agnostics, and deists as well as religious thinkers (Unitarian, transcendentalist, sometimes Quaker) who shared a scorn for religious dogma as a source of truth or authority;



Voltairine de Cleyre in 1891

Spies that 3,000 armed socialists was a woefully inadequate number to launch a social revolution. According to Moulton, the two clashed on their views and Spies was “somewhat bitter against him.” He never heard from Spies or his socialist comrades in Grand Rapids again. Moulton called for the reduction of their sentences to imprisonment for life, but did so in part because he didn’t wish to see the anarchists made into martyrs.¹²⁴

Moulton’s opinions of the Haymarket anarchists mirrored those of a nationwide fight that was going on within the Knights of Labor at the time. While the Knights of Labor was ostensibly open to people of different ideologies, there was considerable fighting over the politics—or lack of politics—that the organization would hold. There was a conservative wing (of which Moulton was aligned) headed up by Terrence Powderly that frequently attacked anarchists and other revolutionaries. To a certain degree, what happened in the lead-up to Haymarket in Grand Rapids and in the months after mirrored what was happening on the national level.

A local Grand Rapids affiliate of the Knights of Labor passed a resolution denouncing violence and illegal methods, as well as revolution following Haymarket.¹²⁵ Across the country, numerous affiliates did the same, while Powderly encouraged them.¹²⁶ The local newspapers enthusiastically reported on efforts by the Knights to expel anarchist members.¹²⁷ Even before the Haymarket incident, Powderly had been fighting against the radical elements and sought to limit strikes undertaken by the Knights of Labor.¹²⁸ In 1887, an assembly held by the Michigan Knights of Labor endorsed Powderly’s positions¹²⁹—even after a controversial “secret” memo that directed Knights of Labor chapters to cease support for the Haymarket anarchists.¹³⁰ Similarly, two local labor organizers praised the work of the Knights of Labor in preventing a general strike on May 1, 1886 in Grand Rapids and isolating the “hotheads” who sought confrontation.¹³¹

The Effort to Save the Haymarket Anarchists

Once the Haymarket anarchists were found guilty, their supporters immediately started organizing to save their lives. A defense committee was formed to raise money for appeals, materials were printed and circulated by the thousands, lectures held, tours organized, and petitions gathered. The effort gained traction and won a significant amount of support.¹³² Lucy Parsons tirelessly toured the country raising money for the Haymarket anarchists and also using the circumstances as a way of agitating for anarchist ideas, which she considered more important than the defense.¹³³

In Grand Rapids, Paul Grottkau spoke to raise support and awareness about the Haymarket anarchists in October of 1887. Grottkau was a former associate of the Chicago anarchists having briefly been a member of the International Working People’s Association before becoming a convert to state socialism.¹³⁴ Still,

Grottkau's efforts typified the effort to save the anarchists as many advocates cast aside their political views to support them. Grottkau spoke twice in Grand Rapids under the auspices of the Turner's Society and other "socialists" in Grand Rapids who wanted to participate in the nationwide effort¹³⁵ (press reports indicated that the Wood Turners' Union was also involved, but they later said that they were not and had "no sympathy for anarchism or anarchists"¹³⁶) Turner Societies were particularly active in the fight to save the Haymarket martyrs, while also being organizations where many radicals sought refuge from the post Haymarket repression.¹³⁷

Over four-hundred people came out to hear Grottkau who spoke at length about the case, the need for socialism, and the realities of a legal system that is designed to prop up capitalist interests.¹³⁸ According to one local paper, Grottkau's views were similar to those expressed by August Spies in Grand Rapids the two years prior: that workers should unite to demand what is theirs and use force if necessary. The local press described the talk as relatively conservative and tame and noted that the attendance was primarily working-class Germans with few "well-known" residents in attendance.¹³⁹ They passed resolutions that criticized the conduct of the Haymarket trial and circulated petitions to Illinois' Governor asking him to commute the death sentences. Interestingly, a few years later Grottkau—who no doubt was compelled to put on a friendly face in order to save his comrades' lives when he spoke in Grand Rapids—was among those who remembered the Haymarket anarchists' revolutionary views, asserting that "If he [Spies] or any of his fellows threw that bomb they did perfectly right."¹⁴⁰

Other efforts were also taken locally to raise awareness about the issue. A Reverend at a "liberal Holland church" dedicated his Sunday service to the Haymarket case and shared an appeal for commutation that was endorsed by the congregation.¹⁴¹ Local labor unions took up the issue—although not in a way that generated support for the Haymarket anarchists. Grand Rapids' Central Labor Union rejected a resolution condemning the Illinois Supreme Court for refusing to grant a new trial.¹⁴² The Carvers' Union also tabled a resolution that was brought to them on the matter, saying that they didn't take social or political positions on issues that don't directly concern their trade.¹⁴³

Despite the efforts, the Haymarket anarchists were executed. Over the course of the campaign, numerous differences came to light. Some of the defendants wished to die as martyrs, others were willing to compromise their positions and ask for clemency. Among those opposed to petitioning for clemency was Lucy Parsons, who despite the imminent execution of her husband, believed that the defendants should not compromise by petitioning the government.¹⁴⁴

A Postscript: Michael Schwab Visits Grand Rapids

In 1897, one of the Haymarket anarchists—Michael Schwab—spoke in Grand

Rapids. Following his pardon and release from prison in 1893, Schwab had resumed his political agitation, writing again for the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and remaining committed to the socialist cause.¹⁴⁵ While Schwab was politically near the center of the anarchist space carved out by the Haymarket anarchists, he had been the Chicago-area distributor for Johann Most's *Freiheit*, a notorious and uncompromising anarchist newspaper that frequently praised "propaganda by the deed."¹⁴⁶

It was his continued advocacy of socialism that brought him to Grand Rapids. Schwab spoke on January 31, 1897 to "a large audience" organized by the Turn Verein. He provided a basic argument for socialism, arguing that capitalists—who own the means of production—seek to pay the lowest possible labor costs. The only solution for the workers was to own the means of production and produce based on actual needs, not profit.¹⁴⁷ Schwab—who had been described a decade earlier in the local press as looking "positively ferocious"¹⁴⁸—was reported to be quite mild.¹⁴⁹ The *Grand Rapids Evening Press* said that anyone searching for something "anarchistic" would have been disappointed, as Schwab encouraged workers to organize together to protect their own interests and secure legislation.

VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE

Voltaireine de Cleyre was one of the leading figures in the U.S. anarchist space from 1890 to 1910 according to anarchist historian Paul Avrich.¹⁵⁰ De Cleyre was born in the small town of Leslie, Michigan in 1866 and spent the majority of her childhood in St. Johns (both are near Lansing). While she lived most of her adult life in Philadelphia, she spent a few years in Grand Rapids in the 1880s. These were important years of her life, marking the period when she became active in radical politics and eventually anarchism. De Cleyre was a prolific writer who wrote both political and literary works, contributing essays and poems to a wide-range of anarchist publications. Central to her anarchism was her critique of gender which ran throughout her life's work, making her one of the major early theorists of anarcho-feminism.¹⁵¹ Her positions with regard to gender were considerably more radical than most feminists of her time (for example, she rejected gender essentialism) and is recognized by at least one of her biographers as "arguably the most radical, revolutionary feminist at the turn of the twentieth century."¹⁵²

De Cleyre became a well-known figure in the anarchist movement, earning the respect of and establishing friendships with several notable anarchists—and the countless many whom never gained the notoriety of Emma Goldman and the other more public faces of the anarchist movement. De Cleyre was a steady advocate of anarchism, writing extensively, speaking, and organizing. De Cleyre lived a