Blustering Brags, Dueling Inventors, and Corn-Square Geniuses: Processes of Recognition Among Philadelphia Artisans, 1785-1825

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"Spanking Jack"

Spanking Jack was so comely, so pleasant, so jolly
Tho' winds blew great guns still he'd whistle and sing
Jack lov'd his friend, and was true to his Molly,
And if honor gives greatness, was great as a king:
One night, as we droe with two reefers in our mainsail
And the scud came on low'ring upon a lee shore
Jack went aloft for to hand the top ga'ant sail,
A spray wash'd him off, and we ne'er saw him more
But grieving's a folly,
Come let us be jolly;
If we've troubles at sea, boys, we've pleasures ashore

Bonny Ben was to each jolly messmate a brother,
He was manly and honest, good natur'd and free;
If ever one tar was more true than another
To his friend and his duty, that sailor was he:
One day with the davit, to heave the cadge anchor
Ben went in a boat on a bold craggy shore,
He overboard tipt, when a shark and a spanker
Soon nipt him in two, and we ne'er saw him more
But grieving's a folly,
Come, let us be jolly;
If we've troubles at sea boys, we've pleasures ashore.

Whiffing Tom, still full of mischief of fun in the middle,
 thro' life in all weathers at random would job
He'd dance and he'd sing, and he'd play on the fiddle
And swig, with an air, his allowance of grog:
Long side of a Don, in the Terrible frigate
As yard arm and yard arm we lay off the shore
In and out Whiffing Tom did so caper and jib it
That his head was shot off and we ne'er saw him more
But grieving's a folly
Come let us be jolly
If we've troubles at sea boys, we've pleasures ashore.

But what of it all lads: Shall we be downhearted
Because that mayhap we now take our last sup?
Life's cable must one day or other be parted;
And death, in fast mooring, will bring us all up
Yet 'tis always the way on't—one scarce finds a brother
Fond as pitch, honest, hearty, and true to the core
But by battle or storm, or some fell thing or other,
He's popp'd off the hooks, and we ne'er see him more
But grieving's a folly,
Come let us be jolly
If we've troubles at sea boys, we've pleasures ashore.
At the symbolic heart of "Spanking Jack" is the question of the implication of the injustice of death for the representation of human experience. Does the arbitrary death of exemplary people mean that all human experiences should be represented in terms of connotations of exposure and loss? Among "Spanking Jack's" audience of artisans, laborers, and seamen, "following a trade" could be represented in the same way it was in the song, in terms of oppositions between honor and dishonor, independence and dependence, and respectability and disgrace. Should this differentiated symbolism be flattened out into a symbolism of vulnerability, because one is arbitrarily exposed to destruction? This is the possibility raised by the fate of the sailors in "Spanking Jack." Even though their manly virtues were a picture of perfection, the sailors died horrible and untimely deaths, unjustly felled by forces of natural and human violence while exercising the virtues that made them exemplary. Given the seemingly inevitable death of one's most admirable comrades, that one "scarce finds" such a brother before he's killed in some way, it would be logical to take an attitude of "downheartedness," to see all experience as symbolizing an immediate or imminent personal vulnerability, death, and loss.

Almost as soon as it is introduced however, the symbolic of vulnerability is displaced by one of pleasure. Arguing that the examples of the three sailors should not be generalized, the song reestablishes the symbolic primacy of pleasure over vulnerability. The refrain's concluding line, "if we've troubles at sea boys, we've pleasures ashore," implies a rough equality between pleasure and trouble, an equality that makes it impossible to generalize exposure and loss as representing the human condition. Because the pleasures of taverns, grog shops, and oyster cellars have just as much standing as the sailors' deaths, it is not only possible, but morally imperative to symbolize pleasure in the face of death's injustice. What makes "Spanking Jack" so exemplary is his ability to experience the conditions of existence in terms of pleasure despite the many dangers about. "Spanking Jack" would still "whistle and sing" like he was in a dockside tavern even though "winds blew great guns." It was within an experience symbolized by pleasure, "Spanking Jack" could form the kind of lasting social bonds that made it possible to
associate meanings of truth, honor, and greatness with his person.

This paper examines the social organization and symbolic mechanisms of leisure among male artisans in Philadelphia between 1785 and 1825. It will be argued that work breaks, tavern socializing, street encounters, and fire companies were informally organized as "processes of recognition" in which the functioning of a group was characterized by alternations between mostly competitive performances and collective judgments on the performers, almost all of whom were men. It will also be argued that leisure involved a mechanism of symbolic displacement in which participants were confronted with a situation that symbolized imminent death and degradation and given an opportunity to create conditions that could be symbolized in terms of a distinct individuality, shared pleasures, and collective membership. In this sense, artisan leisure was not characterized so much by a set of symbols representing artisans as independent craftsmen and virtuous members of the community, but by a process for producing this kind of symbolization, the same kind of process that can be found in "Spanking Jack."

By focusing on the informal social organization and symbolic processes of pre-industrial leisure practices, this paper seeks to contribute to a more differentiated approach to the culture of pre-industrial male artisans. As the first to examine the role of American artisan culture in industrialization, the new labor historians were content with a concept of pre-industrial culture that focused on the historical opposition between pre-industrial and industrial culture. In his study of Philadelphia artisans, Bruce Laurie identifies "traditional" culture with heavy drinking and a casual approach to work, an approach that fails to address issues of symbolism, gender, leisure institutions, or the cultural meaning of work. With a wider variety of sources now available on pre-industrial artisans however, it is possible to engage in more specialized studies of pre-industrial artisan culture and ultimately to develop a more complex picture of how artisan culture developed after the Revolution. Issues of the informal social organization and symbolic processes involved in leisure practices are significant because they can be readily compared to other areas of artisan life. Both of these dimensions can be used to compare male artisan leisure with artisan workplaces, commercial relationships, political activities, formal cultural institutions, and cultural
spheres like the household, the marketplace, holiday celebrations, and romance where women were active. Analysis of the informal social organization and symbolic processes of artisan leisure is thus a useful starting point for the development of a more differentiated view of pre-industrial artisan culture and how it developed during the first forty years of American independence.

The informal social organization of a cultural practice can be defined as those norms through which cultural activity is orchestrated outside situations involving formal rules. In formal organizations, participants agree to, or acquiesce in, a set of stated rules, and their conscious awareness of the stated rules has a role in organizing the activity of the group. In informal cultural contexts however, the orchestration of activity depends on the participants awareness of a complex set of conscious norms, tacit expectations, understandings, and body dispositions, and temporary rules formulated for a specific event. Because the members of cultural groupings or sub-groupings have a common socialization in such practical awareness, participants find that the sequencing of events, positioning of other participants, and possible actions of others have a margin of predictability that makes it possible for them to pursue their own strategies without continually renegotiating the ground rules of the activity. In this sense, the practical awareness of the participants allows for the coordination of a collective activity.

Practices of leisure among Philadelphia artisans were informally organized as "processes of recognition." Processes of recognition can be defined as a group activity characterized by an alternation between individual performances seeking collective acknowledgment of a distinct individuality and a collective judgment which affirmed group solidarity as it approved or disapproved of individual performance. The conscious norms and tacit understandings of Philadelphia artisans defined their work breaks, street encounters, tavern discussions, games, and holiday celebrations as situations of performance, specifying who could or could not initiate a sequence of performances, who could initiate responses, the terms on which individuals performed or competed, when bets were appropriate, and what kinds of sum could be wagered. What was at stake for the participants was group acknowledgement or recognition of the
individual distinctiveness in their performances, an individual distinctiveness which was a condition for the individual's continued participation in the group or "company." Groups and the individuals who performed before them had a common understanding of what constituted a successful performance and if a particular performance did not meet the agreed-upon criteria, individual performers were forced to either openly acknowledge failure or risk exclusion from the group.5

Each of the leisure activities in which pre-industrial artisans participated--daily work breaks, tavern socializing, street gatherings, fire fighting, militia training, Fourth of July celebrations, elections, and Christmas celebrations--was elaborated in relation to a distinct set of social circumstances, all of them had unique characteristics which differentiated them from the others. Because tavern socializing took place in establishments like taverns, grog shops, and oyster cellars where the social space of amusement, proliferation of games and events, and the circulation of personnel were organized around the selling of alcohol for profit, it had a sense of time, a rhythm of interaction, and a circulation of participants which were distinct from those of work breaks, street encounters, or home entertainment. It is possible, however, to treat the informal social organization of all these activities as processes of recognition.

The organization of tavern socializing as a process of recognition can be seen with special clarity in the following incident reported by The Tickler, a federalist satirical newspaper, in 1808:

Passing by a public house some time since, in the Northern Liberties, my attention was arrested by a loud conversation within. On inquiry, I found the dispute arose between a butcher and a young man from the country. The butcher declaring he had better learning than any man in the company; that none of them could propose a question in arithmetic that he could not answer. After his drinking and blowing for a while, the young man said he could name one--by G--you can't says the butcher I'll bet a bottle of wine on it--done - says he. Well can you tell how many grains of corn it will take to make a lump of mush a foot square. The butcher began to roar like a bull in the slaughter house; come into the street you rascal, I'll tell you pretty quick. The company intervened and peace was restored.6

The exchange between the butcher and the young man centered around the problem of recognition. When the butcher boasted that no one "could propose a problem in arithmetic" that he could not answer, he was both claiming distinction as the most learned man in the company
and seeking acknowledgement of that distinction from others in the company. In seeking such recognition, the butcher was presenting a challenge, an opportunity, and a set of obligations to others in the group. The butcher’s boast was a challenge for others to attempt to formulate a problem that could stump him, an opportunity for them to receive acclaim for their own knowledge and abilities if they did stump him, and an obligation to acknowledge the butcher’s pre-eminence should they fail. Implicitly accepting the same obligation to recognize the superiority of others should they triumph, the butcher needed others to accept his challenge if he were to have a chance to actually display his mathematical abilities and distinguish himself. Of course, others in the company need not have accepted the challenge. The butcher might have been ignored or dismissed with an insult if he had made the challenge at an inappropriate time or had so little standing in the group that others would neither want to compete against him or watch any contest involving him. On the other hand, accepting the butcher’s challenge created a situation in which both the butcher and those who challenged him could perform before the company as a whole, seeking to display their distinctive abilities and have them acknowledged by the group.

Unfortunately for the butcher, the prospect of recognition turned into defeat and ridicule when the young man proposed his "corn square" conundrum. Faced with a problem he could not possibly answer, the butcher found himself derailed, exposed as loutish and boorish rather than being cheered as the most learned man in the company. The butcher’s embarrassment was similar to that initially represented by "Spanking Jack," a situation of being confronted by an immediate threat to the integrity of his person. This is well captured by the correspondent’s image of his roaring "like a bull in the slaughterhouse" and its ready associations with the imminent death and dismemberment of an unintelligent beast. In triumphing over the butcher however, the young man faced the more pleasant prospect of being acclaimed for his clever formulation of the corn-square problem. To the young man, the laughter and shouting of the company signified a recognition of his distinct individuality and affirmation of the integrity of his person where it signified a degrading exposure to the butcher. In this sense, the process of competitive performance in this tavern incident had created a zero-sum situation in which the public humiliation of one participant
was the condition for the public acclaim of the other.

The butcher's immediate answer to his disgrace was the invitation to the young man to "come into the street you rascal, I'll teach you pretty quick." Such a response not only expresses anger, but also represents a strategy on the butcher's part to show his individuality and manliness by thrashing his tormentor. By giving the young man a whipping, the butcher might have retrieved his own individuality by wreaking his sense of degradation and vulnerability on him. However, in intervening to stop a brawl, the company was rendering its judgment that the young man had fairly triumphed and communicating its expectation that the butcher would meet his obligation to acknowledge the pre-eminence of the young man and ultimately honor his debt by paying off the bet. If the butcher had ignored the will of the company, he would have risked verbal abuse, exclusion, and ostracism, an eventuality that would have cut him off from subsequent exchanges. In such a situation, he might have gone to another tavern and attempted to join the activities there. At the last extremity, he might have given up on social recognition altogether and shown his manliness by beating his wife and children. The merchant Thomas Cope wrote in his diary of such a "blustering brag who sallies into the streets swearing he will be insulted by no one. He receives a kick from one and a cuff from another, then goes home and vents his rage on his helpless wife and children." 7

Few artisan leisure activities are reported in as much detail as the exchange between the butcher and the young man. However, the informal organization of cultural activity as processes of recognition can also be seen in the partial and scattered sources on other leisure practices. Within many of the civic activities in which artisans participated, including fire companies, militia companies, and political societies, a combination of formal organizational rules and informal understandings served to define situations within which individuals could perform competitively and receive recognition. For instance, Philadelphia fire companies had formal rules that required attendance at meetings, mandated the possession of fire equipment, regulated the use of equipment, and set fines for the "dereliction of duty." To have standing as a member of the company, individuals needed to either obey the rules or re-establish good standing by paying the
fines. However, members in good standing were guaranteed opportunities to seek recognition as firemen. This was because the companies also had informal understandings which dictated that the first member who reached the fire house after the alarm had command of the engine on the way to the fire while whoever had control of the pipe spraying water onto the fires had command of the company at the site of the fire. Thus each member of the company had a chance to display his courage, skills, and dexterity as a fireman before both the company and the gathered public. If the fire was doused at an appropriate time, members would have further opportunities to seek recognition in the taverns, both through the story-telling, boasting, and testimonials subsequent to fire-fighting and the normal course of tavern socializing, games (bowling, cards, etc.) and events.8

Fire companies, militia companies and political societies all met in taverns and their activities were a routine part of tavern atmosphere, often giving the drinking, gaming, and socializing of Philadelphia taverns a civic dimension. Lacking formal organization, the work breaks, street encounters, and home entertainments of Philadelphia artisans had much more of an evanescent character. Artisans all over Philadelphia put down their hammers, needles, knives, paint brushes, and types at least twice a day for alcoholic refreshments, sweets, and a variety of informal contests and entertainments. During work breaks, the rhythm of craft labor was brought to a halt and replaced by a "carnival" rhythm of singing and joking, passing around the bottle, and challenge and riposte concerning games, craft skills, politics, and religion. When (the future Shakespearean actor) Edwin Forrest and other cooper's apprentices climbed on top of tubs, lumber stacks, and benches during work breaks to sing songs and tell jokes, they were vying for the recognition of the journeymen, masters, and whatever visitors were in the workshop. The same was true when the journeymen and masters called for songs, told jokes, challenged the group by taking a political or religious position, or attempted to entertain the group with their stories. The main obligations that had to be met in order to participate were a willingness to treat the group to drinks, sweets, biscuits, and cheese, pay off on lost bets, and follow the rules of card games, craft contests, and the like. Within this context however, apprentices, journeymen, masters, and visitors could seek recognition for their skills and abilities on a daily basis.9
The fact that the same kind of process was also organized in the street encounters that occurred when journeymen were on the way to work, masters were calling on debtors, or apprentices were running errands demonstrates the flexibility of processes of recognition as a mode of cultural organization. When a tailor nicknamed Major Stitch stopped a travelling New York tinker on the street and challenged him to see who was the "prettiest man," he not only sought to distinguish himself before the instantly formed company, but showed what a wide variety of contingencies could be organized into a contest for recognition. If the tailor had triumphed, he would have experienced recognition in a situation distinct from the structured socializing of work breaks and evenings at the tavern, and had a new kind of story to contribute to future encounters. The Tickler was complaining about this kind of cultural portability when it accused the printer John Binns of boasting about his political prosecution in England, "fearing he would not come in for his share of applause and sympathy from the company." Because Philadelphia artisans routinely participated in so many different kinds of cultural activities, they were able to seek recognition, experience defeat and embarrassment, and watch others from a variety of different perspectives, at the same time carrying the stories of previous encounters and triumphs into continually new scenes.

The cultural practices of artisan leisure also involved a process of symbolic displacement, a process which introduced a symbolism of immediate vulnerability and then replaced that symbolism with one of a cohesive individuality. When cultural activity was initiated during work breaks, tavern socializing, street encounters and the like, people, things, and events were introduced which symbolized the kind of immediate pain, loss, and degradation seen in the deaths of the sailors in "Spanking Jack." Within these practices, however, subsequent competitive performances and judgments created new conditions of laughter, applause, and congratulations which the (victorious) participants symbolized in terms of an integrity of individuality, pleasure, and inclusion. It is possible to understand boasts, challenges, card plays, stories, jokes, and the
events of craft contests, fire fighting, and the like as symbols because each of the events and people involved can be seen as a "sign" with a direct and indirect meaning. According to Paul Ricoeur, a symbol is "any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary . . . and which can only be apprehended through the first." The sequences of boasts, challenges, card plays, and jokes that initiated artisan leisure could function as symbols of vulnerability because they had primary meanings of defeat and embarrassment, meanings which themselves signified further meanings of pain, loss, and degradation to artisan particiants. Favorable outcomes to the competitive process could symbolize an integrity of individuality because they directly signified victory, success, and triumph, all of which had the further meaning of a coherent individuality to Philadelphia artisans.11

The symbolic organization of leisure practices as processes of displacement can be seen across the whole range of artisan cultural activities, including work breaks, street encounters, tavern socializing, civic organizations, and holiday celebrations. The inventing contest between Jacob Perkins and Commodore Murray which occurred between 1813 and 1816 is a particularly good example of this kind of symbolic process. Jacob Perkins was a machinist and inventor who built small fire engines in partnership with Coleman Sellers between 1813 and 1817. In his "Memoirs," Sellers' son, George Esco! Sellers, indicated that Murray was a frequent visitor to the shops of Perkins and Sellers on Mulberry Court who "though not founded in first principles; would be and fancied himself an inventor." One day, Murray rolled up to the shop with a ship pump of his own invention, seeking to prove himself the equal of inventive mechanics like Perkins and Sellers and to have them acknowledge it. Being unschooled in the basics of mechanics however, Murray did not realize that he had spent months re-inventing the beer pump. When Perkins saw the contraption, he perceived an opportunity to display his own inventive at Murray's expense. Perkins looked Murray's invention over for a few minutes, worked the pump a few little, and complimented the Commodore, repeating "it works well, Commodore; it is a capital thing." Soon however, Perkins launched into a story of how his own extemporaneous invention of a
pump had saved a heavily-laden schooner from sinking in a storm. Going into detail about how he fashioned the pump in less than an hour, Perkins "became more and more excited" as he told the story and finished by boasting to Murry that he could make a better pump than Murray's in less than half an hour and would be willing to bet an oyster dinner for twelve on it.  

Murray accepted the bet, and after demanding an immediate trial, watched as Perkins built the pump he had described out of handy materials like an old boot. Perkins had his pump working before a company of about a dozen within 24 minutes and it was so obviously superior that Murray declined a comparison. Having seen Perkins win the bet, Murray met his own obligation, telling Perkins to name the time and guest list for the supper. Murray also gave Perkins the kind of flattering praise he had hoped to receive for himself, remarking "that the United States can have any number of my safety pumps on all their vessels, but they cannot find a Jacob Perkins for every man of war." Perkins, who no doubt was already glowing in the assembled group's admiration of his inventiveness and dexterity as a craftsman, took this testimonial as the highest kind of praise and still remembered it fifteen years later.  

Perkins' story of saving the storm-tossed schooner is the key to understanding the contest with Murray as a symbolic process. In the story, Perkins' efforts to build the pump had the added significance of a struggle against the annihilating forces of a stormy sea which threatened to destroy the cargo, sink the ship, and end his own life. By telling the story as the preface to his challenge to Murray, Perkins was indicating that his attempt to build a ship in half an hour had the added meaning of exposing himself to dangerous forces. Boasting that he could build the pump introduced a symbolism of exposure for Perkins because it signified a possibility of failure and embarrassment before the group, the possibility that he might not be a match for a fool like Murray. Because the possibility of failure and defeat had the added significance for Perkins of vulnerability to an external threat, Perkins' boast can be seen as symbolizing vulnerability or exposure. However, successfully competing the pump resulted in the symbolization of Perkins as a man of enormous skill and virtuosity as a craftsman and a tremendous asset to any company of men. It was this combination of exemplary individuality and stalwart social contribution to which
Murray made tribute when he proclaimed that the United States could not find men as good as Jacob Perkins for its ships. In triumphing over the Commodore, Perkins had triumphed over the symbolism of exposure and danger, displacing it onto the Commodore and experiencing himself as identified with a symbolism identifying himself with the well-being of the country.

The same kind of symbolic displacement can be seen throughout the whole range of artisan leisure practices. Organized as processes of recognition, the leisure activities of Philadelphia artisans continually created situations of uncertainty, opposition, and conflict that the participants symbolized in terms of threats to the integrity of their person. The card games, bowling games, humiliation games, and animal baiting that took place in taverns all had rules which formally created the kind of opposition that the butcher confronted in the country boy. In the case of fire companies, the activities of fighting fires provided a variety of opportunities for symbolizing situations as threatening to the integrity of the person. The competition of the companies to attain the best engines and equipment, arrive first at fires, and connect their hoses to the plugs all created conditions in which the presence of the opposing companies constituted a possible defeat, failure, and public dishonor and could thus be symbolized as deadly threats, much the way that fighting the fires themselves confronted individual firemen with "the awful and destructive ravages of fire." 14

However, leisure activity also provided artisans with opportunities to both successfully display their skills, talents, and cleverness and symbolize these triumphs in terms of the independence and integrity of their selves within established social bonds. The applause, huzzas, and smiles from the company that artisans received for scoring points in religious debate, having the best voice, telling a successful joke, or playing an elaborate practical joke not only signified victory, but the company's recognition of them as distinct individuals and craftsmen. Successful performance in leisure activities allowed artisans to displace the symbolism of immediate threat and loss with a symbolism of their own individuality and membership in a collective. In civic associations like fire companies, artisans had the honor of displaying their courage and social commitment before a large part of the community as a whole. At the fires, vendors peddled
alcohol and other refreshment to those present and the mixture of races, brawls, and drinking among fire fighters, neighbors, and spectators created a carnival scene that had analogies to holiday celebrations. Being recognized in this context enabled artisans to symbolize their individuality against the larger background of community life.

Conclusion

Analyzing the informal social organization and symbolic processes of artisan leisure practices raises questions concerning the larger context of cultural change among ante-bellum artisans in Philadelphia. Between 1790 and 1830, Philadelphia grew from a "walking city" of 42,000 to a metropolitan center of almost 200,000, surpassed in the United States only by New York. Beginning in the 1780's, masters began to produce for markets on a regional and national basis, expanding their own facilities, engaging substantial numbers of sub-contractors, and experimenting with factory models of production. Expansion made artisan business even less economically stable than it had been before the Revolution. Relying on their friends and relatives for the capital to launch their speculative enterprises, many masters struggled with large debt loads which kept their businesses and those of their friends, creditors, and subcontractors in periodic distress. Masters also came into conflict with their journeymen, who organized craft unions as early as 1790 in an effort to counteract the efforts of masters to reduce expenses by substituting half-way journeymen, reducing wages, and failing to pay journeymen. By 1828, tensions between masters and journeymen had grown to such an extent that journeymen organized a general union, founded a political party, and launched a newspaper to publicly pursue their interests.

Within the context of general expansion, artisan leisure practices were informally organized as processes of recognition through the whole period between 1785 and 1825. Despite the founding of new cultural institutions, the development of new technologies of leisure, and the weakening of many established practices, artisan leisure was still informally organized as a process of recognition into the late 1820's and beyond. Continuity is not the whole story however. To
comprehend the social organization of leisure in relation to economic expansion, it is necessary to
examine the relation between the social organization of leisure and the organization of the
practices involved in both the work process and household. How did the organization of these
three spheres relate during the 1780's before economic expansion had a significant impact on
business practices and how did such relations change in the context of expansion? The social
organization of both the workplace and household both underwent more in the way of change
than the social organization of leisure. To understand how the role of artisan leisure changed in
the context of economic expansion, it would be necessary to understand the extent to which the
continuities in the organization of artisan leisure exasperbated or relieved the pressures building
up in the other spheres, how leisure functioned within economic change as well as how leisure
served as a basis for artisan political mobilization.17

The problems of relating the symbolic processes of artisan leisure to economic expansion
are more complex. There is evidence that at least the symbolic outcomes of artisan cultural
processes had begun to change by 1825. The Colonel Pluck burlesque militia parades of 1825,
with their enormous satirical swords, oversized boots, and larger-than-life hats, were representing
partial body parts rather than the whole craftsman, indicating a symbolic identification with the
kind of dismemberment that had been a horror in "Spanking Jack." Even if the informal
organization of leisure activity were consistent, it seems that it was at least difficult to reproduce
the displacement of a symbolism of vulnerability and threat by one of individual independence and
integrity of body. The problem for relating this development to changes in economic and social
conditions is first explaining how the symbolizations of leisure correlated with the symbolization
of artisan activity in other spheres, including work, politics, romance, and marriage. It is only
possible to understand how the representation of the self as independent and whole came to be
blocked within artisan leisure in the differentiated context of the impact of deteriorating
conditions of most journeymen and many masters on the symbolization of work, politics, and
love.18

"Spanking Jack" was printed on wrapping paper and could have been purchased by the poorest of artisans, laborers, and seamen. Because it was printed so cheaply, it could have made a profit for its publisher with a relatively small sale on the streets and along the docks. Information on the binding and price of "Spanking Jack" was provided by Phillip Lapsansky of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

The introduction of a symbolism for an immediate kind of vulnerability and loss was a standard motif of the songs, poetry, and advertising directed at Philadelphia artisans. The sign of the Union Hotel stated that:

Whatever may tend to soothe the soul below,
To dry the tear and blunt the shaft of woe,
To drown the ills that discompose the mind—
All those who seek at Warwick's shall find.

A similar representation of vulnerability, this time as pain or care, appeared in a drinking song printed in 1819:

The wise are fools with all their rules,
They would our joys control;
If any pain or care remains,
Why, drown it in the bowl.


4The distinction between consciously-applied and tacit norms is based on Anthony Giddens' distinction between discursive and practical consciousness in Central Problems of Social Theory. Giddens defines discursive consciousness as that "which can be brought into and held in consciousness" and practical consciousness as "tacit knowledge that is skillfully applied ..., but which the actor is not able to formulate discursively." Giddens, however, views both norms and power as involved in the social structure of human action. Likewise, the analysis in this paper needs to be supplemented by a conception of the roles played by social power in the informal social organization of artisan leisure practices. Anthony Giddens, Central Problems of Social Theory, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979, 24-25, 85.


6The Tickler, September 28, 1808, 2.


10For the tailor, see The Tickler, March 15, 1809; for Binns, The Tickler, June 14, 1809.


14Concerning what I called humiliation games, Scharf and
Westcott report that the "most amusing entertainment" at Southwark's "Yellow Cottage" tavern was

walking up the hill to the tree blindfolded. A man would start off. For a few steps he appeared to go direct toward the tree; then he would slide off to the right or left and walk until he thought he had accomplished the feat or was tired. He then removed the handkerchief from his eyes to behold amidst loud shouting that he had walked in a circle... or that he was in the bushes, farther from the tree than ever. The novelty was sometimes changed by trundling a wheelbarrow to the tree blindfolded.

The key to the symbolic process involved in this kind of game was that the lost purposefulness, dignity, and character of the participants symbolized a kind of annihilating threat to the audience, a symbolic threat that, however, could easily be overcome because audience members were not directly participating. In guaranteeing the triumph of audience members, the humiliation game allowed them to displace various meanings of vulnerability. Other popular humiliation games included "wheeling a barrow blindfolded to a stake," pig chasing, fox chasing, and climbing a greased pole. Scharf and Westcott, The History of Philadelphia, 2, 985.

For animal baiting, see the extensive description of a cockfight in The Tickler, April 13, 1808. Members of the audience at cockfights could identify themselves with the struggles to the death of the animals because they were wagering on them. If a cock won in the bloody duel, the roar of his supporters did not only signify approval at their favorite's victory, but a symbolic retrieval of the supporters' individuality and show of their own valor, skill, and virtue in the face of possible death. Receiving money was a confirmation of the bettor's triumph in the face of death and confirmed him as full member of the company.

The Tickler complained about the atmosphere of amusement at fire scenes (Sept. 6, 1809).


The new cultural institutions included public gardens, public museums, hose companies, political societies, and the democratic militia. New technologies of leisure include the end-levered fire engines, hose carriages, and water plugs for fire companies, balloons for balloon ascensions, and steamboats, like the Tammany Club, and if anything, the increasing reports of long-running drinking sprees, a developing social imagery of heavy drinking, and the first significant case loads of delirium tremens indicate that participation in traditional artisan culture accelerated with economic expansion.

was still a group that was organized to allow individual members to seek "recognition" from others in the group and the community at large. However, when the revolutionary generation was replaced by groups of younger men, those younger men both accelerated the activities of the fire companies and elaborated more complex organizational structures to manage those activities. From the 1830's to 1850, these "accelerated pre-industrial structures" became the basis for cultural transition when the activities and symbolism of the fire companies began to focus on identification with the collective rather than the search for individual recognition. Companies kept the same leadership structures and company symbolism but began to devote large amounts of time to symbolic matters (designing uniforms, painting engines, balls, excursions, and receptions), focus their attention on races and riots against other companies (as opposed to fires), and derive their financing from the Fire Insurance Company. Working with elements of company leadership structures, company symbolism, and company loyalty, the artisans and factory workers of the 1830's and 1840's transformed the fire companies into a different form of cultural activity.

Papers and Publications:

In relation to my MSU Faculty Grant, I have written three papers. A revised version one has been accepted for publication by Pennsylvania History. A second paper is being considered for publication by The Journal of American History. The third paper has been rejected by the International Journal of Labor and Working Class History but recently was solicited by the editor of Pennsylvania History for consideration for publication.

I also am proposing to deliver a paper based on my fire company research during the fall semester. The papers are listed below:


4. The title of the paper that I am proposing for the 1996 Ohio Valley Historical Association will be "From Ordered Buckets To Honored Felons: Transformations Among Philadelphia Fire Companies, 1800-1850. This paper will also be the basis for a chapter of the book manuscript originally proposed with the grant.