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Source: *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No. 3 (Fall, 1981), pp. 271-293

Published by: [Oregon Historical Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20613790>

Accessed: 28/04/2013 01:52

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CARLOS A. SCHWANTES

## Free Love and Free Speech on the Pacific Northwest Frontier

Proper Victorians vs. Portland's "Filthy *Firebrand*"

IN THE LATE 1890s Portland, Oregon, was a most unlikely site for the publication of a journal devoted to anarchism and sex radicalism. Portland was, in fact, often noted as a model of Victorian propriety. In contrast to Seattle and Tacoma, her vigorous, rowdy, and often insecure commercial rivals to the north, Portland exhibited the poise and confidence born of her long-standing role as the region's preeminent center of trade and commerce. Her settled, domesticated ways reminded many an eastern visitor of life in a New England village on Sunday. Even the local labor movement seemed more cautious and job-conscious than did counterparts in other cities of the Pacific Northwest.<sup>1</sup> Portland's conservative, family-centered, money-making, churchgoing society represented, however, precisely the kind of smug, middle-class world that a dedicated band of local anarchists sought to undermine by publishing an incendiary weekly, the *Firebrand*.

The first issue appeared in early 1895, a time of intense interest in reforms of all types. By promising to do something about the misery and despair that followed the Panic of 1893, Populists had attracted remarkable support throughout the Pacific Northwest. Unlike the Populists, the prohibitionists, the suffragists, and a host of other reformers, however, the publishers of the *Firebrand* were radicals who could see no point in further patching up a jerry-built political, social, and economic system. Instead, they sought to overthrow it by boldly

1. Samuel Bowles, *Across the Continent* (Springfield, Mass., 1866), 183; Edward Pierrepont, *Fifth Avenue to Alaska* (New York, 1884), 116-18; Lady Mary Rhodes Carbutt, *Five Months' Fine Weather in Canada, Western United States, and Mexico* (London, 1889), 76; J. M. Murphy, *Rambles in North-Western America, From the Pacific Ocean to the Rocky Mountains* (London, 1879), 47; *Firebrand*, Feb. 17, 1895, p. 3. See also E. Kimbark MacColl, *The Shaping of a City: Business and Politics in Portland, Oregon, 1885-1915* (Portland, 1976).



(Courtesy State Historical Society of Wisconsin.)

attacking its very foundation: capitalism, law and order, and the church.

The *Firebrand's* masthead carried a cartoon depicting the capitol dome and a church spire as connected by a huge web at the center of which crouched a loathsome “profit-mongering” spider. Struggling to escape from the mesh was a “poor working bee.” Above a blazing torch was the legend, “For the Burning Away of the Cobwebs of Ignorance and Superstition.” Toward that end the paper not only disseminated explicit sexual information but also engaged in forthright discussions of nudity and free love that even upset some anarchists. The wonder is not that the *Firebrand* was finally suppressed but that Oregonians ignored its unmeasured attacks on their manners and morals for so long.

The *Firebrand* was only one of several anarchist papers that appeared in America in the 1890s, but a contentious blend of earnestness and insouciance, the subtlety of a bludgeon, and a certain western arrogance made the Portland paper unique.<sup>2</sup> For almost two years it proffered its militant bohemianism to the region’s farmers and workers. Its appearance in the remote hardrock mining camps of the Pacific Northwest no doubt titillated miners and generated the kind of ‘consciousness-raising’ discussions that led some members of the Western Federation of Miners to question ever more penetratingly the fairness and efficacy of the bourgeois state. When the federal government brought its publishers to trial for allegedly sending obscene literature through the mails, the *Firebrand* contributed a little

2. *Firebrand*, Mar. 17, 1895, p. 3; *Lucifer*, Mar. 17, 1897, p. 88; Apr. 14, 1897, p. 120.

known chapter to the ever contemporary battle for free speech. Finally, in the story of the *Firebrand* one finds insight as to why certain parts of the Pacific Northwest were so often called upon to play host to the most bizarre attempts to secure fundamental political, social, and economic change. These manifestations have ranged from the communitarian utopias on Puget Sound to the outrageously colorful free-speech fights of the Industrial Workers of the World.<sup>3</sup>

Considering that Oregon has long avoided identification with the regional heritage of radicalism centering in western Washington and the mining areas of north Idaho and British Columbia, the appearance of an iconoclastic publication like the *Firebrand* in a community as staid as Portland seems anomalous. And, indeed, the influence of Portland's anarchists was far greater in Washington than in Oregon. The radicalism of the *Firebrand* must thus be considered in a larger, regional context.

The Pacific Northwest in the late nineteenth century was characterized by the juxtaposition of hauntingly beautiful virgin land and a rapidly developing urban-industrial society. Portland, not unlike her bumptious Washington rivals, was an island of civilization in a still largely untamed wilderness. When the *Firebrand* first appeared, some areas of Oregon and Washington had been settled by whites for less than a decade. As late as 1890, some places, notably the Olympic Mountains, had remained virtually unpenetrated by white explorers.<sup>4</sup> Especially in Washington, the land that had been surveyed and mapped was being clangorously promoted as America's last, best frontier. The widespread availability of so much lush virgin land in the Puget Sound area, for example, at a time when the seminal ideas of Henry George, Edward Bellamy, and the socialist thinkers were gaining currency seemed to present reformers one last opportunity to create a workable alternative to the dehumanizing industrial system so much a feature of life in the commercial and manufacturing centers of the eastern United States and Europe.<sup>5</sup> Against the backdrop of the rapid,

3. The *Firebrand* rates only a sentence in Joseph R. Conlin, ed., *The American Press, 1880-1960* (2 vols., Westport, Conn., 1974), II:391.

4. Robert L. Wood, *Men, Mules and Mountains: Lieutenant O'Neil's Olympic Expeditions* (Seattle, 1976), 45ff.

5. Carlos A. Schwantes, "Left-Wing Unionism in the Pacific Northwest: A Comparative History of Organized Labor and Socialist Politics in Washington and



Burnette G. Haskell, ca. 1885. (Courtesy, The Bancroft Library.)

unprecedented, unpredictable changes associated with the Gilded Age, the efforts of the region's anarchists, socialists, syndicalists, communitarians, free lovers, and whatever seem far less naive than they appear almost a century later.

The phenomenal growth of the urban islands in the Pacific Northwest in the 1880s and early 1890s, each with its business and political elites, tradition-bound churches, and stabilizing social amenities, pleased local boosters as well as visitors from older, more settled regions. Local radicals, however, were dismayed by the rapid expansion of a society which so unequally blended prosperity and poverty. They could only regard the rise of bourgeois society in what they felt was a relatively isolated and unspoiled region as a pointed reminder of the ubiquity of the hated system they hoped to change. Publication of the *Firebrand* was thus an expression of outrage as well as a manifestation of continuing if not fully justified faith in the malleability of society in the new Northwest.<sup>6</sup>

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British Columbia, 1885-1917" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1976), 79ff.

6. Henry Addis once wrote: "The word Anarchy has terrors for very few people in Portland, outside of police headquarters." (*Firebrand*, Sept. 29, 1895, p. 3.) On another occasion he wrote: "As to freedom of personal action I have this to say:

In its own peculiar way, the *Firebrand* both modified and perpetuated a rather freewheeling kind of regional radicalism which originated more than a decade earlier with formation of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA). The IWA arose in San Francisco in 1881 as a by-product of anti-Chinese agitation. It was likewise associated with the sinophobic hysteria that swept western Oregon and Washington four years later. While most of the white workingmen who participated in the outbursts that shook Tacoma and Seattle had no aim except to protect their jobs during a time of economic distress, IWA agitators sought to use fear of Chinese competition to promote socialism among workers.

Although the IWA was supposedly a division of the virtually defunct Marxist International, it reflected the perverse eclecticism of Burnette Haskell, an enigmatic young San Francisco lawyer noted for his indiscriminate advocacy of anarchism, socialism, communitarianism, and eventually Populism. In addition to having established the IWA on the Pacific Coast, Haskell edited the IWA organ, the *Truth*, which he used to focus attention on the problems of Chinese immigration and monopoly and to support the left wing of the Knights of Labor. The IWA held agitation meetings and established labor libraries and lyceums, yet it also attempted to conduct secret, subversive activities within the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor. The IWA was linked to socialism but also espoused a brand of anarchism that generally rejected propaganda of the deed in favor of education. Haskell, however, the perennial adolescent, was fascinated by the political possibilities of explosives, and he once offered readers detailed instructions on how to make dynamite.<sup>7</sup>

In early 1886 Haskell traveled to the Pacific Northwest to

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While in some of the old puritanic communities interference might occur, yet out on this coast but little fear of that need be entertained. I know of backwoods communities in this state [Oregon] where numerous couples live together without any form of marriage unmolested. I know also of married women living with their husbands who are both theoretical and practical propagandists for sex freedom, in such communities." (*Lucifer*, Apr. 27, 1898, p. 135.)

7. Chester McArthur Destler, *American Radicalism, 1865-1901* (Chicago, 1966 [1946]), 78ff; *Truth*, Feb. 11, 1882, p. 1; Feb. 18, 1882, p. 1; June 7, 1882, pp. 1, 3; International Workingmen's Association material in the Burnette Haskell papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. See also Bruce Dancis, "Social Mobility and Class Consciousness: San Francisco's International Workingmen's Association in the 1880's," *Journal of Social History*, XI (Fall 1977), 75-98.



help rid the area of Chinese by Washington's birthday. His mission was a failure. A short while later, however, he claimed that the IWA had grown to include more than 2,000 members in Oregon and Washington. That figure was greatly inflated, for the IWA had declined precipitously in membership after the Seattle agitation subsided. In retrospect, the IWA, which once described itself as a "secret, mysterious, world-wide" organization that was "quietly honey-combing society," appears more ludicrous than sinister. Nonetheless, many citizens of Seattle were no doubt frightened by a grand jury claim that the IWA was using the anti-Chinese turmoil to produce social revolution.

The collapse of the IWA, caused in part by the calming of anti-Chinese passions on Puget Sound, did not completely discourage the more dedicated radicals. Several former members, including Haskell and his Pacific Northwest lieutenant, Daniel Cronin, participated in communitarian experiments in California and Oregon. Others simply joined the Socialist Labor Party.<sup>8</sup>

The failure of the IWA's pretentious efforts to change society by surreptitiously "boring from within" caused some radicals to embrace a drastically different experience, that of physically separating themselves from the oppressive new industrial society. The Puget Sound Cooperative Colony, the first of several communitarian ventures in western Washington, was founded at Port Angeles in 1887 by Seattle attorney George Venable Smith and others. Smith was a leader in the local anti-Chinese movement, but in the disillusioning aftermath of the disturbances, he turned to communitarianism as a solution to labor's growing discontent. He hoped to establish a colony that would enable a group of workingmen to defy growing corporate power by producing and distributing goods on a cooperative basis. For a few years the colony maintained close ties to the Knights of Labor, endorsing many of their economic reform schemes such as the abolition of the wage system. The colony also advocated a potpourri of other reforms ranging from peace to the emancipation of women from the slavery of domestic drudgery. Unlike

8. *Truth in Small Doses*, May 23, 1886, pp. 1ff; "What the I.W.A. Is" (n.p., n.d.), pamphlet in Haskell papers; *The People*, Apr. 19, 1891, p. 5; Robert Saltvig, "The Progressive Movement in Washington" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Washington, 1966), 4, 6. Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States* (New York, 1971 [1910]), 231.

some later communal ventures, the Puget Sound Cooperative Colony shunned free love and regarded good morals and marriage as the foundation of the home. By the early 1890s, however, the Port Angeles experiment in bourgeois radicalism, wracked by internal dissension and economic difficulty, had lost the vision of its founders.<sup>9</sup>

To some degree, both the IWA and the Puget Sound Cooperative Colony were associated with social outcasts. The same was true of the *Firebrand*. The "Firebrand family," a penurious group of five or six Portland radicals, included a novice printer, a junk dealer, a corset maker, and two unemployed workers. They published their paper ostensibly as a group effort; soon, however, Henry Addis emerged as first among equals. Like Haskell, he was young and idealistic, given to an all-consuming pursuit of fundamental change. Like Smith, he was a newcomer to the Pacific Northwest; neither family ties nor institutional loyalty bound Addis to support the established order. His often crude spelling and syntax and his eagerness to offer simplistic assessments of the most complex subjects doubtless indicate a self-educated but frustrated intellect. In the early 1890s, after spending an unnoteworthy youth in Louisiana, California, and Iowa, Addis took up residence in Portland, where he believed he could actually do something about the growing contradiction between the ostentatious wealth of a privileged few and the grinding poverty and misery of the working masses.<sup>10</sup>

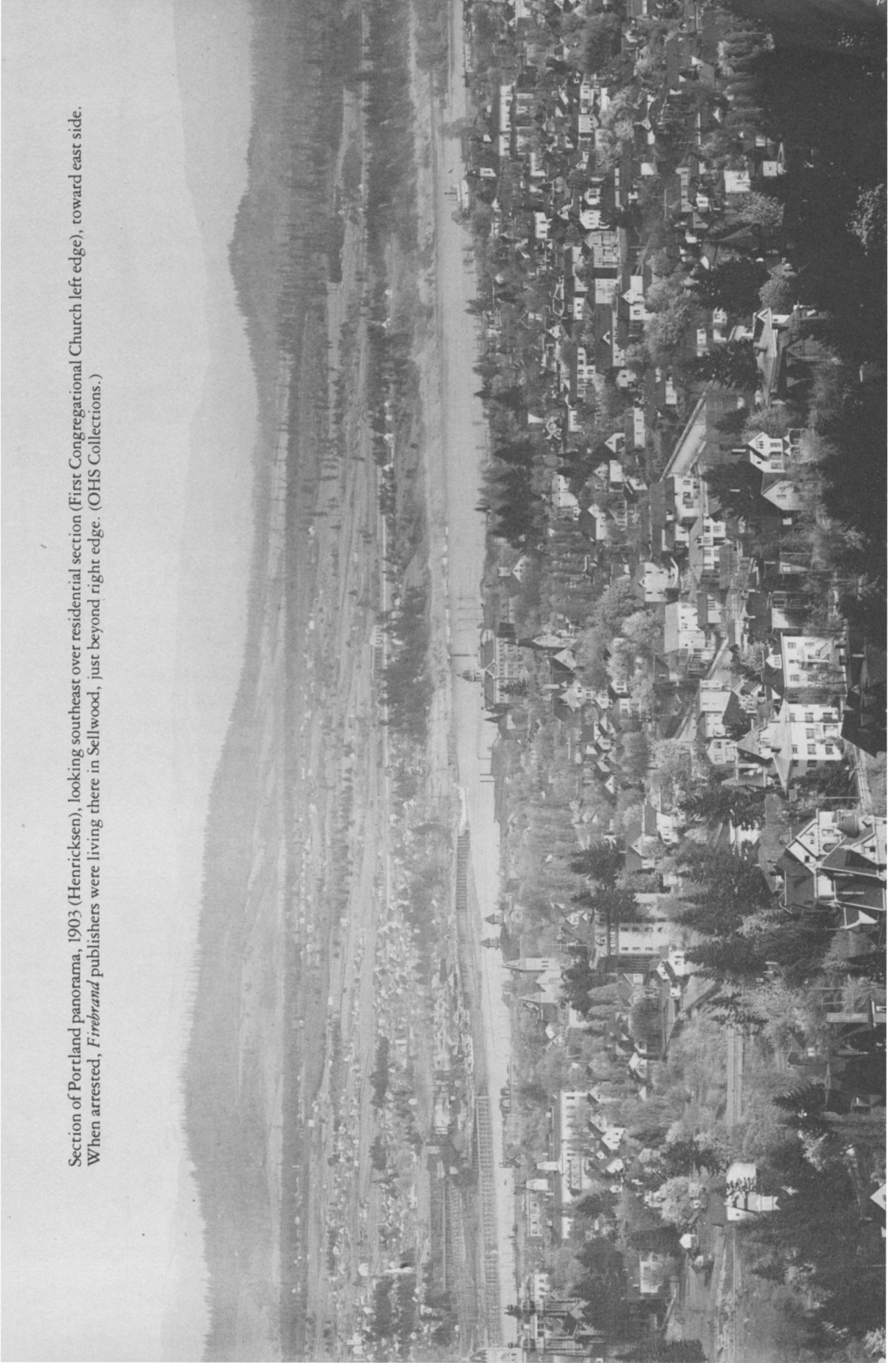
Addis joined the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), which in the Pacific Northwest had become a haven for former communarians and erstwhile members of the IWA. Meetings of the SLP provided him plenty of opportunity to discuss with more seasoned radicals the movement's historic aspirations and past failures. His four years in the SLP, however, proved to be as unhappy as they were educational. Addis, a dedicated individualist, was unable to follow unswervingly the party's self-proclaimed intellectual leader, Daniel DeLeon, and he could not

9. *Model Commonwealth*, June 10, 1887, pp. 3, 8; June 17, 1887, p. 6; July 22, 1887, p. 1; Oct. 7, 1887, p. 3; Charles Pierce LeWarne, *Utopias on Puget Sound, 1885-1915* (Seattle, 1975), 15ff; *Firebrand*, Jan. 27, 1895, p. 1ff.

10. Haskell Journal, May 1898, p. 46 (copy at State Historical Society of Wisconsin); LeWarne, *Utopias on Puget Sound*, 16; *Portland Morning Oregonian*, Sept. 18, 1897, p. 10; *Firebrand*, Aug. 22, 1895, p. 1. The first issue of the *Firebrand* appeared on Jan. 27, 1895. A more or less complete run of the paper is available at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison.



Section of Portland panorama, 1903 (Henricksen), looking southeast over residential section (First Congregational Church left edge), toward east side. When arrested, *Firebrand* publishers were living there in Sellwood, just beyond right edge. (OHS Collections.)



abide the progressive narrowing of the party's membership base that resulted from DeLeon's obsessive pursuit of ideological purity. Convinced that "the attainment of better conditions was more important than the success or failure of any party," Addis quit the SLP and dedicated himself fully to a libertarian philosophy he described as anarcho-communism.<sup>11</sup>

Addis' conversion to anarchism sprang from motives so complex that it is doubtful whether he himself fully understood them. His attempts to explain to others why he had become an anarchist reveal an ill-digested mixture of sentiment and cynicism, metaphysical musings, and deep psychic needs. He became an anarchist, he told readers, because he wanted an opportunity to gratify his innermost yearnings, hopes, and aspirations. Foremost among these was an intense craving for personal freedom. "I see that others want the same conditions, and I know that my freedom can be made more secure only by the freedom of all others." He continued, "I love my fellows, some of them at least, and pity those who suffer. I desire association with my fellow humans, and crave their friendship. I have a horror of violence and the shedding of blood." An anarchistic society, he believed, would eliminate the conditions that produced turmoil and bloodshed. Finally, noted Addis, "I love the beautiful. It gives me joy to see gorgeous sunsets, towering mountains, picturesque scenes. It increases my happiness to see bright, cheery faces, happy people, and comfort."<sup>12</sup>

So complete was Addis' dedication to his dream that he willfully sacrificed both good health and personal freedom to the demanding job of composing, editing, and promoting the *Firebrand*. Fortunately, he was occasionally released from his self-imposed confinement to the print shop by comrades who shared his rudimentary typesetting skills. Abraham Isaak, a Mennonite emigré from Russia, had fallen under the influence of radicals about the time he moved to Portland, and soon the entire Isaak family was helping publish the *Firebrand*. Beginning in early 1897 they were assisted by Abner J. Pope, a wizened old rebel who traced his pacifism and defiance of the social order back to Quaker ancestors who stood up to the Puritan oligarchy in Massachusetts. He arrived in Portland

11. *Firebrand*, Jan. 12, 1896, p. 2.

12. *Ibid.*, Mar. 7, 1897, p. 1.

penniless because he had earlier donated an inheritance of \$30,000 to radical causes.<sup>13</sup>

When Addis and associates began publishing the *Firebrand* their purpose was to provide a forum for the presentation of “any and all opinions on any and all subjects.” A remarkably heterogeneous group of American and European anarchists, both prominent and obscure, submitted material. Certain opinions, however, rarely if ever appeared in print, for the Portland anarchists seemed determined to avoid the mistakes made by the region’s previous radical movements. The paper’s early issues made no effort to capitalize on emotional appeals to anti-Chinese prejudice. It also rejected the surreptitiousness and infiltrating tactics of the International Workingmen’s Association, the communitarianism of the Puget Sound Cooperative Colony, and the authoritarianism of the Socialist Labor Party.<sup>14</sup>

Ever since the 1886 explosion in Chicago’s Haymarket Square, anarchists everywhere had been publicly accused of plotting to overthrow the established order by violent action. The *Firebrand* vigorously denied the allegations that all anarchists were skulking, bloodthirsty terrorists, yet admitted that they regarded the state as a legal obstacle to full human development. The Portland anarchists, like many other libertarians, generally preached a gentle, peaceful brand of revolution. As Addis explained, the undermining of “popular respect for law and custom by quietly ignoring them is not to be underestimated in the work of revolutionizing public opinion.”<sup>15</sup>

To that end, the *Firebrand* urged readers to ignore marriage laws by simply living together, to ignore blue laws by doing as

13. *Ibid.*, Mar. 8, 1896, p. 3; Jan. 10, 1897, p. 2; *Free Society*, Jan. 30, 1898, p. 4; *Morning Oregonian*, Sept. 18, 1897, p. 10; Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (1-vol. ed., New York, 1934), 224.

14. *Firebrand*, Mar. 28, 1897, p. 5. Addis wrote: “I was once a member of the SLP. I paid my dues like a little man, and strove to induce my Section to do something more than meet, pay dues, and go home. In a little while I found I was being denounced for not working according to the program of the party. To me the attainment of better conditions was more important than the success or failure of any party. That did not suit the leaders of the party, from De Leon down, and, as I would not sink my individuality and become a mere automaton, I found it more pleasant to withdraw from the party and its work.” *Firebrand*, Jan. 12, 1896, p. 2.

15. *Ibid.*, Aug. 25, 1895, p. 1; Sept. 15, 1895, p. 3; Sept. 29, 1895, p. 3; Dec. 29, 1895, p. 3; July 18, 1897, p. 6; Sidney Fine, “Anarchism and the Assassination of McKinley,” *American Historical Review*, LX (July 1955), 777ff.

they pleased on Sunday, and to ignore labor leaders by casting aside the “silly, sentimental notion” of trade distinctions. Commented Addis, “the man who pulls the throttle of the locomotive is no more essential to the running of the train than is the fireman who keeps up the steam pressure.”<sup>16</sup>

The *Firebrand* sometimes blasted the foundations of Victorian society with long, erudite dissertations; at other times it sniped at favorite targets with short, caustic definitions:

- Clergy: The paid tools of the rich to keep the poor divided on religion and unanimous in their respect for the state.
- Fraud: Shrewdness in business.
- Marriage: Legalized prostitution and enslavement of the sexes.
- Army: Licensed murderers.
- Congress: A body of men organized to break laws and make debts.<sup>17</sup>

The *Firebrand* also spent much time discrediting rival brands of reform, particularly state socialism and Populism. The Portland anarchists closely followed the Populist triumph in neighboring Washington in 1896 and crowed “we told you so” when the Populist governor and the reformer-dominated legislature proved unable to deliver on most of their campaign promises. “Year by year the fallacy of legislation and the foolishness of paying taxes to keep governmental parasites in power is becoming more apparent.” Some disillusioned Populists agreed and professed support for anarchism.<sup>18</sup>

The *Firebrand* revelled in iconoclasm, but it was the occasional attempt to liberate readers from sexual prudery that generated most of the controversy surrounding the paper. Many of its sexual articles were simply straightforward attempts to discuss matters shunned or suppressed by Victorian moralists. One such essay was entitled “Plain Talks about the Sexual Organs”; another was “Teaching Sexual Truths to the Children.” In no case was the language coarse or vulgar. Addis, nonetheless, fearlessly ventured into the even more controversial issue of

16. *Firebrand*, Aug. 25, 1895, p. 1; July 18, 1897, p. 1.

17. *Ibid.*, Mar. 21, 1897, p. 6; July 25, 1897, p. 6.

18. *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1895, p. 2; Nov. 1, 1896, p. 4; Nov. 15, 1896, p. 4; Mar. 28, 1897, p. 2; Sept. 12, 1897, p. 4.

free love. To him, free love encompassed several anarchist tenets. It was at once a matter of personal freedom and an act of defiance of church and state. He believed that sexual freedom was as important as any other kind of freedom and wondered why a couple having decided that they could live more happily together than apart should not unite their lives without having to secure the permission of the church or state. "Only bigots desire to compel lovers to go through perscribed [*sic*] ceremonies, to fee the preacher and be fined by the county clerk, before they are allowed to associate in sex companionship." Furthermore, according to Addis, free love promised to liberate women from "sexual slavery" by preventing men from holding "their" wives in legal bondage. He claimed that this kind of sexual freedom did not entail promiscuity, but Addis' distinction confused some comrades.<sup>19</sup>

Publication of an article by Oscar Rotter advocating freedom and "variety" in sex relations brought an angry rejoinder from Lucy E. Parsons of Chicago, widow of one of the Haymarket martyrs. She claimed that Mr. Rotter ("the name, by some strange coincidence, well describes what society would come to if his system of variety was adopted") had failed to take cognizance of the meaning "of what is to me the sweetest of all words under the sun: family life, child life. These Mr. Rotter has not deigned to mention. In his system of variety, family life is scorned, child life is ignored."

"Mr. Rotter," she continued, "attempts to dig up the hideous, 'Variety' grub and bind it to the beautiful unfolding blossom of labor's emancipation from wage-slavery, and call them one and the same. Variety in sex relations and economic freedom have nothing in common. Nor has it anything in common with Anarchism, as I understand Anarchism; if it has, then I am not an Anarchist."

Addis coldly replied: "If comrade Parsons would prevent variety by force she is an advocate of government." In anarchy,

19. *Ibid.*, Aug. 25, 1895, p. 1; Dec. 1, 1895, p. 1; Oct. 11, 1896, p. 3; Dec. 26, 1896, p. 2; Apr. 4, 1897, p. 2; June 13, 1897, p. 2. Addis mocked the prudery of the era by composing the following doggerel for the *Firebrand* (Feb. 2, 1896, p. 1) under the title, "Nudity, An Autumnal Idyl":

The naked hills lie wanton to the breeze;  
The bare field are nude, the groves unfrocked;  
Bare are the shivering limbs of shameless trees;  
No wonder the corn is shocked.



he warned, “there could be no interference in sex relations, and variety would become general or not as it added to or detracted from human happiness.”

The controversy continued for several issues. Finally Lucy Parsons attempted to turn the tables on male advocates of variety in sexual encounters by saying, “The *Firebrand* has had a good deal from men in favor of variety, and I would like to see something from the women readers in favor of variety showing wherein it is going to redound to the happiness of women.” About as many women respondents praised variety as condemned it.<sup>20</sup>

The *Firebrand's* battle against ignorance and superstition was no less rigorous than its struggle to survive on the proceeds of subscriptions and donations. Between July 2, 1896, and January 1, 1897, the “Firebrand family” took in \$233.98. Though they retained less than \$90 for their personal needs, the publishers still incurred a deficit of \$122. To stay alive, they moved into the countryside near Portland and attempted to live off the land. They spent days in the nearby mountains picking wild blackberries to can for winter survival. They acquired a cow and then put up hay for neighbors in order to acquire a bit of hay for their own use. Between canning provisions and tending the cow, chickens, and cats, they set type and edited copy. They also earned a little money picking hops on the Willamette Valley ranches. “We have worked hard,” Addis insisted, “lived close, suffered privation and denied ourselves much that we craved, in order to keep the paper alive and make it more instructive and a better paper in every respect.” When an effort to ease their financial burden by starting a small dairy farm failed, Addis began dusting off an old idea whose time had apparently returned: communitarianism.<sup>21</sup>

20. *Ibid.*, Aug. 16, 1896, p. 3; Sept. 27, 1896, p. 1; Oct. 25, 1896, pp. 2-3; Nov. 22, 1896, p. 1; Feb. 14, 1897, p. 6. Although he does not mention the *Firebrand*, Hal D. Sears provides a fascinating look at the sexual reform movement in *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1977).

21. *Firebrand*, Jan. 10, 1897, pp. 2, 4; Feb. 7, 1897, p. 5; Mar. 21, 1897, p. 5; Apr. 25, 1897, p. 7. So well-known was the poverty of the Portland anarchists that a Milwaukee, Wisconsin, paper cynically suggested that the group could not afford to buy the matches necessary to burn down the institutions of the established order. *Firebrand*, July 18, 1897, p. 6. Because so many comrades took out subscriptions but failed to remit any money, the *Firebrand* abolished its subscription fee and attempted to survive on donations alone. The experiment—the first by any English-language anarchist paper—ran afoul of postal regula-



Addis had no intention of trying to resurrect the discredited bourgeois communitarianism associated with the Puget Sound Cooperative Colony. He simply proposed formation of a group of libertarians “who produce within themselves the necessities and comforts of life, and enjoy the association of other free individuals.” By their gardening, fruit raising, grain growing, and clothes making, they might sustain both themselves and the *Firebrand*. In mid-summer 1897 Addis wrote of the possibilities of acquiring a farm on the lower Columbia River near Rainier, Oregon. The act of cultivating and improving this land, he claimed, “would be an important deed of propaganda.” It would also secure a “pleasant home for those who prefer to live away from the city.” When anarchists learned of the socialists’ plans to establish a colony on the shores of Puget Sound, they wondered whether they could not honeycomb Washington with anarchist groups “before Debs’ Social Democracy gets control.” The *Firebrand*’s colonization plans were interrupted in late summer with the arrests of Addis, Isaak, and Pope.<sup>22</sup>

Postal authorities had been keeping an eye on the *Firebrand* for some time. Claiming to have received complaints from readers about the paper’s sexual content and having received an order from Washington, D. C., to investigate the matter, a Portland postal inspector took out a subscription to the journal under an assumed name. In this way postal authorities gathered evidence against the *Firebrand*.

Pope was about to mail the latest issue of the *Firebrand* when a deputy United States marshal, posing as a friendly and sympathetic party, began questioning him about the people responsible for publishing the paper. Pope probably saw through the ruse, for he attempted to take primary responsibility for the journal. He insisted that he was the major stockholder in the enterprise and intimated that Addis and Isaak were merely contributors.

Armed with this information, federal officers arrested all three men and charged them with sending “obscene” literature through the mails in violation of the Comstock Act.<sup>23</sup> Bail was

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tions and had to be abandoned. At one point, however, a helpful comrade came to the paper’s rescue by promising to send two potted plants to anyone who paid for a subscription and enclosed two cents to cover postage on the plants. *Firebrand*, Jan. 3, 1897, p. 4; Feb. 7, 1897, p. 5; *Lucifer*, Mar. 17, 1897, p. 88.

22. *Firebrand*, Feb. 7, 1897, p. 5; July 11, 1897, p. 1; Sept. 12, 1897, p. 4.

set at \$2,000 for Pope and \$500 each for Addis and Isaak, an indication that the government agreed with Pope's assertions of responsibility. Addis and Isaak soon posted bail, but Pope, unable to raise the money and unwilling to sign a bond allowing him to be released on his own recognizance, remained in jail until the trial began some three months later.<sup>24</sup>

Portlanders who regarded the trio as members of a "sort of Anarchist gang" were no doubt surprised by the pacifistic demeanor of the captured revolutionaries. People conditioned to believe that anarchists were wild-eyed, bomb-throwing foreigners especially had trouble comprehending a mild-mannered, seemingly well-educated rebel like Pope. At the time of his arrest the grandfatherly, 74-year-old Pope quietly answered questions about his beliefs and probably stunned some people when he revealed his pioneer New England ancestry and his upbringing in a good Whig family. However, when someone asked him if he thought it right to send broadcast a paper containing such "vile stuff," he lost his temper and stormed back, "If there is anything one-tenth so vile as can be found in the Bible, I'll cut my nose off."<sup>25</sup>

Anarchists around the country rallied to support their Portland comrades. Emma Goldman made a brief appeal to a few of her anarchist friends in Chicago and netted four dollars. Other anarchist editors sent contributions. Chicago comrades organized a protest meeting featuring speeches by Emma Goldman, Lucy Parsons, and Moses Harman, an old friend of Pope and publisher of *Lucifer*, a journal similar to the *Firebrand* in its devotion to anarchism and sex radicalism. The gathering was to have been a demonstration of solidarity with the *Firebrand* publishers, but Lucy Parsons disrupted the harmony by arguing that "there has been some mighty dirty reading in the *Firebrand*." Perhaps as a result of her forthright but injudicious comments, the meeting raised only a small amount of money. On the other hand, Jewish

23. Until a grand jury clarified matters, the anarchists were confused as to which specific articles government officials found offensive. See materials sent from G. F. Miller to F. G. Adams, secretary of the Kansas State Historical Society, Oct. 20, 1897, appended to the society's microfilm of the *Firebrand*.

24. *Morning Oregonian*, Sept. 18, 1897, p. 10; Sept. 21, 1897, p. 16; *Free Society*, Nov. 14, 1897, p. 8; *Lucifer*, Oct. 6, 1897, p. 316; Dec. 22, 1897, p. 405.

25. *Morning Oregonian*, Sept. 18, 1897, p. 10; Jan. 4, 1898, p. 8; *Lucifer*, Dec. 1, 1897, pp. 380-81.

anarchists in New York City held a Yom Kippur meeting and collected more than \$50 for the *Firebrand* defense fund.<sup>26</sup>

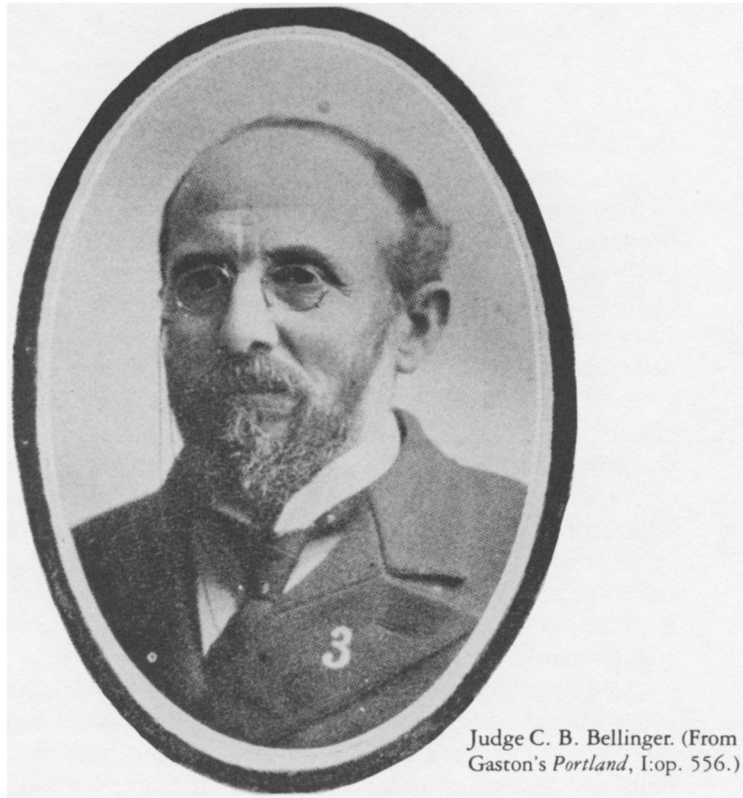
The trial began in Portland's U. S. District Court in early January, 1898, and was presided over by Judge Charles B. Bellinger. Fortunately for the anarchists, Bellinger was reputed to be a fair-minded and conscientious man. Despite his best efforts, however, the trial quickly degenerated into a farce. Harry E. McGinn, the court-appointed defense counsel, was inept. He failed to call important witnesses, he gave Isaak no opportunity to testify in his own behalf, he refused to cross-examine witnesses for the prosecution, and he conceded point after point. Except for an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Bellinger to dismiss the case because of the alleged entrapment of the trio by postal authorities, McGinn was, in Addis' words, "out at sea." At one point he was reduced to quoting St. Paul's admonition that to the pure all things are pure and to the impure all things are impure.

Pope hampered the defense and upset his colleagues by assuming the role of a martyr. When called to the witness stand, he refused to swear or affirm. Instead, he launched into a tirade about his powerlessness in the hands of the law and quoted a Biblical injunction against swearing. Bellinger wisely halted the outburst.

U. S. Attorney John H. Hall cleverly based his prosecution on an exploitation of popular fears and prejudices. He charged that articles published in the *Firebrand* were "indecent, lascivious, and lewd, and are not fit for adults even to read." He then subjected the hastily picked jury to readings of several selections on free love that had appeared in the *Firebrand*. Among these were "A Woman's View of It," "It Depends on the Woman," and "Marriage versus Liberty."<sup>27</sup> On a higher literary plane was the jury's exposure to a *Firebrand* reprint from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, "A Woman Waits for Me," which begins with the lines:

26. *Free Society*, Feb. 6, 1898, p. 5; *Lucifer*, Oct. 20, 1897, p. 332; Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons, American Revolutionary* (Chicago, 1976), 205ff. Pope had once helped publish *Lucifer* while Harman served a prison term for sending supposedly obscene literature through the mail. *Lucifer*, June 21, 1895, p. 2.

27. *Lucifer*, Jan. 19, 1898, pp. 436-37; Feb. 2, 1898, p. 39; *Free Society*, Jan. 23, 1898, p. 1; Jan. 30, 1898, p. 3. The best description of the trial is found in the *Oregonian*, Jan. 4, 1898, p. 8.



Judge C. B. Bellinger. (From Gaston's *Portland*, I:op. 556.)

A woman waits for me, she contains all, nothing is  
lacking,  
Yet all were lacking if sex were lacking, or if the mois-  
ture of the right man were lacking. . . .<sup>28</sup>

Basically, the issue was not a matter of obscene words but rather “obscene” ideas and principles. In a highly emotional summary, Hall challenged the jury to consider the evils of “scattering such filth broadcast through the country to corrupt the minds of the young.” He further asserted that “Marriage versus Liberty” was subversive of morality and was “calculated to undermine the very foundation of government.”

Defense counsel McGinn countered with a simple if vague plea for liberty of the press and freedom of expression. Judge Bellinger, determined to prevent a total miscarriage of justice, directed the jury to confine itself strictly to the narrow issue of whether the trio had actually participated in the act of mailing

28. The complete text of Whitman's poem appeared on the front page of the *Firebrand* of Mar. 14, 1897.

the allegedly obscene literature. He implied that justice would best be served by finding Addis and Isaak not guilty.

The jury, apparently rattled by the emotional charges of the prosecution, took only a few minutes to find all three guilty as charged. Seemingly disgusted by the verdict and willing to defy public opinion, Judge Bellinger refused to sentence immediately the defendants and indicated that he would grant the trio a new trial if they so petitioned.

Addis and Isaak accepted the judge's offer, but Pope declined, saying that "if I should ask for a new trial I should admit the government's right to govern me." He once again refused to sign the bond allowing him to go free on his own recognizance. The stubbornness of the elderly Pope was no doubt subtly reinforced by the stark contrast between the rigors of trying to survive a cool, damp Oregon winter on canned blackberries and the comparative luxury of three square meals a day in the clean, steam-heated county jail.<sup>29</sup>

At a February hearing of the petitions for retrial, Addis and Isaak claimed that they had not been given an opportunity to testify at the earlier trial. They denied responsibility for actually mailing the offending issue and shifted blame to Pope, whom some thought was "longing for martyrdom" anyway. Judge Bellinger agreed that Isaak should have been allowed to testify that he was out of town when the offending issue was mailed. He added that justice would "probably" be served by also giving Addis another opportunity to defend himself. Bellinger then granted the request for a new trial and once again released the two on their own recognizance.

Addis and Isaak traveled the West Coast attempting to marshal popular support for their cause, while Pope, calling himself "a prisoner for righteousness sake," hoped his incarceration would arouse the masses to support anarchism. His stubborn passive resistance, however succeeded only in angering his

29. Pope wrote: "I have a humane jailer; jail well ventilated, steam heated, moderately well lighted by windows before the cells. Electric lights at night and of dark days. A bath tub for hot and cold water; and water closet, in each corridor, and the place kept sweet and clean by scrubbing and mopping with hot water daily. My friends furnished me a good cotton mattress which with three pairs of blankets make a good bed. Sleep well, and rise refreshed every morn. Have plenty of good food three times a day. Am not troubled with tobacco, foul language, etc., for which favor I am truly thankful. Am on good terms with the jailer; all my mail sent direct here will be punctually delivered. I am well, cheerful and happy, and send best regards to all my friends." *Lucifer*, Nov. 10, 1897, p. 358.

Portland comrades. On March 1, Judge Bellinger sentenced Pope to four additional months in jail and fined him one dollar. Four months later the judge simply dropped the charges against Addis and Isaak.<sup>30</sup>

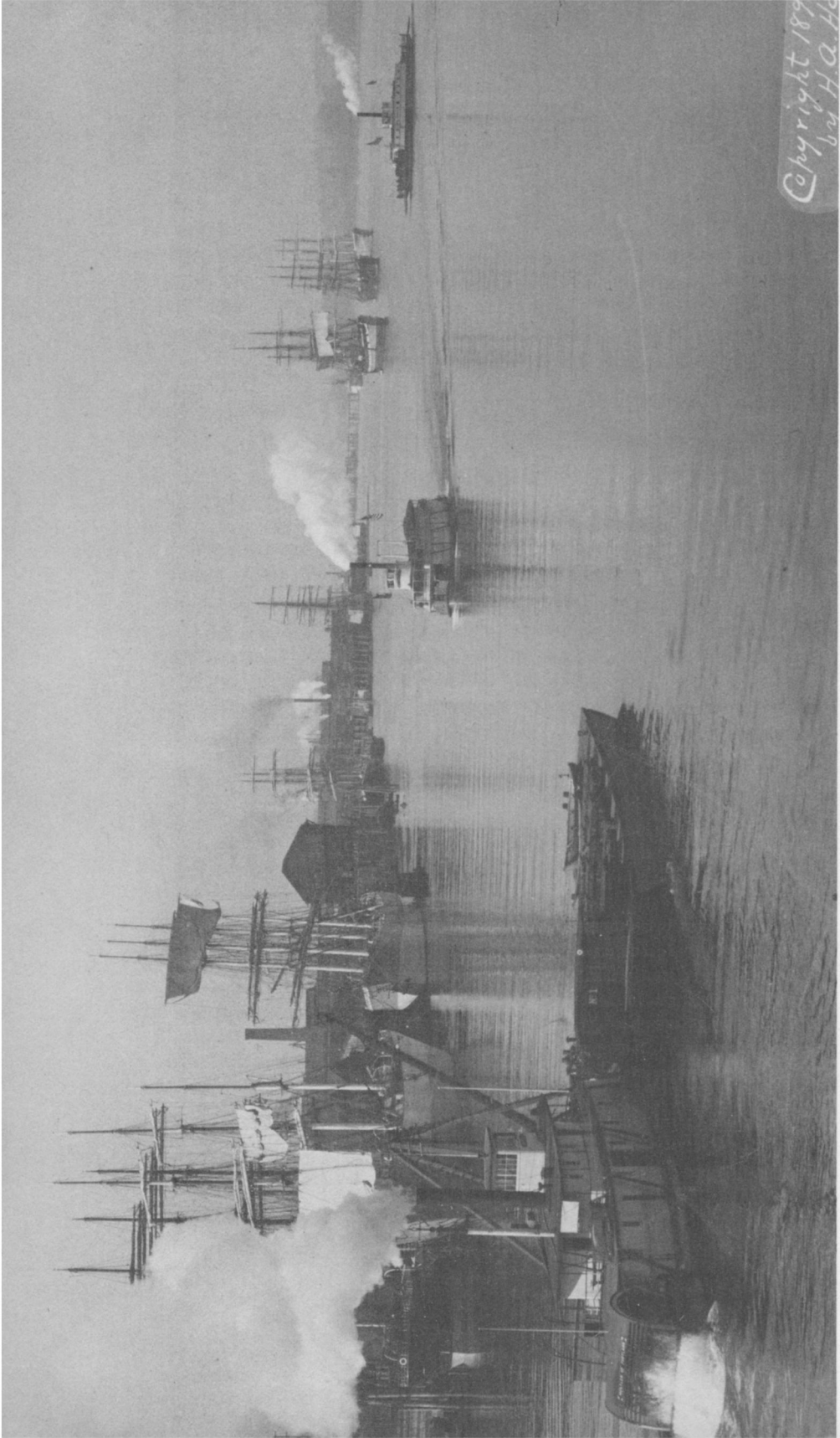
Isaak and his family moved to San Francisco where they used most of the defense fund to establish *Free Society* as the successor to the *Firebrand*. Isaak gradually became a luminary in the American anarchist movement. Addis briefly joined the "Free Society family" but withdrew because he disliked the climate in San Francisco. He eventually migrated to the lively new anarchist colony, Home, at Joe's Bay, Washington. Pope, homeless after 37 weeks in prison, attempted to sustain himself by peddling his photo to sympathetic radicals. He soon joined Addis at Home.<sup>31</sup>

It would be impossible to measure accurately the influence of the *Firebrand* without reference to the structure of reform in the Pacific Northwest. In contrast to the secret operation of the International Workingmen's Association or the separatism of the Puget Sound Cooperative Colony, radicals in the 1890s pursued their goals openly, preaching their gospel on busy street corners, and mingling freely with potential converts. Reform study groups, such as the Academy of Socialism and the Firebrand and Social Science clubs in Portland, abounded in the new Northwest, and debates among anarchists, socialists, single taxers, and others became a popular form of entertainment.<sup>32</sup>

Fund raisers were important social occasions. At one such ball in Tacoma, anarchists rented a hall and invited friends to enjoy an elaborate mixture of oratory, music, and games. A variety of musical selections was performed by vocalists, pianists, "Prof. Jensen's full orchestra," and the Tacoma Zither Club. One

30. *Morning Oregonian*, Jan. 4, 1898, p. 8; Jan. 15, 1898, p. 10; Jan. 16, 1898, p. 12; Feb. 25, 1898, p. 8; *Free Society*, Jan. 23, 1898, p. 1; Mar. 13, 1898, p. 5; *Lucifer*, Dec. 1, 1897, p. 358; Jan. 23, 1898, p. 1; Mar. 13, 1898, p. 5; July 9, 1898, p. 216. E. C. Walker claimed that all the defendants had been endangered by "the sincere but utterly irrational Jesus-Tolstoi non-resistant theories of Mr. Pope, who seems as anxious for the crown of martyrdom as was any Christian in Rome." *Lucifer*, Jan. 26, 1898, pp. 444-45.
31. Goldman, *Living My Life*, 224; LeWarne, *Utopias on Puget Sound*, 175, 178; Fine, "Anarchism and the Assassination of McKinley," 781; *Free Society*, Jan. 23, 1898, p. 8; Jan. 30, 1898, p. 3; *Lucifer*, July 2, 1898, p. 3. Pope lived at Home intermittently the next several years. See *Demonstrator*, Feb. 7, 1906, p. 4.
32. *Firebrand*, Feb. 27, 1895, p. 2; Apr. 21, 1895, p. 4; June 2, 1895, p. 3; Oct. 13, 1895, p. 3; Nov. 24, 1895, p. 3; Dec. 22, 1895, p. 3.





Variety of foreign commerce, wheat ships, steamboats, ferry, in Portland harbor in 1899, was part of city's atmosphere. (OHS Collections.)

popular game was “grape picking” in which comrades attempted to steal certain objects without getting caught and fined. One comrade acted as jailer, and the “slickest thief” got a prize. Half the funds raised in this way went to support the *Firebrand* and half sustained the anarchist literature distribution in Tacoma.<sup>33</sup>

Union halls contained reading rooms which made available to workers a wide variety of radical and reform publications. The region’s pioneer labor papers generally opened their columns to a wide variety of opinion and thus exposed workers to an incredible melange of ideas and nostrums. Labor and reform papers frequently exchanged clippings as well as special subscription offers.<sup>34</sup>

Ironically, even churches sometimes served as forums for the exposition of radical ideas. On one such occasion, anarchists lectured in the Christian Church of Orting, Washington. Anarchistic notions were boldly advanced, yet the audience of townspeople listened intently, even sympathetically, for they invited the speaker to return.<sup>35</sup>

Addis and others became missionaries to take their gospel to the utmost parts of the Pacific Northwest. Traveling by horseback, Addis sought to win converts to anarchism from among hardrock miners in eastern Oregon and northern Idaho. Spokane, still in a state of agitation over free silver and Populism, proved particularly receptive, and W. J. Walker, editor of the influential *Freemen’s Labor Journal*, allowed Addis to explain the “beauties of anarchism” to readers of eastern Washington’s leading labor paper. Walker, incidentally, must have felt sorry for the self-sacrificing anarchist, for he gave Addis a railroad ticket to Portland in exchange for his weary horse. Not all propaganda tours ended on a happy note, however. Herman Eich, Portland’s “rag-picker poet,” was determined to promote the *Firebrand* in the eastern United States. He got as far as Rock Springs, Wyoming, where a Union Pacific brakeman ordered him off the moving freight. Eich fell, was caught under the wheels, and fatally crushed.<sup>36</sup>

33. *Ibid.*, Oct. 4, 1896, p. 4.

34. Schwantes, “Left-Wing Unionism in the Pacific Northwest,” 68, 73.

35. So Addis reported. *Firebrand*, Nov. 24, 1895, p. 3.

36. *Ibid.*, Sept. 6, 1896, p. 3; Jan. 10, 1897, p. 2; Feb. 14, 1897, pp. 1-2.

The personal activity of radicals like Addis and Eich and the availability of the *Firebrand* in reform clubs and union halls suggests that the paper reached an audience considerably larger than the 3,000 subscribers it claimed. For example, a correspondent in Silver City, Idaho, in 1896, reported that miners were afraid they might lose their jobs if they took out personal subscriptions to the paper; nonetheless, they read and passed around dog-eared copies of the *Firebrand*. He further noted that anarchist ideas “are in the minds of a good number of miners, and some who express them denounce and despise Anarchists.” Such a response “proves to me that our influence is felt unconsciously.”<sup>37</sup>

The *Firebrand* also had at least an indirect influence on the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in western Washington. Some of the area’s earliest propagandists for the IWW were residents of Home colony, a settlement popularly renowned as a haven for anarchism, free love, and nude bathing, where the radical vision of the *Firebrand* lived on in the colony’s *Discontent: Mother of Progress* and the *Demonstrator*. A. Klemencic, who in early 1906 initiated and edited the “I. W. W. Department” in the *Demonstrator*, had once been the *Firebrand*’s most vocal supporter in Tacoma. While the proprietor of a small tailor shop in a working-class neighborhood, he had used the *Firebrand* to organize a strong anarchist movement in Tacoma (at about the same time as other anarchists established Home colony nearby).<sup>38</sup>

The ubiquity of reform ideas in the Pacific Northwest makes any attempt to assess the impact of the *Firebrand* on subsequent radical movements speculative yet intriguing. Similarly, the

37. *Firebrand*, Oct. 18, 1896, p. 4; Feb. 7, 1897, p. 5. The historian must wonder whether William D. Haywood was one of the Silver City miners who either consciously or unconsciously absorbed the outlook of the *Firebrand*. Haywood in 1896 was the recording secretary for the newly-organized Silver City local of the Western Federation of Miners (WFM). The ideas and attitudes that he later exhibited as secretary-treasurer of the radicalized WFM and as prominent founder of the Industrial Workers of the World resemble in many ways the attitudes expressed in the *Firebrand*. Given the educational nature of union organization in mining camps it is difficult to believe that Haywood could have avoided exposure to the *Firebrand*. Record Book, Silver City Miners’ Union collection, Bancroft Library. On Haywood’s life in Silver City, see Joseph R. Conlin, *Big Bill Haywood and the Radical Union Movement* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1969), 20ff. Conlin gives no indication whether Haywood ever saw a copy of the *Firebrand*.

38. *Firebrand*, June 2, 1895, p. 3; Mar. 31, 1897, p. 2; *Free Society*, Jan. 23, 1898, p. 1; *Demonstrator*, Feb. 7, 1906, p. 1; LeWarne, *Utopias on Puget Sound*, 168ff.

circumstances surrounding the paper's suppression offer tantalizing insight into shifting popular attitudes toward divergent opinions. During the trial of the Portland anarchists, a reporter for the *Oregonian* remarked: "Just what becomes of the trio of anarchists is a matter of small moment, so that they are precluded from ever again publishing the filthy *Firebrand*." Of all the outrageous aspects of the paper's radical vision, only its sexual opinions were taken as a serious threat to the social order. The Pacific Northwest's proper Victorians, apparently uncertain of the durability of society's prevailing facade of morality, responded to sexual radicalism in much the same way that frightened members of the World War I generation reacted to the pacifism and economic radicalism of the IWW and others. Ironically, a subsequent generation no doubt regards the *Firebrand's* advocacy of anarcho-communism as utterly naive and its sex radicalism as quaint. The *Firebrand's* radical vision, nonetheless, remains a bold dissent from the prevailing political, social, and economic beliefs of Gilded Age America.<sup>39</sup>

39. *Morning Oregonian*, Feb. 25, 1898, p. 8. After the assassination of President William McKinley in 1901 by a self-proclaimed anarchist, frightened and angry residents of the Tacoma area threatened violently to eliminate the Home colony. Though the furor subsided, postal authorities attempted to use the Comstock Act to silence *Discontent*. The outcome of the case, which was in some respects similar to that of the *Firebrand*, disappointed enemies of the colony. The defendants were found not guilty after Judge C. H. Hanford read the paper and announced that he did not consider the offending article obscene. Legal harassment of the residents of Home continued, however, and centered primarily on the allegedly immoral materials published by some colonists. LeWarne, *Utopias on Puget Sound*, 177ff.