

Walter Gordon Merritt Interview.

Abstract: A pro-management perspective on the Danbury Hatters Case (Loewe v. Lawlor, 208 U.S. 274 (1908), 235 U.S. 522 (1915)) and Danbury of early 20th century.

J. Sikora and Tom Miller (interviewers) ca. 1964

- Reaction of the jurors to case. Religious aspect?
- Hatter Dietrich Loewe – physical description – blondish – bald – heavy accent.
- Loewe - respected in the community.
- No labor grievance against Loewe.
- Loewe – founding father of the Lutheran church and Danbury Hospital.
- 1890s union relations. Danbury Hat manufacturers’ reaction to union movement. “Can’t generalize.”
- The whole aim was “monopoly” among the hat unions. It was a case of getting every manufacturer into line. Resistance to unionization resulted in boycotts - not aimed at rectifying abuses.
- “Never happened” – union members were never thrown from their homes. The union stepped in to purchase homes.
- Loewe’s personal reaction to his factory boycott. He never showed emotion or desperation about the situation. Merritt was oblivious to Loewe’s personal demeanor at the time.
- Loewe lived on Deer Hill in a Victorian home – nothing distinctive about home.
- When the strike was called, all union and non-union workers walked out.
- National union leaders were leading the strike.
- The local newspapers were generally were cautious to say anything much about the strike.
- Danbury was a “union” town? “I think so.” Didn’t know whether they were pro union or just afraid of the unions.
- Towns that had hatting industries without unions took the business away from Danbury. “My father wasn’t able to make any money...”
- Feared violence against Merritt, his father and brother. After receiving judgment in the case in 1910, a man came onto Merritt’s lawn (“obviously Irish”) who had been a witness in the trial. At first Merritt was frightened but the man only wanted \$5 of legal advice.
- The violence during the Loewe strike was minimal.

Life in Danbury

- People went sledding and ice skating and went to dances in Merritt’s childhood. Older people played cards (bridge). There wasn’t much entertaining back and forth in Danbury. There wasn’t much formal entertainment with the exception of the opera house.
- Danbury Hospital had a big fight in 1952 with its doctors. Danbury News didn’t want to report on it. Merritt saw to the publication of pamphlet that laid out the doctor’s grievances. Hospital was chartered by Merritt’s father.