Early twentieth century view of Commercial Street, Emporia, Kansas.
Strikers, Loyalists, and Replacement Workers: The 1922 Shopmen’s Strike in Emporia

by James H. Ducker

Paul Weatherbee, “his mouth... set with determination,” strode off the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway’s yards at 10 a.m. on July 1, 1922. Weatherbee, a shopman who was within a week of his sixty-first birthday, was the first striker to risk his job with the railroad that day in Emporia, Kansas. Floyd Wadleigh, a twenty-four-year-old machinist foreman, was the next to leave. Machinist Ed Power and engine inspector William Johns followed. Within the next few days 147 Emporia Santa Fe boilermakers, blacksmiths, car repairers and inspectors, electricians, machinists, and their helpers and apprentices as well as assorted other skilled and semiskilled workers joined in the strike called by their unions against the nation’s railroads, left company property, and stored their work clothes and lunch buckets at home.¹

The 1922 shopmen’s strike was a battle over railroad-labor adjustments after World War I. Shop unions had been weak prior to the war. The Santa Fe had signed contracts with major shop unions as early as 1892, but after it had fought off feeble strikes in the early years of the century, its shops, like those of other major lines, had become nonunion.²

James H. Ducker published Men of the Steel Rails: Workers on the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, 1869–1900 with the University of Nebraska Press in 1983, and this article is his return to the subject of the workers of the Santa Fe. In the interim he had a career as a historian and planner with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in Alaska, wrote a number of articles on Alaskan history, and served for three decades as editor of Alaska History, the Journal of the state historical society. He welcomes information related to work and life with the railroad from pre–World War II Santa Fe railroaders and their descendants at jmducker.inuk@gmail.com.

1. “Men Go Out Quietly,” Emporia Gazette, July 1, 1922. The Santa Fe’s payrolls for the summer and fall of 1922, which reveal who struck and who did not, and demographic data from manuscript federal and state censuses, published directories, and other records accessed through Ancestry.com form the basis for much of the analysis in this article. Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad Company, records 1859–1995, Kansas Historical Society (KSHS). The author extends special thanks to the staff of the KSHS for making the payrolls available.

Railroads were an integral part of the nation’s economy during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, employing hundreds of individuals in shop and division point teams. Thus, labor strikes within the industry were major events, locally and nationally. The photograph, published in a 1925 issue of the company’s employee magazine, captured freight car workers outside the Topeka shop, most of whom were no doubt affected by the strike. Although the 1922 strike, which was a battle over railroad-labor adjustments after World War I, worked no revolution in the Emporia shop’s racial or ethnic composition, the Santa Fe was more successful in recruiting African American and Mexican laborers in Topeka.

The war changed everything. In 1916, with the nation’s rail system straining to meet domestic and foreign war-stimulated demands, President Woodrow Wilson’s administration backed the engine and trainmen brotherhoods’ demand for an eight-hour day rather than suffer a crippling national strike. Once the United States entered the war, the imperative to keep commerce flowing prompted the federal takeover of the railroads in December 1917. The government took a lenient stance on labor to ensure an adequate and cooperative workforce. It removed barriers to union organization, and the Railway Employees Department (RED) of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) moved promptly to unionize the nation’s railroad repair shops and roundhouses. The RED began organizing on the Santa Fe in February 1918, founding lodges in shop towns across Kansas and along the entire length of the railroad and perfecting systemwide organizations for each of six shop crafts and a systemwide federation uniting the six crafts by mid-September. By that summer the RED had unionized over 250,000 shopmen nationwide, and by 1920 that number had jumped to 420,000. At the same time, the government granted pay increases to ensure that rail workers would stay at their jobs in the face of wartime inflation and rising wages in other industries.³

In January 1920 the federal government turned management of the railroads back over to their private owners. The Railroad Labor Board, established by the Transportation Act of 1920, was to oversee relations between the companies and workers. But rulings it made against labor in its first years and its failure to enforce key rulings favorable to workers riled shopmen. The precipitating cause of the strike was the board’s approval of a wage reduction effective nationwide on July 1, 1922.⁴

The walkout, coming as it did on the heels of a national coal strike, rattled the nation. The Warren Harding administration struggled to mediate a settlement. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover urged a settlement on railroad executives, but they rejected it. Two months into the strike, Harding, reacting to the public’s desire for the normalcy he had promised during his 1920 presidential campaign, turned to an injunction that squashed much of the unions’ remaining leverage. In September the RED union heads, realizing the weakness of their position, agreed to a compromise that would ensure that workers returned with their seniority intact, but the Santa Fe and most major railroads refused, determined to break the unions.⁵

After a faltering in train movements in early July, the rail lines gradually resumed full schedules, and most strikers lost their positions well before the end of the year. The Santa Fe, which had upgraded its rolling stock prior to the strike, benefited from the relative weakness of its less prepared competitors and actually increased its

3. Arthur S. Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910–1917 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 235–37; Davis, Power at Odds, 36–47; “The Santa Fe Convention,” Blacksmiths Journal 20 (October 1918): 10. The six shopcraft unions organized under the RED and across the Santa Fe system were the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders and Helpers of America; Brotherhood of Railway Carmen of America; the International Association of Machinists; the International Brotherhood of Blacksmiths, Drop Forgers, and Helpers; the Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers’ International Alliance; and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.


5. Davis, Power at Odds, 126–41. Strike leaders, beginning in late September and working into late October, reached agreements with some railroads, primarily in the East and South under the Baltimore and Ohio Plan, which allowed about a third of the nation’s striking shopmen to reclaim their old jobs, though without the wages for which the strike
freight traffic during the strike. But all the nation’s railroads prevailed in adopting the lower pay rate mandated by the Railroad Labor Board. The RED failed to even hold its biennial convention in 1924, and the shop unions would disappear from many major railroads. The railroaders’ defeat signaled the weakness of labor in the 1920s, a period historian Irving Bernstein labeled “the lean years.”

Although historians have well documented the national story of the strike, less clear is its demographic history. Who struck, and who didn’t? Did work skill level and longevity in the job affect the decision to strike? Did age, marital status, the size of families, home ownership, or ethnicity affect loyalty to union or company? Who took the vacated jobs? What was their previous work experience? Were they local townsmen, farmers from nearby areas, or imports from far away? Were they single or married, youths starting out, or elders looking for an improvement over their current lot? Of the strikers, who returned to railroading? Who moved on to different jobs and different towns? How did the workers who were loyal to the company fare? Were the new workers able to continue with the railroad, or were they only interested in, or able to hold, a short-term job? How did the wider community react to the actions of its striking, loyal, and replacement-worker neighbors?

Emporia provides a useful environment to examine these questions. In 1922 its population was about 12,000. The town serviced the surrounding agricultural community and boasted three colleges. But since the late 1870s, the Santa Fe had been a major employer in town, and in the early 1920s it was by far Emporia’s largest employer with a payroll ranging from 900 to well over 1,200, depending on work demands; the next-largest industrial or commercial employers were a wholesale grocer and the Emporia Ice and Cold Storage Company, each with about 40 workers. Emporia was one of the Santa Fe’s division towns that were placed at roughly one hundred-mile intervals to service and staff trains; similarly situated small Santa Fe division towns in Kansas included Newton, Dodge City, Arkansas City, Chanute, and Wellington. Emporia was home for train and engine crews numbering several hundred; a couple score yardmen to switch rolling stock; station and office workers; telegraphers and dispatchers; laborers to handle luggage and freight shipments; a handful of men to manage animals in the company’s stockyards and barns; crews to repair buildings, bridges, and track; and 250 to as many as 400 in its shops and roundhouse.

Emporia’s federation of shop workers held a mass meeting at the Labor Hall in the first afternoon of the walkout. The strikers passed a resolution pleading that there would be no violence during the strike and called for all the men to stay away from the Santa Fe’s facilities. To ensure a consistent public message, the men elected boilermaker James Keefover as the leader of a committee responsible for communications during the strike and locomotive carpenter Alfred B. Phillips and machinist Harry White as his deputies. The communications committee strove to rally union members and at the same time to keep or win public favor. Keefover told the Emporia Gazette that the strikers bore no ill will toward those who refused to walk off the job but admitted that the holdouts would make it hard for the strikers. The newspaper reported that 115 striking shop workers marched in the Independence Day parade and that they “were cheered by many onlookers.” But Phillips told the newspaper that while the “strikers were heartened by the applause,” he noted that some members of the public derided them. He told the Gazette’s reporter that the strikers needed to explain their position to the public better. “We are not trying to grab higher wages, [and] we wouldn’t strike for shorter hours; but we must hold the living wage and the working conditions... We will keep that living wage if we have to stay out all summer to get it.” He insisted that the strikers were peaceful. “We need public sentiment behind us to win this strike; if a few scabs’ heads are broken or some box cars are burned, we lose.” He added that “the company knows this as well as we do,” leaving unsaid that any violence might well be owing to the rail company rather than the workers.

had been called. Davis, Power at Odds, 137–41; Ziegler, Republicans and Labor, 119–21, 129–39.


9. "Men Go Out Quietly." Because the strike was an action of a federation of unions, the union federations at local and higher levels were careful to ensure representation of at least the three largest unions—those of the boilermakers, machinists, and carmen—in leadership roles.
Although the vote on whether to strike was secret, a Gazette reporter surmised from the men’s reaction a couple of days before the walkout that the local men had backed a strike. “The strike vote probably was in some cases the expression of enthusiasm for the cause, rather than a genuine determination to walk out.” That enthusiasm carried into the early days of the strike. Crowds attended regular union federation meetings, more than 200 showing up at times and 400 coming to hear a national machinist union speaker. Union leaders conceded that a strike might last three to six months but boasted that they were prepared to hold out that long while waiting for the railroad’s equipment to break down. An unnamed striker was more optimistic, telling the Gazette that the locomotives had not been recently overhauled: “For the most part they were hurriedly cleaned, splashed with paint, and turned out.” Another striker doubted the rolling stock would last three weeks: “Pretty soon the grates will be in bad condition and the side pistons of the engines worse: then trains will be late because men can’t get them over the road.” As the engines came into disrepair, others were confident that the Big Four brotherhoods of the engineers, firemen, conductors, and brakemen would refuse to take out the trains. Moreover, one striker said that the companies were trying to break the unions, and he did not believe the Big Four would stand for that.

While most Emporia shopmen followed their unions out, some found fault with the unions and remained at their jobs. Statements by Christian Garth, a fifty-seven-year-old machinist helper, gave a glimpse into the thinking of one who rejected union leaders’ call to strike. Garth had been a union leader. In 1919 he spoke before a gathering of the town’s unions to promote government ownership of the nation’s railroads, a measure then strongly backed by rail unions and commonly known as the Plumb Plan. In 1920 he helped draft a protest against labor provisions of that year’s Transportation Act, and he headed the lobbying in Topeka of Emporia’s International Association of Machinists (IAM) against enactment of a state Industrial Relations Act that, like the federal Transportation Act, set up a system to adjudicate labor disputes while limiting the right to strike. That March he urged laborers to support J. C. Brogan, a Methodist pastor running for mayor who promised to crack down on vice, writing, “Let us lead in hoisting high the standard of moral virtues. We will then merit and receive the support of the public... in larger questions of legislation and economic polity.” Garth also worked as part of a committee of laborers who met with local church leaders and sought to coordinate activities for town betterment with the Chamber of Commerce and the Women’s City Club.

A year before the strike, however, Garth opposed the local unions’ embrace of a United Mine Workers firebrand, the imprisoned Alexander Howat, arguing that union support for Howat would “stop further growth in membership and influence and alienate much of the sympathy and moral support that we have gradually been building up among all classes.” Garth also changed his opinion on the Transportation Act. Like most railroaders, he had feared the loss of the right to strike. But in June 1921 he wrote, “We were misled by our [union] officers [about the] splendid provisions of that bill by which we now have the Railroad Labor Board, which stands as a Rock of Gibraltar in our defense against the assaults of capital—all in payment for our right to strike. There are very few railroaders now that would care to trade back.” Reversing his stance on the state law he had lobbied against, he continued, “I am becoming more and more convinced that time and a fair trial will bring about a like sentiment in terms of the main provisions of the Kansas industrial law. Its general provisions are what organized labor has from its inception demanded.” He argued that the general public would not back the unions if unions had, through federal and state laws, gotten fair compensation for their loss of the right to strike. For Chris Garth, the shopmen union leadership was too radical, risking community comity and the workers’ chance for success.

16. “Chris Garth Explains.” Despite his apostasy, Garth appears to have remained in good standing with Emporia unionists, at least prior to the shopmen’s strike. In February 1922 Emporia’s Trades and Labor Council appointed him, along with strike leader Keefover and seven nonrailroaders, to a committee to recruit labor-friendly candidates for town elections. “Flock of Candidates,” Emporia Gazette, February 17, 1922.
While Santa Fe officials estimated that about 60 percent of the workers left their jobs, the union’s Keefover told the Gazette that the strike was about 90 percent effective. Both were roughly correct. Payroll data allow us to determine the strike decision of 251 workers in the Emporia shops and roundhouse. Of that number, nearly 60 percent struck. However, that number included foremen and many lower-skilled workers—engine wipers, pitmen, hostlers, coach cleaners, firebuilders, flamebullers, and assorted other laborers—who were not organized by the striking unions. In addition, unionization among the fifteen boilerwashers and their helpers probably was spotty, partly because of their borderline affiliation with the boilermaker union and partly because many were not welcome in the union because they were black or Mexican. This analysis, however, includes the boilerwashers and their helpers among the 179 men subject to the strike call. Of that number, more than 81 percent struck, almost precisely the Santa Fe’s estimate of the proportion to strike systemwide.

Members of the three largest unions exhibited impressive unity (see Table 1). Large majorities of Carmen, machinists, and the more skilled and unionized boiler workers walked off their jobs, as did five of six whites in the less skilled boilerwasher and boilerwasher helper jobs. In addition, all three electricians and the single electrician’s apprentice, two of the three blacksmiths, and the blacksmith helper struck.

All the workers in the striking occupations were men. Being older, married, having children, heading a household, and owning a home all correlated with greater loyalty to the company. None of this is surprising, though, except for age, none of the correlations were extremely strong. The average age of the men who remained loyal to the Santa Fe during the strike was forty-five; that of the strikers was a decade younger. The census-taker in 1920 recorded 87 percent of those who would remain loyal to the company as married; that figure fell to 76 percent for strikers. Nearly 90 percent of the married men who had no children at the beginning of 1920 joined the walkout. That figure fell to 83 percent of those with one or two children, to 77 percent of those with three or four children, and to 50 percent for those with larger families. Among residents of Emporia in striking occupations, 79 percent of those listed as heads of household in the 1920 census struck, while the proportion among non–heads of household was 94 percent. Of men in the striking occupations who owned their homes outright, almost three times as many struck as stayed with the company. That proportion rose to nearly four times as many men striking as remaining with the Santa Fe for those who rented their homes or were paying off a mortgage. Still, the vast majority of married workers, men with children, household heads, and homeowners struck. Although these factors may have swayed some men to hold on to their jobs, most workers held to the union cause in the face of, or perhaps because of, their responsibilities to family.

Men who had long resided in Emporia or been long employed by the Santa Fe there struck in about the same proportion as those who had not. Of ninety Santa Fe workers in striking groups in June 1922 who had been listed in the 1916 city directory, 78 percent struck, nearly matching the overall percentage; those listed in the directory as Santa Fe railroaders were only slightly less likely (75 percent versus 83 percent) to strike than those 1916 residents who had not worked for the company.21

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<th>Table 1: Strikers among Largest Shop Unions in Emporia</th>
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17. The United Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees and Railway Shop Laborers organized lower-skilled shopmen. It is uncertain whether the union was present in Emporia; it was never listed among unions participating in Labor Day parades. The union had threatened to strike with the shopmen but pulled back to negotiate with the Railroad Labor Board and by mid-July had determined not to strike. Davis, Power at Odds, 62–63; “Executives of Railways Told to Stay Sleazy,” San Bernardino Daily Sun, June 28, 1922; “No Attempt is to be Halted Walkout,” San Bernardino Daily Sun, July 1, 1922; “Signal Men to Delay Calling Out Members,” San Bernardino Daily Sun, July 7, 1922; “Strike Summary,” San Bernardino Daily Sun, July 16, 1922; “Maintenance of Way Union Not to Strike,” San Bernardino Daily Sun, July 19, 1922.


19. There was one woman employed in the shops and roundhouse. Emma S. Ervin, a forty-five-year-old widowed black woman listed with four children in Emporia’s Third Ward in the 1920 census, worked as a laborer.

20. This is consistent with the experience on the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy, where most nonstrikers “apparently were older, long-service employees who were fearful of losing their accumulated pension rights.” James Rourke Flynn, “The Railroad Shopmen’s Strike of 1922 on the Industry, Company, and Community Levels,” (PhD diss., Northern Illinois University, 1993), 102. The Santa Fe also had a pension plan, the benefits of which strikers sacrificed.

Native-born whites were slightly more likely to strike than foreign-born white workers, as were native-born shopmen with native-born parents compared with native-born white workers whose parents were foreign-born. Of strikers whose ethnicity is known and who were neither black nor Mexican, 98 percent were American born. The corresponding percentage for nonstrikers was 92 percent. Of native-born nonstrikers, 22 percent had one or more foreign-born parent, compared to 17 percent among native-born strikers. Put another way, nearly 86 percent of American-born workers struck compared to three of the five foreign-born workers, and 86 percent of native-born workers with native-born parents struck compared to 82 percent for those with one or more foreign-born parent. With the exception of Mexicans, the foreign origins of strikers and nonstrikers revealed in the census were either in Canada or in western Europe, predominantly the British Isles or Germany.

Loyalty to the Santa Fe was much more pronounced among blacks and Mexicans. Only five of forty-four of these groups struck. This is not surprising, since most striking unions—the blacksmiths and carmen being exceptions—denied membership to nonwhites. Moreover, racial discrimination largely excluded these minorities from those jobs that the striking unions tried to organize. Only thirteen of the minority workers were in jobs in which substantial numbers of whites responded to the strike call. Five of these thirteen minorities struck. Two were African Americans who worked as a blacksmith or blacksmith helper, but the others likely did not belong to a union, suggesting that they recognized that the strikers’ cause of retaining higher pay was their own or that peer pressure or sympathy for their coworkers prompted them to show solidarity with unions that rejected them.

The Santa Fe struggled to maintain an adequate workforce. It placed ads for workers in Kansas City newspapers by July 3 and posted its first advertisement for replacement workers in the Emporia Gazette on July 15, an ad it would run for more than a month. Instead of the usual eight-hour day, men worked in twelve-hour shifts. Some worked much more. One machinist and two car repairers each labored over four hundred hours in July, and boilermaker George A. White put in more than 578 hours during July, leaving him an average of less than 5.5 hours a day of rest. The Eastern Division superintendent, F. E. Summers, said in the first week of the strike that vacant spots had been filled by men who had previously worked for the company but four days later admitted that he was hiring inexperienced workers and donning overalls to help out in the shops, telling the Gazette reporter, “I work with the rest and show green men how the job is done.”

Summers’s claim of hiring men who had previously worked for the company was true. After being freed of government control in 1920 and in response to the slow economy of the early 1920s, the company had trimmed its workforce. It laid off 100 Emporia shopmen in March 1921, part of a 35 percent reduction in the entire Santa Fe workforce from 80,000 in December 1920 to 52,000 in May 1921. The company had hired some of these men back before the strike, but Emporia held a ready supply of former shop employees. In July 1920 the Santa Fe had 15 boilermakers, 74 car repairers and inspectors, and 40 machinists on its payroll in Emporia. At the outset of the strike, however, there were only 8, 42, and 26 in these positions, respectively. A ready supply of experienced workers also prevailed in other Santa Fe division towns.

The 1920 census and payroll and 1921 Emporia directory provide data on the prestrike occupations of three-quarters of the 333 men hired into the shops from July 1 through October 1922. Of the men for whom a prior occupation is known, nearly a quarter held railroad jobs in the approximately two and one-half years prior to the walkout. These men overwhelmingly took positions similar to those they had previously held: boilermakers and boilermaker helpers obtained jobs maintaining

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23. “Expect Long Fight”; “Men Wanted!” Emporia Gazette, July 15, 1922 (the same ad last appeared on August 26); “Both Sides Cheerful,” Emporia Gazette, July 22, 1922.


26. “Santa Fe to Take Back Jobless Men,” Emporia Gazette, June 28, 1921; “Work for Mexicans,” Emporia Gazette, July 6, 1921; “Topeka Shops Recall Men” and “No Shopmen Rehired,” Emporia Gazette, September 12, 1921. For example, there were 37 boilermakers and 74 machinists in Newton on its July 1920 payroll versus 12 and 64, respectively, two years later. In Albuquerque, New Mexico, the comparable numbers were 64 boilermakers and 186 machinists in 1920 compared to 41 and 104 by June 1922.
locomotive boilers, car repairers got carmen’s jobs, and machinists and their helpers and apprentices got machinists’ work.27

Forty-five percent (104) of the replacement workers for whom prior occupation information was found had been farmers or farm laborers. A third of these new hires took jobs as machinist helpers and a quarter as car repairers or inspectors. The company hired twenty-four men who had been common laborers.28 Most of these men got jobs as helpers, car repairers, or car inspectors. The seventeen men hired from white-collar backgrounds—mostly clerks and salesmen—got a variety of jobs, including some skilled positions.

The Santa Fe recruited most replacement workers from Emporia or nearby areas. Twelve percent lived in Emporia’s Third Ward, which encompassed the southwest quadrant of the town, where the company had its facilities; most of the Third Warders had previously worked for the railroad. More than a third of the new workers lived in the city or surrounding township of Emporia, and more than half lived within twelve miles of the shops. Nearly two-thirds were from Emporia’s home county, and 87 percent came from Kansas.29 While it would not be surprising for this pattern to have prevailed in other small Santa Fe division towns in Kansas and elsewhere in farming areas, it may not have been indicative of very large shops, such as the Santa Fe’s in Topeka and San Bernardino, California. Because shop workers numbered over 1,000 in each of those two large centers, the company may have had to look farther afield to find the much larger number of replacement workers needed, though the larger size of those towns would have provided a substantial number of potential recruits.

At an average age of thirty, new workers were substantially younger than the strikers and loyal shopmen. The age difference undoubtedly accounted for nearly half of new workers being single, compared to less than a quarter of strikers and only one (3 percent) of the loyal workers.30

The strike worked no revolution in the Emporia shop’s ethnic composition. Among the striking occupations, 96 percent of 210 new employees whose ethnicity is known were white; the exceptions were seven blacks and two Mexicans who joined the largely nonunionized boilerwasher workforce.31 Among the 201 new white employees whose birthplaces were recorded in the census, all but three were American born, almost precisely matching the proportion among strikers.

As the strike passed into the second half of July and union men began to feel the pinch of a missed paycheck, they looked for other income. Union leaders maintained that “there is no suffering among the families of Emporia strikers, and no indication that there will be suffering for months,” but they still told C. L. McFadden, the Lyon County farm agent, that some strikers would like to work on area farms, and the Gazette reported that some found steady work in the fields.32 There was also plenty of name with a reasonable match in the 1920 census in Lyon County, in which Emporia is located, or an adjacent county and a similarly plausible match in, for example, New Jersey or California, and with other information being equal, it is likely that a link would be made to the Kansas match. However, this bias is likely small because links were made very conservatively. For more than a quarter of the names of new workers for which linkages were not made, the problem was that there were too many plausible matches. For example, there were three Walter Clark’s in eastern Kansas or nearby Missouri alone but no telling which, if any, matched the payroll Walter Clark. There were two Charles Johnsons on the payroll. There also were two in Emporia’s 1921 directory but no way of knowing which if either of them were added to the payroll, since there were many other plausible Charles Johnsons beyond the town’s boundary.

27. R. L. Polk & Co.’s Emporia City Directory, 1921 (Sioux City, IA: R. L. Polk & Co., 1921). Payroll data for 1920 is based solely on the payrolls for July; other months have not been surveyed. Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad Company, records 1859–1995, KSHS. Census and directory workers did not reliably distinguish between apprentices, helpers, and journeymen skilled laborers, so it is not possible to use the census and directories to analyze whether these rehires also got promotions, though a certain amount of that is likely given job mobility for loyal employees and returning strikers noted later in this article.

28. Sons living with their parents on farms have been classified as farm laborers even if the census taker did not list them as employed. Farm work was certainly the sort of work with which they were familiar. The vast majority of “laborers” were listed as such in the sources, though those listed as janitors, woodcutters, or similar low-skill occupations were designated as laborers for this analysis.

29. The 1920 census and payroll, the 1921 city directory, and World War I draft registration forms and directories for other cities and other records available through Ancestry.com allowed prestrike location links to be established for 253 of the 333 new workers. The sources used could skew links toward individuals living in Kansas (availability of 1915 and 1925 Kansas censuses aided in making some links; most states did not take their own censuses) and larger cities (smaller towns and rural areas were less likely to be covered with directories). The rationale for some links also depended in part on proximity to Emporia. Given a payroll

28. “Ask Work on Farms,” Emporia Gazette, July 18, 1922; “Says Strike is Over,” Emporia Gazette, September 8, 1922. The strikers’ committee emphasized to McFadden that the men did not want to take regular
available town work, albeit much of it less desirable and less lucrative than work in the shops. Some strikers took jobs in construction, excavation, or road paving. Others undoubtedly put more effort into their gardens or did odd jobs. An enterprising pair of striking machinists put up two tents over wooden floors near the Cottonwood River; built two boardwalks from the tents to the river; and charged for use of the tents for changing and for soap, towels, and bathing suits.33

William Allen White, the nationally known editor of the Emporia Gazette, had predicted that trouble would erupt in midmonth as strikers missed a paycheck and started to run low on money. The first reports of picketing and intimidation of loyal workers had already surfaced in other Santa Fe towns, and White’s prediction was borne out in San Bernardino and Needles, California, where shots were fired and beatings administered by the fifteenth of the month.34

Emporia, other Kansas Santa Fe towns, and the state of Kansas, however, remained relatively peaceful. In part that was due to Governor Henry Allen maintaining a firm hand. On July 10 Allen ordered a National Guard unit to the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad town of Parsons, and he later sent troops to Hoisington, Horton, Herington, and Newton. Newton was the only Santa Fe town, of which there were more than a half-dozen important centers in the state, to which the governor dispatched troops.35

In Emporia, both law officers and strikers counseled calm. On July 10 Sheriff Charles Gibson deputized more than two dozen guards employed by the Santa Fe. He did not arm them and forbade them to leave company property armed. Guns were a touchy subject. In August Gibson argued against troops in Emporia, saying there already were “too many guns.”36 The Santa Fe removed armed guards from the yards after enginemen and trainmen complained. The Santa Fe’s special agent, Eli Raymond, culled his force of guards, claiming in mid-August that those he retained were “reliable men—I don’t think one of them is under 35 years old. We dropped all the young fellows from the payroll several weeks ago.” Nor did Raymond think them likely to look for trouble: “The guards are on duty 12 hours a day, and by the end of that time they are ready to go to bed.”37

The union men also resisted conflict. The Santa Fe’s Raymond vouched for the strikers’ good behavior. He

33. “Strikes is Over”; “No Labor Shortage,” Emporia Gazette, September 15, 1922; “Ask Work on Farms.”
34. “Next Week’s Trouble,” Emporia Gazette, July 8, 1922; “300 Reported to be Working for Santa Fe,” San Bernardino Sun, July 7, 1922; “Officers and Santa Fe Head in Conference” and “Needles Again Quieted Down,” July 15, 1922.
35. “Kansas Strike Centers Quiet,” Emporia Gazette, July 12, 1922; “Guards Cost State $100,000 to Date,” Emporia Gazette, September 13, 1922. Hoisington was a Missouri Pacific town, and Herington and Horton were on the Rock Island. A disturbance in Newton was the largest on the Santa Fe in Kansas. It was a Saturday-night incident in which strikers and sympathizers taunted strikebreakers, and a fight broke out. There evidently had been some tension building in the town, but this eruption appears to have been an isolated incident. An account in the Emporia Gazette characterized it as a crowd—“mostly boys of high school age”—of 300 to 400 thrill seekers razzing the strikebreakers, laughing, and showing. Newton strike leaders argued that most of the men charged with the disturbance were not strikers, and they roundly condemned any violence. Although strikers may not have made up a majority of the crowd, the payrolls reveal that half of those charged for actions that night were strikers. Graves, “Scientific Management,” 271; “Newton Scrap a Tame Affair,” Emporia Gazette, August 14, 1922; “Riotous Scenes Incident to Strike Saturday Night,” Evening Kansan-Republican (Newton), August 14, 1922; “Nine Arrests in Riot Disorders,” Evening Kansan-Republican (Newton), August 15, 1922;
told the Gazette on July 13 that local strikers remained law-abiding and caused no trouble. From the outset union leaders in their daily meetings had preached messages of nonviolence while exhorting strikers to remain united and steadfast. Mayor J. C. Brogan informed the state’s attorney general on July 26 that the strike committee “has been counseling peace, and as a part of its program every day for two weeks, it has asked leading citizens to come to the [union] hall and talk peace and law and order to the men to keep down disturbances.” The state’s Industrial Relations Act, spearheaded through the legislature in 1920 by Governor Allen, forbade picketing, interpreted as more than two people in any way intimidating workers. Because the Santa Fe and virtually all the railroads in Kansas were engaged in interstate commerce, the Kansas Industrial Relations Act did not apply. The governor, attorney general, and, most importantly, local authorities across the state seemingly ignored this fact, though, and took action against any picketing or support for the strikers. Beginning in late July, pairs of strikers would appear near the Emporia roundhouse at shift changes, reminding workers that the strike continued. But there was little tension. For example, on the evening of July 31 strikers W. W. Hush and Harry White stopped in White’s car off Santa Fe property. Striking car inspector Justin Morgan drove up in his car. Once he had joined Hush and White, Raymond approached and told them, “According to law, two of you can’t be accused of picketing, but three men can. So I guess you’ll have to move on.” The strikers left, afterward acknowledging that Raymond had been “polite and courteous.” The strikers stopped this sort of near-picketing after about two weeks at the request of Gibson, Raymond, and strike leaders.

While harsh words undoubtedly passed between strikers and replacement workers, few such interactions escalated beyond words. The Gazette recounted a name-calling incident involving Charles Melton, the sole white boilerwasher who did not strike, choosing to continue to work alongside a black man and five Mexicans. Strike leader Keeover visited Melton in the second week of the strike. The Gazette quotes Keeover as referring to Melton as “a colored man,” and Melton held that Keeover threatened that once the strikers won, all blacks and Mexicans working for the railroad would be run off the job. Melton responded in the paper, challenging Keeover to get out of the narrow rut of selfishness...

Consider how small a man is on that ball [Earth]. Consider how short his stay there; and most of all, consider you are only one of those small men. You cannot see so much difference in men, white or black, good or bad, wise or foolish, when at a distance. Yet you have hoped to win a strike that would give you 77 cents an hour and your helper only $4. Do you suppose your helper can live that much cheaper than yourself? Think things over, and the next time you are offered 70 cents per hour [Keeover’s wage after the July 1 reduction] you will be glad to take it.

A month later a couple of strikebreakers reported being accosted by men they did not recognize who warned them to quit their jobs, and several men, including Melton, reported that rocks had been thrown at working Santa Fe men. Hearing of these incidents, Superintendent Summers reported “serious trouble” in town, and Santa Fe officials in Topeka pressed these concerns on the governor. But Summers soon refused to endorse his earlier characterization of the situation in Emporia without further investigation. Moreover, the deputy in charge of the company’s guards stated, “None of the guards or strike breakers has reported to me the slightest disturbance, and the strikers always have kept well off the right-of-way.” Sheriff Gibson and Raymond also vigorously denied that there had been trouble. Yet Melton, who acknowledged that he had been the only one hit with a stone and had not been hurt badly, and four others signed a letter to the paper reaffirming that stones had been thrown. This disputed incident was the high point of violence in Emporia.

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40. “Arms Not Needed”; “The Wailing Place: Thoughts from Melton,” Emporia Gazette, July 15, 1922. Keeover did not deny that he called Melton “a colored man” but contended that he said that only those taking strikers’ positions would be put out of jobs once the strike was won.

The incident in the strike in Emporia that received the most press coverage—and the greatest coverage in the historical literature—was only peripherally about the workers. In mid-July businesses in Arkansas City, a southeastern Kansas Santa Fe town, began displaying placards reading, “We Are for the Striking Railroad Men 100 Per Cent. We Are for a Living Wage and Fair Working Conditions.” By the nineteenth the signs had spread to businesses in other shop towns. The Industrial Court, backed by the state attorney general, ordered the placards removed. William Allen White, and much of the national press, transformed the placard issue from one of support for labor to support for free speech. Defying state authorities and seeking a test case in court, White posted the placard at the Gazette’s office after amending the “100” to “49,” promising to increase his support by 1 percent each day the strike persisted. White was arrested, but the case was dismissed before it came to trial.42

The attitude of fellow Emporians undoubtedly affected the course of the strike in town. The strikers valued the support of their fellow citizens. Although most railroaders lived in the southern half of town, shopmen, who exhibited less geographic mobility than enginemen and trainmen, would certainly have had connections with others in the small town.43 Retaining their respect was important. Moreover, they could not have been unaware that should they lose the strike, many would be looking for new places in the town’s economy, an economy with few other large employers.

Emporians were torn. The reaction of observers of the strikers marching in the Fourth of July parade had been mixed. Some businesses displayed the 100 percent placards, but there was no claim that all or even a majority did. On July 3 Gazette editor White penned an editorial stating his views: “This is a railroad town, and the men who work here are our friends and neighbors; good citizens, all of them, mostly taxpayers and property owners, and each a reasonable human being who deserves the confidence and friendship of his fellow townsman.” The interest of these neighbors should be the town’s “big primary interest.” White said that town residents must respect the position the strikers had taken, even though “it may not be our standpoint.” A secondary interest was that of the Santa Fe, which, he wrote generally, “is the fairest of all American roads in its treatment of its workers” and had been friendly to Emporia. “We cannot take a position of bitter antagonism to the Santa Fe without hurting the town.”44

He sympathized with the striking workers and was emphatic that the Railroad Labor Board had treated the railroaders unfairly, failing to back a living wage for workers while disregarding railway owners’ flouting of the board’s order to stop farming out shop work to nonunion companies. Yet White also considered the strike ill-advised because public opinion opposed it. He argued that the strike must remain peaceful for the public to support the workers, but even before there was violence, he wrote that the public was against the strike. He was vague about whether he was referring to national or local public opinion or both, but his lack of clarity on that point suggests that Emporians, or at least middle-class professionals and businessmen, generally opposed the strike.45

From the outset of the strike, Santa Fe officials downplayed any difficulty the railroad was having, and for the most part their boasts of trains running on time and the availability of rolling stock proved correct. The company also boasted of its ability to fill abandoned positions. By August 1 the company claimed to employ 78 percent of its prestrike Kansas shop force, and a month later it reported that it had reached 100 percent. In Emporia, Division Superintendent Summers claimed on

45. In 1918 White published In the Heart of a Fool, which told the story of a labor organizer who came to the fictional town of Harvey and pointed to the greed of the businessmen of Market Street. White faulted the organizer for thinking that he and his union would bring about necessary change rather than have that change come about when “the common mind sees the truth and the common heart feels it.” But he sympathized with the union leader’s aspirations for middle-class status, his efforts to defeat Market Street’s greed, and his rejection of
July 20 that “there are enough men on the job now to do things as they were done before the strike” and announced two days later that at the end of the month the shops would resume eight-hour shifts. Santa Fe General Manager W. K. Etter issued a statement that “so far as the Santa Fe is concerned the strike is over.”

The strikers maintained a hope that they would ultimately prevail, but this hope faded through August, and on September 1 federal judge James Wilkerson in Chicago issued a sweeping injunction not only protecting railroads from interference by strikers but also forbidding union leaders to organize, communicate, or use funds to further strike activities. Emporia strikers feigned indifference to news of the injunction, arguing that it would have no impact in peaceful towns like Emporia. Striker William Woolwine, though, suggested that it had ominous portent: “We are all peaceful here in Emporia and the order will not affect us either way. It shows, however, where the government stands.” On September 7 White editorialized that the shopmen’s strike was “now passing rather deliberately, but still passing, into history.”

The next day Summers said that some strikers had asked for their jobs back but that none had been rehired, and their old places were filled. A week later, however, Etter told a Gazette reporter that he was eager to have longtime shop workers return to work. They would lose the benefits of their seniority, but he offered them a chance to return if they had not committed violence during the strike. He said that “the mere fact that a man has held office in a union will be nothing against him if he comes up for reemployment,” but he pressed strikers to ask for work soon before the jobs were filled.

In the last week of September the Gazette reported “the first break in the shopmen’s strike in Emporia . . . when 15 strikers returned to work.” Others returned within days, and Summers said that many other strikers were asking for work and a waiting list had been drawn up for when jobs became available. Despite Etter’s statement, Emporia’s roundhouse foreman, George Lockard, said that union leaders were not taken back and the company had refused employment to seventy-five Emporia strikers who he claimed had threatened violence or been union leaders. The company consulted with loyal workers on whether they would feel comfortable working alongside specific strikers. While the loyal workers approved of most rehires, they nixed rehiring some men.

By the end of October, 27 of the 147 strikers had been reemployed by the Santa Fe in Emporia. None of the strike leaders were rehired. Examination of demographic factors does not reveal a rationale for who returned to work and who did not. Married workers, those with children, and homeowners were not more likely to return to their Santa Fe jobs.

While taking leading roles in the strike seems to have determined whether some men would be rehired, so too did the skills strikers possessed. The Santa Fe in Kansas much more readily filled unskilled positions than more skilled ones, so there was less pressure to rehire those with lower skill levels. Among skilled workers, the company rehired a small percentage of those in the more common jobs of machinist, boilermaker, or carman, perhaps hiring those who asked first. Shopmen who had relatively scarce skills fared better, the railroad rehiring two of the three striking electricians and the more senior of the two striking blacksmiths.

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51. Roughly 75 percent of those who the payrolls show were rehired and those who the payrolls indicate were not were married. Sixteen percent (13 of 80) of those with children in the federal census taken at the beginning of 1920 returned to work, while 25 percent (5 of 20) of those who had not had children on January 1, 1920, resumed their Santa Fe jobs. Nearly a quarter of both persistent and returned strikers owned their homes free of a mortgage according to the 1920 census. Nor were returning workers older; in fact, those who resumed work on the railroad by the end of October averaged nearly four years younger than those who did not. However, half of this discrepancy is accounted for by the disproportionate number of apprentices taken back by the Santa Fe. Ten of the 120 men who did not appear on the payrolls by the end of October were apprentices, but 5 of the 27 who did return were apprentices; the returning apprentices ranged in age between sixteen and nineteen. Nor is it possible to discern a clear role for ethnicity in who was rehired, especially given the small number affected. A black boilermaker and two Mexican boilermaker helpers were not rehired, but a blacksmith and a blacksmith helper, both blacks, were reemployed. All white rehired workers were American born of American-born parents.
52. Graves, “Scientific Management,” 266–67. The Santa Fe probably ruled out rehiring the third striking electrician, Stephen Bostian. Bostian had been a founder of the stationary engineers’ union local and was the
Although the identity of the workers pictured here at the Santa Fe Emporia depot and “Eating House” in 1924 is unknown, they could include some of the former strikers who were rehired in the months and years after the 1922 strike. An examination of payrolls after the strike reveals that more than forty Emporia strikers returned to work for the Santa Fe by 1925. Some were able to improve their careers, but others were not so lucky; one, perhaps a man pictured here, was taken on as a freight carter and would end the decade as an assistant baggageman.

In late 1922 and in subsequent years, the Santa Fe continued to rehire strikers. An examination of payrolls after the strike reveals that at least fifteen additional Emporia strikers returned to work for the Santa Fe by 1925. While several returned to the same jobs they had held before, some took up substantially different work. Machinist Ralph Metz restarted his career as a locomotive fireman, which led to a good job as an engineer by the end of the decade. Machinist Thomas Kyle was less fortunate, returning as a worker carting freight and ending the decade as an assistant baggageman.

Labor Day parades showed the trajectory of union fortunes in Emporia. In the years immediately prior to World War I, about ten unions participated in the town’s celebration. Construction trades predominated, though barbers, typographical workers, and stagehands were represented; no rail unions, not even the powerful Big Four brotherhoods, marched in the parades. Labor Day was a muted affair without parades or large gatherings during the war.53 In 1919, however, twenty-four local unions participated in the first postwar celebration, with railroad shop unions walking behind a banner declaring “We Are for Government Ownership of Railroads.” Two years later the number of unions was down to fourteen, and Santa Fe boilermaker Fred Baysinger, the parade’s grand marshal, noted that because of the railroad’s reduction of its workforce earlier that year, railroad representatives in the parade had been reduced by a third.54

The 1922 parade reflected a labor movement under attack. A striking Santa Fe electrician served as parade marshal, and strikers marched under a banner reading, “The Striking Railroad Men.” The railway clerks’ banner attacked the federal administration for “A Tariff for the Profiteers, Tax Revision for the Bucaneers [sic], a Ship Subsidy for the Privateers, Senate Seats for the Auctioneers, and the Farmers and Labor Get Hell and Repeat,” while the painters’ banner proclaimed, “We Are in Favor of Free Speech,” subtle support of the 100 percent placards backing the striking shopmen. In 1923 the shop craft unions, defeated and irrelevant, marched for the last time in a Labor Day parade.55

The shop unions’ disappearance after the 1923 Labor Day celebrations reflected their disappearance from the Santa Fe shops. As late as September 1923 Emporia strikers continued to meet regularly, but the unions had lost, and the national leadership called off the strike in December.56 Company unions replaced the AFL unions on

Labor Day parade marshal during the strike. Bostian, as noted above, established his own business and thus may not have wanted to return to railroading. “Stationary Engineers Organize,” Emporia Gazette, June 9, 1919; “Labor in a Parade,” Emporia Gazette, September 2, 1922; “Few Strikers Back,” Polk’s Emporia City Directory, 1926 (Kansas City, MO: R. L. Polk & Company, 1926), 53.


56. “Shop Strikers Still Meeting,” Emporia Gazette, September 19, 1923; Davis, Power at Odds, 153.
the Santa Fe and on many of the nation’s railroads. In 1919 there were no railroad company unions; by 1926 there were twenty-six, all of which were shopmen unions. In that year more than 80 percent of railroad shop craft workers on western railroads belonged to company unions. Machinist Mortimer Vermillion organized the first company railroad union in Emporia in early August 1922. Vermillion had helped form the IAM’s local in Emporia in 1918 and had been its president for its first two years but remained loyal to the company during the shopmen’s strike. Though Vermillion did a lot of the legwork to create the new organization, it was a creation of the company. Vermillion repeatedly consulted with roundhouse foreman George Tier, and Tier, while protesting that the men organized the local themselves, conceded that “we have to help them get started.” The company unions’ organization mirrored the former shop unions with separate associations for each skill and local, regional, and systemwide councils of the leaders. Company unions would predominate on western railroads well into the 1930s and on the Santa Fe into the 1940s.

But what of the future of the workmen caught up in the strike in Emporia? Censuses, directories, and payrolls provide evidence of the workers’ near-term (one to three years) and long-term (eight years) persistence in town and employment with the railroad. Workers who had refused to leave their jobs and those who had been able to rejoin the Santa Fe by October were far more likely to remain in town than were new workers and strikers who had not been able to return to the railroad in the fall (see Table 2). Strikebreakers were particularly unlikely to remain in Emporia in 1930, probably because they were far less likely than strikers and loyal workers to have prestrike roots in town.

Those workers who had not struck and those strikers who had been able to return to work with the Santa Fe within a few months of the strike overwhelmingly persisted in their work for the company (see Tables 3 and 4). Most strikers did not return to railroading, but those whom the Santa Fe rehired within a few years of the strike were likely to cling to their jobs. About half of replacement workers traceable to 1930 remained in railroading. The best indicator of whether a man hired to replace strikers would remain a railroader eight years later was what work he had done in the years immediately preceding the strike. Of 72 strikebreakers known to have been farmers or farm laborers and 47 who had worked in other nonrailroading occupations prior to the strike, 31 (43 percent) and 18 (38 percent), respectively, continued in railroading in 1930. In contrast, of 41 who had worked for railroads prior to the strike, 26 (63 percent) were employed by railroads in 1930.

### Table 2: Emporia Residents in Mid-1920s and 1930

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent residing in Emporia in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-1920s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonstrikers</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strikers who returned to work by the end of October 1922</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strikers who did not return to work by the end of October 1922</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement workers</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis is for those in occupations subject to the strike call and for the mid-1920s does not include four workers who had died and six whose whereabouts is unknown or for 1930 thirteen men who had died and five whose location is unknown.


60. Short-term changes in Tables 2 and 3 are measured by evidence found in the 1925 Kansas census, the July 1925 Santa Fe payroll for Emporia, and city directories available through Ancestry.com, including the 1924 Emporia directory compiled in the fall of 1923 and the 1926 Emporia directory compiled early in that year. Measures of long-term change in Table 4 reflect information from the 1930 federal census, the July 1930 Santa Fe payroll for Emporia, and city directories from 1929 to 1931. A worker who appeared in Emporia or as a railroad worker in only one of these sources is counted as having persisted in town or been a railroader in the respective period.

61. Given the substantial number of replacement workers who could not be traced in the short and the long term and the fact that an important means of tracing workers is their appearance in payrolls, it is likely that a smaller proportion remained railroaders than the ratio of railroaders to nonrailroaders noted here. The contrast in persistence in railroading eight years after the strike between those who had formerly worked as
Table 3: Employment Classes of Strike-Era Workers in 1923–1925

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nonstrikers</th>
<th>Strikers who returned by October 1922</th>
<th>Strikers who did not return by October 1922</th>
<th>Replacement workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of known</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railroader</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonrailroad</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis is for those in occupations subject to the strike call and does not include four men who had died by the mid-1920s.

Table 4: Employment Classes of Strike-Era Workers in 1930

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nonstrikers</th>
<th>Strikers who returned by October 1922</th>
<th>Strikers who did not return by October 1922</th>
<th>Replacement workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of known</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railroader</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonrailroad</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis is for those in occupations subject to the strike call and does not include one man who had retired and thirteen who had died by 1930.

The Santa Fe rewarded some of those who remained loyal with bonuses and promotion. The company distributed $4,000 in bonuses to Emporia workers who refused to strike.52 Seven of thirty-three loyal shop workers in striking groups were promoted by September, including three helpers promoted to journeymen (moving from 47 cents to 70 cents an hour) and two machinists—one being company union leader Mortimer Vermillion—promoted to foremen. An equal number of loyal workers in nonstriking groups were promoted to fill vacated striking positions, in some cases nearly doubling their hourly wage. Nor were these temporary promotions; those who remained with the Santa Fe to 1930 retained their more lucrative jobs.

Nearly a year after the strike, the Gazette reported that those who had been unable to hire back with the Santa Fe in the fall of 1922 had gone searching for other work. Some found work in other towns on other railroads.53

Floyd Wadleigh and William Johns, two of the first four strikers to exit the Santa Fe yards, left the state and found work on the Union Pacific and the Missouri Pacific, respectively. Others scrambled for work in town. The Gazette held up Stephen Bostian and Harry White as examples of strikers who had fared well. Bostian had his own electrical business and White had bought into ownership in a candy store the spring after the strike. Bostian seemingly met with some success; his business survived for at least six years. But long-term prosperity eluded him. He left town prior to 1930, and by at least 1935 he had moved to New Mexico, where he lived with in-laws. There both he and his wife worked long hours—48 and 72 a week, respectively—and together earned less than $800 in 1939, according to the 1940 federal census. White’s candy venture apparently proved unsatisfactory, and by the fall of 1923 he worked for a bottling company. Two years later he was a clerk in an auto-accessories business, and in 1930 he was a salesman; none of the positions was likely to have paid as well or as steadily as his Santa Fe machinist work.54

The Gazette noted that most strikers suffered: “Expert mechanics and carpenters who walked out of the roundhouse at the union’s call last July are supporting.

64. “Few Strikers Back”; “Localettes,” Emporia Gazette, April 17, 1923; “Bostian Electric” advertisement, December 19, 1928; R. L. Polk & Co.’s Emporia City Directory, 1924 (Sioux City, IA: R. L. Polk & Co., 1924), 231; Polk’s Emporia City Directory, 1926, 247; Polk’s Emporia City Directory, 1930 (Kansas City, MO: R. L. Polk & Co., 1930), 231. The average hourly wage for Emporia’s male nonoffice workers in 1921 was 50 cents, 20 cents less than the Santa Fe paid its boilermakers and machinists after the July 1, 1922, reduction. Second Annual Report of Court of Industrial Relations of the State of Kansas for the Year Ending December 31, 1921, 81. Paul Weatherbee and Ed Power, the first and third men listed by the Gazette to strike in Emporia, both died within about two years of the walkout. “Deaths and Funerals: E. S. Powers Dead,” Emporia Gazette, February 12, 1923. Wadleigh and Johns were recorded in the 1930 federal census as railroad employees in Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Sedalia, Missouri, respectively. The 1935 and 1940 data on Bostian and his wife were recorded in the 1940 census at Carrizozo, New Mexico. Weatherbee’s wife was listed as a widow in the 1925 Kansas census. Census data was located using Ancestry.com.
large families by doing odd jobs, by working for the city, by digging for gas and sewer pipes, and often they have had long waits between jobs.” The Gazette highlighted the case of “a middle-aged man with a large family who talked continually against violence in strikers’ meetings, who threatened seriously to resign from the union if any of its members resorted to terrorism and violence, and who is now making a scant living doing odd jobs.” A dozen strikers worked for the city in the fall of 1923, at least seven within the water department. Mayor Brogan had received strong electoral support from the railroad-dominated Third Ward, so he may have eased the way for this source of work.66

Examination of poststrike census records and directories allows for a more systematic look at what the future held for strikers. Comparing unlike jobs for which wages, yearly income, hours, duties, and stresses were highly variable does not allow for easy characterization. However, some generalizations are possible. Boilermaker and machinist helpers who did not return to the Santa Fe did not show an obvious upward or downward occupational trend. Several helpers took work as common laborers, and an equal number became farmers or farm laborers. John Plummer worked and briefly was part owner of an auto-battery and tire retailer, while Amos Curry completed his bachelor’s degree at the College of Emporia and would teach high school into the 1940s. Car repairers and car inspectors took a variety of jobs—country blacksmith, grocer, taxi driver, plumber. Several worked at odd jobs and as common laborers, a couple worked as janitors, and three farmed. Boilermakers and machinists were among the elite in the Santa Fe shops, and among them a downward occupational trend was most obvious. Of four striking boilermakers who did not return to railroading, two would work in town as janitors, and James Keefover, the strike leader, was listed as a laborer in the 1925 census and an “ice puller” in a cold-storage company five years later. Some machinists fared better, several readily obtaining other jobs as machinists. But one worked most of the 1920s as a janitor and another was listed as a street laborer in Kansas City in 1930.67

The 1930 census’s estimate of the value of homes provides a very rough indicator of the poststrike finances of men involved with the strike who remained in town.68 In addition to poststrike employment fortune, marriage, divorce, number of children, inheritance, and personal preferences could affect a person’s decision on whether to buy a home and the price of the home. Still, as Table 5 illustrates, some trends are apparent. Loyal workers and strikers who returned to work by October were most likely to own rather than rent a home eight years after the strike, and their homes, particularly those of loyal workers, were worth more. Controlling for whether the worker’s home in 1920 was mortgaged or not, loyal workers’ homes ten years later were worth more than those of strikers or new workers. Finally, whether the workers were high-skilled journeyman employees at the outset or during the strike or medium-skilled employees—commonly helpers—by 1930 those who had not gone on strike generally had homes of higher value. Those who struck paid a price when the strike failed.

Colin Davis, in his fine Power at Odds: The 1922 National Railroad Shopmen’s Strike, cited the strike’s “insurrectionist quality,” which made railroad towns “battlegrounds.”69 Emporia was more peaceful than many other railroad shop towns, and Kansas as a whole witnessed little upheaval. Governor Allen and the state’s industrial court kept pressure on local officials to maintain the peace, restricting picketing and public shows of support for the strikers. William Allen White opined on the peace in Emporia in mid-July, “There has been no violence in Emporia, because the men have felt that they had behind them in their trouble, if not the agreement of their neighbors in every point, at least respectful and sympathetic neighborly feeling of good will.”70 Five weeks later White

65. This hardship case was undoubtedly locomotive carpenter and strike leader Alfred Phillips. Because he had taken a lead in the strike, the Santa Fe never rehired him; he continued working as an independent carpenter in town at least well into his sixties. “Few Strikers Back”; Polk’s Emporia City Directory, 1940–41 (Kansas City, MO: R. L. Polk & Co., 1940), 163.

66. Mayor Brogan was the pastor of a church in the Third Ward, had worked for the Santa Fe when it was short of laborers during World War One, and had championed bringing sewers to the southern part of town. He received the endorsement of the Trades and Labor Council in 1920 and outpolled his rival for the mayoralty by nearly four to one in the Third Ward. “Labor Is for Brogan,” Emporia Gazette, February 20, 1920; “The Wailing Place: A Boost for Mr. Brogan,” Emporia Gazette, March 23, 1920; “Brogan Is Elected,” Emporia Gazette, April 7, 1920.

67. Analysis here is limited to home values in Emporia. Estimates of property values are problematic, but values within a town are more likely to be accurate in relative terms than estimates in multiple locations.


69. Gagliardi, The Kansas Industrial Court, 164–68; “Public Meeting of Strikers,” Emporia Gazette, July 15, 1922.
Table 5: 1930 Homeownership in Emporia and Value of Homes Owned by Those Involved in 1922 Strike

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number in Emporia in 1930</th>
<th>Number/ % who owned home in 1930</th>
<th>Average price of home in 1930</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Owned free in 1920 (n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non strikers</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24/86</td>
<td>$4,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strikers who returned by the end of October</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14/74</td>
<td>$3,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strikers who did not return by the end of October</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>34/64</td>
<td>$3,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement workers</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>61/66</td>
<td>$3,036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis encompasses workers involved in the 1922 strike who lived in Emporia or Emporia township in 1930 as found through Ancestry.com. By 1930, 15 percent of loyal workers, 55 percent of strikers, 30 percent of returned strikers, and 63 percent of new workers were no longer living in Emporia.

again editorialized on why Emporia and Kansas in general had been peaceful: “Whether because they are naturally decent or because the governor... kept his hand on the situation and held down the few hot heads found in every group of human beings, the shopmen have kept the peace and are greatly to be praised for it.”70 Whether any of White’s explanations for peace in Emporia are convincing will require more in-depth research among multiple communities displaying different levels of violence.

This study does, however, give insight into the demographics of the strike. Being older, married, having children, and owning one’s home all correlated with a likelihood of staying with the Santa Fe rather than striking. But these factors were far from determinative. The vast majority of shopmen walked off the job, no matter their age or domestic situation. Fidelity to the union and its cause and to the great bulk of their fellow shopmen was far stronger than these personal considerations or any loyalty to the railroad company. Indeed, some minorities struck despite being spurned by the unions, showing sympathy with their striking fellow workmen and their cause.

The shopmen went into the strike in a weaker position than union leadership and many members perceived. The economy was recovering from the previous year’s slump and railroad traffic and profits with it.71 Yet in Emporia and in division towns along the line, the Santa Fe had a pool of prior employees from which to recruit replacement workers. While not all of these laid-off workers returned as strikebreakers, a substantial number did, providing the railroad with an experienced and readily available workforce.

The strike offered a rare chance to secure a railroad job and for quick advancement for those who already had one. In normal times there was little turnover in shop jobs, as railroads commonly hired relatives and friends of roadworkers and promoted from within. For some, particularly for young and single men, the strike was literally the opportunity of a lifetime. Jim Timmons and Schuyler Wagner, both in their early twenties, hired on as car inspectors. They still worked for the Santa Fe as carmen in Emporia nearly forty years later.72 Given that many jobs, including helper and carmen positions, required only rudimentary training, the Santa Fe could hire the most readily available labor. In Kansas, many of the new workers came from nearby farms. Farmers and farm laborers from the counties surrounding Emporia changed their lives by hiring on during the strike. Twice as many farmers and farm laborers hired during the strike who could be traced to 1930 remained in railroading as returned to farming. Jacob Martenson, a twenty-two-year-old immigrant from Finland, hired on with the Santa Fe during the strike. His World War I draft registration stated that he had no relatives in the country and that his best friend was the man who employed him as a farm laborer. More than forty years after the strike he had married, had a family, and still worked for the Santa Fe, having been promoted to a machinist.73 And loyal workers and those strikers who were able to retrieve their jobs in the fall were able to advance. Earl Austin had tried

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70. “Fair Answer,” Emporia Gazette, August 21, 1922. In his autobiography, White suggested that the Gazette’s even-handed coverage of the strike was a partial explanation for the lack of violence in Emporia, writing that violence occurred in “towns where the newspapers hooted at the strikers and refused to give them space to present their side of the case.” William Allen White, The Autobiography of William Allen White (New York: Macmillan Company, 1946), 611.

71. Davis, Power at Odds, 61.


73. Polk’s Kansas City (Wyandotte County, Kansas) City Directory, 1963 (R. L. Polk & Co., 1963), 327. Martenson was listed as Jack, rather than Jacob, on his World War I draft registration form dated September 12, 1918, in Lyon County. The form was located through Ancestry.com.
farming west of Emporia, but the first winter after he bought five purebred cattle, the animals fell through the ice and drowned. Left with a large debt for cows but no actual cows, Austin moved to town and took a job as a Santa Fe coach cleaner. During the strike he was promoted to fill a car repairer position, nearly doubling his hourly wage from 34 cents to 63 cents. He would remain with the railroad, pay off his cow debt in the early 1930s, and retire in 1954.  

Strikers who were unable to return to their Santa Fe jobs generally fared worse. Eight years after the strike some had been able to return to railroading in Emporia or by moving elsewhere, though not necessarily in a position that paid as well as the one they had left. Those in the most skilled positions when the shop unions struck had the greatest potential for recovering their job quickly or getting another. Yet they also had the greatest potential to end up in a substantially poorer job than the one they had left and, at least as measured by the value of their homes, later experienced a substantial disparity in wealth between themselves and loyal workers.

Striking was a political act, an ideological and economic stand. Striking was also a social act, standing in solidarity with your union brothers. The bond among coworkers could prove very strong, overriding the substantial risks involved. Such bonds, while they led many shopmen to painful defeat in 1922, would be critical to future union victories. Historians have been correct to trace the struggle for the dignity and well-being of workers through the triumph of their unions.

Yet the story of a strike is also the story of immediate risk for thousands of individuals. Strikers, and even more so strikebreakers, acted for reasons other than ideology or solidarity with their fellows. They also calculated what was best for themselves and their families. Emporia strikers were justifiably angry at the decisions of the Railroad Labor Board, and they were enthusiastic, like shopmen nationwide, to confront the railroad owners, reinforcing each other in the battle for a better wage. Yet the shopmen’s strike was a terrible mistake for union workers, and, as an examination of Emporia’s strikers’ subsequent lives shows, some paid a high price for throwing off their Santa Fe positions.

Others chose to stand against coworkers, refusing to risk their livelihoods and jobs they wanted to keep.

The Santa Fe offered employment opportunities for farmers and farm laborers from the counties surrounding Emporia. Many jumped at the chance to work for the railroad during the strike. The strike also offered opportunities for company workers in lower paid positions to advance, as it did Earl Austin pictured here near the end of his career. He hired on with the Santa Fe several years before the strike after falling into debt as a farmer. During the strike he was promoted from coach cleaner to car repairer, nearly doubling his hourly wage from 34 cents to 63 cents. He remained with the railroad, paid off his farming debt in the early 1930s, and retired in 1954. Courtesy of Nancy Swanwick, Fort Scott, Kansas.

Perhaps they considered their wage, even after the July 1 reduction, to be fair or the best they could hope for given the relative strength of the railroads and unions. Strikebreakers, for their part, saw a chance for desirable work that could improve their lives, perhaps for all their remaining working years. Loyal workers and strikebreakers bettered their positions and the prospects for their families. Theirs are not the heroic accounts of the advancement of the working class, yet their stories, as well as the strikers’, need telling.  

74. Nancy Swanwick (Earl Austin’s granddaughter), e-mail messages to author, October 7 and 9, 2015.