

decades ago. Inability to cut costs in the past, and ever-increasing reluctance to take risks currently, have encouraged operations with obsolescent plant and inadequate capital investment.²⁷

By labor

Trade unions in the leather glove industry have always insisted on "equal distribution of work." This insistence has resulted in shorter hours, shorter workweek, and skip-week employment, instead of steady work for one part of the labor force and extended layoffs for the other. The impact of seasonal operations on the glove workers' families has thereby been reduced. Those who worked only every other week, or every third week, could draw unemployment benefits for intervening idle periods. Those who worked 3 days a week or less could draw partial benefits.

Many more families in Fulton County than elsewhere have two or more wage earners. The 1950 census (although taken in April, an off-season month in glovemaking), showed 41 percent women in Fulton County's labor force, compared with a New York State average of 32 percent.²⁸

Another circumstance tending to weaken workers' willingness to readapt has been that the unions representing the majority of local leather glove workers have no affiliation with other labor organizations for glove workers. Of limited outlook, their activities have tended to be concerned solely with local problems and have shown an almost medieval rigidity. Glove cutters, for example, have not permitted a tablecutter to do block or pattern cutting and the other way round. For many years also the cutters union has restricted apprenticeship, allowing only sons of members to serve the 3 years' apprenticeship required for table cutters.²⁹

The postwar shift to employment outside Fulton County has been brought about as much by the attraction of high wage rates in defense work as by the lack of local opportunities. But even though it is an hour's drive from Gloversville to Schenectady, practically nobody appears to have moved closer to their work. Scarcity of housing and preference for local amenities may explain this immobility.

Another factor making for immobility has been homeownership in the Gloversville area.³⁰ According to the 1950 Census of Population, about one-fourth of the houses in Fulton County are owned mortgage-free—a higher ratio than for New York State as a whole (22 percent). This high percentage of homeownership means that more cash is available for other living expenses, since there are no rent payments, and repairs and maintenance can be postponed. As a result, the possibility of higher income elsewhere becomes less attractive.

Being relatively comfortably situated, the older people tend to remain in the community. The old homes have a comparatively small resale value, and there is a little opportunity to sell. The presence of so many older people means that the local labor force is of higher than average age. In late 1954, the average glove cutters' age was reported

²⁷ With the sewing machine essentially the most important piece of equipment in a leather glove plant, modernization would have to be chiefly environmental.

²⁸ This appears to be a carryover from the days when homework was prevalent in the industry. In New York State, homework has been outlawed since May 1942.

²⁹ After World War II, the union admitted 82 apprentices under the "GI bill." However, by the end of 1954, all but three of these newcomers had left the industry, mostly for better paying or more steady employment elsewhere.

³⁰ Goldwasser and Huber, op. cit.