

TRANSITIONS OF MANHOOD:  
EUGENE SHAW AND MASCULINITY IN THE LATE 1800s

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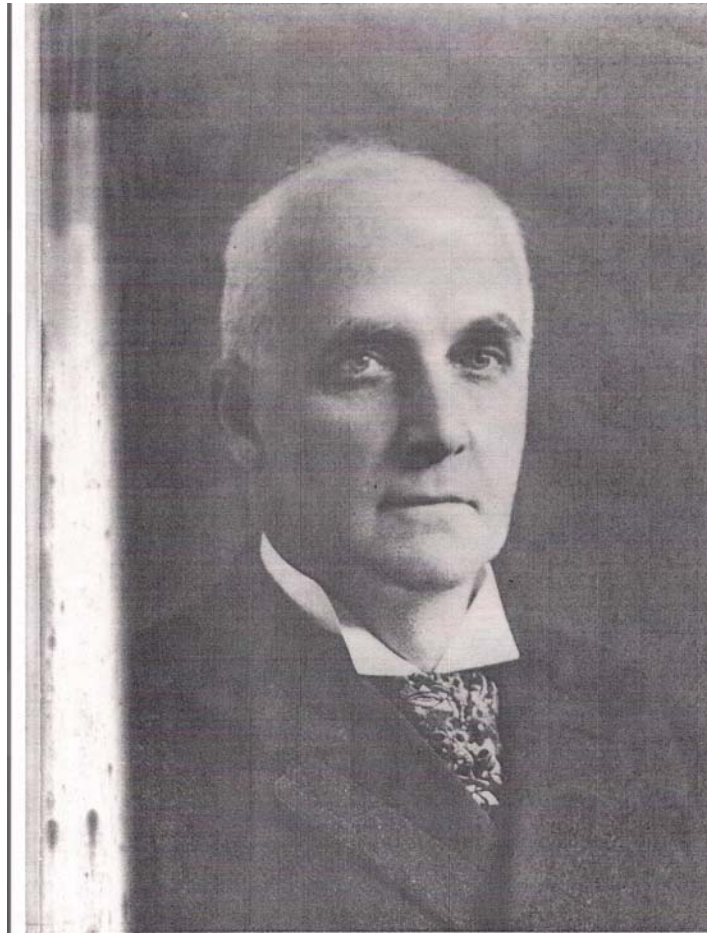
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## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	3
INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER ONE-HISTORIOGRAPHY	5
-First Category: Transition to the Working Man	6
-Second Category: Men: Social Networks and Activities	8
-Third Category: Fatherhood	11
-Fourth Category: Honor	12
CHAPTER TWO-THROUGH EUGENE SHAW	13
BIBLIOGRAPHY	27

**ABSTRACT:**

This paper examines the life of Eugene Shaw, son of successful lumber baron Daniel Shaw, and dissects his life and accomplishments according to the definition of masculinity as of the mid to late 1800s. Through this examination, we can see the parallels between what a man was “supposed” to be during this time period, and the way that Eugene actually lived his life.



Photograph courtesy of Chippewa Valley Museum

When analyzing this image, notice the ornate and expensive clothes that he is wearing. Also, note that while he is not smiling, it appears that he is almost smirking. This matches up with people who described him as being a man who had a kind look about him.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Eugene Shaw provides a foundation on which many interesting histories could be written. Son of a wealthy lumber baron in Eau Claire, the history could be written on his eventual takeover of his father's business empire. A powerful and influential man in a small frontier town, the history someone could write about his rise to prominence alongside Eau Claire's development. Perhaps the most interesting perspective, however, is to examine his story through the lens of masculinity.

The stereotypical thought when presented with the subject of "gender studies" is that it is automatically geared towards women, since it has been through their efforts that such an academic distinction has been made. To quote the historian Thomas Lacquer, "Woman alone seems to have 'gender' since the category itself is defined as that aspect of social relations based on difference between the sexes in which the standard has always been man."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, while the argument could be made that all history is "men's history" and women have to fight for their story to be told, the truth is that men do not have history, at least as far as manhood is concerned.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, Eugene Shaw's story could not be better suited for examining the perceptions and applications of manhood in the late nineteenth century. His influence came in the midst of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era (from about 1870-1920), when perceptions of masculinity were being reshaped, thus putting him in a position between some of the worldviews of men. There is much to be said of his relationship

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Lacquer, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, (New York: Free Press, 1996), 1-2.

with his father, Daniel Shaw and his brother, George B. Shaw, and how their collective competition and comparisons may have motivated them. This competition drove much of the masculine success during the 1890s, and his experience was no exception. Eugene Shaw's life, success, hardships and expectations were all firmly rooted in the nineteenth century view of what masculinity should be.

## **CHAPTER ONE: HISTORIOGRAPHY**

As mentioned before, women's studies have been around longer than the study of masculinity, thus making the historiography of the subject exciting and new. Much of the information written on the subject is still new, written within the past fifteen years. While this does make the subject fresh, it does not lend itself well to disagreement among scholars, at least not yet. The literature is full of conflicts during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era of what masculinity should be, such as the debate between the idea that men should be rugged and dominating versus the idea that men should be nurturing fathers, but the analysis is new enough that there have been few debates between historians on manhood.

Despite its recent emergence in scholarship, masculinity is still a very broad topic. Even narrowing it down to masculinity in the late nineteenth century would provide far too much information, and much of it would not prove relevant in a comparison to Eugene Shaw. Still, breaking the subject down into a handful of categories, it becomes easier to see what the research says about relevant studies on

manhood. The categories that work best here are the transition to the working man, looking at what men did in groups or alone for entertainment, fatherhood, and honor. These four categories encapsulate the most relevant subjects on Eugene Shaw, and the historiography, while fairly agreeable, is very thorough.

First Category: Transition to the working man:

This body of work yielded the most information, because it covered not only the relevant progressive era's views on manhood but also the cultural events leading up to it. Two of the finest works I have run across are *Manhood in America* by Michael Kimmel and *American Manhood* by E. Anthony Rotundo. These two books mirror each other in many ways and provide excellent chronologies of manhood's evolution both leading up to and during the progressive era.

The literature involving more complete histories of American masculinity has many similar themes running through them, but the two broad categories that seem most important and most relevant to my work with Eugene Shaw are how men view themselves and how others view men. These two aspects represented much of the drive for being manly, and thus will give accurate comparisons for Shaw and the "typical" male of the 1890s.

With the progressive movement in full swing, men were torn between two worlds, that of the employed wage-earning man and the prior, "savage" world of the uncivilized man. Many men feared becoming the "breadwinner" in the house, as sitting

behind a desk, as opposed to more physical lines of work, was viewed as an emasculating process.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, much of the literature suggests that the crux of masculinity, beneath the confidence and bold demeanor of men, is fear. Kimmel sums it up nicely in his introduction:

Manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us. Throughout American history American men have been afraid that others will see us as less than manly, as weak, timid, frightened. And men have been afraid of not measuring up to some vaguely defined notions of what it means to be a man, afraid of failure.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, through public opinion, the rules of manhood were altered to adjust for this new world of wage labor. Without physical labor as the main element that “fueled” a man’s day, the ideal of dominance was transferred into work ethic. As America grew after the Civil War, with men sitting at desks instead of chopping down trees, those who worked hard and dominated others in business would be considered manly. Slothful men who lacked the desire and power to strive in the world were despicable and unmanly; laziness was effeminate and to be avoided.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, almost every book and article on the subject of manhood indicates that the primary motivation of men was to avoid seeming effeminate. This new ideal related very closely to another virtue of manliness in a changing world: success. To be a success meant that you would be neither effeminate nor dominated in the workplace. The desire to succeed became

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<sup>3</sup> R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 28-29.

<sup>4</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: a Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 193.

matched only by fear of failure. Some felt that men of business should not know the meaning of “failure,” and that failure should even be ignored if it manifests itself.<sup>6</sup>

This hardy work ethic became even more important considering that not only was the primal, physical manliness being repressed at the work place (shifting instead to office work), but also in the family setting. After years of patriarchal leadership over the family, men’s authority was being diminished in the home as well, sometimes even legally. Courts began ruling in the Progressive Era, for the first time in American history, in favor of women instead of men regarding divorce matters and especially in matters that involved children.<sup>7</sup> The widespread view was that women would likely care for children better than the father would, and that fathers should focus their attention on breadwinning and other “fatherly responsibilities.”<sup>8</sup>

#### Second Category: Men: Social Networks and Activities:

Cut off from their prior power in the household, earning wages under an employer, considered by some men to be emasculating in and of itself, and shedding the rudimentary layer of the “primal man,” many men sought alternative outlets not only to reaffirm their own manliness but to also project that image to others.<sup>9</sup> Popular methods for combating this fear were found in outdoor activity, either through hunting,

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<sup>6</sup> E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 182.

<sup>7</sup> Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History*, (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 30-31.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Margaret Marsh, “Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity, 1870-1915,” *American Quarterly* 40 (June 1988): 166.



sports, or other physically demanding tasks in nature. Men idealized sports because they instilled competitiveness in boys and placed importance on being physically fit. Some even went so far as to say that boys who did not enjoy or engage in sports like baseball were not really boys at all, which surely would have struck a blow against any young man who did not enjoy sports.<sup>10</sup>

Getting outside to hunt was an alternative to playing sports, one that had the added benefit of a man exerting dominance over nature by killing “lesser creatures.” Professor Tina Loo of Simon Fraser University explained that much of this appeal was not only of men returning to a physical environment and freeing himself from the bonds of the office, but it also represented the imperial mentality that was gripping Britain in its colonialism or America as it executed its Manifest Destiny. By hunting, these men were “taking over” this territory and making the beasts of nature conform to his will, in this case, by dying.<sup>11</sup> President Theodore Roosevelt himself became an advocate for such a lifestyle, saying that stalking game encourages a “vigorous manliness for the lack of which in a nation, as in an individual, the possession of no other qualities can possibly atone.”<sup>12</sup>

With this resurgence of masculinity to combat the changing world, there developed a male camaraderie that had not been as present before (or, before, it had not carried with it the weight of distancing men from femininity). Even the office or

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<sup>10</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 140.

<sup>11</sup> Tina Loo, “Of Moose and Men: Hunting for Masculinities in British Columbia, 1880-1939,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 32, (Autumn 2001): 298-299.

<sup>12</sup> David D. Pugh, *Sons of Liberty: The Masculine Mind in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984), 132.

factory, where many men were now gathering, lent itself well to this growing male companionship. Places that had previously simply catered to men, like billiard halls, saloons, and casinos now provided havens for them. This universal push to deny the feeling that they were emasculated brought out many of the vices of the time, and likely aided in the later push for prohibition.<sup>13</sup>

Fraternal orders also became popular during this time period, and for much the same reason. The Freemasons and the Knights of Pythias offered both unity of men and an “us versus them” mentality.<sup>14</sup> What better way to bring men together than to make it a secret society and exclude others? This, like the saloon, provided a refuge for men struggling to maintain their masculine identity. Here men could freely converse with each other about women, the stress of work, share crude humor and “get away with it,” all the while giving some commonality to men at a time when they were increasingly seen as solitary creatures. Some even went so far as to suggest that the rites of these secret societies enabled a wish that men supposedly had: an all male family, cut off from the supposed feminization of the world.<sup>15</sup>

Male bonding had never achieved such a high level of importance before, at least not to this degree. As such, it was met with multiple views from society. One of the more interesting opinions came from certain psychologists and members of groups like the Social Purity Movement, who believed that men spending this much time

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<sup>13</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 124.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Ann Clawson, “Fraternal Orders and Class Formation in the Nineteenth-Century United States,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, (October 1985): 673.

<sup>15</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 202.

together created an environment that would breed homosexuality. Too much male bonding created a need for male companionship, one which would detract him from focusing on women (as he was supposed to do). Adding alcohol to this equation only made things worse; one psychologist went so far as to say that “when drinking, men fall on each other’s necks and kiss one another,” and that the support network built into these manly institutions made men weak and emotional.<sup>16</sup> Certainly an ironic take on the situation, as many of these men were motivated to gather in this way to *avoid* looking like they were effeminate.

The counterargument came from President Theodore Roosevelt, who argued that these men were engaged in “male passion,” an animalistic, primal state of being that should be embraced, not shunned. He argued that not only was this behavior common, but it was necessary and even mandated by God, saying that once hope and aid had gone, “. . .nothing remains under God but those passions which have often proved the best ministers of His purpose and the surest protectors of His world.”<sup>17</sup>

### Third Category: Fatherhood:

To examine fully the mentality of working men, it is important not to overlook the aspect of the father. In Griswold’s *Fatherhood in America*, he explains that there is plenty to be said of fatherhood in relation to masculinity. In addition to the aforementioned new responsibility as the breadwinner, many men saw themselves as

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<sup>16</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 125.

<sup>17</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 231.

role models for their children. As fathers, men were supposed to help their children build character, good habits, and moral nature.<sup>18</sup> The problem was that men, who were supposed to suppress their emotions, had to face the obstacle of the connection of his children with their mother. Child bearing aside, children generally gravitated to their mother for advice, for aid when ill, bedtime stories, and etcetera.<sup>19</sup> The argument could be made that this favoritism of the mother would only increase during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era as the once-solid defense of unquestioned patriarchy began to chip away.

#### Fourth Category: Honor:

While this study examines Eugene Shaw during the early Progressive Era (roughly 1890-1920), many of his influences would have come from his upbringing during the Gilded Age, which was around the end of the Civil War to the Progressive Era. Although many of the previous examples of masculinity during the Progressive Era did apply to Eugene Shaw during his later years, there was still a lot of his humanity rooted in what he learned in his younger years, and one of the hallmarks of Gilded Age masculinity was honor.

Considering its place in American history, honor in the Gilded Age makes sense. Honor, in essence, involves standing up for what is “right.” It means defending yourself or your image when challenged, and America as a whole experienced this phenomenon

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<sup>18</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 159.

<sup>19</sup> Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 132-133.

during the Civil War. Quite literally, an entire nation split in two, and two separate ideologies emerged, each challenging the other. This led to a generation of young men fighting, in part, because their Northern or Southern honor had been challenged.<sup>20</sup>

While Eugene Shaw did not fight in the Civil War, he was a young teenager at the end of it, and society did not lose the importance placed on honor as soon as the war had come to a close. Thus, Shaw would have been immersed during his adolescence in a world where his masculinity was defined in large part by honor. If someone challenged a man during this time period against him physically or against his character, that man was obligated to defend himself lest he lose his honor.<sup>21</sup>

## **CHAPTER TWO: THROUGH EUGENE SHAW**

Taking into account the aforementioned scholarship on masculinity, the parallels between the social view of manhood and the life of Eugene Shaw cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence. Shaw exemplified what it meant to be a manly Gilded Age and Progressive Era man in many ways, including his forms of entertainment, business ethic, and family life/fatherhood. He also symbolized specifically the masculine realm of honor, which will be discussed in more detail upon analysis of the *Ferguson v Daniel Shaw Lumber Company* case. Although he had the advantage of being born into an already wealthy family, he did not rest comfortably on his father's accomplishments.

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<sup>20</sup> James Bowman, *Honor: A History*, (New York: Encounter Books, 2006), 89.

<sup>21</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 236.

Eugene Shaw was born in Industry, Maine, on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1850, and shortly thereafter his father, Daniel Shaw, permanently moved to Eau Claire, Wisconsin in 1856.<sup>22</sup> Eugene went to common schools and an academy in Eau Claire, but also spent time back in Industry.<sup>23</sup> While back in Maine, he spent time with his Uncle Milton on Shaw's old farm, which Eugene alludes to in a letter he sent to Daniel in 1869. In the letter, Eugene expresses his excitement for attending college in Chicago and all the hard work that Uncle "Mill" is doing on the farm.<sup>24</sup>

Within the letter, there is a unique juxtaposition of traits that Eugene would have picked up during his teenage years. On the one hand, raised in part on a farm, he would have been exposed to a hearty work ethic that involved "getting his hands dirty." On the other, he writes to his father about how much he loved to be well dressed, and how excited he was about being able to shop for clothing in Chicago. In addition, showing early signs of entrepreneurship, he suggested buying large supplies of clothes and then bringing them out to Eau Claire, where they could then sell the clothes for profit.<sup>25</sup>

This early fervor for hard work and business continued after college. Eugene managed the sales for a store, which averaged \$124,000 per year, a healthy figure for

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<sup>22</sup> A. R. Reynolds, "Shaw, Daniel 1813-1881," Wisconsin Historical Society, [http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term\\_id=2612&term\\_type\\_id=1&term\\_type\\_text=People&letter=S](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/dictionary/index.asp?action=view&term_id=2612&term_type_id=1&term_type_text=People&letter=S), accessed 03/03/09.

<sup>23</sup> Ralph Owen, "Ralph Owen Manuscripts, 1950s-60s," p. 690, Special Collections, Chippewa Valley Museum, Eau Claire.

<sup>24</sup> Eugene Shaw to Daniel Shaw, 21 August 1869, William W. Bartlett Papers, Box 16, Folder 6, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

the mid to late 1800s. Eugene was given additional responsibility between the years of 1871 and 1878, where he would take steamboats up and down the Mississippi river and sell additional lumber.<sup>26</sup> Even so, it was really after the death of Daniel Shaw on October 23, 1881 that Eugene emerged from his father's shadow and was able to assert himself as the capable, masculine man described in the historiography.

One particularly odd aspect of Eugene Shaw's professional life was the business relationship with his brother, George Bullen Shaw, who was about four years younger. In all the documents I have read, I have yet to come across one that questions or doubts Eugene's capability in the business, and yet George B. seemed to edge him out, at least early on. Up until an 1880 stockholders meeting, Daniel had 2880 shares of stock, George B. has 10 shares and had been the general secretary of the business for at least six years, yet Eugene had nothing.<sup>27</sup> It is possible that Eugene was trusted with more of the sales aspects of the business rather than the administrative duties, but it is still odd that for so long George B. held stock while Eugene did not. In the 1880 stockholders meeting, Daniel finally transferred 10 shares to Eugene; a wise move considering that Daniel would pass on little over a year later.<sup>28</sup>

Whatever reasons that prevented Eugene from entering the administrative aspect of the business were negated shortly after Daniel's passing. In another

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<sup>26</sup> *Eau Claire Weekly Free Press*, May 7, 1912. "Eugene Shaw," card located at Chippewa Valley Museum.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, Stockholders Meeting, 08/09/1880, Box 16, Folder 10, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. William W. Bartlett Papers. Mss BY. Records housed in Special Collections & Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

stockholders meeting several months after their founder had died, the Daniel Shaw Lumber Company held elections for various new posts that would fill the roles once filled solely by Daniel. Eugene was unanimously nominated General Manager.<sup>29</sup> A decade later, he was nominated both General Manager *and* Vice President of the entire company, all the while leaving George B. Shaw to hold the same secretary position that he had held for the previous nineteen years.<sup>30</sup>

There is no evidence that I have come across that shows that these two brothers bore any animosity toward each other. Indeed, they were both members of the same men's social group, the Knights of Pythias, in which they both held office.<sup>31</sup> Still, much could be said of male competition in business, and it was likely frustrating for George B. to see Eugene climb up the ladder so swiftly. It is perhaps with little surprise, then, that George B. ran for and was elected Mayor of Eau Claire in April of 1889.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, while both men were respected in the Eau Claire area, there is evidence to suggest that there were those who preferred to associate with Eugene.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, Stockholders Meeting, 02/07/1882, Box 16, Folder 10, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. William W. Bartlett Papers. Mss BY. Records housed in Special Collections & Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, Stockholders Meeting, 03/27/1893 Box 16, Folder 10, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. William W. Bartlett Papers. Mss BY. Records housed in Special Collections & Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

<sup>31</sup> Ralph Owen, "Ralph Owen Manuscripts, 1950s-60s," p. 690, Special Collections, Chippewa Valley Museum, Eau Claire.

<sup>32</sup> *Eau Claire Weekly Free Press*, April 1889. "George Bullen Shaw," card located at Chippewa Valley Museum.

<sup>33</sup> Ralph Owen, *Ralph Owen's Eau Claire-The Character of a City, 1884-1909*. ed. Frank Smoot and Eldbjorg Tobin (Eau Claire: Chippewa Valley Museum Press, 2005), 53-54.



Before delving too deeply into Eugene's definition of masculinity in the workplace, it is important to take into account the ways in which his gendered identity shone through in the Theodore Roosevelt-ian definition of "man in the wild." While Eugene was not nearly as obsessive or fanatic as his president was, he did love the outdoors. He enjoyed his time on the Mississippi River during the days of his youth, and frequently took trips "into the wild." While he was not a "hunter," as President Roosevelt prescribed, he was an avid fisherman. He knew everything about fish, and would loathe to hear someone misname a fishing rod a "pole," or if someone could not properly identify a particular fish.<sup>34</sup> As usual, though, Shaw provided an interesting mix of the outdoors savage man with the indoors businessman; on any of his outdoor ventures, he was always dressed extremely well, to the point that in the wilderness he was "immaculate."<sup>35</sup>

One area that Eugene definitely did not typify the older visage of masculinity involved his respect for women, beginning with his wife. A year after Daniel died Eugene, at age 32, married the daughter of Donald Kennedy, another lumber baron in the Chippewa Valley.<sup>36</sup> Her name was Charlotte, although every source I can find indicates that Eugene affectionately referred to her by her nickname, "Lottie."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ralph Owen, "Ralph Owen Manuscripts, 1950s-60s," p. 696, Special Collections, Chippewa Valley Museum, Eau Claire.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 700.

<sup>36</sup> Lois Barland, *Sawdust City*, (Stevens Point: Worzalla Publishing Co., 1960), 41.

<sup>37</sup> *Eau Claire Weekly Free Press*, May 7, 1912. "Eugene Shaw," card located at Chippewa Valley Museum.

According to Ralph Owen, Eugene and Lottie were wonderful hosts who loved company and were “completely devoted to each other.”<sup>38</sup>

When looking at the following picture, note how she is holding a book, which symbolized that she was a woman of taste, culture and intelligence. Likewise, her dress is very elaborate and chaste, which was typical.



Photograph courtesy of Chippewa Valley Museum

This love and affection carried over to his three daughters, Margaret, Geraldine and Eugenia. As mentioned before, the concept of the breadwinner was an important aspect for masculinity during this time, and it became doubly so given that Eugene was

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<sup>38</sup> Ralph Owen, “Ralph Owen Manuscripts, 1950s-60s,” p. 705, Special Collections, Chippewa Valley Museum, Eau Claire.

the only male in his immediate family. As such, he also became very protective over his girls. Again quoting Ralph Owen, "Surrounded by his household of females plus a liberal influx of sisters in law . . . I had a feeling that he was beginning to resent the presence of potential male rivals on the scene. I believe he always felt his daughters' male friends markedly inferior to their girl friends and definitely unworthy of their hands and hearts."<sup>39</sup>

It is perhaps this feeling of paternal responsibility and protection for the girls in his life that led to what can probably only be described as a fear of germs or sickness. Each spring he would ladle out his medicinal concoction of sulfur and molasses to his family, and anyone who would dine with his family, to prevent them from getting sick.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, should one of his girls get sick in the middle of the cold Wisconsin winter, he prescribed a mix of Kentucky bourbon and rock candy, with the thought that if you "go to bed, keep warm, sip the concoction until it was drained to the last drop and a cure would speedily ensue."<sup>41</sup>

Despite his overprotective nature, Eugene was not demeaning toward women. Quite the contrary, in fact, as Shaw proved shortly after he became General Manager. Following the financial losses of a mill that burned down, Eugene needed additional labor to help speed up profits. In 1883, he tried an "experiment," wherein he employed girls to sort shingles, which was relatively unusual for the time. Not only did they

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 701.

<sup>40</sup> Ralph Owen, *Ralph Owen's Eau Claire*, 29.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 55.

perform well in their positions, they exceeded expectations. Compared to the earlier men employed at the position, the girls were more dexterous, and were more careful. As a group, they could pack 20,000 to 25,000 shingles in a day, and subsequently earned a wage of \$30 to \$35 per month,<sup>42</sup> which was actually a very fair wage for 1883, considering the average wage in 1890 was around \$1.53 per day, man or woman.<sup>43</sup>

It was this sort of forward thinking business sense that made Eugene Shaw so successful. In fact, as was outlined earlier in the paper, perhaps the most important aspect in the “new” man is success. To illustrate how important success and honor were for men of business during the Progressive Era, I could showcase his capability and skill in business, I could list countless areas of financial growth, wise investments, and new sales partners that he picked up. I could do this because Eugene kept incredible records and ledgers of almost everything he did in the realm of the Daniel Shaw Lumber Company.

But all the figures in the world do not showcase his business prowess, in both skill and character, like the following example. E. M. Ferguson, an upper-level stockholder in the Daniel Shaw Lumber Company in 1889 became disgruntled and dissatisfied with the direction that the company was headed, and in particular with Eugene Shaw as the head. What’s more, he accused Eugene of lining his own pockets via shady bookkeeping. At the time, Eugene owned 871 shares of stock, Ann F. Shaw

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<sup>42</sup> Barland, *Sawdust City*, 39.

<sup>43</sup> Clarence Dickenson Long, *National Bureau of Economic Research Publications In Reprint: 1860-1890*, (Manchester: Ayer Publishing, 1975), 48.

(Daniel's widow) owned 665 shares, and Ferguson owned about 400. I am not entirely sure what Ferguson expected to come of the case, but I doubt he anticipated that Eugene would go and obtain 31 testimonials, some from as far away as Missouri, to defend his honor. Surely even ten would have been sufficient, but it as it was mentioned before, to be a man of the Gilded Age meant defending his honor, no matter what the cost. Thus, it was so vitally important to maintain his honor that Eugene Shaw left nothing to chance.<sup>44</sup>

James T. Barber of the Northwestern Lumber Company in Eau Claire wrote of Eugene:

I know him to be a man of superior business ability, of strict integrity and of great capacity to perform and dispatch business. I know of no other man in the lumber business, or in any other business, who devotes his time and attention more closely and with greater fidelity to the conduct of the business in which he is engaged.<sup>45</sup>

Others leapt specifically to the defense of Eugene's integrity and honesty. Frank G. Bigelow from Milwaukee wrote that Eugene was "incapable of doing or performing a dishonorable act." John J. Cruikshank from Hannibal, Missouri wrote that Shaw was "scrupulously honest" and that he had integrity both as a businessman and a gentleman. James Defebaugh from Chicago wrote that Eugene was very trustworthy, "[His] mere word I would consider as good as his written contract." William Irvine, General Manager of the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company, wrote that before this

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<sup>44</sup> E.M. Ferguson v. Daniel Shaw Lumber Co, Box 15, Folder 7. University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. William W. Bartlett Papers. Mss BY. Wisconsin Historical Society. Records housed in Special Collections & Archives, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

case he had never “heard it even hinted that Mr. Shaw was not a most excellent manager, and never heard anyone impugn his honesty.” Everett W. Warren of Minneapolis cited his practicality, “Personally, I regard Mr. Eugene Shaw as one of the best all around practical lumbermen in the country. I believe him to be a man of strict integrity, high business qualifications, and one whose advice would be quickly heeled by experienced lumbermen.”<sup>46</sup>

Occasionally, there was a testimonial that was less glowing than the others. For example, George T. Thompson of the Chippewa Valley Bank of Eau Claire did not focus quite so much on Shaw’s outstanding moral fiber, but rather simply praised him for his satisfactory work as a manager of the company.<sup>47</sup>

Some of the testimonials focused on Shaw’s work ethic and drive. A. J. Rust was a very prominent lumberman of the day, running at least in part the Owen Lumber Company, the Westville Lumber Company, the West Superior Lumber Company, the Three States Lumber Company, and Rust Land & Lumber Company. While he touched on moral fiber, like many of the other testimonials, he also made note of his drive in business,

. . . Eugene Shaw is regarded generally by lumberman and is to me known to be one of the hardest workers and most intelligent and able manager of any lumber concern in the west; I know personally that he devotes his time closely to the conduct of his business and that, by reason of the prompt and efficient manner in which its business is conducted, the company has among its patrons some of the most exacting and best lumber consumers in the west.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Perhaps the most important point one could make regarding Shaw's drive to gather such a large number of supporters was specifically on the subject of honor. Surely, especially considering the aforementioned emphasis placed on honor for men raised during the Gilded Age, this was what drove Eugene in part to overcompensate in such a way that no one could have questioned his honor in any way. This was made obvious by the number of testimonials that specifically referenced honor.

C.M. Buffington, manager and secretary of the Eau Claire Dells Improvement Company, wrote of Eugene, "I know him to be a man of superior business ability, unswerving integrity, untiring industry and remarkable fidelity and devotion to the conduct of the business of the Daniel Shaw Lumber Company."<sup>49</sup> Likewise, W. H. Carter, a lumber purchaser from Keokuk, Iowa, specifically cited his honesty in his testimonial, "I have found and known [the Daniel Shaw Lumber Company's] manager Eugene Shaw to be one of the keenest, brightest and most capable and honorable business men with whom I have come in contact."<sup>50</sup>

The testimonial of N. C. Chapman, a stockholder in the Daniel Shaw Lumber Company, is particularly interesting. It references honor, but sounds suspiciously similar to the testimonial given by Frank G. Bigelow on the previous page, "I believe that Mr. Shaw is incapable of countenancing or doing a dishonorable act."<sup>51</sup> Likewise, George S. Long, who worked in the sales of the Northwestern Lumber Company of Eau Claire and

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

the Montreal Lumber Company, ended his testimonial with, "I know Mr. Shaw to be a high-minded business man, of strict integrity, of superior business ability, of untiring industry and great capacity to do and perform business. I believe him to be incapable of doing a dishonorable or dishonest act."<sup>52</sup>

While not all of the testimonials have identical language, there are patterns, like the above example, that emerge. While I don't doubt the sincerity of the testimonials, it does come across as a bit odd that so much of the language is that similar. This could simply be the professional language of the day, but it would not be out of the realm of possibilities to suggest that there may have been some coaching involved when the request was sent out to come to the aid of Eugene Shaw.

However, as I said, I do not doubt that the authors of these testimonials meant what they were saying. That being said, the definitive defense of Eugene Shaw came from Archie Montgomery, who delivered a particularly effective testimonial. His comments carry with them particular weight, because he was the brother-in-law of D.H. Ferguson, the joint owner of the stock with E.M. Ferguson, who brought the case to trial in the first place. He wrote, "No losses of considerable amount have occurred. Confidence in Mr. Shaw's judgment and integrity. Would be in the best interest of all the stockholders and everybody interested in the D.S. Lumber Co. to have this action dismissed."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



These 31 leading businessmen of the time came to the aid of Eugene Shaw when his character and skill were challenged, and they all testified under oath, essentially, that Eugene Shaw was an honorable, capable and respectable businessman. The hidden message here, though, showcased two of the cruxes of masculinity in the late 1800s: fear of failure and fear of dishonor. Five or ten of these testimonials ought to have been sufficient measures to showcase his moral character, but Eugene sought out 31. So great was this fear that he wanted to bury any questioning of his morality or capability beneath a mountain of paperwork praising his name. Ferguson, meanwhile, seemingly listening to the suggestion of Archie Montgomery, decided to settle out of court, sell his shares of stock, and permanently leave the company.<sup>54</sup>

From age to age, it is easy for historians to look back to the past and see trends but not people. In the case of Eugene Shaw, we have the unique opportunity to see a trend *through* a person. In the new punch clock business world that was pushing men further from the “wild” and closer to life behind a desk in the late 1800s to early 1900s, the most masculine man was quick-witted, capable, and able to rise past competitors in a constant drive for success. Shaw embodied these traits, but also showed that the new man must also be compassionate, kind, and loving, especially to his family. After all, what is a breadwinner if not someone who is actively committed to protecting and providing for your family?

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Eugene Shaw was respected and admired by nearly everyone he met, excluding, of course, someone like Ferguson (and in that situation, he was able to defend his honor and show to the world that he had risen to that challenge). He was influential in more ways than simply acting as a manager for a company. What Daniel Shaw began, Eugene finished and improved upon. The lumber supply in Eau Claire was already dwindling by the time Eugene took over the company, but he saw fit to stay and further the development of the town rather than continue west in search of more lucrative forests. He was one of the directors for the Eau Claire Light and Power Company, buying electric power from a nearby dam to provide electricity for the Eau Claire area.<sup>55</sup>

When he became ill with pneumonia in 1912, not much was made of it. Early on, Eugene was supposed to make a full recovery. It was completely unexpected, then, when on May 7<sup>th</sup> his health took a turn for the worse and died suddenly. The city was in shock and mourning, and subsequently the entire city put its flags at half-staff in tribute.<sup>56</sup> Still, his legacy lives on, both in what he did to improve a city and how he lived his life according to new social norms that were outlined for men during this time period. Many parallels can still be made between “typified” men of the mid to late 1800s and to the life of Eugene Shaw, such as his drive for success and his fear of failure and dishonor. Looking past the initial observations of his life as a businessman, a scholar can find a partial blueprint for what it meant to be a man around during the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era.

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<sup>55</sup> Barland, *Sawdust City*, 94.

<sup>56</sup> *Eau Claire Leader*, May 7, 1912.

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