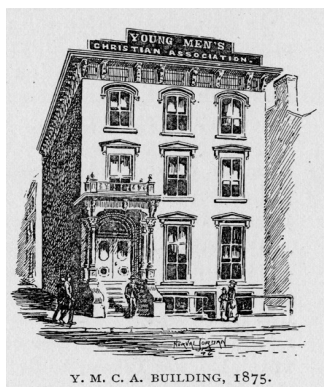


Newsboys and Bootblacks

IN the mid 19th century thousands of kids lived on city streets, many supporting themselves by selling newspapers, shining shoes, and doing other odd jobs – not all of them legal. It was a tough life for a homeless child. In 1869 the Cleveland city fathers placed a seventy-five cents bounty on the head of every dog found wandering at large without a muzzle. Newsboys and bootblacks combed the streets for strays that were quickly converted into cash, and deposited in a dog pound.

In 1854, the first Young Men’s Christian Association of Cleveland was founded. The YMCA was disbanded in 1863 due to the Civil War, but in 1875 they opened a home for “Newsboys and Bootblacks,” with beds for fifteen and furniture for a greater number. Night schools and a Sunday school were held regularly. The boys were charged a small amount for lodgings each weekday night, no charge being made on Sunday.



In 1928 the U. S. Government Printing Office released a pamphlet entitled *Early Accounts of Newsboys and other Street Workers*. : “ Fifty years or more ago newsboys and other street workers were believed to be either waifs and strays or half orphans whose attempts to support themselves and their widowed mothers by such work as selling papers, blacking boots, or playing a violin on street corners made them the object of pity and the subject of romance. Who does not remember the little match girl of the fairy tale or the heroes of such books as Alger’s “Tom the Bootblack” and “Paul the Peddler”?

The average age of the newsboy was about 12 years, but many news-boys were much younger.

Many boys began selling papers at very early ages. A 15-year-old boy in one of the surveys had sold papers ever since he was six. It is generally believed that the very small boys are the most successful newspaper sellers. ‘My little brother sells more,’ said an 11-year -old newsboy, “because people think he is cute.’ ”



Among the earliest efforts to deal with the problem of child labor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were those of organized labor. The fledgling industrial unions organized the youngest workers, and there was even a union of child workers: *The Newsboys and Bootblacks’ Protective Union*, chartered by the Cleveland AFL.

The union’s purpose was “to secure a fair compensation for our labor, lessen the hours of labor and educate the members in the principles of trade unionism, so when they develop into manhood they will at all times struggle for the full product of their labor.”

On the evening of July 15, 1895, an immense audience greeted Mark Twain in Cleveland’s Music Hall when he delivered one of his famous lectures. It was a benefit performance for the Newsboys Home and the stage was crowded with restless youngsters. He was not happy with the experience because “*there were a couple of hundred little boys behind me and nobody to watch them or keep them quiet. Inside about a half hour the scuffling boys had the audience’s maddened attention. So I skipped a third of my program and quit.*”

Sources: *Cleveland, The Making of a City*; *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*; *Children’s Aid Society Records, WRHS*; *U.S. Govt. Printing Office*

Newsboys and Bootblacks Home in 1880

Name	Age	Birth	Father BP	Mother BP
Kiefer, George	15	Kansas	Germany	Germany
Kelley, Arthur	17	Penna.		
Candoan, Thomas	16	Ohio	Ireland	Ireland
Kumode, John	15	England	England	England
Hausler, James	21	Italy	Italy	Ohio
Davis, Edward	16	Wisconsin	N.Y. State	Ohio
Williams, Louis	16	N.Y. State	N.Y. State	N.Y. State
Graham, John	16	Ohio	Ireland	Ireland
O’Brien, John	18	N.Y. State	Ireland	Ireland
King, Thomas	16	Illinois	Ireland	Ireland
Johnson, Fred	16	Canada	Ireland	Ireland
Allen, Michael	17	Ireland	Ireland	Ireland
Murphy, Jerry	17	Ohio	Ireland	Ireland
Malloy, James	17	Ohio	Ireland	Ireland
Fahey, William	17	Ireland	Ireland	Ireland
Collins, Thomas	14	Penna.	Ireland	Ireland
Dissette, Edward Supt. N.B. Home	47	Canada	Ireland	Ireland

1880 U. S. Federal Census, Cuyahoga County, pg.81,ED 2