

THE CRATCHITS

(in America)



WRITTEN BY
JAMES STILL

DIRECTED BY
HALENA KAYS



BACKSTAGE GUIDE
A publication of **COMMUNITY SERVICE** at
AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

BACKSTAGE CALLBOARD

THE CRATCHITS (IN AMERICA)

by James Still*

Directed by Halena Kays*

FEATURING



Dawn Bach*



Maya Lou Hlava



Joslyn Jones*



Camille Robinson*



Matthew Schnitker



J.G. Smith*

The Cratchit family. Weren't they in "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens? Yes. But this is about another Cratchit family that is both contemporary and American.

Adult siblings Martha, Belinda, and (Tiny) Tim share history with Dickens' fictive family, but also have history of their own making. Maybe the American cousins from the future? Set in a declining American city called Dickens, some of the Cratchits live in the house they grew up in, some of them have moved away, some of them have suddenly returned. They are a family of broken relationships trying to find ways to repair and move forward. Of course they're also trying to pay their electric bill, fighting for forgiveness, and getting to know each other all over again. There's also a wedding in the mix. And joyfully, disco music.

*Ensemble member or Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater

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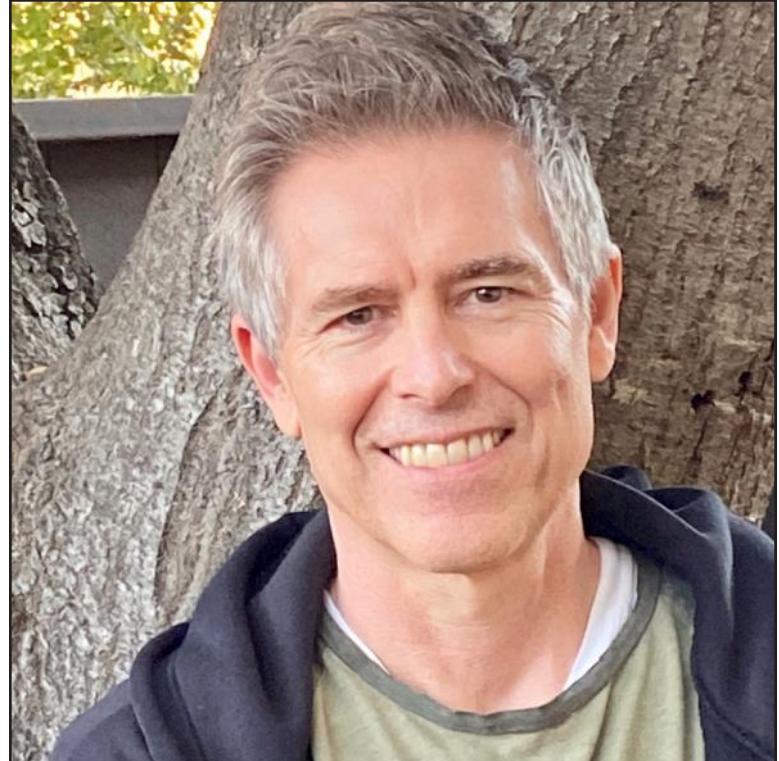
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INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT **JAMES STILL**

We asked playwright James Still about *The Cratchits (in America)* and his upcoming projects.

WHAT WAS YOUR INSPIRATION FOR WRITING THE CRATCHITS (IN AMERICA)?

I've read Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol", seen it onstage dozens of times in several adaptations, and directed a big beautiful production of it a couple years ago. But as a writer, I've never been tempted to try my hand at (yet) another adaptation of the holiday staple -- I mean, do we really need another adaptation of that venerable story? I've always loved that it's a ghost story. And I've always been intrigued with the Cratchit family. There seems to be buried treasure in that part of the story, something that I've never found completely satisfying as a listener. The danger is that the Cratchits are romanticized, as though poverty is something that makes people lovable and hearty. As someone who grew up in a family with little means and always trying to dig itself out of debt (and ultimately failing), I reject that portrayal of poverty. Being poor does not make you stronger and worrying about paying your electric bill does not make you noble. It's maddening and shaming. I've been thinking about the Cratchits for a long time. This play is not a sequel, it isn't meant to satisfy our need to know whatever happened to the Cratchit family after Scrooge supposedly had an enormous change of heart. This play is about another family -- a Cratchit family -- that is contemporary and American. They share history with Dickens' fictive family, but also have history of their own making. I wanted to lend the family a distant familiarity, a strange sense that we know this Cratchit family before we get to know them better. They have surprised me in every moment of writing with them.



I was driven to write the play because I grew up poor, in a family that never had enough money to pay every bill every month. As a child, I witnessed (and felt) the spectrum from pride to shame, from rage to humor... I wanted to honor that kind of family reality with a poetry that is neither sentimental nor dirge-like. "Getting by" in American culture where the message is mostly "try harder" and "you failed if you aren't rich" — but really getting by isn't a prize or a goal, it's simply being in the moment. So how is my play authentically IN its own moment? And how is the play in conversation with the larger national conversation about issues of class, education and employment?

WHAT DO YOU HOPE AUDIENCES TAKE AWAY FROM THIS PIECE?

In the spirit of all new plays being some kind of experiment, the play was built on questions and reflections, wishes and warnings, craft and instinct. A big question (maybe unanswerable) is about points of access for different audiences. Because the play was inspired by Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" and reimagined as a contemporary American family — I wonder how/where collaborators and audiences will meet the play. If one is deeply familiar with the Dickens' story, what does my play challenge and satisfy? If one only knows the basics about Dickens, how does the play straddle their curiosity? And for those who know nothing about Dickens (or are weary of the original story), does my play create its

INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT **JAMES STILL**

own demands and cast its own kind of spell? I'm not convinced that the play's "success" is dependent on my answering those questions, but I'm not naive about the ways this play might invite engagement and opinions.

New play development and its relationship to audiences is rigorous, sometimes my heart hurts before my head hurts. And always I'm focused on a few true questions: What is the play telling me about itself? Where is its heartbreak, its longing, and how does it use humor as weaponry? How does structure determine how the play unfolds and does it create momentum that results in surprise and a sense of immersion?

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NEXT?

As a writer I'm deep into a rewrite of a new play called EVERYBODY'S FAVORITE MOTHERS which is inspired by the early 1970s gay rights movement and the founding of PFLAG. The play is in joyful process with Launch Pad at UC-Santa Barbara where it will have a "preview production" in February 2024. As a director I'm directing a workshop at the Autry Museum in Los Angeles of a new verbatim play called THAT DAMN HORSE based on oral histories with folks associated with Gay Rodeo. And as always, I'm juggling a dozen new projects — each one convinced it needs my full attention.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



JAMES STILL (*playwright*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. His plays have been produced throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia, South Africa, China and Japan. His new plays include EVERYBODY'S FAVORITE MOTHERS; THE CRATCHITS (IN AMERICA); DINOSAUR(s); (A) NEW WORLD; JOY WAVES TO YOU FROM A DISTANCE; and DASH CLIMBS A ROPE. Recent work includes a trilogy of linked plays: THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT (Indiana Repertory Theatre), APPOGGIATURA (Denver Center Theatre), and MIRANDA (Illusion Theater, Minneapolis). Also: APRIL 4, 1968: BEFORE WE FORGOT HOW TO DREAM (Indiana Repertory Theatre); two plays about the Lincolns: THE WIDOW LINCOLN and THE HEAVENS ARE HUNG IN BLACK (both premiering at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C.); a play for one actor about culinary icon James Beard called I LOVE TO EAT (Portland Center Stage); a play for 57 actors called A LONG BRIDGE OVER DEEP WATERS (Cornerstone Theater Company in Los Angeles); LOOKING OVER THE PRESIDENT'S SHOULDER at theaters across the country; and AND THEN THEY CAME FOR ME at theaters around the world (most recently at Alabama Shakespeare Festival). His short play WHEN MISS LYDIA HINKLEY GIVES A BIRD THE BIRD was a winner of Red Bull Theater's Short New Play Festival in New York and performed at many festivals. He has directed at theaters around the country including productions of OEDIPUS; 12 ANGRY MEN; RED; A DOLL'S HOUSE, PT 2; GOD OF CARNAGE; THE MYSTERY OF IRMA VEP... and many others. Still is an elected member of both the National Theatre Conference in New York and the College of Fellows of the American Theatre at the Kennedy Center. He received the Otis Guernsey New Voices Award from the William Inge Festival, the Todd McNeerney New Play Prize from Spoleto, and the Indiana Authors Award for Drama for his published trilogy THE JACK PLAYS. His plays have been developed at the New Harmony Project, the O'Neill Conference, Sundance, Seven Devils, the Colorado New Play Summit, Launch Pad, and many others. He is a four-time Pulitzer nominee for his work in the theater, and a five-time nominee for his work in television. He is the Playwright in Residence at Indiana Repertory Theatre and lives in Los Angeles.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



HALENA KAYS (director) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. She is the head of the directing program for University of Michigan, teaching introductory and intermediate levels of directing and supervises senior directing thesis projects. She is a founding member of the artistic collaborative the Ruffians, a former member of the Big Apple Circus Clown Care unit, past artistic director of the Hypocrites, former co-artistic curator for Theater on the Lake, and co-founder and former artistic director of Playmakers Lab. As an artistic associate with the Neo-Futurists Chicago, she directed *Comfortable Shoes*, *Pop/Waits*, *44 Plays for 44 Presidents*, *Burning Bluebeard*, *Daredevils*, *Daredevils Hamlet*, *Fake Lake*, and *Wildcat!*. Other Chicago directing credits include *Endgame*, *Ivywild*, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (the Hypocrites), *The Magic Play* (the Goodman), *Lord of the Flies* (Steppenwolf), *How a Boy Falls* (Northlight Theatre), *On Clover Road* (American Blues Theater), and *Feast* (the Goodman; part of a collaborative directing effort with the Albany Park Theatre Project). Regionally, she has directed *Do You Feel Anger?* (Circle X, LA), *Shapeshifter* (Bard at the Gate with the McCarter Theatre Center), *The Magic Play* (the Olney Theater Center, the Actor's Theater of Louisville, Portland Center Stage, and Syracuse Stage), *Love Song* and *The Welkin* (Nashville Story Garden), and *Secretary* (Nashville Rep's Ingram New Works Festival). She has been nominated for Jeff Awards for Best Supporting Actress, Best Direction, Best New Work, and Best Production; named one of the top 50 players in Chicago theatre by NewCity; and is a recipient of the prestigious 3Arts Award. She received her BS from Northwestern University and her MFA from the University of Texas at Austin. She is a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC).



DAWN BACH (Martha) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. Since joining the Ensemble in 1993, Dawn has appeared in numerous Blues productions over the years, including *Catch-22*, *A Stone Carver*, *On the Waterfront*, *A Lie of the Mind* and *Dark at the Top of the Stairs*. She served as musical director/composer for *Medea* and wrote original music for *Toys in the Attic*, for which she received the After Dark Award for outstanding original music. She has hosted and narrated numerous industrial films and has appeared on the stages of Lifeline, Shakespeare Project of Chicago, Bailiwick, Next, Buffalo Theatre Ensemble, Northlight (*Cowgirls*, *Smoke on the Mountain*) and Goodman Theatre (*A Christmas Carol*). A long-time student of the late Mary Ann Thebus, Dawn is also a trained singer and violinist.



MAYA LOU HLAVA (Billie) is thrilled to back at American Blues Theater where she was seen in *Things With Friends* for the 2023 Blue Ink Theater Festival. Other Chicago credits include *Dory Fantasmagory* (YPPT/Greenhouse Theater); *Spring Awakening* (Porchlight Theater); *Act 5, The Killing Game*, and *The Nether* (A Red Orchid Theatre); *Zurich* (Steep Theatre); *Shrek*, *White Christmas* and *Bye Bye Birdie* (Drury Lane Theatre); *Oklahoma* (Marriott Theatre); *Violet* (Griffin Theater); *Trevor* (Writers Theatre); *Jake's Women* (Spartan Theatre Company); *The Secret Garden* (Court Theatre); *The Talking Cure* (Idle Muse Theatre Company); *Jane Eyre* (Lifeline Theatre); *The Wheel* (Steppenwolf Theatre); Film and Television Credits include *The Perpetrator*, *Chicago Med*, *The Chi*, and *The Big Leap*.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



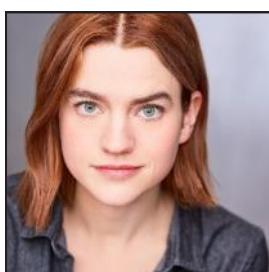
JOSLYN JONES (Mrs. F) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater. Credits include *Flyin' West* (American Blues Theater) *Steel Magnolias* (Theatre at the Center); *Intimate Apparel* (Theatre Squared); *ANDROMEDA* (Theatre Squared); *The Project(s)* (American Theater Company) Jeff Nomination, Best Production; *The Delany Sisters: Having Our Say – The First Hundred Years* (Fleetwood Jourdain Theatre); *Once On This Island* (Marriott Lincolnshire Theatre); *12 Ophelias* (Trap Door Theatre); *Weekend* (TimeLine Theatre), *Bourbon At The Border* (Eclipse Theatre) BTAA Nomination, Featured Actress; *Escape* (Live Bait Theatre); *Flyin' West* and *RAISIN* (Court Theatre), *Bee-Luther-Hatchee* (The University Of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign); *Fabulation: Or, The Re-Education of Undine* (Next Theatre); *Relevant Hearsay* (MPACCT: Theater on the Lake); *Bee-Luther-Hatchee* and *Smokey Joe's Café* (Open Door Theater); *Meshuggah Nuns!* (Chicago Jewish Theatre); *The Kurt Weil Revue: Songs of Darkness and Light* (Theo Ubique Cabaret Theatre) Jeff Nomination, Best Musical Production; *To Kill A Mockingbird* (Metropolis Performing Arts Centre); 2002 Class of The School at Steppenwolf. She has understudied: *Having Our Say* and *Crumbs From The Table of Joy* (Goodman Theatre); Film: *Cherry*, directed by the Russo Brothers with Tom Holland as her scene partner; Television: *South Side-Mrs. Odom* (HBO Max); *Chicago PD* (NBC). Joslyn is a proud member of Actors Equity Association and SAG-AFTRA. linktr.ee/JoslynJones



CAMILLE ROBINSON (Belinda) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. She has been with the company since 2016, after making her debut in the critically-acclaimed production of *Little Shop of Horrors*. She has also appeared in 4 productions of Blues' smash holiday tradition, *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!* Recent theater credits include: *Once on This Island* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Cinderella* (Paramount Theatre) and *The Color Purple* (Drury Lane Theatre). Proud member of AEA and SAG-AFTRA. Represented by Gray Talent Group. camille-robinson.com



MATTHEW SCHNITKER (Tim) is thrilled to be working with American Blues Theater! Hailing from Florida, he graduated from the University of West Florida with a B.A. in Acting. Recent Chicago credits include *Teenage Dick* (Theater Wit), *Non-Player Character* (Red Theater), *Curious George* (Northbrook Theatre for Young Audiences) and *We Found A Hat* (Lifeline Theatre). Matthew can also be seen working with Red Theater as one of their company members.



J.G. SMITH (Carol) is a proud Ensemble member of American Blues Theater. You may have seen her performing with Blues in *It's a Wonderful Life: Live in Chicago!*, *On Clover Road*, *Ripped*, and virtual readings of *The Thanksgiving Play* and *On the Greenbelt*. Theatre: *I And You* (Peninsula Players); *Mother of the Maid* (Northlight); *Plantation!* (Lookingglass); *The Art of Sisters* (Vision Productions); *MARYSHELLEYSHOW* (National Tour, Chicago Fringe, TheTankNYC); *Peter and the Starcatcher* (City Equity Theatre); *Alice in Wonderland*, *As You Like It*, *King Lear*, *A Christmas Carol* (Alabama Shakespeare); and *Censored on Final Approach* (The GYM at Judson). Film/TV credits include Jennifer Reeder's *Knives and Skin*, MTV's *Short Comings*, *The Dancing Monkey*, *Dreaming Grand Avenue*, *Pry Me Open*, and *Dorm Therapy*. Her original films and performance art have shown at New Orleans' Hell Yes Film Festival, Williamsburg Circus, Salonathon!, Undiscovered Countries: The Infinite Fest, and TransVisions' virtual SOFT PALETTE festival. She is a proud Equity member and repped by Paonessa Talent Agency. AEA. jgsmithactor.com

ABOUT "A CHRISTMAS CAROL"

The Cratchits (in America) is inspired by the characters of Charles Dickens' "A Christmas Carol". Below is an overview of Dickens' famous and beloved novella.

"A Christmas Carol. In Prose. Being a Ghost Story of Christmas", commonly known as "A Christmas Carol", is a novella by Charles Dickens, first published in London by Chapman & Hall in 1843 and illustrated by John Leech.

It recounts the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, an elderly miser who is visited by the ghost of his former business partner Jacob Marley and the spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Yet to Come. After their visits, Scrooge is transformed into a kinder, gentler man.

Dickens wrote "A Christmas Carol" during a period when the British were exploring and re-evaluating past Christmas traditions, including carols, and newer customs such as cards and Christmas trees. He was influenced by the experiences of his own youth and by the Christmas stories of other authors, including Washington Irving and Douglas Jerrold. Dickens had written three Christmas stories prior to the novella, and was inspired following a visit to the Field Lane Ragged School, one of several establishments for London's street children.

Published on December 19, 1843, the first edition sold out by Christmas Eve; by the end of 1844 thirteen editions had been released. Most critics reviewed the novella favorably. The story was illicitly copied in January 1844; Dickens took legal action against the publishers, who went bankrupt, further reducing Dickens's small profits from the publication. He went on to write four other Christmas stories in subsequent years. In 1849 he began public readings of the story, which proved so successful he undertook 127 further performances until 1870, the year of his death.

"A Christmas Carol" has never been out of print and has been translated into several languages. The story has been adapted many times for film, stage, opera and other media.

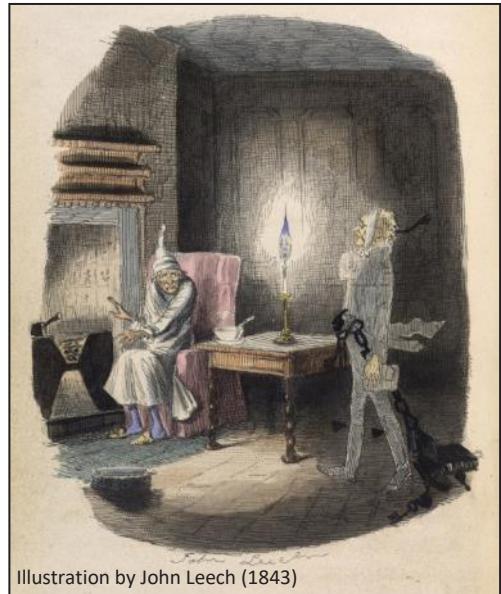


Illustration by John Leech (1843)

ABOUT CHARLES DICKENS

Charles Dickens (1812 - 1870) was an English novelist and social critic who created some of the world's best-known fictional characters, and is regarded by many as the greatest novelist of the Victorian era. His works enjoyed unprecedented popularity during his lifetime and, by the 20th century, critics and scholars had recognized him as a literary genius. His novels and short stories are widely read today.

Born in Portsmouth, Dickens left school at the age of 12 to work in a boot-blacking factory when his father John was incarcerated in a debtors' prison. After three years he returned to school, before he began his literary career as a journalist. Dickens edited a weekly journal for 20 years, wrote 15 novels, five novellas, hundreds of short stories and non-fiction articles, lectured and performed readings extensively, was an indefatigable letter writer, and campaigned vigorously for children's rights, for education, and for other social reforms.



Charles Dickens

WHOSE WHO IN “A CHRISTMAS CAROL”

The adult siblings in James Still's play share history with Dickens' fictive Cratchits family, but also have history of their own making. Below is a character breakdown from “A Christmas Carol”, which includes several names referenced in *The Cratchits (in America)*.

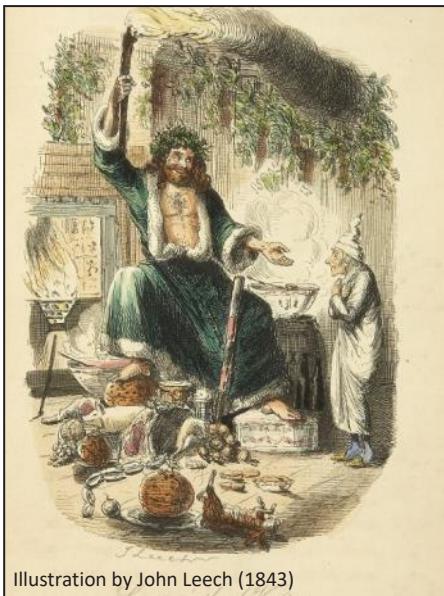


Illustration by John Leech (1843)

EBENEZER SCROOGE

The miserly owner of a London counting-house, a nineteenth century term for an accountant's office. The three spirits of Christmas visit the stodgy bean-counter in hopes of reversing Scrooge's greedy, cold-hearted approach to life.

JACOB MARLEY

In the living world, Ebenezer Scrooge's equally greedy partner. Marley died seven years before the narrative opens. He appears to Scrooge as a ghost condemned to wander the world bound in heavy chains. Marley hopes to save his old partner from suffering a similar fate.

BOB CRATCHIT

Scrooge's clerk, a kind, mild, and very poor man with a large family. Though treated harshly by his boss, Cratchit remains a humble and dedicated employee.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST

The first spirit to visit Scrooge, a curiously childlike apparition with a glowing head. He takes Scrooge on a tour of Christmases in his past. The spirit uses a cap to dampen the light emanating from his head.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT

The second spirit to visit Scrooge, a majestic giant clad in a green robe. His lifespan is restricted to Christmas Day. He escorts Scrooge on a tour of his contemporaries' Holiday celebrations.

THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS YET TO COME

The third and final spirit to visit Scrooge, a silent phantom clad in a hooded black robe. He presents Scrooge with an ominous view of his lonely death.

MRS. CRATCHIT

Bob Cratchit's wife, a kind and loving woman.

PETER CRATCHIT

The Cratchit's oldest son, who inherits his father's stiff-collared shirt for Christmas.

MARTHA CRATCHIT

The Cratchit's oldest daughter, who works in a milliner's shop.

BELINDA CRATCHIT

The Cratchit's second-oldest daughter.

TINY TIM

The Cratchit's young son, disabled from birth.

FRED

Scrooge's nephew, a genial man who loves Christmas. He invites Scrooge to his Christmas party each and every year, only to be refused by his grumpy uncle.

FEZZIWIG

The jovial merchant with whom the young Scrooge apprenticed. Fezziwig was renowned for his wonderful Christmas parties.

BELLE

A beautiful woman who Scrooge loved deeply when he was a young man. Belle broke off their engagement after Scrooge became consumed with greed and the lust for wealth. She later married another man.

FAN

Scrooge's sister; Fred's mother. In Scrooge's vision of Christmases past, he remembers Fan picking him up from school and walking him home.

THE PORTLY GENTLEMEN

Two gentlemen who visit Scrooge at the beginning of the tale seeking charitable contributions. Scrooge promptly throws them out of his office. Upon meeting one of them on the street after his visitations, he promises to make lavish donations to help the poor.

THE STATE OF AMERICA'S INDUSTRIAL TOWNS

The Cratchits (in America) is set in a fictional declining American industrial town called Dickens. Below are excerpts from a 2017 Associated Press article titled “Some towns rebound, others wither as manufacturing declines”, which offers some examples of the current state of industrial towns in the Midwest. It has been edited here for length. You can read the full article [here](#).

Approach nearly any small town in central Pennsylvania and you’re likely to see one of two things.

If the town is lucky...you will see plumes of steam and full parking lots at an industrial landmark. If it’s not...you will see a shuttered factory, “for sale” signs and all the attendant markers of a town whose industry has died.

The story of the Rust Belt, the wide expanse of Great Lakes and Midwestern cities, is one of decades-long manufacturing decline. But while the Rust Belt’s large and medium-sized cities have often managed to claw their way back to a growing economy, small towns with just one or two employers can remain desolate for decades.

The paths they have taken to survive and grow can serve as examples for those still reeling in a post-industrial era. Some have preserved their old industries in a smaller, more high-tech form; others have shifted gears completely.

And some remain seemingly unable to recover.

GRADUAL DECLINE

The loss of industry in Northeastern and Midwestern towns is often demonstrated visually: huge, empty steel mills and shipyards in cities like Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Detroit. But many of the changes have hit smaller towns with just a few thousand people, often many miles from metropolitan areas.

In the decades after the 1950s, dozens of Pennsylvania counties not touching Pittsburgh and Philadelphia lost manufacturing work with many shedding more than half their manufacturing jobs by the early 21st century.

During the first 13 years of the century, non-metropolitan counties nationwide grew far more slowly than large and small cities — with rural areas shrinking overall for several of those years.

“At this point, the prognosis does not look good for much of small town America,” researchers for the Brookings Institution wrote in 2014. “As badly as some regions have fared during the post-recession period, the new statistics show population decline in smaller areas, increasing large

metropolitan area dominance.”

Since 2001, Pennsylvania in total has lost 300,000 manufacturing jobs — 34 percent of its base, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The decline hit different towns at different times, but the story is often similar. A major factory or cluster of factories closes or shrinks as jobs are automated or sent overseas. In some cases, another business takes their place for a time, but rarely equals its predecessor.

That can lead to not only a depressed economy, but a demoralized populace.

A single large factory or power plant could once sustain not only hundreds of well-paying jobs, but an entire economy, [Saxton Mayor Alan] Smith said.

“Communities that at one time were almost self-contained communities that had furniture stores, men’s clothing stores, women’s clothing stores, butcher shops, hardware stores where you could find anything, theaters — that all had disappeared.”

“When there is not the prospect or opportunity for meaningful employment, which in turn means families and home ownership, I think it creates a sense of despair and some degree of hopelessness,” he said.

In Claysburg, the decline of silica bricks was years in the making as steel waned across the country, said Rich Allison, a community activist and historian who once was president of General Refractories. The mills closed for months at a time, leaving workers without the security they’d once enjoyed.

Not every small town took those hits, however. And some that did managed to survive by other means — in some cases fighting to keep their factories or bring them back into operation within a few years.

REOPENING AND AUTOMATION

When Westvaco closed its Tyrone paper mill’s doors on Oct. 26, 2001, local leaders didn’t know what to do.

The closure shed 265 jobs and left a sprawling industrial

THE STATE OF AMERICA'S INDUSTRIAL TOWNS

center closed, but officials weren't even certain the site would be put up for sale, according to Mirror interviews at the time.

Two years later, a group of area business figures and investors united to buy the property and reopen the site under a new name: American Eagle Paper Mills. Today, according to company literature, the mill employs about 240 people — fewer than at its height, but a sizable economic force for a town of a few thousand.

Not every town has been so lucky, however.

In many cases, there is little hope of preserving a local industry. Instead, local leaders have to branch out into unfamiliar new fields in hopes of weathering change.

That's what officials have attempted in Mount Union. Once a thriving silica center nicknamed "Bricktown," the town lost its industry and the bulk of its population in the same downturn that struck Claysburg.

[C]ounty officials have filled a business park near Huntingdon and are still working to revitalize Mount Union's business district. But where larger cities...can rely on booming fields like medicine and education, those like Mount Union don't often have as many options.

It's not simply a matter of convincing new industries and companies to move into a post-industrial town, said Steve McKnight, president and CEO of the Altoona-Blair County Development Corp., which controls several business parks across the county.

"When you're looking at a true single-industry town, where say, more than half of your employment base rested on a single company — a U.S. Steel or a Pennsylvania Railroad — it's going to take a long time to diversify. And it's definitely going to take a long time for a community to culturally change."

McKnight said the broad trend today is for more a diverse, broad industry spread across a city or town. Visitors might not see a single towering mill or factory anymore, he said, but a collection of less noticeable companies can still operate across a community.

For those that have not yet got those industries, an aging population with pensions, Social Security payments and property can buy some time and support an economy, said Smith of Saxton. But sooner or later, a town needs a new industry.



DISCO TO KNOW

FOR THE CRATCHITS (IN AMERICA)

In *The Cratchits (in America)*, the character of Mrs. Fezziwig is a big fan of disco music. Below is a quick overview of the genre, as well as closer looks at some of the songs and artists referenced in the play.

ABOUT DISCO

Disco is a genre of dance music and a subculture that emerged in the 1970s from the United States' nightlife scene. Its sound is typified by four-on-the-floor beats, syncopated basslines, string sections, brass and horns, electric piano, synthesizers, and electric rhythm guitars. Several dance styles were developed during the period of disco's popularity in the United States, including "the Bump" and "the Hustle".

Well-known disco artists included the Bee Gees, ABBA, Donna Summer, Gloria Gaynor, Giorgio Moroder, Baccara, Boney M., Earth Wind & Fire, Chaka Khan, Chic, KC and the Sunshine Band, Thelma Houston, Sister Sledge, Sylvester, The Trammps, Diana Ross, Kool & the Gang, and the Village People. While performers garnered public attention, record producers working behind the scenes played an important role in developing the genre. By the late 1970s, most major U.S. cities had thriving disco club scenes, and DJs would mix dance records at clubs such as Studio 54 in Manhattan, a venue popular among celebrities.



"DON'T LEAVE ME THIS WAY" - THERESA HOUSTON



"Don't Leave Me This Way" is a song written by Kenneth Gamble, Leon Huff and Cary Gilbert. It was originally released in 1975 by Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes featuring Teddy Pendergrass, and was subsequently covered by American singer Theresa Houston in 1976 and British duo the Communards in 1986, with both versions achieving commercial success.

Following the release of Houston's fourth studio album, *Any Way You Like It* (1976), a Boston DJ record pool unanimously reported positive audience response to "Don't Leave Me This Way" in discothèques, and the song was selected for release as a single. In February 1977 the track hit Number 1 in the U.S. on the R&B and Club Play Singles charts, then in April 1977 on the Billboard Hot 100. "Don't Leave Me This Way" won Houston the Best Female R&B Vocal Performance at the Grammys for 1977.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Houston's version of the song became an unofficial theme song for gay men during the AIDS epidemic. On September 20, 2004, Houston's rendition of "Don't Leave Me This Way" was inducted into the Dance Music Hall of Fame in New York City.

DISCO TO KNOW FOR THE CRATCHITS (IN AMERICA)

"LAST DANCE" - DONNA SUMMER



"Last Dance" is a song written by Paul Jabara and performed by Donna Summer from the soundtrack album to the 1978 film *Thank God It's Friday*. Summer has a role in the film as an aspiring singer who brings an instrumental track of "Last Dance" to a discothèque in hopes the disc jockey will play it and allow her to sing the song for her fellow patrons; after refusing through most of the film the disc jockey eventually obliges and her performance causes a big sensation.

The song won Jabara a Grammy Award for Best R&B Song, an Academy Award, and a Golden Globe Award for Best Original Song that same year. Summer also won the Grammy for Best Female R&B Vocal Performance for the song.

During her career, Donna Summer became known as the "Queen of Disco" and her music gained a global following. She amassed a total of 32 chart singles on the US Billboard Hot 100 in her lifetime, including 14 top ten singles and four number one singles. She claimed a top-40 hit every year between 1976 and 1984, and from her first top-ten hit in 1976, to the end of 1982, she had 12 top-ten hits, more than any other act during that time period. In 2013, Summer was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

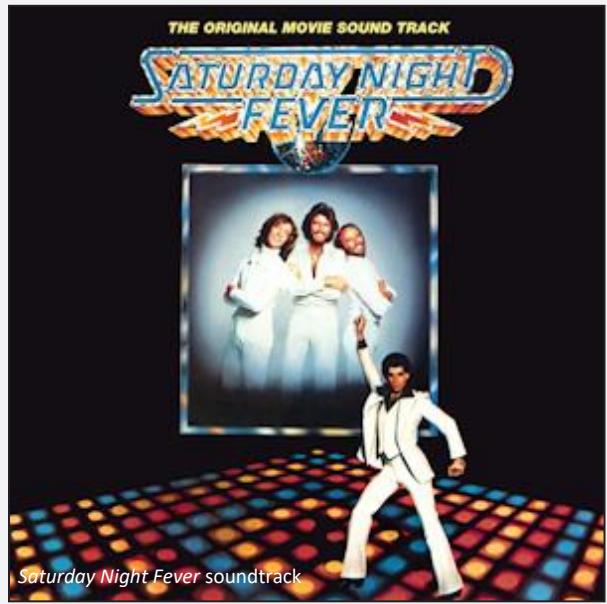
Donna Summer's 1983 hit "She Works Hard for the Money" is also briefly mentioned in *The Cratchits (in America)*.

"STAYIN' ALIVE" - THE BEE GEES

"Stayin' Alive" is a song written and performed by the Bee Gees from the *Saturday Night Fever* motion picture soundtrack. On its release, "Stayin' Alive" climbed the charts to hit the number one spot on the Billboard Hot 100 the week of 4 February 1978, remaining there for four consecutive weeks. Consequently, it became one of the band's most recognizable tunes, partly because it appeared in the opening credits of *Saturday Night Fever*. In 2004, "Stayin' Alive" was placed at No. 189 by Rolling Stone on their list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time. The 2021 updated Rolling Stone list of 500 Greatest Songs placed "Stayin' Alive" at No. 99.

The Bee Gees' *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack (1977) was the turning point of their career, with both the film and soundtrack having a cultural impact throughout the world, enhancing the disco scene's mainstream appeal. They won five Grammy Awards for *Saturday Night Fever*, including Album of the Year.

The Bee Gees sold over 250 million records worldwide placing them among the best-selling music artists of all time. They were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1997.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



THE FAMILY INSTITUTE AT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

The Family Institute brings together a diverse group of leading therapists to provide behavioral health care to children, adults, couples and families across the lifespan. They tailor treatment to match the client's unique needs and goals, integrating feedback from clients through measurement-informed care. Behind each clinician at The Family Institute is a collaborative team of over 100 clinicians who engage in continuous learning, consultation, information sharing and providing effective referrals.



NAMI CHICAGO

Since 1979, NAMI Chicago has fought for families and individuals impacted by mental health conditions. They promote community wellness, break down barriers to mental health care and provide support and expertise for families, professionals and individuals in Chicago and beyond.



SAMHSA

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

MISSION

American Blues Theater is an Ensemble of artists committed to producing new and classic American stories that ask the question: "What does it mean to be American?"

VALUES

American Blues Theater *acts* on its values –

- Accountability – we hold ourselves and each other responsible to do the right thing.
- Courage – we have a fearless mindset and find strength in persevering.
- Teamwork – we invest in collaboration and the success of others.
- Service – we believe it's an honor and duty to help the community.

ABOUT US

Winner of the prestigious National Theatre Company Award from American Theatre Wing (Tony Awards), American Blues Theater is a non-profit arts organization that produces high-quality productions with a focus on stories that are relevant, timeless, and inclusive to the American spirit.

American Blues Theater is **committed to developing new work as more than half of the productions are world and Chicago premieres**. Play development programs include the nationally-recognized Blue Ink Award, commissions, readings, and the 16th annual Ripped Festival of short plays.

American Blues Theater **believes in teamwork both on and off-stage**. A leader in community engagement for decades, the theater matches each play's themes with other non-profits' missions to raise awareness.

In addition to producing plays, American Blues Theater **offers a range of free services**, including continuing education programs, writing instruction and matinees for Chicago Public Schools, dramaturgical materials, and post-show discussions to widen access in the community.

American Blues Theater and its artists have earned 232 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations, 44 Black Theater Alliance Awards, and numerous industry accolades, including nomination and awards for the Pulitzer Prize, Academy Awards, Tony Awards, Golden Globes Awards, Emmy Awards, and more.

WHAT'S HAPPENING AT BLUES



Visit AmericanBluesTheater.com to learn more.



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American Blues Theater sits on the original homelands of the Council of Three Fires (Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa). Read full land acknowledgment at americanbluestheater.com/location.