

BUILDING EAST AKRON:  
THE LOCAL VISION OF F.A. SEIBERLING AND THE CITY OF AKRON

by  
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## ABSTRACT

The welfare capitalist endeavors of F.A. Seiberling, president of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, contributed to a broader trend of structuring the city of Akron for the benefit of the rubber companies. As Goodyear became internationally successful, Seiberling's business ethos adapted from a proprietary form to a corporate form, and his role in Akron reflected the corporate ideology. The inordinate growth of the rubber companies placed a significant demand on the city's infrastructure and housing, and the burden of meeting the demand created an environment of speculation and limited municipal services. The leaders of the rubber industries influenced the local government, society, and eventually the physical environment to meet the needs of industry. The author looked at the multiple situations that led to a municipal environment conducive to industrial dominance. State and local legislative changes, reform efforts of the chamber of commerce, and Seiberling's efforts all served to mold the city of Akron and its citizens for the benefit of the rubber industry.

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To honor the muse that inspires across time, I titled the chapters in the following thesis with lines from the following Ezra Pound poems: “The Garden,” “The Garrett,” and “In a Station of the Metro.” All are available in a paperback printed edition, Ezra Pound, *Early Poems* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996).

“...And round about there is a rabble  
Of the filthy, sturdy, unkillable infants of the very poor.  
They shall inherit the earth...”

“...Nor has life in it aught better  
Than this hour of clear coolness  
the hour of waking together.”

“The apparition of these faces in the crowd;  
Petals on a wet, black bough.”

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## Introduction

From the construction of exquisite estates, cultural institutions, and carefully crafted company towns, the efforts of Progressive-era industrialists altered the built environment of America's cities significantly. The long-term effect of these business owners is immediately evident. What is not evident, however, is the nature of the municipal environment in which their projects occurred and the contribution of industrialists to the building of municipalities. In the city of Akron, F.A. Seiberling began the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company at the eastern edge of the city, blocks from where he lived. Within thirty years of starting the company, Seiberling built his grand estate, Stan Hywet, and a multi-acre Goodyear campus that included several factory buildings, employee housing, recreation, learning, and commercial facilities.<sup>1</sup> He also helped build a municipality receptive to his endeavors and eventually dependent on a single-industry.

Seiberling's efforts began innocuously as he continued his father's tradition of involvement in multiple owner-operator enterprises. As a businessman, he filled a societal role that included involvement in reform, politics, and social scenes, but with the inordinate success of the rubber industry his role shifted from small-town burgher to industrial capitalist. Likewise, as his role in business changed, the city of Akron attempted to adapt to the new industrial environment and struggled with the social, environmental, and economic conditions created by the rubber magnates.

Upon the initial establishment of Goodyear, Seiberling contributed to the economic and social environment of Akron strictly as a small businessman concerned primarily with the individual success of his industry. As the company proved successful,

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<sup>1</sup> The employee housing included permanent single-family residential housing, duplexes, and dormitories.

he evinced the mores and patrician values of a proprietary capitalist by supporting the economic, social, and political environment of Akron. The transition to corporate capitalist occurred after the first year of international business success after which Seiberling became involved in national ventures.<sup>2</sup> After Seiberling lost control of Goodyear, his attention returned to his family and community, and he became marginally involved once again in furthering the success of the city of Akron. The city, though, accepted dependence on the single-industry of rubber and managed infrastructure to accommodate the needs of industry. This created an extremely unstable economy. Ultimately, Akron's industrialists undermined the foundation of municipal autonomy that should have carried the city through the Depression.

The study of Seiberling and Akron is unique because the industrialist evinced a marked change in ideology as corporate success became inevitable. The change in ideology affected the city of Akron by dramatically changing an established canal town to a ward of the rubber industry in less than twenty years. Scholarly attention has been given to company towns within the context of the industrial environment, but little attention has been accorded to cities that existed before and during the early growth of corporations.<sup>3</sup> Historiographic trends since 1980 shifted from the reformers and corporations of the Progressive period to the workers and individuals of urban areas, cultural and immigration dynamics, and gender and race issues. In following this trend, an examination of Akron and its citizens provides an understanding of the early chaos

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Sklar examined concisely the transformation in American economy as it was affected by the change from proprietary to corporate capitalism. The proprietary form originated with an owner-operator who managed multiple facets of business, while the corporate form depended on managers to administer the business for absentee owners. Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism: 1890-1916* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Crawford studied the evolution of company housing and determined that the form adapted because of sociological and industrial trends. Margaret Crawford, *Building the Workingman's Paradise*. Haymarket Series (New York: Verso, 1995).

created by industrialization and urbanization. Seiberling's evolution from proprietary capitalist to industrial capitalist corresponded with deleterious effects of unchecked industrial dominance. In this environment dominated by the rubber industry, Seiberling's welfare capitalist projects contributed to a larger trend of management of the entire municipal environment for the benefit of the single industry. However, the projects contributed insignificantly to his, and other businessmen's, efforts to order the city.

In 1898 when Seiberling purchased the four abandoned manufacturing buildings in Akron's sixth-ward—the former town of Middlebury—the city of Akron and the country were emerging from a serious economic depression. Determined to enter into the rubber business because of his father's and brother's involvement in the industry, Seiberling solicited family funding to start the endeavor. In the early years, when profits were tied up in a patent infringement suit, Seiberling maintained the business by soliciting subscriptions and funds from local business associates in East Akron where he lived. Investment in Goodyear, Seiberling promised, would bring business back to East Akron.

By 1906, with the company's profits released and a consistent product produced, Seiberling became president. Locally, the B.F. Goodrich Company was still the largest producer of tires and rubber goods, although several upstart companies had entered the rubber business. Production increased exponentially after the bicycle craze gave way to the automotive craze, and with the boom in industry, the population of Akron exploded. Workers poured in from Appalachia where the rubber companies recruited heavily because the mountain people were purportedly not prone to organize or strike.



Because of the increased population density, houses, boarding rooms, and shanty towns were hurriedly constructed to accommodate the workers. The city of Akron, still operating under their 1876 city charter that considered peddling a serious crime, struggled to maintain order. In this boom town period, Akron established ordinances to protect private property, discourage disorderly behavior, and create a healthier city. Additionally, revisions to the state constitution in 1903 dismantled Akron's commission form of government and limited their ability to exert municipal authority. Workers constructed shanty and tent towns at the fringes of the industrial property, and boarding houses let beds by the shift. Scores of stores and entertainment venues, from jewelry and cigar stores to moving picture houses, opened and sought the business of the rubber worker. The city continued to react to the changes, and in 1907, the businessmen of Akron created a chamber of commerce to assist with municipal administration. The chamber directly managed many municipal projects and essentially shaped the environment to best accommodate industry.

The unstable environment resulted in high employee turnover, and Seiberling recognized that company policies should target employee retention. He made efforts to secure land and build employee housing, but the officers and board of Goodyear were strongly against involvement in employee's personal lives. As industrialists perceived it, George Pullman's feudal attempt to order the lives of his employees led to a notoriously violent strike.<sup>4</sup> Endeavors reminiscent of paternalism were treated with extreme caution.

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<sup>4</sup> The 1894 Pullman strike actually occurred because of Pullman's wage cuts without a subsequent decrease in rental rates, according to Stanley Buder's *Pullman: An Experiment in Industrial Order and Community Planning*. Margaret Crawford in *Building the Workingman's Paradise* argued that other industrialists perceived the strike as a reaction against paternalism. Crawford, 43.

Seiberling, nevertheless, forged ahead with his plan, and by 1912, planned construction on land that he and his wife Gertrude privately purchased for the construction of company housing. The company housing project that he established—Goodyear Heights—received national recognition, but contributed little to creating a stable workforce. Although Seiberling’s intent was for the city to annex and assume responsibility for it, the project folded into the Goodyear Corporation under the head of the Goodyear Realty Company. Eight years later the development expanded twice to meet the housing needs of Goodyear employees. Additionally, in 1912, the state revised the constitution and created a Home rule charter. The city attempted to return to a commission form of government, but a sweeping audit of governance by the chamber caused the mayor and council to devote attention to internal organization. Finally by 1922 the city established a commission form of government.<sup>5</sup>

This period saw Seiberling’s progression from local patrician to industrial magnate. His success led the citizens of Akron to clamor for his bid for mayor in 1911, but the growth of Goodyear began to absorb most of his attention. By 1912, Seiberling followed the trend of the majority of Akron’s elite. The sulfurous fumes of the factories and the congestion of the city led these families to move from east Akron to the west side of Akron. His newly constructed palatial residence Stan Hywet insulated the family from the city and provided an enclave for patrician activities. Rumors swirled in Akron that Seiberling undertook a campaign for the state legislature.

Despite local reform efforts and contributions to Akron’s well-being, Seiberling’s financial success made him the subject of public scrutiny. With corporate success, he

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<sup>5</sup> Each commission type of government is examined accordingly in this work although none evince characteristics of typical forms of commission government.

looked beyond city and community efforts, and he became part of a national and global industrial environment. He invested in the funding and development of the Lincoln Highway, helped establish nation-wide trucking industries in Akron, and he established domestic and international Goodyear tire production facilities. Businesses in Akron responded to the diversification of products with specialty shops and supporting industries.

Goodyear had long supported—financially and with leadership—employee recreation and education efforts, but in 1915, Seiberling centralized all the various clubs and affiliations and began to withdraw corporate involvement. Corporate interest in clubs and activities was becoming time consuming and costly as leaders were called upon to mitigate minor issues that arose in what were supposed to be extra-curricular activities.

However, Seiberling and the company did not want to totally abandon the effort to educate, entertain, and encourage the recreation of the employees, and in 1916, he began the construction of the six story Goodyear Hall. This architectural hallmark of the Goodyear campus followed the pattern that Pullman had established for company towns. The Hall provided room for recreation and entertainment and educational facilities, a cafeteria, stores, and a bank. It served East Akron as an extension of downtown facilities.

Industrialists of this period had *carte blanche* in many building and industrial efforts, and Seiberling was no exception. Akron did not have a zoning policy, and ordinances were suited to a small town ethos. For the most part, early industrial changes were without civil infringement. In 1908, the city passed a set of ordinances to deal with problems created by an increased population, and by 1918, Akron saw the need for the creation of a new city charter. In this period, Akron's chamber encouraged and lobbied

for civic improvements and became essentially a shadow city government. The chamber funded the creation of a new city plan for Akron in 1917, and in 1921 helped create zoning ordinances in order to legally regulate the urban environment.

When Seiberling lost control of the company in 1920, he established a new tire and rubber company in the nearby city of Barberton and eventually brought that company, the Seiberling Rubber Company, to international success as well. The city that served the rubber industries continued to decline after the peak year of rubber and tire production and population in 1919. A culture of single-industry dependency became firmly established, but the political environment struggled to maintain any semblance of order.

Managing order proved a running theme of the early industrial and civic growth of Akron, and the city's businessmen recognized that by changing the built environment they could contribute to a harmonious city. In doing so, they became town philanthropists and sometimes local heroes. The story of Akron and Seiberling belongs to a broader context that at its root involves a change in American corporate and municipal history. Additionally it relates to an evolution of business ethos from a near-patrician form with industrialists investing in the community as part of a moral and patriotic duty to a corporate form of civic administration; and finally to yet another evolution of the corporate form, the laissez faire mentality, with few local affiliations or responsibilities.

The corporations, reformers, and recipients of reform garnered much of the attention of historians throughout the twentieth century, and early examinations of the Progressive era revolved principally around the reformers and their efforts. By the

1960s, Gabriel Kolko examined the idea of reform as it related to big business and status. In *The Triumph of Conservatism* Kolko asserted that business used the Progressive movement to obtain economic dominance. The efforts of the upper and middle class of the early twentieth century secured societal status, and did not reveal any altruistic motive.<sup>6</sup>

An organizational interpretation developed that was synthesized by Robert Wiebe, who looked at the predominant effects of industrialization and argued against Kolko's assertions. Wiebe examined the simplicity of the early Progressive "people vs. the interests" interpretation, and in *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* Wiebe argued that earlier studies generalized the varied economies within the United States.<sup>7</sup> He asserted that industrialization in this period led people from individual communities to ordered, organized societies with more homogeneous municipal authority. This trend toward organization and rationalization, argued Wiebe, led not only to increased professionalization and management, but also to the multiple reform movements. These works and John Cooper's *The Pivotal Decades: the United States 1900-1920* placed the activities of businessmen such as Seiberling within an historic context, but they did not address public policy.<sup>8</sup>

Interpretation within the organizational model resulted in Glenn Porter's work *The Rise of Big Business, 1860-1920*. Porter's work focused principally on the causal relationship of industrial growth and acceptance of values promoted by bourgeois

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<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).

<sup>7</sup> Wiebe wrote from the perspective of a business historian, and it was he that developed the idea that the middle class led to reform movements. Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966).

<sup>8</sup> John Milton Cooper, *Pivotal Decades: the United States 1900-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992).

businessmen.<sup>9</sup> Stanley Buder's *Pullman: An Experiment in Industrial Order and Community Planning, 1880-1930* intimately examined the world that George Pullman manufactured, and Stuart Brandes looked specifically at corporate reform practice in his 1976 work *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940*.<sup>10</sup> The inclination that Brandes observed was one of subjugation of employees with reform efforts. Buder, on the other hand, pointed out the problems that careful manipulation of the built environment caused when feudal business practice prevailed. Additional historians, including Martin J. Sklar and Alan Trachtenberg detailed the change in patterns of ownership, capital distribution, and corporate organization that allowed big businesses to dominate the economy.<sup>11</sup> The theses of these two historians most directly relate to the patterns evident in Akron.

Recently, though, scholars have begun to focus on the built environment and the city in the context of the welfare capitalism movement. Studies exist that examine isolated settlements and extractive industries where a very unique set of circumstances allowed company owners to become modern feudal lords; fewer studies look at progressive developments within industrializing cities. In 1987, Daniel Nelson examined the rubber boom and its effect on the housing market in Akron. In the article "Of Mortgages and Men: A Housing Boom in Rubber City" which was published in the Ohio Historical Society's *Timeline* publication, Nelson focused on the effect the Rubber boom

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<sup>9</sup> Glenn Porter, *The Rise of Big Business: 1860-1920* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., Second edition, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Buder, *Pullman...* Stuart Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism: 1880-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

<sup>11</sup> Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction...* Trachtenberg's work focuses on the decades following the Civil War, but the patterns that were evident in larger cities were then repeated in smaller cities at the turn of the twentieth century Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

had on the built environment.<sup>12</sup> Margaret Crawford's 1995 work, *Building the Workingman's Paradise: the Design of American Company Towns*, examined the towns created by industrialists where, she argued, the company towns were a result of the trend toward order and organization.<sup>13</sup> This same focus was taken by Kevin Delany Frazier with his 1994 thesis "Model Industrial Subdivisions: Goodyear Heights and Firestone Park and the Town Planning Movement in Akron, Ohio, 1910-1920," where he examined the placement of Goodyear Heights and Firestone Park within the context of garden communities and the City Beautiful movement.<sup>14</sup>

Carl Smith re-investigated Pullman in 1995 with his work *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Disbelief*. Smith observed that part of the success of Pullman's manufactured environment depended on the manipulation of the press and public figures.<sup>15</sup> The city as an entity received scrutiny by John Fairfield in his 1997 work *The Mysteries of the Great City*, and in 2003, Jon Peterson explored the dynamic of city planning as it related to several critical periods. *The Birth of City Planning, 1840-1917* placed city planning efforts within the broader trends of reform and order.<sup>16</sup>

The aim of this thesis is two-fold. The first is to examine the role of Seiberling as proprietary capitalist and civic leader within the context of the development of Akron and the second is to show the degenerative effect of industrial hegemony on an urban environment. Chapter One examines the development of Seiberling from small

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<sup>12</sup> Daniel Nelson, "Of Mortgages and Men: A Housing Boom in Rubber City" *Timeline* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio Historical Society, 1987).

<sup>13</sup> Crawford, *Building...*

<sup>14</sup> Kevin Delaney Frazier's. "Model Industrial Subdivisions: Goodyear Heights and Firestone Park and the Town Planning Movement in Akron, Ohio 1910-1920" *M.A. Thesis*. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Carl Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Disbelief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> John Fairfield, *Mysteries of the Great City: The Politics of Urban Design, 1877-1937* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993). John Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning, 1840-1917* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

businessman to proprietary capitalist and his efforts within the context of Akron, while Chapter Two examines his role from proprietary capitalist to corporate capitalist and the factors that indicated this change. Chapter Three studies the changing city, and the effects of corporate manipulation. The cause and effect relationship that led to the changing business ethos of Seiberling will be examined with the context of the city serving as an indicator of the general change in organization and environment.



## Chapter One—And Round About there is a rabble

The city that provided the context for Seiberling's industrial endeavors underwent significant changes throughout its brief history, and the industries and individuals that maneuvered within its limits. At the turn of the twentieth century, Akron evinced characteristics common to certain industrial cities. As Trachtenberg noted, these towns though "hardly metropolitan... served as [a] vehicle of urban influence on large numbers of people...in limbo between the cosmopolitanism of the big city and the provincialism of the small town."<sup>17</sup> The largely agricultural industries of Akron employed skilled and semi-skilled workers and a small contingent of business owners controlled the social scene and exerted marginal influence over the government. In this environment, Seiberling began a rubber company by following the success of another. The beginning, though inauspicious, marked the start of a trend toward industrial dominance of a municipality.

### *Introduction to the city of Akron*

At the confluence of a series of swirls and rills on a topographic map is a horizontal ridge that marks the divide between two continental watersheds. On the north side of the ridge, water finds its way to streams and rivers that empty into Lake Erie, then to the St. Lawrence Seaway, and eventually, those waters filter into the North Atlantic Ocean. South of the ridge, streams find their way to the Muskingum watershed, then the Ohio River, then the Mississippi, and finally, they empty into the Gulf of Mexico.<sup>18</sup> At a

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<sup>17</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 113.

<sup>18</sup> The St. Lawrence Seaway Continental Divide stretches from the southern tip of Florida, north through the southern states of Georgia, the Carolinas, Maryland, and Virginia where it begins a westerly trek through western Pennsylvania and New York before meandering south of Lake Erie. The hills and ridges of Summit County resulted from glacial action and Summit's two main rivers in Summit County, the

time when water provided the most efficient means of transport, the region became noted for its potential. The hills and ridges that marked the edges of the divide inspired town planners to call the area Akron, from *Akros*, Greek for ‘high place.’<sup>19</sup> Although built on many hills, Akron was never a city on a hill; rather, it was a town founded mere miles from an established town and important trading center—Middlebury—and built as a speculative commercial venture.

The venture involved the construction of the Ohio and Erie Canal, which required twenty-one locks to negotiate canal boats over the change in elevation. The town of Middlebury, by-passed because of political pandering, remained important because of the industries it supported. However, the slow progress of ‘locking’ ensured the commercial success of businesses built around the canal that met the needs of canal travelers. Indeed, in the spirit of competition, two Akrons were built. The first, South Akron, built just south of highest lock, followed the square orderly plan of New England towns, and the early businesses met the needs of the canal construction workers.<sup>20</sup> The second, Cascade, planned around a critical water race, utilized every square foot of land.<sup>21</sup> Cascade planners recognized the necessity of competing with South Akron for the business of the citizens of Middlebury, and Cascade’s east to west thoroughfare, Market Street, bent to the south to converge with South Akron’s east to west running thoroughfare.

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northern flowing Cuyahoga and the southern flowing Tuscarawas, mark the divide. Akron is situated on the ridges of the divide.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Grismer, *Akron and Summit County* (Akron: Summit County Historical Society, n.d.), 80-81.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 84-85. The town planners, General Simon Perkins and Paul Williams platted the Akron with squarely with the canal as its axis, wide streets, and a public square with public buildings. Cascade, later called North Akron, was built on a near North to South axis, with many narrow streets, small lots, and a cascade race running down its Main Street. The race contributed to the growth of industries powered by water wheels that utilized the hydraulic potential created with the change in elevation.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 94-97.

Akron's canal days lasted until the lure of speed and convenience made obsolete the slow canal waterways bound to available water supplies. The first railroad in the area passed northwest of Akron, and the second generation of Akron speculators hastily raised subscriptions for the building of a branch line. The Akron branch of the Cleveland and Pittsburgh railroad completed in 1852, shifted transportation from the canal and downtown Akron to the eastern edge of the city closer to Middlebury.<sup>22</sup> The town endured despite competition with Akron and even supported the thriving industries of clay products and matches. Nevertheless, in 1870, Akron formally annexed the town and Middlebury became an economic, political—but not social—subsidiary of Akron.<sup>23</sup> Despite becoming Akron's sixth ward, Middlebury remained distinctly viable. The three towns, Akron, Cascade, and Middlebury founded at different times for different reasons, united as a single city. Akron remained solidly agrarian with a dim recollection of boom town success. Ordinances passed in 1886 concerned health and safety, real estate conveyances, general offenses, and other small town issues such as peddling, marketing, loitering, etc.<sup>24</sup>

### *Ideal of the Great City*

In the decade prior to the twentieth century, great cities across the United States began devoting attention to their development and infrastructures in the form of secure utilities, rapid transportation, parks and cultural institutions, and city planning efforts. Spurred by the rise of city planning as a profession and grandiose impressions from Daniel Burnham's White City, American cities scrambled to reconcile their existing built

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 152-153.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>24</sup> The conveyances by the city of Akron transferred municipal property and raised funds to pay off the city's debts. City of Akron, *The Revised Ordinances of the city of Akron, 1886* (Akron, Ohio: H.G. Canfield, printer, 1886).

environment with the new standards of order. The White City, featured at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, in Chicago set the standard for city planning and introduced planning concepts to average Americans. The commentator Henry Adams reconciled his previous antipathy toward capitalism after visiting the 1893 Exposition with the promise and order exemplified by the planned built environment. Adams conceded that "if capitalism 'were to be run at all, it must be run by capital and by capitalistic methods..."<sup>25</sup> Adams revealed his inherent elitism by deploring the attempt of farmers and day-laborers to order a city, and their ability to plan seemed as absurd to him as the notion of popular sovereignty. City officials and businessmen returned to their cities disgruntled by the abject urban conditions, and they sought measures to order their cities on a model of organization and beauty. This sharp contrast to the prevailing pattern of speculative urban development led to municipal projects from Public Square in Cleveland to the McMillan Plan in Washington D.C.

The flurry of organization and reform efforts that ensued made the previous century's urban growth seem static. Despite a mid-nineties economic panic, the turn of the twentieth century ushered in public projects and an industrial model that made the political and social order of the previous century obsolete. However, the change was not always dramatic. In small cities and rural areas, as Martin Sklar indicated, "market relations, forms of thought, political movements, and cultural patterns associated with small-producer and proprietary enterprise remained widespread, influential, and strongly represented in party politics."<sup>26</sup> The simple canal town had burgeoned into a full-fledged city with a solid base of agricultural related industry, cereal, match-making, clay

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<sup>25</sup> Trachtenberg, 220. [Henry Adams as quoted in Trachtenberg.]

<sup>26</sup> Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism: 1890-1916* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 15.

products, general manufacturing, printing, and a rubber company, B.F. Goodrich's rubber company, colloquially referred to as the gum shop. In an 1890 letter to the *Akron Beacon Journal* editor, the Secretary of the Akron Twine and Cordage Company, A.M. Cole noted, "the city is booming."<sup>27</sup> The efforts of Akron's Mayor William H. Miller had reduced the public debt significantly, but the city was desperately lacking amenities that made tax-paying bearable. In 1893, Akron's mayor Democrat Lorenzo Dow Watters, helped create a new form of city government with "four non-partisan commissioners who were to devote their entire time to the business interests of the city."<sup>28</sup> The usurpation of Republican control of local politics indicated the general dissatisfaction with municipal projects. Typically the commission form of government is credited to the city of Galveston which enacted such a government after the devastation of the 1900 Hurricane; indeed it is called the Galveston plan. The adoption of such a government indicated Akron's commitment to early attempts at municipal reform and organization around business models.<sup>29</sup>

Although the 1890 decade started out promising, hope contracted in 1893 when the nation's economy collapsed. In Akron, citizens placed the blame on the Democrats who controlled local and state offices. Nationally, however, the electoral re-alignment of 1894-1896 resulted in the establishment of the Republicans as majority party, an

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<sup>27</sup>Cole observed the booming status as he reflected on the 300 homes built, \$2,000,000 of outside capital invested, and the installation of the private electric belt line street railroad. A.M. Cole. *Akron Daily Beacon*. 9 January 1890, pg. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Grismer, 542.

<sup>29</sup> However, in a true commission government, the positions of mayor and council do not exist, the commissioners exert the legislative and executive power. For a period examination of commission governments, see Clinton Rogers Woodruff's *City Government by Commission* (New York: Appleton, 1911) digitized by New York Library in 2006 and available through Google© books. For a contemporary examination of the commission form of government within the context of early twentieth century reform movements, see Bradley R. Rice, *Progressive Cities, the Commission Government Movement in American, 1901-1920* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1977).

ascendancy realized in 1896 with the election of President McKinley. Additionally, dependent largely on agrarian-based industries, Akron townspeople focused on the wheat surpluses as the cause of the collapse.<sup>30</sup> The city's paving project was halted and business confidence was low. Those involved in speculative ventures were trying to get out, and those that were already out were more than hesitant to get in. In an effort to provide jobs, the city made an unusual move and tentatively restarted the paving project. The extensive and much needed street improvement project approved at the end of Mayor Miller's term in 1894 continued with the commissioners directing the project. The commissioners received plans and proposals for sidewalks, brick streets, electric lights, and sandstone curbing and the paving project continued despite the depression.<sup>31</sup> However, many of the improvements that were so vital for community success and development were undertaken by privately owned companies. The resulting inter-urban railway, electric, and telephone wars and limited service were an economic and psychological drain on the citizens of Akron.

This was by no means a unique situation, and reformers spent much time attempting to resolve these conflicts over municipal utilities. The companies that met municipal needs operated as autonomously as the municipality allowed, often to the economic detriment of citizens and in extreme cases to the disadvantage of their health, safety, and welfare. As Trachtenberg observed,

Cities did not expand and change mindlessly, by mere entropy. If they lacked democratic planning, they submitted to corporate planning-which is to say, to the overlapping, planned evolution of many private competitive enterprises. The visible forms make this clear: the power of organized wealth, answerable only to the limits of the possible.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Grismer, 280.

<sup>31</sup> Akron City Council, *Akron City Council Minutes* Vol. K, University of Akron Archives, Akron, Ohio

<sup>32</sup> Trachtenberg, 117.

Although the commission did not establish urban projects such as utilities and transportation, in the 1890s, Akron did undertake a few important municipal endeavors. These projects included the installation of a municipally funded city-wide sewer system, the re-codification of city ordinances, a contract with a private waterworks program, and the establishment of its first municipal parks, Elizabeth Park and Grace Park.<sup>33</sup> The establishment of municipal parks followed trends noted by George A. Parker who “reported the findings of a nationwide city park census, the first systematic inquiry of its kind...by 1902, ‘796 cities and towns’ were ‘doing more or less of park work.’”<sup>34</sup> Although cities established parks, they often primarily served aesthetic purposes. They did not meet the leisure needs of working class people.<sup>35</sup>

Strangely, the city retained the positions of mayor and ward representatives, although the plan included an eventual full commitment to the commission form of government. The commissioners reduced payroll and pushed for the passage of levies and the sale of bonds to raise money for infrastructures.<sup>36</sup> Despite initial reticence, by 1901 citizens expressed their preference for the commission form of government.<sup>37</sup> Akron politicians, however, viewed commissions unfavorably and subjected the new form to close scrutiny.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Theodore Roosevelt addressed the townspeople of Akron in 1900 at Akron’s Grace Park. Arthur Blower, *Akron at the Turn of the Century* (Akron, Ohio: Summit County Historical Society, 1955), 25-26.

<sup>34</sup> Parker served as superintendent of parks for Hartford, Connecticut and reported his findings in his “Park Census Report, 1902.” Jon Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning, 1840-1917* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 116. For an erudite study of the many facets of early city planning, see Peterson’s work.

<sup>35</sup> For an examination of the role of public parks and leisure within the context of the labor movement and working class needs, see Roy Rozenzweig’s *Eight Hours for What We Will* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>36</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*, 25, 28, and 29 February 1896.

<sup>37</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*, 27 October 1901.

<sup>38</sup> The form disbanded the accepted system of separation of powers, and endeavored to reduce politics by managing the city in a business-like fashion. Politicians resented the form because it greatly reduced their

### *Early industrial development*

As Akron initiated efforts to reform its government, the industrial environment followed trends established nationally by industries such as Standard Oil, American Sugar Refining, and American Tobacco.<sup>39</sup> Akron business owners consolidated numerous cereal operations, farm machinery works, and many of the clay products manufactories. As the ‘Gay Nineties’ progressed, the industrial environment was lucrative and successful. Combines seemed a worthwhile venture and were made possible by state general incorporation laws; additionally, combines and trusts limited competition in an unstable business environment.<sup>40</sup> Despite the Congressional attempt to re-establish a competitive business environment, the decade after the passing of Sherman Anti-Trust Act (1890) witnessed the establishment of more powerful horizontal trusts with the first great merger wave. Additionally, as Glenn Porter noted in *The Rise of Big Business: 1860-1920*, the new national market for industrial securities “made it much easier to build large combinations, and the appearance of an increasing number of successful big businesses helped explain the market for industrials.”<sup>41</sup> Historian Naomi Lamoreaux examined the merger movement, and argued that the

Entrepreneurial model does not fit many large-scale industries, including most that subsequently formed consolidations. Far from being dominated by extraordinary entrepreneurs or robber barons who managed to overwhelm their competitors, the more common experience...was a rivalry among a relatively small number of matched firms, no one of which was able to secure a permanent advantage.<sup>42</sup>

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power and ward rule. The efforts of the commissioners received much criticism from Akron politicians and the *Beacon* and they were blamed for the poor finances of the city. *Akron Beacon Journal*, 29 May 1901.

<sup>39</sup> Glenn Porter, *The Rise of Big Business: 1860-1920* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc., Second edition, 1992), 79.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Porter, 84.

<sup>42</sup> Naomi Lamoreaux, *The Great Merger Movement* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 11.



When the Akron economy came to a nearly complete stop in the mid-1890s factory owners boarded doors or shut down entirely; few remained solvent. One of the only companies to continue successful operations through the financial difficulty was the B.F. Goodrich Rubber Company which was established in 1870. The business owners of Akron were in a precarious position socially and economically; it was a general period of uncertainty, with two periods of economic depression. Also, increased taxation because of developing infrastructure levied financial pressure on business owners. Many owners lost empires that they spent a lifetime creating. John Wolf who started the decade living next door to J.F. Seiberling lost his successful retail store and ended the decade living in one of the less-refined neighborhoods of Middlebury.<sup>43</sup> After losing a lawsuit because of unpaid personal and industrial property taxes, Akron's leading industrialist O.C. Barber attempted to cripple the city's economy by locating his industries outside the city.<sup>44</sup> Akron historian, Karl Grismer related that Barber told his friends "in no time, owls would be hooting from Akron's deserted buildings."<sup>45</sup> Barber continued to live in the city of Akron until 1909, while he planned the town of Barberton around his companies and employees.

Another prominent figure in Akron, Ferdinand Schumacher, acclaimed in the cereal industry for the manufacture of oats, encountered financial ruin after his giant mill burned and he struggled to retain full control of his American Cereal Company throughout the nineties. After he borrowed heavily, he was forced to make an assignment of all of his property, and he, too, spent the last years of his life paying off debts and re-

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<sup>43</sup> Akron City Directories 1890-1900. Akron-Summit County Public Library, Akron, Ohio

<sup>44</sup> William F. Fleming, *America's Match King: Ohio Columbus Barber, 1841-1920* (Barberton, Ohio: Barberton Historical Society Press, 1981), 88. Fleming's dissertation, published by the local historical society and reviewed by Bertram Wyatt-Brown, serves as the most complete biography of Barber.

<sup>45</sup> Grismer, 277.

establishing a successful cereal company in Iowa.<sup>46</sup> When he died in 1908, the *Beacon* reported “he [had] been a tower of strength, a factor that will always make his name respected and revered by all familiar with the city’s affairs and the city’s history.”<sup>47</sup>

Akron’s elite did not respond negatively to the financial adversity that befell those in their midst. In a letter to his business associate, Otis Hower, O.C. Barber criticized the Cedar Rapids businessman, Mr. Stuart, who sought to profit from Schumacher’s misfortune. Barber emphatically noted that he “[had] no confidence...in the fairness or even the honesty of some of the parties in control of the business...[he thought] the deliberate methods of Stuart and his colleagues to depreciate the value of the stock in Mr. Schumacher’s troubles...[was] not much less...than an attempted theft..he [was] a first-class liar.”<sup>48</sup> In general, urban elites forgave business failure, but chicanery and ruthlessness were reviled. As Porter succinctly indicated, “business failures were frequent, but there was little social or economic stigma attached to having failed.”<sup>49</sup>

### *The Seiberling family*

This economy saw the near ruin of the East Akron Seiberling family. John F. Seiberling, originally of the Loyal Oak Community in nearby Norton, Ohio, dabbled in a myriad of endeavors including managing a drug store and operating his father’s sawmill before he developed an improvement to the mechanical farm reaper and mower.<sup>50</sup> The

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 290.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 290. As quoted by Karl Grismer.

<sup>48</sup> Correspondence O.C. Barber with Otis Hower. Box B5. Hower Family Papers. University of Akron Archives, Akron, Ohio.

<sup>49</sup> Porter, 8.

<sup>50</sup> Farm equipment was a considerably lucrative endeavor at the time...as well as competitive. Agents from various equipment manufacturers were known to resort to sabotage, price-cutting, and other nefarious business practices to ensure their own success. One of the reasons given for the failure of J.F. Seiberling’s reaper business was that in a combination formed between numerous small companies and McCormick, the farm equipment giant backed out of the trust at the last minute, and subsequently undercut the combination that formed. Hugh Allen, *House of Goodyear* (Cleveland: The Corday and Guss Company 1943): 11-12.

main company, J.F. Seiberling & Company, founded in 1861 in nearby Doylestown, by 1865 became established in Akron.<sup>51</sup> Seiberling additionally built a strawboard company in East Akron, and owned an interurban railway company. The economic downslide of the 1870s was detrimental to all but the primary company, and Seiberling concentrated on the manufacture of farm equipment at his Empire Works on Mill Street.<sup>52</sup> By the late eighties, his two sons, Franklin and Charles assisted him in his business speculations and ventured their own capital as well.<sup>53</sup>

The J.F. Seiberling family evinced middle-class mores and aspirations. Although by no means secure due to the family's brief association with Akron's social scene, their role in the civic community was prominent. The Seiberlings moved from Doylestown, Ohio, to East Market Street in Akron in 1871 and there they established the Empire Works Industry on nearby Forge Street. The family occupied a stately Italianate home with amenities, wings, and annexes that turned the simple house into a mansion.

After J.F. Seiberling's oldest son Frank (F.A.) married Gertrude Penfield of Willoughby, Ohio in 1887, the young couple moved a few blocks away to Forge Street, close to the Empire Works. The demographics of this new area were significantly different from the East Market Street neighborhood. Carpenters, blacksmiths, bartenders, and boarders in boarding houses made up this neighborhood with George J. Renner's brewery within blocks of Frank's new home.<sup>54</sup> A year after the birth of their

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<sup>51</sup> Grismer, 197.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>53</sup> Allen, *House of...*, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Akron City Directories 1870-1891. Akron-Summit County Public Library, Akron, Ohio.

daughter, Irene (1890), Frank and Gertrude moved into the East Market Street house recently vacated by local store owner John Wolf.<sup>55</sup>

This new home, in Akron's elite neighborhood, was next door to the Seiberling patriarch and his wife Catherine, across the street from the "Match King" O.C. Barber, and within a block of the "Cereal King" Ferdinand Schumacher.<sup>56</sup> Other neighbors included circuit court judge the Honorable William H. Upson, the widow of a prominent physician, and other physicians, store owners, and prominent industrialists.<sup>57</sup> Later, F.A.'s sister Grace and her husband Dr. William S. Chase moved nearby as well.

These eminent citizens of Middlebury comprised an influential class in the city of Akron.<sup>58</sup> Although not directly involved in city politics, this elite class included primarily families that had long dominated local industry—Barber, Hower, Schumacher, Pflueger, Robinson, Goodrich—and these families supported each other financially and socially. The families inter-married, purchased stock in one another's companies, hired each other's sons and daughters, and even worshipped together.

This mobility was manifest in offices in New York or Chicago, business enterprises from Montana to Alaska, and recreational travel in Europe, Africa, and Asia. They were in communication with other elite families in major cities, educated their children at private schools, and were shareholders and directors for each other's companies.<sup>59</sup> These families lived either on Fir Hill at the eastern edge of downtown, or

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Labor historian Daniel Nelson, indicated that the working class of Akron was "distinctly central European," and he went on to indicate a hierarchy amongst workers which he called "German blue-collar elites." The entrepreneurial elites also were distinctly German. Daniel Nelson, *American Rubber Workers and Organized Labor, 1900-1941* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 18.

<sup>59</sup> Hower Family Collection. Series II and III, Boxes B5-B8. University of Akron Archives. Akron, Ohio.

along East Market Street, which at the turn of the twentieth century was a residential enclave of industrialists and professionals such as lawyers, physicians, and store owners.

The Seiberling family was part of this middle class, and they exerted social influence in Akron. Following the period trends toward involvement in religious institutions, the Seiberlings, along with the Hower and Schroeder families, were charter members of the prominent Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church. J.F. served as Church officer, council member, and head of the Sunday school department.<sup>60</sup> His nephew Francis Seiberling, son-in-law Lucius Miles, and daughter-in-law Gertrude Seiberling were also involved in the Trinity church. After J.F. Seiberling's financial difficulty in the nineties, social support remained strong. However, the generally understood reason for his "trouble", as Grismer noted "was mainly" because of his "involvement in too many projects."<sup>61</sup>

Social establishment aside, the nineties were economically ruinous for J.F. Seiberling. Despite weathering the 1893-1894 phase of the panic, products liability cases, political and legal fallout from the inter-urban street car turmoil, and patent infringement cases caused the senior Seiberling to lose the empire he created. In 1896, Seiberling announced the closing of the Empire Mower and Reaper works.<sup>62</sup> Following this, legal battles and financial difficulty absorbed the last dozen years of J.F. Seiberling's

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<sup>60</sup> "Memorial of the Twenty-fifth Year: 1871-1896." (Akron, Ohio: Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1896). It was to J.F. Seiberling's home that a Lutheran missionary first went to discuss the establishment of a Lutheran church in Akron. After determining that the citizenry would be supportive, the Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church was formed with 18 members. J.F. Seiberling was one of the core members who purchased property, raised subscriptions for the building of the church, and managed the administration of the church.

<sup>61</sup> Grismer, 290.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 288.

life. W.D. Shilts noted that at the end, Seiberling's nephew, Francis served as assignee for his property, and distributed his assets to his creditors.<sup>63</sup>

### *The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company*

Although J.F. Seiberling's financial difficulties certainly affected the finances of his sons, the family remained firmly committed to encouraging local business endeavors. Often sagacious, F.A. Seiberling once advised "a strong man [did not] wait for someone to offer him a job... [He] went out to build something of his own."<sup>64</sup> While liquidating one of his father's businesses in Chicago in 1898, F.A. Seiberling encountered a business acquaintance from Piqua, Ohio, H. C. Nellis. Nellis was the secretary at the F. Gray Company, owners of the buildings of Seiberling's defunct Akron Strawboard Company, which folded after the Panic of 1893.<sup>65</sup> Aware of Seiberling's business connections in East Akron, Nellis asked if Seiberling knew any businessmen willing to buy the Strawboard properties. Upon consideration, the Seiberling brothers, F.A. and C.W., made the decision to enter into the rubber business, one of the few businesses that remained viable through the depression of the nineties.<sup>66</sup> The decision to venture into rubber was not made lightly, considering that one of Seiberling's father's earlier endeavors had been the incorporation of the Akron India Rubber Company. Also, given

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<sup>63</sup> An assignee basically assumed fiduciary responsibility for distributing assets to creditors. W.D. Shilts, "Early Years of Goodyear." Unpublished manuscript. Box 1. W.D. Shilts collection. University of Akron Archives. Akron, Ohio. 2008.

<sup>64</sup> Allen, 13.

<sup>65</sup> The Strawboard Company was forced to close the year after the Panic of 1893, and the empty buildings, built originally by the Akron Woolen and Felt Company, lay immediately east of one of Seiberling's Milling Companies. Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> The exact details of the meeting and business transaction of the purchase of the Strawboard Factory property may never be known. Many company sources cited that Seiberling and Nellis bantered the price from \$27,000 to \$13,500, and Goodyear official, W.D. Shilts attempted to solve the puzzle by examining period records. The Synoptic Journal indicated that the purchase price was approximately \$13,000 and further documented the transfer of funds for the purchase. The deeds that recorded the transfer were signed by Henry B. Manton, trustee of the F. Gray Company and brother-in-law of F.A. and C.W. Shilts collection.

the consistent success of Dr. Goodrich's rubber company and the more frequent use of rubber goods and bicycle tires, rubber seemed the least risky of current ventures.

With their own background in the gum industry, the Seiberlings determined that they could produce sundries, belts and hoses, and also tires for the newly popular bicycles.<sup>67</sup> It was with this relatively modest vision of production that the Seiberlings began the rubber company they called Goodyear, a name then instantly associated with rubber.<sup>68</sup> Seiberling purchased the property in May of 1898, and the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company incorporated August 29, 1898.<sup>69</sup> The Seiberlings' combined business experience was extensive. Both had practical experience in aspects from manufacturing, finances, management and sales and both had, as well, dynamic, effusive personalities that drew people to them. The brothers had an extremely close kinship and social network with many of the major industrial and business families of Akron, such as Howers, Pfluegers, Miles, and Mantons, who became early investors in and supporters of Goodyear.

The industrial property F.A. Seiberling purchased from the F.Gray Company was just east of what had been the thriving town center of Middlebury.<sup>70</sup> Although many of the mercantile and service industries had relocated to Akron, the area maintained an agricultural base, and many manufacturing companies had their structures around the

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<sup>67</sup> C.W. Seiberling belonged to an early bicycling club and organized cycling events and races. C.W. Seiberling Vertical File. Records collection of Stan Hywet Hall and Gardens. Akron, Ohio.

<sup>68</sup> Sixty years earlier, Charles Goodyear discovered the vulcanization (heating and curing) process that made rubber a practical resource. Numerous small rubber goods companies utilized the name Goodyear in the nineteenth century.

<sup>69</sup> Maurice O'Reilly, *The Goodyear Story*, ed. James Keating (Elmsford, New York: The Benjamin Company, 1983), 9.

<sup>70</sup> Middlebury purportedly still maintained a distinct identity although it had been Akron's sixth ward for nearly thirty years. Herman Fetzer, *A Centennial History of Akron: 1825 to 1925* (Akron: Summit County Historical Society, 1925), 95

town.<sup>71</sup> Past the town center, Market Street became a deeply rutted dirt road.

Seiberling's new property, seven acres and three buildings, was not in a particularly desirable place. The old East Akron Cemetery lay directly across the street, a saloon lay to the east, vacant land and cow pastures bounded the property, and a little used rail line lay alongside.<sup>72</sup>

Goodyear public relations director and author of *The Goodyear Story*, Maurice O'Reilly, noted that the structures included a "small power plant and two dilapidated buildings [which faced] each other on opposite banks of the Little Cuyahoga River."<sup>73</sup> The two large buildings were of brick load-bearing construction, one single story, and the other two stories. Structures built later in 1901 and 1902 also had brick load-bearing walls and featured monitored roofs that ventilated the sulfur and burning-rubber fumes. The property transferred with valuable riparian rights, however. Additionally, the property had a long history of industrial use as the site of the first charcoal-fired blast furnace in the area, and until 1872, it was the site of the first match company established by O.C. Barber's father.<sup>74</sup>

The *Beacon Journal* article that announced the formation of a new company was enthusiastic. "King Rubber" the front page article was headlined, and the Beacon reporter noted that "...Akron [was] growing as a manufacturer of rubber goods."<sup>75</sup> It was in 1870 that B. F. Goodrich brought the rubber business from the east coast, and established the first rubber company west of the Alleghenies. Because the raw material

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<sup>71</sup> Among the industries left were cereal mills and clay works, one of which, the Robinson Clay Company gave Akron the dubiously honorable title of Sewer Pipe Capital of America. Seiberling later implored these companies for subscriptions as he raised money for his tire industry. Ibid, 90.

<sup>72</sup> Hugh Allen, *House of...*, 10.

<sup>73</sup> O'Reilly, 8.

<sup>74</sup> Shilts, 5.

<sup>75</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 30 August 1898.



for rubber products was more difficult to obtain than in other top Akron industries (mechanical reapers, clay, cereals and toy marbles), competition in the rubber products industry was nearly non-existent. Goodyear's formation and early growth was typical of many regional manufacturing industries. The Board of Directors included F.A. and C.W. Seiberling, with F.A. serving as secretary and general manager, their brothers-in-law Lucius Miles and Henry Manton, with Manton as treasurer, and the owner of the Akron and Hill Sewer Pipe Company, David Hill and his son George, who served as president and vice president respectively.

The Seiberling brothers raised subscriptions for common stock through relatives and close friends, and the 900 shares sold at \$100 each enabled the company to incorporate with close to \$100,000.<sup>76</sup> The early stockholders included the wives of F.A. and C.W., the wife of David Hill, the directors, F.A.'s brother-in-law R.C. Penfield, and close family friend Charles Dick. The Seiberling brothers purchased only 1 share each.<sup>77</sup> With the first sale recorded December 1, 1898, the business seemed to be an extension of the myriad endeavors earlier begun by J.F. Seiberling. Initially, the young company poured its effort into keeping up with production costs and payroll. A few patents essentially monopolized the tire production business, and the holders of those patents granted few licenses for use. As a result, Goodyear found itself in various patent infringement suits with the major tire companies, Hartford and Kelly Springfield, and the financial future seemed uncertain.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Shilts, 8.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

<sup>78</sup> Hugh Allen, *Rubber's Hometown*, Heritage Series vol. 5. (New York: Stratford House, 1937), 142-143.

The company's saving grace was its commitment to advertising which began as early as December 1898 with an advertisement in the bicycling publication *Cycle Age*.<sup>79</sup> Despite the promise of the new century, the young company fit into the local and national economy as simply another regional venture. Goodyear followed the trend of small owner-operated firms that competed with each other. In the city of Akron, it was B.F. Goodrich's company that evinced the corporatism that led to robber baron capitalism. Glenn Porter observed "ordinary citizens who sat around planning the creation of, for instance, another U.S. Steel in 1901 with the savings and credit of a few friends would surely have been thought lunatics."<sup>80</sup>

The mentality with which F.A. Seiberling, his brother, brothers-in-law, and friends entered the rubber business was a business mentality steeped in antebellum owner-operator tradition. It was a tradition that encouraged a diversity of business efforts in order to become established and the building of horizontal or vertical combines to ensure profitability.<sup>81</sup> Although the company began small, the context for industrial development proved that the potential existed for growth. Akron was historically a merchant's town built around commercial endeavors, and another company manufacturing 'King Rubber' most likely was welcomed for the temporary economic relief it afforded the citizens.

### *The Nature of Industrial ownership*

However, the old role of the proprietary capitalist as civic leader had no place in an increasingly ordered and professionalized business world. As cities moved toward a

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>80</sup> Porter, 11.

<sup>81</sup> The vertical combine was a growth strategy that typically indicated the involvement of Wall Street promoters, although they also worked around the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to establish horizontal mergers.

business mode of operation through commission governments, the politics of urban environments depended less on the boss system of favors and coercion and more on the building of mutually favorable relationships. The business environment changed, though, too. In the transition from proprietary ownerships to corporate ownership, many communities that supported industry struggled to define their new role. Managers had little incentive to contribute to the local economy, and corporate capitalists operated on a national rather than a local level. As business owners became absorbed in their own internal and national affairs a rift in society emphasis on the material and social differences between owner-operators and laborers and later between managers and workers created a rift in society.

In studies of corporate capitalism the negative effect on the American city is often overlooked. Industrialization created increasingly urban environments and populations characterized by fragmentation. The industrial economy led to a *laissez-faire* urban growth model that as Kathryn Kish Sklar indicated, “left many questions unanswered about what members of a democracy owed one another and how that responsibility should be exercised.”<sup>82</sup> Cities scrambled to accommodate big business to the detriment of citizens. In doing so, they lost disciplined and concerned leaders and an informed and involved citizenry. City organization efforts were insignificant when compared to the whims of big business, and they could be quite capricious. During McKinley’s 1896 campaign, the owner of one of Akron’s rolling mills shut the doors and posted a sign

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<sup>82</sup> Sklar argued that the growing trend toward civil society reform was due, in part, to the involvement of women in public life. She concentrated on the establishment of common ground to stimulate reform and encourage accountability. Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Ohio 1903: The Heartland of Progressive Reform.” *Ohio and the World, 1753-2053: Essays Toward a New History of Ohio* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005), 99.

asserting that if the Republican did not win, the mill would remain closed.<sup>83</sup> The dynamic between citizens of an established town and the workers for big business created a symbiotic relationship with the entire town ultimately dependent on local corporations for economic stability.

Akron experienced the first waves of corporate control with the cereal and farm machinery combines that left abandoned factory buildings around the city and masses of people unemployed. Yet another Seiberling venture hardly warranted a city plan to manage the population surges and impact on infrastructure, and the city was caught unaware when Seiberling brought business back to town. The years bracketing the turn of the twentieth century are remarkable for the amount of social change they saw. The Progressive movements at the turn of the twentieth century reflected the growing apprehension toward changing roles within a fragmenting society.

Francis R. Aumann examined the effect this critical period had on the government of the state of Ohio in the essay, "Ohio Government in the Twentieth Century: From Nash to White, 1900-1931."<sup>84</sup> The turn of the century campaign included reform minded candidate Samuel "Golden Rule" Jones of Toledo who garnered enough votes to be a viable third-party candidate, but the Ohio people voted for a Republican governor, George Nash, who sought fiscal and corporate control.<sup>85</sup> A series of Supreme Court decisions essentially dismantled existing municipal codes of cities in Ohio and Governor

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<sup>83</sup> Grismer, 288.

<sup>84</sup> Francis R. Aumann "Ohio Government in the Twentieth Century: From Nash to White, 1900-1931." Harlow Lindley, ed. *Ohio in the Twentieth Century 1900-1938* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1942), 5. Retrieved from [www.heritagequestonline.com](http://www.heritagequestonline.com) March 4, 2008.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

Nash created a new Municipal Code effective in 1903.<sup>86</sup> This bureaucratic decision affected 72 cities in Ohio with populations larger than 5,000; this included the city of Akron which had over 42,000 citizens in 1900. The 1893 city government with four commissioners disbanded, and the new city government followed the municipal codes established by the state of Ohio. These codes, however, arguably restricted a city's powers and ability to govern.<sup>87</sup> With the government of Akron in an indeterminate state, the responsibility for meeting the needs of Akron's citizens fell to the self-appointed leaders of Akron—Seiberling, Barber, Firestone and the new generation of Akron industrialists.

### *Changes at Goodyear*

In this transitional political and economic environment, society accepted a business venture that followed an established and accepted model. Nevertheless, social acceptance of business efforts was not insurance against economic difficulty. The company formed by the Seiberling brothers in an attempt to stave off poverty and social decline was a company established on an outdated, antebellum model that depended on

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 6. A constitutional amendment additionally gave the governor of Ohio the right to veto legislation. The municipal environment of Ohio resulted in cities that were classified by population with each exerting individual means of municipal control. The Supreme Court decided that all municipal codes were special legislation and declared the municipal codes unconstitutional. Since cities were left without any municipal codes, in order to retain order, the state passed municipal codes. The court decisions that were used to dismantle the old city codes were *State ex. rel. v. Knisely* and *State ex. rel. v. Jones*. Another Ohio city was examined by Robert A. Burnham. "Obstacles to Plan Implementation in the Age of Comprehensive City Planning: Cincinnati's Experience." *Ohio History*. Vol. 105. (retrieved March 16, 2008). Available online at <http://publications.ohiohistory.org/ohstemplate.cfm?action=index> For detailed examinations of the municipal codes, see Edward Kibler, "Ohio Municipal Code Commission," *Municipal Affairs*, 3 (September, 1899), 528-29; Max B. May, "The New Ohio Municipal Code," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 21 (January, 1903), 126; *Laws of Ohio* (1898), vol. 93, 192.

<sup>87</sup> For a period review of the legislation leading to the change and an overview of the change, see John A. Fairlie, "The Municipal Crises in Ohio." *Michigan Law Review*. Vol.1. No. 5. (February, 1903), pg. 352-363.

family and friends. Although the company lost the business experience of David and George Hill in 1899, the Seiberlings continued to rely on family and friends to lead the business. The addition to the board of Gertrude Seiberling's brother R.C. Penfield, and the close family friend and uncle of Harold Manton, Byron W. Robinson, ensured that decisions would be made by individuals committed to the Seiberling vision.<sup>88</sup>

As Grismer recorded, the generally understood reason why the Hills left Goodyear was because David Hill could not reconcile his own business ethic with Seiberling's more progressive views.<sup>89</sup> These progressive views became manifest as early as 1902 when the Seiberling's began an annual tradition of entertaining their employees at the popular Cedar Point amusement park.<sup>90</sup> These welfare practices, as Daniel Nelson noted in his work *Managers and Workers*, evinced to later scholars the growing sense of inequality felt between managers—or owners—and workers.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, in the early years of the company's establishment, with wages starting at thirty cents a day and Seiberling's lament that the family would be forced to accommodate with only \$5,000 a year, the inequality is apparent.

In 1900, though, the board made a decision that would have lasting importance. Goodyear hired young Paul Litchfield, trained in business at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, with five years of experience in the rubber business. Litchfield was young, intrigued with the rubber industry, and while he noted that he was not especially

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<sup>88</sup> Shilts, 15.

<sup>89</sup> Although early Goodyear records do not exist, Grismer and Allen assert that Hill's inability to reconcile with Seiberling's progressive views led him to leave the company. Allen argued that "the sewer pipe man found Seiberling's financial ideas too much at variance with the more conservative line of his own industry." Allen, *Rubber's Hometown*, 142. Grismer, 670.

<sup>90</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 15 July 1902.

<sup>91</sup> Additionally, as labor historian Dr. Thomas Leary indicated, this represented an "attempt to create a perception of mutual interests between employer and employees and to counteract the 1890s labor violence." Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the Twentieth Century Factory System in the United States, 1880-1920* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 114.

“impressed with the financial operations of its factory” he was drawn to the Seiberling brothers and the opportunities the new company could provide.<sup>92</sup> Litchfield would become instrumental in the establishment of fair employee relations and labor practice. Yet in the early part of the twentieth century, the company still operated under the auspice of a “brawling youngster in the rubber industry” according to Seiberling.<sup>93</sup> In his work *Rubber’s Hometown*, Akron historian Hugh Allen noted that Seiberling’s decision to hire Litchfield was an effort not to repeat “Schumacher’s mistake of trying to run every detail of business himself.”<sup>94</sup>

Goodyear continued to grow with the support of family and friends; as Shilts observed, “the solidarity of the Seiberling family show[ed] up vividly in the records as frequently...some member, not a shareholder, would advance sizeable sums to tide the company over for a few days.”<sup>95</sup> Perhaps influenced by the extensive advertising of ex-retailer John Wolf, whose former house he occupied, F.A. Seiberling consistently encouraged expenditure for marketing. In 1901, Goodyear ran a column advertisement for its carriage tires in the *Saturday Evening Post*, and succumbed to the sex-sells and Gibson girl mentality by promoting Goodyear tires with the “Goodyear Girl” plastered on a lithograph poster.<sup>96</sup> Advertisements in *Harper’s Weekly* in 1902 lauded the merits of

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<sup>92</sup> O’Reilly, 15.

<sup>93</sup> F.A. Seiberling recalled “those were the years when Goodyear was often referred to as the brawling youngster of the rubber industry. Perhaps it was. It was in many ways a fight, but most of the fights were forced on it. No matter how peaceful its intentions and no matter how much it wanted to live and let live, it never had that chance. It had to fight to stay in the rubber business.” Norman Beasley, *Men Working: A Story of The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company* ( New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1937).

<sup>94</sup> Hugh Allen. *Rubber’s Hometown...*, 146.

<sup>95</sup> Shilts, 15.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

Goodyear's "new composition rubber horseshoes," and the company offered a free book "Horse Sense on Horses' Feet" to market their product.<sup>97</sup>

By 1902, the company petitioned the city for expansion, and the city "vacated part of Factory Street to permit the erection of a new building 300 ft. by 60 ft., 3 stories and a basement."<sup>98</sup> Despite these efforts, the company reported significant losses in the fiscal years of 1902-1903 and 1903-1904.<sup>99</sup> Additionally, patent infringement suits instigated by the Kelly-Springfield and Hartford tire companies kept any profits tied in escrow. The business appeared destined to follow the same pattern as J.F. Seiberling's earlier ventures. Shilts recorded that the company often experienced difficulties meeting payroll and soliciting business. The average number of employees dropped from 637 in 1902 to 281 in 1904.<sup>100</sup> Shilts continued "in some cases, employees turned over money out of their savings to help out and Akron friends advanced cash."<sup>101</sup>

In 1902, when the federal court of appeals found that Goodyear did not infringe on the patents of either the Kelly-Springfield or the Hartford companies, the court released profits kept in escrow.<sup>102</sup> An extensive campaign of building and modernizing followed, and, ever the innovator, Seiberling tinkered with the tire production process and the product. One of Seiberling's early missions was to create an inexpensive tire. Experiments with tissue and paper infused with rubber and built up in layers resulted in a near catastrophe for the young company; when clients derided "those Goodyears," in reference to a bad tire, company policy had to drastically change. Research and

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<sup>97</sup> Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company advertisement. "Horse Sense on Horses' Feet." Harper's Weekly Online. March 1901. <http://app.harperweek.com.proxy.ohiolink.edu> (retrieved January 30, 2008).

<sup>98</sup> Shilts, 17.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>102</sup> O'Reilly, 16.



development efforts resulted, finally, in a tire that was efficient and economical for the general public.<sup>103</sup> The company thereafter adopted the slogan “Protect our good name” in an effort to project a more positive corporate image. Although Goodyear won the patent suit, the young company struggled to remain solvent. R.C. Penfield succumbed to his own financial difficulties, and as F.A. later attested in court he “left the country practically overnight.”<sup>104</sup> Goodyear’s financial difficulty continued.

With the death of J.F. Seiberling in September of 1903, the Seiberling family faced a financially discouraging future. Shilts recorded that “at one point F.A. went so far as to negotiate a sale of [Goodyear] to the Rubber Goods Manufacturing Company and brought the proposed terms of sale for submission to his Board.”<sup>105</sup> Ever the salesman, F.A. was able to use the favorable proposal to negotiate for an extension of credit and convinced his creditors that Goodyear could turn around. In the midst of these negotiations, F.A. wrote Gertrude from New York on their 16<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and reflected on their wedding day:

How could two be happier than we on that day. No thought of yesterday or tomorrow. Simply, completely satisfied with the immediate present. Notwithstanding we have encountered ups and downs, we can safely say that our lot has been happier than the average of humankind and therefore we have no cause for complaint. If our children can have as much happiness in life as I have had it will be more than I expect, and all I can hope for.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Until practical Goodyear tires were developed, tires belonged to realm of luxury. A set of tires in 1904 cost \$500, adjusted for inflation, today that would have meant over \$12,000 expenditure for tires.

<sup>104</sup> Shilts, 33.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 33-34.

<sup>106</sup> Correspondence. October 13, 1903. F.A. Seiberling Vertical File. Records collection of Stan Hywet Hall and Gardens. Akron, Ohio. Hereafter referred to as SHH collection

Despite the reorganization effort, F.A. realized that the next few years would be even more financially difficult. He warned his wife that their lifestyle would be dropped to what it was five years prior.<sup>107</sup>

Later F.A. recalled the financial difficulty of the period, “in 1903-1904 we made less than \$10,000 worth of tires, as that was the year when we were ‘walking in the valley of the shadow of death’ and we were only looking for a way out and were not making an effort to get business.”<sup>108</sup> This tentative method of conducting business was by no means respected by Seiberling’s contemporaries. Impressed with C.W.’s business accomplishments in Akron, the *Plain Dealer* included him in their 1906 edition of “Progressive Men of Northern Ohio” publication, but F.A.’s business accomplishments remained conspicuously absent.<sup>109</sup>

Fortunately, the Seiberlings took such business risks and failures in stride, and considered the effort alone an accomplishment. The modest business was not hindered by a sense of its own failure, and it fit within the local business environment as simply a local endeavor. With an annual salary of \$5,000, Seiberling’s pay was the highest within the company. Executives and shareholders at companies such as US Rubber, Diamond Rubber, and Goodrich were already millionaires by 1905, and the upstart company was hardly seen as a threat.<sup>110</sup>

One of the critical developments at Goodyear occurred in this period, with the development of the straight-side tire. Allen, Fetzer, and Shilts all concurred that it was the straight-side tire and its universal rim that propelled Goodyear to manufacturing

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Correspondence F.A. to Willard Seiberling. March 29, 1916. SHH collection.

<sup>109</sup> “Progressive Men of Northern Ohio.” (Cleveland, Ohio: Plain Dealer publications, 1906), available online through [www.heritagequest.org](http://www.heritagequest.org) (retrieved March 3, 2008). 144.

<sup>110</sup> Shilts, 44.

success. Standard tires—clincher tires—bolted onto the rim of a wheel, and required considerable time and effort as well as special tools to repair or replace.<sup>111</sup> Additionally, Seiberling and master mechanic, William State, developed the first tire-building machine. When larger more reputable companies realized the merits of these two products, licenses were granted, royalties were collected, and Goodyear quickly became well-established in the rubber and auto worlds. Seiberling became President of Goodyear in 1906 and formally assumed a role he had essentially filled since its founding.

Convinced of Goodyear's potential for success, F.A. Seiberling followed his father's tradition of involvement in multiple ventures. With the population of Akron over 60,000 in 1905, a few of Akron's businessmen organized a committee to see to the development of a hotel between Main Street and High Street. That initial endeavor failed because of the city's reluctance to pay the costs of condemning the property, but Seiberling's support of the use of municipal power to further the interests of business was apparent.<sup>112</sup>

In his letter to business colleague, L.T. Firey in Kansas City, Missouri, Seiberling attempted to solicit support for the construction of a new hotel. In his letter to Firey, Seiberling noted "Like all things of this sort the legislation dragged slowly through the council, there being a lot of opposition to saddling upon the city the cost of condemning the property... the project is practically abandoned."<sup>113</sup> Seiberling pointed to the improved transportation between Akron, Cleveland, and Canton, and the financial success of Akron's Hotel

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 38a.

<sup>112</sup> Correspondence F.A. Seiberling to L.T.Firey. November 6, 1906. Investments Vertical File. Records collection of SHH.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

Buchtel as indicators of the probable success of a short-term housing venture.<sup>114</sup>

Unfortunately, this project never saw fruition.

Providing quality housing for the workers who filled Akron was the foremost issue between 1905 and 1915, and civic and industry leaders alike strove to accommodate the hundreds of employees. Many sought to profit from the increased demand for shelter and this trapped the workers in high rents and poor housing. Superficially, the city appeared economically stable with the industrial success of US Rubber, Diamond, Goodrich, Goodyear, and the most recent addition, Firestone Tire & Rubber Company, organized in 1900.<sup>115</sup>

The city's commercial districts were booming, with the Howard Street commercial district in downtown the most lucrative and popular. The proliferation of stores, breweries, and entertainment houses gave testimony to the crowds of young men who by 1909 averaged salaries of \$562 per year.<sup>116</sup> Much of that money was sent to the farms and villages from where the young men came, though. The center of industry and commercial activity shifted once again from East Akron to downtown Akron, which was more centrally located with relation to the many new industries.

Although Charles W. Kempel, Akron mayor 1903-1908, rebuilt city hall and led the construction of a much needed viaduct on Mill Street; it was his successor, William T. Sawyer who most effectively knit the interests of big business with the interests of the city of Akron.<sup>117</sup> Sawyer's own background in real estate and development gave him

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Approached by the Summit County Auditor, Dr. L.E. Sisler, County deputy M.D. Buckman, local builder, James Christy, and jack-of-all-trades and local inventor James Sweinhart, Harvey S. Firestone was challenged into entering the tire and rubber production business. Harvey S. Firestone, *Men and Rubber: the Story of Business* (New York: Doubleday, Page, & Company, 1926), 52-53.

<sup>116</sup> Daniel Nelson, *American Rubber Workers...*, 11.

<sup>117</sup> Grismer, 686.

the economic incentive to encourage the development of Akron for the interests of business.<sup>118</sup> A contemporary and fellow developer, Edward McQueeney, protested Sawyer's types of developments. McQuinney observed that they created "a menace to health and family life, but [Sawyer's] reply was that a working man with a family could not afford to buy... improved lots... he offered to these poor devils the only opportunity they had to provide a home for their families."<sup>119</sup> On certain issues, such as, clean water, the interests and health of the public and business coincided. However, on the issue of housing and civic control, the impulses of Akron's industrialists and developers, rather than a government and concerned citizenry, permanently affected the landscape of Akron.

#### *Reckless Growth of the City of Akron*

Akron, at the turn of the twentieth century, evinced potential for municipal reform and orderly development, while still retaining local customs and practices. The city's centennial ceremonies evinced this small-town ethos. Local official's uncertainty over the "correct" turn of the century resulted in a double celebration, one held December 31, 1899 and the other December 31, 1900, both occurring at Akron's "sun time" of 11:27 p.m.<sup>120</sup> This seemingly innocuous detail of Americana reflected a local philosophy independent of standardized national events or times and accommodating of regional idiosyncrasies. Regional idiosyncrasy belonged to the prior century, however. With the predominance of big business came standards of professionalization and scientific technique that correlated in much the same way manners dominated in the previous

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<sup>118</sup> Grismer credited Sawyer with developing over 40 allotments in and around Akron. Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Edward McQuinney, *A History of Housing the Industrial Employee*, (self-published Akron, Ohio, 1937), 2. Akron Summit County Public Library, Akron, Ohio.

<sup>120</sup> Grismer noted that many of Akron's citizens refused to follow the newly (1883) developed standard time, preferring to follow "God's time" or sun time. Grismer, 301.

century. In a world of strangers, corporate method and professional behavior established a commonality and a means of evaluating an individual.

As opposed to the quaint observance of the double centennial celebrations, Akron in 1910 would have taken its celebratory cue from one of the large cities it aspired to emulate. The 1905-1910 period was Akron's indoctrination into the Mysteries of the Great City, to use a chapter title from Alan Trachtenberg's work *The Incorporation of America*, but the influx of transient workers, a nouveau-riche citizenry, and profit-minded civic leaders led to uncontrolled, irresponsible town development.

In a city such as Akron, business leaders such as Seiberling historically exerted local autonomy. Elsewhere in America, Progressive reform created a trend toward social improvement inspired business leaders to make accommodations for their employees, ostensibly with financially lucrative results.<sup>121</sup> With the change from personal paternalism to welfare capitalism, the employee became simply another resource to secure in a vertically integrated manufacturing process.

The city's population and needs led to the establishment of a Carnegie Library in 1901 at High and Market Streets.<sup>122</sup> Additionally, the YMCA, YWCA, institutes for assimilating the city's small proportion of immigrants, and chapters of social clubs formed to meet the social and civic needs of the growing city. In order to address the high food costs in the increasingly urban center, the city designated a specific market area. Central market, located on the east side of North Main Street between Market and

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<sup>121</sup> A long tradition of reform instigated by businessmen affected the lives and social environments of cities in which they operated. Continuity existed between the evangelical movements that created the Christian capitalism and Progressive reform. For further studies of the Christian capitalism and the businessman, see Anthony Wallace, *Rockdale* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

<sup>122</sup>Per the "Carnegie Formula" requirements, \$70,000 was granted to the city to establish a library with a guarantee of annual maintenance at \$7,000. "Carnegie Library for Akron, Ohio." *New York Times*. December 25, 1901. <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive>, retrieved from the Internet February 20, 2007.

Federal Streets erected in 1905 by the city, served farmers and food buyers by keeping costs of living down.<sup>123</sup> The city of Akron's reaction to the influx of people and its attempt to regain control after the 1903 legislative change was to rewrite the city ordinances in 1908. These ordinances enacted at the end of Mayor Kempel's term increased the number of patrolmen to 45 and firemen to 57, created positions for officers, and increase the salaries of these civil servants.<sup>124</sup> Beyond these basic means of establishing order and reacting to crises, the ordinances hardly accommodated a population that increased by 20,000 in ten years.

*Bourgeois businessman*

Although practical-minded and an established fiscal deal-maker, Seiberling's ambition furthered middle-class values of reform and business success. There are three primary areas that indicate the early burgher mentality. The first is the level of Seiberling's local involvement. As a second generation industrialist in the city of Akron, Seiberling became part of an elite group of businessmen who supported one another's endeavors. Additionally, Seiberling helped establish an influential chamber of commerce and he was part of a group of reform-minded citizens.

The second manifestation involved Seiberling's committed establishment of vertically integrated business with the bourgeois belief in an investment in employees. This investment made the most impact on Akron's built environment and contributed to a lasting legacy of welfare activity. However, the welfare capitalism that afforded amenities beyond wages was rooted in a paternalistic attention to the ordering of

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<sup>123</sup> Grismer, 353.

<sup>124</sup> In 1908, the chief of police made \$1500 per year, the chief of the fire department made \$1600, and patrolmen and firemen made \$900 and \$900-\$972 respectively, compared to Seiberling's \$5,000 salary, Goodrich's millions, and rubber worker's \$562. Clyde Beery, City Solicitor. *Revised Ordinances of the City of Akron, Ohio*. (Akron, Ohio: Commercial Printing Co., 1908), 124.

employee lifestyles and a desire to reform behavior. This third evidence of Seiberling's small-town ethos included Seiberling's myriad business involvements that reflected an early 'diverse portfolio' mentality; from rubber goods and sundries, to tires, to aeronautics, trucking, roads, hotels, and housing, Seiberling dabbled in multiple enterprises. This burgher—proprietary capitalist—mentality changed with the success of Goodyear, and Seiberling adapted his ethos to accommodate the national society that he operated in.

### *The Changing Face of the City*

The East Akron neighborhood that served as a catalyst for the development of Goodyear and as a home for the early elite families of Akron underwent significant changes by the second decade of the twentieth century. The Seiberling brothers and their families remained in their East Akron neighborhood until the death of their mother, Catherine Lewis, in 1911, despite repeated burglaries and attempted burglaries that were indicative of the changing neighborhood demographics and flood of strangers.<sup>125</sup> One by one, the old Akron families were leaving the East Market Street neighborhood—the Schumacher family in 1908, the Barbers in 1909, and the Seiberlings began making plans to leave by 1911.<sup>126</sup>

The demographics and physical environment of Akron were drastically different by 1910, the population had increased by nearly 25,000, and it was crowded with hastily constructed single family housing. A prevalent form, according to Daniel Nelson, dominated the working class neighborhoods. "Gabled, with large front porches, and relatively simple appointments," these houses occupied most of a lot and the lack of

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<sup>125</sup> Seiberling family Vertical file. SHH. *Akron Beacon Journal*. 2 September 1912, 18 October 1912

<sup>126</sup> Akron City Directories.



managed development led to crowded courts and alleys as speculators availed themselves of any available space for housing.<sup>127</sup> The state's exertion of municipal control limited the ability of cities to exert local control, so the cities developed without restrictions. Wages increased with the success of the companies, and at Goodyear, Litchfield instituted a bonus plan to increase production.<sup>128</sup> This bonus plan placed increased production squarely on the shoulders of the individual tire builders. This economic brass ring allowed for wages to increase from "\$3.50 a day to \$4.50 a day, with some exceptional individuals earning \$6.00 or \$7.00—two years before Ford's famous \$5.00 a day."<sup>129</sup>

The rubber workers made money. A prevailing contemporary mindset maintained that employment in the rubber mills was a temporary situation. In the nineteenth century and prior, husbands, sons, and daughters would sell their labor for a season or two at lumber mills, mines, textile mills, or at sea and then return "home." This mindset even caused Goodyear executives to reflect that "men come here because they feel it is a place to make money and forget about pleasant conditions and circumstances."<sup>130</sup> To meet that end, developers constructed shanty towns and multi-room residences that encompassed entire lots and even tent cities that housed the great multitudes of people. The rubber workers of Akron earned the most of any industry in the city, and with any increase in wages, rental rates rose. Unfortunately the economic boon was not necessarily felt across all of the city's industries and the economic standard set by the rubber workers resulted in drastically increased living costs with a profound effect on affordability.

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<sup>127</sup> Daniel Nelson. "Of Mortgages and Men..." 51.

<sup>128</sup> Litchfield sought efficiency in all departments, but the tire builders exerted the most autonomy over the pace of production. Nelson. *American Rubber Workers...*, 20.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 51.

Although the possibilities existed for a laborer to earn good wages—for the period—the civic and social environment of Akron was not conducive to proper management of wage resources. The rubber companies employed twenty thousand of the city’s workforces, and this dynamic crippled other industries. Businesses that catered specifically to the young rubber workers prevailed and proved profitable. “Long lines formed outside burlesque theatres” and as Nelson quoted a citizen, “Akron couldn’t get enough disorderly houses in those days’.”<sup>131</sup> As Figure 2.1 shows, the largest increase was in the entertainment sector. Although not reflected in the chart, other forms of entertainment abounded including, clubs and secret societies, dances at Summit and Silver Lake, and evangelical tent meetings.

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<sup>131</sup> Nelson. “Of Mortgages...,” 50.

Service/Luxury	1890 (pop.27,601)	1900 (pop.42,728)	1909 1910 data N/A (pop.69,067 in 1910)	1915	1918 (1920 pop. 208,435)
Churches	22	43	68	82	97
Barbers	30	63	81	131	181
Billiard/Pool Rooms	10	8	13	44	97
Candy Mfr/Confectioners	41	32	60	111	175
Bowling Alleys	-	5	5	3	10
Canoe Liveries	-	-	2	6	6
Cigar Mfr/retail/Commercial	12	29	41	72	77
Hospital	-	1	1	3	3
Hotels	7	7	12	30	47
Ice Cream parlor/Mfr	9	14	27	30	10
Jewelers	8	11	16	25	40
Library	1	1	1	1	1
Lunch Rooms	-	5	10	28	38
Massage Parlors	-	-	4	5	2
Moving Picture Houses	-	-	7	24	29
Photographers	7	9	15	19	27
Restaurants	13	24	37	68	63
Saloons	65	126	129	168	171
Sporting Goods stores/Mfr	-	6	14	12	18

**Figure 2.1.** Data from Akron City Directories and the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Censuses of the United States. While all service industries showed a marked increase in the period, the chart indicates a noticeable increase in luxury goods and services that catered specifically to the needs of young crowds of male rubber workers. The leveling off of saloons after 1915 indicated the effect of the 1916 city ordinances that required licenses for saloons, of course saloons were illegal after 1920 as well. Additionally, by 1918, ice cream parlors were listed under confectioners.<sup>132</sup>

With almost thirty saloons in a one mile radius of the family home on East Market and the increasingly industrial land use, it is little wonder that Seiberling endeavored to remove his family from the neighborhood. Elsewhere in Ohio, 62 of the 88 counties were legally dry; however Summit County, with its base of young laborers was slow to adopt the Prohibition cause.<sup>133</sup> Seiberling's concern extended not simply to

<sup>132</sup> Akron City Directories 1890-1918. Akron-Summit County Public Library, Akron, Ohio

<sup>133</sup> Aumann, 9.

his family, as Daniel Nelson pointed out, Goodyear's president quickly became "one of the nation's best known corporate executives..." although "at heart [he] remained a small-town entrepreneur."<sup>134</sup> One of the indicators of his small-town ethos was his concern for his employee's welfare in the tumultuous social atmosphere of Akron.

"Thirty-five hundred men added at rubber mills so far in 1910" was a headline on the *Beacon Journal's* March 15<sup>th</sup> front page.<sup>135</sup> "Enough employees [have been] taken on by factories in this city in two and a half months to populate [a] village."<sup>136</sup> Goodyear planned that same year to double the size of its production plants, and the company initiated a newspaper, the *Wingfoot Clan*, to keep employees abreast of the many facets of the company.<sup>137</sup> When the company proved successful, Seiberling focused attention on securing all the raw materials and resources necessary for tire production. This vertically integrated trust method was thought to insure the corporation against the vagaries of price-fixing or price-gouging. Goodyear additionally invested heavily in the manufacturing process and company records show forty-eight new buildings constructed in Akron between 1900 and 1916, the year Goodyear became the world's largest producer of tires. The company built around, over, and even under the original buildings, and they constructed plants in California, Canada, England, and Brazil. Goodyear secured their raw products base with cotton fields in Arizona, textile mills in Massachusetts, coal mines in Appalachia, and rubber plantations in Indonesia.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Nelson, "Of Mortgages..."

<sup>135</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 15 March 1910.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Another aspect of welfare capitalism concerned the establishment of employee newspapers.

<sup>138</sup> Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company Property Records. University of Akron Archives, Akron, Ohio. Box 10 and 11.

Considering this history of secured resources, it is easy to argue that the employee was simply another resource included in Seiberling's vertically integrated trust. Nevertheless, Seiberling's actions and assertions indicate that his concern for Goodyear employees was genuine. That is not to say that he was not aware of the opportunity that existed by investing in his employees. Seiberling was a speculator, with Progressive values and principles of reform and civic-mindedness, but he was foremost a risk-taker and an opportunist and he recognized the prospect of financial success that existed by investing in his employees. The approach to welfare work taken by Seiberling and Litchfield resulted in attention to housing and material needs and attention to education and recreation. Both approaches eventually impacted the built environment of East Akron.

In addition, three conditions shaped the early development of Akron as it embraced a single-industry economic environment. The first included the legislative impact of the 1903 Ohio Constitutional revisions that repealed municipal codes and restricted the municipal control of Akron politicians; this resulted in reckless growth and development. The second related to the first since the appalling infrastructure of the city led to the patent need for leadership and direction. As one of the last of Akron's old industrialists, Seiberling initially assisted with providing the leadership Akron needed. Because the Seiberlings barely recognized any profit in the initial years, the city of Akron and its citizens were hardly aware that the town was experiencing further signs of incorporation as Allan Trachtenberg referred to the corporate exertion of civic control. As the city became dependent on a single-industry, leadership became inter-changeable

with self-interest, and this, the third impact on the city's development related directly to the powerful effect of corporate capitalism on a city.

## Chapter Two—The Hour of Waking Together

During the second decade of the twentieth century, the sociological effects of the influx of rubber became apparent. The successful development of the new straight-side tire and Ford's economic Model T created an increased demand for tires, and by 1910 the rubber companies operated at full production. Companies recruited workers for this industry and single young men flooded into Akron. The state-wide municipal code dismantled the commission form of government that Akron operated under, and provided simply for municipal administration consisting of a mayor, council, and numerous boards. Debt plagued the city and the poor infrastructure made significant expenditures in the near future necessary. Local businessmen, primarily non-rubber businessmen, recognized the need for major reform, and attempted projects successful in other cities. Although absorbed in projects that benefitted Goodyear, Seiberling also contributed to local efforts, and evinced more of a commitment to local endeavors than any other rubber magnate. Nevertheless, the nature of industrial development created a corporate environment with Seiberling and other Akron businessmen evincing control over the industrial and social environment and delegating supervisory responsibility to managers. A key piece of legislature during this time concerned the revocation of the limits on municipal rule. The state's grant of power to create a "Home Rule Charter" in 1912, allowed Akron to legally exert municipal autonomy. The businessmen of the city seized this opportunity and created a municipal environment favorable to their needs.

### *The City's Issue of Water*

As one of Akron's leaders, Seiberling shouldered the responsibility of investing in both his employee and the community. In an effort to participate in the administration of

the city, Akron businessmen, led by O.C. Barber, created a chamber of commerce to examine the problems of the municipality.<sup>139</sup> One of the critical issues in Akron concerned the procurement of water. This essential need had not been met with efforts by a municipal government, but rather a private firm called the Akron Water Works Company. The company drew water from wells and springs, and funneled it to the homes of Akron through water mains. This was serviceable until the wells proved insufficient to handle the volume of people, and the company resorted to water from Manning's Pond and then Summit Lake on the southwest side of Akron.<sup>140</sup> These water sources were also collection sites for the waste water from Akron's manufacturing companies, and this industrial pollution, coupled with routine outbreaks of typhoid, in the summer made individuals utilizing the city's water aware of their flawed systems.

Because of the pollution and limited water, citizens began to organize regularly over the water issue.<sup>141</sup> In addition to water, the chamber of commerce encouraged the city to address the influx of people and to rewrite the city ordinances. The city conceded and in 1908 adopted ordinances to accommodate the changing urban environment. Despite these municipal endeavors, the water issue remained a top priority for the city.

In December of 1908, a group of East Akron businessmen, including F.A. Seiberling, convened with board of public safety members and Mayor Sawyer to air their grievances regarding the inefficiency of fire protection and the availability of water particularly in East Akron.<sup>142</sup> Seiberling reportedly stressed that "one-third of the goods manufactured in Akron [were] turned out of East Akron concerns and that the fire

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<sup>139</sup> Curiously, an earlier Chamber of Commerce existed, one that received ridicule for its ineffectiveness by Barber. *Akron Beacon Journal*. 7 January 1899.

<sup>140</sup> Karl Grismer, *Akron and Summit County* (Akron: Summit County Historical Society, n.d.), 355.

<sup>141</sup> Grismer, 356.

<sup>142</sup> "Fire Protection in East Akron Nil." *Akron Beacon Journal*. 7 December 1908.



protection afforded them was entirely inadequate.”<sup>143</sup> He went on to raise concerns about the twenty-year old fire-fighting apparatus at the closest engine house, and promoted the new self-propelled equipment. The fire chief concurred with Seiberling. A day after the report of that meeting, a fire broke out at Goodyear with damages approximately \$2,000; a “peculiar coincidence” noted the *Beacon*.<sup>144</sup>

The following May in 1909, fire devastated the Hower office building on West Market Street, and firefighters impotently fought the flames with insufficient water pressure. The public outcry against the inadequate water raised concern with the city, and they sought measures to release the Akron Water Works Company from their long-term contract.

The political bandying and propaganda that ensued was a direct result of the city’s dependence on privately owned corporations to provide the public with adequate municipal utilities. Elsewhere in the United States, public water-works projects began as early as 1842 and waste management projects started as early as 1866.<sup>145</sup> The city proposed a number of different plans between 1908 and 1910. Finally, in an effort to gain release from the long-term contract with the Akron Water Works Company, the city hired engineers from Columbus and Boston to examine their water situation. The engineers proposed a system that would dam the Little Cuyahoga River in Portage County, create a reservoir, and tie into the mains and pipes already established by the

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> “Fire Damages Rubber Plant.” Akron Beacon Journal. 8 December 1908.

<sup>145</sup> New York established a waterworks system by 1842 and Peterson indicated that the cholera epidemic of 1849-1854 spurred Jersey City, Brooklyn, and Chicago to establish sewerage systems. Additionally, Peterson emphasized “the absence of planning with respect to other aspects of the urban environment should not be equated...with disorder. Piecemeal, additive growth...enabled big American cities to adjust to congestion by spreading out.” Jon Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning, 1840-1917* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 19.

Akron Waterworks Company.<sup>146</sup> This diversion of water affected individuals and municipalities from Geauga County and Portage County, to the city of Akron, and because of this, the state legislature was slow to act.

Finally, however, the typhoid epidemic that struck the city in 1911, pressure from the public, and lobbying by the city council and chamber of commerce—with F.A. Seiberling as chamber president—convinced the Ohio state legislature to amend the Ohio Constitution. The new amendment, House Bill 357, allowed for the “right to divert and use forever for the purpose of supplying water to said city of Akron and the inhabitants thereof, the Tuscarawas River, the big Cuyahoga and little Cuyahoga rivers, and the tributaries thereto...”<sup>147</sup> This diversion of water caused the city considerable debt as they secured the riparian rights and built new systems. Seiberling secured the land options for the city’s purchase of real estate, and the city council passed ordinances to secure bonds for the construction of the extensive system.<sup>148</sup> Finally, in 1915, the new system was in place.<sup>149</sup>

After the city, through the chamber, solved the water problem, a logical maneuver would have been to tackle the housing problem. However, wary of the social ills that resulted from slums, the city never established a tenement district, or barracks for the transitory employees. Instead of developing a city plan that would take into consideration responsible municipal growth, the city left urban planning up to industrialists, real-estate speculators, and private companies.

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<sup>146</sup> Grismer, 356-357. Legal battles continued until 1918, however, long after the city had secured water rights, incorporated, and established their water works. *Sears v. City of Akron*, 246 U.S. 242, 1918 U.S. Supreme Court. [online]LexisNexis® Academic State Legal Research/Cases/Ohio.

<sup>147</sup> Robert Desty. *Supreme Court Reporter*. (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1918), 246.

<sup>148</sup> Carl Leffler, *Akron and the Chamber of Commerce*. MA Thesis (Akron, Ohio: University of Akron, 1923), 28.

<sup>149</sup> Both Mayor Sawyer and his successor, Mayor Rockwell, after whom the reservoir was named, attempted to receive full credit for the public waterworks project. Grismer, 359.

The underlying need for such an extensive system for water, namely the influx of rubber workers, was not addressed responsibly by the city. Booming success in the tire and rubber business meant one thing for Akron—growth. For a time, nearly every capitalist venture begun in Akron involved some form of rubber or tire production. O.C. Barber operated Diamond Tire and Rubber Company, Firestone saw success with Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, Goodrich, the veteran, still operated the “gum shop,” and there were literally hundreds of small companies that formed with their success certain just by having the name Akron associated with their product. “Thirty-five hundred men added at rubber mills so far in 1910” was a headline on the *Akron Beacon Journal’s* March 15<sup>th</sup> front page.<sup>150</sup> “Enough employees [have been] taken on by factories in this city in two and a half months to populate [a] village.”<sup>151</sup> Goodyear planned that same year to double the size of its production plants, and a company newspaper, the *Wingfoot Clan*, was organized to keep employees abreast of the many facets of the company.

The chamber responded to the growth by urging the city to draft building codes, and in 1911 the city passed building code ordinances designed primarily to prevent fires.<sup>152</sup> This nearly futile effort did little to manage the development of Akron. The pressure to adequately house and meet the civic needs for the masses that descended on the city of Akron fell to the entrepreneurs for whom these individuals worked. These industrialists, for whom the creation of capital was second nature, endeavored to justify any effort with economic practicality. However, in this speculative environment they had

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<sup>150</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 1910. 15 March.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> Leffler indicated that during the presidency of C.B. Raymond, the Chamber and city council drafted the building codes in 1910. The ordinances passed in 1911. City of Akron, *Building Code of the City of Akron, Ohio, February 1, 1911* (Akron: Commercial Printing Company, 1911).

to act with prudence and keep the needs of their employees—and by extension their business—at the forefront of efforts. When he assumed the presidency of Akron’s chamber of commerce, Seiberling evinced a commitment to multiple city improvements including the establishment of the city armory, paving projects around the city, the creation of an Akron Settlement House, and the promotion of the city of Akron as “The City of Opportunity.”<sup>153</sup>

### *The Dominance of the Businessman*

The political environment of Akron favored the Progressive form of Republicanism, and local politicians and small businessmen supported the campaign of Theodore Roosevelt in 1912.<sup>154</sup> This presidential campaign proved critical for reformers and business owners with both Roosevelt and his opponents, Republican incumbent Howard Taft and Democrat Woodrow Wilson, seeking the support of these individuals.<sup>155</sup> Reform became the political and social buzzword of the period and the organizational objective of industrialists dove-tailed with the call for reform.<sup>156</sup> Many of the philanthropic gestures by businessmen in Akron, though, contributed to the creation of a society more suited to the acceptance of corporate policy.

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<sup>153</sup> The city used the Armory for more than simply training. The Armory was used for storage, concerts, and other municipal gatherings. Leffler, 28 and F.A. Seiberling MSS.

<sup>154</sup> A period photograph records a dozen prominent Akron partisan leaders including Otis Hower, O.C. Barber, William Christy, and Mayor Frank Rockwell awaiting Theodore Roosevelt’s arrival. Fleming, Plate 23.

<sup>155</sup> John Milton Cooper, *Pivotal Decades: the United States 1900-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 176-178.

<sup>156</sup> In *Triumph of Conservatism* Gabriel Kolko became the first historian to espouse the idea that reform and Progressivism served the conservative agenda of business leaders. Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963). Both Nelson and Crawford discussed the reform that dominated the social environment of the period. It directly met the needs of big business by creating an employee with values shaped around consumerism, home-ownership, cleanliness, and accountability. This regulatory reform indoctrinated employees into an American way of thinking and maintained the status quo. Daniel Nelson, *American Rubber Workers and Organized Labor, 1900-1941* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). Margaret Crawford, *Building the Workingman’s Paradise* Haymarket Series (New York: Verso, 1995).

The need for reform at the state level led to the convening of Ohio's fourteenth Constitutional Convention in 1912. In addition to tax-reform, the home-rule for cities issue occupied the attention of the predominantly Progressive leaders of the convention.<sup>157</sup> The final Constitution voted on and accepted by Ohio citizens amended three issues specifically "(1)...a vast increase of popular control in State and municipal governments, (2)...an enlargement of the powers of the legislature to permit freer action in dealing with problems of capitol and labor; and (3)...judicial reforms which attempted to reduce the law's delays."<sup>158</sup>

One of the key amendments involved the permission of municipalities to exercise home rule. With this power, cities exerted more control in the governance of municipal affairs, although, ostensibly the control involved the health, safety and welfare of citizens. The *Beacon* editor reflected on the impact of the amendment in a July 1912 editorial. In addition to choosing their own type of government, the amendment gave cities and villages "the right to frame their own charters, regulate their own public utilities and to adopt, by ordinance such local police, sanitary and other regulations as may be deemed necessary for the well being of the community."<sup>159</sup>

Akron embraced the concept of home rule, and soon after the state legislation passed, the Mayor in 1912, Frank W. Rockwell, asserted that the city should secure a new charter and adopt a commission form of government.<sup>160</sup> The commission form of governance organized the administration in a manner "similar to that of a large

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<sup>157</sup> Aumann, 13-14.

<sup>158</sup>The 1903 reform revoked municipal authority, while the 1912 reform granted liberal executive and legislative authority to cities. Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> The state-wide constraints on municipal action since 1903 hobbled the efforts of municipalities to adapt to their changing social, political, and economic environments. *Akron Beacon Journal*. 26 July 1912.

<sup>160</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 6 September 1912.

corporation.”<sup>161</sup> The “Des Moines style” of commission government that the city favored, granted directors “full power to act” in the legislative and executive capacity but not judiciary.<sup>162</sup> Before the city could establish a commission government, though, the chamber became involved in municipal reform.

The second major task that the chamber undertook in 1912, involved the complete accounting of the city’s administration. Continuing in the reform spirit, the chamber of commerce assumed the responsibility for systematizing and evaluating the city government, and created the Bureau of Municipal Research to accommodate this organizational effort.<sup>163</sup> The sweeping inspection of the method of governance revealed corruption in the form of contrived personnel, gross financial irresponsibility and recordkeeping, and general fiduciary ineptitude.<sup>164</sup> The members of the Bureau, which included F.A. Seiberling and Harvey Firestone, as well as executives from additional companies in Akron, held the city accountable and demanded improvement of the city’s administration.<sup>165</sup> The city halted the restructuring of government process because of this organizational activity.

For the year 1914 alone, the Bureau prepared a twenty page report on the city administration. This report outlined expenditures, revenue, loans, budget procedure, bond outlay, and general administration trends. The Bureau summarized their findings by observing that the city should cease public improvements and “turn its attention... to

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Additionally, the mayor sought to create a new city charter. Ibid.

<sup>163</sup>The BMR, created in 1912, attempted to model the city administration on a strictly business model, and published results and reports. F.A. Seiberling Collection, MSS 347, Box 18, Ohio Historical Society Archives, Columbus, Ohio (hereafter referred to as F.A. Seiberling MSS).

<sup>164</sup> Bureau of Municipal Research, Box 18, F.A. Seiberling MSS.

<sup>165</sup> Other Board trustees included Fred Harpham, president of Akers and Harpham, J. Edward Good, president of The Hardware and Supply, James Andrews, superintendent at Akron Mills Quaker Oats Company, and Edwin Shaw, vice-president and works manager at B.F. Goodrich. Bureau of Municipal Research, Box 18, F.A. Seiberling MSS.

internal administration, the problem of supervision, and its attendant problems of operation and maintenance.”<sup>166</sup> The following year, the Bureau published a series of pamphlets to inform the public of the state of affairs of their city government.

Akron’s businessmen contributed to a wider trend of restructuring cities for the benefit of business. James Weinstein argued that businessmen through the chamber of commerce furthered the trend toward commission governments.<sup>167</sup> The commission government essentially structured the city as a corporation, with “voters... as stockholders, and the commissioners as corresponding to the board of directors.”<sup>168</sup> In many cities, corruption among the commissioners led to the adoption of a city manager to oversee the executive functions.<sup>169</sup> The involvement of businessmen through chambers of commerce resulted in efficient municipal governments, but as Weinstein noted “social and political problems were often outside their range of interest.”<sup>170</sup>

The chamber manufactured the government of Akron and municipal reforms in an effort to allay the inadequacies, but the burden to fund the proposed endeavors fell on individuals paying personal and industrial property taxes, the sales of bonds, and the issuance of licenses and fees.<sup>171</sup> Tax reform served as the motivation behind the

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<sup>166</sup> 1914 Report. Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> James Weinstein, “Businessmen and the City Commission and Manager Movements.” *Urban Bosses, Machines, and Progressive Reformers* (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath and Co., 1972), 129-143.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>171</sup> Akron collected no taxes on income, and after 1913, the Wilson administration’s Underwood-Simmons Tariff with its income tax revisions affected only the incomes of the wealthy. After relying on general property taxes to operate, by 1912 the state of Ohio created a system of corporate and inheritance taxation and allowed municipalities to collect operating revenue from general property taxes. For annual earnings over \$20,000, a 1% tax was imposed. The tax gradually increased to 6% for earnings over \$50,000. Cooper, 195. According to city council minutes, the majority of the funding for the municipal waterworks project depended on the sale of bonds and special assessments. As late as 1929, the city continued to sell bonds and collect funds from citizens to pay for the waterworks project. Akron City Council Minutes. Akron, Ohio: University of Akron archives. Ernest Ludlow Bogart, *Financial History of Ohio*, Urbana-

chamber's inspection of the management practices of the municipal government. The city's reception of the chamber's organization efforts contrasted with the evidence of mismanagement that the chamber discovered. Akron city council president and Akron chamber of commerce president (1913-1914), Fred M. Harpham rejected his dual obligations to defend the city. In a letter to the chamber, Harpham indicated that a more reasonable survey needed to be done to truly ascertain departmental needs. He asserted "your committee is neither qualified to do this work, nor has it the time which would be required to do the work properly."<sup>172</sup>

### *Organization for the Citizens*

The internal political environment of Akron reflected the disorder that also prevailed in the physical environment. Young, single men sought employment in the city and evinced a more transient attitude toward working in the "gum mines" than established working men and women. The *Beacon* ignored the prevalence of unimproved lots at the edge of the city, and asserted, on the contrary, that the city experienced healthy growth with "the merry ring of the carpenter's hammer and the clink of the bricklayer's trowel" heard in every corner of the city.<sup>173</sup> This haphazard growth, however, led Akron's industrialists to seek their own solutions to the housing crises to further their own business interest and to fulfill a social and moral obligation.

Seiberling's social and moral obligation manifested itself most obviously in his manipulation of the built environment. The municipal policies he promoted were rooted

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Champaign, Illinois: The University, 1912, 352-354. Accessed through Heritage Quest© [www.persi.heritagequestonline.com](http://www.persi.heritagequestonline.com), March 26, 2008.

<sup>172</sup> F.M. Harpham, "Report on City Tax Rate," *Akron Chamber of Commerce Bulletin*. " Akron, Ohio, Vol. 1, No. 8-9, Sept.-Oct., 1914.

<sup>173</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 9 July 1912.



in a school of thought promoted by Progressives. Welfare endeavors that involved housing became a principle method of securing a nucleus of dependable employees, maintaining a harmonious workplace, and preventing insurrections. In *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940*, Stuart Brandes examined multiple industrial welfare practices and the theories with which industrialists justified their involvement in their employees' lives. He discussed the arguments scholars have made regarding industrial welfare work, and determined that welfare work served multiple purposes. Primarily welfare work allowed enlightened businessmen to fulfill a perceived moral duty. It also ensured stability at home and therefore global success and welfare work served to educate employees "into accepting corporations as the central institution of modern American life."<sup>174</sup>

Among the multitudes of welfare efforts initiated by Seiberling, the company housing project impacted the physical environment of Akron the most, and it garnered the most publicity. The project, begun in 1912, stabilized the workforce by providing close, affordable, quality housing. The reality of the housing effort will be examined in more detail in chapter three, but the company housing project contributed to Seiberling's general involvement in welfare and charitable ventures. The principle concern of Seiberling, though, was that of adequately housing his employees in order to retain a stable workforce.

Seiberling's intent developed because of the evident need for housing and because of an aesthetic ideal. In 1912, Seiberling addressed the Akron Council of Women, and

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<sup>174</sup> Stuart Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism: 1880-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 8. Not all industrialists subscribed to this mentality. Henry Ford preferred a hands off type of employee management with higher wages instead of regulatory welfare work.

pointed out the flawed manner in which the city addressed the influx of workers. Seiberling promoted the harmony of proper landscaping for the benefit of the urban dweller, and he called on officials to create a responsible plan.<sup>175</sup> In his thesis “Model Industrial Subdivisions,” Kevin Delaney Frazier examined the high turnover between 1910 and 1912 and noted that “Seiberling realized that unless something was done, Goodyear could expect ever-higher rates of employee turnover.”<sup>176</sup> Seasonal demands led the company to depend primarily on temporary employees in the early part of the decade, but as more individuals became dependent on the automobile, demand for steady workers increased.<sup>177</sup> In order to house these employees that he sought to retain, Seiberling initiated the building of 100 houses in the summer of 1912.<sup>178</sup> The project went against the caution of other members of Goodyear’s board of directors, but he secured the purchase of property on the hills east of the factory to further his plan.<sup>179</sup>

The crux of Seiberling’s company housing plan involved the harmony of nature and living space and the creation of a peaceful enclave just outside the shadow of the Goodyear factory. The renowned landscape architect, Warren Manning, who designed the extensive grounds at Seiberling’s home, plotted the streets and layout of the Goodyear Heights project. Instead of following an economical street grid with houses plotted for efficiency rather than aesthetics, Manning used the natural contours of the hills to create

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<sup>175</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*, 8 August 1910.

<sup>176</sup> Kevin Delaney Frazier, “Model Industrial Subdivisions: Goodyear Heights and Firestone Park and the Town Planning Movement in Akron, Ohio 1910-1920.” M.A. Thesis (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University, 1994), 31.

<sup>177</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 20 February 1912.

<sup>178</sup> F.A. announced his intention at a meeting of factory foremen, and asserted the ambition to provide quality housing in a natural setting with easy payments. As Shilts noted “it was to be no ordinary mill town with scores of jerry-built houses all alike.” W.D. Shilts. “Early Years of Goodyear.” Unpublished manuscript. Box 1. W.D. Shilts collection. University of Akron Archives. Akron, Ohio. 2008, 105. In the subtitle of the 1912 article describing the housing project, the *Beacon* editor asserted that the “settlement of Goodyear employees near Blue Pond in East Akron will be the result of [Seiberling’s] efforts.” *Akron Beacon Journal*. 20 July 1912.

curvilinear streets and terraced parks. Although not as immediately apparent as the shield that Harvey Firestone built into the central green space at Firestone Park, Manning manipulated the streets and lots to create an outline of Goodyear's trademark winged foot.<sup>180</sup> The existing shade trees and orchards remained for aesthetic purposes and for the practicality of cultivating fruits.

Company housing of this sort differed from the traditional company town in both design and intent. George Pullman's town, for example, maintained a static harmony throughout and required residence for employment. His town exemplified the imposition of the capitalist over the reality of the laborer, and the town contributed to the profits of the industrialist.<sup>181</sup> The Goodyear Heights project, on the other hand, ensured affordability by providing houses at cost in the early years.<sup>182</sup> Payment terms commensurate with length of employment thwarted speculation, and Seiberling donated extensive acreage to the city for the construction of schools and parks.<sup>183</sup> The few restrictions on the Goodyear Heights property related to aesthetics and race.<sup>184</sup>

### *The strike of 1913*

Welfare capitalism and involvement in municipal reform could not insure Akron's industrialists against discord. In spite of the multiple projects undertaken to order the lives of the working class, the workers asserted their own demands. In early July of

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<sup>180</sup> 1937 Akron Street Map. Map Collection. Akron Summit County Public Library. Akron, Ohio.

<sup>181</sup> Stanley Buder, *Pullman: An Experiment in Industrial Order and Community Planning, 1880-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 44.

<sup>182</sup> The article described Seiberling's attempt "for some years" and the buying of approximately 100 acres to facilitate the plan. In the tradition of applying management terms, the *Beacon* called the project "the Seiberling Plan." *Akron Beacon Journal*. 20 September 1912.

<sup>183</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 7 August 1912.

<sup>184</sup> For additional material relating directly to the aesthetic development of Goodyear Heights, see Frazer's thesis or Allen's book *House of Goodyear*. For a detailed examination of the demographics of Goodyear Heights and the project within the context of labor and industrialization, see Daniel Nelson's work *American Rubber Workers*. Or for an examination of the project within the context of other employee housing endeavors see Margaret Crawford's *Building the Workingman's Paradise*.

1912, the *Beacon* printed an article that appeared in the political newspaper *Albany Argus*.<sup>185</sup> The article implored the press to act responsibly as an advocate for the working man; and cited an example of publications that stirred public sentiment in favor of workers exploited by oppressive working conditions. This arbitrary article preceded the end of July visit of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, spokesperson for the Industrial Workers of the World. The *Beacon* editorial disparaged the efforts of the I.W.W., and warned Akron workers that an “industrial disturbance” would end their “peace and prosperity.”<sup>186</sup> Additionally, the paper admonished that any disturbance would “endanger the title to the homes of thousands of Akron workers.”<sup>187</sup> From that time on, in both the *Beacon* and the more Progressive Akron newspaper the *Akron Press*, letters to the editor and editorials appeared alluding to dissatisfaction and unfair wages.

In February of 1913, Goodrich workers chose to strike and within the day, workers from all of Akron’s rubber factories turned out to protest the introduction of new tire building machinery and piecework pay. Local leaders of the Industrial Workers of the World claimed responsibility for the strike, and the management and owners of Akron’s rubber companies appealed to the Mayor for help. Mayor Frank Rockwell appealed to the State Capitol for militia help, but the State refused to step in. Rockwell declared martial law and ordered saloons shut. A citizens’ police force assembled and restored calm.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 12 July 1912.

<sup>186</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 5 August 1912.

<sup>187</sup> The *Beacon*’s use of property loss as a scare tactic to prevent unrest preyed on the uncertainty of homeowners in this tumultuous environment. Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Daniel Nelson examined the 1913 strike in the second chapter of his work *American Rubber Workers, 1900-194*. Daniel Nelson, *American Rubber Workers and Organized Labor, 1900-1941* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 23-31.

Seiberling refused to negotiate with the Goodyear strikers, but the event encouraged the factory manager Paul Litchfield to seek ways of preventing future outbreaks of discontent. The fact that the “fires of discontent” were lit in the vulcanizing pit, had not escaped his attention.<sup>189</sup> The pit was one of the most dangerous, skilled departments, and it was also one that promoted brute strength as a core requirement. Workers lifted “green” uncured tires into molds where heat turned the sulfur and rubber into a durable product. If work stopped or slowed at the pit, uncured tires would create a bottleneck, and production throughout the company could grind to a halt. To prevent further insurrection, Litchfield formed a company union, and a special group called the Flying Squadron was officially organized on April 15, 1913.<sup>190</sup> The Squadron was established to prevent Goodyear from becoming entirely dependent on a single department’s skilled workers.<sup>191</sup> According to the official announcement, the Squadron would:

[Include fifty of]...the best workmen now on the various operations in the factory, and they will be trained not on one particular operation, but on all the principal operations in the factory, becoming general experienced rubber men. Whenever any one department is in need of men to balance up the production, as many of the Flying Squadron as are necessary will be put on the work.<sup>192</sup>

Goodyear’s welfare efforts preceded the 1913 strike, and saw the organization of employee endeavors, including a Relief Association, Labor Department, newspaper, hospital, and athletic associations. In 1913, though, instead of organizing and operating

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<sup>189</sup> Hugh Allen, *House of Goodyear* (Cleveland: The Corday and Guss Company 1943), 297.

<sup>190</sup> Norman Beasley, *Men Working: A Story of The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1937), 51.

<sup>191</sup> It is interesting to speculate whether or not the “flying squadron” under the command of Commodore Schley during the Spanish American war so impressed Litchfield that he referenced this elite crew of war vessels when he too led men.

<sup>192</sup> *Wingfoot Clan*. April 1913.

all details, the company created a central committee to be consulted only regarding financial support.<sup>193</sup> Across from the Goodyear factory on Market Street, employees met for clubs and social recreation in Goodyear-owned houses. Education, Litchfield believed, created a workforce that would not be prone to striking or general discontent. Seiberling continued the Heights project with even more momentum after the strike, and created the Goodyear Heights Realty Company to manage the project.<sup>194</sup>

Surveyors laid out the streets and lots and families began to construct tent cities at the edge of Goodyear's reservoir and on plots of land. Beginning in May of 1913, the Realty Company sold lots and the few houses constructed. The architectural firm contracted for the project, Mann and McNeille, designed English cottage style houses in the Tudor-revival style favored by the wealthy on Akron's west side.<sup>195</sup> The compact houses featured porches, yards with a fruit and shade tree, and side entrances that led to the basement. Nelson recorded that the contractors finished "153 houses...by late 1915, 300...by the following spring, and 800...by the end of 1916 when the company opened a second large allotment."<sup>196</sup> These houses received acclaim from all manner of venues. *The Outlook* published an article from the *Architectural Review*, "A Garden Suburb for Wage-earners at Akron, Ohio" and examined the Heights project within a nation-wide context. The federal government's "program of house-building...led logically to a

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<sup>193</sup> Beasley, 57-58.

<sup>194</sup> Jeffrey Hornstein in *A Nation of Realtors*® studied the professionalization of the real estate industry at the turn of the twentieth-century and the triumph of middle class values. Hornstein argued that the individuals who organized the industry were motivated by the idea of real estate as a commodity and therefore subject to corporate policy and privatization of information. Professionalization perpetuated the idea that the administration of the transfer of real estate should be left to professionals. These individuals presumably knew more about a property and had the ability to grapple with the nuances of property law. By professionalizing, real estate industries could monopolize the sale and transfer of real estate in a region. Jeffrey Hornstein, *A Nation of Realtors*® (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2005).

<sup>195</sup> Daniel Nelson. *American Rubber Workers...*,56.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

demand for more exact knowledge with regard to the scope and results” of similar projects undertaken by industrialists.<sup>197</sup> To facilitate the study of similar projects, an examination of Goodyear Heights found it “one of the largest and most-interesting operations of [the] type.”<sup>198</sup>

By 1917, construction continued as families flocked to the banks of the Blue Pond and the company’s water reservoir. A 1917 *Wingfoot Clan* article concerned Lawrence Bedford, the first baby born “on the Heights.”<sup>199</sup> The photo accompanying the article showed a large, white, canvas tent with clothes draped over the anchor lines. The family created a semblance of order by clearing the area of brambles and erecting the tent under a shade tree. The Bedford family demonstrated the need for better housing in Akron, but the efforts of Seiberling barely fulfilled the need. In 1917 Goodyear built their first company camp, the Steven’s Boulevard Camp, which included 15 two-story bunkhouses. Forty-five more were built a year later in addition to a wash house, latrines, mess hall, hose house, hospital, and “school for Americanization.” Three more similar camps followed: Tobin Heights Camp in June 1919, the Belden Terrace Bunkhouses in August of 1919, and the Walkerville Camp in December 1919.<sup>200</sup> The company established the Tobin Heights and Walkerville camps immediately west of the factory for Goodyear’s black employees and their families.<sup>201</sup> These shanty towns were the only effort Goodyear made to assist with the housing of black employees.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> “A Garden Suburb for Wage-Earners at Akron, Ohio,” reprinted from the “Architectural Review,” *The Outlook*. New York, New York, May 29, 1918. SHH vertical file collection.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *Wingfoot Clan*. 9 June 1917.

<sup>200</sup> Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company Collection. University of Akron Archives. Akron, Ohio.

<sup>201</sup> Shirla Robinson McClain, *The Contributions of Blacks in Akron: 1825-1975*. Doctoral Dissertation (University of Akron, Akron, Ohio, 1975), 157-158.

<sup>202</sup> Blacks in Akron experienced even more difficulty finding employment and housing than their white co-workers. Despite oppression by the KKK, blacks eventually established businesses and formed a close

### *Imperialist Affairs 'Over There'*

In 1914, civilization plunged “into an abyss of blood and darkness” as Henry James so eloquently penned to a friend.<sup>203</sup> The period of peace and optimism that prevailed in Europe ended with international conflict on a scale unequaled in history. As John Cooper observed, Americans, however, disassociated themselves with the conflict in Europe. The war happened ‘over there.’<sup>204</sup> Cooper additionally observed that Americans viewed the war in Europe as yet another confirmation “of the age-old beliefs in a moral, political, and cultural dichotomy between a despotic, war-like Old World and a democratic, peaceful New World.”<sup>205</sup> America preferred an isolationist foreign policy and remained removed from the European conflict.

Likewise, American industrialists removed themselves from the increasingly turbulent environment of cities. The country houses built by Akron’s elite followed a nationwide trend that led the majority of American capitalists to create rural retreats where they could display their wealth and distance themselves from urban pollution, noise, crime, and congestion. Seiberling’s mansion, Stan Hywet, completed in 1915 proved to be one of the largest and most extravagant of any of the residences built by Akron’s elite. Hundreds of mansions that rivaled those in the formerly elegant East Market street neighborhood were built along Akron’s new “Millionaires’ Rows” in West Akron. The old neighborhood succumbed to the effects of time and commercialization;

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social network in Akron. McClain noted that “the segregated circumstances under which blacks were forced to live served to develop black consciousness and black culture” in Akron. Ibid, 169.

<sup>203</sup> James’ reflection proved so apt and appropriate that numerous writers referenced his poetic communication. Henry James, *The Letters of Henry James* (New York: Charles Scribner Press, 1920), 384. Cited in John Milton Cooper, *Pivotal Decades: the United States 1900-1920* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 220-221.

<sup>204</sup> Cooper, 221.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.



by 1915 the only families left in the neighborhood were the Hills and Robinsons.<sup>206</sup> The nouveau-riche citizenry created a new social order and the familiar mantra of real estate, “location, location, location,” determined entry into their social order.

American industry continued to profit, and in 1916 Goodyear led the world in the production of tires. Nelson noted the two stimuli of the phenomenal growth of the rubber companies. The increased production of the auto and later the truck marked the first cause of growth, and the war contracts spurred production after 1914.<sup>207</sup>

The events that ultimately resulted in American involvement in the Great War led to a nationalist spirit that permeated the country. Goodyear responded to this nationalism by insisting on American citizenship throughout the plant and the ability to read or write English.<sup>208</sup> Goodyear had not concentrated on recruiting as heavily in Europe, but after 1916 “the hiring office employ[ed] only Americans...” and Goodyear began Americanization classes.<sup>209</sup>

At the camps and within the company, Seiberling built facilities for courses and even utilized offices after hours. The company hired Joseph Horky to teach Americanization classes. The *Akron Beacon Journal* described Horky’s efforts. Fluent in ten languages, Horky gave free classes that were designed not just to convey facts, but rather to teach the student “to better himself and to make himself a better man for the community.”<sup>210</sup> The Flying Squadron and Americanization schools gave way in 1917 to classes designed for foremen, to give them “a better understanding of the industry

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<sup>206</sup> Hugh Allen, *Rubber’s Hometown*, Heritage Series vol. 5 (New York: Stratford House, 1937), 175.

<sup>207</sup> Nelson, 45.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 170-171.

<sup>209</sup> The *Beacon* and Allen both call the courses schools. Allen, *House of...*, 304.

<sup>210</sup> Three to Four hundred people daily took advantage of the free classes given by Horky. *Akron Beacon Journal*. 15 February 1919.

generally and fit them for larger responsibilities.”<sup>211</sup> Classes ranged from engineering, to blueprint reading, to economics and administration. In order to further combat the problem of uncertain labor relations, Litchfield began organizing a democratic workers union called the Industrial Assembly. The Assembly was organized around the same principles as the federal government with a House and Senate, and elected representative officials.<sup>212</sup>

### *The International Dominance of the Rubber Industry*

Seiberling’s role as company president became ever more taxing, especially after Goodyear’s international success and recognition of production leadership. Endeavors became less regional and Seiberling operated on a national and global level. Seiberling’s efforts furthered the interests of the company and allowed him to exercise leadership in multiple forums. Consequently, Litchfield made many of the managerial and employee relations decisions. Projects such as the creation of the Flying Squadron and the establishment of a company “representation” plan, the Industrial Assembly underlined Litchfield’s utilization of novel methods of corporate organization. Additionally, by most accounts including that of O’Reilly, it was Litchfield who “conceived the idea for [a] facility, a place for employee education, sports activities, and pastimes.”<sup>213</sup>

The success of Goodyear’s schools proved rewarding within the company. Litchfield philosophized that “successful industry depend[ed] on a large organization of men, physically fit and mentally able to solve the problems of the industry...this [could]

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<sup>211</sup> Allen, 304.

<sup>212</sup> Alternately praised for its ‘progressivism’ and derided as a company union, Litchfield nevertheless considered it his most successful endeavor. The organization effectively managed problems and issues within a department, but lacked inter-departmental communication. For a specific examination of company unions see Daniel Nelson, “The Company Union Movement, 1900-1937: A Reexamination,” *Business History Review* 56 (1982): 335-57.

<sup>213</sup> O’Reilly, 31.

only be acquired by adequate training within the industry itself.”<sup>214</sup> Peak production certainly served to strengthen Litchfield’s opinions regarding the success of his Flying Squadron and his additional educational and recreational endeavors. As part of the Goodyear Heights project, Seiberling initiated plans to build a center to meet employees’ mental and recreational needs. By naming the new building Goodyear Hall, a name which conjured images of ivy walls, educated repartee, and academic learning, Goodyear expanded on the tradition of the factory as campus. Seiberling contracted with the Cleveland architectural firm of Walker and Weeks, for the building that was to epitomize Goodyear’s employee standard.

In April of 1917, after Congress authorized America’s entry into the war American industry responded to war effort. General suspicion revolved around the idea that big business encouraged war to profit and to detract attention from domestic reform efforts.<sup>215</sup> As early as 1916, Seiberling shifted his chamber of commerce involvement from local efforts to involvement in the national chamber of commerce where he chaired the War Payroll Committee. This committee addressed the way industries should assist with the compensation of employees who served in the military as well as treatment and re-education of returning soldiers and management of returning employees with handicaps.<sup>216</sup> Although the Great War halted progress on the Hall, Litchfield felt so emphatically about physical fitness for Goodyearites that the gymnasium construction began by 1917.

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<sup>214</sup> Pamphlet. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company Collection. University of Akron Archives. Akron, Ohio. History Box 4.

<sup>215</sup> Cooper noted that even the President “suspected big business of fomenting wars.” Cooper, 267.

<sup>216</sup> Charts indicated that employers contributed a certain percentage and the government contributed the remainder. Companies contributed from 10% to 40% of sustaining wages depending on rank. Box 33 Seiberling MSS.

Various sources call the Goodyear gymnasium, completed in 1918, the largest gym in Ohio, while others were more effusive. “The largest and most modernly equipped gymnasium in the country” crowed a *Beacon* article.<sup>217</sup> The gym floor was 172 feet by 100 feet and was two stories high. On the main floor was space for three full-court basketball games to be played across its width; six teams could be engaged at once. Machinery lifted the backboards and hoops for alternate uses of the floor. A balcony ran along three sides of the gymnasium (the north, south, and east sides), eight tiers high with wooden folding theater chairs. Constructed of steel and concrete, the balcony was built in 1919 after the gymnasium construction was complete and it sat twelve hundred fans.<sup>218</sup> Builders constructed the gymnasium with many of the same engineering principles that created an efficient factory floor.

Since the train shed of Cornelius Vanderbilt II’s Grand Central Station in New York (1869-1871) had introduced an industrial design that allowed for cavernous interior spaces, the same principles of truss design and weight distribution were applied to factory buildings to allow for the machinery that was becoming increasingly integral to the manufacturing process.<sup>219</sup> The gymnasium evinced the same factory floor plan utilized for many single story manufacturing buildings. Additionally, because of the need to connect with Goodyear Hall the builders constructed a massive arch at the west end. A temporary wall separated the gymnasium from the theater incorporated in the Goodyear Hall plan. The multiple uses of the gymnasium included meetings, performances, and

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<sup>217</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 12 March 1919.

<sup>218</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 9 September 1919.

<sup>219</sup> Carl Condit, *American Building* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968): 292.

social gatherings, and with the floor of the gym filled with chairs for additional seating, literally thousands could make use of the space.<sup>220</sup>

Litchfield's commitment to employee fitness and recreation accompanied the growing trend in Akron to entertain and engage the time of the hordes of workers. With temperance in full force and Summit County one of the few Ohio counties that still permitted the sale and distribution of alcohol, the problem of "what to do with the working man" occupied every reformer's attention.<sup>221</sup> Despite sending over a thousand Akron employees to war, job growth increased as the rubber industries profited.

When the war finally came to an end, Akron reacted to a false bulletin from the United Wire press, and turned out en masse to celebrate the ending of the war on November 7. When news of the actual signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918 reached Akron, subdued celebrations resulted.<sup>222</sup> The tempo of the rubber industries had just begun, though, and with peak production recorded in 1919, the city experienced the greatest population surge in its nearly 100 year history.

### *Building Men*

The population surge required industrialists to devote attention to changing the habits and lifestyles of their employees. At Goodyear, Seiberling continued the cultivation of employees by erecting a clubhouse specifically for the leisure and recreation purposes of the employees. The construction crew of Hunkin and Conkey broke ground for Goodyear Hall in March of 1919.<sup>223</sup> The lot was cleared of debris, and "an army of men, a battery of steaming and puffing excavating machinery...and a stream

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<sup>220</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 17 October 1923.

<sup>221</sup> "What to do with the Working Man on Sunday" title of a *Beacon Journal* article. *Akron Beacon Journal* 14 March 1917.

<sup>222</sup> Grismer, 383.

<sup>223</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 12 March 1919.

of teams [were] all at work.”<sup>224</sup> Teams of mules and heavy draft horses pulled the steaming, hissing excavating equipment and brawny men, three to a team, manually bent the steel rods that would provide structural support.<sup>225</sup> This uneven technical development depended on low labor costs as compared to material costs. While the construction and engineering may lie in the realm of contractors and engineers, the veneer belongs to the architects. Prior to the late nineteenth century a building’s veneer created its identity, but the growing trend at the start of the twentieth century incorporated structural members in the building’s design. The firm of Walker and Weeks practiced this design aesthetic.

Walker and Weeks organized their firm in 1911, and according to historian and archivist Eric Johannesen, established a managerial, marketing, and a production method similar to that “pioneered by Daniel Burnham in Chicago in the 1890s.”<sup>226</sup> Theirs was a large firm with over thirty men on their permanent staff by the time Litchfield hired them in 1917.<sup>227</sup> With their Euclid Avenue firm established only a few years by 1917, their oeuvre consisted mostly of private residences, office buildings, and other small-scale buildings.<sup>228</sup> MIT affiliations aside, Litchfield certainly appreciated the organization and efficiency of Walker and Weeks’ firm. In this era of time efficiency engineering, Walker

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> It is interesting to note the metal rims on the equipment. Within a decade, Goodyear would produce a puncture-proof heavy-equipment tire that would revolutionize construction methods. Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company Collection. University of Akron Archives. Akron, Ohio. Property Records. Box 17 photos.

<sup>226</sup> Eric Johannesen, *A Cleveland Legacy: The Architecture of Walker and Weeks* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1999), 2.

<sup>227</sup> The fact that Walker and Weeks shared a home state with Litchfield as well as an alma mater (Weeks graduated from MIT in 1893 and Walker was in Litchfield’s 1900 graduating class) possibly compelled the young manager to hire the firm. Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Walker and Weeks were both hired in the architectural firm of J. Milton Dyer in 1905. Dyer’s most significant works were done between 1905 and 1911 when Walker and Weeks served as principal designer and project supervisor respectively on a number of commissions that included the Cleveland City Hall, Summit County Courthouse, and major residences. Ibid, 5-6.

and Weeks incorporated their client from the start of the design process to the supervision and scheduling. In one proposal for the Libby Glass Company, they outlined their method:

[We] place our engineers and equipment men in your plant, working with the heads of various departments...and gathering all of the various requirements and details of every nature and then writing a program based on what we have found...We retain a complete corps of engineers covering structural...and all branches of mechanical work...we are sure that because of having these men within our own organization we can develop a much more homogeneous result than should it be necessary for us to call in various outside concerns...As to economical construction, our engineers and working drawing men have striven for years to keep down the cost of construction of our various types of buildings.<sup>229</sup>

Records documenting the design process are, unfortunately, no longer extant, but the Beaux-Arts philosophy which Walker and Weeks were clearly familiar with must have appealed greatly to Litchfield's own sense of order and aesthetic. Architectural Historian Mark Gelernter points out that those schooled in the Beaux-Arts tradition "stressed the logical planning of rooms based on axial arrangements, and insisted on close adherence to the Classical rules of structure and decoration."<sup>230</sup> The aesthetic evoked not a style but rather a revival of Classical Renaissance elements with particular emphasis on symmetry and arrangement.

Seiberling's objective to draw the commercial district back to East Akron came to fruition with the construction of Goodyear Hall. Walker and Weeks incorporated an elaborate bank front and storefronts on the ground floor.<sup>231</sup> The Ohio Savings Bank

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>230</sup> Mark Gelernter. *A History of American Architecture*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England. (1999), 158. This aesthetic is entirely at odds with the asymmetrical Tudor Revival that Seiberling had commissioned Charles S. Schneider to build a few years prior. Litchfield's predilection for organization, symmetry, and restraint clearly prevail.

<sup>231</sup> This combination of bank, stores, and office building was typical of the prewar period. It consisted of a "classical street façade of two or three stories...a separate band of upper stories, a colonnaded section, or simply a cornice. Almost without exception these buildings were faced with stone, Indiana limestone,

(presided over by F.A. Seiberling) occupied the bank space, and over a dozen small specialty stores lined East Market and Goodyear Boulevard.<sup>232</sup> The Hall occupied a triangular space created by the geometrically precise east to west section of Goodyear Boulevard intersecting with Market Street, which ran northwest to southeast through Goodyear property. The gymnasium filled a large section at the northeast corner of the property and Walker and Weeks designed the Hall around the gym in an L shape. The bank occupied a triangle at the very front. Physical recreation governed Litchfield's philosophy regarding employee production and morale, and the gymnasium remained open through the construction of Goodyear Hall.

The *Beacon* noted that "an imposing structure 6 stories high, fronting 400 feet on Market Street and about 170 feet on Goodyear Ave." began to take shape by the spring of 1919.<sup>233</sup> All of Akron marveled at the structure, which, in the words of Litchfield, was to be "a monument to the fact that Goodyear intends to devote its energies to the building of men instead of the building of the machine."<sup>234</sup> The *Beacon* effusively called the Hall "the most pretentious buildings ever erected for industrial welfare work."<sup>235</sup> The basement contained lockers, a bowling alley, and six rifle ranges (where sharpshooters were charged a nickel for five shots), a clothes check room, a barbershop, and access to a tunnel that connected the Hall with the plant across Market Street. Two large-scale murals, *Separation* and *Reunion*, executed by Cleveland artist Cora M. Holden (1895-

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sometimes marble or granite for the street-level stories, terra-cotta ornamentation, or a matte, glazed brick for the main shaft." Johannesen, 33.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>233</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. March 12 1919.

<sup>234</sup> Litchfield's stirring sentiment was voiced at the April 20, 1920 inauguration of the building. Additional speakers included Ohio State University President W.O. Thompson, who pointed out "All Ohio is watching with interest this experiment in industrial education." F.A. Seiberling introduced Litchfield and C.W. as the speakers for the event. Senator Warren G. Harding also spoke in Goodyear's gymnasium, just a few months before his election to presidency. O'Reilly, 46-47.

<sup>235</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 16 December 1919.



1938) graced the Hall's main lobby.<sup>236</sup> The lobby was adjacent to an arcade with a box office and lobby for the 2,000 seat Goodyear Theater. First floor space allowed for as many as 12 stores and East Akron became a veritable shopping center.<sup>237</sup> The theater's stage was "40 feet across the footlights and [was] a much greater depth."<sup>238</sup> An orchestra pit was at the fore of the stage, and the seating included a second story balcony supported by four columns. The "most modern stage equipment" encouraged stage performances by the Goodyear community theater as well as traveling performers including Blackwell and Houdini.<sup>239</sup> At the time it was built, it was the largest theater in Akron.

Rooms on the second floor included a "large community room for men, library, pool, writing, and music rooms, [also] as many as nine billiard tables filled the billiard room."<sup>240</sup> On the third floor, a men's dormitory capable of accommodating up to 300 individuals occupied the triangular space at the front of the hall. The Industrial Assembly, convened in elegantly paneled quarters on this floor, and rooms set aside for women's recreational activities, a kitchen for domestic science, and a community hall were on the this floor, as well. Additionally, as the *Wingfoot Clan* pointed out, Goodyear's Silents Athletic Club, which was composed entirely of deaf and mute workers, "could relax in their plush chambers and read one of the many periodicals before a roaring fire."<sup>241</sup> Directly above the men's third floor dormitory was a women's dormitory. "The entire fourth floor [was to be] given over to classrooms for 'Goodyear University.' [There] the company's educational activities will be continued on a greatly

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<sup>236</sup> Information about the artist's life and career can be found at a web-site maintained by Case Western University. <http://www.case.edu/artsci/dittrick/murals/holdenhome.htm>

<sup>237</sup> Some of the shops included a jewelry store, confectionery store, and a women's shop. *Wingfoot Clan*. April 1917

<sup>238</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 16 December 1919.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> *Wingfoot Clan*. April 1920.

increased scope, an enrollment of 8,000 being planned for.”<sup>242</sup> The laboratories and engineering rooms and large assembly room at the front of the building on the fifth floor supplemented the twenty-five classrooms on that floor. The final full floor, the sixth floor, had facilities for a full-size cafeteria, which was capable of producing everything “from a simple lunch to a course banquet for the 8,000 employees to be fed there daily.”<sup>243</sup> The final floor was to house a “moving picture department” for the production of Goodyear advertising and educational purposes.<sup>244</sup> Dedicated on April 20, 1920, the Hall became the pinnacle of Litchfield’s ideals regarding the management of men and machine. Prior to the dedication of the Hall, Litchfield wrote in the *Wingfoot Clan*:

Goodyear Hall is both a means and a sign of assurance of prosperity for the future of the Goodyear organization. It is an instrument of mental and physical growth for the men and women of Goodyear, the means of perpetuation of the vitality of the organization. Goodyear Hall opens the door to every man and woman in the organization, not open for but a moment, but open for all time.<sup>245</sup>

### *The Loss of Goodyear*

Seiberling’s role as corporate capitalist culminated in 1920. A number of milestones marked the start of the third decade of the twentieth century. Goodyear reached peak production and employment in the preceding year. The completion of the Hall lent credence to the desirability of the Heights project, and Litchfield made the majority of management decisions at the company. The fortunes of Seiberling and his role as entrepreneur and leader seemed firm. Unfortunately, 1920 also marked the first slump in business since the early brawling days of the company.

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> *Wingfoot Clan*. 15 April 1920.

The reasons that caused F.A. Seiberling and his brother C.W. to lose control of Goodyear cannot be traced with good conscience to a single cause. The company rarely kept their profits liquid, preferring instead to spend money on expansion and research and development. Additionally, company policy favored stock-piling resources, which proved effective as costs rose, but detrimental when costs dropped. At any rate, when the stock market dropped after the war, Seiberling scrambled to cover his losses, and he finally appealed to the New York banking firm of Dillon, Read, and Company to underwrite refinancing for the company. Refinancing established systematic re-payments of debts, it provided for capital to continue production, and it enabled the company to re-establish credit.<sup>246</sup> This was a last resort effort for the man who created the company virtually from scratch and who was never able to say no to someone's ideals or wants.<sup>247</sup>

In 1921, a decision was made, and the terms of the refinancing were outlined. The front page of the *Beacon* announced the terms “\$30,000,000 worth of twenty year, eight percent, first mortgage bonds, and \$30,000,000 worth of ten year, eight percent first mortgage gold debenture bonds...the issues of the bonds were to be secured by the execution of the mortgage to the Cleveland Trust Company (Cleveland) and the Central Union Trust Company (New York).”<sup>248</sup> Although blame cannot be solely placed on Seiberling, as president during the downfall, he stood to risk the most. He and his brother essentially turned over the company to the underwriters and resigned. When they announced their resignation to the board of directors, no one objected.

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<sup>246</sup> Grismer, 411.

<sup>247</sup> From building an indoor pool for his sons and a huge music room for his wife and daughters to seeing to the funding of all of Litchfield's programs and welfare endeavors, Seiberling consistently afforded others the opportunity to exercise their ambitions and desires.

<sup>248</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 13 May 1921.

The Seiberling brothers did not stay out of the rubber business for long, however. They spent their lifetimes establishing an empire, and retained many friends and business associates in the rubber and automotive industries. Mere months after resigning from the board of Goodyear, the Seiberlings started the Seiberling Tire and Rubber Company in nearby Barberton. The financial assistance of \$500,000 and the pledge of \$5 million by old friend and Texas millionaire, Edgar B. Davis, enabled the Seiberlings to create a securities company and fund the startup capital of this new enterprise.<sup>249</sup> A stable base of contacts and associates resulted in the almost immediate success of the new tire company.

The second decade of the twentieth century (1910-1920) began with the concerted effort of Akron's industrialists to solve a critical urban issue and continued with attempts to reform the administration of the city government. Businessmen and industrialists favored a corporate type of business model with a prescribed method of organization, and through the chamber of commerce they expressed their intent to impress that model on the city as well. However, the accommodation of the rubber workers created the need for the extensive infrastructure work, and the industrialists who profited from the arrival of inexpensive labor treated the workers simply as chattel. The workers became a resource to be managed and directed, but not invested in properly. Investment made by Seiberling contributed to the built environment of Akron, but in the long run his efforts did little to assuage the glaring problem of housing in Akron. Ultimately, neither the city nor the chamber solved the housing problem as evidence indicated that a culture of home-ownership provided not only a base of workers but also a base of taxpayers.

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<sup>249</sup> In 1928 when the two men met to dissolve the Prudential Securities Company that had secured the startup of the new company, Davis rejected the advice of his lawyers to collect interest on the initial \$500,000 by saying "Business is Business, but friendship is also friendship." "Business is Business." *Time Magazine*. 16 January 1928. Available on-line at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,731382-1,00.html>

The post-war recession affected the entire rubber industry and, of course, the city of Akron. Many of the workers left, and despite recovery from the recession the companies never employed the numbers they did before 1920 or had production as they did in 1919. Nevertheless, the city continued to expand as the workers that stayed in the area chose to settle, start families, and buy homes.<sup>250</sup> The recession finally resulted in the fruition of the cities' efforts to create legislation that dealt with the uncontrolled growth. In a town run by business, the owners of industries and businessmen of Akron drove the process that led to urban order.

Akron's problems with managing growth and appropriately responding to the reform efforts of big business plagued it throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century. The success of Akron depended on the success of the rubber companies, and the city essentially responded to any growth—however unplanned—with positive acceptance. The city also looked to and depended on the owners of the rubber companies to provide direction and leadership in municipal endeavors. In the early years of the rubber companies' progress, this relationship proved positive and rewarding for the city, the companies, and to an extent the citizens and employees. By never fully reconciling the housing situation with the interests of the public, the city allowed itself to become a ward of the rubber companies and truly lost the autonomy that great cities exert.

Seiberling and a few additional industrialists filled the leadership void in Akron, but as industry expanded because of the Great War, the immediate concerns of business absorbed their time and expertise. Additionally, national endeavors including the Lincoln Highway and the United States chamber of commerce drew Seiberling's attention from local problems. However, in correspondence with his daughter Irene, Seiberling

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<sup>250</sup> Grismer, 414.

expressed regret that he would be unable to join the family on vacation.<sup>251</sup> Certainly the leadership needs of the city paled in comparison to time spent with family, but the success of his industry remained a top priority. The corporate capitalist ethos manifested by Seiberling after the extraordinary success of Goodyear benefitted only the company.

The impression of individuals living in Akron during this time remains largely a mystery. Patterns in mobility and a few casual observances indicate that a faction of Akron's citizens, at least, viewed the chaotic growth as being counter-productive to a harmonious environment. The majority of individuals in Akron found employment in the hundreds of other businesses in the city, but the impact of the rubber companies permeated the life of every citizen of Akron. In the early decade, people enjoyed major civic improvements funded by the wealthy elite including hospitals, sanatoriums, parks, and charitable contributions. The wealthy, additionally, formed organizations for edification and supported venues for sports, recreation, and entertainment. As the rubber magnates retired, they became important influences on the social environment of Akron. Through the chamber of commerce and personal relationships with Akron's politicians the wealthy exerted enormous authority, although they did not provide direct leadership. Nevertheless, non-rubber company employees of Akron found themselves bound to unwritten and unspoken rules of respect for the companies and the men who managed them. The same codes that employees adhered to in order to retain and protect their livelihood.

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<sup>251</sup> Correspondence F.A. Seiberling to Irene Seiberling, April 1916. Box 12. Seiberling MSS.

### Chapter Three—The Apparition of These Faces in the Crowd

Industrialization in Akron resulted in population surges, which created pressure on municipal resources. Two of the most basic requirements for living, shelter and water, received inadequate attention from the city. Pressure, finally, from industrialists, who additionally required these resources, resulted in the extensive water system. These individuals, however, availed themselves of property at the western—upwind—side of the city and removed themselves literally from the problems created by their industry. Real-estate speculators, including Seiberling, seized the opportunity to profit from the demand for housing and promoted the idea of single-family home ownership to ensure a more committed base of workers. The population left within the city, non-rubber company business owners, workers, and rubber workers, the *citizens* of Akron depended on the municipal services and transportation networks of the city. More often than not, however, the men at Portage Country Club ran the city of Akron.<sup>252</sup>

Because of this ability to influence city governance without direct responsibility, the city's businessmen wielded unusual power. Management of the city contributed as much to Seiberling's welfare capitalist endeavors as company newspapers and tidy homes. This corporate control of the urban environment created the opportunity for autonomy of the rubber barons, and Seiberling operated powerfully within this environment. After the events of 1921, Seiberling endeared himself to the people of Akron after he willingly rescinded control of Goodyear in order to maintain the fortunes of Akron investors. The autonomy of corporatism retracted in the face of significant negative municipal impact. The city and the citizens of Akron—rubber workers and non-

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<sup>252</sup> Portage Country Club served as a recreational venue for the nouveau-riche businessmen of Akron and counted among its members the many executives of the rubber industry, these men additionally served on the chamber of commerce and exerted considerable influence on the local economy and politics.

rubber workers alike—adapted to and resisted some of the changes imposed upon their environment (social, political, and environmental). Ultimately, they submitted to the complete dominance of the single industry of rubber and the values of the industrialists.

### *The Reticence of the Citizens and City Officials*

The aspirations of Akron's industrialists and the reserve of Akron's citizens created an environment of mutual caution. As early as 1909, a group of Akron industrialists including Seiberling and Charles B. Raymond of the B.F. Goodrich Company, planned to build a hotel to serve the rubber workers, "It is going to be hard to raise [money] in Akron and to do so we have to make the bait as attractive as possible and even then I have fear for the success of the thing."<sup>253</sup> Aware of Seiberling's patent battles, the business failures of his father, and history of poor products developed by the young company, citizens treated the enterprise cautiously. After Goodyear's success, the public became aware of changing environment because of the rubber companies. Changes included an obvious environmental impact, and the sociological, political, and economic environment of the city changed as well. Grismer observed that Akron's

Rush and bustle and seething activity... [pleased] the Chamber of Commerce...the real estate and construction men...[and] merchants. But to countless Akronites, the change...was not entirely welcome. They were glad...that home town folks who wanted jobs could find them, and that business men were prospering, but the sight of Akron bursting at the seams, suffering numberless civic headaches, brought more regret than pleasure.<sup>254</sup>

The citizens of Akron complained about the pollution from the factories, the crowds of workers, and the inability of city officials to effectively manage for the citizens. Transportation became an issue, as over-filled 'jitneys' transported workers to

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<sup>253</sup> Correspondence, F.A. Seiberling to C.B. Raymond, 24 February 1909, SHH collection.

<sup>254</sup> Karl Grismer, *Akron and Summit County* (Akron: Summit County Historical Society, n.d.), 377.



and from the gum shops.<sup>255</sup> A city ordinance in 1915 required a license and imposed limits on passengers. The majority of Akron's physical growth occurred because of the extensive trolley systems and these jitneys that allowed workers to commute from the shanty town developments at the fringe of the city to their respective companies. Developers voraciously cobbled together single family houses in what had been farmer's fields the year before, and workers travelled to work on the privately owned lines.

Additional ordinances passed that concerned littering, loitering, spitting, chewing, singing after dark, selling bad milk, and speeding.<sup>256</sup> Allen noted that "Akron became a city of strangers... a city of single men staying on in the hope that homes would be available for their families later."<sup>257</sup> As the city ignored the larger issues of municipal planning, they retroactively grappled with the perceived immediate need to establish an orderly city. Because of the crowds of young laborers in an unfamiliar setting with unfamiliar habits and mores and a reactionary form of municipal action, Akron manifested characteristics of a disorderly town.

The years between 1908 and 1921 marked the transition from chaotic town to ordered city, and the reaction of the city, businesses, and Akron's citizens indicate tension. The city reacted against the organization of the chamber, citizens responded against city ordinances and assessments, and business leaders rejected the imposition of taxes and demands for leadership. In this type of setting, established citizens attempted to restore the city to a form recognizable, orderly, and functional. Because of his affiliations and obligations to the city, Seiberling belonged both to this faction of

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<sup>255</sup> Rubber workers travelled to and from work in the trolleys and jitneys. Grismer called the proliferation of jitneys "a swarm of June bugs." 380-381.

<sup>256</sup> Clyde Beery. City Solicitor, *Revised Ordinances of the City of Akron, Ohio* (Akron, Ohio: Commercial Printing Co., 1908). Akron Summit County Public Library. Akron, Ohio.

<sup>257</sup> Hugh Allen, *Rubber's Hometown*, Heritage Series vol. 5. (New York: Stratford House, 1937), 172.

citizenry and also to the industrialist faction that sought to shape the urban environment for industrial purpose. Allen wrote of Akron's industrialists, "[they] created work for more people at good wages... [they] built homes, churches, and schools... [and they] increased real estate values, purchasing power, and taxable income."<sup>258</sup> Akron's rubber industrialists also produced capital on an unprecedented scale, and kept it concentrated in the single industry of rubber. The *Beacon* regularly reported on the growth of the city, but rarely reflected on the cause of growth and never the effect on the citizenry. On the contrary, the official city paper reminded citizens repeatedly that "Akron [was] growing by leaps and bounds."<sup>259</sup> The enthusiastic opinion of the editor continued, "evidences of the growth and prosperity of Akron come so fast that it is hard to keep track of them."<sup>260</sup>

The management of the urban environment fell to the chamber of commerce. This union of businessmen assumed responsibility for monitoring the 'business' of the city and established a model advantageous to citizens and industry. Business leaders soon realized that the manipulation of the legislative and executive powers of cities profoundly impacted their ability to produce capital. In the semblance of promoting projects ostensibly for civic betterment, business leaders promoted projects that furthered their interests and that of their industry. These business interests revolved principally around producing capital, although welfarism effectively cloaked their efforts. In a letter to his son Willard, Seiberling discussed the prudence of weighing decisions and others' objectives. He provided an example from a meeting on civic betterment:

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>259</sup> The city passed a motion in July of 1895 requiring the *Beacon* to announce their status as "the official newspaper of the city." Akron City Council Minutes. Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Archives. In addition to the quoted article, numerous articles and editorials between 1909 and 1920 positively reminded citizens of the city's growth. *Akron Beacon Journal*. 15 July 1912.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

Miss Lyon of the Y.W.C.A. felt that the greatest need Akron had was a women's hotel, this dominating her mind above all other Akron needs... Waller [of the Y.M.C.A.] had an idea of his own entirely different, to take care of the young men of the town. A third party rose in the meeting and announced that neither of them had any position as compared with the importance of two thousand new homes in Akron to take care of families now here and that would come here, that are now unprovided [*sic*] for, and of course the last man was right...<sup>261</sup>

While publicly the city reported positively on its growth and indicated that the only problem concerned where to put the people, the reality of unmanaged growth had real repercussions. In less than ten years, Akron citizens became burdened with inadequate municipal services, extraordinary costs of living, and urban pollution and congestion. The wealthy elites left the city proper and this action testified to the abject conditions they found in their city. The citizens of Akron, the non-rubber company business owners and employees, and rubber employees alike, had no choice but to struggle to retain control over their environment.

In addition to the hotel project initiated by Seiberling, he contributed directly to the establishment of a settlement house. This project, begun April 1, 1912, relied on methods practiced by Jane Addams at Chicago's Hull House.<sup>262</sup> The head resident at the Settlement house, John Huntoon, previously worked as the Summit County Probation officer of the Juvenile Court, and Huntoon felt particularly charged to remedy the meager conditions of children.<sup>263</sup> Huntoon maintained careful records of the work accomplished at the Settlement House and effusively praised the efforts of Seiberling. "[He] saw through the smoke of the factory district the face of the child and above the din and noise

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<sup>261</sup> Correspondence F.A. Seiberling to Willard Seiberling, 6 June 1916. SHH collection.

<sup>262</sup> John W. Huntoon., "Report on Akron's Settlement House." F.A. Seiberling Collection, MSS 347, Box 9. Akron Settlement House file. Ohio Historical Society Archives, Columbus, Ohio (hereafter referred to as F.A. Seiberling MSS)

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

of industry heard its plea” wrote Huntoon in 1913. Unfortunately, this project folded after one year, burdened by the necessity for funds and leadership.<sup>264</sup>

Seiberling’s service as president of the chamber of commerce, 1911-1912, witnessed not only the Akron settlement house project and the procurement of property for water rights project, but it additionally involved petitioning for the widening and paving of East Market Street. In an editorial in the *Beacon*, Seiberling outlined the merits of widening the street, and pointed out that the single-use trend toward commercial and industrial purposes on Market Street would be better served by widening and paving the street.<sup>265</sup> He chastised the editor for writing that it was inadvisable “to enter upon a policy of adornment” until the city finished other projects.<sup>266</sup> Taxpayers rejected the paving and widening plans proposed and supported by the chamber. The paving project planned by the city, initially utilized Medina bricks, but homeowners and concerned individuals protested against the use of bricks because of the cost.<sup>267</sup> They preferred instead creosote covered wood blocks.<sup>268</sup> The appeal of citizens finally convinced the city not to pave with brick, although the city ignored their additional plea to “save the shade trees” by not widening the streets.<sup>269</sup> The attempt to preserve the Market Street shade trees indicated the public’s reluctance to accept without murmur every change to their environment. Additionally, in 1912, Akron clerk George V. Lehew penned a letter to the editor expressing his concern for the control of the city by industry. He discussed the

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 24 February 1911.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 10 September 1912.

<sup>268</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 11 September 1912.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

effect even a slight decrease in wages had on the merchants and other industries in Akron, and continued rhetorically,

How long must the poor, humble, ‘worthless’ laborer—‘creator of all wealth’ continue to be the victim of consciousless [*sic*] men, whose only thought appears to be ‘My Dollars and Me?’... [can] anyone produce justified cause for the unmerciful reductions to which we as a laboring world are constantly subjected, and because we are forced to live hand to mouth are unable to resent.<sup>270</sup>

Home ownership increased through this period, although the quality of housing remained poor. Akron developer Edward McQueeney contrasted one of the improved allotments he created in 1911, with the multitudes of unimproved allotments developed around the city. “Two furrows were plowed to mark the streets and any kind of house could be built on the rear of the lot...there were no sidewalks, sewer, water, or other utilities... dug wells supplied water...it was just beyond the city limits.”<sup>271</sup> McQueeney reflected upon the efforts of Seiberling and Firestone within the context of this type of speculative environment. He indicated that the industrialists recognized “the inability of private developers and the hesitancy of the city to expand improvements” and they created “excellent improved allotments.”<sup>272</sup> Despite the security of selling houses to employees and deducting the mortgage costs from their earnings, McQueeney pointed out that they “suffered a grievous loss.”<sup>273</sup> Nevertheless, the Goodyear Heights project, by Seiberling’s own admission, created housing, not revenue. In a letter to the Shaker Heights Improvement Company, Seiberling’s secretary, Harry S. Quine, asserted “the

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<sup>270</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 9 September 1912.

<sup>271</sup> Edward McQuinney, *A History of Housing the Industrial Employee* (self-published Akron, Ohio, 1937.) Akron Summit County Public Library, Akron, Ohio, 2.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid*.

allotment near the Goodyear factory...[was] not to be a profit-taking enterprise, but it [included] practically as much work as if it were.”<sup>274</sup>

To the business and political leaders of Akron, a stable citizenry meant a base of taxpayers and stable inhabitants of property. The problem that predominated in Akron concerned not necessarily the volume of people or even how to provide municipal services for them, but rather how to profit most efficiently from these people.

McQueeney noted that “the civic and industrial leaders in Akron had a splendid ideology of developing Akron into a city of homeowners, living in single family dwellings...with all modern conveniences.”<sup>275</sup> As evinced by the *Beacon*, homeownership could also be used as leverage to prevent strikes and discourage restlessness.<sup>276</sup>

The ideology of homeownership and its accompanying doctrine of scarcity spurred people to purchase homes, autos, and obtain the accoutrements of a successful lifestyle. The consumer lifestyle that developed directly profited the corporate environment that became established in Akron. Newcomers to the city adopted the ideologies promoted by business and civic leaders, although as one real estate specialist noted “Appalachians [were] as ignorant...as the most illiterate foreigner.”<sup>277</sup> Akron’s skilled trades unions expressed dissatisfaction with the recruiting practices of the rubber companies and the effect on the city. In a letter to Mayor Rockwell in 1912, the Akron Central Labor Union called attention to the “campaign of misrepresentation employed by Akron rubber factories in their effort to flood the town with cheap and unintelligent

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<sup>274</sup> Correspondence H.S. Quine to Shaker Heights Improvement Company. October 1912. Box 15. Seiberling MSS.

<sup>275</sup> McQueeney, 3.

<sup>276</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 5 August 1912.

<sup>277</sup> Frederick M. Davenport, “Treating Men White in Akron Town,” *The Outlook*. Vol. 126 (November 3, 1920), 409. As noted by Daniel Nelson. Daniel Nelson collection. Box 8. University of Akron Archives, Akron, Ohio.

labor.”<sup>278</sup> The unsophisticated workers that arrived in the city became pawns in the game of greed, and ultimately suffered because of the corporate control of their environment.

The city experienced a peak in building activity between 1919 and 1920, but the economic recession of 1921 caused a collapse in the building market.<sup>279</sup> Nevertheless, citizens adhered to the false presumption that the growth experienced by the city was progressive and stable growth. Inspired by this vision and encouraged to sacrifice for the betterment of Akron, citizens compromised traditional values and succumbed even to working on Sundays.<sup>280</sup> The blithe naiveté Akron’s workers and citizens evinced enabled them to adapt to the dissonance of compromise and consumption. As the industrialists erected palaces at the western fringe of the city, they encouraged citizens to “put [their] shoulders to the wheel and all work together for the betterment of Akron, both morally and beautiful [*sic*] as well as financially.”<sup>281</sup> However, citizens suffered little tolerance for others’ judgment of their illusion of success. As the political scientist Frederick Davenport observed:

If you wish to get into trouble in Akron, just speak of it as a ‘welfare town.’ How both managers and men hate the word ‘welfare.’ Nobody ever uses it except in derision. It seems to carry with it the notion of benevolent autocracy which the men will not abide and which modern managers are very anxious to get away from.<sup>282</sup>

In addition to establishing the standard of the social environment in Akron, business leaders manipulated the political environment through the chamber of commerce.

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<sup>278</sup> The CLU represented the traditional skilled crafts, iron-workers, blacksmiths, etc. that were not profiting in the environment that favored unskilled labor. Mayor Rockwell forwarded a copy of the letter to Seiberling and asked for his input. Seiberling responded with statistics and the invitation to send “300 skilled and intelligent men and thereafter 50 more per day.” Correspondence Akron Central Labor Union to Mayor F.W. Rockwell. Box 14. Seiberling MSS.

<sup>279</sup> McQueeney, 5.

<sup>280</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 5 April 1916.

<sup>281</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 17 February 1912.

<sup>282</sup> Davenport, 410.

The city's congestion no longer existed simply at its fringes by the peak years of production. Workers moved from the traditional working class neighborhoods on the south and east sides of Akron into the city center, the north side, and the former elite neighborhoods. Grismer observed that the rubber companies created "a dense pall of smoke [that] hung over the city" and many in Akron lamented that "the city was becoming gloomier than Pittsburgh."<sup>283</sup> While many urban problems can be attributed to xenophobia and pollution, an additionally relevant fear and uncertainty developed as a result of the rapidly changing built environment. Processes that traditionally changed over the course of a lifetime occurred within a decade, the new systems challenged values instilled for generations, and the city barely addressed the immediate needs and concerns of its citizenry.

### *The Effort of Planning*

Between 1910 and 1920, the industrial environment changed so rapidly that Akron officials merely reacted to the growth of the rubber industries and the influx of workers rather than planning for it. In an attempt to assuage the impact on their urban environment, in 1917 the chamber of commerce commissioned the city planner John Nolen to prepare a proposal for the proper planning of the city. The chamber published Nolen's Plan for the city of Akron in 1919.

In this period, American city planning followed reform trends calling for a more beautiful and healthful environment. In his concise history of the origins of city planning, Peterson observed that city planners were "free to experiment, to ally with community builders...but mainly [they were] free to serve those with the power to act."<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Grismer, 377.

<sup>284</sup> Jon Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning, 1840-1917* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University



American city planning ascribed not to the ideology that rectified social problems, but rather to the City Beautiful movement that led to “city remodeling.”<sup>285</sup> Nolen presented his plan to the chamber in 1919 with a cursory outline of Akron’s development and the observation that the city grew “without any thought as to proper development.”<sup>286</sup> Nolen’s plan included an examination of the existing residential, commercial, and industrial districts and even the prevailing wind patterns. He continued the trend to remodel the aesthetic aspects of the town, and recommended the purchase of the Portage Country Club and Sumner Home for park purposes, proposed building a series of small parks in the inner city and beautifying the attractive canal waterway, and strongly encouraged the purchase and control of property around Summit Lake.<sup>287</sup> Nolen praised the efforts of Seiberling and Firestone to create order in the city, particularly through their efforts to plan parks and incorporate landscape design in the planning of their company housing projects.<sup>288</sup>

The glaring error in Nolen’s study involved the housing problem evident in the city. On the contrary, he devoted scant attention to the creation of adequate housing. He recommended instead that “manufacturing and business interests that depend upon the efficient and happy workman” should be encouraged to “produce good housing.”<sup>289</sup> Peterson noted that this trend to ignore housing concerns and focus on aesthetics dominated the city planning movement, although Nolen and a few others “addressed

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Press, 2003), 315.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>286</sup> John Nolen, *City Plan for Akron*, prepared for the Chamber of Commerce, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1919. Akron Summit County Public Library, Akron, Ohio, 2.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>288</sup> Nolen, 65.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

housing briefly... [though] none thought in terms of population dispersal.”<sup>290</sup> In the short section on housing, Nolen asserted that “a great change in housing methods will come” and he summarized the “factory methods” that would be used to create adequate housing, but he provided no solutions or plans for housing.<sup>291</sup>

### *City Planning Commission and the Zoning of Akron*

Meanwhile the city created a new charter, the first in over thirty years, to combat the problem of disorganized growth. The 1918 charter, appointed a special city planning commission with powers and duties that included acquisition of property, street improvement, to create and maintain parks, engineering projects, regulate buildings, and manage the water and waste systems.<sup>292</sup> After the state granted municipalities the right to create their own charters again in 1912 and the failed attempt to create a commission government that same year, Akron trundled along by adding revisions to their 1886 charter.

The 1918 charter established a department of city planning to administer the legislation created by the planning commission. The primary powers and duties of the department revolved around the aesthetic issues of planning parks, streets, and acting in an advisory role on engineering projects. Additionally, the city promoted the unusually progressive concept of “preservation of natural and historic features.”<sup>293</sup> The charter passed in 1919, and two years later, the first city planning commission headed by Harvey Firestone and Rev. Howard MacAyeal published a “Tentative Zoning Plan for Akron” in 1921, which acknowledged the haphazard growth and established regulations on private

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<sup>290</sup> Peterson, 229.

<sup>291</sup> Nolen, 65.

<sup>292</sup> *Proposed Charter of the City of Akron*. 1918. Akron Summit County Public Library. Akron, Ohio.

<sup>293</sup> *Proposed Charter...*

property in order to secure a more harmonious urban environment.<sup>294</sup> The publication indicated that haphazard city development belonged to a national trend of poor city planning. The American city suffered because of mismanagement, improper utilization of resources, and non-functional, inefficient land use. The publication asserted that the regulation of private property would “supplement the city’s endeavors and accomplishments in providing adequate public service and facilities.”<sup>295</sup>

Small businesses occupied residential property of Goodyear Heights as early as 1917, and residents utilized a former farmhouse for their children’s school.<sup>296</sup> In an effort to curb this type of proprietorship and property use, planners encouraged zoning regulations. The city planning commission outlined tentative zoning districts to legislate the use of private property within the municipal district.<sup>297</sup> The commission asserted that citizens should approach zoning “not from the view point of its effect upon the individual or upon a particular lot or parcel of land but from the higher standpoint of community welfare.”<sup>298</sup> They used business terms to outline the reasonable effect zoning would have on the city. The tentative plan pointed out that “privately owned land” constituted the majority of land within a municipality. In an effort to avoid inefficiency and wasteful spending,

Regulating and directing the development of private property in a sensible and practicable way will supplement the city’s endeavors and

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<sup>294</sup> The Tentative Zoning plan prepared by businessmen relied on a business model and economic terms to rationally justify the regulation of private property. To date, a comprehensive study of the zoning history of Akron does not exist. For a period review of city planning efforts and zoning, see Frank Backus Williams’ *The Law of City Planning and Zoning*. New York: the McMillan Company, 1922. *Tentative Zoning Plan of the City of Akron*. Akron City Planning Commission. Akron, Ohio. 1921.

<sup>295</sup> *Tentative Zoning...*, first page after Forward (pages not numbered).

<sup>296</sup> Photograph of “Goodyear Heights first school house.” Daniel Nelson papers. Businesses were recorded on residential streets Akron City Directories.

<sup>297</sup> City Planning Commission, *Tentative Zoning Plan for Akron* (Akron, Ohio: City Planning Commission, 1921).

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid*, forward.

accomplishments in providing adequate public service and facilities. The adoption of such regulations should precede, rather than follow, the completion of plans for adequate street, park and transportation systems.<sup>299</sup>

The publication continued by discussing the success of New York's 1916 zoning ordinances and the necessity of "providing the right location" for residences, businesses, and industry.<sup>300</sup> Regulations addressed included building heights, land uses, the establishment of a board of zoning appeals, plat requirements, and building line and setbacks.<sup>301</sup> In a direct appeal to the logic of zoning, the planning commission pointed out the pecuniary loss because of the improper placement of buildings. The planners warned "haphazard and unregulated development...has ruined investments in buildings...depreciated the value of property...made real estate values uncertain, destroyed...residential neighborhoods and injuriously affected the health, safety, convenience and welfare of entire communities."<sup>302</sup>

Although granted the power to legislate, the city never conducted any of the additional projects that Nolen recommended. These municipal reform efforts led additionally to the creation of a commission form of government, with C. Nelson Sparks serving as city manager from 1920 until the repeal of the commission government in 1923.<sup>303</sup> The flurry of job eliminations and the maneuvering of funds to cover operating expenses contributed to failure of the commission form.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid, second page.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, third page.

<sup>301</sup> For a critical examination of zoning and its effect on urban environments, see Jane Jacobs, *Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House Publishing, 1961).

<sup>302</sup> City Planning Commission, 7.

<sup>303</sup> This hybrid commission-manager form resulted from the corruption that resulted when commissioners traded favors and sacrificing service for efficiency. See James Weinstein's "Businessmen and City Commissions and Managers." Akron's city manager, Sparks, later blamed the unions for the downfall of

The zoning ordinances passed in 1922 followed the plan proposed by Nolen and adapted by the commission.<sup>305</sup> Peterson observed that the professional city planners of the period viewed zoning as “an authentic expression of public interest and a valid basis for claiming success for their cause.”<sup>306</sup> Planning accommodated those with the power and the resources to act and zoning manifested the expert’s discernment of public interests. Planners did not unilaterally unite behind this creed. One of the earliest proponents of the city planning movement, Benjamin Marsh, asserted that low wages caused the housing problems and shortages, and he lamented the manipulation of city planning by speculators and bankers.<sup>307</sup> Urban historian John Fairfield observed that social reform played a “minor theme” in the movement well into the 1920s.<sup>308</sup> The federal government became involved in the zoning and planning movement by creating a special administrative agency within the Department of Commerce. With the creation of State and City Standard Enabling Acts in 1921 and 1927 respectively, the federal government outlined for states and municipalities the legal methods to create zoning and planning ordinances.<sup>309</sup> While citizens in other cities fought against the regulation of private property using the Fifth Amendment protection of property rights, the citizens of Akron adapted relatively seamlessly to the regulations. To citizens that struggled without

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the city in his September 24, 1938 article for *Liberty* magazine “Why Akron is a Ghost City.” C. Nelson Sparks, “Why Akron is a Ghost City,” *Liberty*, September 24, 1938.

<sup>304</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 2 March 1922, 20 March 1922, 13 September 1922.

<sup>305</sup> The commission did not follow Nolen’s plan exactly. They made many changes, particularly with regard to urban expansion to the south and west. Comparison of Nolen’s *City Plan* and the planning commission’s *Tentative Plan*.

<sup>306</sup> Peterson, 315.

<sup>307</sup> Fairfield quoted John Nolen’s admonishment to colleagues to remember that the “controlling purpose of land subdivision is profit.” John Fairfield, *Mysteries of the Great City: The Politics of Urban Design, 1877-1937* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 134.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid*, 136-137.

<sup>309</sup> Ruth Knack, Stuart Meck, and Israel Stollman examined the role of the Progressive Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover and his role in the creation of the Standard Enabling Acts. Their article “The Real Story Behind the Standard Planning and Zoning Acts of 1920s,” and copies of the Acts are available on-line at <http://www.planning.org/growingsmart/enablingacts.htm> (retrieved March 13, 2008).

any type of orderly system, the efforts of Nolen and the legislation passed by the city seemed to solve the need for order.

*The Reality of the City*

By that time, though, with the costs of housing 25 percent more than any other area in the country, many Akron citizens struggled to simply meet housing needs.<sup>310</sup> Daniel Nelson studied Akron's City Directories and created a table to provide an example of the changing neighborhood composition. An average working class Akron neighborhood, Crosier, between Crosier, Grant, and Brown Streets and near both Goodyear and Goodrich, underwent a dramatic change in the seven years between 1913 and 1920. Builders constructed 245 houses, and 221 general workers, and 17 rubber workers filled the neighborhood.<sup>311</sup> Only the number of craftspeople, additional industrial employees, and common laborers declined slightly in the period. Most remarkably, Nelson noted that "by 1920, 93 percent of the inhabitants were newcomers; only twenty-three of the [108] families who had lived in the neighborhood in 1913 remained."<sup>312</sup>

Goodyear Heights evinced a similar degree of turnover. An examination of the rates of occupancy of the first 87 houses built in the Heights indicates that Seiberling's manipulation of the built environment may have looked excellent, but in reality, the project accomplished little to make housing affordable for or contribute to the stability of the average wage earner. Between 1914 and 1925 (excepting unavailable data from 1916 and 1921, 1923, and 1924), the majority of occupancies lasted less than four years, with

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<sup>310</sup> Daniel Nelson, *American Rubber Workers and Organized Labor, 1900-1941* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 72.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

only 19 of the original 69 residents remaining longer than 8 years.<sup>313</sup> All of the non-employee residents moved from the allotment within two years, and many of the remaining residents took in boarders, particularly during the recession of 1920.<sup>314</sup>

1914-1925 Housing Turnover											
First 87 houses recorded in Goodyear Heights											
Year	1914	1915		1917	1918	1919	1920		1922		1925
Vacant	18	11		5	1	0	3		0		1
1st year	69	13		39	20	26	24		23		32
2nd year		63		n/a	26	10	11				
3rd year				6	n/a	26	7		15		
4th year				37	7	n/a	19		10		10
5th year					33	5	n/a		2		1
6th year			1916 data N/A			20	6	1921 data N/A	18	1923 data N/A	6
7th year							17			1924 data N/A	7
8th year									2		1
9th year									17		12
10th year											1
11th year											3
12th year											13
Boarders	3	3		4	3	10	16		3		4

**Figure 3.1** Between 1914 and 1925, individuals inhabiting the first 87 houses spent less than four years in the Heights. Data compiled from the Akron City Directories.

The reality of the ideology of home-ownership led to increased home values and debt. In a three month span of time in 1922, Akron’s municipal court executed foreclosure proceedings on nearly fifty homes. Of those fifty homes, five cases involved homes in Goodyear Heights.<sup>315</sup> The problem began when Goodyear Heights property owners endeavored to sell their property. In each case, the owners did not take steps to quiet the title on the property by seeking a release from the mortgage, insurance, tax and

<sup>313</sup> Data compiled from the Akron City Directories 1914-1925, excepting data from 1916, 1921, 1923, and 1924). Akron Summit County Public Library, Akron, Ohio.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> 1919-1922 Municipal court records. Summit County Courthouse, Akron, Ohio. Cases included #43346, #43375, #43449, #43472, and #43505.

assessment liens, and simply issued a warranty deed to the new occupants.<sup>316</sup> If the new owners defaulted at any times they, the original owners and any interval owners, received summons to court. Goodyear sought original owners as far away as Canada to collect money owed.<sup>317</sup> These liens complicated the simple matter of buying and selling property, and raised the amount owed on a property beyond its material value. In order to collect, the Realty Company placed the properties in receivership under the care of their attorney, George Hawkins, who assumed responsibility for renting and maintaining the property.<sup>318</sup> The industrial housing effort praised throughout the country for its beauty and organization created such extra work for Goodyear's legal division that they allowed the city to annex the property in 1929. Additionally, the project accomplished little in the effort to house the industrial worker. The speculative efforts to accommodate the rubber workers through the ideology of home-ownership served the industries and the city. The evidence of mobility indicated, however, that the needs of the workers included quality, affordable housing and temporary housing situations. Workers indeed came to the city to work, not necessarily to stay.

### *The Citizens and Seiberling*

As the city quickly filled with strangers and Akron's wealthy families moved to the western edge, the activities of the rubber industrialists received but cursory attention from the people that continued to inhabit the city proper. In the tumultuous period of

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<sup>316</sup> A quiet title refers to the release of all liens from a title.

<sup>317</sup> *Goodyear Heights Realty Company vs. John Bjelis, et. al.* 43505, Summit County Municipal Court Records, Akron, Ohio.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*



growth and expansion, the public quickly forgot the support and solidarity felt after Goodyear's triumph in the tire patent suits. During Seiberling's term as president of the chamber, his public reputation led to rumors of his run for state Senate.<sup>319</sup> He also inspired a newspaper correspondent to provide a remedy for Akron's outmoded civic administration. The writer indicated that a businessman of Akron could serve the city and provided Seiberling as an example.<sup>320</sup> He soon became involved in national endeavors and local interest lessened. Even the Goodyear Heights project garnered little interest from the public. Goodyear's president maneuvered within his own sphere of influence and the projects he undertook had seemingly little effect on any but the Goodyear employees.

After Seiberling lost control of Goodyear, he again became a public figure subject to critique. Considering the circumstances of Seiberling's departure, though, criticism and reproach were the last sentiments expressed by the citizens of Akron. Seiberling chose to leave Goodyear rather than plunge the city and its banks into a panic by restructuring the company in a receivership. Individuals in Akron rallied to understand the processes that led to Seiberling's loss. Seiberling immediately began a new tire and rubber company in the neighboring city of Barberton in the former buildings of the Portage Rubber Company, and he worked just as strenuously to build that company to success. Fortunately a lifetime in the rubber business afforded him business contacts and loyalties, and Seiberling tires soon filled merchants' stores.

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<sup>319</sup> Seiberling and the Beacon's editor exchanged a series of letters in which the Progressive editor attempted to bait Seiberling and corner his views on Taft and Roosevelt. The allusion to a run for Senate was meant to imply that Seiberling belonged to a class of self-seekers. *Akron Beacon Journal*. 11, 12, 13, and 20 April 1911.

<sup>320</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 4 July 1911.

At the time of Seiberling's resignation, the editor of the *Beacon* published a facetious letter from one "Mr. Bimbo," written to the newly appointed Goodyear president. The letter, an introduction to Akron, welcomed the president and informed him that "Akron used to be famous for rubber, but that was back in the good old days before they changed the anthem to 'God save Akron and Goodyear.'"<sup>321</sup> The writer continued to allude to problems that existed in Akron and Goodyear. He reminded the president to begin looking for a new pitcher for Goodyear's baseball team, because last year's pitcher quit in the spring. Although, he asserted, he was not "insinuating that he quit because he heard you [were] going to be president."<sup>322</sup>

Seiberling's role as industrial leader afforded him the opportunity to develop a business and personal ethos that secured his reputation in the city of his youth. However, his standing developed over a lifetime and depended not upon his success, but rather his failure. From the first George Washington-like brush with deception which led him to implore the company to "Protect Our Good Name" to the willing resignation to protect the fortunes of Akron, Seiberling's reputation became subject to mythologizing evaluation. However, the Seiberling of 1900-1920 fit into the civic environment as simply another capitalist and industrialist. While he evinced proclivities toward reform and welfare work, he manipulated his environment to shield himself and his family from the pollution and poverty he helped create.

The built environment of Akron changed dramatically because of the rubber boom. Temporary success gave businesses and individuals the capital to build and enjoy their capital, and the city administration was reticent to manage what so obviously looked

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<sup>321</sup> *Akron Beacon Journal*. 18 May 1921.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

like progress. To accommodate this progress, industry and municipality united to shift the tax burden from the corporation to the individual. The prevalence of single-family residential housing and the encouragement of homeownership attest to this change in ideology. However, payment for the infrastructure in order to accommodate the growth caused by the rubber companies eventually bankrupted the city of Akron.<sup>323</sup> The city's financial state hobbled its ability to effectively administer for its constituency, and led to even greater economic hardships during the Great Depression.<sup>324</sup>

In the 1920s, the new middle-class and *nouveau-riche* of Akron picked up the torch of reform and founded aid and beautification societies. Many industrialists retired and maneuvered as socialites in a new "high-society" culture, and others donated to high-profile projects rather than efforts in Akron.<sup>325</sup> In the milieu of reform, building, and growth, Seiberling contributed to the ideologies that created the housing crisis and shaped a civic policy more favorable to industry. He also emerged as the last of the city's leading industrialists who directly attended to Akron's philanthropic, economic and social environment.

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<sup>323</sup>In a 1930 letter to bonded citizens, the city formally apologized for its inability to pay its bonded indebtedness. "Statement and Proposal to Holders of Akron, Ohio Bonds Maturing in October, November, and December," City of Akron, Akron, Ohio, 1930. Akron Chamber of Commerce collection. University of Akron, Akron, Ohio.

<sup>324</sup>For a critical analysis of Akron's ability to weather the Great Depression, see Mary-Ann Blasio, "Akron and the Great Depression: 1929-1933. M.A. Thesis. (University of Akron, Akron, Ohio, 1987).

<sup>325</sup>Instead of donating to the municipal University, for example, Firestone donated a considerable sum of money to help finance the construction of Princeton's library, later memorialized as the Harvey S. Firestone Memorial Library. William S. Dix, "The University Library," Retrieved from the internet April 1, 2007, [http://etcweb.princeton.edu/CampusWWW/Companion/university\\_library.html](http://etcweb.princeton.edu/CampusWWW/Companion/university_library.html).

## Conclusion

The early endeavors of the Seiberlings, including the industrial enterprises of John Seiberling, belonged to a form advantageous to the economic and social stability of the proprietor, the employee, and the city. This proprietary capitalist form only marginally affected the lives of non-employees. The welfare capitalism evinced by Seiberling and Akron's other industrialists in the years of peak production affected the entire city. This corporate model resulted in social reforms that created a civic environment favorable for industry. The actual needs of the citizens, though, became secondary to the purpose of serving industry, and the burden of meeting the needs of industry fell to the city and the citizens that comprised the tax-paying base.

The Akron that existed prior to the growth of the rubber companies proved favorable to its leading families and by extension other individuals living within municipal limits. In a letter to Otis Hower, J.F. Seiberling attempted to coerce him into moving back to Akron to take charge of his mill, the Akron Cereal Company. "Besides" Seiberling convinced Hower "you would live in a city that would afford pleasures to yourself and family which you cannot get in gloomy Chicago."<sup>326</sup>

As corporations shaped the cities to their economic advantage, unfocused tension resulted. Some non-rubber business owners and workers in Akron evinced an awareness of the shifting nature of their city and various public forums discussed nuances of the changing environment including the industrialists and workers roles in it. The prevailing attitude led non-employees and employees alike to concentrate on the routines of their worlds and leave little time for reflection on the activities of Akron's industrialists.

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<sup>326</sup> Correspondence, J.F. Seiberling, Akron, Ohio to Otis Hower, Chicago, Illinois, 5 February 1895. Hower family papers. Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Archives.

Although the *Wingfoot Clan* raised awareness of Seiberling's welfare capitalist endeavors, external news sources gave only a modicum of attention to his projects. Despite the impact rubber companies had on their entire lives, the public only reflected on their role in society when their lives were immediately affected.

The welfare efforts of Seiberling in the company's first decade remained largely unnoticed by the Akron public. Aside from contributing to the business environment of the city, Seiberling's early actions revolved around his family and their social circle. The local companies with which Seiberling conducted business certainly did not create a favorable environment in which to establish a business nor did Akron's tax assessor. Goodyear historian and contemporary, Hugh Allen, noted "financial difficulties dodged the company in the early years... materials shipped C.O.D... [Seiberling] sold stock to anyone who would buy, and traded it at times for merchandise, but without too much success."<sup>327</sup> Additionally, special assessments and industrial property taxes levied by the city burdened the company's financial resources.<sup>328</sup> The company struggled throughout its first decade and anticipated collapse. Only the temerity of the Seiberling brothers, assistance from friends and family, and supportive employees sustained the company. With confidence established by 1904, after succeeding in their patent suits, Seiberling became committed to the young company and the betterment of the city. The seasonal ebb and tide in production and demand did not deter the company, and it slowly became profitable during the first decade.

Practically overnight, though, the citizens of Akron became aware of the impact the rubber companies had on their world. Due to the affordability of Ford's Model T, a

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<sup>327</sup> Hugh Allen, *Rubber's Hometown*, Heritage Series vol. 5. (New York: Stratford House, 1937), 150.

<sup>328</sup> Numerous ordinances and assessments passed between 1900 and 1910. Volumes L-O. Akron City Council Minutes. Akron, Ohio: University of Akron Archives.

surge in the production of tires caused the city of Akron to become polluted with smoke and crowded with workers.<sup>329</sup> The rubber factories accommodated the growth by building additional factories and recruiting more workers. Goodyear's first sign of financial success manifested in the city in the form of enlargements to the factories and, of course, increased numbers of employees. In the decade between 1910 and 1920, Seiberling's projects contributed to a larger trend of industrial assertion of control over the economic, social, and political environment of the city. This control manifested in an economic standard set by the industrialists, the establishment of a culture of consumerism, and the creation of the chamber of commerce. The welfare capitalist efforts of Seiberling became lost amid the efforts to shape the municipal environment.

While not explicit, the actions, few sentiments, and observations of Akron's citizens indicate a reticence to embrace wholeheartedly the changes imposed upon their environment. Citizens tolerated the congestion of the urban environment or exercised their civic rights by petitioning the city to impose ordinances to alleviate problems. Housing, however, became a critical issue for which the city refused to accept responsibility, and speculators and industrialists assumed the duty of housing the non-employee and employee citizens. In this same environment, the chamber of commerce operated initially with complete autonomy, but by 1914, these business leaders met the reserve of municipal government. The local government thereafter tried to carefully accommodate citizens and industrial leaders. When Akron's industrialists recognized the

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<sup>329</sup> Grismer noted that automobile production increased from 895,930 in 1915 to over 8,000,000 in 1920 Karl Grismer, *Akron and Summit County* (Akron: Summit County Historical Society, n.d.), 376-377. Daniel Nelson discussed the effect of Ford's auto production and the systemization of mass production in his article "Mass Production and the U.S. Tire Industry." Daniel Nelson, "Mass Production and the U.S. Tire Industry" *Journal of Economic History*. Vol. 47, No. 2, The Tasks of Economic History (Jun., 1987), pp. 329-339.

merits of appealing to the aesthetic of Akron's citizenry with city planning and beautification projects, the city yielded to industrial control.

The fortuitous events that resulted in the overwhelming success of the rubber industry created a tumultuous urban environment with an administration ill-prepared to manage the change in municipal needs. The city evinced signs of increased order in the decade before the rubber boom, principally with the creation of a commission government and elimination of debt. Critical state legislative changes coupled with the demands on the urban environment, because of the influx of rubber workers, contributed to an unstable city. The disbanding of municipal codes in 1903 and the dismantling of Akron's seven year old commission government rendered the city ill-equipped to meet the demands on infrastructure and management.

A few industrialists committed to the city sought ways to remedy the urban problems, through the creation of the chamber of commerce. As a second-generation resident of Akron, F.A. Seiberling adhered to Progressive principles of reform and civic mindedness, and he became part of this reform environment. Ultimately, though, the chamber developed an agenda beyond reform, and in the guise of accommodating the industrial workers and citizens of Akron, they promoted projects that benefitted primarily the industrial and business environment. These projects included the funding of a multi-million dollar water procurement project, the establishment of extensive sewer systems, the paving of city streets, and the promotion of home-ownership among employees. In a mobile society with employees drawn to the city specifically to work, home-ownership provided a steady base of employees and taxpayers. When the state gave cities the power to create their own forms of government in 1912, the interest in a commission form of

government led to administrative inspections and criticism of their method of governance by the Chamber. The city altered their efforts to change their form of government and allowed the businessmen to determine the needs of the city.

The industrialists who created a city conducive to their business needs retired or no longer sought involvement in municipal issues by the early twenties. In later years the example of reform and involvement set by Seiberling encouraged a civic spirit. However, in the twenties in a city of virtual strangers there existed few shared histories or incentive to commit to municipal success. Aid and beautification organizations filled the reform void, but lacked the foundation support the industrialists provided.

Rubber success completely changed Akron. Once success became evident the city enthusiastically supported growth and expansion and accommodated the new citizens—and by extension the rubber companies. However, this support eventually resulted in a culture of dependency upon and indebtedness for the large corporations. One of the great ironies of the city lies in the fact that both the city and the laborer gave the most but benefitted the least. The successes of the Gilded Age are evident in other American cities in the form of foundations, endowments, museums, and civic projects. In Akron, however, the evidence of success remains only in the aging built environment of a sprawling city and an ideological commitment to home ownership.



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