INDUSTRIAL VOYAGERS: A CASE STUDY OF APPALACHIAN MIGRATION
TO AKRON, OHIO
1900-1940

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Susan Allyn Johnson, B.A., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
2006

Dissertation Committee:

Professor Warren Van Tine, Adviser
Professor David Stebenne
Professor Mansel Blackford

Approved by

Adviser
Graduate Program in History
ABSTRACT

Between 1910 and 1960, nearly nine million southerners left the South for other regions of the country. The vast majority of the historical scholarship on this “Great Migration” has focused on the out-migration of African Americans from the South. “Industrial Voyagers: A Case Study of Appalachian Migration to Akron, Ohio, 1900-1940,” examines the migration of an often overlooked element of this migration—Southern Appalachians who moved to the industrial centers of the Midwest.

Akron is a significant case study for this process. Migration to Akron began in the early twentieth century as the emergence of the rubber industry attracted thousands of newcomers who sought jobs in the city’s expanding factories. The duration of this in-migration presents the opportunity to examine this movement as it evolved and changed over decades. This study focuses on the regional economic disparities that encouraged out-migration from Appalachia; the ways migration streams became established between Appalachia and Akron; the experiences and reception of newcomers; and the evolving relationship between southerners and the labor movement in Akron.

The southerners who arrived in Akron during this period were encouraged to move by Akron manufacturers who suffered recurring periods of labor shortages.
Unfortunately, when recessions hit the industry, the city would find itself with thousands of unemployed rubber workers. During such hard times southerners had to decide whether to return home or try to make ends meet in the city. Furthermore, local residents had mixed attitudes toward these newcomers whom they sometimes blamed for a host of problems. In particular, labor organizations in the city blamed the new arrivals for driving down wages and inhibiting unionization efforts.

It took several decades for this wave of newcomers to establish roots in the city. By the 1920s, this process was underway. More newcomers became homeowners and considered Akron their permanent home. Many new churches were established, as were other organizations such as the West Virginia Society. By the 1930s, newcomers had achieved greater acceptance and expressed a deeper interest in the future of the city. Southerners took leading roles in the creation of the United Rubber Workers of America and participated in local politics.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my thanks to the members of my committee—Warren Van Tine, David Stebenne, and Mansel Blackford—for their encouragement and patience with this project.

I also would like to thank John Miller of the University of Akron Archives for his assistance. In addition, the staff and students at Berea College were both helpful and friendly, thank you.
VITA

1993 .............................................................B.A., History and Sociology, Northwestern University

1993-1994 .................................................................University Fellow, Ohio State University

1994........................................................................M.A., History, Ohio State University

1994-1998 ...................................................... Graduate Teaching Associate, Ohio State University

1998-1999 ............................................................... Ohio Bicentennial Scholar, Ohio State University

2000-2004 ............................................. Graduate Teaching Associate, Lecturer, Ohio State University

2002-2003 ..................................................................Lecturer, Ohio State University-Newark

2004 ...........................................................................Lecturer, Ohio State University-Mansfield

2004- .................................................................Research Assistant, History of the Ohio General Assembly

2005- .................................................................Content Editor, Glencoe Social Studies, McGraw-Hill

PUBLICATIONS

Research Publications

“How the ‘Rubber City’ Became the ‘Capital of West Virginia.’” Journal of Appalachian Studies 6 (Spring/Fall 2000).

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: History

Area of Emphasis: U.S. History Since 1877

Minor Fields: U.S. History to 1877
Latin American History
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................................................................................. ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................... iv
VITA ............................................................................................................................................ v
LIST OF TABLES ....................................................................................................................... ix
LIST OF MAPS .......................................................................................................................... x

CHAPTER 1: AKRON AND THE GREAT MIGRATION ......................................................... 1
   The Great Migration in Historical Perspective ................................................................. 5
   Why Study the “Great Migration”? ................................................................................... 9

CHAPTER 2: “DOWN HOME” ............................................................................................ 20
   A Brief History of the Southern Appalachian Region .................................................... 21
   Out-Migration from the Southern Appalachian Region ................................................ 33

CHAPTER 3: CITY OF OPPORTUNITY ............................................................................... 53
   Expanding City and Industry ............................................................................................. 56
   Early Recruits and High Mobility ..................................................................................... 64
   Economic Factors Influencing Decision of Early Migrants ............................................ 73
   Southern Migrants 1900-1914 ......................................................................................... 76

CHAPTER 4: STANDING ROOM ONLY ........................................................................... 83
   World War I Opens the Floodgates .................................................................................. 85
   “This House is Rented” ...................................................................................................... 90
   City of Problems ............................................................................................................... 103

CHAPTER 5: THE TURBULENT TWENTIES ................................................................. 115
   Are They Needed? ............................................................................................................ 116
   Are They Welcome? ......................................................................................................... 131
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>Estimated Net Population Change Resulting from Interstate Migration</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of Native-Born Citizens, 1910-1960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>Population Change Through Interstate Migration of Native-born</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Citizens in the State of West Virginia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>Net Migration from Southern Appalachian Counties</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>Rubber Manufacturing in Akron, 1909-1919</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>Akron’s Population Growth: 1880-1920</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>Employment of Males in Select Occupations in West Virginia</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7</td>
<td>Number of Rubber Workers Employed in Summit County, Ohio</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8</td>
<td>Akron Heads of Household, 1920</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF MAPS

Map 1: Akron and Southern Appalachia ................................................................. 22
Map 2: Akron Neighborhoods .............................................................................. 218
CHAPTER 1

AKRON AND THE GREAT MIGRATION

They came here from a West Virginia mountain-top home, 14 miles in the clouds. They came here from a settlement consisting of four shacks in which four families live. There are no schools there, no churches, no doctors, no nurses.

Mrs. Mabel Strawder wore a neat pink home-made dress. She made it. Her two little overalled sons, Cecil, jr., 6 and Russell, 4, were neat. Their clothes were home-made too.

None of them had ever seen a “talkie.”

Once in her childhood, Mrs. Strawder had been taken to an old silent film in a mountain town.

Electric irons, electric ice boxes, furnaces, and all the myriad complexities of modern civilization are all new to the family from the West Virginia hills.

A ride in an elevator was an alarming experience—but the escalator was an unheard of joy. They drank from a “bubbler.” Their lips trembled.

“I came because I wanted my boys to go to school. I wanted them to be near where there are doctors. Down there, we are snowed in from October until late spring. Mail only comes once in two months. I want them to know something different,” said pretty blond Mrs. Strawder.

Their mountain is called “Cheat”—an apt term—since it has cheated them of all but the barest of living necessities. Mrs. Strawder’s mother died when she was small. She was one of 12 brothers and sisters. Her father was killed four years ago. Her husband works as a hand on the railroad which winds its way across Cheat mountain, where a little valley lies on both sides of the river. He gets $2.49 a day.

“You can’t even grow a tomato plant in my back yard,” said the mother. “You can’t even raise chickens. When anyone dies we nail a few boards together for a coffin.”
She has learned to send to mail order houses for her Christmas decorations long before Cheat mountain is closed in for the winter.

The boys have never been to school a day in their lives.

“But it’s the many cars which amaze us the most here,” she said. “I had only seen one or two very old cars in my life. And the boys are thrilled by the cars.”

The boys’ uncle, Victor C. Holterman—R. D. 3, East Akron, heard that Mrs. Strawder wanted to come north to earn enough to send later for her husband, and to place her boys in good schools. He drove down to Cheat mountain this week for the three. Strawder has remained on his job, but is hoping that his wife will find something to do in the north so that the boys can get “larnin’.”

Holterman is a Goodyear worker. He has an old car in his backyard and ever since the boys came they have sat awe-struck in it, tinkering with the various gadgets.

“I’m willing to work at anything,” said Mrs. Strawder today.

The boys talk very little. But their eyes are round with wonder as they gaze at the glories of this new world into which they have suddenly been precipitated. Akron, to them, is the acme of all things to be desired.¹

Thus began a feature article published in the Akron Beacon Journal in 1936.

Both the tone of the story and the reactions it generated seem a fitting place to begin this study of southern migrants in Akron. The contrast presented between the secluded isolation and poverty of the family’s home and the bright lights of the big city represents the extreme of the differences between the two areas. The family’s situation was not the typical background of most southern migrants, but did reflect a prevailing stereotype of the background of rural migrants who came to Akron. Mrs. Strawder and

¹ Akron Beacon Journal, 11 September 1936.
her children left behind poverty and isolation in the hope of gaining a better life in the city.

The desire for a better life was true of many migrants who had been drawn to the booming rubber city. Yet the publication of the family’s story provoked controversy, claims that it exaggerated the remoteness of their living conditions, and outright denials that any of it was true. To many of the thousands of southerners in Akron, especially the West Virginians, the article was an insulting rehash of the worst stereotypes they frequently came up against. Dozens of letters poured into the *Akron Beacon Journal*, mostly by native West Virginians, denouncing the *Tobacco Road* slant of the piece. “A loyal West Virginian,” wrote one reader, “resents hearing statements that would lead outsiders to believe that West Virginia is a wild, uncivilized state without cars, without electric lights, no schools, no doctors, etc.” Many rejected the story as “propaganda” and denied that areas so remote still existed in West Virginia. Even more common was the sentiment: Why was the local paper printing a sob story to help some outsider get a job when local workers were unemployed? Thus the story encapsulates many of the tensions revolving around Akron’s development as a city composed of migrants drawn from the South and Appalachia.

More strikingly than any other American city, Akron emerged as an industrial center by attracting newcomers from the South, particularly the mountain regions of the

---

upper South. From an early date, rubber manufacturers saw the vast potential in the mountains. There lay a white English-speaking population of native workers accustomed to difficult work and low wages; to tap this resource, the rubber manufacturers sent out their recruiters and posted advertisements to bring them to Akron. A migration that was initially encouraged became self-sustaining as the city’s reputation grew, and soon mountaineers and other white southerners came to fill the city’s neighborhoods and factories. Yet, while they became a key element of the labor force that was badly needed by local manufacturers, long-term residents of the city often resented them. Workers recruited from rural areas often failed to put down roots in the city where rapid growth was attended by a host of urban problems. When times were good and jobs plentiful, they flocked to the city, causing overcrowding and straining local resources; when times were poor, they were blamed for unfairly taking jobs from “real” Akronites. Local residents blamed a host of problems on the newcomers. The sheer volume of job-seekers and their supposed willingness to work for a pittance was criticized for undermining the position of local workers and inhibiting the development of any labor organization.

In the end, the southern migrants who came to Akron did transform the city, but not in the ways one would anticipate if one had only read accounts by contemporary journalists and social scientists. Most writers have portrayed southern migrants—particularly those from Appalachia—as too different, too independent-minded, and too attached to their home region to adapt successfully to life in industrial
cities. This study offers both contrast and counterpoint. Although the impact of some migrants to Akron was transitory, particularly in the early years, many others came to set down roots, became homeowners and gradually incorporated elements of their culture into the fabric of the city. The fact that many successfully made the transition to urban life has received too little attention from scholars who have dwelled disproportionately on those who did not. As southern newcomers became established city residents, many had a greater stake in their adopted community and even went on to become community leaders.

The Great Migration in Historical Perspective

The region from which these migrants came remains one of the most culturally distinct regions of the United States. Through the nineteenth century, the impact of industrialization, the rise of large metropolises, and influx of foreign immigrants—trends that shaped the course of northern development—largely bypassed the South. The region’s history of slavery, racial discrimination, and rural poverty gave rise to many personal tales of tragedy left undocumented. The twentieth century relieved the most serious of these problems as the region’s racial climate slowly improved through great struggles and an economy that once relied on the labors of tenant share-cropping farmers diversified and grew more prosperous; however, long before progress became evident, many southerners fled poverty and racism by leaving the region to seek better lives elsewhere. The result was one of the greatest population
movements in American history: the exodus of white and black Americans out of the South.

The migration of rural peoples to urban industrial areas was a global phenomenon of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and migration from the American South shares many characteristics with this process elsewhere. Although crossing no national boundaries and facing no linguistic barriers, migrants from the South did come from a region with a very different culture and history. They were both encouraged and needed by employers, but received receptions in the North that varied from uneasiness to outright hostility. For African Americans, the move to northern cities held forth the promise of escape from the rigid social and legal racial caste system of the South. Although leaving the South did not mean fully shaking off the injustices of racism, black migrants generally found wider economic opportunities and subtler or milder forms of racism. White southerners, easily identified by their speech, faced negative stereotypes that presumed them to be ignorant, lazy, racist, and generally undesirable as neighbors. Yet the promise of prosperity in the North inspired millions of white and black southerners to abandon their home region and move elsewhere, most frequently to the industrial centers of the Midwest. The drain of population reached such magnitude that between 1910 and 1960, nine million southerners (the equivalent of one-third of the region’s 1910 population) made their homes outside the South.3

3 Historians, economists, and social scientists have defined “the South” in various ways. In this study, “the South” refers to the states of the old Confederacy (minus Florida), plus Oklahoma, Kentucky, and West Virginia. Florida’s drastically different population dynamics makes it unique among the Southern
The most obvious lures for these migrants were the promise of jobs and the hopes for a higher standard of living, but personal factors and ambitions also shaped their decisions to abandon their native region. The impetus for migration further waxed and waned over the broad course of the twentieth century. Although there had always been limited out-migration from the region, the loss of population due to migration exploded after 1910, particularly during the First World War. The First World War accelerated trends already underway at the turn of the century to produce this first period of heavy out-migration from the South. This voluntary movement northward of millions of southerners resulted from regional economic and social disparities. The standard of living for residents of the South, black and white, was considerably lower than that of other regions of the country. For much of the twentieth century, the more industrialized regions of the Northeast and Midwest experienced economic growth, while the South remained cash poor and largely dependent upon a declining agricultural base and the extraction of natural resources.

The individuals and families who took part in the out-migration from the South did so for many different reasons. Few headed northward for economic reasons alone; nor did most likely perceive their actions as part of any broader movement. The availability of jobs “up north” was important, but other reasons also influenced the decision to uproot and relocate. For some, the potential of a more exciting, less isolated
life in the city proved attractive; such was the case for millions who left rural America in the twentieth century. Many decided to move and chose a particular destination based upon the presence of family members or former neighbors in certain cities; letters and word-of-mouth communication were often the most important factors in the decision to move. The momentum that sustained this mass migration for five decades, however, derived from both the economic and social opportunities promised by a life outside their native region. Although a widely acknowledged historical trend, historians have examined the exodus of whites from the South in little detail. Because native-born whites from the South are difficult to distinguish from the general population in most sources of statistical data, the task of studying them as a group is quite challenging. Unlike African Americans or immigrants, they were not generally singled out in demographic studies in the early twentieth century, nor did they attract the same level of interest from contemporary social scientists. Furthermore, they were less likely—in the age of the telephone and easy transportation—to write letters or keep the sort of personal journals that have served to document the experiences of sojourners of earlier eras. No historical study has examined the long-term impact of white southern migrants on a particular city.

Although spared the vicious racism that plagued black southern migrants, the experiences of white southern migrants share other parallels with their black southern counterparts. In the North, these nine million migrants would transform the racial and ethnic makeup of urban centers, and bring southern regional culture and, at times,
southern regional prejudices to urban centers that were much more diverse than their home communities. Southern migrants typically came from rural areas in which high rates of poverty and few years of formal education were the norm. The South was culturally and religiously more homogeneous than the North and interactions between southern blacks and whites were severely circumscribed by the racial caste system of Jim Crow. For both white and black southern migrants, life in northern urban centers generally required considerable adjustment. Both groups had to adjust to crowded urban housing conditions, the imposed discipline of industrial labor, and the greater cultural and ethnic diversity of America’s northern cities.

Why Study the “Great Migration”?

The “Great Migration,” initiated by World War I, began a period of out-migration from the American South that would continue through the 1960s and beyond. Although the South lost slightly more white residents than black during this period, American historians have used the term “Great Migration” almost exclusively to denote the migration of African Americans. Both streams of migration, however, had significant consequences. This mass migration had an enormous influence upon rural southern communities that suffered the drain of young people, very often the most talented of the region’s youth. The migration process proved to be highly selective;
those who left were overwhelmingly young adults who had more years of formal education than those who remained.4

Historians have long been interested in the “Great Migration” of African Americans northward that began in the 1910s and remained strong through the 1960s. The racial, cultural, and economic impacts of this migration are well-documented as, to a lesser extent, are the experiences of those black Americans who established themselves in new urban centers, often while retaining strong ties to family and communities left behind.5 This aspect of the southern exodus drew scholarly attention from contemporaries, as well as historians. The influx of southern blacks into cities that previously had very small black communities was a striking development. African Americans sought jobs in northern industry in predominantly white, often heavily


ethnic, workforces. Met with varying degrees of acceptance, they added new dimensions to labor relations both between employers and employees and between unions and the workers they represented. Generally, racial discrimination in housing led to the establishment of segregated residential areas, even in the absence of formal legal restrictions. The North, in short, offered black southerners a greater degree of social and economic mobility than existed in the South, although racism still erected powerful obstacles to full equality.

While a substantial body of scholarship about southern black migration northward exists, there are few studies of the migration of southern whites. The dearth of research is all the more striking because white southerners composed the numerical majority of migrants from the South (4,594,700 whites compared to 4,526,100 blacks). Only recently have these white southern migrants attracted significant attention from social and labor historians. Almost completely lacking is a study of the long-term patterns of migration of white southerners and the various social, cultural, and economic effects of this mass migration. What were the “push” and “pull” factors that explain the southern white migration and how did these factors change over decades? What were the experiences of those migrants who established permanent roots in new


communities? This study examines these questions in the context of one city: Akron, Ohio.

Although Akron’s long ties to Appalachia are widely recognized, the city has received scant attention in histories of migration. Its virtual absence from the literature derives from two factors. First, scholars have focused on migration to larger cities, most notably Detroit and Chicago, whereupon they added to an extensive historiography of ethnic and racial studies. Secondly, and more importantly, Akron’s heyday as an industrial city and, concurrently, its heaviest period of in-migration occurred in the first half of the twentieth century. By the time policymakers and scholars discovered (or rediscovered) Appalachia in the 1960s, Akron’s golden age as the rubber capital of the world was long since past and the city was less of a magnet to migrants seeking economic opportunities. The tendency in the scholarship to focus on later migrants has fostered the impression that southern migrants were a desperate lot who had trouble advancing socially and economically. The earlier generation of migrants, such as those who had come to Akron in the early twentieth century, had experiences that were far different from those who came later; their decision to move was influenced as much (if not more) by the opportunities the city offered as by the poor economic conditions they faced at home.

Most scholarly attention to southern migrants in the Midwest has come from sociologists and economists who have focused on the post-World War II era; such studies have documented the educational and income levels of migrants and the
relationship between regional economic conditions and migration rates.\textsuperscript{8} In their 1968 report to the President’s National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, John F. Kain and Joseph J. Persky present this assessment of southern migrants:

The migration streams originating in the rural South form the crucial link in a system of poverty; a system nurtured by the inability or unwillingness of rural communities to adequately prepare their children for the complexities of modern life; a system brought to fruition in the metropolitan area too crowded and too short-sighted to rectify these mistakes. While much of this argument appears to be obvious for the southern Negro migrants, it is important to realize that a similar causal chain explains substantial amounts of metropolitan white poverty. The Appalachian South plays a role for white urban poverty (especially in the North Central region) similar to that which the Core South plays vis-à-vis the metropolitan ghetto. While the southern White does not come up against the same obstacles of discrimination that meet the southern Negro, he does suffer from similar, if not as extreme, educational and vocational handicaps.\textsuperscript{9}

Other studies documented the problems of adjustment and poverty faced by many white southern migrants in northern urban areas. This research tends to focus on the latter half of the twentieth century and depicts a pattern of high rates of poverty, unemployment, and school dropouts, as well as “disproportionate demands on welfare

\textsuperscript{8} Several scholars have examined the relative importance of a host of factors that underlie the decision to relocate; others have investigated the adjustment or assimilation process in destination centers. Almost all of these studies, however, focus on the 1950s and 1960s when the mass departure from the Southern Appalachian region reached its peak and so-called “hillbilly ghettos”, such as the Uptown neighborhood in Chicago, began to attract the attention of media reporters, social scientists, and social activists. There are, however, a few studies that examine the early period of white out-migration from the South, the most comprehensive being sociologist Neil Fligstein’s \textit{Going North: Migration of Blacks and Whites from the South} (New York: Academic Press, 1981).

and public services.”10 Until recently, the tendency in the scholarship on white migrants has been to treat southern newcomers as a group plagued by various social problems in midwestern cities in the latter half of the twentieth century. “Were one to believe many of the stereotypes about migrants,” notes one historian, “the ‘typical’ migrant would have hailed from such a county as Harlan in eastern Kentucky’s coalfields; gone to a sprawling megalopolis, such as Chicago, Detroit, or Cleveland; discovered there shoes, booze, and welfare; and become a public nuisance through violence, fecundity, intoxication, laziness, and squalor.”11 In the eyes of many northerners, all white southerners were “hillbillies”—a label loaded with negative stereotypes.12 They regarded the newcomers as “undernourished, uneducated, unwanted, and unable to cope with a society that does not understand them or their ways.”13

Such stereotypes have led some scholars to compare the experiences of poor white southern migrants to that of non-native born ethnic groups in the United States. Sociologist Lewis M. Killian is not alone in his assessment that “some, if not all [white

10 Ibid., 294.

11 Berry, 6.


13 Bruno, 28.
southerners], undergo the experience of the American-type minority when they migrate to other regions of their own nation.”

The “hillbilly” was the object of derision and recycled ethnic jokes and frequently viewed as a troublesome element in the community. In 1951, Wayne State University conducted a survey of Detroit residents that asked respondents to identify “undesirable people” in the city. Twenty-one percent of respondents identified “poor southern whites/hillbillies” as persons who were “not good to have in the city.” One respondent found southern whites objectionable because they “just come to Detroit, earn money, and go back home . . . add nothing to the city.” Other respondents expressed sentiments such as: “The hill-billy is not thrifty or a help; just a big brawler who cares not how or where he lives” or “They are not permanent residents, have no city pride. They do not keep up their homes so there are eye sores where they live.” A striking finding of the study was that residents less frequently expressed antagonism toward the in-migration of African Americans or foreign immigrants. Thirteen percent of respondents mentioned “Negroes” and six percent cited “foreigners” as undesirable additions to the community. Indeed, the only group

---


15 Clyde B. McCoy and Virginia McCoy Watkins note: “An important consideration in discussing this type of ethnic humor is whether it is truly indicative of the general stereotype held by the urban population concerning the Appalachian migrant. Does it not indicate that the urbanites responded to the Appalachian in the same way as to other migrant groups—the Irish, German, Jewish, Polish, Puerto Rican, and black migrants? In fact, many of the so-called “hillbilly” jokes are simply retreaded applications from a former migrant group to a newer one.” “Stereotypes of Appalachian Migrants,” in *The Invisible Minority: Urban Appalachians*, ed. William Philliber and Clyde B. McCoy (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1981), 23.
identified as more objectionable than poor southern whites were “criminals and gangsters,” objected to by twenty-six percent of respondents. Such general distaste for “hillbilly” migrants is unmistakable in the recurring variations on the joke: “Did you realize that there are only forty-eight states now?” “No, how did that happen?” “All of Kentucky moved to Ohio, and Ohio went to hell.”

This northward migration produced many urban neighborhoods in the Midwest that became known as “hillbilly ghettos.” Yet these neighborhoods were often brief stopping points for new arrivals. When economic troubles in Appalachia prompted a mass exodus in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, blue-collar jobs in the Midwest were readily available. Thus, while many came as a result of narrow opportunities in their home region, there were ample opportunities to transition into the working and middle class and most migrants were successful.

A statewide study by the Columbus Chamber of Commerce found that approximately one out of every three blue-collar workers in Ohio was of Appalachian heritage. For Akron, estimates were even higher. Approximately half the residents of Akron in the 1970s were from Appalachia

---


17 McCoy and Watkins, 22-23; Killian, 98.

18 Chad Berry notes: “Already by 1960, after only a little more than a decade of heavy settlement in the North, the economic status of southern white exiles was becoming indistinguishable from that of their blue-collar white midwestern neighbors.” *Southern Migrants*, 130.

19 Cited in Dorothy Kunkin and Michael Byrne, *Appalachians in Cleveland* (Cleveland: Institute of Urban Studies, 1972), 8.
or had parents who originated there. Other metropolitan areas in the state also attracted significant populations of Appalachians. In 1976 the Council of the Southern Mountains estimated the percentage of Appalachians in various Ohio cities: Cleveland, 13 percent; Cincinnati, 17 percent; Columbus, 33 percent; Middletown, 50 percent; Norwood, 50 percent; Hamilton, 60 percent; and South Lebanon, 95 percent. The sheer number of Appalachians and their offspring in many cities—frequently clustered in particular urban neighborhoods such as Cincinnati’s Over-the-Rhine neighborhood—attracted attention because of high unemployment rates and school dropout rates. Yet often neighborhoods pointed to as “problem areas,” were not ghettos in the traditional sense that residents there remained trapped without opportunities or hope for the future. Such neighborhoods were highly transitional, with new arrivals often settling there, but from which many escaped to working class and middle class suburbs. Indeed, by 1969, the income of southern-born whites living in the Great Lakes region nearly equaled that of the white population as a whole.

Not only have studies disproportionately dwelled on those who struggled economically and socially, they have generally overlooked the generations that migrated north in earlier decades under very different circumstances. Out-migration


22 Gregory, “Southernizing,” 139.
before the 1950s has been largely ignored and few studies have examined white southern migration over an extended period of time. Virtually absent from historical narratives are the experiences of the 1.3 million white southerners who left the South before the Great Depression. As historian Jack Temple Kirby once noted, the “white masses who moved to the Northeast and Middle West have no historians.”23 Only recently have works such as Chad Berry’s *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles* attempted to fill this void. In his examination of the experiences of white southern migrants from a broader historical perspective, he finds that many migrants were successful in adapting to urban life, establishing roots, obtaining employment, and contributing positively to their new communities. For too long, the “urban hillbilly” stereotype has been used to lump together all white southern migrants, when the story is quite different and more varied as Berry documents.24 The difficulties attending a more detailed study of the experiences of white migrants and their impact on the course of urban history are, however, considerable. Migrants, by definition mobile, create few records or manuscripts upon which the historian usually relies and can be difficult to identify in the records that do exist. Yet, the volume of this migration and its importance to the evolution of the working class merit attention; this work attempts to address this shortcoming.


24 Berry, 197-200.
The core chapters of this book approach this subject in three different ways. The following chapter traces the broad outlines of the history of Appalachia and the varying impulses which drove migration from the region in the twentieth century. Subsequently, Chapters 3 through 6 follow the development of southern migration in Akron and the changing circumstances and experiences of southern newcomers through four chronological periods. Chapter 3 examines the first period of migration that occurred before World War I; Chapter 4 looks at the chaotic wartime years; and Chapters 5 and 6 cover the 1920s and 1930s, respectively. Chapters 7 and 8 look at the cultural impact of southern newcomers and the ways in which they became integrated into the life of the community. Chapter 7 looks specifically at the racial dynamics created in the city by the simultaneous arrival of whites and blacks in the city. Chapter 8 discusses the organizations formed, joined, and led by white southerners in Akron as they established roots and began to fully participate in civic life.
CHAPTER 2

“DOWN HOME”

We hope to go back, of course. But you can’t come to the city unless you’ve decided to come. You see what I mean? I’ll tell you how it is: you don’t want to leave because of the strangeness ahead of you, but you know you leave or you near die, just about, and you know your kids might find something in the cities, though God knows what, so you wrench yourself away . . . and soon you’re there. And here we are and here we’ve been for a couple of years, but don’t ask me if I was right or wrong. Do we ever know, any of us, what’s right and what’s wrong? I say no—but I could be wrong, you know. . . . There’s one answer I do believe I’ve found for myself; it’s better for my children up here. In a city you can get some money; it may not be a lot of money, but back there we got no money. . . . I love the mountains, but look what goes with the mountains.

—West Virginia migrant

The region from which Akron drew so many migrants has been discovered and rediscovered by scholars, writers, missionaries, and reformers numerous times. The history of its history itself is a story. There is much unique about the region, but too often writers have done more to perpetuate stereotypes than to reveal the diversity and complexity of the area. Southern Appalachia is far from a homogeneous region and its residents are divided by economic, racial, and religious differences. The region proved much more responsive to change than most writers have given it credit for and its

people much more willing to embrace new opportunities whether they remained there or left the region. The mass movement out of the mountains that occurred between the 1910s and the 1960s, however, was often spurred by necessity more than choice as the region’s troubled economy presented each new generation with diminished opportunities.

A Brief History of the Southern Appalachian Region

Although not all white southern migrants to Akron came from Appalachian counties, a majority arrived from the three major physiological divisions of Southern Appalachia: the Cumberland Plateaus, the Appalachian Valleys, and the Blue Ridge Mountains. The precise boundaries of Appalachia are much debated. Indeed, one scholar has observed that “Appalachia’s boundaries have been drawn so many times it is futile to look for a ‘correct’ definition of the region.”

In general geographic terms, however, the region encompasses the entire state of West Virginia and the mountainous parts of western Virginia, southeastern Ohio, western North Carolina, eastern Kentucky, western Maryland, eastern Tennessee, northern Georgia, and northern Alabama.

Much of this mountainous region was first settled by Europeans before the American Revolution. As the new nation expanded westward, most settlers preferred

---

Map 1: Akron and Southern Appalachia
land farther west to the difficult environment of Appalachia, and those communities established in mountainous areas remained largely isolated for much of the nineteenth century. Only in the years following the Civil War did new in-migration of significant volume occur. The early settlers were primarily Protestants of Anglo-Saxon heritage who sustained themselves through self-sufficient agriculture. Horace Kephart found that as late as 1900 “the mountains proper [were] free not only from foreigners but from negroes as well” and, with the exception of larger towns, the population was almost exclusively white and native-born.³

In the late nineteenth century rapid industrialization elsewhere in the country created new demands for raw materials that soon brought extractive industries—notably coal and timber—into Appalachia. The related demands for labor in these fields permanently changed life in mountain regions. With the rise of the coal industry, the region experienced a new influx of population. Mine owners recruited workers not only from nearby mountain communities, but also blacks and whites from the deep South and European immigrants. The newly-arrived Italians, Poles, Hungarians, and Slavs and southern blacks created pockets of ethnic diversity surrounding the coal towns; on the whole, however, the region remained unusually homogeneous in comparison to other areas of the United States. Even some coal mining towns remained populated

overwhelmingly by white native stock, with only a small minority of blacks and foreign workmen well into the twentieth century.⁴

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, massive changes dramatically altered the quality and nature of life in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, gradually eroding the isolation that had characterized the region for so long. At the same time, the Appalachian mountaineers became subjects of much fascination and discussion as writers “discovered” Appalachia and set about characterizing the region and its inhabitants, strongly emphasizing its isolation and “backwardness.” At the end of the nineteenth century, William Goodell Frost of Kentucky’s Berea College described the Southern mountaineers as “contemporary ancestors” whose way of life had changed little since colonial times.⁵ Indeed, whereas much of the United States underwent rapid social and economic change in the late nineteenth century, the customs, religious beliefs, and means of livelihood found in Southern Appalachia reflected remarkable continuity with those of previous generations. The distinctive mountain dialect was perhaps the most striking evidence of how isolated some mountain communities had been. After spending five years in the Cumberlands, one author came away reassured that Shakespeare’s English was yet alive in the mountains where they spoke “as their

---


grandfathers spoke when they came out of England.” 6  The cause of this continuity lay in the difficult terrain of the region; the most remote mountain communities lacked paved roads, telephone service, and even consistent mail delivery well into the century. As Horace Kephart observed in 1913, “three-fourths of our mountaineers still live in the eighteenth century, and that in their far-flung wilderness, away from large rivers and railways, the habits, customs, morals of the people have changed but little from those of our old colonial frontier.” 7  Missionaries and teachers believed the “southern mountaineer” to be so alien to contemporary America that teachers from mountain settlement schools were sent “to study ‘folk education’ abroad to see how far foreign methods may be applied to the education of southern mountain people.” 8

Contemporary images of the native inhabitants of the mountainous regions of Kentucky and West Virginia—who comprised the largest group of migrants in Akron—were frequently reinforced. Such images were constructed by travelers, missionaries, teachers and other outside visitors to the mountains. Horace Kephart’s Our Southern Highlanders (1913) and John C. Campell’s The Southern Highlander and His Homeland (1921) presented lengthy, non-fictional expositions on the region. Both authors emphasized Appalachia’s historical isolation and echoed William Goodell


7 Horace Kephart, Our Southern Highlanders (New York: Outing Publishing Co., 1913), 211.

Frost’s description of “contemporary ancestors” who were throwbacks to an earlier era.\(^9\)

Coupled with assertions that the region had existed unchanged since colonial times were expressions of dismay that “as pure a stock as we can boast in America” had become so dissipated.\(^{10}\) Among such commentators was an Akron schoolteacher, Emily Harpham, who spent a summer at the Pine Mountain Settlement school in southeastern Kentucky. Upon her return, she noted that despite “being poor and ignorant . . . these people are an isolated remnant of some of the finest stock which has peopled America. . . . The people are suffering because they have been cut off from the rest of civilization. The children to this day are singing fine old English rounds and ballads, some of them dating possibly from Shakespeare’s time.”\(^{11}\)

In addition, Appalachia was a frequent setting for much of the “local color” literature that proliferated in the early twentieth century. The author most associated with creating a national image of the southern mountaineer was John William Fox, Jr. Fox wrote numerous best-selling novels filled with “hillbilly villains and poets; feuding clans, [and] vigilantes imposing order with justice;” works such as *Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* (1903), *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1908), and *Heart of the Hills* (1913) popularized an image of mountain life that proved enduring in the public

---

\(^{9}\) Frost, 311.


\(^{11}\) *Akron Beacon Journal*, 20 May 1922.
imagination. Journalists and other novelists drew upon Fox’s supposed “true descriptions” of the mountains to perpetuate a host of negative stereotypes. Fox’s Appalachia has been summarized as a region of “‘dangerous borderlands’ whose ‘rude and unlettered’ inhabitants feared ‘furriners’ from the ‘settlements’ and shared a common indigenous bent for ‘slyness,’ and other ‘crudities and oddities.’” Indeed, such writings propagated regional stereotypes that bear strong similarities to ugly racial stereotypes. As historian James C. Klotter observes:

The contradictory image of bondsmen as either the loving, peaceful “Sambo” or the violent, hating “Nat” could also be applied to postbellum mountain whites. The literature, almost without exception, agreed on Appalachian hospitality and openness toward visitors. At the same time, however, these families could be engaged in a feud of obscure origins and bloody results. The hospitable mountaineer might lie in ambush of an enemy, or commit bloody atrocities. Instead of “Sambo” and “Nat” came “Abner” and “Joab.”

The literary “discovery” of Appalachia at the beginning of the twentieth century created images of mountain whites that became embedded in American culture. These images were frequently reinforced by other accounts by outsiders who, traveling through the

---

12 Not only was the image of the mountaineer presented by Fox enduring, but the first two novels cited above remain in print. Jack Temple Kirby, “The Embarrassing New South,” chap. in Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination, revised edition (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 40; see also Darlene Wilson, “A Judicious Combination of Incident and Psychology: John Fox Jr. and the Southern Mountaineer Motif,” in Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes: Back Talk from an American Region, eds. Dwight B. Billings, Gurney Norman, and Katherine Ledford (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 99-100.

13 Wilson, 107.

region, found so many to be living in poverty that the region was deemed “economically uninhabitable.”

A second “discovery” of the region occurred in the 1960s—this time by social scientists who simultaneously became fascinated by the unique regional culture and alarmed by the magnitude of its economic problems. This rediscovery was precipitated by two related events. The first was the collapse of employment in mining communities which prompted out-migration from the mountains at unprecedented levels—the effects of which were readily apparent in midwestern cities. The second was the publication of Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* (1962), which drew widespread attention to the insular poverty of Appalachian communities that had become “economically obsolete.” Harrington’s depictions of the America that had not shared in the general prosperity of the 1950s helped to inspire the War on Poverty programs of the 1960s, of which economic development in Appalachia was a major part. The renewed interest in the region produced new studies and analyses by observers and social scientists, many of which echo characterizations of an earlier generation of observers and emphasize considerable cultural continuity. When Thomas R. Ford attempted to characterize the region in the early 1960s, he identified four cultural themes which were particularly

---


strong: “(1) individualism and self-reliance; (2) traditionalism; (3) fatalism; (4) fundamentalist religion containing a powerful strain of Puritanism.”

These qualities have weakened over time, but were clearly evident to observers early in the century. In isolated mountain hamlets, little sense of community was apparent to outside observers; even those more closely acquainted with the region found that the “mountains and the isolation of life in the hills have so separated men and thrown them on their own resources that they have in a large measure forgotten the necessity and worth of co-operation in most forms of human endeavor. . . .

*Individualism has run riot in the mountains.* The individualism of the mountaineer was the most striking cultural characteristic to Horace Kephart who in 1913 despaired that: “Except as kinsmen or partisans they cannot pull together. . . . They will not work together. . . . Labor chiefs fail to organize unions or granges among them because they simply will not stick together.” In their endeavor to improve social and living conditions, the Conference of Southern Mountain Workers declared in 1915 that the first prerequisite for achieving this goal was to engender “a larger spirit of co-operation.”

The reluctance of mountaineers to give up their traditional autonomy

---


19 Kephart, 309.

20 Conference of Southern Mountain Workers, 45.
formed the basis for tensions with industry, unions, educators, and missionaries who penetrated the mountains in the early twentieth century:

Since the mountain laborer still relies upon his farm as his main source of support . . . his services can not be depended upon. To work when the larder is empty and to rest when it is full has always been his economic ideal. Accustomed to do his work in his own way he is quick to resent dictation or interference and with little sense of the value of time or the moral obligations of a contract, will forsake his tasks because of a fancied slight, regardless of consequences to employer and industry. Without disposition to co-operate, he is at once the menace and the despair of the labor union.21

Decades later, outsiders continued to express frustration with the staunch independence found in the mountains. In his investigation of conditions in the bituminous coal industry, economist Homer Morris echoed such sentiments in his observation that the “majority of the miners in West Virginia and Kentucky . . . are slow to learn the advantages of cooperation. . . . Their environment and traditions have steeled them to endure hardship with passive resignation.”22

The traditionalism and fatalism of the mountaineers stemmed not simply from isolation, but from the uncertain condition of rural agriculture in difficult, albeit beautiful, environments. To an observer who witnessed the harsh living conditions in the Blue Ridge Mountains in 1912, farming entailed “a prolonged and fierce warfare with nature.”23 The challenging nature of life in the mountains and valleys of


Appalachia was such that a “sort of fatalism [became] a part of the intellectual and
spiritual makeup of the mountaineer.”\textsuperscript{24} Although church membership in the region
has been historically lower than in the country as a whole, particularly in the more
remote mountainous regions, religious belief was much stronger than formal church
membership reflected.\textsuperscript{25} One journalist aptly summarized the importance of religion in
the region: “To an outsider coming in, it is a source of wonder how universally religion
is recognized in the mountains. Practically everyone acknowledges its claims, whether
he does anything about them or not. Almost no one opposes or deprecates religion.”\textsuperscript{26}
Protestant fundamentalist churches long had a near-monopoly on the portion of the
population who were regular church-goers. The majority of the church-going
population has historically been affiliated with various Baptist and Methodist traditions.
A study published in 1935 found that Baptists constituted nearly forty percent of the
population and Methodists composed another thirty-three percent; non-Protestant
churches constituted only two percent of all religious bodies in the region. Religion in
the region was not only fundamentalist in nature, but it tended to be highly sectarian,
with some eleven varieties of Baptists, nine denominations of Methodists, and fifteen
“perfectionist” or “Holy roller” sects.\textsuperscript{27} These churches have traditionally been small,

\textsuperscript{24} Conference of Southern Mountain Workers, 46-47.


\textsuperscript{27} United States Bureau of Agricultural Economics, et al., \textit{Economic and Social Problems and Conditions of the Southern Appalachians} (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Agriculture, 31
locally-organized, and generally infused with a strong emphasis “on the emotional, nonrational religious experiences of the individual.”

The region’s history and geography produced “one of the very few uniquely American regional religious traditions” with roots that predate the Second Great Awakening:

[M]ountain religion has consciously continued doctrinal traditions of grace and the Holy Spirit, especially by maintaining the centrality of religious experience (from the ordinary to the extraordinary) in the worship life of mountain church communities. The expression of these doctrinal legacies in mountain church traditions remains closer to the conversion and revival traditions of Jonathan Edwards in the 1730s than of Charles Grandison Finney, the “father” of modern revivalism.

Clearly, over a century of industrialization has changed life in the region and undermined much of the famous independence of the mountaineer. Cultures continuously evolve and the Southern Appalachian region has undergone a transformation in the last century. The stubborn independence and reluctance to give up old ways ascribed by Kephart to the mountaineers gave way to a great extent with the ascendancy of coal mining. While there were early difficulties organizing miners in the coalfields of Southern Appalachia, West Virginia later became the most unionized state in the nation. (In Akron, natives of West Virginia took leading roles in the creation

1935), 169.


29 Ibid., 2, 6.

of the United Rubber Workers of America during the 1930s.) Furthermore, the fact that millions of individuals decided to abandon Southern Appalachia to seek opportunities elsewhere contradicts their supposed “fatalism.”

Other characterizations show stronger continuity in the region. Organized religion in the region remains highly sectarian and heavily fundamentalist. Of all the qualities ascribed to natives of Southern Appalachia, religion has left the most tangible mark upon the northern destinations of migrants. Migrants came to establish churches of their own in northern cities. Both the appearance of hundreds of small storefront churches and the more sizable edifices for larger congregations, represent the efforts by these newcomers to maintain cherished traditions and establish roots in their new environments.

Out-Migration from the Southern Appalachian Region

Although there was always some out-migration from Appalachia, it was never of significant proportions until the first decades of the twentieth century. The disruption of a stable, subsistence agrarian way of life was a byproduct of industrialization and created conditions that gave rise to mass emigration from the South, especially Appalachia. Between 1900 and 1960, every state in the South (except Florida) lost more individuals through migration than it gained (Table 1). In the state from which Akron drew so many of its early migrants, West Virginia, out-migration began slowly. In the decade 1901-1910, West Virginia lost a total of 6,200 native-born whites through
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>White Population</th>
<th>Black Population</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>+140,000</td>
<td>-283,000</td>
<td>-143,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>-713,000</td>
<td>-29,300</td>
<td>-742,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>-261,100</td>
<td>-403,200</td>
<td>-664,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>-85,500</td>
<td>-713,000</td>
<td>-798,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>-275,700</td>
<td>-781,300</td>
<td>-1,057,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>-1,059,200</td>
<td>-81,700</td>
<td>-1,140,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>-498,400</td>
<td>-125,100</td>
<td>-623,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>-467,100</td>
<td>-572,300</td>
<td>-1,039,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>-335,200</td>
<td>-779,000</td>
<td>-1,114,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>-765,200</td>
<td>-88,100</td>
<td>-853,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>+18,700</td>
<td>-265,100</td>
<td>-246,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>-749,100</td>
<td>-68,000</td>
<td>-817,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>+456,100</td>
<td>-67,000</td>
<td>+389,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>-4,594,700</td>
<td>-4,256,100</td>
<td>-8,850,800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 1: Estimated Net Population Change Resulting from Interstate Migration of Native-Born Citizens, 1910-1960
### Table 2: Population Change Through Interstate Migration of Native-born Citizens in the State of West Virginia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Net Migration*</th>
<th>Population Change Through Migration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901-1910</td>
<td>+42,248</td>
<td>+4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911-1920</td>
<td>+18,471</td>
<td>+1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-1930</td>
<td>-41,064</td>
<td>-2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-1940</td>
<td>-96,262</td>
<td>-5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-1950</td>
<td>-297,420</td>
<td>-15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1960</td>
<td>-446,711</td>
<td>-22.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


interstate migration. By the following decade, out-migration was clearly increasing, as another 29,300 residents were lost through interstate migration; one the whole, however, the state continued to receive more interstate migrants than it lost (Table 2).\textsuperscript{31} While the rate of out-migration was relatively low during these years compared to later decades, these early migrants established patterns for future migrants who often chose the same destinations. For many, the decision to leave communities where their family had lived for generations was painful. In 1910, a native of the Blue Ridge Mountains expressed the ambivalent attitude of the region’s population toward out-migration: “We hated to see them go . . . we foresaw the depopulation of our mountains and a scarcity of labor on our farms, but our country is better off, and the labor we have left is better, too.”\textsuperscript{32} Even at this early date, the common denominator for many migrants was the hope that opportunities “up north” were better than “down home.”

Much of Southern Appalachia’s population had long subsisted on small-scale mountain agriculture before the introduction of the coal and timber industries forever changed the region. From an early date, observers noted that these extractive industries brought greater benefits to outsiders than to natives of the region. One of the founders of the Pine Mountain Settlement School, located in southeastern Kentucky, sympathetically described the situation in 1917,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{32} Quoted in Dawley, 12710.
\end{flushleft}
Fortunes have already been made in timber in the Kentucky mountains, and the coal-fields just being opened are said to be the richest in the world. There are fortunes, indeed, in the mountains for men who have bought fifty thousand acres of original forest for fifty cents an acre; who have purchased poplar trees, averaging from two thousand to ten thousand feet of lumber, at two dollars a tree; and have bought in trade six hundred acres of land for a little gray nag and a squirrel-shooting rifle. But, even though in his first encounter with the commercial world the mountain man was not shrewd enough to hold his own, the greatest wealth of the mountains is the people themselves.33

Decades later, Harry Caudill more bitterly described the misfortunes of the region. He blamed coal mining for creating “a land of economic, social and political blight without parallel in the nation. . . . Coal has always cursed the land in which it lies.”34

In Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, historian Ronald D. Eller describes the profound changes brought about by industrialization. Modernization and industrialization destroyed self-sufficient communities and gave rise to an abundance of social ills in the region. Residents went to work in nearby coalmines; when employment there evaporated, many had become dependent on those wages and could no longer be self-sufficient. Concurrent with the growth of extractive mining and logging, land that had long been tilled for self-sufficient farming became overworked and gradually wore out. In some cases, land that had been in a family for generations was lost to the coal companies. In a region where land titles were often of obscure old origin, outside speculators frequently used their

---


34 Harry M. Caudill, Night Comes to the Cumberlands: A Biography of a Depressed Area (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), ix.
“greater understanding of litigation procedures and access to the courts” and “other methods of deceit” to acquire such property.\textsuperscript{35} The combination of the loss of family-held farmlands and greater dependence upon employment in coal mining created conditions ripe for out-migration whenever employment in the collieries slumped. The first great outpouring from the coal regions began in the 1920s. As overproduction reduced the number of days worked and wages slipped steadily downward, over 200,000 miners abandoned the coalfields between 1923 and 1927.\textsuperscript{36} Many communities found themselves in desperate economic straits when mining or timber companies closed up operations. A 1934 study of nine counties in West Virginia found ninety-one communities (sixty-two of which had depended upon coal mining, twenty-three that had relied on the timber industry) where half of all families dependent upon relief were those formerly employed by a now defunct industry.\textsuperscript{37}

Opportunities outside the region also influenced migration patterns. The First World War spurred the first significant wave of migration from the South and Appalachia, but developments in the 1920s ensured this movement would continue. During World War I, manufacturers, out of necessity, turned to the South as an untapped reserve source of labor. The disruption caused by the war sharply curtailed immigration to the United States, and immigration levels were deliberately kept low in


\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 157.

the 1920s, particularly after passage of the National Origins Act of 1924. Thus, the reliance of northern manufacturers on southern laborers to maintain their workforces increased. In the 1920s, northern industries not only continued to advertise for workers throughout the South, including Appalachia, but again sent recruiters to fill their labor vacuum.

Concurrently, new economic factors encouraged increased out-migration from the South and Appalachia. During the 1920s, the three major “sick industries” in a seemingly booming national economy—agriculture, bituminous coal, and textiles—formed the backbone of the region’s economy. In the coal fields of eastern Kentucky and West Virginia, falling prices led to the collapse of many coal companies which meant soaring rates of unemployment in many communities since only one or two companies usually operated in a particular town.\(^{38}\) In the rest of the South, a depression in agriculture, exacerbated by infestations of the boll weevil, forced thousands of white and black tenants and sharecroppers off the land during the twenties.\(^{39}\)

The decade would witness the first major wave of out-migration from West Virginia, as the state suffered a net loss of 41,000 residents through interstate migration. Rural counties in Kentucky similarly felt the impact of the decline in jobs in coal mining. During the 1920s, the state lost 144,478 residents to interstate migration, as

\(^{38}\) Eller, 238.

one hundred and four of Kentucky’s one hundred and twenty counties experienced a net loss of five hundred or more inhabitants. Hardest hit were the mining regions of eastern Kentucky where seven contiguous counties in the Eastern Highlands lost between twenty and thirty percent of their total population through migration. 40 The industrial cities of the Midwest were the major beneficiaries of this migration, as the majority of Kentucky migrants moved to the East North Central States, with the largest group settling in cities in Ohio. 41

Ohio’s cities, however, were not the only ones that increasingly relied on the recruitment of southern workers for their factories. Other midwestern cities realized the large pool of cheap labor in the South and Appalachia. Migration was spurred through both direct advertisements by northern manufacturers in southern communities and through personal communications from migrants who had moved north during World War I or earlier. One Detroit factory executive noted:

After the World War, our personnel director discovered that it was no longer possible to get cheap labor in the North even for the unskilled jobs. He was a southern gentleman and knew conditions in the South. He knew how plentiful labor was down there. So he asked his friends in different towns in Missouri and Arkansas to advertise for workers and

40 Merton D. Oyler, *Natural Increase and Migration of Kentucky Population: 1920 to 1935*, Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 395 (Lexington, Ky.: Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Kentucky, 1939), 251-253.

send them up to our factory. These people could do the unskilled jobs all right and were glad to get whatever wages were given to them.42

Moving to northern industrial centers outside the region was but one option for potential migrants. Relocating to find work became commonplace, even within Appalachia. As coal miners increasingly found difficulty supporting their families, many shifted between railroad and mining towns, at times returning to agriculture. The case of Roscoe Ledington is one example. In the space of one year, he first worked in the Blue Diamond Mines in Hazard, Kentucky; when he couldn’t make ends meet loading coal there, he then worked in the timber industry for the winter; found occasional work in the Black Mountain mines in Harlan; and then became a tenant farmer. In the spring of 1930, he and his family were living on potatoes and corn-bread as he struggled to eke out a livelihood from a rented farm with “no cow, no pigs, no chickens, and no land of his own.”43

Increasing instability of employment and fewer working days continued to characterize the mining industry in the late 1920s. These conditions produced tremendous hardship for families initially attracted by the promise of good wages. Whereas in 1925 a miner received ninety cents per ton, the rate had declined to sixty cents per ton by 1927, and to only forty cents per ton by 1929. In addition to wage cuts, miners like Ledington found their work week cut to only twenty-two hours (which


netted Ledington only $17.60 per week on which to support his family, which included a wife and four children). 44

During the Great Depression, many Americans reversed the rural-to-urban trend of previous decades. Returning to the family farm to eke out an existence was often preferable to enduring conditions in the city in the 1930s. This was true of Appalachia as well. Out-migration from Southern Appalachia waned during this decade, with one significant exception. Rising unemployment and falling wages created crises in communities dependent upon coal mining. Those born and raised in the mountains tended to remain there, as did whites and blacks from other parts of the South. The foreign immigrants who had been recruited to the mines, however, abandoned the region en masse. During the 1930s, an estimated seventy-five percent of immigrant families abandoned coal mining and life in Southern Appalachia. 45 Appalachia emerged from the 1930s less populous and less diverse.

For the Southern Appalachian region, long noted for its poverty, out-migration from the region had often been hailed as a solution to its problems. During the early 1930s, however, the return of adult children with their spouses and offspring put further strain on families, some of whom were already reduced to waiting in line for rations of corn-meal. As Mary Breckinridge of Kentucky’s Frontier Nursing Service observed:

We are constantly told by people outside the Appalachian range that the solution for the poverty of that region lies in bringing the

44 Ibid.
45 Caudill, 179.
mountaineers out. Well, thousands have gone out and today their only hope of livelihood rests with their friends who stayed at home. In the mountains there is at least a shelter without rent to pay, and a meager living can be wrested from the ground... It will be seen that the mountain country is having troubles of its own. Is it fair that it should be asked to shoulder the cities’ unemployment as well? The industries which entice labor away from the mountains, and keep it employed through years of clamant prosperity, should help tide these workers over the lean days. But they have drawn the labor out and used it, and now they cast it back upon the mountain country which did not share the prosperity of the city, and which is now asked to add the cities’ unemployment problem to its own struggle for existence against the forces of nature.46

Although poor economic conditions were the major factor for out-migration from Appalachia, other factors fostered this movement. The pattern of “spectacular overproduction of children everywhere in the South” was especially true of Southern Appalachia.47 The Southern Appalachian region had a higher birth rate than other regions of the country until the 1950s, at times more than double the rate of the national average.48 In some rural counties, the disparity between local reproductive rates and the national average was extraordinary. In 1940, the national birth rate in the United States was 73.7 children per 1,000 women of childbearing age. In the same year, the birth rate of women in Wolfe County, Kentucky was 174.3 births per 1,000 women.49 Such patterns meant that the poorest region of the country also strained under the

46 Breckinridge, 423.
47 Kirby, Rural Worlds Lost, 320.
burden of educating so many children; with low tax bases, southern schools remained woefully under-funded, often lacking qualified teachers and adequate buildings. As one government study summarized the problem: “The South must educate one-third of the Nation’s children with one-sixth of the Nation’s school revenues.”

Thus, high rates of natural increase masked high levels of out-migration for many areas of Southern Appalachia. The coalfields of eastern Kentucky, for example, had a net out-migration rate (loss of population excluding births and deaths) of nearly twenty-seven percent in the decade 1940-1950. Nonetheless, the region’s high rate of natural increase caused a population increase of 4,191 during that period. The tendency to have large families, so common in the region, had inevitable consequences. Local economies could no longer support growing populations; thus, many young men and women had few options other than to leave. The impact of out-migration of youth from Southern Appalachia became, at times, so acute that it virtually became an expected rite of passage to adulthood. This trend became noticeably pronounced by the 1960s when, by one estimate, approximately seventy percent of West Virginia’s young people left the state by the age of twenty-four.


No state has more associated with—and dependent upon—coal mining than West Virginia. The only state entirely within the boundaries of Appalachia, economic development in West Virginia was effected by the exploitation of its abundant natural resources. This occurred in the absence of significant successes in developing other areas of the economy, most notably the establishment of a solid manufacturing base. Consequently, the state’s economic health depended heavily upon the demand for coal and the ability of the coal industry to provide jobs; coal mining, however, experienced spectacular “boom” and “bust” cycles which made mining a precarious occupation for miners not only in West Virginia, but in the coal-producing regions of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia. The coal industry provided jobs in abundance in the first few decades of the twentieth century. The bituminous coal industry in West Virginia employed 29,163 miners in 1900, 117,300 in 1923, and 119,799 in 1927. As employment in coal declined in subsequent decades, however, it served to fuel out-migration from the state. Unquestionably, the foremost cause of out-migration from West Virginia by mid-century was the loss of employment in this industry.

Although scholars’ assessments of the “push” factors behind migration differ in degrees of emphasis, most evaluations conclude out-migration was a necessary development in Southern Appalachia. Economic factors, combined with high fertility rates, created a “surplus population” in most counties. Emigration from Appalachia stemmed from diminishing opportunities for employment as soil, timber, and coal

---

53 Morris, 20.
resources were depleted; small-scale mountain agriculture became less tenable; and employment in mining declined due to mechanization in the industry. In the coalfields of southeastern Kentucky, for example, the introduction of mechanized mining in the 1950s caused such widespread unemployment that forty-two percent of the population in 1950 left the region over the next ten years. Indeed, between 1940 and 1960, nearly half a million people left eastern Kentucky—a region that had only 751,000 residents in 1940. It is during this period that “hillbilly” ghettos in midwestern cities emerged and attracted widespread attention.

The long-term decline in employment in mining created the heavy period of out-migration from Appalachia between 1940 and 1970 (Table 3). One study of this trend estimated that approximately seven million people left the Appalachian region during these years and that as many as half that number may have settled in the Ohio. The 1950s were an especially harsh period for Southern Appalachia. In that decade, the


56 Dan M. McKee and Phillip J. Obermiller, From Mountain to Metropolis: Urban Appalachians in Ohio (Cincinnati: Ohio Urban Appalachian Awareness Project, 1978), 1. This figure includes the estimated twenty-five percent who later returned home. The net migration rate (population gain or loss through migration, exclusive of births and deaths) cited in Table 1 makes the population loss less dramatic.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>-137,010</td>
<td>-205,821</td>
<td>-73,463</td>
<td>-416,294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>-60,854</td>
<td>-53,656</td>
<td>+52,446</td>
<td>-62,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>-246,227</td>
<td>-340,876</td>
<td>-146,597</td>
<td>-733,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>-10,543</td>
<td>-14,751</td>
<td>-2057</td>
<td>-27,351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>-94,878</td>
<td>-90,324</td>
<td>-34,861</td>
<td>-220,063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>-77,124</td>
<td>-84,691</td>
<td>-4,485</td>
<td>-166,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>-23,578</td>
<td>-40,593</td>
<td>-3,807</td>
<td>-67,978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>-62,162</td>
<td>-173,871</td>
<td>-45,514</td>
<td>-281,547</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>-69,234</td>
<td>-117,798</td>
<td>-74,133</td>
<td>-261,165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>-204,763</td>
<td>-446,711</td>
<td>-259,528</td>
<td>-911,002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>-986,373</strong></td>
<td><strong>-1,569,092</strong></td>
<td><strong>-591,999</strong></td>
<td><strong>-3,147,464</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3: Net Migration from Southern Appalachian Counties
number of jobs in mining and agriculture declined by 600,000, with devastating consequences for many communities. Although manufacturing would replace mining as the dominant element of the economy by 1960, the rapid decline of jobs in coal mining had effects far beyond those families who lost their livelihoods. When, in an area of twenty-two counties of eastern Kentucky, 16,000 miners lost their jobs in six years, business owners providing goods and services to miners shared in the financial hardship.\(^5\) During the 1950s, for every new job created by manufacturing, six others were lost in coal mining and agriculture.\(^5\) Although approximately two-thirds of the unemployed in Southern Appalachia opted to remain and eke out a living as best they could, an estimated one-third left the region in search of work elsewhere.\(^5\)

The 1950s marked the peak of out-migration from Appalachia. The promise of an improved quality of life remained an enduring magnet for migrants and, the roots established by earlier migrants made the transition smoother for later migrants who received assistance in finding lodging and employment from family and friends in the city. Out-migration was most striking in West Virginia, which lost a greater number, and percentage, of residents through migration than any other state in the nation.\(^5\) In

---


\(^5\) Figures cited by Flynt, 134-135.

the 1950s, the state suffered a net loss of population through migration of 446,711 individuals, or 22.3 percent of its population; eastern Kentucky experienced a similar drain of 340,876 individuals, or 31.8 percent of its population. In subsequent decades, out-migration would continue, but on a less dramatic scale. Long before this time, however, a strong economic bond had been established between Ohio industries and the economically-depressed regions to the south and east of Ohio.

The migration patterns established between the “Rubber City” and West Virginia had as much to do with economic changes in West Virginia in the early twentieth century as it did with the lure of well-paying manufacturing jobs in Akron. Among the earliest arrivals from West Virginia was future president of the United Rubber Workers, Sherman Dalrymple. Dalrymple was born and raised on a farm in Walton, West Virginia, where his family struggled financially. After leaving school around age eleven, he first went to work in the oil fields of West Virginia before moving to Akron in 1903. At age thirteen (having lied about his age to the foreman), Dalrymple was earning ten cents an hour working sixty hours a week at B. F. Goodrich as a beginner in the curing pits. Clearly, proximity to Akron was an important factor that fostered this relationship. Many of the early migrants from West Virginia arrived directly from towns that bordered Ohio, such as Parkersburg and Wheeling, and very

---

61 McCoy and Brown, “Appalachian Migrants,” 36.
frequently those towns represented interim moves from smaller communities in West Virginia. As early as 1914, an editor at the *Akron Evening Times* maintained that there were enough migrants in Akron from one West Virginia city, Parkersburg, to constitute a fair-sized city in itself.\(^{63}\)

Many of the men and women who left Appalachia before World War I were from highland regions in which timber resources were declining, many coal mines were already “worked out,” and poor soil barely provided for subsistence-level agriculture.\(^{64}\) This pattern holds true for migrants to Akron. According to one study of long-term Goodyear employees, the most frequent former occupation of these early migrants was in agriculture (21 percent). The next most common occupation was in the lumber industry (14 percent), followed by former employees of the railroads (10 percent). The fourth most common former occupation was in oil and coal mining (9 percent). This group, of negligible importance in the early years, grew substantially in later decades.\(^{65}\)

That so many of the earliest recruits from West Virginia came from farms is a reflection of a broader trend, as farmers across the Appalachia region abandoned agriculture as their primary vocation between 1900 and 1920. While some left because their labor was no longer needed or they had lost title to their lands, a great many

---

\(^{63}\) *Akron Evening Times*, 28 February 1914.


abandoned farming because low crop yields or low market prices forced them to find other means of support. The most remote mountain farms lacked transportation facilities that would make farming for market feasible, leaving families dependent upon the success of their annual crop. The threat of hunger was an even bigger concern for farmers who had come to depend upon cash crops for their income. A poor year in agriculture often left families in stark circumstances. After a year spent tending to a tobacco crop which netted him a profit of only twenty-three cents, Garland Carl Parsons decided to abandon his farm in Ripley, West Virginia, and moved his family to Akron in 1917. Drawn by work available in the factories, father and, later, son made their careers in the rubber industry.66

A similar story was related by the Hosper family. The Hospers left the farm they rented in the hills of Kentucky around 1920 after receiving a letter from a friend who had come to Akron. For years, the rent on their farm had consumed most of the profits from the crops they grew. Their home had no running water and the children went to class in an “unhealthy school house” that was open only six months of the year where they were instructed by a “teacher who did not know much more than the children.” Indeed, the father later reflected, “We were only ‘hill climbers’ and so long as the boys learned to figure a little and the girls could make biscuits and rock the cradle, that was all that was necessary. It was never intended for us to come to the city

to live a more enjoyable life, or we thought not then.” After five years in Akron, however, Mr. Hosper considered himself a veteran rubber worker and was pleased with his decision: “My wife has conveniences and our children are attending a good school. We are happy and thankful. We have no desire to return to the mud.”

Most accounts of migration from Appalachia have overlooked the importance of the early decades of the twentieth century. Migration began long before mechanization of the coal industry produced massive unemployment in the region. Like later migrants, those who moved to the industrial cities of the Midwest were seeking better opportunities. They should not, however, be understood as economic refugees who drifted aimlessly in search of employment, with little hope of finding any. Migrants in the early decades of the twentieth century left with the knowledge that there were good opportunities elsewhere and were well aware of what cities and industries offered good jobs. Migration from the South was stimulated by industrial needs; manufacturers actively recruited these individuals to come to Akron because they needed the labor. It was labor recruiters and advertisements sent by corporations that drew the first wave of migrants from the mountains. Once they established themselves in the city, they began a process wherein neighbors and family members back home followed as news spread that jobs were readily available. Within a generation, Akron had established its reputation as a prime destination for those seeking a new life and those new arrivals quickly established themselves as the backbone of Akron’s working class.

67 Akron Beacon Journal, 13 January 1925.
The time stars fell on Alabama was as nothing compared to the time the Alabamans fell on Akron. With West Virginians, Tennesseans, Kentuckians, Pennsylvanians, Magyars, Scotchmen and Serbians they rained down on the overgrown town on the canal summit; choked its sidewalks and streets in a living tide of humanity that three times every twenty-four hours rolled in and out of east and south ends; washed over corporate boundaries and spread across the countryside for miles in every direction. In 1910 three out of every seven Akronites were invaders arrived since 1900. In 1920, two out of every three were members of the army of occupation that came in after 1910. There had been, of course, strange portents of the coming of this horde; gigantic smoke signals writhing into the skies; black snow pelting a sooty citizenry in summer as in winter; the mystic stink of caoutchouc [rubber] in heat wafting over South and East Akron; acre after acre of block-long buildings suddenly materializing to add to the cloud by day and the thousand-windowed glowing of unearthly light by night; the roar and growl and mutter as of metal monsters caged in the colossal brick prisons swelling to the mighty voice of a new city.

—Harold and Ralph Wolf, *Rubber: A Story of Glory and Greed*¹

The city that earned the nickname the “capital of West Virginia” was a classic one-industry boomtown. Akron had grown up along the Ohio Canal and had a diversified economy before it became the “Rubber City.” In 1880, rubber was still an infant industry in the city, employing only forty people; two decades later, it was a

---

¹ (New York: Covici Friede Publishers, 1936), 430.
thriving center of manufacturing in which a single company employed 1,200 people and produced 1,500 sets of bicycle tires each working day. During this period, rubber became increasingly important to Akron’s economy, especially after the depression of the mid-1890s which badly hurt other established industries. In the process, what had been a modest-sized town had rapidly become a city. It was obvious to manufacturers that if they were to keep up with the latest bicycle craze, more workers were needed. The question remained: Where would they come from?

In 1903, Frank A. Seiberling, president and founder of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, was busy touting Akron’s assets in an effort to attract investment in his young company. Seiberling promoted Akron as a city with strong population growth and social stability: “The population of Akron is largely German. The town is increasing in size steadily at the rate of about 65% every ten years.” He went on to boast of the wonderful living and working conditions that prevailed: “We have had no labor disturbances of a serious character since 1886, the period of the Powderly wave. Workingmen generally own their own homes, there being no tenements in the city.”

Indeed, Akron offered many advantages for the production of rubber, including “the

2 Akron Beacon Journal, 28 April 1900, 9.


4 Frank. A. Seiberling to Roth & Englehardt, Proprietors, 23 April 1903, F. A. Seiberling Papers, MSS 347, box 3, Ohio Historical Society
availability of clean water, good transportation facilities, cheap fuel from Ohio’s coal mines, and a relatively inexpensive labor supply.”

Over the next two decades, however, the conditions described by Seiberling would change dramatically as the rubber industry underwent rapid growth. The rise of the automobile industry necessitated a major recruitment effort by rubber manufacturers to secure a labor force for their expanding factories. Rather than rely on immigrant workers to fill its labor needs—like so many American industries—the rubber manufacturers in Akron chose a different source and looked to the South and Appalachia.

It is during this period that Akron’s long relationship with southern migrants emerges. The rubber manufacturers chose to rely on imported native-born workers, enticing thousands with promises of the wealth to be made in Akron. The consequences were mixed for both employers and employees. On the whole the rubber manufacturers mainly benefited from the increased pool of labor, although competition for workers resulted in chronic problems of employees who found it advantageous to “job hop” from factory to factory. As for the southern newcomers—especially those from neighboring regions in West Virginia and Kentucky—their ties to Akron remained tenuous during this period. Both through personal choices and industry fluctuations many individuals and families found themselves frequently on the move—between jobs in different factories and between Akron and home. Encouraged to come by promises of good wages and plentiful jobs, they often found conditions other than advertised as

5 Blackford and Kerr, 37.
the employment needs of factories fluctuated widely, with periods of layoffs leaving employees unemployed for extended periods, and grossly inflated housing costs eroded employees’ incomes. Furthermore, while Akron’s manufacturers welcomed the newcomers, local residents viewed their rapidly growing numbers with some apprehension and unease. By the early 1910s, local citizens were already blaming these “hordes” for lowering working standards and wages, as well as causing overcrowded conditions in the city.

*Expanding City and Industry*

Akron’s development in the Progressive Era was atypical of American cities of the era. At the peak period of European immigration to the United States, Akron’s growth as a city was only in small part due to an increase in the number of immigrants. Rather, most of its growth stemmed from attracting new workers from rural America. “Akron is an American city,” noted one observer, “atypical only in that it is more American than most other industrial cities.”6 This unusual pattern of growth was the result of conscious decisions made by the rubber manufacturers. As historian Daniel Nelson has noted: “Akron manufacturers were wary of immigrants, especially those from non-English-speaking countries.” Their concerns stemmed mainly from doubts that immigrants could do the fast-paced, precise work required in the factories; thus,

---

manufacturers relegated most immigrant employees (and African Americans) to the backbreaking, dirty tasks working with raw rubber. Goodyear, which typified this trend, regularly turned down applicants who could not read or speak English, even when workers were needed. The decision to rely on native-born workers to the greatest extent possible meant the city’s development took a path much different from most industrial cities.

Akron’s native-born population always far outnumbered its immigrant population. After completion of the Ohio Canal, a small Irish population who had labored on its construction remained; they were joined in the 1850s by German immigrants, who would be the largest immigrant group—followed by immigrants from Ireland and the British Isles—in the city through the rest of the nineteenth century.

Thus was the situation when Dr. Benjamin Franklin Goodrich established the first rubber company in 1870. More than thirty years would pass, however, before rubber

---


8 F. A. Seiberling to Vincent S. Stevens, Secretary Akron Chamber of Commerce, 7 March 1912, F. A. Seiberling Papers, MSS 347, box 4, Ohio Historical Society.

9 On the opposite end of the spectrum from Goodyear, B. F. Goodrich was the largest employer of immigrants, with nearly 50 percent non-citizens in its labor force in 1917. Blackford and Kerr, 71.

manufacturing became the dominant industry in the city. It was the bicycle craze of the 1890s that spurred rapid expansion of the industry and initiated the transformation from town to city. By 1900, local rubber companies—including B. F. Goodrich, Goodyear Tire & Rubber (established 1898) and Firestone Tire & Rubber (established 1900)—employed 2,098 men and 574 women; by the end of the decade, Akron was home to over a dozen rubber companies which combined employed the majority of all manufacturing workers in the city. The addition of more than a dozen other new rubber companies in the 1910s—including Mohawk Tire & Rubber, General Tire & Rubber, and Seiberling Rubber—cemented Akron’s position as the center of the American rubber tire industry.

Like Detroit, Akron’s prosperity and growth between 1900 and 1920 resulted from the rise and expansion of the automobile industry. As the demand for automobile tires soared in the early twentieth century, Akron’s rubber companies expanded. By the 1910s, the rubber tire industry was growing at an astonishing pace. With the growing consumer market for automobiles, the concomitant surge in demand for tires resulted in a twenty-fold increase in production in the 1910s. World War I further increased the demand for rubber products for military production and sparked the entry of new companies into the industry and a surging demand for labor. According to the Akron Economic Study, the “total value of Akron’s manufacturers grew from $73 million to

### Table 4: Rubber Manufacturing in Akron, 1909-1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1909</th>
<th>1914</th>
<th>1919</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubber Companies in Akron</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers Employed by Rubber Companies in Akron</td>
<td>9,015</td>
<td>17,468</td>
<td>53,806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers Employed in all Akron Manufacturing</td>
<td>15,831</td>
<td>24,680</td>
<td>65,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Akron Manufacturing Workers Employed by the Rubber Industry</td>
<td>59.9%</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
<td>82.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Table 5: Akron’s Population Growth: 1880-1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1920</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>27,601</td>
<td>42,728</td>
<td>69,067</td>
<td>208,435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage Increase in Decade</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>202%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Population Native-born</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Volume I: Population* (Table 47) for the Tenth, Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth Censuses (Government Printing Office).
$559 million between 1909 and 1919. During the same period, the average number of factory workers quadrupled, rising from 15,831 to 64,054. By the end of the decade, Akron was home to twenty-two rubber manufacturing companies and the industry employed over eighty percent of all manufacturing workers in Akron. The pace of growth was so astounding that by 1919 Akron’s rubber factories employed more men and women than the total number of people who lived in the city in 1900.

Such rapid expansion of the industry fueled an ever-growing demand for additional workers and necessitated that employers recruit laborers from outside the city. As early as 1903, the rubber manufacturers were actively recruiting workers from throughout Ohio. In the early years, word-of-mouth news of the comparably good wages and abundant job opportunities in the city was sufficient to draw new workers from neighboring counties and other cities in Ohio. Many residents of rural Ohio were eager to “see about that there ten-to-fifteen cents-an hour wealth they had heard was being tossed around.”


meet the industry’s unceasing demand for new workers. Yet, at a time when many American companies looked to Europe—through advertisements and labor recruiters—to attract new workers, Akron companies focused their efforts on recruiting workers from neighboring rural areas. As Alfred Winslow Jones noted in his study of the industry:

As early as 1914, the rubber companies had drawn upon and exhausted the supply of labor from the city itself and from the surrounding counties even at the prevailing high wages. So the long arm of labor recruiting was stretched to West Virginia and Kentucky, to western Maryland and Pennsylvania, into the region of declining coal mining and agriculture in the southeastern part of Ohio, across the Ohio [River] and even to Tennessee and the deep South.\textsuperscript{15}

The result of this strategy was that, during the heaviest years of immigration to the United States, the percentage of Akron’s population who were foreign-born remained relatively stable in relation to the total population. While the number of immigrants in the city also grew, white native-born Americans composed the majority of newcomers.\textsuperscript{16} In 1910, persons born in other states constituted less than seventeen percent of the city’s population; by 1920, there were nearly as many native-born

\textsuperscript{15} Jones, 60.

citizens born outside of the state of Ohio living in Akron as there were native-born Ohioans.\textsuperscript{17}

Akron’s relatively small population of immigrants is striking when compared to other midwestern cities during the Progressive Era. Immigrant stock (immigrants and their American-born children), for example, composed seventy-two percent of the inhabitants of Chicago; sixty-nine percent of Cleveland’s population; and sixty percent of Youngstown’s residents in the 1910s.\textsuperscript{18} In contrast, the proportion of Akron’s population composed of immigrant stock actually decreased between 1890 and 1920, dropping from forty-four percent to only thirty-seven percent. Despite the immigration of Germans, Irish, and Scots who came to Akron before 1910, and the Hungarians, Austrians, and Italians who came to Akron in the 1910s, Akron remained an atypically “American” American city.\textsuperscript{19} Not only were immigrants underrepresented in the city’s total population, they were evenly dispersed throughout all sections of the city rather than concentrated in particular “ethnic enclaves.”\textsuperscript{20} Throughout the late nineteenth and


\textsuperscript{20} Leon Friedman notes: “In 1920, the American born pupil of American born parents represented 65 per cent of the pupil population; 29 per cent of children had one or more foreign born parents; and only 6 per cent of the pupils were born in foreign lands. Interestingly, these proportions held true in various
early twentieth centuries, approximately four out of every five Akron residents were native-born citizens, and a growing segment of the population was composed of newly-arrived southern whites. The composition of Akron’s labor force reflected this trend, as native-born workers remained in the majority. This was unusual. Native-born workers composed the majority of employees in only five out of the nineteen major industries in the United States in 1907-1908.

This demographic pattern resulted from the job opportunities in Akron, the pattern of labor recruitment pursued by Akron rubber manufacturers, and the economic conditions in mountainous regions to the east and in the southern states. The rapidly expanding rubber industry was the magnet to which young men and women from rural counties in Ohio, neighboring states of West Virginia and Kentucky, and as far away as Alabama and Mississippi were drawn. For a variety of reasons, not least of which was the rubber manufacturers’ labor recruitment practices, these migrants from the rural sections of the city.

---


22 In 1907-08, rubber was not among the nineteen largest U.S. industries. The five major industries in which native-born men composed the majority of employees were locomotive building (51%), boots and shoes (66%), cigars and tobacco (61%), glass (60%), and paper and wood pulp manufacturing (59%). Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the Twentieth-Century Factory System in the United States, 1880-1920*, 2d ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 81.
Early Recruits and High Mobility

The decision to rely heavily on recruited workers from neighboring regions, coupled with the industry’s ever increasing demand for new workers, created a situation for great job mobility for employees. The result was that many of the earliest migrants to Akron moved frequently between different factories, between Akron and other cities, and between Akron and their home communities; in short, they became highly mobile with a great sense of economic independence. With so many rubber companies in Akron facing labor shortages, workers had many opportunities to change employers with ease seeking preferable conditions. Also, because so many workers had only recently arrived in the city, they had few ties to keep them in the community. These employees were often less committed to staying and moved when dissatisfied with their job situation or living conditions. In many cases, employees never intended to make Akron their permanent home, but planned to stay only long enough to save money before returning home or moving on. In this regard, they were like many of the European immigrants arriving on American shores who intended to earn a stake and then return home.

The experience of John William Boyle was fairly typical of early recruits. The son of a railroad worker, Boyle was born in 1891 and raised in the Ohio River town of
Pomeroy. Like many children of his generation, Boyle stopped school after the sixth grade and went to work at the age of thirteen. Before he moved to Akron at the age of eighteen, he had already been employed at a meatpacking plant and worked as a deckhand on a river steamboat. When he arrived in Akron, Boyle initially worked in the pit at Diamond Rubber Company; however, like many new arrivals he found it easy to jump from company to company in order to find a better position. In his first three years in Akron, Boyle also worked for B. F. Goodrich and Firestone before going to work for Goodyear, where he stayed for thirteen years. This tendency of workers to frequently change employment from one tire manufacturing company to another was a persistent and, to the manufacturers, frustrating pattern during this period.\(^{23}\)

By the early 1910s, it was common practice for the rubber manufacturers to seek new employees from all across the country, with the heaviest recruitment and newspaper advertising in West Virginia and eastern Kentucky. Labor recruiters were sent out offering jobs to virtually anyone who was interested and physically capable. The process of labor recruitment can be seen in the experience of Henry Florence. A native of Parkersburg, West Virginia, Florence spotted an advertisement by Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company in a local newspaper in 1911. The advertisement directed potential employees to a local hotel; there, he met a representative of the company who presented him with a card that guaranteed him employment at Goodyear’s Akron

\(^{23}\) “John William Boyle,” Local History Collection, Akron-Summit Metropolitan Library.
facility. Paying his own travel expenses, Florence joined thousands of others lured to Akron with the expectation of high wages and a better life. For Florence, everything worked out according to his plan. After only three years working as a tire-builder in Akron, one of the best-paying (and most arduous) jobs in the rubber factories, he had saved enough money to return home and purchase a farm in Wood County, West Virginia.\(^{24}\)

Although such recruitment tactics were successful in attracting potential employees to the city, the rubber companies remained concerned about their inability to secure a stable workforce. The rubber manufacturers in Akron had continually sought new workers not only because increased demand for tires necessitated a larger workforce, but also to compensate for high labor turnover. Not only did many workers, like John Boyle, hop from factory to factory looking for a more advantageous position, others simply returned home for periods of time. Approximately two-thirds of all employees who quit neglected even to notify their foreman or supervisor that they were leaving.\(^{25}\) Manufacturers experienced constant frustration that good wages were not sufficient to maintain employee loyalty and a stable workforce. In the first two months of 1912, for example, Goodyear hired 2,883 employees, but lost another 1,276.\(^{26}\)


\(^{25}\) Ibid., 78.

\(^{26}\) Frank A. Seiberling to Frank W. Rockwell, 16 March 1912, Frank A. Seiberling Papers, MSS 347, box 14, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.
Factory managers expressed their belief that the problem stemmed from the fact that many new employees recruited from “the mountain States of the South” were simply too “green” and “thin-skinned” to stick it out. One factory superintendent complained:

Out of seven men . . . I would lose two in the first forty hours. These men were thin-skinned strangers, who couldn’t stand the good-natured kidding of their fellow-workers about the color of their hair or the cut of their clothes. They hadn’t the stamina to stick. We give every new man special instruction for six days. At the end of the time his teacher has to back more or less away from him in order to pay some attention to somebody else who has come in meantime. And at this point two more men of the seven would go, thin-skinned ducks who hadn’t followed the instruction or grasped the operation, and felt lost when the teacher let up on his attention a bit; a letter comes from home, or the room and board aren’t just what they should be, whereupon these drop out. Then we have three left of the seven, and if we can hold two of these over a period of seven months and carry the third on indefinitely we think we are doing well.27

Manufacturers in other cities voiced similar complaints about their inability to retain workers. In their study of “Middletown,” Robert and Helen Lynd interviewed manufacturers who had recruited workers from Appalachia when their business was booming. They quote one manufacturer who reported:

In 1922 we were rushed with orders . . . so we had to import some men from Kentucky and West Virginia. . . . These men we brought in from the mountains we called “green peas.” We brought two train loads of them down. . . . We figured it cost $75-$200 to train each one of them, and there was such a demand for labor about town that they didn’t stay

with us. They drifted from shop to shop, and of course when the slump came we fired them and kept our old men.\textsuperscript{28}

Although the rubber manufacturers often attributed their inability to retain workers to an apparent fickleness among their “green” recruits, a significant factor contributing to the high rate of labor turnover among early migrants was that employees faced sharply fluctuating conditions of employment. In the early years of the automotive age, production levels and labor demand in the tire industry were closely tied to the needs of automobile manufacturers, which varied considerably throughout the year. Peak months of production were frequently followed by slacker months during which employees were laid off until the manufacturer received new requisitions for tires. Thus, the high turnover that characterized labor conditions in Akron was partially generated by the seasonal needs of the manufacturers. The rubber industry, admitted Goodyear president Frank A. Seiberling, “employs these men for one season in the year to full capacity and then throws them out on the streets for a period of three to six months hunting a job.”\textsuperscript{29} The fact that employees, under such circumstances, felt little loyalty to their employers was a natural outgrowth of such job insecurity.

Another reason why many of the earliest migrants drawn to Akron stayed only briefly had to do with unrealistic expectations of how far the “good” wages paid by the industry would stretch in a rapidly-expanding city. As the population of the city grew,

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{29} Quoted in Wolf and Wolf, 497.
\end{flushright}
housing costs soared, living conditions deteriorated, and many newcomers discovered that advertised wages did not necessarily translate into an improved quality of life. Such disillusionment often discouraged migrants from staying. The rubber companies did take steps to address these problems in order to entice their employees to remain in their employment. Goodyear and B. F. Goodrich attempted to reduce their turnover rates by offering better wages and new amenities for their workers. B. F. Goodrich focused on improving working conditions and offered athletic clubs (including a track and field team and bowling league), an insurance society, medical care, and free legal advice for its employees. Goodyear launched an even more expansive program. By 1913, the Goodyear offered “an extensive health and safety program, an employee savings plan, a variety of athletic teams, lunch rooms, theatrical shows, and a plan to help home buyers.” Despite such efforts—and even as rubber industry wages came to surpass wages paid by virtually every other industry in the city—employee loyalty remained weak. Thus, in 1916, Goodrich estimated that the annual turnover at its Akron facility was 180 percent.

30 Blackford and Kerr, 71.

31 Nelson, American Rubber Workers, 21.


33 Blackford and Kerr, 69.
The type of high labor turnover among recruited workers experienced by the rubber manufacturers was closely paralleled in coal mining regions of Appalachia. Since both industries relied heavily on individuals drawn away from mountain agriculture, the similarity of complaints about employees coming and going at will is striking. Employee mobility was very common in the coalmines of West Virginia, home to five of the six coalfields with the highest rates of labor turnover in the nation. At one West Virginia mine, for example, out of fifty-eight men hired in November 1904, only twenty remained with the company ten months later; by March 1906, there remained but twelve of the original miners. The reason for such high labor turnover, according to historian David Alan Corbin, was that “native miners” recruited from surrounding farms regarded coal mining as a temporary occupation, a means of making extra income before returning to their farms. During slack times or labor unrest, the farmer-turned-coal miner simply returned home only to reemerge when conditions had improved.

Many families in these regions had long practiced self-sufficient agriculture, but the penetration by the coal industry undermined this independence. The economy of West Virginia underwent a transformation in the early twentieth century that fostered

35 Ibid., 40.
36 Ibid., 27.
growing mobility (occupationally and geographically) of its population. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, farming as a primary occupation was on the wane while employment in extractive occupations soared. During these two decades, the population of West Virginia increased by more than half a million, but the number of West Virginians who were employed primarily in agriculture declined proportionately and absolutely.\textsuperscript{37} Using West Virginia as an example, Table 6 demonstrates the growing importance of extractive industries as employers in Southern Appalachia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1920</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture*</td>
<td>143,685</td>
<td>113,440</td>
<td>-21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining/Quarry/Oil</td>
<td>23,733</td>
<td>102,856</td>
<td>+333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timber**</td>
<td>5,460</td>
<td>11,254</td>
<td>+106%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>8,527</td>
<td>12,435</td>
<td>+46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\* Excluding lumbermen and wood choppers.

\*\* Including lumbermen, wood choppers, and saw and planing mill employees.


Table 6: Employment of Males in Select Occupations in West Virginia

While many of the white “mountaineers” and southern blacks accepted employment in the mines, they did not regard it as a permanent break from their former occupation. Thus, many continued farming as a part-time occupation. “In 1924,” historian Ronald L. Lewis notes, “the West Virginia Coal Association estimated that a

majority of the state’s coal miners cultivated gardens and raised livestock and barnyard fowl. The percentage was higher in the southern counties, where over 70 percent of the miners reportedly tilled gardens and raised livestock.”

The continuation of agricultural pursuits, combined with the independent nature of work in the mines, meant that becoming a coal miner required a less radical alteration in work habits than was required by factory employment. The independent nature of work in mining was even blamed by manufacturers for fostering resistance to the imposition of factory discipline. Experience supervising former miners prompted one author to include “those who have come from the coal mines, particularly the bituminous mines of our country” among the “class of men to be avoided for industrial plants.” The author specifically blamed the impossibility of continuous supervision in mining where the foreman visits “once or twice a day . . . every approach heralded by the echoing foot-falls . . . and the flash from the lamp which adorns every head” for creating work habits ill-suited to factory employment. “Transplant such a man into a factory where production is speeded and no imagination is required to picture what will happen. The ex-miner resents all suggestion as to his working methods, resents all effort to compel continuous application, and assumes in general a hostile attitude to all supervision. The foreman becomes his avowed enemy.”

---


In several ways, the labor mobility patterns in the southern West Virginia mines paralleled those that vexed Akron rubber manufacturers in the 1910s. As rubber workers would move between the various rubber factories in Akron, so West Virginia miners readily expressed to their employers any dissatisfaction with wages, facilities, or treatment by quitting and seeking out a different position. In addition, many workers had a family homestead—of relatively near proximity in both cases—which remained an easy alternative for West Virginians if they found their working situation unsatisfactory. Not only did the farm provide a refuge for escape in harsh economic times, but some West Virginia miners and rubber workers viewed their occupation as a source of temporary, supplemental income, rather than a permanent career, and so took employment for a period of a few months with little intention of staying.

*Economic Factors Influencing Decision of Early Migrants*

Over the course of the twentieth century, the relative influence of “push” and “pull” factors in the decision to leave rural areas has fluctuated dramatically. In the early period of migration to Akron, the attraction of the city was clearly the paramount factor. Here was a city with bustling industry eager to promise them jobs and offer good wages. To the first wave of rural recruits coming from western Pennsylvania, eastern Kentucky, and West Virginia, Akron appeared to be truly the “City of Opportunity” that its Chamber of Commerce proclaimed.
Compared to job opportunities available in these coal-mining regions, employment in Akron’s rubber factories promised to be both more lucrative and a safer way of making a living. The wages paid by the rubber industry certainly appeared to compare favorably to those received in the coal industry. The average annual wage for miners in West Virginia in 1909, for example, was $481.\textsuperscript{40} In the same year, male rubber workers in Akron earned an average of $667, although female employees earned considerably less at only $428 per year.\textsuperscript{41} (Few job opportunities existed for women in mining communities.) Furthermore, the earnings of Akron rubber workers also compared quite favorably to the wages received by other manufacturing employees in the Midwest. In 1909, for example, Detroit autoworkers earned an average of $613 per year; Cleveland foundry and machine shop workers earned an average of $627; and Pittsburgh iron workers earned an average of $614.\textsuperscript{42} The wages paid by the major rubber manufacturers in Akron remained comparably high for decades to come and continued to attract workers from nearby regions of Southern Appalachia.

\textsuperscript{40} Homer Lawrence Morris, \textit{The Plight of the Bituminous Coal Miner} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1934), 153.

\textsuperscript{41} This report also precisely categorizes employees by specific position—the vast majority of male rubber employees being categorized specifically as “rubber workers” (thus, excluding workers in lower-paying positions—such as curers, turners, and stock room hands—and the best-paid workers, foremen). \textit{Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics to the 78th General Assembly of the State of Ohio for the Year 1909} (Springfield, Ohio: State Printers, 1910), 367-79.

\textsuperscript{42} Figures cited in Karl H. Grismer, \textit{Akron and Summit County} (Akron, Ohio: Summit County Historical Society, 1952), 370.
Wages paid by the rubber industry were attractive, but jobs in the industry were often quite arduous and even dangerous. The industry preferred young men since many jobs required considerable physical strength. A key step in the process of tire building, for example, required workers to bolt tires onto heavy iron moulds and pile them one on top another in a heater, a job that wore out even the strongest men quickly.\textsuperscript{43}

Conditions in Akron’s early rubber factories posed many health risks as well. The numerous chemicals used in rubber manufacturing made work in certain departments particularly noxious, as various stages of production involved toxic chemicals. Nonetheless, the wages being paid in the industry were so far above those available in the South that thousands were coming to Akron long before the First World War prompted the “great migration” of the late 1910s.

In the mountain regions from which Akron recruited workers, the greatest source of non-agricultural employment was in the coal mines where workers faced a host of dangers. All coal miners faced unsafe working conditions in the United States, but the West Virginia mines were the most dangerous—despite claims to the contrary put forth by mine operators. According to assertions made by the Northern West Virginia Coal Operators’ Association, coal mining offered many advantages over other forms of manufacturing work and miners worked under more than satisfactory conditions:

\textsuperscript{43} Harvey S. Firestone, \textit{Men and Rubber: The Story of Business} (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1926), 133.
The simple statement that the Bituminous mine worker is one of the most favored classes of workmen has never been denied. The worker is practically an independent contractor with few restrictions or regulations as to the amount of work he must do. There are few compulsory regulations as to time of working or continuous attendance. He works in the uniform temperature the year round of about 60 degrees, and is free from heat and extreme weather conditions of the outside workers.\textsuperscript{44}

Yet, not only were the earnings of coal miners lower than that of most manufacturing workers, they faced serious dangers. The death rate in West Virginia coal mines was higher than that of any other coal-producing state and \textit{five times} higher than that of any European country.\textsuperscript{45} Between 1908 and 1930, an average of 5.49 out of every 1,000 miners in West Virginia died in accidents each year.\textsuperscript{46} These figures exclude non-fatal injuries, permanent disabilities, and the incalculable number of coal miners who would die prematurely from occupational diseases.

\textit{Southern Migrants 1900-1914}

The largest white native-born group to come to Akron in the first two decades of the twentieth century came from Ohio’s nearest neighbors to the south. Akron’s proximity to West Virginia and eastern Kentucky made it a logical destination for these

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{44} Northern West Virginia Coal Operators’ Association, \textit{The Coal Industry of the State of West Virginia: Compiled to Give the Public Some General Information on the Subject} (Fairmont, W. Va.: Northern West Virginia Coal Operators, 1932), 4.

\textsuperscript{45} Corbin, 10.

\end{footnotesize}
migrants. Out-migration of the native white population from these regions began slowly at the turn of the century and the number heading to Akron steadily increased. In 1900, there were only two hundred and four natives of West Virginia living in Akron. By 1910, the number of West Virginians had increased tenfold to 2,075. In addition to recruitment efforts by the rubber manufacturers, word-of-mouth news and family ties fueled this migration and helped lay the foundation for future generations of migrants.

The arrival of so many southern migrants in Akron began to trouble local labor organizations long before the heavy influx that occurred during the First World War. Many of the complaints about the “importation” of West Virginians and others mirrored the concerns expressed by other labor organizations—then and since—to the impact of large numbers of foreign immigrants on the wages of “native” workers. Indeed, the influx of foreign labor had concerned Akron’s Central Labor Union for many years. Despite the relatively small proportion of foreign laborers in Akron, the Central Labor Union expressed concern about their numbers and their effect on wages. As early as March 1906, the Central Labor Union established a committee to investigate the effect of foreign labor on wages and “their mode of living and the sanitary conditions surrounding them.” The committee discovered—in contradiction to the claims made by Goodyear’s President, Frank A. Seiberling, and other rubber manufacturers—that Akron’s working class, particularly those who were immigrants, did not “generally own their own home” and, in fact, tenement-like conditions did exist in the city. Indeed, the
committee uncovered one situation in which fifty-three persons shared one small dwelling.\textsuperscript{47}

In a similar vein, local labor organizations regarded the influx of southern newcomers with apprehension. The combination of the steady stream of migrants from West Virginia and elsewhere with persistent high rates of labor turnover generated conditions unfavorable to the organization of rubber workers; indeed, the rise to dominance of the non-unionized rubber industry actually eroded the influence of Akron’s existing Central Labor Union. In 1907, the \textit{Akron Beacon Journal} proclaimed: “Akron is among those [cities] classed as ‘union towns.’”\textsuperscript{48} The rubber industry, however, would prove resistant to unionization efforts until the 1930s. Disputes over wage scales resulted in occasional walkouts, but these short-lived strike efforts invariably ended with the prompt replacement of striking workers—a feat easily accomplished with so many newcomers arriving in Akron.\textsuperscript{49}

These newly-arrived workers were clearly resented by the established working class in Akron. The constant influx of newcomers was a cause for complaint for many Akron workers who believed they were driving down wages by accepting low pay and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 7 March 1906.
\item \textsuperscript{48} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 23 November 1907.
\item \textsuperscript{49} For example, five hundred rubber workers attempted to unionize in 1906. The manufacturers quickly quashed this effort by burglarizing the union’s office, stealing its records, and then firing all union members John R. Commons, ed., \textit{History of Labour in the United States} (New York: Macmillan, 1935), vol. 4, \textit{Labor Movements}, by Selig Perlman and Philip Taft, 277.
\end{itemize}
creating a new class of unemployed by frequently glutting the labor market. This
oversupply of workers—generated by the rubber companies’ practice of advertising for
workers outside of Ohio—was a major concern for Akron labor organizations. The
Central Labor Union first issued a formal remonstration to both the Mayor and City
Council about the rubber companies’ practice of advertising for workers in 1912—a
protest that came one year before a major strike in the rubber industry in which this
practice would be one of several issues of contention. The Central Labor Union
attempted to offset further labor recruitment by the rubber manufacturers by issuing its
own circulars around the country. The circulars apprised would-be job seekers of the
labor surplus in Akron, explaining “hundreds of men are turned away from the Akron
employment offices each day.”

Although the rubber manufacturers’ practice of labor recruitment was not the
central cause of the industry’s first major strike in 1913, it did ensure its failure. Newer
workers, with weak ties to the city, felt threatened by the seemingly volatile situation
and tended to refrain from organizing efforts and many abandoned the city altogether.
The strike, ultimately led by the Industrial Workers of the World, prompted great
community tension with sporadic clashes between strikers and police and the formation
of a “deputized vigilante group” of prominent Akronites. The five-week strike was a

50 Akron Beacon Journal, 6 March 1912

51 Kevin Michael Rosswurm, “A Strike in the Rubber City: Rubber Workers, Akron, and the IWW,
1913” (MA thesis, Kent State University, 1975), 36-37.
failure that gained workers nothing and underscored the weak bargaining position of rubber employees. With Akron’s reputation as a city with plentiful jobs and good wages, striking workers knew they could easily be replaced by the next wave of recruits. Furthermore, in the wake of the strike, rubber manufacturers continued to advertise heavily for workers in neighboring states—*even when production levels were down and new workers were not needed*. “Over the Ohio border from West Virginia and Kentucky the recruits came pouring; newspaper advertising was redoubled; Frank Bucks were outfitted at the factories and chased south to comb the hills and brush for husky lads and bring them back alive.”

Events of the following summer demonstrated the consequences of such practices. In May and June of 1914, the rubber factories laid off thousands of men and women in Akron (one factory alone laid off between 1,300 and 1,500 over a period of a few weeks). The local YMCA reported that as a result of the layoffs “scores of able-bodied men in Akron are actually on the verge of starvation because they cannot find work with which to earn food or money.”

*Meanwhile* advertisements posted along highways told of “the ideal conditions, easy work, and good wages of rubber workers,” despite the fact that the reality was very

---

52 Frank Buck was an adventurer who traveled around the world hunting and trapping exotic animals for zoos. His published accounts of his adventures, such as *Bring ‘Em Back Alive*, were made into movies, starring himself. Quote taken from Howard Wolf and Ralph Wolf, *Rubber: A Story of Glory and Greed* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1936), 435.

different. A member of Akron’s Central Labor Union sympathetically described the dismal situation in which many new arrivals found themselves:

I talked with one man who came here from West Virginia to get work in a rubber factory. . . . He had only $4 when he arrived in Akron. He left a wife and two children at home. His money was gone and he could find no work and was becoming desperate when I met him. He came here because he read an advertisement for men in the newspapers. The city is full of such men.\textsuperscript{54}

Not all residents of the city were sympathetic to the plight of new arrivals. For residents who already had concerns about the steady stream of newcomers into Akron, this influx became more alarming during periods when there was no work to be had. During slack seasons and layoffs, the presence of so many idle young men was perceived as a “constant menace” to the public safety. Unable to support themselves, local residents feared they might turn to crime.\textsuperscript{55}

Between 1900 and 1914, recruitment of southern workers to Akron underwent a transformation. Initially, rubber manufacturers had recruited workers by necessity, and chose southern workers by preference. By the eve of World War I, however, the practice of relying on recruited workers had emerged as a controversy that would trouble the city for decades. The practice of constantly recruiting new workers had become a useful tactic for the rubber companies. Not only did it ensure sufficient labor during peak months, but it also ensured their firm control over their labor force. Efforts

\textsuperscript{54} Akron Beacon Journal, 3 June 1914. \textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
to organize workers could easily be quashed when there were so many newcomers eager to take a place in the factories. Local residents thus felt insecure in their employment and resentful at the ease with which newcomers were hired. Furthermore, the sheer number of newcomers in the city and the strains they placed on housing stocks and public services made Akron an increasingly difficult and unpleasant city in which to live.
CHAPTER 4
STANDING ROOM ONLY

There was no place to sleep. A certain landlady was known to brag that, owing to the three shifts then in vogue in the factories, the sheets in her house were never cold. Every man who had not made good in West Virginia came to Akron, bought root beer and never changed his collar, if any. The town swelled and smelled. An Akron policeman, charged with housebreaking with intent to steal, put up the defense that he was drunk at the time. At the dance-halls, the men outnumbered the girls two to one. Plain maidens moved in from the country. Cafeterias, installment furniture, houses, beauty parlors and garages built additions. On Summit Beach Lake, slick-haired men-about-town (farmers seven months before) put victrolas and waitresses into their canoes and set about seeing what Life was like.

The city grew as an amoeba travels, and gave evidence of a commensurate conception of proportion and design. It straddled its deep ravines and into them threw its empty tomato cans. With the exception of the older residential sections, it had the feel of a temporary barracks. The one beauty spot was the walk down the valley of the Little Cuyahoga, the open sewer of the town, to the garbage disposal works. I took it often. It was a relief to get a breath of fresh air.

—Don Knowlton, “The City That Blew Itself Up”¹

The most chaotic years of the southern migration to Akron occurred during World War I. The war produced a surge in demand for rubber products that accelerated the already rapid pace of industrial expansion. At the same time, the war disrupted immigration to the United States thereby removing a major source of labor upon which

¹ The American Mercury (February 1926): 176.
many American industries depended. In 1914, over one million immigrants entered the
country. The following year, the number of immigrants admitted had declined to one-
third that number and, by 1918, to one-tenth previous levels with only 110,000 entering
that year.2 With immigration effectively cut off by the war and millions of young men
drawn into military service, the increased job opportunities in midwestern factories
drew southerners, white and black, north in record numbers. As a result of the heavy
influx of newcomers, Akron suffered all the negative consequences associated with
being a boomtown—overcrowding, skyrocketing housing costs, the proliferation of
saloons, and rising crime rates. The city offered newcomers great job opportunities,
but, if they wanted to stay, they had to endure many hardships.

Akron had long had a steady stream of southern newcomers entering the city in
the hope of finding work. What was new during World War I was the intensity of in-
migration. Being a boomtown came at a price that many in Akron resented. The
thousands who came during the war were often seeking to make a quick fortune in the
factories, not to make Akron their permanent home. Most came as individuals, rather
than as families. Having no long-term plan of settling permanently in the city, they
made little effort to establish community ties. The result was social disorder and a
sharpening divide between native Akronites and the “outsiders” who were blamed for
all the problems attending rapid growth.

2 Daniel M. Johnson and Rex R. Campbell, Black Migration in America: A Social Demographic
World War I Opens the Floodgates

It was World War I that sparked the first mass exodus from the South. The practice of sending labor recruiters south, already commonplace in Akron, was adopted by many American industries. Attracted by the promise of plentiful jobs at good wages, many southerners—black and white, male and female—left their homes to seek better opportunities in northern cities. Thus began the population drain from the South that would continue for the next fifty years. Similarly, the stream of migrants leaving Appalachia first attracted widespread notice as wartime opportunities drew thousands more from mountain regions. Even in its early stages, the loss of population had dramatic consequences for many rural communities. One eastern Kentucky tenant farmer recalled World War I as,

[T]he beginning of the division in the people. Before the war these hollows was full of tenants. When this war come up, then work started booming: coal mining, railroads, factories, oil fields, and everything. One man would sneak out and get him a job in an oil field, or in a coal mine. . . . He comes back home every three or four weeks and his neighbors would find out about it, maybe get them a job so they could follow the same pattern.  

Not only were mountaineers leaving for cities like Akron, but increased demand for coal during the war induced thousands to relocate within Appalachia, leaving parts North Carolina and Tennessee for the coalfields of Kentucky and West Virginia.

---


Thus, the process of severing ties with families and communities was begun. Tight-knit rural communities were increasingly drawn into the industrial economy and were exposed to the uncertainties that accompanied it.

The war increased Akron’s reliance on southern workers to fill employment demands. What had begun with the conscious preference of local manufacturers for native-born workers now became the only resource available to keep pace with rising labor needs. Wartime expansion of the rubber industry meant that the number of local rubber workers more than tripled. In January 1915, the local rubber factories employed 16,225 workers; by March 1917, on the eve of American entry into the war, the industry employed 50,363 workers.\(^5\) During the war, Goodyear, which had typically hired fewer foreign workers than other manufacturers, embraced the “100% Americanism” brought about by the war and established a policy of hiring Americans whenever possible and requiring any employee who was not a citizen to take steps to become one.\(^6\) By the end of the war, 13,650 of Goodyear’s 17,000 workers—some eighty percent—were native-born.\(^7\)

\(^5\) Spurgeon Bell and Ralph J. Watkins, *Industrial and Commercial Ohio: Volume II* (Columbus, Ohio: Bureau of Business Research, College of Commerce and Administration, Ohio State University, 1928), 686.


\(^7\) “Study of Methods of Americanization,” David Saposs Papers, Box 21, folder 4, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
For both African American and white southern migrants, the decision to move and the choice of destination were the result of a combination of knowledge of jobs available at specific firms and information gleaned from letters and word-of-mouth news. The fact that a sizable number of white southerners lived in Akron before the war, combined with more advertisements for workers, brought a flood of newcomers to keep the rubber factories running at full capacity. A 1918 advertisement by Goodyear in the *Wheeling Register* described jobs available with the company:

> We are offering steady employment to men between the ages of 18 and 45, for government work and regular commercial lines; our factory operates six days per week eight hours per day on three shifts; we are doing an enormous business both in government and regular commercial lines; piece workers after learning the work which takes from one to two weeks are able to earn $3 and $5 per day and better; we have a housing department which will assist our applicants in securing rooms at the lowest rates. We also need a large number of girls, ages 21 to 35, for steady profitable factory employment.

Through the placement of such advertisements, the influx of newcomers continued to increase. Between 1918 and 1920, between 50,000 and 77,000 men and women arrived from West Virginia alone.

---

8 James R. Grossman provides an excellent account of the various channels through which southern blacks gained information about opportunities up north that provided a basis for decision-making. *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 66-97.


10 Jones, 61.
Akron’s State-City Free Labor Exchange acted as a clearinghouse for new arrivals, directing them to factories currently hiring. West Virginians consistently composed the majority of job-seekers that came to its offices, followed by large numbers who arrived from Alabama and Georgia. For the first time, many of the newcomers to Akron were African Americans encouraged to come to Akron by labor bureaus in other states. During the war, Akron’s Employment Bureau recorded a fifty percent increase in the number of blacks applying for jobs as an estimated 3,000 black migrants arrived in the city. Record numbers of women were seeking work in Akron as well, composing about forty percent of all applicants seeking job placements at the Labor Exchange.11 Despite thousands of new arrivals and widespread availability of jobs, the question remained as to whether these newcomers would help to solve the problem of labor turnover by making permanent homes in Akron. The superintendent of the Employment Bureau worried: “Not only do men come from south of the Ohio river, but likewise women folk, all for the same purpose; to earn a stake and then go back.”12

Although the influx of southern newcomers had already become a source of local comment and concern in Akron, the problems created by the massive influx during and immediately after World War I served to exacerbate local tensions. The rubber

---


12 *Akron Evening Times*, 2 March 1917.
industry desperately needed the newcomers, but the city was unprepared for them. Most newcomers drawn to the city by the promise of good wages arrived to find a housing crisis, unhealthful living conditions, and rising crime rates. Each week, hundreds of newcomers arrived—and hundreds left. Jobs were plentiful, but the realities of life in the overcrowded city could be daunting. Newcomers arrived in a city where housing shortages meant sharing rooms with strangers or living in tents or makeshift barracks. Prices were so overwhelming that many new arrivals never bothered to retrieve their luggage from the train station. Inflation and overcrowded conditions were problems that arose in most American cities during World War I. The changes created by wartime economic mobilization, however, were even more pronounced in Akron. The city’s rapid growth over the previous decade meant that housing supplies and municipal services, which were already overly burdened, would have to bear even more strain. Indeed, both the positive and negative trends that characterize the “boom years”—which are usually associated with the coming of the war and continuing through the economic collapse of 1920—had begun long before the war in Akron.

Having emerged as the center of the rubber tire industry in the United States just after the turn of the century, Akron’s fortunes had grown with the rise of the automobile industry, but the city had yet to sufficiently expand its municipal services and housing base to meet the needs of the thousands of new arrivals. Akron City Council minutes for 1900-1920 reveal countless examples of unpaved roads, unlit streets, unfinished
sewers, and unpaid debts—the last of these incurred as the city had gone from village to burgeoning metropolis with amazing speed. Akron’s population explosion had already outstripped existing housing supplies and overwhelmed public health and sanitation services. After a brief visit to the city, a newspaper editor from Canton, New York, summarized the situation:

Akron is a city in numbers and in volume of business but it never had a ghost of a chance to get ready for itself. The whole thing came with a bang and every one had to run so fast to keep up with the procession that things got down to a question of expediency for the hour rather than permanency for the future. Someone wanted to build a home on a back lot and the street was opened to let him do so.

The ground plan of Akron looks like a badly warped and much askew fish net. Her streets run most everywhere and are called by most any name. . . . Akron is a city of contradictions, of architectural hideousness, of country stores and city blocks. . . . It has marble hotels and just around the corner little wooden hostelries of its pioneer days. . . . Akron has outgrown its city government, its financial resources, its police protection.  

“This House is Rented”

The most serious problem migrants had to face upon arrival in Akron was finding living quarters. For some, the high rent costs and competition for housing were so severe that they abandoned any idea of remaining in the city shortly after their arrival. High prices and inconvenient living situations were in store for those determined to stick it out. By early 1916, the housing shortage had become critical, as

---

13 Canton (N.Y.) Plain Dealer; reprinted Akron Beacon Journal, 28 February 1917.
downtown rooming houses were packing in four or five men per room, each of whom paid five dollars per week for rent.\textsuperscript{14} One surveyor of housing conditions came to the dreary assessment:

The housing conditions in this city are abominable; some places are worse than any tenement district I have ever been in. Men and their wives rooming, three to five families or anywhere from ten to 40 persons in a single house. Such conditions breed immorality and crime. Rent is sky high, and unscrupulous men are taking advantage of the conditions and selling almost anything for homes.\textsuperscript{15}

Inflation of housing costs occurred in cities across the country during the war, but rents in Akron were twenty-five to forty percent higher than rates in comparable cities. Thus, the housing situation discouraged many migrants from settling permanently in Akron. In the first half of 1916, out of the 30,000 men who came to Akron, approximately two-thirds left. Local authorities agreed unanimously that the problem stemmed not from a lack of available jobs or adequate wages, but the housing situation.\textsuperscript{16}

Akron’s housing shortage was severe enough to attract national attention in an article published in \textit{McClure’s} magazine entitled: “Akron: Standing Room Only!” The article surveyed the dismal conditions in which new arrivals in the city were forced to live, even when profitably employed. Not only were boarding houses overflowing, but the author found people living in “chicken-coops, worn-out box-cars, shanties, lofts,

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 23 March 1916.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 23 December 1916.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 14 June 1916.
and cellars.” During the war, Akron’s landscape became dotted with crudely-constructed shelters covered with canvas that housed hundreds of families. Cellars and unfinished lofts were premium rental properties for recently-arrived families, considering the miserable alternatives. Stories abounded of families making homes in any available space. One family made their home in half a hen house that they rented for eight dollars per month, with only a board partition separating their quarters from their feathered neighbors.17

The most dramatic evidence of Akron’s inability to cope with the large influx of newcomers was the appearance of a tent city along the Ohio Canal. The occupants were not unemployed homeless individuals—such as those that would later occupy the Hoovervilles that sprang up during the Great Depression—but employees of the rubber factories and their families. Hundreds of families lived in such tents, some for more than a year.18 Rental accommodations were sometimes even less hospitable. In some rooming houses, landlords adopted the practice of running a “three-shift” room (reflecting the three-shift schedule of the factories), in which occupants shared one room, sleeping in rotating eight-hour shifts.19 In the winter of 1916-1917, of the 6,670 men provided beds on a nightly basis by the Salvation Army, an estimated eighty percent had employment, or were recent arrivals looking for work who—while able to

18 *Akron Beacon Journal*, 16 June 1916; Woolley, 14.
pay rent—could not find available rooms. The housing shortage affected not only newcomers, but existing residents as well. As rents skyrocketed with increased demand, families who had once rented homes found themselves evicted by landlords who wished to convert single-family homes into boarding houses. An investigation ordered by Harvey Firestone found many employees faced by this problem. According to Firestone’s Labor and Welfare Department, there were at least ten thousand men in Akron whose families lived someplace else, a situation that even affected some of its own executives and managers. When suitable family housing was unavailable, employees were forced to send their families to live temporarily with relatives elsewhere. Meanwhile, homeowners in Akron became so frustrated by uninvited visitors knocking on their door seeking rooms to rent that many began posting signs in their front yards stating: “This house is rented.”

The situation was so acute that newcomers could find jobs much more quickly than they could secure even the poorest of living arrangements. Akron’s overcrowded conditions became so notorious that newspapers in other Ohio cities began refusing to run employment advertisements from Akron companies in 1917. Faced with

---


23 Lief, 96.
conditions of overcrowding and high rents, many new arrivals understandably became frustrated and left the city.\textsuperscript{24} The city’s labor paper, the \textit{Akron Herald}, cautioned those considering moving to Akron: “If you can’t buy a house in Akron stay where you are!” Long opposed to the rubber companies’ practice of labor recruitment, the \textit{Herald} went on to explain:

Hundreds of men come to the city in the morning and leave on the evening of the same day for no other reason than that they cannot find a room in which to sleep, yet the money grabbing companies seek to inveigle more and more men to the city on the promise of good wages and fine housing conditions, when as a matter of fact, there is not a house to be had unless the newcomer owns a half-interest in his home-town bank and brings a certified check with him to make an immediate purchase. . . . [T]he city is now flooded with men who ‘shoot at the moon’ in naming the sale price of a shack that ordinarily would be condemned as unfit for habitation in any community where morality and good health were considered. . . .

Workingmen cannot long continue to do good and satisfactory work when they have not time or place in which to secure proper rest, food and recreation. Nor can men, who have reared families and aimed to maintain homes conceive of the absolute indecency of having their sons and daughters jammed into one common bedroom, that they may barely eke out a living and pay the highbinder’s price for property in this city.\textsuperscript{25}

The \textit{Herald’s} view that fairness dictated that potential newcomers deserved some warning of conditions in the city was echoed in other quarters. Wages that sounded unbelievably generous compared to those paid by southern industries would often not translate into an improved quality of life in Akron.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 23 February 1917.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Akron Herald}, 2 May 1919.
The housing shortage became so severe that it discouraged families from moving to the city as a unit—and this separation created further problems. Most male newcomers were either single or married men who had left their families behind until they could obtain suitable housing. As affordable housing was difficult, if not impossible, to come by, the situation was intolerable for many workers. By 1919, between 8,000 and 10,000 married men lived in Akron, while supporting families back home. This separation was not only difficult emotionally for those involved, but entailed the burden and expense of maintaining two households. Firestone’s employee newspaper included news of employee visits with family back home and reveals how commonplace separation was. To cite one typical item: “Red Evans paid a visit to Wheeling a few days ago. He brought the news back that he was the father of a fine baby girl. The next time he visits his home we suspect that he will be wheeling the baby.” Many never did find housing adequate to bring their families to the city; thus, many families were separated for years. The situation encouraged frequent moves back and forth between Akron and “home;” often workers left for prolonged visits home before returning, confident that they could quickly secure another job. Such attitudes increased the rubber manufacturers’ labor turnover problem. The president of Akron’s Chamber of Commerce summarized the response of most newcomers as: “We like the

---

26 Firestone, 245.

27 Akron Beacon Journal, 19 October 1916.

28 Firestone Non-Skid, April 1917, University of Akron Archives.
company, like its policy, like the working conditions, like the wages, but WE CAN’T LIVE IN AKRON. We haven’t any place to house our families.”29 Similarly, the Akron Evening Times concluded, “No matter how alluring the wages or the conditions of labor, the man of family cannot be expected to tarry long in a position which precludes his enjoyment of the one thing which inspires his labors—the wife and the children.”30

While finding housing could be difficult for men (with or without a family), the situation for women who arrived during the boom was even worse. Akron’s housing shortage was most acute for single women who had come to Akron on their own. In 1917, the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) decided to investigate the local housing situation and discovered that most landlords were reluctant to rent to women: “Most of the boarding houses wanted men only—they had the money to spend and they weren’t much trouble.”31 One landlady explained that she preferred male tenants because female boarders were too quick to complain about unheated rooms and the shortage of bathing facilities.32 With rents high and few boarding houses open to women, many young women who came to Akron found they had no place to stay. While the YWCA offered accommodations for some women, it lacked the space to

29 Akron Beacon Journal, 16 November 1916.
30 Akron Evening Times, 28 April 1919.
31 Akron Evening Times, 23 February 1917; Wolf and Wolf, 442.
house all the women who needed to rent a room. The organization received dozens of reports of young women who had resorted to staying in the waiting room at the railroad station or sleeping in chairs in public buildings.33

Thus, compared to male migrants, women who arrived in Akron found themselves in an even more frustrating situation. As in most industries, female employees were paid less than men, regardless of their job category.34 Half of all female rubber workers earned less than eight dollars a week, well below the estimated twelve to fifteen dollars a week necessary to live comfortably in the city.35 “So few were those [boarding houses] accepting girls that when one attained admission she had to share cramped quarters with two or three others and still pay seven or eight dollars a week.”36 Thus, some women found the only affordable living units available to them were in Akron’s red light district. Although morally in favor of eliminating the district, even local clubwomen believed that it was not advisable to do so before other accommodations could be created for single women who, having few alternatives, would otherwise be thrown out into the street. Unless the city took action to provide

33 Akron Evening Times, 7 June 1919.

34 For example, John D. House wrote of being a new employee in one department: “On one of my several assignments in the inner tube department I worked alongside a female employee, doing practically the same kind of work she was doing. I received 10¢ an hour more than she did even though she was more proficient.” John D. House Manuscript, MIC 138, Ohio Historical Society.


36 Wolf and Wolf, 442.
clean and affordable housing for single women, clearing out the red light district would unfairly burden “good girls who had come to Akron to work [and] had to go down there simply to find a place to room because there was no other place open to them.”

The failure to cope with the housing shortage became a source of embarrassment for the city. In an editorial entitled “Thankful, But Do We Deserve It?” the editor of the *Akron Beacon Journal* decried the fact that—despite its great growth and material prosperity—Akron had become a city cursed with deplorable housing conditions, high rents, and declining living standards. Newcomers to the city were “left alone till they either blundered into some solution for themselves, went to the street and the saloon for human companionship and comfort, or gave up the struggle and went back to their home town.”

The conditions in Akron also attracted notice in newspapers across the country, particularly in regions from which the rubber manufacturers had regularly recruited workers. The *Wheeling Majority* informed its readers of conditions in the city. Advising those considering seeking work in Akron of the lack of housing and high cost of living, the newspaper warned:

> It is a town of boarders and roomers. It is 85 per cent male, young men lured from the farms of Ohio and adjoining states, unmarried men with their homes in their suit cases, married men who cannot send for their families until they acquire a nest egg and locate a nest—all this explains the great preponderance of men folks. Almost all families have


boarders; some simply to accommodate their relatives or friends, many from a money-hunger that destroys within them all love for the sweet privacy of a family life. It is common to find the wife and husband both working in the factories, their children left to the occasional “dropping-in” of a neighbor, or shifting entirely for themselves.

The real estate inflation has permeated into all other lines of business. Basement store rooms abound, in cellars, where the proprietors pay huge rents for what was once a rubbish storage, or under the sidewalks where they pay huge rents to men who originally had nothing but a permit from the city. Transfer men overcharge for hauling baggage, taxi proprietors have abolished the meter system, store keepers have cut out both extending credit and making deliveries. Nearly everybody has got the get-rich-quick fever, and the commonest topic of conversation is of how much money how many people make in how little time.\textsuperscript{39}

Although the claim that the wartime city was “85 per cent male” was certainly an exaggeration, it wasn’t a \textit{gross} exaggeration. Men greatly outnumbered women in Akron. According to the 1920 U.S. Census, Akron had 138.9 men for every 100 women—the largest imbalance of men to women of any major city in the United States.\textsuperscript{40}

Many of the workers drawn to Akron by the promise of high wages found living under such conditions to be intolerable. Thus, many migrants left after a short period of time. Indeed, one company reported hiring 642 new employees during one week of 1916, only to have another 652 quit.\textsuperscript{41} The short tenure in Akron of many migrants

\textsuperscript{39} Reprinted in \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 3 September 1917.

\textsuperscript{40} Of the U.S. cities with a 1920 population of 100,000 or more, Akron’s sex ratio was, \textit{by far}, the mostly badly out of balance. Not surprisingly, due to its similar growth pattern, Detroit came in second with 119.1 men for every 100 women. United States Bureau of the Census, \textit{Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920}, Volume II, \textit{Population} (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1921), 115.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 16 November 1916.
means that most left little record of their experiences or reactions to the city. Such was almost the case with Harry (“Hal”) Hosterman. Hal Hosterman was the son of a lumberman who moved his family around various West Virginia timber sites; like his father, Hosterman was highly mobile as a young man, always seeking better employment. Born in 1894, as a child he lived mostly in the vicinity of Pocahontas County, West Virginia. The idea of moving to Akron may have occurred to Hosterman at an early age. When Hosterman was about nine years old, he received his first impression of what Akron was like from a calendar that hung in his family’s kitchen. The calendar depicted Akron as a tropical paradise, featuring a picture of an alligator sunbathing on a beautiful beach—behind this idyllic beach loomed a B. F. Goodrich factory. Accustomed to moving as a boy, Hosterman moved with his family to Elkins, West Virginia, when he was fifteen, and took a job in Parkersburg at age nineteen. In 1916, he met a recruiter from B. F. Goodrich and quickly accepted the offer of a job. Moving to Akron at the age of twenty-two, he was mature enough to know that Akron was no paradise, but still felt a certain curiosity about the city that was attracting so much attention. After only two weeks at B. F. Goodrich, Hosterman realized that the thirty-five cents an hour he earned in Akron would not go as far as he had anticipated and so quit his job and left, only to return to Akron when offered better employment in a different line of business.42

42 “Harry Leo Hosterman” undated “Biography in Brief” from the Akron Beacon Journal found in the Local History Collection, Akron-Summit Metropolitan Library.
The desperate housing situation in the city was a substantial factor in the inability of the rubber manufacturers to keep the workers they needed and labor turnover was very costly to companies. The cost of hiring and training an employee—and then having to replace him or her—was between fifty and eighty dollars.\textsuperscript{43} Alleviating the housing shortage, they hoped, would reduce the staggering level of turnover. To this end, Firestone scrambled to provide makeshift temporary housing and started a home building program at Firestone Park for its employees (Goodyear had begun construction on Goodyear Heights in 1912).\textsuperscript{44} The Firestone development built one thousand new houses in its first four years alone. In these housing developments, employees could purchase homes for about $3,800 with small down payments and monthly payments lower than rental payments in most parts of the city.\textsuperscript{45} While more single-family dwellings promised a long-term solution for Akron’s housing shortage, a lack of available houses or rooms to rent remained an enormous problem for wartime migrants, even if one had adequate funds. At a minimum, eight thousand additional houses needed to be built to alleviate the housing shortage.\textsuperscript{46} Goodyear tried to ease the situation for its workers by creating its own housing bureau

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{43} Akron Beacon Journal, 30 May 1917. \\
\textsuperscript{44} Harvey S. Firestone, Men and Rubber: The Story of Business (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1926), 245. \\
\textsuperscript{45} Davenport, 408; Akron Beacon Journal, 14 March 1917. \\
\textsuperscript{46} Woolley, 14. 
\end{flushleft}
that assisted new employees in finding living accommodations and encouraging its employees to provide addresses of any property available for rent or purchase.\textsuperscript{47} When such efforts failed to solve the problem, the rubber companies resorted to providing lodging for some 1,500 workers in temporary “barn-like structures to house hundreds of their own newly recruited men” where “little was provided in the way of comfort, privacy, or convenience.”\textsuperscript{48} Although Goodrich never launched a home-building program, it did consider two options for easing the housing shortage for its employees. The first was to follow the pattern of Goodyear and Firestone by launching a company housing program; the second was to simply move operations out of the city to a cheaper labor market. Neither plan was adopted. Company housing, it was decided, would be too expensive; furthermore, the company believed that its employees would not truly appreciate the modern amenities of new homes. (Goodrich’s plant manager reasoned: “[I]f you provided these people with the type of houses I understand are being planned for them . . . you would probably find their coal supply in the bath tub, and a lot of things of that nature.”) Moving operations out of the city was also rejected as too costly.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Goodyear Wingfoot Clan}, 14 March 1917.

\textsuperscript{48} Leon Friedman, “The Matter of Racial Imbalance: A History of Pupil Attendance and Pupil Housing in the Public Schools of Akron, Ohio” (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1968), 103.

No housing program managed to overcome the urgent problem of housing shortages and, thus, problems of labor turnover persisted. Miller Rubber Company reported that in 1918 it hired 10,742 new workers—out of which 9,433 quit within a year. The existence of “tent cities” filled with employed workers best demonstrates how the city’s magnetic prosperity was a mixed blessing. As thousands flocked to the rubber factories, the overgrown town reeled under the extra pressure. Local papers were agreed in their assessment. “If one could give accurate figures on the number of desirable workers who have come to Akron within the past few years, worked a while and given up the struggle, for the lack of a place to bring their families,” lamented the Akron Evening Times, “the material and social loss disclosed in the total would be astounding.” The Akron Beacon Journal assessed the city’s situation even more bluntly: “Our housing conditions are damnable. They are a menace to growth, prosperity, sanity.”

City of Problems

To many residents who witnessed Akron’s evolution from a small town to a growing city and booming manufacturing center, the changes that accompanied rapid urbanization were not entirely welcome. Increasing congestion and growing numbers

50 Akron Evening Times, 28 April 1919.
51 Akron Evening Times, 14 February 1919.
of transients appeared to be byproducts of all the newcomers. Quality of life deteriorated and living conditions became increasingly unhealthy in Akron in the early twentieth century. Most streets remained unpaved and “sewer privies” were common, especially in working class neighborhoods. As late as 1915, Akron had no municipal program for the collection or disposal of garbage; thus, “more or less officially recognized” dumps existed throughout the city. Business streets were unpaved in places and residential ones were almost never paved. Furthermore, the streetcar system was designed when Akron was a much smaller city. In the year 1916 alone, twenty thousand new workers moved to the city bringing three thousand school-age children with them. In Akron’s schools, spending per pupil fell far below the national average for a city its size, and the “migratory” nature of the student population was to the detriment of the educational system. All of these problems were evidence that the city had outgrown itself. With the city unable to cope with the magnitude of population growth, the ordinary problems associated with urban life intensified.

---


54 Akron Beacon Journal, 2 May 1919.

55 Woolley, 13.

Akron’s growth was accompanied by an increase in disease and infant mortality rates. Many neighborhoods, particularly those surrounding the factory districts, experienced sharply elevated rates of infant death. With prostitution on the rise, the number of reported cases of venereal disease rose alarmingly. Akron accounted for thirty-one percent of all venereal disease cases reported in the state, far exceeding the number of cases reported in the more populous cities of Cleveland and Cincinnati.57 These trends resulted from both the city’s overcrowded conditions and its woefully under-funded City Health Department. A study conducted by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor found that although “the American Public Health Association set the minimum per capita appropriation required for a city health department at 50 cents. The per capita expenditure for public health in Akron during 1913 was less than 13 cents.”58 The influx of newcomers and overcrowded conditions during World War I only made matters worse. Already higher than most cities of comparable size when the United States entered the war in the spring of 1917, Akron’s infant mortality rate increased during the war.59

The under-funded Health Department was but one city agency that had failed to keep pace with the city’s rapid population growth. Like the Health Department, other public services were so inadequate to meet the city’s needs that they put residents at

57 Akron Evening Times, 18 July 1919.
58 Brittain, 56.
59 Goodyear Wingfoot Clan, 11 March 1916; Halley, 15.
risk. This was particularly true of the fire department. Despite the fact that the city’s population had tripled, the fire department had the same-sized force and equipment in 1917 as it had in 1908 when Akron had only 65,000 residents.\textsuperscript{60} Only in 1920 did the city increase the budgets of city departments (including health, police, and fire departments) to allow for a significant increase in their number of employees.\textsuperscript{61}

As crime rates rose, the inadequacy of the city’s police force became a primary concern. Despite public clamor for more police officers, the city lacked the resources to meet the need. During the hustle and bustle of the war years, crime rates increased dramatically. The \textit{Akron Beacon Journal} warned: “If we do not look out Akron will be one of the most notorious cities in the United States not because it has grown rapidly but because of the evil conditions obtaining here.”\textsuperscript{62} The public perception of a crime wave sweeping the city was not simply a reflection of wartime anxiety, but was founded in reality. Historian John W. Hevener calculated that Akron’s murder rate increased a staggering 457 percent between 1914 and 1920. Even if the city’s rapid population growth (202 percent between 1910 and 1920) is taken into account, the murder rate still rose alarmingly.\textsuperscript{63} Similarly, the number of cases of criminal assaults against women

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{60}] \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 10 May 1917.
\item[\textsuperscript{61}] \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 4 September 1920.
\item[\textsuperscript{62}] \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 14 June 1920.
\item[\textsuperscript{63}] John Hevener, “Appalachians in Akron, 1914-1945: The Transfer of Southern Folk Culture,” TMs [photocopy], p. 6, Box 17, John Hevener Papers, Southern Appalachian Archives, Special Collections, Berea College.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
and girls skyrocketed. In the two-year period between 1917 and 1919, the city recorded more assaults against women than in its previous fifty-year history.\textsuperscript{64}

While local papers frequently printed complaints about all the newcomers invading the city and causing problems, the experiences of specific individuals and families rarely were reported unless to note that an individual arrested for a crime was an “outsider.” The rising crime rate was frequently blamed on undesirable elements drawn to the booming city. Despite the association in the public mind between rising murder rates and southern newcomers, there is little evidence that southerners were the source of trouble. Of those newspaper accounts that reported the accused perpetrator’s race or place of origin, Hevener found that only three percent were southern-born whites (thirteen percent were foreign-born whites and twelve percent were African Americans).\textsuperscript{65} B. F. Goodrich executive C. P. Ufford observed that those brought to Akron “at the solicitation of the factories” were on the whole a good group. The situations in which most were forced to live, however, created conditions ripe for criminal activity. “[M]any of them are living in kennels that some people would not permit their pet poodle to live in. They are without their families, a great many of them.” The housing situation he concluded—“and nothing else”—had driven many to crime.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Akron Evening Times}, 30 July 1919.

\textsuperscript{65} Hevener, 7. Unfortunately, newspapers were inconsistent in reporting such information making estimates unreliable.

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Akron Evening Times}, 13 April 1920.
Stories of the struggles and hardships faced by newcomers were sometimes front-page news. Frequently, brief columns related minor incidences they encountered. For example, the lack of preparedness with which some newcomers arrived to face the blustering chill of winter in northeast Ohio was written about with humorous undertones—such as the story of a teenage boy fresh from Tennessee, who arrived in January without a coat, stole one from a boarding house, and promptly landed himself in jail. Other stories recounted the success and accomplishments of new arrivals. Thus, the *Beacon Journal* reported the story of Wilbur Spurlin and his wife who lost their small Texas farm to foreclosure and came to Akron in 1916 with five children and only seven dollars to their name. Arriving in February, three of their children were barefooted; all were unsuitably clad for a northern winter. Akron’s Charity Organization Society responded with emergency clothes and shoes and found the family a two-room apartment. Wilbur Spurlin soon found a job at the Firestone factory and was promoted shortly thereafter. Tragedy, however, soon struck. Within months of their arrival, the two youngest children died. The story of this particular family might have been lost amongst thousands of similar tales, but the Spurlin family received notice as a success story. One year later, they owned two adjoining lots on which the family built a house and the family had repaid local charities for the assistance they had been provided.

---


In addition to problems finding shelter, new arrivals sometimes encountered other difficulties. Thieves, con artists, and pranksters targeted new arrivals as easy marks. Such was the misfortune of Charles McGavin of Wheeling, West Virginia. When he arrived in Akron, McGavin had $190 with him to tide him over until he found employment. He was promptly stripped of his savings, however. On the pretense of taking him to an affordable boarding house, a thief lured him into a side street where accomplices helped to rob him at gun point. Another new arrival with dreams of making it big in the rubber industry also quickly lost his savings. Arriving from Murfreesboro, Tennessee, seventeen-year-old William Haynes was enticed to join a poker game by card sharks who soon parted him from most of the $500 he had brought with him.

One problem that faced newcomers was the process of becoming integrated to the new community. Many newcomers regarded their stay in Akron as a temporary situation during the war and so had little incentive to establish ties in the community. Attending the movies and visiting saloons were the favorite leisure activities for workers, but local residents were dismayed at how their city was changing. Indeed, many Akron citizens believed that finding a solution to the housing crisis was critical in order to maintain community virtue; the crowded living conditions of most boarding

---

69 Akron Evening Times, 14 March 1917.

houses were viewed as breeding grounds for vice. Among the social ills attributed to the housing shortage were “divorce increase, juvenile delinquency, and immorality.” “Thousands of young married people, attracted here by spreading rumors of Akron’s unlimited prosperity,” noted Judge E. D. Fritch, “find temptation waiting for them and their easily earned money.”

Akron’s domestic relations court judge, H. C. Spicer, echoed this sentiment, noting that men “are prone to go wrong when they come to Akron to work and fail to find homes here to which to bring their families. They are very apt to become entangled in affairs with young girls or else take to gambling or drinking.” He continued, “Anything that will encourage more home building in Akron will encourage morality and the permanency of marriage.” The proliferation of boarding houses was specifically cited as being a detriment to stable families, since they supposedly encouraged infidelity. Furthermore, away from the watchful eyes of parents, often for the first time, many young people took advantage of the greater freedom they had in the city. In some cases, the consequences were tragic and horrifying. Nineteen-year-old Clara Marr arrived from her parents’ farm in West Virginia in 1918 and got a job at the Goodyear factory. After she gave birth to a child out of wedlock she stabbed the

---

71 Akron Evening Times, 9 July 1920.

72 Akron Evening Times, 11 April 1920.
newborn three times and cut its throat. Later, she explained to police detectives, “I didn’t want mother and daddy to know the things I have done in Akron.”

The families of migrants were placed under great strain by the physical separation often imposed by housing shortages. Marriages frequently became casualties of wartime separation. Akron’s domestic relations court began receiving a record number of divorce petitions. “It used to be that only one marriage in ten, in Summit county, went on the rocks,” noted Judge Fritch. “Now . . . about one marriage in five is a failure.” The root of the problem, explained another judge, was “Akron’s floating population . . . men come here from various states, particularly West Virginia and Pennsylvania, to work in the factories, leaving their families in their home towns. Having established a residence here and found cause for divorce they file their petitions in Akron courts.” In some cases, the legal formalities of divorce were simply discarded by those who had left families behind; although he had a wife back home in Kentucky, W. O. Kirkland, claimed he was single and married again.

The fact that many newcomers had no roots in the community (and thus were less likely to be concerned about the welfare of the city) troubled community leaders. The president of Goodyear, F. A. Seiberling, worried of the “tendency in Akron . . . to

73  *Akron Evening Times*, 11 August 1919.

74  *Akron Evening Times*, 9 July 1920.

75  *Akron Evening Times*, 6 April 1920.

76  *Akron Evening Times*, 16 April 1919.
an excess of single men. That is because married men cannot find homes here for their families. Too often the single man is a floater. He is here today and tomorrow in Detroit and the next day in Pittsburg.”

To combat this problem, following the lead of the state legislatures in New Jersey and West Virginia, Akron’s city council adopted an anti-loafing ordinance in 1918. The law was justified as a wartime measure, designed to put all able-bodied men to work, but was motivated by concerns over the city’s rising crime rates. The ordinance required “every able-bodied male resident of the City of Akron between the ages of 18 and 50 years . . . to be regularly engaged in some lawful business profession, occupation or employment . . . at least 36 hours per week.” The law exempted students and those with physical disabilities, but, otherwise, men who were unable to provide evidence of employment were to be deemed “vagrants” and subject to a fine for the first offense, and a jail sentence of up to sixty days for subsequent violations. As the law functioned, it gave Akron police the authority to “run in street loafers, the pool room hanger-on . . . all young men who were not pretending to do any work.”

As in many other boomtowns, saloons and taverns proliferated in Akron, but other avenues for social gatherings were limited for newcomers. This situation was a concern for local ministers who noted that “young men had a social life among their

---

77 Akron Evening Times, 28 March 1917.

78 Akron Beacon Journal, 20 April 1918; 23 April 1918.
own kind where they had lived. They come here and find no social life open to them . . . they are barred from the home life of the community.” Members of the Goodyear Industrial Assembly similarly expressed concern about the lack of interest migrants had in becoming involved in community activities or joining a church. “Too many people who come to Akron from other cities and towns fail to identify themselves with any church. . . . No matter how staunch church members they were in their hometowns, when they get here they forget all about their church connections.” Some local churches took steps to try to reach out to newcomers, even hosting special guest evangelists from West Virginia and designating certain evenings “West Virginia night,” with special seating reserved to welcome newcomers. Many newcomers, however, continued to stay away. The fact that many newcomers arrived without their families lessened the likelihood that young men and women would join a church in the city, even if they could find one to their liking.

The failure of migrants to establish ties to their new community stemmed from many sources. The most obvious factor is that many newcomers were sojourners, intending to work a few years, “grab a stake,” and take a tidy sum back home with them. Yet in many cases, they failed to establish ties because they either were made to feel unwelcome or felt otherwise uncomfortable. So much of what is written about

80 Goodyear Wingfoot Clan, 7 June 1921.
81 Akron Evening Times, 28 February 1917.
southerners in Akron, unfortunately, comes from non-southerners, often biased against them, making it difficult to probe their impressions. The failure to join churches, however, is an area where cultural alienation seems most clear-cut. Migrants from Appalachia came from a plethora of denominations, not all of which were organized as a church in Akron. Even when that was not the case, migrants found religious services varied from those to which they were accustomed. In addition, the fact that the average migrant arrived in Akron without their family further lessened the likelihood that they would join a church. The lure of the saloon and other entertainments in Akron generally proved more attractive. Only when the boom years of World War I had passed would southern migrants begin to form permanent attachments in Akron, as more and more became property owners, began participating in local politics, and established their own churches. In doing so, they helped make Akron a northern city with very southern roots.
There is considered to be a labor shortage in Akron when the number of unemployed drops below 5,000 men and women and steps are immediately taken to remedy the matter. Advertisements are placed in Southern papers to bring men here. When they arrive here they are told “Nothing today, sorry; but if you will leave your name and address we will send for you;” or, “Come in again.” . . . Incidentally, these workers brought here from the South are the greatest obstacle to organization. They come from the rural district . . . in the “Pure Americanism” belt where wages are low and they feel deeply indebted to the rubber companies who pay a “living” wage.

—A Rubber Worker

Compared to other cities that were slow to tap into the vast southern labor market, Akron had a head start on labor recruitment from the South. With the manufacturers’ preference for native-born workers, and nearly two decades of experience in relying on southern workers, the city had no trouble encouraging the next generation to come—whether or not jobs were available. Although the city’s growth during the 1920s did not match the overwhelming rate of the 1910s, it added nearly sixty thousand new residents, with the majority arriving from Kentucky and West Virginia. The rubber industry and the jobs it promised remained the primary attraction,

1 “Rubber Slavery at Akron,” Industrial Pioneer 3 (August 1925): 44.
but the migrants of the 1920s were more likely than ever before to have left their home states due to diminished economic opportunities at home. The city regularly attracted more hopeful job-seekers than local industry could consistently employ. Thus, the residents of Akron continued to have conflicting attitudes regarding the industry that brought prosperity and that “army of occupation” to the city. The 1920s, for the rubber town, meant slower growth and continued uncertainty. As one author summarized the decade, “The Roaring Twenties did not roar in Akron, but they hummed.”

Are They Needed?

Initially, Akron avoided the economic problems that plagued other cities following the armistice of November 11, 1918. Indeed, during the subsequent six-month period, Akron employed an additional thirty thousand workers, many of them sent to the city by the federal employment service that served as a clearinghouse through which returning soldiers and workers displaced by the conversion to peacetime production could find employment. In the spring of 1919, the bureau noted: “Akron is almost exceptional in the whole country in this respect. . . . Almost all of the other cities of equal or larger size have thousands of men walking the streets in search of employment. Akron, on the contrary, is overcrowded.”

---


3 *Akron Evening Times*, 2 May 1919.
South returned to the city and reported: “Akron and Detroit are the only cities that are mentioned in the conversation that includes discussion of prosperity and progress.”

As employment became scarce elsewhere, “poor authorities” in neighboring states began sending their destitute to Akron. Communities in Pennsylvania and West Virginia offered to pay transportation costs—and provide packed lunches—for some families on their relief rolls. Such “dumping” of charity cases caused problems as many were “physically embarrassed as well as financially deficient” and failed to obtain employment.

Yet the rubber industry was not immune from the general economic slowdown that followed the war and conversion to peacetime production. By the summer of 1920, the rubber companies were laying off thousands of workers and the situation continued to worsen. The State-City Employment Bureau announced that twelve thousand men were laid off in one month and pessimistically described this estimate as “conservative.”

With slackening demand, by early 1921, rubber tire production had dropped to one-fifth of wartime high levels and the industry that had employed more than 56,000 employees in 1919 would provide fewer than 25,000 jobs in 1921 (Table

\[\text{Table 4}\]

4 *Akron Evening Times*, 7 November 1919.

5 *Akron Beacon Journal*, 22 August 1919.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>15,646</td>
<td>17,816</td>
<td>19,818</td>
<td>21,234</td>
<td>20,237</td>
<td>17,731</td>
<td>17,000</td>
<td>15,835</td>
<td>16,240</td>
<td>15,872</td>
<td>16,323</td>
<td>15,497</td>
<td>17,437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>29,703</td>
<td>38,824</td>
<td>33,987</td>
<td>36,652</td>
<td>32,235</td>
<td>36,222</td>
<td>35,628</td>
<td>36,440</td>
<td>36,315</td>
<td>37,391</td>
<td>39,551</td>
<td>42,532</td>
<td>36,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>45,127</td>
<td>48,140</td>
<td>50,363</td>
<td>50,294</td>
<td>50,660</td>
<td>50,963</td>
<td>51,179</td>
<td>46,498</td>
<td>44,753</td>
<td>44,325</td>
<td>44,634</td>
<td>42,980</td>
<td>47,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>42,708</td>
<td>44,125</td>
<td>42,781</td>
<td>41,600</td>
<td>42,988</td>
<td>45,482</td>
<td>44,767</td>
<td>44,484</td>
<td>40,940</td>
<td>39,721</td>
<td>39,717</td>
<td>40,429</td>
<td>42,479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>45,849</td>
<td>47,931</td>
<td>47,991</td>
<td>48,964</td>
<td>51,741</td>
<td>53,827</td>
<td>57,404</td>
<td>61,531</td>
<td>61,858</td>
<td>64,567</td>
<td>66,936</td>
<td>70,188</td>
<td>56,566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>68,446</td>
<td>69,751</td>
<td>72,373</td>
<td>73,490</td>
<td>71,200</td>
<td>65,633</td>
<td>58,386</td>
<td>43,200</td>
<td>35,299</td>
<td>38,560</td>
<td>29,749</td>
<td>26,007</td>
<td>54,341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>40,168</td>
<td>43,447</td>
<td>44,301</td>
<td>45,084</td>
<td>44,339</td>
<td>40,751</td>
<td>27,442</td>
<td>33,437</td>
<td>31,241</td>
<td>32,079</td>
<td>34,013</td>
<td>35,831</td>
<td>37,678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>36,547</td>
<td>37,371</td>
<td>37,829</td>
<td>37,882</td>
<td>36,135</td>
<td>33,832</td>
<td>34,281</td>
<td>37,215</td>
<td>41,561</td>
<td>41,253</td>
<td>40,473</td>
<td>41,325</td>
<td>37,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>42,491</td>
<td>43,084</td>
<td>43,812</td>
<td>44,262</td>
<td>46,717</td>
<td>48,344</td>
<td>49,745</td>
<td>50,856</td>
<td>49,721</td>
<td>47,477</td>
<td>46,815</td>
<td>48,229</td>
<td>46,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. by Month</td>
<td>36,614</td>
<td>39,041</td>
<td>39,290</td>
<td>40,498</td>
<td>41,074</td>
<td>40,334</td>
<td>39,094</td>
<td>38,577</td>
<td>37,214</td>
<td>37,267</td>
<td>37,133</td>
<td>37,859</td>
<td>38,666</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data by county unavailable for 1922

Source: Spurgeon Bell and Ralph J. Watkins, *Industrial and Commercial Ohio: Volume II* (Columbus: College of Commerce and Administration, Ohio State University, 1928), 686.

Table 7: Number of Rubber Workers Employed in Summit County, Ohio
With this dramatic curtailment of production, Akron’s rubber manufacturers could no longer employ the large labor force they had recruited from around the country in the past decade. As nearly eighty-three percent of its manufacturing workers were employed in the industry in 1919, the recession in the tire industry had devastating consequences. The overcrowding and chaos of the war years had produced fears of social anarchy; now, such concerns intensified. As the number of unemployed continued to rise, crime rates also increased, with a rash of murders and shootings that once again triggered public demands that the city expand its police force to match its enlarged population.

For those who had come to Akron anticipating sustained employment, the slump in the demand for tires hit hard. Thousands who had arrived during the peak war years decided to leave as employment dried up. Most newcomers had rented (at inflated prices) their living quarters—family men often having left wives and children back home—and so had nothing to tie them to the city; they could easily pick up and seek better opportunities elsewhere or return home. Through the combination of wildly fluctuating employment levels and housing shortages, Akron’s population remained highly unstable as arrivals of recent years outnumbered long-term residents of the city.

---

7. Again, the rubber industry’s reliance on the health of the automobile industry is obvious. Sales of automobiles fell from 2.2 million in 1920 to only 1.6 million the following year. Mansel G. Blackford and K. Austin Kerr, *B. F. Goodrich: Tradition and Transformation, 1870-1995* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 78.

As massive layoffs occurred, the newcomers abandoned the “City of Opportunity” in droves. Between 1920 and 1922, the city’s population declined by eighteen percent, dropping from 208,000 to 171,000 residents.\(^9\)

As whenever unemployment levels rose in the city, the recession deepened the resentment of long-term residents toward the rubber companies’ practices of labor recruitment and the “outsiders” brought in who, now more than ever, appeared a burden to the city. As unemployment rose, requests for assistance increased and city relief offices made 36,000 home visits in the first half of 1921.\(^10\) Akron residents frequently complained that their property taxes were now paying to support the thousands of workers recruited to the city (who were not taxpayers), in addition to bearing the cost of educating their children. Yet, despite accusations that “outsiders” were draining local charitable resources, surveys conducted by the Akron Charity Office found that ninety-four percent of the families who received aid had been residents of the city for a year or more.\(^11\) The fact remained, however, that most residents of the city were relative newcomers and Akron’s economic well-being depended on the ability of the rubber tire industry to provide jobs.

A paramount concern of most residents was that the rubber manufacturers give preference to local workers in hiring. The history of recruiting new workers, regardless

---

\(^9\) *Ohio State Journal*, 25 July 1922.

\(^10\) *Akron Beacon Journal*, 13 July 1921.

\(^11\) *Akron Beacon Journal*, 15 August 1922.
of the current economic conditions or labor need, made residents suspicious of their hiring practices. In response to criticisms, Akron manufacturers pledged that the first re-hires would be Akron men and assured local residents that it would be “many months . . . before men from other cities can find work here as easily as in the old days.”

Despite optimistic pronouncements regarding the health of the industry by the major rubber companies, however, conditions continued to worsen and, by early 1922, an estimated fifteen thousand workers were unemployed in the city.

Many of those requesting assistance during the depression of the early 1920s had come during the war years, and could not return because their families back home were experiencing their own economic troubles. One couple from West Virginia reported they had left home because of limited opportunities for work in their small farming community. The husband and wife both came from large families and had left school at early ages to help work their families’ farms. After the couple requested assistance, a staff member from the Social Service Exchange visited their home in late 1921. Both husband and wife had worked for Goodyear, but had been laid off; the one hundred dollars they had saved during the wartime boom had already been exhausted. The husband had had only two months work since the previous autumn and the couple was living in “the rear of an old dilapidated house . . . [in] the typical attic room.”

---


13 *Akron Beacon Journal*, 21 January 1922.
social worker noted further, “There are three windows and the pane is gone out of one
of them. . . . The hot plate furnished the only heat.” Both of their families struggled to
make ends meet on their farms in West Virginia and could not afford to take them in
nor send money to help them out.\textsuperscript{14}

Akron’s reputation as a boomtown where anyone could find work remained
undiminished despite poor economic conditions in the city and growing problems. The
ease with which new arrivals had found work in prior years was well known. Many
assumed this was still the case. In January 1922, articles appeared in newspapers in
Cleveland and elsewhere reported that “conditions were normal and industry booming”
in Akron. This grossly inaccurate assessment of the situation prompted hundreds more
to come to the city, many of them spending their last dollar to pay for transportation to
Akron. That month, A. A. Beery, superintendent of Akron’s State-City Employment
Bureau, reported that the major source of those applying for work was “the great
number of men coming here from the south, from Tennessee, Kentucky and Alabama,
every day.” The situation became so severe that, to cope with the rising number of
unemployed, the city created a Special Committee on Unemployment in early 1922 to
enlist public schools, fraternal organizations, and civic societies in a campaign to
encourage city residents, who could afford to do so, to hire local men to do odd jobs.\textsuperscript{15}
Efforts to halt the influx of new job seekers, however, produced minimal results.

\textsuperscript{14} Daniel Nelson papers, Box 6, University of Akron Archives.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 21 January 1922.
Suspicions that the articles misrepresenting economic conditions in the city were, somehow, the fault of the rubber manufacturers had arisen because of the industry’s history of labor recruitment. Subsequent actions by the rubber companies only appeared to confirm those suspicions. As the rubber industry began to revive later in 1922, rubber manufacturers provoked more outrage when the Chamber of Commerce announced that one thousand men would be recruited from outside of the city to fill positions as tire builders, despite continuing high levels of unemployment in the city. In response to heated protests, the companies claimed that the thirteen hundred men applying weekly at the State-City Free Labor Exchange lacked experience or were physically not qualified for the work. Complaints came not only from rubber workers (employed and unemployed)—who cited estimates that 3,000 rubber workers were currently unemployed and many of those fortunate to be working had been reduced to a three-day week—but the major local newspapers as well. In an editorial titled “Do We Really Need Them?” the Akron Beacon Journal questioned:

Is this really the case or is it a method to insure a surplus of Labor? One does not know, but one suspects that this thing has been done rather freely in the past. Of course, it may be good business but we are unable to see it. One does not long inordinately for another mobilization of the suitcase division that once afflicted and helped to demoralize Akron. Of course, if this labor is really needed and if these jobs cannot be given to the people here and out of work, it is all right to bring here the workers necessary to do that work. But it does seem strange when but a few weeks ago the papers were being importuned to aid in finding work for

16 Akron Beacon Journal, 29 April 1922.

17 Akron Beacon Journal, 3 May 1922.
thousands that could not find it for themselves we should now begin to import labor. The best town is where the largest number of its people are engaged in steady work and for this reason we should like to see Akron in that category and it would be good business to employ all our idle, if that is possible, before calling in outsiders.\footnote{18}{Akron Beacon Journal, 1 May 1922.}

That same day the newspaper printed a letter to the editor from an outraged reader who claimed:

I have seen experienced men turned down by the scores without even the opportunity of an examination, men who are permanent residents of this city and have families as well as paying on their homes and at the same time I have seen men who claim they have never had any experience hired.

I myself have a family and have been trying to get work for about nine months and I am physically fit and experienced in work. . . . This city today is just like a powder keg full of powder and stunts like the rubber companies are about to perform are just like sparks of fire and though I am not a radical labor man still if something does not turn up soon I will be ready for the conflagration.\footnote{19}{Ibid.}

Another local resident found the rubber companies’ claims that suitable labor could not be found locally to be absurd, protesting: “It may be that these men from Texas, South Dakota, West Virginia, etc., make better tires than our local taxpayers who furnish good schools for the children of these ‘foreigners.’ But I dare say we have a very generous supply of the very best tire builders in the world right here in Akron, and a small advertisement in our local papers will bring 5,000 of the best tire builders ready for work any day.”\footnote{20}{Akron Beacon Journal, 3 May 1922.}
Among the southern newcomers arriving in 1922 was John D. House, future president of Local No. 2 (Goodyear), United Rubber Workers. Born and raised near Cleveland, Georgia, House later recalled his arrival at the train station in Akron, where he was greeted by a billboard that proclaimed: “Welcome to Akron, City of Opportunity.” His older brother had worked for a time in the rubber industry upon his discharge from the military at the end of World War I and was ready to return. House, recently graduated from high school, decided to follow his brother and hoped to save money to attend Georgia State University the following year (a plan later abandoned). Recalling his experience looking for a job in Akron, House described the process of finding a job as a newcomer:

I would join the long line of men, stretching for at least a city block, long before the employment office would be opened for interviews—men who, like me, had been lured to Akron by the widely-advertised promise of good jobs at high wages. . . . After several days of standing in line for as long as four or five hours before reaching the man who did the hiring—sometimes twice a day—and then being told you were not needed, I finally got a job paying a minimum of 35¢ per hour.\(^2\)

That newcomers were being hired while long-term residents of the city remained unemployed was a recurring pattern and the source of much local frustration with the rubber companies. Echoing complaints of the early 1910s, unemployed workers charged the companies with unfair hiring practices and that they were deliberately creating an excess pool of labor in the city. The relative ease with which House found

\(^{21}\) John D. House Manuscript, MIC 138, Ohio Historical Society.
work as a new arrival in the city also provides evidence that, contrary to assurances by
the major rubber companies, Akron rubber workers were not always given preference in
hiring. Yet, House himself soon felt the instability of employment that confronted
rubber workers. Within a few months, he and some fifty other workers were laid off as
“surplus labor.” “Two months later I was rehired,” he recalled. “This time I worked
two weeks, and, again, was laid off. A week or ten days later I was rehired.”

During the 1920s, the number of newcomers who reported coming to Akron as a
result of advertisements in out-of-town newspapers waned, but the problem persisted
even as the industry once again prospered. Some advertisements, in addition to citing
wages and job descriptions, offered to refund to new workers the cost of their
transportation to Akron once they had remained with a company for three months.

Although the rubber companies claimed they had reduced their reliance on advertising
for workers (and Goodyear having ended the practice altogether), newcomers still
arrived in great numbers during the 1920s. The long-standing practice remained a sore
spot with rubber workers, some of whom perceived it as a deliberate effort to thwart
employee demands or attempts to unionize. From the vantage point of the
manufacturers, however, aggressive labor recruitment was necessary because they
continued to struggle with extremely high rates of labor turnover. Between 1921 and

22 Ibid.

23 Akron Beacon Journal, 3 February 1925.
1929, for example, “Goodyear hired about 87,500 workers to maintain a workforce that averaged just 13,000 and never reached 19,000.24 Ongoing difficulties maintaining a stable labor force in Akron also led manufacturers to consider building new factories in other parts of the country.25

A further difficulty stemmed from the fact that advertisements posted in out-of-town papers often misled potential employees. By the time potential employees made arrangements to travel to Akron, the positions may have already been filled or, due to fluctuating labor needs, were no longer available. As one new arrival expressed his desperate circumstances in which he found himself:

I was attracted to this fair city by an ad in the paper by one of the rubber companies. I scraped enough money together to get here, but, when I visited the company that had advertised, I was informed that they were laying off men instead of hiring them. In fact, I have heard that every place I ask for work. Why, oh why, do they fool people here like that?26

Even in the absence of direct recruitment of workers, the State-City Labor Exchange found that workers continued to flock to the city. Akron’s well-established reputation as a destination point for migrants, according to the A. A. Beery, superintendent of the


25 Although the process of decentralization didn’t build momentum until the mid-1930s, new rubber factories were built in Los Angeles, California (Goodyear, 1920 and Goodrich, 1928) and Watertown, Massachusetts (Goodrich, 1930). Ralph William Frank, “The Rubber Industry of the Akron-Barberton Area: A Study of the Factors Related to Its Development, Distribution, and Localization” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1952), 25.

employment service, meant that many “came expecting to find plenty of work.” He continued, “When asked if they had seen advertisements, asking for men here in Akron, they answer that they came on their own initiative, thinking they could locate something anyway.”

By the late 1920s, the impact of two decades of labor recruitment was reflected in the composition of Akron’s population and workforce. At Goodyear Tire & Rubber, for example, natives of West Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee had come to compose thirty-seven percent of all employees by 1929 and were well represented at all levels. Yet, despite the fact that many southerners had made Akron their permanent home, the issue still rankled some local residents. “All the ‘God fearing, liberty loving’ southerner wants is just enough money to buy a ‘Lizzie’ with,” accused one Akron Beacon Journal reader. “Then he goes south with $50 in his pocket, spends it in his home town and comes back to Akron, down and out and expects Akron to give him work again, only to do the same thing all over again. . . . They are a detriment to Akron. Give our northern men the work; especially our own taxpayers.”

Such back and forth movement was a common trend, but one caused in large part by the widely fluctuating demands for labor in Akron. Not only did the rubber factories’ need for labor vary based on the demands of the automobile industry, but seasonal fluctuations in the

---

29 Akron Beacon Journal, 2 February 1925.
demand for replacement tires further entered the equation. In the year 1925, for example, the number of rubber workers employed in Summit County fluctuated between 42,491 in January and 50,856 in August (see above, Table 7). When temporary layoffs occurred, it was only logical for workers to return home for a few weeks, rather than pay to rent a place in Akron’s inflated housing market.

As the industry matured, the strong presence of southerners in Akron’s rubber industry could be seen not only at the entry level, but in the up-and-coming ranks of factory managers and supervisors as well. The best demonstration of the representation of “outsiders” in all levels of production can be seen at Goodyear. The Goodyear Flying Squadron was the innovation of factory manager (and subsequent president) Paul W. Litchfield. In the wake of the labor unrest of 1913, Litchfield established the training program to prepare a group of elite workers who could “on short notice . . . go into any part of the plant and give the help needed to balance up production between departments. The Squadron was to back up the line, to be sent in to plug up a hole.” Enrollees in the training program divided their time between academic courses (in subjects such as rubber chemistry, blueprint reading, and mechanics) and working in various divisions of the factory learning all aspects of production. Initially, the program had been met with distrust. Created in the aftermath of the IWW-led strike of 1913, the Squadron was, according to historian Hugh Allen, “misinterpreted as a

---

defensive movement on the part of the management against recurrence of labor trouble.” Whatever its true original purpose, it evolved into a program that graduated many of Goodyear’s future supervisors and even top management. One of the members of the first Flying Squadron class, W. I. Satow, had moved to Akron from Parkersburg, West Virginia, shortly before being accepted to the program; he made “rapid” progress, eventually becoming division superintendent. Like Goodyear’s overall labor force, the Flying Squadron reflected the diverse labor force recruited over the years.

By the late 1920s, the training program had not only increased the number of academic courses offered, it had added athletic and recreational programs. In keeping with “college” style curriculum, the program also began publishing an annual yearbook, The Coagulator. One of these, from 1927, survives and provides a snapshot of these “elite” employees. Of the fifty-six members of the graduating class of 1927, place of birth could be determined for all but one trainee. The largest group, composed of thirteen trainees, was from Ohio. Pennsylvania and West Virginia each sent seven trainees. Five were from Tennessee; four from Illinois; and two each from the states of Kentucky, Mississippi, Georgia, and North Carolina. Four trainees were born in other countries. The remainder of the class came from Alabama, Arkansas, Maine, Indiana, Virginia, Oklahoma, and Texas (one trainee from each). Thus, trainees from southern


32 Goodyear Wingfoot Clan, 7 July 1937.
and Appalachian states constituted forty-seven percent of the class. Originally picked from the ranks of predominantly unskilled rubber workers, the Flying Squadron became an avenue to the higher levels of factory management for new recruits to the industry.

Goodrich, too, continued to expand its corporate welfare programs to improve and stabilize employee relations. Already offering a variety of programs in the 1910s, Goodrich expanded existing medical services and athletic clubs and began offering life insurance and a profit-sharing program to its employees. On the other hand, Goodrich tried to make its workers more efficient through the introduction of the Bedaux system (in which time-motion studies were used to set pay rates and bonuses). Although the various corporate welfare programs introduced by Akron companies continued to expand, the companies still struggled to win employee loyalty.

Are They Welcome?

Despite the many personal success stories, however, regional prejudices remained strong. Southerners in general were alternately accused of being lazy, clannish, and generally bad for the city. They were blamed for wages not being higher, taking jobs from Akron residents, and inhibiting organization among the rubber

33 Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, The Coagulator (Akron, Oh.: Goodyear Tire and Rubber, 1927), Special Collections, Akron-Summit County Public Library. The names and brief descriptions of “students” were compared with on-line census and genealogy sources.

34 Goodyear Wingfoot Clan, 7 July 1937.

35 Blackford and Kerr, 87-88.
workers. (Although subsequently, in the 1930s, southerners would be blamed by some as the rabble-rousers behind the disruptive strikes that shook the industry.) The literary stereotype of the mountaineer may have been “Abner” and “Joab,” but in Akron they were called “snakes.” The term probably originated from tales of West Virginians being “snake hunters,” but in its usage became a slur used against natives of the state.\textsuperscript{36} Newcomers to the city were well aware of the stereotypes and prejudices they faced. Born on a tobacco farm in Graves County, Kentucky, future minister Dallas Billington recalled his reception in Akron as “chilly” (both literally and figuratively). Arriving during a snow storm in February 1925 dressed in only a summer suit, he later recalled, “It didn’t take long for me to see that people of the North thought nothing of calling one any kind of name. For a while it was hard for me to take, and then I found if I were to behave as a Christian, I would have to put aside anger created by what men said or did to me.”\textsuperscript{37} A native of West Virginia complained, in rhyme, of the blanket stereotypes prevalent among Akron residents: “They think we are living in jungles, that we are low-minded and rude, that all of our efforts are bungles and all of our implements crude. They think that we are men are all ‘grubbers’; they call us ‘hill billies’ and ‘snakes’; they think all our women ‘snuff rubbers,’ and the men folks nothing but ‘rakes.’”\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} Akron Beacon Journal, 20 March 1914.


\textsuperscript{38} Akron Beacon Journal, 22 March 1927.
The continuing influx of southerners and their swelling numbers in Akron’s labor force came under repeated attack, despite the fact that native Akronites had long ago ceased to be the majority in the rubber factories or in the city generally. Not only were newcomers regarded with suspicion because of competition for jobs, but locals also attacked southern newcomers for not trying to fit in. “Why are the majority of southern people, when they take residence in northern cities, so terribly clannish in their manners and opinions?” asked one resident.39 Southern people, “particularly farmers,” did not make good industrial workers or citizens, claimed another Akronite—“not being interested enough to vote, not caring to be home owners here, not wishing to fraternize with anyone except those from the south, and in fact living with their hearts in Dixie, but making their money and raising their families in Akron.” The heart of his complaint, however, stemmed from the overabundance of job-seekers that resulted from southerners in Akron “writing ‘back home,’ plenty of work in Akron, come and grab the big money, and . . . their friends and relatives get here and find it untrue.”40 Another writer echoed this sentiment, claiming Kentucky farmers were just “‘meat’ for the manufacturers.” His biggest complaint was what he viewed as their negative impact on wage rates and labor conditions: “[T]hey will work for less, are not as independent as maids, and would drop in their tracks from work (as long as the boss is looking).” If

---


40 Akron Beacon Journal, 29 January 1925.
they would stay on the farm, he contended, workers in Akron “would be getting more
than $40 a week . . . instead of living from hand to mouth.” Another reader claimed,
“All these southern fellows that I have worked with are nothing but job killers. They
make $2 a day down home and when they get a job here they are not satisfied with
$7.”

Such negative characterizations prompted defenses of the South and the right
of southerners to pursue opportunities in Akron. “A Real Southerner” responded to
such attacks—“in the south we would not say we wished you should go back where
you belong as each and every one of us are free, moral agents, and belong whereever
[sic] we wish to go.” Another reader wondered why southerners were singled out
for criticism in the city, when Akron drew job-seekers from all across the country.
Regional bias, he argued, was unwarranted, un-American, and potentially dangerous.
“Have we forgotten the cruel days of ’64 and ’65? Is there anyone among us who
would drift back and harbor grievances of those days when our best and purest blood
was spilled in the most disastrous Civil war of history?” While the author conceded
that, “some of them [southerners] would be much better off at home,” he continued:
“On the other hand it is up to every individual to work out his own destiny and if they

41 Akron Beacon Journal, 5 January 1925.
42 Akron Beacon Journal, 10 February 1925.
have a desire to do their work in the fields of manufacturing it behooves the rest of us to act as innocent bystanders unless we have a word of encouragement to offer.”

Many of those arriving during the 1920s had left farms in the South along with millions of other who abandoned agriculture that decade. Although mining communities would suffer the greater drain of population in subsequent decades, during the 1920s, it was agricultural communities in areas such as eastern Kentucky where out-migration was heaviest, resulting in the loss of one-fourth their population. Having lived most of her life on southern farms, native Kentuckian Elizabeth Guinn described the difficult and untenable circumstances in which many farmers found themselves—working fourteen to sixteen hour days much of the year and facing declining agricultural prices that often left farmers with little to show for their hard labor. Defending her family’s decision to come to Akron, she wrote: “Yes, you would keep our noses to the grindstone and steal from our ‘corn crib’ at night. But when we rise up and say, ‘we will go where we can better our circumstances’ and come to the rubber works, (which happens to be located in Akron), we come empty handed and ignorant, but with a willingness to work, receive our jobs and draw our $40 per week.”

44 Akron Beacon Journal, 21 January 1925.

45 Chad Berry, Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 19.

Many southerners and their defenders pleaded for tolerance in patriotic terms, citing the unity among Americans fighting in the First World War and despairing of those who harbored resentments reminiscent of the Civil War. As one reader wrote to the *Beacon Journal*:

> How can a man forget so soon the horrors, the death struggles in the trenches and the “Hell of the Hindenburg line,” where northerners and southerners fought and fell not as such but as Americans from the land of freedom? How can any true American citizen take on the responsibility of dictating to his fellow countryman as to where he shall live and what he shall do for his life’s work? Is this not contrary to the very fundamental principles on which America was founded?\(^{47}\)

The *Beacon Journal’s* decision to allow this debate to be carried out on its editorial page is understandable considering the past controversies over labor recruitment; however, the decision to reprint the following scathing assessment of West Virginia demonstrated either incredible insensitivity, poor judgment, or a share in the bias:

> Possessing the greatest natural resources of any state among the forty-eight, in timber, coal, oil, gas and waterpower, she has dissipated her natural resources and has not one city worthy of the name; no great buildings; no arts; no sciences. She has not produced one great man on any sort. She has no roads. . . One may travel over the state a week and talk to five hundred natives. The chances are he will not meet one who knows who Herodotus, Gibbon, Buckle, Ridpath, Homer, Dante, Milton, Shakespeare, Hume, Spencer, Carlyle, Dumas, Voltaire were, when they lived or where. Almost every country boasts of a college. It is either a Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian or something of the sort. Yet not one in 50 of their graduates can talk on an intellectual subject.

\(^{47}\) *Akron Beacon Journal*, 21 January 1925.
They know in a hazy sort of a way that Ingersoll was a “great infidel” and of course is in hell. Perhaps they have heard that Shakespeare was a poet. But where he lived, wrote, died and when they could not tell. Their subjects of discussion are loading coal, moonshine, bootlegging, K. K. K., and that the government ought to do something for them. . . . I don’t know of a town under 10,000 with a library . . .

A little while ago I met an aspirant for a place in the state legislative halls who was making a canvass with the slogan, “get a law passed to make compulsory the reading of the Bible in the public schools.” He admitted he did not know how to draw up such a bill, but thought he could get some lawyer to do it. Do people really live in West Virginia? No they only exist, not knowing or caring how or why.48

Predictably, a torrent of outrage against the paper, for printing the article, and its “star spangled jackass . . . half baked nut . . . blithering ass” of an author for his “ignorant” remarks, followed its publication.49 Dozens of letters defending the state and extolling its history and merits filled the paper for weeks. One writer responded with humor playing on the negative stereotypes, explaining, for example, that illiteracy stemmed from the location of the school houses “high on a mountain where one has to be from 15 to 16 years of age” before a youngster could reach it and explaining that Calhoun County was actually had “a large population, especially if they were allowed to count all of their friends and relatives who work in the Goodyear, B. F. Goodrich and Firestone rubber factories.”50

48 Reprint from the Haldeman-Julius Weekly (Girard, Kansas), Akron Beacon Journal, 9 March 1927.
49 Akron Beacon Journal, 23 March 1927.
50 Akron Beacon Journal, 29 March 1927.
After two decades of the local economy centering on the rubber tire industry and relying on a southern-born labor force, many residents of Akron remained ambivalent about the city’s development. The town had only become a city with the arrival of southern newcomers, yet unstable employment levels and the continuing high cost of housing meant Akron remained a city populated by migrants—transplants often driven from home by economic crises, but not quite ready to settle permanently in the city. That many hoped to earn a stake and return home generated resentment among local residents who stayed during times of high unemployment. Southern migrants were sometimes viewed with disdain as either naïve newcomers who would eagerly accept any wage offered or as opportunistic transients taking jobs from “deserving” local workers. The divide between local workers and southerners remained strong, as the rubber manufacturers’ history of labor recruitment had fostered the belief that their misrepresentation of employment conditions was a deliberate strategy to suppress wage levels in Akron. The parallel to anti-immigration sentiment was clear. Like immigrants, these newcomers were viewed as inferior, willing to be exploited, and generally bad for the position of local workers. Indeed, outbursts of hostility towards southerners inevitably followed a recession in the rubber industry. However, Akron would not have become a city, nor would the rubber industry have remained centered in Akron for so long, without the immigration of thousands of southerners who eagerly sought those jobs and suffered through homesickness and negative stereotypes.
CHAPTER 6

SOUTHERN MIGRANTS IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Akron, O., is the world’s tire capital. The community grew from a diversity of industry, first upon bicycle tires and later the development of the automobile industry.

During the Great War Akron enjoyed and later suffered from a wild real estate boom—outskirt lots and downtown store leases were bought and sold on curb market.

Mountaineers from Kentucky, West Virginia and Tennessee were imported into Akron to take the places of tire industry labor that had enlisted or been drafted into military service; and until beds were rented in eight-hour shifts, rents took most of the wages of workers.

Some of these mountaineers and their descendants are there yet—on relief, sitting out on the porches of dilapidated houses, listening to the radio in the front room and with an ancient car at the curb.

—David Gibson, “What One Man Thinks”

By 1929, the city and the industry that had so heavily relied on imported southern labor had hit its peak. Akron’s dominance in rubber production reached an all time high in 1929, the year in which the relative prosperity of the 1920s came to an end. That year, Akron “made some famous boasts—two-thirds of all the tire and tube manufacturing in the United States; the highest wages in industry; 90 per cent of the

---

1 Mansfield News, 7 May 1938.
town’s population American-born; 50 per cent of its homes owner-occupied.”

Events of the following decade, which included massive layoffs, reduced workweeks, and a series of dramatic strikes that culminated in the creation of the United Rubber Workers of America, marked the beginning of the long-term decline of the industry in its hometown. As the industry decentralized, many of its new operations were, ironically, established in the southern states from which it had long drawn its labor force.

Sales of new automobiles began to slump in the late 1920s and the slowing demand for new automobiles was, as always, a trigger for hard times in Akron. Not only were the two industries interdependent, they both relied heavily on workers recruited from Appalachia and other parts of the rural South. As Akron journalist Ruth McKenney noted a decade later:

Auto was very close to Akron. The rubber factories got their biggest orders from Detroit. Men in the rubber shops knew their tires would go to Ford or General Motors or Chrysler.

But Auto was closer than mere orders to Akron. Detroit was a town like Akron, only bigger. The hill-billies in Akron all had cousins who worked in Detroit. Thousands of men in Akron rubber shops had stood at the conveyor belts in Michigan. In the early twenties men used to


3 Although three new plants were built in other states between 1920 and 1930, the process accelerated after 1935. To cite a few examples: Goodyear Tire & Rubber opened a factory in Gadsden, Alabama (1936); B. F. Goodrich opened two new factories, in Clarksville, Tennessee (1939) and Tuscaloosa, Alabama (1945); and Firestone Tire & Rubber launched operations in Memphis, Tennessee (1937). Ralph William Frank, “The Rubber Industry of the Akron-Barberton Area: A Study of the Factors Related to Its Development, Distribution, and Localization” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1952), 25.
float from Detroit to Akron and back. There was a tie, like a twisted hemp rope, between the men in Rubber and the men in Auto.⁴

When the economy began its long downward spiral after 1929, the rubber manufacturers in Akron weathered the recession relatively well, although their employees did not. Although B. F. Goodrich suffered losses every year from 1929 through 1934, Goodyear and Firestone did much better. Goodyear made a profit every year of the depression except 1932; and Firestone, impressively, turned a profit every year of the depression.⁵ Employees in the industry, however, were not so fortunate. Although most employers initially resisted laying workers off or cutting wages, layoffs soon followed and those still employed faced a shortened workweek which left employees with a smaller paycheck to cover living expenses. “Until 1932, the Depression merely exaggerated the seasonal pattern of industry employment. In 1932 and early 1933, it severely distorted that pattern,” notes historian Daniel Nelson. The industry that employed 58,188 employees in the summer of 1929 provided only 27,355 jobs by March 1933.⁶ Even those workers fortunate enough to keep their jobs felt the impact. The median weekly wage for male rubber workers in Ohio, which had been $37.18 in 1928, had dropped to $21.17 by 1933; wages for female workers declined


even more dramatically in the same period, from $21.17, to only $13.75 per week.\(^7\) In part, weekly wages dropped because of “share the work” policies in which factories adopted the six-hour shift with employees working only three or four days per week. Goodyear was the first company to adopt the six-hour shift in 1930; by 1933, all the major tire factories had reduced employee hours in an attempt to minimize layoffs.\(^8\) Despite such efforts, the number of unemployed continued to mount and the city scrambled to raise funds for both direct relief and work relief programs.\(^9\)

Ire over “outsiders” getting jobs in Akron was only exacerbated as the Depression worsened. In his doctoral dissertation, Akron native Gerald Udell reflected on the bitterness towards West Virginians and other southern migrants during the depression.

In my childhood, the terms *snakes* and *hillbillies* were used frequently by native Akronites about such persons. There was resentment especially during the depression days of the thirties, and the stories were widespread of West Virginians who collected relief money in Akron and lived handsomely from it in their mountain shacks. Their pronunciation was mocked. Their distinctive lexicon was made the butt of jokes. The association was massive and thorough in Akron between

\(^7\) Mary J. Drucker, *The Rubber Industry in Ohio* (Columbus, Ohio: National Youth Administration in Ohio, 1937), 38.


ignorance, shiftlessness, and illiteracy and the West Virginians, Tennesseans, Georgians, etc.10

Residents frequently voiced complaints that “while so many Akron men are unemployed there have been men coming back from West Virginia, Tennessee, and Virginia and working every day since the first of 1932.”11 Responding to such accusations, Goodyear Tire & Rubber countered the persistent rumors that the company was advertising for workers, asserting:

The large number of people calling at our Employment Office for employment brings about the persistent rumor that Goodyear is advertising for labor and is doing so deliberately to maintain an excess of labor in Akron. We believe that this calls for an explanation on the part of the Goodyear Management and a statement of the true facts.

Goodyear has not inserted a single advertisement for labor of any kind in any paper in any part of the United States in over ten years.

We have always followed the policy, if labor was needed, of inquiring of our own Organization if they had any friends in the home town out of employment whom they would care to recommend. In this manner we have always been able to recruit a very efficient force of excellent workmen, and have found it far more effective than any advertising. In the past year, however, even this has been unnecessary as there has always been a surplus of labor in Akron—the source of which we have no knowledge.

It is Goodyear’s definite policy before hiring any new employees to take back into our shop as fast as business conditions warrant those laid off who care to return. So far, we have been able to take back only a small percentage of those laid off; and until we have taken them all back, we hope Goodyear employees will do everything they can to prevent


their friends and relatives coming here from other towns and swelling the ranks of unemployed in Akron.¹²

Yet, despite repeated assertions that the industry had stopped recruiting workers, the belief remained strong that the rubber industry was failing to show any loyalty to the employees they had laid off. Much of the problem lay in the fact that many workers had maintained more than one residence for years, traveling back and forth between their hometown and Akron depending on the availability of jobs. The issue of hiring out-of-state workers became so contentious that the City Council launched its own investigation—reviewing employment records and comparing them to recently hired workers and surveying factory parking lots for out-of-state license plates—into how closely the rubber manufacturers were complying with their pledge to give preference to Akron workers.¹³ One unemployed lifelong resident of the city vented his frustration:

“I stand in line at a local rubber factory from 5:30 in the morning until close to 12 o’clock and talk with a lot of fellows and mostly out-of-town fellows and they all seem to get jobs but me. I think the next time I go to seek a job I will dress like a rube and tell them I just came up from Moundsville, W. Va., or some other ‘seaport’ and possibly I will get myself a job.”¹⁴ Another accused:

There have been instances when men started working on the day of their arrival, with no knowledge of where they would sleep that night.

---

¹² Goodyear Wingfoot Clan, 15 January 1930.

¹³ Akron Beacon Journal, 24 June 1933.

¹⁴ Akron Beacon Journal, 5 July 1933.
Many of them rent rooms, have no taxes to pay and send their money home to pay off the mortgage on the farm. . . . While these out-of-towners are looking forward to a life of ease on the farm, Akronites are still walking the streets, many of them about to lose their homes, depending upon charity for their daily bread.15

Even while the rubber industry was drafting its industrial code for the National Recovery Administration, the companies continued to lay off workers, prompting more accusations of disloyalty toward long-term employees. The Akron Beacon Journal reported:

To worker stories of layoffs, which have not been denied by the factories, have been added allegations that in numerous instances the very men who should be kept on the payroll until the last are among those being turned loose.

Citizens who have continuously resided in Akron and are trying to pay for their homes have felt the ax, it is claimed, while the payrolls still list plenty of footloose youngsters who rallied here from other states when employment notification was relayed from their former local rooming houses. To cut down the number of employes at all in these times is a clear violation of the whole spirit of the N. R. A. movement. To lop off some of the best citizens among our factory workers is even worse.16

Leading the City Council’s attacks on the rubber companies’ layoff and hiring practices was Councilman Richard Nye who pointed to the fact that employment records showed that between 12,000 and 14,000 workers had been added to local payrolls between April 1 and September 1, 1933, but that the number of families on the city’s charity rolls

15 Akron Beacon Journal, 3 August 1933.

16 Akron Beacon Journal, 1 September 1933.
decreased by only 2,000. This was proof, he asserted, that local factories were failing to
give local citizens preference in hiring.¹⁷

The difficulty in sorting out who was an Akron worker versus “outside” labor
was compounded by the fact that many rubber workers maintained a residence back
home to which they could return. Akron had become a city by attracting workers from
other states. In both the 1920 and 1930 U.S. Census tabulations, the percentage of
Akron’s population born in other states was approximately forty percent—a much
higher percentage than any other city in Ohio.¹⁸ Thus, although many of those added to
the payrolls were probably not newly-recruited workers, the fact that some workers
returned to farms until they were recalled for work outraged local residents who
struggled to get by in the city. Often, when layoffs occurred, workers would leave the
company a local address where notice of rehiring could be sent. When such a letter
arrived, complained one “taxpayer,” the “friend sends it or a telegram down south and
back comes the southerner as fast as he can and goes to work.”¹⁹ Not all Akron
residents viewed this as unfair. One native responded to the uproar, “I am quite sure the
different companies from which they were laid off from their work, do not have any

---
¹⁷ Akron Beacon Journal, 14 December 1933.

¹⁸ In comparison, in 1930 residents born in other states as a percentage of the total populations were:
Canton, 22.5%; Cincinnati; 29.8; Cleveland, 21.8%; Columbus, 21.5%; Toledo, 25.8%; and Youngstown,
29.0%. United States Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Volume II,

¹⁹ Akron Beacon Journal, 24 June 1933.
objections if they went south during the depression. They were fresh from the south when first hired, so why shouldn’t they be fresh from the south the second time hired?”

Many residents, however, fiercely disagreed with such logic. The Akron Beacon Journal regularly printed letters complaining that the rubber companies treated long-term city residents unfairly. One writer claimed, “I talked to two men from Alabama who both have had work for some time. Neither of them owns property in Akron and stated that they wouldn’t buy a piece of property in this city. They both have farms in Alabama which are rented, thus giving them an independent income.”

Given the condition of agriculture in the early 1930s, however, it is doubtful that much income was being generated by those farms.

The best evidence that local companies were indeed failing to give Akronites preference in jobs was the continuing increase in relief expenditures even when local payrolls increased. The local economy showed strong signs of recovery in 1934, with an increase in rubber factory payrolls of forty-eight percent and in homebuilding trades of twenty-five percent compared to 1933 levels; overall, the city’s employment rate had risen by over seventeen percent during that period. Yet, despite those gains, the city’s relief caseload not only failed to decline, it experienced an increase of fifty percent.

---

20 Akron Beacon Journal, 28 June 1933.

21 Akron Beacon Journal, 10 August 1932.

By the end of 1934, a total of 41,367 individuals were on the city’s relief rolls. Even taking into account the probability that some of those on relief were composed of families who had held out as long as possible before applying for assistance, the failure to see a corresponding decline in the charity case load as factories added thousands of workers in 1934 seems to bolster the argument that local manufacturers were not sufficiently holding to pledges that they would give local workers preference in hiring.

Akron’s rubber companies had long pointed proudly at the various corporate welfare programs they provided their workers. Many of these had been adopted in the 1910s and 1920s as part of their efforts to cultivate employee loyalty. During the Depression these activities continued, but were of no benefit to the growing ranks of unemployed. At Goodrich, for example, the company helped to fund employees’ purchases of coal and developed a community garden program. The limitations of such programs were obvious—they only assisted individuals who had employment with the company. In a report to Harry Hopkins, head of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), field representative Lincoln Colcord related the following exchange:

Mr. Robinson [Vice President] of the Firestone Company went into full details as to the development of that concern, telling me how it had been built up from small beginnings, how remarkable it was, and especially going into full particulars as to their welfare department, for which he claimed every virtue. They were one company, he said, which

---

“looked after their own men.” I asked him how many men they had employed at the peak; he answered, “Over 23,000.” I asked how many they employed now; he answered, “Less than 10,000.” “What has happened to the other 13,000?” I asked. “Were they your men or not; that is, have you kept them on in Akron under your Welfare department?” He answered, “Of course not; they have gone back to the mountains of Kentucky and West Virginia where they came from—and a good thing, too.” “Then your welfare department, in principle, applies only to the group that you have under employment at any given time?” I asked. “That is about the way of it,” he said. I asked: “You do not feel any responsibility for continuous employment?” He shook his head.25

Part of what had worked for the rubber companies, if not employees, was the very fact that by recruiting workers with roots in neighboring rural areas they had created a labor force that would leave the city in times of hardship. From its inception, the rubber industry had been characterized by wildly fluctuating employment needs and the city had come to count on the fact that newcomers would leave when employment dried up (thus sparing the city the cost of relief) or labor strikes made employment uncertain and the city volatile. The early 1930s was a period that followed early patterns in which many workers left Akron and returned to rural homesteads, repeating the back-and-forth movement of previous decades. By 1935, however, things were much different. When the automobile industry showed strong signs of improvement and the demand for tires increased accordingly, a new labor movement was emerging that, this time, did not repeat earlier patterns in which many workers abandoned the city in the face of labor unrest.

25 Lincoln Colcord to Harry L. Hopkins, 10 December 1934, Lincoln Colcord Papers, VFM 2662, Ohio Historical Society.
Urban to Rural Migration in the Great Depression

Although conditions in rural America were far from ideal in the early 1930s, from the perspective of urban unemployed workers the situation of workers who could return to family homesteads—where they could (hopefully) get both food and shelter—seemed preferable. The return to rural family farms was a mass phenomenon in the early years of the 1930s, a trend most noticeable in the rising farm population in Appalachia. Precise figures are difficult to ascertain. Some of the gain in farm population between 1930 and 1935 did stem from the return of former migrants to industrial areas that, as urban unemployment rose, sought shelter in rural homesteads where one might raise sufficient produce to feed the family. In other cases, however, the “gain” in workers classified as “farmers” actually represented workers who had always possessed land, but had previously been employed industry or mining, who were now, absent other employment, classified as farmers. In Ohio, the decline in jobs in manufacturing prompted some unemployed workers to return to rural schools seeking knowledge of agricultural techniques. Rural schools, which had once focused on teaching small-scale farmers better techniques, experienced a large influx of “city workers . . . hoping to learn the tricks of tilling the soil.”

---


27 Akron Beacon Journal, 30 January 1933.
Many of Akron’s rubber workers came from farming backgrounds and fell back on those skills as employment dried up in the city. Robert Myers had brought his family to Akron in 1928 from Paris, Tennessee. After being laid off early in the depression, the family moved outside the city to neighboring Kent where they could get farm work. Myers, however, remained determined to return to the rubber plants. His son, Joseph Thomas Myers, later recalled that his father frequently got up at midnight, walked all the way to Akron, and then waited in line for ten hours hoping to get a job. Over and over again, however, the trip proved futile as no one was hiring.28

Although the return to the land was often hailed as a panacea for urban unemployment, it often changed little but the geography of the problem, representing “a return to the problem conditions which the migrant earlier had left. Although they had left the cities, these workers still constituted an unemployed labor reserve.”29 Welfare workers in West Virginia found that almost half of the destitute families entering the state had resided there prior to 1930. In northern counties, this was especially the case as large numbers had “found employment for several years in the tire factories of Ohio and who were cutoff and returned to the rural sections of West Virginia.”30

28 “Joseph Thomas Myers,” Local History Collection, Akron-Summit Metropolitan Library.


where so many workers were recent arrivals from Kentucky and West Virginia, the exodus of the early 1930s was clearly evident. The perpetually overcrowded city became less crowded between 1929 and 1933 as the number of houses that contained boarders or were subdivided into apartments dropped by sixty percent.  

Akron’s unemployed rubber workers were not the only ones who sought shelter, at least temporarily, in rural homesteads during the early years of the Great Depression. Detroit, which shared Akron’s history of reliance on workers from Appalachia, experienced a similar pattern. At Hudson Motor Company, Denver Mattingly kept his job at eighty cents an hour, but when the workweek was reduced to only twenty-two hours, he could no longer afford to support his family in Detroit. He was more fortunate than some because his father welcomed him and his family back on the farm. Yet, the reason they had left was that the small farm on which Mattingly was raised with his brother provided neither enough work nor enough produce to support the entire family. A similar fate was met by Hugh Morgan who once earned $7.20 per day at Ford Motor Company, but had to return to the family farm in eastern Kentucky (already worked by his father and four brothers) when he was laid off.  

Not only were mountain regions receiving a return flow of unemployed workers from midwestern cities and elsewhere, but the move back to the farm occurred in coal mining regions within Appalachia as well. In 1933, Malcolm Ross observed,


[T]here still remains a surplus of people who cannot be used underground. Already the pressure of hunger has sent them by tens of thousands back to the soil. . . . A revival of frontier life is going on. . . . Log cabins and split rail fences are being built on cleared land. Men and boys are occasionally harnessed to drag the plows. There is barter of home-made utensils for food.

It is good that a farm people should return to the soil. The trouble is that they no longer have any claim to it. The coal companies own the land. [33]

Indeed, between 1930 and 1935, the farm population in West Virginia and Kentucky rose dramatically. During that period, the farm population of five Kentucky coalfield counties increased forty percent. [34] The return to the rural homesteads, however, was an inadequate solution. Many of these farms were unable to support existing family members, and, with the return of grown sons and daughters, became more overburdened. The result was an impossible situation in mountain areas where farms were small, having been subdivided amongst sons for generations. “There is something under 400,000 farms in the Southern Highlands,” estimated one writer. “One half of them are of less than 50 acres, one fourth under 20 acres. The average amount of cultivated land on them is 7 acres per adult male worker. This means that thousands of families are trying to make a living on from 3 to 10 acres of poor land.” [35]


34 Merton D. Oyler, *Natural Increase and Migration of Kentucky Population: 1920 to 1935*, Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin No. 395 (Lexington, Ky.: Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Kentucky, 1939): 260.

Akron’s concern about newcomers arriving from out-of-state who threatened to become economic burdens was ubiquitous in the United States during the Great Depression. In response to the “transient” problem, states began lengthening the residency period required to secure public relief funds, were more aggressive in verifying and documenting that information, and took steps to “deport” unemployed non-residents back to their home state. Responding to such concerns, the U.S. House of Representatives launched a series of hearings across the country to investigate the problem. H. W. Morgenthaler, testifying for the Ohio Department of Public Welfare, reported on the situation in Ohio, highlighting conditions in Akron: “Prior to the last decade, the vast majority of the people coming into Ohio from other States have been independent. Ohio’s actual industrial growth and in some instances an exaggerated statement of labor needs on the part of employers have caused the largest influx.” He maintained that the excessive use of job advertisements in other states by some Ohio employers remained a persistent problem, even in the late 1930s. Although he noted some of the impetuses for migration lay in the home region (mechanization in mining and agriculture, restriction of acreage under production), he also blamed Ohio employers who continued to recruit workers “by the distribution of handbills (in one instance by airplane in the Kentucky mountains), picturing employment needs to be in

---

excess of the number of people actually needed . . . [or] could possibly absorb.”

Akron and other Ohio cities that had long drawn workers to their factories had, by the 1930s, begun to view their “southern newcomers” as burdens. Morgenthaler assessed the situation:

The thing that is causing us more trouble now, I think, than that [job advertisements] is the fact that some adjoining States have fewer resources to our cities and some find work. They write to relatives in other parts of the country—in Kentucky, West Virginia and the South. Relatives come in and crowded housing conditions result with people becoming dependent very shortly after they are here, with all of the health and other problems that come along with bad housing. . . . When we try to return these folks, we have great difficulty . . . we find that the other State says they are not giving relief, and that these folks should be advised if they do come back they are not giving relief, which, of course, creates a barrier which the people themselves are not willing to face.

As Ohio law required a full year of residency before public assistance could be received, those unable to find and keep a job were left in a precarious position.

_Southern Newcomers and the Rise of Organized Labor in Akron_

In the midst of the Great Depression, New Deal legislation provided new rights and new opportunities for workers to form unions. Within two weeks of the passage of the Nation Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) in 1933, organizational meetings sponsored by the American Federation of Labor were held to launch a union among Akron’s

---

37 Ibid., 1108-1109.
38 Ibid., 1132.
rubber workers. This marked the first step in the formation of the United Rubber Workers of America (subsequently affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations) and the beginning of nearly a decade of strikes and labor upheaval in Akron. Although Akron’s labor troubles in the 1930s are often eclipsed in labor history by subsequent struggles in the automotive and steel industries, the very effective (and illegal) sit-down strike that distinguish the labor struggles of the late 1930s was first used in the rubber industry.\(^3\) The United Rubber Workers (URW), officially founded in 1935, became the only enduring union among Akron’s rubber workers.\(^4\) Earlier efforts had met not only strong opposition from Akron’s rubber manufacturers, but failed to attract strong support among the rubber workers themselves. Beyond the legal rights granted by the NIRA and the stronger provisions of the Wagner Act of 1935, which were absolutely essential, other reasons factored into the success of the URW in the 1930s. One factor was the leadership provided by native southerners who had, by the 1930s, developed strong bonds with the industry. Although occasionally maligned and resented by unemployed residents of Akron, much of the leadership of the URW stemmed from their ranks. The relationship between Akron’s rubber industry and the southerners the industry had begun recruiting decades earlier had evolved over the years.

---


40 The URW subsequently became the United Rubber, Cork, Linoleum & Plastic Workers of America and was absorbed into the United Steel Workers of America in 1995.
Those southerners recruited to Akron, especially those from Appalachia, were (by conventional wisdom) not supposed to be interested in unions. Past history in Akron and elsewhere seemed to support this notion. There had been tremendous obstacles to organizing coal miners in West Virginia where labor struggles were bitter and violent in past decades. In his study of the southern West Virginia mines, historian David Alan Corbin examined why coal miners in the region did not embrace unionization. Corbin found that the miners—native Appalachians, southern blacks, and European immigrants—who went to work in the coal fields of southern West Virginia between 1890 and 1912 were predominately of non-union backgrounds and many, particularly native West Virginians, viewed mining as a temporary vocation.

[The miners] cared little for making the coal fields a permanent home and a decent place in which to live and work. . . . The native miners were farmers and seemed intent on returning to their farms rather than making a career of mining coal. In fact, many of them kept their farms and returned to them during slack runs or strikes. . . . Bent on mining and earning their daily bread, or getting rich and moving on, or returning to their farms, the miners . . . were quick to accept both company promises and advice to stay away from the union.41

Early attempts to organize a union among Akron’s rubber workers suffered from similar difficulties. The inconstant workforce of the 1910s, which included many single young men and women who had no roots in Akron and little intention of settling there permanently, further diminished the likelihood that this pattern would change. In his analysis of class relations in Akron, Alfred Winslow Jones concluded that, “the sort of

disciplined adaptability to others that is called for in a labor union, was quite foreign to the natures of the Snakes [West Virginians] during their early years in Akron.”

The prevailing assumption was that southerners were poor prospects for union recruitment. Unions had enormous difficulties trying to organize in the South. Many southerners viewed unions with distrust because the union movement in the United States was heavily associated with immigrants and frequently accused of radicalism. Studies of the coal mining regions frequently noted that the native “mountaineers” were too independent, too quick to return home to the farm, and generally bad for union organizing. In Akron, the southerners had similarly been blamed for the failure to organize a union among the rubber workers. Two reasons were cited frequently. First, the strong lure of Akron’s rubber factories for outside labor kept long lines of job-seekers looking to take the place of any troublesome employee who attempted to organize a union. Second, they were indifferent or hostile to unions. Two major strike periods occurred in Akron—a six-week strike in 1913 and the strike wave of the 1930s. The reactions of southerners during the two labor organizing periods varied considerably.

During the first strike wave, southern newcomers were doubly blamed. Both the cause of the strikes and its failure were attributed to southern workers recruited by the manufacturers. Their presence, according to striking workers, drove down wages and

---

42 Jones, 78.
worsened conditions in the factories. The strike’s failure was blamed on their unwillingness to join the strikers’ cause. In the latter period, the series of strikes that rocked the industry in the 1930s, former southerners took leading roles in the labor organizing drives and were praised (or blamed) for the movement’s success. The two strike periods occurred twenty years apart and in very different contexts. The attitudes of southern recruits had changed as their ties to the industry and city had deepened with time and experience. And, while the rubber companies had long staved off union organizing by maintaining high wages, keeping a reserve pool of labor standing outside their gates, and instituting employing representation and welfare programs, these strategies were rendered less effective with the passage of Section 7(a) of the National Industrial Recovery Act.

Although there were other sporadic attempts to create a union among rubber workers prior to the 1930s, only one attracted sizable support. This was the organizing effort begun in February 1913 that produced the most serious labor conflict in the industry before the advent of the URW. The six-week strike throughout the Akron rubber industry attracted organizers from both the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), but the IWW ultimately took control of the strike. The causes of the strike were rooted in workers’ concerns about “speed-ups” at the plant and wage cuts that followed the increasing mechanization of the industry. Yet, included among the strikers’ grievances was the manufacturers’ constant recruitment of workers from other states. During the standoff, conditions
became volatile in the city as striking workers clashed with police. The ongoing strife prompted the mayor to send a panicked appeal for National Guard troops to Governor James Cox (who denied the request) and spurred the formation of a Citizen’s Welfare League, self-appointed guardians of “law and order” who acted as a “vigilante group,” patrolling the streets dispersing groups of striking workers, and “deporting” outside labor organizers.\(^4\) Under these turbulent circumstances, many striking workers, with few roots in Akron, decided to return home. Figures compiled by local railroad stations showed that approximately 1,000 rubber workers left Akron shortly after the strike broke out; an estimated three hundred of these were immigrants who intended to return to their home country, while others left the city to return to nearer homes, at least until tensions subsided.\(^4\) To probe the causes of the strike, the Ohio Senate established a committee under the leadership of Senator William Green, miner and labor leader. After several weeks of investigation, the Green Committee concluded that the increased pace demanded of workers had created unnecessary risks for injury and that the thirteen-hour night shift was excessive. Yet, on the central issue of wages, the committee found that, contrary to claims of strikers, male rubber workers were relatively well-paid. Although expressing shock at the meager wages paid to female employees, the committee concluded wage levels for men in the industry were “so high

\(^{43}\) Roy T. Wortman, “The IWW in Ohio, 1905-1950” (Ph.D. diss, Ohio State University, 1971), 36-37.

\(^{44}\) *Akron Beacon Journal*, 24 February 1913.
as to be dangerous to other lines of business [in Akron] not able to meet it.”45 The committee’s findings, however, came weeks after workers had begun drifting back to work and the strike had collapsed.

In its own publication, the IWW later assessed the Akron strike as its “supreme mistake” and attributed its failure to the “phlegmatically individualistic” nature of Akron’s largely native-born workforce: “The American element was predominant in Akron. Unlike the foreigners whom the IWW had led at Lawrence and Little Falls, the American striker is unschooled in picketing and unamenable to the mass enthusiasms which mean so much to the success of a strike.”46 While this estimation may contain some element of truth, little evidence exists of real conversion among the strikers to the ideology of the IWW.47 The high rate of labor turnover (and the good wages that attracted so many to Akron) that plagued the industry was likely the same factor that made any attempt by labor organizations to secure a sustained commitment from workers unlikely to succeed. In a situation where events threatened to become violent, outside workers preferred not to get involved. Meanwhile, rubber companies expanded their corporate welfare programs in an effort to improve labor relations and stave off future organizing efforts.

45 Akron Beacon Journal, 1 March 1913.


By the 1930s, the situation was different. Unemployment levels had reached unprecedented levels across the country and southerners had stronger ties to both the city and the industry—and their reaction to union organizing efforts was markedly different. As a local journalist assessed the situation: “These mountaineers, union organizers will tell you, are hard to convince, but once convinced, they take their union very seriously.”48 Indeed, many of the future leaders of the United Rubber Workers of America came from the ranks of southerners attracted to Akron in previous decades. Some had arrived in Akron with union experience, often survivors of the bitter battles in the coalfields during the 1920s. Many of the early leaders had firmly put down roots in Akron and felt they had a greater stake in the outcome of the movement. Also contributing to the increased interest in the union effort among southerners was the fact that the organizing drive of the 1930s was led by fellow southerners. In other cities, southerners, especially Appalachians, were slow to embrace union organizing movements in large part because they were a minority compared to the foreign immigrants who often dominated the movement. As Peter Friedlander observed in his study of the effort to organize a union among Detroit’s auto workers: “About 10 percent of the workers were Appalachian migrants. . . . Feeling intensely alien in the midst of the mass of Slavic workers and scattered throughout the shop . . . the

Appalachians were ‘the most lonely and isolated people in the plant.’ With few exceptions they . . . remained apart from the union.”

In Akron, rather than feeling marginalized, southerners were the dominant group in many factories and, at union organizing meetings, “the soft southern drawl” dominated discussion. Although it is probably impossible to compile a comprehensive profile of the URW membership in the 1930s or even a statistical profile of those who took leading roles, a number of those southerners who enthusiastically backed the movement have left records of their experiences. As Akron’s industrial labor force was unusual in its demographics compared to most other industrial cities (where “ethnics” dominated the labor movement), it follows that the URW’s composition and leadership reflected this. In contrast to the leadership of other unions, “Rubber Workers leaders were also white males, but, it appears, had little else in common with their fellow union executives. With few exceptions they were products of the rural South and Midwest. They were native WASPS, their fathers were farmers or

---


50 *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 13 March 1937.

51 Historian Daniel Nelson notes: “URW members were not accomplished bureaucrats. They were products of a social milieu that placed little emphasis on formal organizations, was contemptuous of sociological data, and did not associate history with the accumulation of statistical information. Individuals were not numbers or even names, but unique entities. . . . Because of this kind of problem the accumulation of biographical data on a systematic basis is often impossible. I have abandoned the effort, convinced that it is easier to reconstruct the lives of the 17th century Puritans than of 20th century industrial workers.” “The Leadership of the United Rubber Workers, 1933-42,” *Detroit in Perspective* 5 (Spring 1981): 23.
unskilled industrial workers, and among them high school diplomas were rare and prized commodities.”

Considering the many abortive efforts to organize the rubber workers in the past, the creation of the URW, even with New Deal legislation, was not a guaranteed success. Georgia native John D. House was among those who helped start up a union at Goodrich after the passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933. Initially, his efforts met with a lukewarm response. Despite the circulation of pledge cards and recruitment notices, only thirteen fellow workers appeared at the first meeting. Sustained efforts paid off, however, and House went on to become the first president of Local 2, held that position from 1935 to 1940, and subsequently served in other union offices before his retirement.

Many of the leaders and members of the early URW had come from coal mining regions where they had witnessed, and sometimes participated in, union struggles with the mining companies. Such experiences often shaped their attitude toward the union movement. Joseph Childs, future president of the local at General Tire & Rubber Company, was born in the mining community of Barrackville, West Virginia, and his family was frequently on the move in West Virginia and Pennsylvania during his childhood (he attended thirteen different schools by age twelve). The conditions he

52 Ibid., 23-24.
53 “John D. House,” Local History Collection, Akron-Summit Metropolitan Library.
witnessed in the coal mines first drew him to the union movement. Childs was part of the exodus from mining communities in the 1920s, arriving in Akron in 1928. He subsequently became involved in the formation of the union at General Tire & Rubber in 1933, later becoming president of the local, and ultimately international vice president of the URW.54 Others had more direct experience with union organizing in the coal mines. Frank Easterling had been a member of the United Mine Workers (UMW) in West Virginia before moving his family to Akron. That experience prepared him for the difficulties that faced the union organizing drive in Akron. His daughter later recalled: “During the organizing drive, my dad worked 12 hours a day at Goodrich and walked five miles in 13-degree freezing weather to pull his picket duty.” Easterling expected the “chilly reception” union efforts met in Akron; in his experiences with the UMW, he had been beaten up by Pinkerton guards and once the mining company had shut off the electricity to the family home because of his involvement with the union.55 Like Easterling, Fleet Perrine brought experience with the UMW with him to Akron. Perrine was born in Worthington, West Virginia, the son of a coal miner. His father was president of the coal miners union local. By the age of thirteen, Perrine was working in the coal mines between school sessions and acting as doorkeeper during union meetings. His father took the family to Akron when Perrine was a boy, but they

54 “Joseph William Childs,” Local History Collection, Akron-Summit Metropolitan Library.
55 “Barbara Easterling,” Local History Collection, Akron-Summit Metropolitan Library.
stayed only a brief time before returning to West Virginia. There, Perrine dropped out during his freshman year of high school to become a full time coal miner. By the age of fifteen, he had been elected to his first union office, as secretary-treasurer of his local. Thus, when Perrine returned to Akron in 1925, he was already a veteran union member and was quick to join the effort to organize the first AFL local at B. F. Goodrich in 1933. When the local joined the CIO in 1935, he became county chairman of the union’s Political Action Committee.56

Another leading figure in the early URW was Rex D. Murray. Murray was born in 1908 on a farm in Ripley, West Virginia, the sixth of nine children. Quitting school after the seventh grade, Murray worked in road construction and then for a steel mill, where he developed an interest in the labor movement. In 1926, he arrived in Akron as a “strong-willed young man full of proud, old-fashioned mountain notions.” Working at General Tire & Rubber, Murray experienced first-hand the speed-ups and job insecurity of the early 1930s. In the summer of 1933, he helped form General Local 18323, United Rubber Workers Federal Union and was elected its president. Murray has been credited for pioneering the first “sit-down” strike in 1934—the first of many that ultimately resulted in the unionization of Akron’s rubber workers as the United Rubber Workers of America. Murray suggested a sit-down strike “as a way to keep heads from getting bloodied. The strikes of the teens [in Akron] had been rough on the

56 “Fleet Perrine,” Local History Collection, Akron-Summit Metropolitan Library.
strikers. He thought that if they followed the practice of some European miners, simply
ceasing work at their machinery, there would be less chance of violence.”

The tactic had not been used in the United States. He later recalled initial reactions to his
suggestion: “They thought I was off my rocker.” Ultimately he persuaded other union
organizers that it could be done effectively and peacefully. The first sit-down at
General Tire began in June and lasted more than a month and, although it did not result
in formal union recognition, won workers numerous other concessions.

The most high-profile figure in the early leadership of the United Rubber
Workers was Sherman Dalrymple. A farm boy from Walton, West Virginia, Dalrymple
had come to Akron in his early teenage years and, except for the years he served in the
Marines during World War I, had worked in the rubber industry ever since. Dalrymple
was elected the first president of the URW in 1935, a position he held until retirement in
1945. As president, Dalrymple won the respect of both rubber workers and industry
managers and was a consistent opponent of spontaneous sit-down strikes which he
believed would damage the influence and public perception of the URW.

---

57 “Rex Clifford Murray,” Local History Collection, Akron-Summit Metropolitan Library.

58 On July 18, 1934, General Tire agreed to the following: It would “meet with the worker’s
representatives, pay rates comparable to those paid in the Big Three plants, consider seniority in making
job assignments, improve working conditions in the plant, and abolish the employee representation plan.”
Rex Murray and Mrs. Sherman Dalrymple, “Union Organizing in the Thirties,” in F.D.R.’s America:

years as president of the URW, all the major rubber manufacturers entered into formal collective bargaining arrangement with the URW.\textsuperscript{60}

The turmoil caused by labor militancy in Akron during the 1930s created heated controversy in Akron. By 1935, increased demand for rubber tires alleviated the worst of the unemployment problem in Akron with sharp drops in the number of residents on relief and WPA rolls; however, the city quickly became notorious for its strikes. There were sixty-five separate sit-down strikes in Akron’s rubber factories between March and December 1936 alone, although many were of brief duration.\textsuperscript{61} C. Nelson Sparks, a former mayor of Akron, hysterically railed against the changes that followed the arrival of the CIO union as “a sordid tale of suicides, broken homes, evictions, foreclosures, privation, and want; of destruction of private property and violence to workingmen whose only crime was that they wanted to work; of bombings, shootings, stabbings, kidnappings, and threats to women and children.”\textsuperscript{62} Although Sparks grossly exaggerated the situation, both industry observers and many Akron residents feared the strike wave threatened the future of the rubber industry in its hometown. \textit{Factory} magazine opined: “For industry, there is a warning against putting all your

\textsuperscript{60} Official union recognition was won at Firestone in 1937, B. F. Goodrich and U. S. Rubber in 1938, General Tire in 1939, and Goodyear in 1941.


production eggs in one basket, or one city. For labor, there is a warning that you are killing the goose that laid the golden eggs when you enforce high wage differentials to the detriment of the city that suffers from them. Indeed, decentralization of the rubber tire industry accelerated after 1935. In 1936 and 1937 alone, nine new rubber factories were established outside of Akron, reducing the city’s dominance as the center of rubber manufacturing. Whereas in 1929, the city had manufactured two-thirds of all tires in the United States, by 1938, sixty-five percent of all tires were made outside of Akron.

In the early 1930s, southerners in Akron endured accusations of taking jobs from “real” Akronites. By the late 1930s, with much of the URW’s leadership natives to the South, they became easy scapegoats to blame for the city’s labor troubles. Perhaps the most extreme example of this appeared in a letter to the editor of the *Akron Beacon Journal*, which read: “You and I know who these strike agitators are. I’ll come out and tell you in the plainest words I know. They are these uneducated tobacco chewing geetar playing hillbilly illiterates from West Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee.” The author continued on to criticize these “hillbillies” for having sloppy homes (if they even bothered to buy homes in Akron), “polluting” local speech with their “nauseating accent,” and befouling the airwaves with their music. The letter

---

63 Coates, 38.

64 Frank, 25; *Akron Beacon Journal* 16 February 1938.

65 *Akron Beacon Journal*, 1 June 1938.
from “Union Hater” prompted the usual denunciations and defenses of the city’s southern population. What is more interesting is how once again southerners became easy scapegoats for all difficulties in the city. Long having been blamed for undermining the position of Akron’s rubber workers as a reserve pool of replacement workers, once southerners established firmer roots in the city and industry, they were committed to the fight to improve their situation. Far from being the enemy of union organizing efforts, once the legal provisions were available to launch a successful organizing drive, southerners took leading roles, bringing experience in both the factories and mining with them to the struggle.
CHAPTER 7

BLACK AND WHITE MIGRANTS: RACE RELATIONS IN AKRON

One of the older Negro informants expressed her reactions to these new arrivals [1915-1920]. Her thought was that before these southern Negroes arrived the relations between the Negro and white Akronites were comparatively good. Negroes were served at all the city’s restaurants, not segregated in places of public entertainment. Then the southern Negroes arrived and began to appear in numbers on Main Street on Sundays wearing overalls. Clearly she felt that this had produced the subsequent period of segregation and discrimination.¹

The massive explosion of Akron’s population in the 1910s and 1920 did, to a great extent, stem from the in-migration of southern whites. Not to be overlooked, however, is the large number of African Americans from the South who arrived during this period. As Akron’s black population grew, race relations worsened in the city.²

With both white and black southerners arriving in the overcrowded city, it was, perhaps, inevitable that racial tensions would surface. Indeed, in the 1920s, Akron achieved the ignoble distinction of having the largest chapter of the Ku Klux Klan in Ohio. The facile explanation for this then, and often since, was that the city’s large population of white southern transplants, with their racial and religious intolerance, was to blame.


² This pattern was repeated in cities across the North as cities experienced large influxes of southern blacks. Kevin Boyle, Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age (New York: Henry Hold and Co., 2005), 9-10.
The situation, however, was much more complex and the role of white southerners in shaping northern race relations deserves closer consideration.

White southerners have frequently been blamed for bringing their notions of racial superiority and racial separation into northern cities. Many white newcomers to Akron did, after all, come from areas where the Jim Crow system ruled. Racial segregation was ubiquitous not only in the deep South, but in most of the Southern Appalachian region where African Americans faced residential and educational segregation. In Appalachia, the African American population was concentrated primarily in mining communities where recreation was segregated and they were restricted to living in areas known by names like “Colored Town.”

Eastern Kentucky native Warren Wright recalled, “As I grew up of course we counted Negroes inferior. The mountain people looked at them that way and there’s no doubt in my mind that the ethnics also . . . soon looked at them in the same manner.”

In some mountain communities, there were few or no blacks; elsewhere, segregation remained the norm.

Of course, segregation was not limited to southern communities. Even in states like Ohio where laws abolishing segregation in public accommodations and education had been adopted in the late nineteenth century, residential segregation and employment

---


discrimination maintained a clear racial caste system. The rapid growth of northern black communities during World War I and the 1920s coincided with the migration of southern whites; both white and black southerners arrived in industrial cities where they competed for housing and jobs. Since deteriorating race relations coincided with the Great Migration, a recurring theme in the literature concerns the effects of white southerners on race relations in northern cities. Resistance to integration and growing blue-collar conservatism in the latter half of the twentieth century have frequently been attributed to the influence of southern-born whites and their supposed ubiquitous racism. As historian James N. Gregory has observed, “Southern whites have often been implicated in this trend, both by journalists, who instinctively associate the southern background with virulent racism, and by scholars, who sometimes are less than careful when it comes to stereotyping southern whites. . . . The fact is that northern whites needed no instruction in racism from southerners.”

Similarly, the racism of northern

---

5 After the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the Civil Rights Cases (1883) that the Fourteenth Amendment only protected citizens from discrimination by government (thereby allowing discrimination by private individuals), Ohio and twelve other northern states adopted civil rights statutes protecting citizens from discrimination in public accommodations. The Ohio Public Accommodations law, adopted in 1884, prohibited racial discrimination in places of “public accommodation and amusement.” Although the law was “underutilized,” historian Frederick M. Gittes notes that the law “received surprisingly strong support from most courts” and, even after the establishment of the doctrine “separate but equal” doctrine, Ohio courts generally “took the ‘equal’ requirements seriously.” In 1887, Ohio abolished racially-segregated schools; however, since a prohibition on housing discrimination was not included amongst the civil rights provisions, de facto segregation occurred in school systems in many parts of the state. Ohio did not adopt a comprehensive fair employment law until 1959. Frederick M. Gittes, “Paper Promises: Race and Ohio Law after 1860,” in The History of Ohio Law: Volume II, eds. Michael Les Benedict and John F. Winkler (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004), 797-804, 818.

“ethnics” is too often overlooked. Many northern ethnic neighborhoods (often lower middle class themselves and fearing their own loss of status) fiercely resisted black encroachment and most labor unions (in which immigrant stock often composed the majority of members) were slow to embrace African American workers. White southerners, nonetheless, became easy scapegoats for racial problems in many cities of the Midwest during the post-World War II era, but the association did not begin then.

Since few studies of southern white migrants before World War II have been attempted, accounts of their effect on race relations are mainly anecdotal. The best comparison, however, seems to be the growing literature that concerns race relations in Detroit. Like Akron, Detroit witnessed a massive influx of black and white southerners, both of whom were regarded as undesirable additions to the city by many native Detroiters. The simultaneous influx of large numbers of southern white and black migrants in Detroit was repeatedly cited as the cause of rising racial tensions despite the fact that the racism of native Detroiters was a large part of the problem.7

One only has to look at contemporary assumptions about the 1943 race riot in Detroit to see how southern whites became scapegoats for racial problems. The riot began on June 20 as a small series of fights that soon escalated into a full-scale riot that

7 In a recent study, Kevin Bole examines a racial outburst in Detroit when a black family moved into a white neighborhood. While Boyle does not provide (and it would probably be impossible to compile) a systematic profile of the members of the white mob, he does observe that the neighborhood into which the family moved was composed of the upper ranks of the working class: “There was no doubt that they had risen in ranks because they weren’t immigrants or Negroes, because they came from Ohio or New York or small-town Michigan instead of Alabama or Galacia or Lodz, because they wore a Masonic pin on their lapels when they went to see the boss who did the hiring, and the bonds of brotherhood extended to the factory floor.” Arc of Justice, 149.
left twenty-five blacks and nine whites dead by the following day. Although detailed studies of the riot found that it was mainly native white Detroiters who lay behind the violent attacks against blacks, popular opinion—black and white—insisted that the white rioters were those southern newcomers who had brought their nasty racial attitudes with them. For many, “the connection between these violent actions and ‘respectable’ white Detroiters was untenable. . . . Hence, journalists and city officials insisted that it was the ‘rabble rousing,’ recent white arrivals from Appalachia who carried out the disturbances.”

In their detailed study of the riot, Dominic J. Capeci, Jr. and Martha Wilkerson explain:

“Old” and “Real” Detroiters, proud of their locale’s reputation as a refuge for blacks, deplored the riots and blamed it on uneducated, belligerent white Southerners. They castigated newcomers from “backward states,” bearing “ignorant prejudices” and undemocratic ideas. . . . Even “an enlightened Southerner” apologized for “the hillbillies who were largely responsible for the racial trouble.”

This impression remained firmly entrenched in the public mind despite extensive investigations into the riot that showed that native Detroiters and long-term residents—not newly-arrived southerners with their “ignorant prejudices”—were behind the violence. “Hoodlums and hillbillies,” the authors conclude, “made for easy

---


scapegoats and sensational press, but they hardly reflected the reality of those who rioted.”

Although many southern migrants were accustomed to a clear “color line” separating the races in social and economic relations, they still had more experience interacting with African Americans than did many northerners (and mountain whites) who lived in areas with negligible black populations. Southerners from Jim Crow states did not, however, introduce racism to Akron, although increased segregation of public places did coincide with the years of heaviest influx. The appearance of “whites only” signs (notwithstanding state law) in public facilities that emerged in Akron during and after World War I, came from business owners and shop-keepers—not recently arrived white southerners. Southern newcomers may have exacerbated racial tensions in the city, but they were not the ones introducing segregated facilities. Indeed, Akron’s most serious outburst of racial violence—the attempted lynching of a black man accused of raping a six-year-old girl—occurred in 1900, long before there was a sizable southern (white or black) population in the city. Rather, discrimination in employment and

\[\text{Ibid., 31.}\]

\[\text{11 The accused was a forty-year-old man who was arrested and allegedly confessed to the crime. As news spread, a crowd of two or three hundred surrounded City Hall, where it was believed he was being held. Police had to fire repeatedly into the mob to keep them back, accidentally killing two children in a passing buggy. By late that evening, rioters had put dynamite to the walls of City Hall and began shooting through windows. It took the militia to restore order. The accused man had fortunately been secretly whisked off to safety in Cleveland. He subsequently pleaded guilty, but was pardoned unconditionally by Governor James Cox because of severe doubts about the man’s guilt and the fact that he was given little opportunity to assert his innocence. Karl H. Grismer, \textit{Akron and Summit County} (Akron, Ohio: Summit County Historical Society, 1952), 298-301.}\]
services came from native Akronites who were the ones who held the most power to advance or deny equal rights to Akron’s growing black population.

Akron did not attract a heavy influx of southern blacks on a level comparable to other industrial cities and its black population remained relatively small before World War II. In 1910, only six hundred and fifty-seven blacks lived in the city and race relations have been characterized as having been relatively positive for the era. Before the war began, the members of Akron’s small black community (approximately one percent of the city’s population) were welcome “at all the city’s restaurants, not segregated in places of public entertainment,” according to one longtime black resident.\footnote{12} As Akron’s overall population expanded, its African-American population grew in number and as a percentage of the total population. By 1920, the city’s black population had reached 5,580 (2.7 percent of the population); the growth having derived mainly from black newcomers from southern states who arrived during the war years. In 1917, the \textit{Akron Evening Times} observed that although a “short time ago few negroes could be seen on Akron’s streets,” the number of blacks applying for jobs in the city had increased by fifty percent.\footnote{13} Most African American men found employment in either the rubber factories or in the construction trades. In the rubber factories, the six or seven hundred African Americans employed by 1919 were relegated mainly to heavy

\footnote{12} Udell, 75.

\footnote{13} \textit{Akron Evening Times}, 2 March 1917.

177
menial jobs such as washing bales of crude rubber.14 Most African-American women in Akron were employed in domestic work.15 Despite being confined to the lower ranks of employment, many African Americans found the opportunities the city provided to be preferable to those available in the South. One black migrant reported in a letter home, “people are coming from the south every week the colored people are making good they are the best workers.” Furthermore, he appears to have been made to feel welcome, noting, “I have made a great many white friends.”16 Akron, however, was less attractive to blacks than cities with long-established black communities (such as nearby Cleveland) or known for progressive hiring of African Americans (Detroit, especially the Ford Motor Company). During World War I, black Akronites were alarmed as segregation began appearing in stores and other public places in Akron. The application for a charter to begin a local chapter of the NAACP in Akron in 1918 asserted: “The NAACP is an organization badly needed here; there is much work to be done as in very few communities are the colored people in the north treated worse.”17


15 Akron Sunday Times, 5 April 1925.


17 Hannibal B. Lyons to Assistant Secretary of the NAACP, May 23, 1918, Papers of the NAACP, Part 12, Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939, Series C: The Midwest, Reel 19.
Deterioration of race relations in Akron was similar to that of other cities experiencing a rapid influx of southern blacks. In Cleveland (where the black population grew from 8,500 to over 50,000 between 1915 and 1925) the city’s longest-running black newspaper, the *Cleveland Gazette*, expressed concern that the heavy influx of African Americans from the South was “undoubtedly lowering the status of our people in this section of the country.”

A similar pattern was seen in Chicago where what historian James R. Grossman terms “Old Settlers” (longtime black residents of the city) viewed wartime black migrants as threats to their hard-won civil rights and greater acceptance in the city. He notes:

> Much of what offended and embarrassed those [Old Settlers] concerned with maintaining standards . . . was identifiably southern. The Deep South origins of the wartime era migrants distinguished them not only from native Chicagoans, but also from those who had arrived earlier, usually from the Upper South. The differences were obvious to black Chicagoans: there was no mistaking the regional provenance of streetside barbecue stands and such icons as watermelon and head rags. . . . Many feared that the already tenuous racial peace in Chicago would dissolve as whites reacted against crude peasants unaccustomed to the proper exercise of those rights.

Chicago’s leading black newspaper, the *Chicago Defender*, expressed consternation with black southern migrants who appeared in public wearing overalls or head rags noting, “We are not in the Southland and there is no mark of servitude that must be

18 *Cleveland Gazette*, 12 May 1923; 18 April 1925.

placed on a man or woman of these climes.” In Akron such sentiments were echoed by one of its “Old Settlers” who dated the shift in the racial climate to when “southern Negroes arrived and began to appear in numbers on Main Street on Sundays wearing overalls.” By 1917, signs began appearing in some business places in Akron stating “colored people are not wanted” and movie theaters began refusing admission to blacks. By the end of the war there was no question Akron was becoming an increasingly segregated town. In his history of Akron, Karl Grismer observes:

Akron had less difficulty assimilating the newcomers from foreign countries than it did Negroes from the South, not because the colored people were less adaptable or less desirable but because of race prejudices. Prevented by the antipathy of the whites from living in good residential sections, they were forced to take squalid quarters in the worst districts. For the first time in its history, Akron got extensive slums, and the slums bred disease and crime.

Although residential segregation was not enforced by statute, discrimination in housing was commonplace. Landlords in the more prosperous sections of the city would only rent to whites and the new neighborhoods built during the 1910s—including the company-financed Goodyear Heights and Firestone Park—initially refused to sell to blacks; thus, the black population remained clustered in the valley area around Furnace

20 Ibid.
21 Quoted in Udell, 75.
22 Akron Beacon Journal, 6 December 1917.
23 Grismer, 402.
Street in central Akron. The valley section, however, was not a black-only or black-majority ghetto. At the Bryan school in the valley, only one-fourth of the students were African Americans and black students could be found in schools district-wide. Building or buying one’s own home, however, was often the only opportunity for blacks to move to another district.25

Many white Akronites blamed black newcomers for rising crime rates in the city. Overt expressions of racism were voiced by Summit County Municipal Judge E. D. Fritch. After finding that, on one particular day, thirty-one percent of those arraigned before him were black, Fritch denounced the recruitment of southern blacks by labor agents, asserting they belonged “to the shiftless class who are not wanted in either the South or North.”26 In addition, he publicly proposed a separate segregated state for African Americans in which they would have full civil liberties, unless they venture outside whereupon they would be disfranchised for life. “Until the negro has his ambition aroused and awakens to his own responsibility,” he argued, “he will be a menace to himself and society.”27 While expressing outrage over Fritch’s comments, “A Southern Negro” also blamed the high numbers of blacks arrested in Akron on the


25 Akron Sunday Times, 5 April 1925.

26 Akron Beacon Journal, 23 May 1917.

27 Cleveland Advocate, 21 July 1917.
recruiting tactics of local firms. The practice of sending labor recruiters south (rather than publishing employment ads in newspapers) and offering men free transportation, he reasoned, attracted the wrong element: “The negro who goes into his pocket and pays from $20 to $30 for a railroad ticket doesn’t do so to go to some city to break the law. He goes for betterment of conditions.”

In response to fears about blacks committing crimes, the city council considered raising a fund to ship “undesirables” back South. This plan received qualified, tongue-in-cheek, approval by the pastor of the A. M. E. Zion Church—on the condition that “some provision . . . be made for the so-called ‘poor white trash,’ who . . . are also responsible for crime conditions.”

Amid overcrowding and rapid population growth, a factor frequently cited as aggravating wartime race relations was the simultaneous arrival of southern whites. Grismer argues that, “Akron’s Negro problem undoubtedly was aggravated by the large number of southern whites who had flocked to the city. Raised in states which had Jim Crow laws, they could not get used to having colored people sit next to them in street cars or enter restaurants where they were eating, and . . . objected to their children being compelled to attend schools where colored children also were pupils.”

One native Georgian, publicly defended the southern racial caste system, explaining: “We do not

---

28 Akron Beacon Journal, 26 April 1917.
29 Akron Beacon Journal, 29 May 1917.
30 Karl H. Grismer, Akron and Summit County (Akron: Summit County Historical Society, 1952), 402-403.
call him ‘Mr.’ or ‘Mrs.’—we call them ‘Sam’ and ‘Sally.’ We extend to them no hope of social equality—they not only do not expect it, they do not want it.”

Despite the appearance of segregated facilities in some businesses and being limited mostly to lower-paying work, the city continued to attract southern blacks and the black population grew steadily. The YMCA director for “negro welfare work” insisted the city remained attractive to African Americans for “the opportunity offered by the city for greater progress educationally, economically and socially.” By the mid-1920s, the number of black-owned businesses and black professionals was increasing, including, “three negro physicians, two dentists, three attorneys, two undertakers, a district insurance agent, a shoemaker, four grocery stores, numerous barber shops and poolrooms.” Segregation, however, remained commonplace. By the early 1920s, many restaurants refused to serve blacks; theaters requested blacks sit in the balcony; hotels refused blacks rooms; and they were “‘invisible’ in both managerial business positions and in administrative posts in the local government.” In such a racial climate, the appearance of the Ku Klux Klan in the city was a dreaded development.

31 Akron Beacon Journal, 27 September 1917.

32 Akron Sunday Times, 5 April 1925.

Migrants and the Rise of the Klan in the Rubber City

Amid economic uncertainty and rapid social change, the second Ku Klux Klan swelled in membership and influence in Ohio and elsewhere in the early 1920s. The organization marketed itself as a “patriotic” American organization for “ordinary white Protestants.” In addition to the anti-black racism of the original Klan, the second Klan espoused anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, and anti-immigrant sentiments, as well as presenting themselves as defenders of “morality” in the face of “moral corruption.” The cultural transformation of American society in the 1920s—from jazz music to more relaxed sexual mores—was condemned by many Americans who viewed such changes as evidence that the moral foundation of society was threatened. Historian William D. Jenkins summarized its widespread appeal: “Although Klan rhetoric included more than a sprinkling of prejudice, its growth depended on its moral authoritarianism and its efforts to enforce—even by extralegal and violent means—laws regulating the vices of the community.” This second Ku Klux Klan flourished in Ohio where membership, by one estimate, peaked at between 400,000 and 450,000 members.

Akron, where rapid growth accentuated the changes of the “New Era,” earned the dishonorable distinction of having the largest klavern in the state. Evidence of

34 William D. Jenkins, Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio’s Mahoning Valley (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990), viii.
growing social chaos and immorality abounded in Akron and created an environment ripe for the Klan. In the spring of 1922, circulars announcing the formation of a klavern in Akron first appeared.

If you are 100 per cent. American, and believe in the tenets of the Christian religion, white supremacy, our free public schools, just laws and liberty, protection of pure womanhood, separation of church and state, limitation of foreign immigration, upholding the constitution of the United States, freedom of speech and press, preventing the cause of mob violence and lynching, law and order, you are invited to attend the big mass meeting at the Akron armory Wednesday night, May 24, to get the inside facts on the principles, practices and purposes of the Ku Klux Klan.36

The Summit County Klan (Klan No. 27) rapidly drew a large membership and publicly claimed a membership of 52,980 at its peak. Although the Klan regularly exaggerated its membership rolls, even the more conservative estimate of approximately 18,000 members is striking.37 “At its peak in 1923,” according to historian Kenneth T. Jackson, “Klan No. 27 claimed 350 applications per day, suggested that the name of Summit County be changed to Ku Klux Kounty, and enrolled so many national guardsmen that the local artillery battery became known as the Grand Dragon’s Guard.”38 Akron Klan initiations were large affairs in which hundreds of individuals became new members and featured burning crosses that could

36 Akron Beacon Journal, 22 May 1922.


38 Jackson, 166.
be seen in many areas of the city. Although precise attendance figures are elusive, it is clear that Klan activities consistently attracted large crowds. When one Klan meeting was held downtown, the main avenue traversing the central city became so choked with traffic that vehicles on surrounding streets were forced to a halt. According to one Klan lecturer, Akron was so thoroughly infiltrated that every block within the city was monitored by at least one klansman on the lookout for illegal and immoral activity. Despite the large size of the Summit County Klan and well-attended events, however, there is no record that any violent or destructive altercation ever took place in Akron.

Although a membership profile is impossible to ascertain, the Klan certainly drew many members from the local rubber factories. Future United Rubber Workers of America leader John D. House recalled that by 1923, “thousands of rubber workers had been conned into joining and purchasing their white robes and masks for which they paid $10.00.” The Klan was an organization in which white Protestants, local natives or not, could belong on an equal footing based on the assumption of a shared affinity. Although he “had no sympathy for the organization,” House claimed to know many who joined the organization which quickly rose in popularity and whose events were numerous and well-publicized. Indeed, House’s sister was married by the pastor of her church at a Klan event held at Fountain Park, on Summit County’s fairgrounds.

40 Howson, 59.
The possible correlation between the large size of the Klan in Akron and the city’s unusually large population of white southern Protestants is difficult to access. The secretiveness of the organization and the scarcity of surviving membership records, makes creating a profile of Klan members anywhere extremely difficult. No known records of the Summit County Klan survive, leaving only inferences drawn from contemporary observers and rough comparisons to cities in which records have been preserved. In his study of Klan activity in the Youngstown area, William D. Jenkins constructed a profile based on partially preserved membership records. A frequent interpretation of the Klan during this period is that the organization was most attractive to native whites who were economically on the margins—those who felt most threatened by changes in society. Yet, in contrast to such assertions by historian Kenneth T. Jackson and others, Jenkins found that the Klan attracted more support from the middle class than from semiskilled and unskilled workers. Indeed, Jenkins describes it as an organization “that defined America as a conservative Protestant culture” whose appeal was one that “cut across class lines and attempted to produce a unified front, a stiffened resistance to a politically corrupt society.”

Akron’s Klan seems to have fit this model. John Lee Maples, author of the most detailed study of the Akron Klan, asserts that it “seems always to have been under the control of respectable

---

42 Jenkins, 94.
Protestant social and political leaders and was an effective means of local political control for several years.” He continues:

If having members in office can be termed “control,” the Klan at one time controlled the office of Mayor, Superintendent of Schools, County Sheriff, County Prosecutor, Clerk of Courts, two of the three County Commissioners and four of the seven seats of the Akron Board of Education including the Presidency. . . . For a while, the Klan was the agency through which anyone of political ambition “got somewhere” in Akron.43

One of Akron’s Common Pleas Court judges explained his motivation to join the Klan:

“The Klan to me was just another club to join. I belonged to anything I could get in. Anybody with political pretensions joined.”44

Akron’s large population of southern whites might seem to suggest that the organization there would be more racist than nativist in its message. Indeed, several writers have asserted that the Klan in Akron (as well as Springfield) was more overtly racist than in other Ohio cities—an assertion tied to the presence of southern whites who, raised in Jim Crow states, objected to the more fluid race relations in the city. Karl Grismer notes that the racism of southern-born whites “was capitalized upon . . . by organizers of the Ku Klux Klan.”45 Similarly, in her contemporary account of Akron, Ruth McKenney described men “from the southern mountains” as “fair bait for


44 Jackson, 166.

45 Grismer, 402-403.
the savage program of the Ku Klux Klan.”46 Akron’s black newspaper, the *Black and White Chronicle*, remarking on the need for the NAACP in the city, noted: “We need it, because this town has a reputation that it justly deserves: It is dominated by southerners and southern sentiment.”47 Indeed, the Klan’s political power was strongest in the factory neighborhoods of South and East Akron, where the largest concentrations of white southerners lived.48

That many southern whites brought racist attitudes with them is undeniable, but insufficient to explain the popularity of the Klan in Akron. Despite casual assertions that the large southern white population and its racial prejudices explain the Klan’s organizing success in the city, the Akron Klan never overtly directed efforts to impose segregation or target blacks for violence; indeed, no direct racial confrontation ever occurred. The public revelation that the KKK had organized a klavern in Summit County, however, generated public condemnation by Mayor D. C. Rybolt, both of the city’s major newspapers, as well as local black organizations. For the city’s black population, the majority born in the South, the Klan was, and always would be, an organization of terror and violence and their reaction to the appearance of the Klan in Akron was swift and organized. When in May 1922, a public meeting of the Klan was


48 *Cleveland Gazette*, 4 November 1925.
announced, members of the Young Men’s Progressive Club, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and the NAACP successfully sought an injunction which prevented the organization from holding its meeting at the Akron armory on the grounds that “said organization has for its purpose the fomenting of racial hatred, religious intolerance and the oppression of the weaker elements of our community and State and also that it is calculated to array different Nationalities against each other.”

Subsequently, local African-American organizations launched boycotts of businesses that advertised in the *Fiery Cross*, the official Klan publication.

Although the Akron Klan has been repeatedly characterized as more anti-black than other klaverns in Ohio, its known activities do not bear out this assertion. If indeed the Klan was as popular as reported, one would expect pressure to be exerted to extend and reinforce segregation of public accommodations and public schools. Yet, in 1922, the year the Klan first appeared in the city, the local branch of the NAACP, with the cooperation of the Chief of Police, was successful in having all discriminatory “for whites only” signs promptly removed from businesses whenever they appeared. Throughout the 1920s, complaints of discriminatory service were

---


investigated by the NAACP and the police quickly responded to such civil rights violations.\textsuperscript{52} Nor was there any public effort to segregate African-Americans in education. In his analysis of Akron’s school system during this era, Leon Friedman found no attempt was made to subvert Ohio’s ban on segregation in the public schools, including the period when Klan-backed candidates controlled the local school board. The city’s nine hundred and forty-two black students were well dispersed throughout the district and his analysis of pupil attendance districts found no evidence that racial bias influenced school assignments.\textsuperscript{53} “Because of the known affinity of the school superintendent and certain members of the Board of Education for the Ku Klux Klan (during the period 1924-1928) it may be assumed that those persons were racially biased in attitude.” He continues: “There is no mention, however, of race of pupils, either in Board Minutes or records, for this period. There is no evidence to indicate that racial bias was prevalent in the drawing of pupil attendance districts or in determining the need for or location of pupil housing.”\textsuperscript{54}

Rather than focus its efforts on racial issues, much of the Klan’s activities centered on introducing compulsory Bible reading in the schools and attempting to

\textsuperscript{52} Based on Annual Reports for the Years 1927, 1928, 1930 in \textit{Papers of the NAACP}, Part 12, \textit{Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939, Series C: The Midwest}, Reel 19 and Reel 20. This, despite the fact that “the Klan’s influence permeated the Akron police department.” Maples, 111.


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 177.
force the school district to fire Catholic teachers.\textsuperscript{55} The focus on the school system helps to explain why—according to Katheryn Anneshansley (wife of a local minister and head of the Women of the Ku Klux Klan)—the women’s organization was “more than one and a half times the size of the men’s organization.”\textsuperscript{56} During a school assembly in November 1923, robed Klansmen appeared to present an American flag and Bible to the principal. The Board of Education, however, would not tolerate such behavior and ordered the principal to return the items—which were subsequently mailed to the local Klan headquarters.\textsuperscript{57} The sole victory during its short period of control over the school board was the approval of a plan to include the reading of selected Bible passages in the public schools. Selections were required to be not “objectionable to any creed or denomination,” including only “those lessons which are considered helpful in character building” and provisions were included to allow students to opt out of Bible study.\textsuperscript{58} Such provisions did not satisfy most critics, but the plan went into effect.\textsuperscript{59}

Control of the schools was the most contentious political issue that exploded into widespread alarm when the Klan gained a majority on the Board of Education in

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Akron Sunday Times}, 31 May 1925.\

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 21 October 1925.\

\textsuperscript{57} Friedman, 159.\

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 2 August 1924.\

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 4 October 1924.
an election to fill a vacancy in January 1925 and selected a new superintendent who was allegedly a Klansmen. Control of the school board remained the most contentious issue in that autumn’s election. William O. Thompson, president of Ohio State University declared: “The spectacle of seven Ku Klux Klaners on the Akron board of education is as disgraceful to the state of Ohio as anything in history.”

The subsequent defeat of three out of four Klan-endorsed candidates represented widespread rejection of its agenda. Subsequent revelations of the misappropriation of Klan dues in Summit County and other scandals elsewhere in the country ensured the demise of the organization as a major force in the city and nation.

If indeed Akron’s large southern-born population proved a ripe recruiting field for manipulation by the organizers of the Ku Klux Klan, its self-representation as an organization defending conservative Protestant values appears the main source of attraction. Akron was a city rife with the sort of social turmoil and uncertainty that made an excellent breeding ground for an organization that declared itself “the return of the Puritan in this corrupt jazz mad age.” Akron’s large southern population may have benefited the membership roles of the Klan, but to link its popular support with an anti-black racial agenda is not supported by its actual activities. To what extent those who joined thought of it as “just another club” is difficult to fathom, but many likely found a sense of belonging they felt a lack of in the city. The organization was steeped in anti-

---

60 Akron Beacon Journal, 30 October 1925.
Catholic and anti-Semitic bigotry; racial prejudice, undoubtedly intertwined with other biases, never became part of the Klan’s public rhetoric in Akron. Rather, the enforcement of standards of conservative Protestant morality appears to have served as the main attraction to the Klan. As one study observed: “Klansmen recruiting in Akron could scarcely have found a situation more to their liking. The city’s population was predominantly southern white Protestant inclined to the fundamentalist persuasion. In addition, Akron had only recently settled down from several tumultuous years as an industrial boom-town with frontier-like living and social conditions.”

---

61 Maples, 16.
CHAPTER 8

SETTING DOWN ROOTS

When he climbs that great Cheat mountain—
Some “snakes” think is 10 miles high—
He can look right into Akron,
Where the West Virginians lie.
And right then he will discover.
What most Akronites now know.
West Virginia moved to Akron,
Many, many years ago.

—“Pa Jay”

From the beginning, white southern migrants to Akron experienced wildly
ranging levels of acceptance in the city. Although frequently resented for creating job
competition and accused of harming workers’ interests, they were not unwelcome by
all. Through the years, as the tumultuous period the 1910s gave way to increasing
stability in later decades, southerners became integrated into not only the labor force,
but the whole range of city life. In doing so, they established their own organizations,
ranging from social clubs to churches, laid down roots in the city, concentrated in
certain neighborhoods, and became increasingly active in public life. By the 1930s,
their influence had begun to reshape not only the course, but the culture of the city.

The chaotic years of World War I were most notable for the instability faced by migrants, a situation not conducive to establishing connections with Akron’s various churches and clubs. However, one organization founded during the war, the West Virginia Society, did attract many natives of that state. The organization was the idea of William B. Catlett, a former newspaperman from Berkley Spring, West Virginia. On August 5, 1917, the first meeting of the society drew eight hundred former residents of West Virginia. The stated purpose of the organization was to strengthen the bonds between West Virginians living in Akron and to foster friendly relations with local residents. The organization declared itself dedicated to promoting “the prosperity and general welfare of the rubber city.”

Guests at meetings often included local politicians and business leaders, as well as special speakers from West Virginia. One of the early guest speakers was Judge Charles C. Benner who gave a speech entitled “What West Virginia and Ohio Have in Common.”

Although residing in Akron, many West Virginia natives closely followed news and politics from their home state. Indeed, West Virginia’s absentee voting laws—described as “one of the best, if not the best” in the nation—allowed them to cast votes from Akron. The large number of potential absentee voters in Akron frequently

---

63 *Akron Beacon Journal*, 6 August 1917, 14 August 1917.
64 *Goodyear Wingfoot Clan*, 26 September 1917.
65 *Goodyear Wingfoot Clan*, 13 July 1918.
attracted special visits from politicians in their home state.\(^{66}\) Indeed, at least one
candidate for governor even visited the city in hopes that some West Virginians might
return to vote, or at least write positively about the visit to their relatives back home.\(^{67}\) Not all speakers, however, were making campaign appearances. A common theme of
both Ohio and West Virginia speakers was to encourage West Virginians to become
more fully involved in their adopted community. Appearing on behalf of the governor
of West Virginia, son-in-law and private secretary, Vincent Legg advised an audience,
“Now that you have made Ohio your home, you must take an active part in civic affairs,
you must build your homes here and you must receive your education here, to better
yourselves for the responsibility of becoming good citizens.”\(^{68}\)

Initial membership in the West Virginia Society drew heavily from new
employees of the rubber factories. The organization often met at the Firestone Club
House to run meetings and select officers.\(^{69}\) The central purpose of the organization
was as a social club. The organization remained strong over subsequent decades. In the
1930s, the organization opened the West Virginia Society Home and Hall on South
Arlington Street. The hall operated as a place for meetings and social activities,

---

\(^{66}\) *Parkersburg News*, 8 August 1938.


\(^{68}\) *Akron Beacon Journal*, 4 August 1930.

\(^{69}\) *Goodyear Wingfoot Clan*, 26 September 1917.
including dances and performances by guest radio stars. The thirties were the high point for the organization when its biggest event, an annual picnic, drew up to 25,000 people. The event had become so popular by the 1930s that prominent West Virginia politicians, including Governor H. G. Kump and Senator Rush Holt, came to Akron to serve as the principal speakers. At the 1932 picnic, both then Governor George White of Ohio and former West Virginia Governor Howard M. Gore were featured speakers. The organization, however, remained explicitly non-partisan and focused on its social activities rather than taking positions on problems facing the city (although the Beacon Journal claimed its founding members were predominantly Republicans). Political speeches aside, the real draw of the picnics was the contests, music, and general festivities. Attendees could participate in baseball games and compete in contests for honors such as “Best Baby,” “Most Beautiful Girl,” “Largest Family,” and even “Homeliest Man” and “Homeliest Woman.”

As a social organization, the West Virginia Society brought together the many transplants from that state who clearly embraced the social outlets it provided. As for

70 Goodyear Wingfoot Clan, 2 August 1933.
71 Goodyear Wingfoot Clan, 17 August 1932.
72 Goodyear Wingfoot Clan, 1 August 1934; 7 August 1935.
73 Akron Beacon Journal, 29 August 1932.
74 Akron Beacon Journal, 14 April 1920.
75 Akron Beacon Journal, 29 August 1932.
being an organization that “strengthened bonds” between West Virginians and Ohioans, it probably did little to advance that cause, it did, however, engage in various fund-raising activities the proceeds from which were donated to charities. The popularity of the organization’s big events waned slowly after the 1930s until the organization faded into obscurity. By the mid-1970s, the organization continued to host occasional events and raise funds for charity, but its membership had dwindled to only one hundred and its annual picnic attracted only four hundred attendees. 76

Religious Influences of Southern Migrants

The influence of southern migrants on the cultural development of the city can be seen in a variety of ways. (There is no question how the soft southern drawl became commonplace in northeast Ohio.) Two areas where their influence was and remains most apparent are in religion and music. The branching out of southern evangelical Christianity and country music have become part of the southern legacy in the Midwest, while decidedly retaining their southern roots. In religion, their influence can be seen not only in the growth of evangelical denominations, but in the growing numbers of churches that remained independent of associations with larger denominations. As one scholar of religion in the region has noted: “While there were many denominations in the South, southern religion was shaped by what might be called the Baptist/Methodist

religious establishment. The Baptists were everywhere, in all kinds of churches with diverse doctrines and varying practices. . . . Add to that the Methodists, with their ubiquitous circuit riders, and the religion of southern Appalachia was almost complete, except for an occasional Presbyterian or Disciple of Christ.” In Appalachia, geographic isolation fostered both conservatism of churches and independence of local congregations.\textsuperscript{77} Akron’s southerners brought their religious traditions with them and added new flavor to religious life in the city. As one journalist recalled: “Some were Baptist, some were Pentecostal, some were ‘shouting Methodists.’ Different strains with one thing in common: the Southern religious folks celebrated with a fervor Akron had never seen.”\textsuperscript{78}

Although newcomers often failed to become members of churches when they first arrived in Akron, the long-term picture is quite different. The popular perception that the mass of newcomers had forgotten all about their church connections ignores the fact that many did indeed join churches. During the heavy years of in-migration during and after World War I, both the number of churches and the membership of existing churches increased rapidly. Akron had 59 churches in 1906, 89 churches in 1916, and 151 in 1926. Over the same period, the number of Akron residents thirteen years of age


or older who belonged to a church grew from 18,370 in 1906 to 86,815 in 1926.\textsuperscript{79} (Not only were there more church members, but the percentage of Akron residents who maintained a formal membership in a church also increased from 26.6 percent to 35.5 percent.\textsuperscript{80} Many Akron churches made special efforts to encourage attendance by newcomers to the city. During the World War I boom, Grace Methodist Church, for example, invited newcomers to special Sunday afternoon meetings that included a social hour and music, followed by a meal and evening religious service. With such efforts, the church increased its membership by more than a third in 1918 and 1919.\textsuperscript{81} The rapidly rising southern population in Akron was reflected in the growth of particular denominations, notably those with strong evangelical strains. Between 1909 and 1922, the number of Baptist churches grew from five to thirteen and Methodist congregations grew from twelve to eighteen.\textsuperscript{82} The most rapid growth occurred in the 1920s, once the tumultuous war years were past and wartime migrants had either left or begun to put down more permanent roots with their families. By the end of the 1920s, there were twenty-five Baptist and twenty-four Methodist churches in the city.\textsuperscript{83}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{80} Based on comparison of membership figures with Akron’s population as measured in the 1910 and 1930 U.S. Census reports.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Grace Methodist Church, \textit{Our Heritage: One Hundred and Forty Years, Grace Methodist Church, Akron, Ohio} (Akron, Ohio: Grace Methodist Church, 1964), 26.
\item \textsuperscript{82} \textit{Akron Directory 1909} and \textit{Akron Directory 1922}.
\item \textsuperscript{83} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 11 April 1976.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Thus, despite concerns that southern newcomers had failed to maintain a church affiliation when they came to Akron, it did not mean they had completely abandoned their religious ties. Many early migrants were young men and women who failed to join a church in the tumult and adventures of the city. Over time, however, new churches were formed, many founded or headed by former southerners, which catered to newcomers and offered religious services with which they felt more comfortable. A sort of culture shock was experienced by many southern migrants when they first attended churches in the Midwest. As historian Chad Berry has noted:

Northern churches, particularly those in urban areas, were often of a higher social class than that of migrants and were more formal, with robed clergy and regular choirs that sang rehearsed anthems. The closely knit rural character of southern churches was often missing: no family atmosphere, no Sunday evening “meetings,” no gospel “singings”—even the quarterlies were from a different publishing house and had a different perspective. Moreover, those migrants who in the South had been Sunday school superintendents, deacons, and teachers were doubtless denied or at least delayed in attaining such positions in northern churches. Northern Baptists seemed to have made no significant attempt to welcome Southern Baptist newcomers.84

One newcomer to Akron recalled the differences between her hometown church and those in Akron in similar terms. In West Virginia, her church “had a homecoming in the fall and it was a big air type atmosphere where everybody brought their biggest pumpkin and a jar of beans they had canned.” Services were held at least twice a day on Sundays and everybody participated, “shouting Amens and Praise the Lord.” In

84 Chad Berry, Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 148.
contrast, going to church in Akron, she felt, “was more of a thing that you go to be seen.”

Indeed, what became the largest church in the city, the Akron Baptist Temple, was founded by a native Kentuckian who felt out of place in churches in Akron. Born in 1903, Dallas Billington described his birthplace in western Kentucky as a place where “there were one grocery store and the old-type blacksmith shop where they built wagons, shod the horses, and where the crowds met on Saturday afternoons to pass the time away.”

Raised in a deeply religious family, both parents instilled a strong faith in their thirteen children, reading the Bible nightly and discussing its meanings. His father, a trustee in the Methodist church, took the family to every Methodist and Baptist revival that came near their home; his mother took the children to Presbyterian revivals as well. Despite an upbringing steeped in religion and his own faith, however, Billington failed to join a church when he first left home and moved to Paducah, Kentucky, because he found “the churches were not conducted as [he] was used to.”

In 1925, Billington decided to move to Akron and was hired by Goodyear Tire &

---


88 Billington, 6-7.

89 Ibid., 13.
Rubber the first day he looked for work; he remained at that job for the next eleven years. When he first arrived in Akron, he described his impression in a letter to his bride: “This is the wickedest place this side of hell,” a place where the populace was concerned only with card-playing, dancing, smoking and drinking. Although he tried attending various churches in Akron, none satisfied him. He believed this sentiment was shared by others from the South, who “went to church at home regularly, but coming to Akron and away from the churches they were used to, they just did not attend anywhere.” In the city, he noted, “It was easy for them to drift from the teachings they had known at home.”

Although Billington began attending the Akron Baptist Church after he married, he still missed the style of worship he remembered from his formative years and began independently studying the Bible and, in 1930, began preaching at the Furnace Street Mission in Akron (giving his first sermon to “derelicts, prostitutes and rum-dums”) and soon was giving sermons in various churches, traveling to Youngstown, Canton and other nearby cities. In becoming a lay preacher, Billington espoused a faith that resonated with his listeners and fit within a southern, especially Southern Appalachian, tradition. In rural communities religion was “primarily a lay movement.” Sunday schools, prayer meetings, and even Sunday services were frequently held without the

90 Ibid., 28.

assistance of a formally trained minister. Thus, it is not surprising that many lay
preachers were among the southern newcomers working in midwestern factories;
indeed, during World War II, Detroit’s Ford local of the United Automobile Workers
had some 2,000 lay preachers in its ranks.⁹² Although Billington had only an eighth
grade education, he became an inspiring preacher, drawing on his self-directed Bible
studies. Billington’s popularity as a lay preacher increased further when he launched a
weekly gospel program on Akron’s WJW radio station (which he nicknamed “Watch
Jesus Win”) and gave sermons as “The Southern Evangelist.” The self-financed
program became very popular as Billington’s “plain Bible message,” and literal reading
of the scripture, resonated with his audience, which reportedly grew to 100,000 listeners
within two years.⁹³

Echoing concerns expressed by others, Billington worried: “People had left
farms and come to the city, where they were making more money than they had ever
made before; and they had forgotten God.”⁹⁴ To reach out to this group, Billington
decided to found his own church in June, 1934; meeting in a school building, his
services attracted many southerners.⁹⁵ Two months later, Billington was ordained a
Southern Baptist minister in Kentucky and prepared to build his own church. Despite

⁹³ Billington, 58-59, 74.
⁹⁴ Ibid., 69.
⁹⁵ Ibid., 74.
being rejected for loans from two insurance companies and a bank, the Akron Baptist Temple became a reality in just three years by raising money mainly from the congregation even though many members faced economic hardships in the 1930s. The success of the church stemmed from the fact that it reflected a style of worship that many found lacking in Akron. The congregation, which consisted mostly of southern-born factory workers, had grown to 640 families, boasted of Sunday school attendance of over 900 and a 300-voice choir. In addition to Sunday sermons, the church offered separate prayer services, Bible classes, Sunday school, and revivals. The high level of involvement in church activities extended to the construction of the facility itself, as “the rubber factory employes labor[ed] daily on the church before going to their regular jobs.” The evangelical church remained independent of both the Northern and Southern Baptist conventions, but kept to fundamentalist tenets, what Billington described as “old fashioned, as far as believing every word of the Bible.” This message was immensely popular in a city full of southern transplants and the church grew in popularity to become not only the largest congregation in the city, but, at one time, the biggest Baptist congregation in the nation.

The church’s southern roots lay not only in its membership, but in its long-term leadership as well. In addition to the dynasty of Billingtons (Dallas, his son Charles, 

96 Akron Beacon Journal 12 November 1937.

97 Billington, 103; “Biggest Baptist Church,” 59.
and grandson Dallas R.), other West Virginia and Kentucky natives held top posts. John Stanley Bond of Lewis County, West Virginia, came to Akron in 1925 after seeing advertisements in local newspapers. In Akron, he got a job at Firestone where he worked for forty-three years. Like Billington, Bond tried various churches in Akron, but found it “difficult to get to know and trust people,” although he did form a church quartet called the “Southern Singers.” It was at a performance at a local school where he met Billington who was using the auditorium to hold services. Bond became one of the earliest members of the Baptist Temple and held the position of Sunday School superintendent for over forty-eight years, during which time the church built the world’s largest Sunday school. Another long-time leader was Kentucky native Paul D. Outland, who served as associate pastor from 1946 to 1996.

Under such leadership, the Akron Baptist Temple continued to expand impressively. By 1960, the 6,400 members attended weekly services (with an additional 2,000 children enrolled in its Sunday School). Furthermore, it operated its own bookstore, print shop, radio equipment, sponsored twice weekly radio broadcasts and television messages five nights a week. The church was also successful in expanding its base beyond the southern factory workers to include “many professional people and businessmen and large numbers of Yankees.”

Despite its efforts to reach...

---

98 *Akron Beacon Journal*, 25 June 1967 and 3 September 1984; Ohio Urban Appalachian Awareness Project, n.p. In the latter, all interviewees are given aliases, but “Mr. Brand” is clearly Bond.


100 *Akron Beacon Journal*, 10 April 1960.
people “from all of the various social, economic, and cultural categories,” the church long remained a white Protestant church. As late as 1963, no African-Americans were reported among the congregation.\textsuperscript{101}

In addition to the Akron Baptist Temple, three other independent Baptist churches found fertile soil in Akron and established large congregations: the Chapel on Fir Street, the Cathedral of Tomorrow, and Grace Cathedral. The Chapel on Fir Street was founded by Reverend Carl Burnham whose background and career parallel Billington’s life in many respects. Born in Dukedom, Tennessee, Burnham lived in Fulton, Kentucky, as a boy before moving to Akron. Like Billington, he began preaching at the Furnace Street Mission before founding his own congregation in a converted storeroom. The Chapel on Fir Hill grew to have the second largest congregation in Akron (after the Akron Baptist Temple), claiming 2,700 members, a large percentage of whom “were born in the South or . . . children of the Southern-born parents.”\textsuperscript{102} The Cathedral of Tomorrow similarly expressed a strongly evangelical message. Founded by Rex Humbard, formerly a traveling revivalist preacher from Little Rock, Arkansas (and future televangelist), the church began as Calvary Temple, meeting in an old movie theater in Akron where crowds filled the seats for five services every Sunday. Finally, Grace Cathedral was founded by Ernest Angley and his wife,

\textsuperscript{101} Regional Church Planning Office in cooperation with the Council of Churches of Greater Akron, \textit{The Church in Akron: An Interpretive Analysis} (Akron, Ohio: Regional Church Planning Office 1963), 95.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 96-97.
Esther. Born and raised in rural North Carolina, Angley was raised a Baptist but launched a career as a traveling evangelist disavowing any denominational affiliation. In 1954, he chose to set down roots in Akron where he continues his “unconventional” ministry focusing on “faith healing” and televangelism. Grace Cathedral, like the Akron Baptist Temple, was built as a “megachurch,” with seating for 5,400 congregants. The appeal of the independent Baptist churches discussed above to native southerners in Akron was clear. Those four churches alone accounted for eighteen percent of all southern church-goers.

The rise of Protestant fundamentalism is the most striking cultural contribution of southern migrants in the Midwest. Indeed, old-fashioned revivals came to be the dominant characteristic of churches in the Akron area. By the early 1960s, seventy-seven ecumenical white Protestant churches existed in Akron, claiming a combined membership of 58,600, the equivalent of thirty percent of the city’s population. What is most striking is the fact that independent Protestant churches became so prevalent in Akron. Four churches—the Akron Baptist Temple, the Cathedral of Tomorrow, Grace Cathedral, and The Chapel on Fir Hill—in the revivalist,


104 Author’s survey derived from the Local History Collection, Akron-Summit Metropolitan Library. Other denominations include: Catholic (12%); Church of God (12%); Presbyterian (9%); United Church of Christ (6%); United Brethren (6%); and Unitarian (3%).

105 Regional Church Planning Office, 68.
fundamentalist tradition became enormous institutions with influence beyond the bounds of Akron. Indeed, the city became a center for “televangelism,” before the term was even coined. Billington’s Baptist Temple was not the only church to launch radio and television broadcasts, his efforts were exceeded by those of Rex Humbard and Ernest Angley. Live broadcasts of services at the Cathedral of Tomorrow began in 1953, reaching nearby stations in Ohio, West Virginia, and western Pennsylvania. Ten years later, broadcasts had expanded into Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, New York, California, and five foreign countries. By 1980, Rex Humbard’s sermons reached a national audience of over 2.4 million, with 46.5 percent of his viewers living in the South. Ernest Angley similarly began broadcasting sermons in 1973 with “The Ernest Angley Hour” and “The Ninety and Nine Club.”

Migration and the Popularization of “Hillbilly” Music

The religious influences of southern migrants in the Midwest is but one aspect of the process historian James N. Gregory has termed “southernizing the working

106  Hadden and Swann, 26.
107  Regional Church Planning Office, 99.
class.” With the advent of radio, regional music and traditional folk ballads now had broader audiences and became a commercial media. In early radio, country music—then usually referred to as “hillbilly music”—was a style that “incorporated elements of blues along with song and instrumental forms that evoked white rural America.”

The southerners who came north during and after World War I, brought their musical styles with them and soon “hillbilly music” was attracting broad audiences. While African-American migrants introduced northern audiences to jazz and the blues with great success in the 1920s, white southern migrants brought other musical traditions with them as well and they attracted growing audiences in the North, where “folk music had eroded away . . . with the exception of certain pockets of geographical or occupational isolation.”

In the South, closer parallels between regional music forms and traditional English folk music remained although time and circumstances brought permutations on older forms. Folklorist W. K. Wilgus stresses the innovations on older musical forms: “By and large, the inhabitants of Appalachia were subjected neither to total geographical isolation nor to totally involuntary cultural isolation. That is to say, their geographical and industrial position permitted them to develop a degree of cultural isolation but did not prevent contact with elements of the

---


dominant and developing American culture; their position made it possible for them to accept, reject, or modify many of its elements.”

Radio was crucial to the preservation and increased popularity of “hillbilly” country music and its audiences extended well beyond its home regions and southerners living in northern cities. “The first successful radio barn dance program was established on WLS in Chicago in 1924 with a strong nucleus of Kentucky hill talent. All of the audience could not have been transplanted southerners. . . . At any rate, we can establish that there was in hillbilly music an essence of wide rural appeal, even in the North where expressed urban opinion was contemptuous.”

Hillbilly music continued to grow in popularity through the 1920s as professional bands traveled the nation and songs were reproduced on phonograph records and radio shows. In Nashville, station WSM founded the Grand Ole Opry in 1925 offering a variety of country string bands and within a decade had helped launch the careers of early country music stars like Uncle Dave Macon and Roy Acuff. With country music’s stories of hardship and suffering (sometimes referred to aptly as “three minute soap operas”), the genre became even more popular during the Great Depression. Although an object of scorn in the eyes of many record producers and audiences, its audience was widespread. Wilgus

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid., 162.

observes that while “the music did not have a national audience, it had audiences everywhere in the nation.”

Radio programming in Akron during the 1930s included an ample helping of religious programming as well as country music. Akron residents were clearly divided over the merits of the genre, as the playing of “hillbilly music” on local radio frequently came under attack. One listener complained: “I consider this old mountain farmyard stuff to be one of the worst curses that ever harassed a long suffering radio public. It strikes me that the only ones who go for that lousy tripe are people who came from the farm and brought the farm with them.”

Following criticism of “hillbilly music” by Dorothy Doran, radio columnist for the Akron Beacon Journal, fans jumped to its defense. “The American public is made up of plain, simple folks who are not educated in music and feeding them Metropolitan music is like talking Chinese to a Frenchman. Hillbilly music is simple and that’s why they like it and then, too, it’s not only confined to the poor. Ford, one of the richest men, makes it his favorite type of entertainment.”

The editor diplomatically responded: “No doubt, as long as we have radio, we will have hillbilly music fans and just as long will we have listeners who make a habit of dialing it out.”

115 Wilgus, 165.
116 Akron Beacon Journal, 2 April 1934.
117 Akron Beacon Journal, 26 March 1934.
118 Ibid.
Although not everyone was a fan, country music had a strong local following. Indeed, some of bluegrass music’s most famous musicians were heard regularly on Akron stations. Native of Henderson County, Kentucky, Louis Marshall Jones, youngest of ten children, moved with his family to Akron where he got his start on radio in 1929. Later to become best known as “Grandpa” Jones, as a fixture at the Grand Ole Opry and on the television show “Hee Haw,” Jones started as a seventeen-year-old musician playing on Akron’s WJW where he was billed as the “Young Singer of Old Songs.”

During the 1920s, “Hendershot’s Trio” played at clubs around Akron and performed regularly on local stations. Formed by Al Hendershot, a native of Calhoun County, West Virginia, who had come to Akron in 1911 to work at Firestone, the group later gained greater fame as the “Dixie Ramblers.” In 1930, the “Dixie Harmonizers,” one of the most popular local groups of the 1930s, was founded by three native southerners: Warren Caplinger, of Wood County West Virginia, former farmer and coal miner; Andy Patterson, native of Wartburg, Tennessee, son of a Baptist preacher; and William Austin Strickland, “Flip,” native of Birmingham, Alabama, and tenor banjoist. The trio later moved to West Virginia where they became a long-time fixture of radio programming performing as “Cap, Andy, and Flip” in Wheeling and Fairmont. Other local music stars and radio programs emerged to cater to Akron’s southern audience. By the mid-1930s, WJW also hosted a show by Howard Rouse,

“The Yodelin’ West Virginian,” whose theme song was the West Virginia University fight song.120 The National Barn Dance, which broadcasted country music from Chicago, was so popular that three of Akron’s six radio stations broadcast the program every Saturday afternoon in the 1930s.121

Both the religious and musical influences of Akron’s southern migrants introduced new elements into the city’s culture. This, of course, was part of a process that occurred throughout the Midwest, and across the country, as a result of the southern diaspora. The roots of many evangelical churches and country music remain identifiable very southern. Their success and wide popularity outside the South, however, reflect a broad appeal. They may have originated with southern migrants, but audiences for country music and the millions of non-southern adherents to evangelical churches expanded far beyond their original base of southerners and beyond the working class. Both “traditional southern” music and religion were able to expand their appeal in Akron and elsewhere, in large part, due to the advent of the radio which gave them exposure to a vast audience of listeners. The same medium that was creating a national culture and national trends successfully preserved and advanced a distinctly regional culture far beyond its boundaries.


121  Akron Beacon Journal, 8 July 1939.
Of course, two key indicators of integration into the community and establishing roots entail becoming home-owners and participating in the political process. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the conditions that met the earliest southern newcomers were not conducive to establishing roots in the city. New arrivals faced overcrowding and high housing costs, especially in the neighborhoods surrounding the factories. The largest rubber concerns were located on the city’s South and East sides. The Fifth Ward, on the South side, was home to the Goodrich and Firestone Plants; General Tire and Goodyear were located in the Sixth Ward. From an early date, Akron’s shortage of affordable housing for factory workers was recognized as an obstacle to maintaining a stable workforce. This led both Goodyear and Firestone to begin home-building programs. Goodyear Heights, the initiative of F. A. Seiberling, was begun in 1912 on property (then just outside city limits) that was within walking distance of Goodyear’s facility. Although construction in the neighborhood was insufficient to keep pace with the dramatic population growth of subsequent years, it remained dedicated to providing homes for factory workers. New homes were sold to employees for a down payment of as little as two percent. As new sections of the neighborhood were opened for purchase, sales were restricted to Goodyear employees for the first thirty days, after which time sales were opened to the general public. By 1920, one in five Goodyear workers lived
Following Goodyear’s lead, Firestone launched a similar project, Firestone Park, on the city’s South side in 1916. (Goodrich, located in central Akron, was already surrounded by established neighborhoods.) As these and other building projects progressed, they gradually alleviated the city’s housing shortage. Indeed, by 1926, the rate of homeownership in Akron—approximately 45%—far exceeded that of other cities in Ohio. The relatively good wages earned by rubber workers, combined with company housing programs, had finally made the city a more comfortable place to live.

As home to the city’s major manufacturers, South and East Akron emerged as bustling working class neighborhoods. So too, did these neighborhoods become home to many southern newcomers who clustered in the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Wards—the city’s most densely populated neighborhoods. Over one-fifth of all residents in the Fifth and Seventh Wards (where Firestone Park was built) were southern-born. The Sixth Ward, home to both Goodyear and General Tire, which had the highest number of residents, was also home to the largest concentration of southerners in the city (see Table 8, below).

---


123 Rates of home ownership: Cincinnati, 29%; Cleveland, 35%; Columbus, 37%. Akron Beacon Journal, 25 October 1926.
Map 2: Akron Neighborhoods
Southern newcomers also came to reshape politics in the city. In the late nineteenth century, Summit County was generally a Republican stronghold. From the late nineteenth century through the early years of the twentieth century, Akron voters strongly supported the Republican Party. This fact was slow to change, even as the city’s population and demographics changed radically after 1910. The Republican Party was particularly strong in municipal government. In City Council elections between 1911 and 1939, Republicans won seventy percent of the seats and had a near monopoly on the mayoralty until 1927 (See Appendix B). Although many of the newcomers to Akron came from southern states where the Democratic Party dominated, their political influence was slow to be seen. Not until the 1930s, with the ascendancy of the New Deal and organized labor, did Akron experience a widespread shift in political allegiances.

Several factors account for the continuing one-party dominance in Akron politics, despite its rapid transformation into a major industrial center. First, although whites in the South overall strongly favored the Democratic Party, its dominance was by no means monolithic. This is especially true of West Virginia, where opposition to slavery and secession—with strong Republican leadership—led to its establishment as an independent state. Although the Republican Party’s dominance in the state waned

---

124 Between 1889 and 1903, every Republican candidate for governor won Summit County (Ohio Election Statistics for the years 1889-1903).
### Table 8: Akron Heads of Household, 1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ward 1</th>
<th>Ward 2</th>
<th>Ward 3</th>
<th>Ward 4</th>
<th>Ward 5</th>
<th>Ward 6</th>
<th>Ward 7</th>
<th>Ward 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heads of Household in 1920</td>
<td>10,812</td>
<td>7,631</td>
<td>9,187</td>
<td>9,979</td>
<td>15,975</td>
<td>21,039</td>
<td>14,627</td>
<td>6,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern-born Heads of Household</td>
<td>2,185</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>1,151</td>
<td>2,008</td>
<td>3,347</td>
<td>5,919</td>
<td>3,151</td>
<td>853</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data compiled from the on-line service Heritage Quest based on U.S. Census returns for 1920. At present, to search by city ward, one can only extract results of heads of household. These tabulations are based on actual returns, rather than statistical samples. Existing samples, such as IPUMS, when “weighted” to reflect actual population numbers, produced wildly exaggerated tabulations for Akron’s total population. For a thorough breakdown of birthplace by ward, see Appendix A.
after Reconstruction, it continued to rival the Democratic Party for control. Thus, it is not surprising that many West Virginians who came to Akron would support the local political organization. That many did is supported by anecdotal evidence regarding the members and leadership of the West Virginia Society.

Another factor that explains the continuing dominance of the Republican Party on the local scene relates to the impermanence of many newcomers. As many retained residences in their home state and regarded their stay as temporary, they never registered to vote in Ohio either out of disinterest in local politics or a failure to meet residency requirements (this began to change in the 1930s). The fact that migrants were typically younger than non-migrants further decreased the likelihood that they would become politically involved. This was particularly true during the tumultuous years of World War I. Despite the city’s rapid growth, the number of Summit County residents who turned out to vote in the governor’s race was nearly the same in 1914 and 1918.

Furthermore, newcomers who did vote often encountered criticisms, particularly when it came to the question of supporting bond levies. As most newcomers were renters, Summit County’s Deputy Auditor believed it was unfair to allow non-property owners


126 In 1914, 27,618 Summit County residents voted for governor; in 1918, 27,799 turned out to vote. Ohio. Secretary of State, Ohio Election Statistics, the General Election (Columbus: Government Printing Office, 1914), 34; Ohio Election Statistics, the General Election (Columbus: Government Printing Office, 1918), 296.
to have a say on tax issues. One homeowner complained that newcomers were voting on issues that affected the city’s long-term future and liabilities, although many would “pull up stakes tomorrow” and never feel the consequences:

Living next door to me last year was a family of voters, father and three sons. They rented the house they lived in, and they voted at the elections. I can assume they voted on bonding questions, although I do not know they did. When the slump hit Akron the family moved back to the state they came from, and the installment furniture house came and collected the furniture. The bonds they voted on Akron will not bother them any more than the bill for the furniture. Another instance: In the shop where I work were 14 single fellows, each from other states, and each boarding and rooming. They had votes here and they boasted that they voted for the bond issues, every one of them “to make work plentiful and raise hell with the landlords.”

Every one of those floaters has left the city, and the bonds they voted for, they having no civic interest in the bonding proposition at all, must be paid for by the people who have invested their money here in order to settle down and become steadfast and decent citizens.127

Even as Akron’s population stabilized in the 1920s, its newcomers fit the pattern typical of most migrants: They were “less involved and committed to politics than nonmigrants.”128 Voter registration and participation remained low during the 1920s, even as the controversies surrounding the Ku Klux Klan drew more voters to the polls for municipal elections. The record turnout at the 1923 election—in which Klan control


of the school board was at stake—drew only 35,622 voters (out of 45,000 registered voters) to the polls. 129

Finally, the massive influx of newcomers did not prompt any upheaval in local politics because the areas of the city in which they clustered had the same amount of representation in city government in the late 1920s as they did before World War I. Akron was divided into eight wards in 1911, and—with the exception of two new wards added through annexation in 1928—remained virtually unchanged until 1949.130 Until then, the population of the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Wards—located in South and East Akron—were severely underrepresented on City Council. These were the crowded industrial neighborhoods surrounding the rubber factories. Thus, residents of the more affluent Eight Ward had more than three times the representation as those in the densely populated Sixth Ward (see above, Table 8).

As southern newcomers were concentrated in a few wards and slow to become registered voters, it naturally followed that they were virtually absent from city council before the 1930s. No southerner was elected to city council between the election of 1917 and the election of 1925. In each election between 1925 and 1929, one southerner was elected ward councilman (two from West Virginia and one from Kentucky). Not until the 1931 election did the city’s strong southern base become evident on city

129 Akron Beacon Journal, 7 November 1923.

130 Based upon maps provided by Claudia Burdge, Librarian, Akron Department of Planning and Urban Development. Kenmore, located on the southwestern edge of Akron, was annexed in late 1928, creating the Ninth and Tenth Wards. Akron Beacon Journal, 7 November 1928.
council. In that election, three southerners were elected ward councilmen. At least three southerners were elected to City Council in the four subsequent municipal elections of the 1930s. The industrial neighborhoods of the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Wards accounted for sixty percent of the southerners elected to office. Of the sixteen southern ward councilmen (one was a woman, all were white) elected during this period, there were five from West Virginia, three from North Carolina, three from South Carolina, two from Kentucky, and two from Alabama. As to party affiliation, seven were Republicans and nine were Democrats. Notably, all five West Virginians to serve as ward councilman were Republicans.¹³¹

The process of “settling down” and having a stake in the community was underway noticeably in the 1930s. The number of registered voters in Akron increased from 93,215 in 1932 to 110,375 in 1936. While much of the increased interest is attributable to the popularity of the New Deal among Akron’s industrial workers and the increased influence of the labor movement, it still signals a rising level of political involvement. Even in municipal elections the city witnessed record registration levels. In the 1937 campaign, when a Democratic CIO-backed candidate, Judge G. L. Patterson, was running for mayor, 110,000 residents were registered, setting a new record for a municipal election (80,000 went to the polls).¹³²

---

¹³¹ Based upon election returns printed in the Akron Beacon Journal and on-line census records available on Heritage Quest and Ancestry.com.

number of voters was not simply a reflection of high turnout of union members. Rather, the perceived excesses of the labor movement in the city prompted many non-union Democrats to oppose Patterson.\textsuperscript{133} Thus, despite the growing power of the CIO in local industry, Patterson was handily defeated by the Republican candidate, as were six of the ten labor-endorsed candidates for city council.\textsuperscript{134} Labor-backed candidates won the ward council races only in the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, and Tenth Wards (all but one was a southerner).

Among those elected in 1937 was Ralph F. Turner, Sr., of the Sixth Ward. A Democrat and southerner, Turner is the best representation of the growing incorporation of southerners—and labor unions—in Akron politics. Turner was born in 1896 on a farm in Cabarrus County, North Carolina, the seventh of eight children. In 1919, after serving in World War I, he came to Akron with the intention of staying for a brief visit with some Army buddies. Hearing of the excellent job opportunities, he visited Goodyear and was surprised to find himself hired the first day. During his forty-five years as a Goodyear employee, he served seven years on Goodyear’s company union, the Industrial Assembly, and was a leading organizer (and first vice president) of its URW local. Described as a “skinny, dignified . . . rubberworker with the North


\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Akron Beacon Journal}, 3 November 1937. In other cities experiencing ongoing labor strife, labor candidates met a similar fate: “Law and order, not party politics, control the results in Detroit, Akron, Canton and Cleveland.” \textit{New York Times}, 4 November 1937.
Carolina hill twang still strong in his talk,” Turner had a long career in local politics, serving twelve terms on city council, including fifteen years as its president.135 By the late 1930s, when Turner was elected, being southern was no handicap in Akron politics; in many neighborhoods, it could provide a decided advantage.

In conclusion, while southern white migrants were slow to set down roots in the first decade or so of migration to Akron, the situation had begun to change in the 1920s, and their integration and adaptation to the city’s life were well underway by the 1930s. Organizations, like the West Virginia Society, served a purpose akin to immigrant ethnic societies—providing opportunities for socializing with others of a similar background and expressing pride in their common roots. Churches founded by migrants left perhaps the most palpable imprint on the city of Akron. The importation of southern evangelical traditions and their widespread appeal influenced the culture of the city, as well as its landscape through the construction of dozens, large and small, churches they established. Over time, these churches’ appeal spread beyond their original base of southern adherents. Similarly, the music embraced by these southerners reintroduced northern audiences to a genre that had faded away in northern cities. Arriving in Akron by the thousands at the dawn of the radio age, southerners ensured an audience for such traditional music in the newest medium and, in doing so, popularized the genre for a whole generation of northern audiences. Finally, southern transplants in

the city, by the 1930s, were increasingly involved as participants and leaders in public life. Their support of and leadership in the United Rubber Workers gave southerners a strong role in the direction of labor relations in the city and their increased voter participation and presence in city government lent them a voice in the governance of Akron.
CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

Akron remains a city with very southern roots. The imprint left by the new arrivals of the early twentieth century—and the subsequent generations that followed them—can be felt in subtle and palpable forms. The prevalence of the “soft southern drawl” today seems in no way out of place in northeastern Ohio. Southern cultural strains—from music to religious worship—have become staples of white working class culture in the Midwest. And, far from remaining marginalized in the city’s public life, southern-born Akronites and their offspring have long been incorporated into leadership roles.

By the eve of World War II, nearly four decades of southern migrants had made their homes in Akron and the city retained its reputation as the “City of Opportunity” for migrants well into the 1960s. As long as the rubber industry manufactured tires in Akron, West Virginians, Kentuckians and other southerners knew the city as a place of economic opportunity. The migration to Akron began in the earliest years of out-migration from the American South and its long duration meant the city’s southern population grew and stabilized along with the city. From the earliest years of the
automobile age, southerners were the backbone of Akron’s working class and they prospered and suffered as the industry’s fortunes changed.

The importance of studying pre-World War II migration is to establish a counterpoint to the many postwar studies that assert there are and were cultural barriers and attitudes that prevented many southern migrants, but especially those from Appalachia, from successfully adjusting to urban life. The *Akron Beacon Journal* itself repeated such notions in a 1976 article entitled, “Almost Heaven: Problems Linger for Many Migrants.” In the article, it cites sociologists’ “consensus” that “Appalachians tend to be ambivalent toward education and employment; suspicious toward government, law and the outside world, and opposed to joining groups.” Yet, while reporting on this “problem,” and asserting its importance—as approximately forty percent of the city’s population was born in Appalachia—at no point in the article is it documented that they represented any disproportionate share of Akron’s poor. Generations of Appalachian natives had found profitable employment in Akron’s factories, but in discussing “migrants” the article conflates the experiences of arrivals in the 1960s and 1970s with the tens of thousands who had made Akron their home decades before. Nor does it consider the vastly changed economic circumstances of

---

Appalachia and the diminished fortunes of Akron itself, no longer the world’s tire capital.²

While migrants of both pre-World War II and postwar decades did, on average, come from humble economic circumstances and had fewer years of formal education compared to their northern counterparts, the “problems” faced by Appalachian migrants in later decades stemmed from the loss of factory jobs in the Midwest more than any other factor and these were not problems limited to any particular subgroup of American society. Furthermore, more detailed analyses of family income of southern transplants to the Midwest do not support assertions that large numbers ended up living in poverty. In James N. Gregory’s analysis of household income in the Great Lakes, he finds the average annual income of Appalachian families was $9,586, compared to $11,203 for other southern-born whites, and $10,533 for all other whites. Furthermore, while approximately twelve percent of Appalachian families lived below the poverty line, so did nine percent of other southern-born whites and eleven percent of non-southern whites in the Great Lakes region. In contrast, African-American families (not differentiated by region of birth) had an average annual income of $7,429, with twenty-five percent of all families living below the poverty line.³

² “Akron retained corporate headquarters and research facilities, but the ‘Rubber City’s’ loss of tire manufacturing, which had begun between 1926 and 1945, was completed. Passenger tire production in Akron ended in 1978; truck production left in 1983-84; in 1987 Goodrich’s aircraft tire operation was relocated. The majors’ withdrawal left only small firms manufacturing in Ohio.” Michael J. French, The U. S. Tire Industry: A History (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 103-104.

Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that the southerners drawn to Akron were part of a larger, global phenomenon—the migration of rural people to urban areas that began in the nineteenth century and occurred not only in the United States, but around the world. The migration of the early decades of the twentieth century was not a mass exodus from chronically depressed areas, but became part of a change from regional subsistence economies to a modern industrial economy. Many did leave marginal agricultural areas, but difficult conditions for farmers were nothing new. What was new, however, were the greater opportunities now available elsewhere and the ease of modern transportation that made long-distance moves more feasible and less permanent, returning home was always an option. In Akron, southern migrants were the invited guests of the rubber manufacturers who promised excellent wages and plentiful jobs. The labor recruiters, job advertisements and other strategies of attracting southern workers to the city were sent out by the rubber companies because they preferred an English-speaking native labor force; knew the wages they offered outstripped wages in the South; and wanted to keep a reserve pool of labor in the city.

This system worked well for the rubber companies for a long time. The Appalachians and southerners drawn to Akron eagerly accepted the wages offered and could be counted on to leave the city in times of high unemployment and (at least until the 1930s) periods of labor upheaval. During periods of prosperity, southern migrants also could manipulate the labor situation to their advantage—easily moving between different factories and working in Akron seasonally while maintaining a farm back
home. This could make for an uneasy existence for workers and their families, particularly when such back and forth movement necessitated the physical separation of families, as was quite common during the early years when Akron’s housing crisis was most acute. Over time, however, more and more of those migrants settled permanently in the city. Local workers, fairly, felt threatened by the large numbers of southern migrants that streamed steadily into the city. Not only did they make convenient scapegoats for rising rents, overcrowding, and the proliferation of taverns, they created competition for jobs in an industry that where employment was notorious unstable. In the place of ethnic slurs, local residents played upon every ugly “hillbilly” stereotype to characterize these new workers as detriments to the community.

As agriculture and coal mining underwent their own declining levels of employment, factory work became not only the more profitable alternative, but was sometimes the only recourse. As workers no longer considered their residencies in Akron to be temporary, they became more concerned about the direction of the city and their position in the industry. This growing sense of a connection to the city was manifested in several ways. They established churches that reflected the beliefs and more emotional styles of worship with which they had been raised. They created their own organizations, like the West Virginia Society, to create a sense of connectedness to the communities they had left behind. They also became more firmly invested in the fate of their employment in Akron’s rubber factories. Rubber workers endured years of job insecurity, speed-ups, and fluctuating wages. After years of being regarded as a
dependable and expendable resource, southern workers in Akron were willing to embrace unionization efforts whereas previously such efforts had attracted little interest, or outright alienated them. The massive layoffs and extreme uncertainties of the early 1930s had prompted this willingness to assert more control over their position in the rubber industry.
APPENDIX A

AKRON HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD BY PLACE OF BIRTH, 1920
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ward 1</th>
<th>Ward 2</th>
<th>Ward 3</th>
<th>Ward 4</th>
<th>Ward 5</th>
<th>Ward 6</th>
<th>Ward 7</th>
<th>Ward 8</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>1567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>641</td>
<td>378</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>2450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>3434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>3056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>3539</td>
<td>2663</td>
<td>3861</td>
<td>2559</td>
<td>3597</td>
<td>5135</td>
<td>4656</td>
<td>2477</td>
<td>28487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Native-born Population</td>
<td>Foreign-born Population</td>
<td>Total Heads of Households</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>1258</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10812</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7631</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9187</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9979</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>3265</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4317</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1581</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4317</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>5981</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10971</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>14627</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data compiled from the on-line service Heritage Quest based on U.S. Census returns for 1920. At present, to search by city ward, one can only extract results of heads of household. These tabulations are based on actual returns, rather than statistical samples.
APPENDIX B

AKRON MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT, 1911-1939
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Mayor</th>
<th>Republicans on City Council</th>
<th>Democrats on City Council</th>
<th>Other Parties on City Council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Frank W. Rockwell (R)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 Socialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Frank W. Rockwell (P)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 Socialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>William J. Laub (R)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>I. S. Myers (D)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>Carl F. Beck (R)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>D. C. Rybolt (R)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>D. C. Rybolt (R)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>D. C. Rybolt (R)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>G. Lloyd Weil (D)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>G. Lloyd Weil (D)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>C. Nelson Sparks (R)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>I. S. Myers (D)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Lee D. Schroy (R)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>Lee D. Schroy (R)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>Lee D. Schroy (R)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>129</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Election results printed in the *Akron Beacon Journal* and *Akron Times.*

In the elections between 1925 and 1933, Akron’s city council races were officially non-partisan, with no party affiliations listed on the ballot. Newspapers, however, regularly reported the political composition of the newly elected council. Variations in the total number of council members reflect changes in Akron’s city charter and the addition of two new wards (Kenmore was annexed in 1928, its ward councilmen first served in 1929).
WORKS CITED

**Manuscript Collections**

Akron City Council Minutes, Akron, Ohio
David Saposs Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
F. A. Seiberling Papers, Ohio Historical Society.
Local History Collection, Akron-Summit County Metropolitan Library.
Merton D. Oyler Papers, Ohio State University Archives.
Special Collections, Akron-Summit County Metropolitan Library.
Ohio Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Ohio Historical Society.
Daniel Nelson Papers, University of Akron Archives
John Hevener Papers, Special Collections, Berea College
Southern Appalachian Archives, Special Collections, Berea College

**Newspapers**

*Akron Beacon Journal*
*Akron Herald*
*Akron Times*
*Cleveland Advocate*
*Firestone Non-Skid*
*Goodyear Wingfoot Clan*
*Nashville Tennessean*
*Ohio State Journal*
*Parkersburg News*

**Government Publications and Other Reports**


**Dissertations, Theses, and Unpublished Papers**


Journal Articles


Oyler, Merton D. *Fertility Rates and Migration of Kentucky Population, 1920-1940, as Related to Communication, Income, and Education.* Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 469. Lexington, Ky.: Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Kentucky, 1944.

---. *Natural Increase and Migration of Kentucky Population: 1920 to 1935.* Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin 395. Lexington, Ky.: Agricultural Experiment Station, University of Kentucky, 1939.


**Books**


Bell, Spurgeon and Ralph J. Watkins. *Industrial and Commercial Ohio: Volume II*. Columbus, Ohio: Bureau of Business Research, Ohio State University, 1928.


Drucker, Mary J. *The Rubber Industry in Ohio*. Columbus, Ohio: National Youth Administration in Ohio, 1937.


