AN EARLY ILLUSTRATION OF PROGRESSIVE MANAGEMENT IN THE AREA OF HUMAN RELATIONS: THE T. B. LAYCOCK MANUFACTURING COMPANY

The golf links lie so near the mill
That almost every day
The labouring children can look out
And see the men at play.

— *Sarah Cleghorne*

The T. B. Laycock Manufacturing Company, which was never large and has been forgotten because of its failure, was among the first to initiate social reform measures for its employees. Reconstruction of the financial history of the company has been difficult because of the scarcity of factory records. But even though company records have been lost, many important legal documents discarded, and bank records destroyed, enough published information exists to depict accurately the reforms that Thomas Benton Laycock introduced in his factory and industry.

The findings are of particular interest in light of recent publications on Douglas McGregor's "Theory Y." Many organizational theorists are of the opinion that the employee has certain needs that must be satisfied both at home and on the job. The Laycock management was aware of many of these needs and seems to have made every effort to fulfill them.

One is continually impressed by the unique social reform measures that the company and its founder initiated. Almost since its inception, T. B. Laycock attempted to provide his workers with an efficient, clean, almost ideal factory in which to work, in strong contrast to prevailing attitudes of the "captains of industry" during the same era.

As far as records show, Thomas Benton Laycock, trained in law and admitted to the Indiana Bar in 1875, found his Davis County jobs of prosecuting attorney and city clerk less challenging than he had expected. He gave them up and with his wife of one year, moved in January, 1880, to Indianapolis, Indiana, where he founded the T. B. Laycock Manufacturing Company on 80 South Pennsylvania Street.

Thomas' father, William H. Laycock, was reputed to have invented the coil bedspring many years earlier. William H.

traveled about the countryside making bedsprings for the settlers, receiving payment for the springs in the form of feathers (which the springs replaced) and in turn, selling the feathers for cash to dealers. Laycock's small factory produced in quantity coil bedsprings like those formerly peddled in the hills of Indiana and Kentucky. The company was operated as a partnership with William H. Laycock as president and T. B. Laycock, the actual manager, as secretary and treasurer. Though slow at first, business soon became profitable, and in 1886 the firm was incorporated under the Indiana incorporation statutes.

The Pennsylvania Street factory site quickly became too small for the large production that the Laycocks envisioned. In March of 1887 the facilities were moved to 10th and Canal. Within six months of the move, the factory suffered the first of several devastating fires to plague the Laycocks; burning to the ground, the well insured factory was immediately rebuilt upon the same site. The company continued to make only coil springs until 1896, when a mattress department was added. At this same time the capital of the corporation was raised from $25,000 to $50,000 through an issue of common stock.

Again in 1898 fire destroyed great portions of the building at 10th and Canal; damage was so great that complete loss was reported, the entire raw material stock being lost in addition to the building. This news account provides the first indication of the size of the factory and its output. Two hundred and fifty employees were temporarily without jobs after the fire. The company had been some 5000 orders behind schedule at the time of the fire.

Rebuilding began immediately, an entirely new building being erected on the site of the old factory. Evidentally the existing capital (still $50,000) and insurance of $40,000 were sufficient to finance the new factory. The new plant, in full operation again by 1899, was of brick construction and stood three stories high. The manufacturing facilities were naturally more modern and efficient, and the new factory had room for additional diversification in production. Space for a larger mattress department and a new iron and brass bed department was provided.

But more important, the factory offered revolutionary conveniences for employees. Baths and restrooms, eating facilities, meeting rooms, and many other unique innovations were constructed in the new building.

To support increased sales, the capitalization was raised to $100,000 by the issue of 50,000 shares of preferred stock in 1900. In 1902 an additional $125,000 of preferred was issued, raising the total book value of the company from $288,677 to over $400,000. From 1902 the company experienced its most rapid growth in sales. The production of mattresses, coil springs, and iron and brass beds had mushroomed the size of the company to $813,320 in 1906, over $300,000 having been retained in the firm. An additional $125,000 of preferred (total of $400,000) appeared on the books in 1907. At the same time common stock was increased from $100,000 to $300,000. How the money was raised is not known, but the use of these funds can be closely estimated.

In August, 1906, a new factory was completed in a more modern industrial park. The new Brookside Park factory was an enormous structure. The 852 by 270 foot building was built to be a model factory.[1] Although the square footage was not much larger than the Canal Street building, the layout and use of space was much more economical. Their straight assembly process for the iron beds was a forerunner of the assembly line. From a virtual raw material state, through shaping and bending, then through the enameling stage, and finally to the shipping department the production process continued without stopping. This efficient assembly process and other innovations allowed doubling of production capacity with the addition of only a few employees.

As the previous factory had provided employees with ideal working conditions, the Brookside factory satisfied the worker even more. Larger and more modern bath and toilet facilities, a library, lounges, and club rooms were additional improvements.

The records of the company become surprisingly scarce following its transfer to Brookside. T. B. Laycock continued to run the factory, as he had since its start, as secretary-treasurer. William H. merely served as a figure-head president. The oldest son of T. B., Reed Bradford Laycock, had been sent to Purdue for an engineering education. It was intended that he would succeed his father in the manufacturing enterprise upon completion of his higher education.

The money panic of 1907 was far more disastrous in New York City than in other industrial cities and financial centers. However, the effect was felt by the small Indianapolis banks, even though newspapers of the city reiterate the supposed calm

within the banking circles during the shakey October of 1907. Although no printed material reveals it and all records regarding the matter have been destroyed, Laycock's descendents believe that large sums of money were borrowed from the Meyer-Kiser Bank of Indianapolis to finance the Brookside Park factory. Family legend says that Sol Meyer of the Meyer-Kiser Bank demanded immediate payment of the 90-day notes which had provided the funds to build the new factory.

This demand upon the funds of an enterprise only recently moved into new facilities, staggered the company. Evidentally the notes were paid off or some type of arrangement was made, for the company continued to operate for another five years. However, the number employed dropped from 337 in 1906 to 185 in 1908.

Unfortunately financial circumstances were coupled with additional problems which led to the rather rapid decline of the company. In late 1907 and 1908 a mild recession caused wholesale prices to fall slightly. Prices on furniture and household goods fell considerably more than other products between 1908 and 1910. This drop in prices would have been weathered by most concerns. However, the iron bed industry, in which the Laycock Company was heavily committed, faced rapid increases in prices for metallic raw materials at the same time wholesale prices were falling.

Undoubtedly a major factor contributing to the decline of the Laycock's company was the speed with which iron and brass beds went out of vogue. The iron bed craze had swept the country during the 1890's. The wooden furniture manufacturers maintained a constant campaign against the iron and brass bed industry since during the height of the vogue households would not purchase wooden suites as a unit. The iron bed was not cheap by anyone's standard, sometimes selling for as much as $100 to $500. The wooden furniture industry needed only to wait for the time when pinched pocketbooks dictated the cheaper wooden beds.

The company had chosen to produce a specialized product. It was produced under ideal conditions for two decades, and the operation, so long as the demand continued, was most successful. The company failed to foresee the consequences of a non-diversified production. An attempt was made to produce bicycles but it came too late. Because the Laycock enterprise remained almost totally involved in one aspect of furniture manufacturing,

the company was subject to the consequences of changing whims of the buying public. Slight recession and a financially weak company further complicated the situation.

Relatives of T. B. Laycock indicate that as long as he and his company were on the offensive, nothing could stand in the way of success. But as soon as they were on the defensive — as happened during the money panic, mild recession in the furniture industry, and failing demand for metal beds — there seemed to be nothing to stand in the way of failure.

The revolutionary innovations to improve working conditions and employee relations, Laycock's real claim to fame, seem to have had little to do with the failure of the company in 1913. It is important to note that even as the company proceeded to its downfall, the social welfare programs were not discontinued. The employees' dining room continued to operate at a below cost basis as late as 1910. Workers continued to be happy and satisfied with their jobs at the time.

There would be those that would argue, however, that Laycock's innovations did lead to the eventual downfall. Altruism is commendable, but when it precedes sound industrial management, it can do nothing but aggregate a deteriorating situation. T. B. Laycock may very easily have understood the needs of his fellow man but not, at the same time, the prerequisites of the successful corporate enterprise. It is regretful that financial and legal records are not available to support this argument.

After the appointed receivers sold the remaining assets of the company, which were valued at $400,000, to satisfy claims against the T. B. Laycock Manufacturing Company, T. B. Laycock retired. He spent much time furthering the local cause of the Y.M.C.A. and his church. T. B. Laycock died in 1936. He was at his death still considered one of Indianapolis' leading industrialists and citizens.

Pioneer Efforts in Industrial Relations

The social reforms which the Laycock Company initiated during the last decade of the 19th century were truly unique. The National Cash Register Company of Dayton, Ohio was probably the first company in the great mid-section of America to initiate any such reforms on a large scale. Doubtless the reason T. B. Laycock has received little credit for his innovations is that fact that the company failed in 1913. Had it sur-

vived, historians would indeed treat this Indianapolis company as charitably as they treat the Dayton enterprise.

It is quite obvious that there was a close tie between the National Cash Register Company and the Laycock Company. In December of 1899 *Factory News* states:

"We are under many obligations to the National Cash Register Company of Dayton, Ohio, for repeated kindnesses which have been of much assistance to us in the inauguration of new methods of conducting our factory." And in April of 1902, "Ever since the management's visit to the National Cash Register Company factory at Dayton, Ohio, in June of 1899 we have felt a lively interest in not only their exemplified industrial reform ideas, some of which we have copied, but also in their enterprising business methods."

Many of the innovations carried out by T. B. Laycock are identical to those carried out by President Patterson of National Cash Register Company. The officers' club, the dining room for employees, the various internal clubs for employees, the landscaping and the beauifying of buildings, and relationships between officers and employees are a few identical programs initiated. The Laycock Company, however, deserves credit for some truly original programs which they initiated on their own.

All of the Laycock reform measures are based upon the motto of the corporation: "It's right." A sign bearing this motto was found hanging in every room of the factory. "It's right" is a simplification of the much longer factory motto. "'It's right' because it is our motto and our motto is right in principle, precept, and practice. 'It's right' to accord employees that full measure of courtesy and respect which is expected of them and the management that fails to see and appreciate these needs more light." The motto serves as the basis for all innovations and employer-employee relationships.

For the researcher the factory publication, *Factory News,* provides the most insight into the corporation's welfare programs. This publication hit the press for the first time in November, 1899 and continued until 1903, but subsequent volumes of this publication seem to have disappeared.

The monthly publication told employees, customers, and friends of the happenings of the T. B. Laycock Manufacturing Company. It was mailed to customers and to the various trade journals of the furniture industry, employees received their copies at work, and visitors to the factory were presented with a

copy and/or placed on the mailing list. About half of this twenty-four page booklet is devoted to advertising which was of interest to the retailers of iron beds, bedsprings, and mattresses. The pamphlet also contained from month to month a *pot pourri* of information, some of which might fall into the following categories:

1. Social events announced and reviewed
2. Biographical sketches of employees and departments
3. Activities of officers and their children
4. Introduction of new ideas, methods, and lines of merchandise
5. Short stories, quips, and jesting about employees
6. Poetry
7. Lists of visitors during the previous month and their home towns
8. Birth, weddings, and anniversary notices
9. Accident and sick lists
10. Death notices and eulogies
11. News and whereabouts of salesmen
12. Customer comments (favorable and unfavorable) and description of customer facilities

Although a factory of 250-350 people is by 20th century standards quite small, it was still large enough to encompass various cliques and factions. *Factory News* provided the house organ by which employees became well aware of other activities within the factory. Generally speaking, *Factory News* provided employees and friends of the factory with the justification for the social reform which had been inaugurated. The editor jested often with popular and controversial employees, criticized employees for lack of enthusiasm, and bragged in the vociferous Victorian fashion of the great achievements made by the company. The success of the social affairs of its employees often times seemed to be of foremost importance.

Not only did this publication provide friends and customers of the factory with information about new products, methods of production, and simple advertising which retailers could, in turn, use to promote their own sales, but it also provided the same individuals with information about the social reforms that were taking place within the factory. T. B. Laycock not only envisioned great changes within his own factory, but he also

foresaw the day when industrial reform would sweep all of America. His "crusade" went beyond the factory and city limits of Indianapolis; it also reached the retail stores where his products were sold.

Because T. B. Laycock was convinced that the factory must continue to be efficient and modern, he offered prizes for suggestions which might cause improvement in the efficiency of operations. These prizes, ranging from one dollar to 35 dollars depending upon the amount of savings to be incurred, were presented at the semi-annual December and June meetings of all employees. At the fifth annual session on December 18, 1902, the following individuals received prizes for their suggestions:

R. N. Beeson, for improvement in marking tags	— $ 1.00
T. Cunningham for saving in varnish	— $ 2.00
ornament on childs folding bed	— $ 1.00
improvement in tank	— $ 1.00
Ella Mason for improvement in the office	
office telephone equipment	— $ 2.50
T. W. Pelton for improvement in the	
the child's folding crib	— $ 5.00
G. M. Henderson for improvement	
in the dipping tank	— $20.00

It is interesting to note that employees were compensated for their suggestions in a monetary way rather than being chastised for suggesting that existing facilities were inadequate. To the researcher many of the suggestions seem trite; however, in order to maintain enthusiasm, the officers were inclined to award small prizes for virtually every suggestion made. The largest prizes between $20 and $35 were few and far between. Usually one or two such prizes would be given at each semi-annual meeting.

From time to time company officers thought that apathy prevailed among the employees with regard to suggesting improvements. Following the fifth annual awards in December of 1902, officers expressed a desire to even double the amount of prizes at the next meeting in June. In December they passed out $60 in prizes; money never seemed to limit the company's commitment toward its programs.

The presentation of prizes was not only a matter of bonus money; it also provided the rationale for one of many social events which took place within the factory. The prizes were awarded during work hours at a meeting of all employees where

Since most workers of this era did not have the luxurious facilities of inside bathrooms, hot running water, or especially showers, the Laycock factory set out to provide these facilities for its workers The women were the first to receive bathroom facilities. Individual lockers, toilets, baths, and resting rooms were provided. The hot and cold water, soap, and towels were provided free by the company. In 1900 a set of showers had been installed for the women.

With the new factory built in 1898-99, the female employees were provided with a dining room (the Girl's Dining Room). This room, decorated with paintings, prints and photographs, provided a place where the girls might bring their lunch to be eaten. The girls were divided into groups of four, each group being responsible for heating and serving coffee and soup and cleaning up afterwards. A group fulfilled these duties for one week after which another group was given the same responsibility. The company provided the coffee and soup free.

In 1902, the company provided a dining room for the men of the foundry. They, too, were added when the new wing was built onto the factory. These men brought their lunch to the factory, and enjoyed the "luxury" of a dining room in which to eat. Hot coffee and soup were purchased, rather than provided free, at a nominal price from the Officer's Club. The Officer's Club, which had been in existence since before the girl's dining room, was a facility established for officers, managers, and foremen where they discussed factory problems over lunch. The Club also provided the proper environment for entertaining factory guests.

In November, 1903, it was decided to provide a large dining room for all employees rather than the separate dining room for women and men. This dining room would provide the necessary facilities for the large entertainments and gatherings which took place during both work hours and at night. In addition, a kitchen was built to provide food for the various gatherings of tourists, friends, and other guests which frequented the factory.

the assorted musical and dramatic clubs displayed their talents. T. B. Laycock opened the formal session with a brief speech, usually followed by a humorous speech given by one of the other officers. The prizes were awarded personally by Mr. Laycock, as he felt the importance of the occasion dictated his participation

When the girl's dining room and men's foundry dining room were abandoned in favor of a larger dining hall, these respective rooms were converted into still more bath and toilet facilities. Five new shower baths were provided for men and a larger rest and reading room were made available for women. Employees found these facilities even more extensive when they moved into the modern Brookside Park building.

The new Brookside Park factory provided an even larger dining room for all the employees. This room would comfortably seat 200 people at small tables where they enjoyed hot lunches cooked in the adjoining kitchen. At one end of the large dining room were restroom facilities and a lounge for women filled with large chairs, pillows, and magazines. At the other end of the dining room was a small dining room for officers and guests, although on normal occasions the officers ate with the employees.

The employees ate their noon meals in the dining room which were served at reduced expense to the workers. The menu of hot meals varied daily; the meals were noted for their size and quality even though subsidization by the management of $600 each year was necessary. Individuals touring the factory were impressed by the variety and quality of the food served and the factory took great pride in providing these meals to their guests.

It is interesting to note that this new dining facility was convertible into a large auditorium with a stage raised well above the floor. Since the entertainment provided by music clubs had been so successful and because there were numerous factory gatherings of a social nature, the new dining room saw a great variety of activity.

The company initiated and sponsored various clubs and social groups for the employees. The most important and the longest lived group was the T.B.L. Literary and Social Club. All women were eligible for membership in the club, the purpose of which was to provide exactly what the title implied. In addition, the women made frequent visits to the homes of their sick colleagues, and they took great interest in their "physical culture classes." Originally the club met in the Officer's Club across the street from the factory. But within a few years of its initiation a meeting room was provided in the factory itself.

A great many other clubs came and went as employee turnover took place, social groupings changed, and interest varied.

There was, for instance, the Laycock Dramatic Club which provided the factory with dramatic entertainment. The Girl's Musical Club, the Boy's Musical Club, and for a while the T.B.L. Orchestra for Boys and Girls provided "cultural entertainment" for the gatherings of the factory workers. It is interesting to note that the company paid for the conductor or teacher but not for the music. In addition to these clubs, there was also the T.B.L. Adult Reading Circle and the T.B.L. Girl's Club which concentrated on sewing, lectures, and music. As the spring months rolled around renewed interest blossomed in the quite successful baseball team which represented the company in the city league. The T.B.L. team won the city title for 1902 and 1903, having played a perfect season in 1902.

Probably the most unique reform inaugurated by the Laycock Company was the library. Originally started by the T.B.L. Literary and Social Club for its members only, the factory library became available to all employees in 1900. All workers within the factory could borrow books to read during the rest period following lunch or at home. A "Junior Reading Circle" was initiated for the boys, each of whom promised to read one book every two weeks.

All the books were donated by employees, the Laycock family, and friends and visitors to the factory. From time to time benefit auctions were held to buy important volumes which as yet the library did not possess. In 1901 the library contained 641 volumes and that number was known to have grown steadily as the years passed.

A librarian was employed on a part-time basis, her other duties devoted to her factory job. Each day she took a cart loaded with books through the factory and distributed these books to those who had requested a particular volume the previous day. A monthly report by the librarian indicated the volume of books checked out by members from each department.

Factory News also indicates additional social reforms about which very little other information is available. On several occasions the company bought, at reduced prices, large volumes of produce which it resold to the employees, passing the savings on to them. At one time the company bought 75 bushels of apples and resold them "at a great savings to the workers."

There were also periodic factory picnics which the officers of the factory sponsored and attended. As has already been mentioned, the monthly entertainments were given at the factory at

night. A great variety of musical presentations, lectures by guests and friends of the employees, short addresses by bishops, ministers, college presidents, lawyers and other professionals not only provided the employees with some enjoyable social gatherings but also a bit of educational experience.

A photographic darkroom for employees, "court martial" trials for offenders, and a barber shop for men were other innovations of the company. The barber shop was justified on the grounds that a male worker found going out on the town inconvenient, since following work, a rushed trip to a barber shop for a shave was necessary. The barber shop, which opened at four in the afternoon, therefore provided a convenience for the men of the factory. Flower boxes were placed in all the windows of the factory and the bank of the canal and factory grounds were also planted with flowers each spring.

Generally speaking, carrying out the firm's motto "It's Right" not only provided ideal working conditions for workers, but it also made work a pleasant experience. In most cases, in fact, the living conditions of the factory were better than those at home.

One method already mentioned of impressing the public with the progress made by the factory was through the circulation of *Factory News*. A seemingly more successful means of propaganda was the open invitation extended to virtually anyone who would take the time to visit the factory. Almost all conventioneers in Indianapolis were invited to both the Canal Street and Brookside Park building to view the phenomenal innovations which had taken place. *Factory News* often carried thank you letters and testimonials to the success of these social reforms. In addition the local newspapers went to great lengths to tell their public of the unique factory which operated within their city.

As early as November, 1899, the *Indianapolis Journal* had said "The T. B. Laycock Manufacturing Company has made advances in the way of creating pleasant relations between employer and employee which but few manufacturers have accomplished." In that same year and month Mr. D. G. Allen, Vice President of the A. Burdsol Company, visited the factory. In a message to the employees and officers he said,

> We were very much impressed with the improvements that have been inaugurated there and the original system that has been put into practice, and especially the

fact that throughout the entire factory the comfort and convenience of the employees were never lost sight of. There can be no question whatever that when all improvements completed have been carried out that you will have a model factory in every respect and one that will undoubtedly be carried out by others..... Employees will take pleasure in their work, as they could only do in a model factory like yours.

In 1901 the *Indianapolis Press* said,

Today this institution stands as a monument to improved conditions for factory employees, and the factory is a model that others will do well to copy. No money has been spared in providing comfort and convenience for employees. Indeed, the management seems to have been impelled by a wish to build a factory where work would be a pleasure, out of which men and women would go to their homes with unclouded brain and unstrained muscle that come with the drudgery common to most institutions of the kind.

On April 14, 1900, the State Factory Inspector, Mr. McAbee, spoke to the officers at a luncheon at the factory. The newspaper account states that in the course of his remarks he said that during the past year many factories throughout the state of Indiana had begun the work of trying to better their working conditions. He was certain that they were following the footsteps of the Laycock establishment which he classified as a "model factory of the state." The *Indianapolis Press* went on to say that,

the Laycock institution is going to be looked upon as one of the points of genuine interest in Indianapolis, and visiting parties such as the one of today are becoming frequent. With the exception of the great Cash Register Company at Dayton, Ohio there is probably not another manufacturing company in the world like the Laycock concern. The factory is operated on the kind of system that the late novelist Harold Frederic loved to dream and write about; it is just such a village of happy working people as that pictured in Frederic's "*Gloria Mundia*," except that the Indianapolis enterprise is more practical and more substantial and better suited to the laborers themselves.

It would be extremely interesting to know where T. B. Laycock received the impetus to initiate such controversial and unique reforms for his era. It is quite obvious that some contact

was maintained between the National Cash Register Company and the Laycock concern. However, there must have been some reason for Laycock's initial interest in such reform. Could it be that his father, William H. Laycock, recalled the days of the utopian community at New Harmony, Indiana? William H. Laycock had moved to Washington, Indiana from Kentucky in the 1830's. Robert Owen had purchased New Harmony, Indiana in 1820 but by 1827 the community as a Utopian community had nearly failed. However, the close proximity of Washington to New Harmony might have given William H. Laycock the original idea, which he in turn passed on to his son.

Perhaps a more logical approach, however, is an analysis of T. B. Laycock's philosophical approach toward his relationship between employer and employee. It resembles very closely that of Robert Owen's "master-servant" philosophy. This may be, however, merely coincidence. T. B. Laycock said,

> No man can map out his course in life exactly. His life must be governed by his environment. He must watch for opportunities and seize them at the proper moment in his career.
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> With all this he must have ambition. If he has no ambition the Lord help him.
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> Once he succeeds he should not be so puffed up with pride that he cannot see his feet, lest he stumble. He must cultivate touch with his fellow man and his fellow workers. There are many successful businessmen today who are cold and indifferent toward their employees, but the majority of such men are not highly successful.

T. B. Laycock seems to be concerned about the relationship between he and his employees. If for any reason this relationship is strained, some corrective device must be initiated. Working conditions which are undesirable tend to automatically strain this relationship. The reason that T. B. Laycock mingled with his employees was not to force them to work harder or to look down his nose at such lowly creatures. Instead, it was to impress upon them the fact that he was sincerely interested in their well-being. So sincere was he that he would even spend great sums of money to improve their conditions in order that they might all be the happier. On many occasions his workers found that they were enjoying their hours at the factory more than those at home. Colleagues found great satisfaction in returning for social gatherings at the factory for they knew that they would be among friends, whether they be among fellow workers or the managerial staff.

The Laycock Company was not an attempt at a Utopian community. T. B. Laycock, his father, and the other officers appeared to be genuinely interested in the relationship between officer and worker. Their objective, it seemed, was to make the employee happy, a happiness that doubtless led to a congenial atmosphere in which production never failed because of distrust, or lack of cooperation. And Thomas Benton Laycock should certainly be regarded as a progressive entrepreneur, whether his company eventually failed or not.

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1 *When the Canal Street factory building was vacated, it was separately incorporated as the Laycock Power House Company. Electric power was generated for roughly 35 small manufacturing concerns which rented space in the building. The Industrial Building, as it was called, burned to the ground on January 13, 1918, in a spectacular $2,000,000 blaze. The building was insured at reduced rates because of the hopefully effective sprinkler system. However, because of a shortage of coal, the system had been turned off in anticipation of sub-zero weather for it was feared that the pipes might burst if frozen. Several of the firms within the factory complex were known to have produced or been producing war machinery. Since the remains of several isolated fires were found, it has been often hypothesized that the fire was set by an arsonist, possibly sympathetic to the German cause in World War I.*