COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN KALAMAZOO

What Has Been The Effect of Members of Important Industrial Families 1929-1975

Ann Keyser Gary
Local History Project
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For a city of its size, Kalamazoo, Michigan offers outstanding cultural, educational, political and industrial opportunities. Kalamazoo grew from the fur trading settlement of Titus Bronson in the early 19th century to today's industrially diversified city of 25,000. The city's various industries have included making carriages, corsets, cars, and caskets; as well as fishing rods, peppermint, pants and paper. In 1918 the city's political organization was changed to a City Manager-City Commission system. This switch facilitated the political administration of the growing city. During the twentieth century, Kalamazoo has expanded and changed. The community has developed to encompass the needs and interests of the Kalamazooans.

At this point in time, Kalamazoo is at a turning point in its history. Many of the industries that dictated the city's growth are no longer Kalamazoo based; some having left the city; others becoming subsidiaries of national firms. A generation of citizens who were directly involved in the growth of the community are now becoming less active. These two factors have and will have an effect on Kalamazoo and its community assets.

This report is an attempt to look back on Kalamazoo as a developing community. It will deal with one particular facet of this growth: to determine the effect of members of important industrial families on community development since the Depression.
The elite of Kalamazoo have played a major role in the city's political scene. This involvement is exemplified early in the 1900's when W.E. Upjohn, co-founder of the Upjohn Company, proposed that the city adopt a council-manager system. This was a reform movement which would "increase the financial efficiency of the city."\(^1\) As the first mayor of Kalamazoo, W.E. Upjohn was able to create a "business like"\(^2\) atmosphere. This political setting encouraged the natural leaders of the small city, the business men and prominent members of the community to become involved. This move, towards greater involvement of the elite, began a trend: from the 1920's through the 1950's these citizens were in political control of the city.

During the 1930's the elite were mainly business men. Having established themselves in local industry, they were able to increase their control by holding political office. With a community of approximately 50,000 people and less conflict between diversified interests than today, these community leaders, with their know-how, interest, and positions of prominence, were able to successfully run the city. Familiar names, such as Upjohn, Shakespeare, Todd, Light, and Sutherland were frequently members of city commission.

Direct participation of industrial leaders is an advantage for industry: if a bill is proposed which affects a company, the leaders of that company, as members of the city commission, are in a position to determine the outcome of the bill.

As Kalamazoo grew, and institutions of higher learning became an important part of the community, the elite grew to include members of the academic community. At this point,
membership in the 'elite' was no longer solely determined by economic status. Men who were in the business of providing for others, whether through education or business, became very active in community and political affairs. Up until approximately 1950, six out of seven of the members of city commission were members of the elite; from affluent, industrial, or academic circles.¹

One of the major reasons, other than natural ability and interest, which made the control of the city commission by the elite possible, was a semi-formal group called the Citizen's Committee ⁴ or the 'Park Club' group.⁵ This group was comprised of prominent Kalamazooans and met with the purpose of selecting and asking knowledgeable citizens to run for seat on the city commission. This citizens' committee had a "very real concern for the welfare of the community".⁶ Because people do not generally volunteer to run for commission, a stimulus was necessary to insure an effective city government system. With the 'Park Club' groups' organization and moral and financial backing they made a real contribution to the community. The 'Park Club' group included members of the Kalamazoo elite: businessmen, academicians, and those from the upper-class.

The Citizens' Committee's success was partially due to the fact that until the 1960's no other group was as well organized, or had the ability to effectively sponsor candidates for public office. It can be said that although they did not ask for or demand political favors of their candidates they had control over the make-up of the City Commission from the 1940's to the mid-1960's. Until recently this helped to make Kalamazoo a city
involved in the affairs of city politics. Then, in the late 1960's, a member of City Commission was elected Mayor—without the backing of the Citizens' Committee, it was realized that broader representation was necessary in order to meet the demands of the people. The Citizens' Committee was forced to adapt to an increasing amount of involvement by other members of the community. This could only be done through the endorsement of non-elite candidates.

By bringing people knowledge, interest, and ability to public office in Kalamazoo, the Citizens' Committee had both a positive and negative effect on the community. Prominent citizens, directly and indirectly, helped to make Kalamazoo a working city.

Because business is such an important aspect when considering community development, industrial leaders have had an effect on the city. Companies bring jobs and jobs bring people. A locally-owned and managed company provides a service for the community. Home-owned industry cycles money back into the community. Naturally, if a company is owned by a member of the community it is easier to understand and respond to the interests and needs of the citizens and employees. In viewing the growth of Kalamazoo, it is evident that the locally-owned industry has had a positive effect on the city.

From 1930 to the mid-1960's Kalamazoo was known as a city with locally-owned and diversified industry. This was a great
advantage for Kalamazoo, but, unfortunately, the situation has changed.

Although diverse in their goals and emphases the established industries have done what they can for the community. One of the ways that the companies have contributed to the city comes from the industrial leaders' concern for their employees. Until recently there was little union power in the city. Unions were not necessary in a city that offered good pay, good benefits, and a general feeling of good will created by the managers and owners. Because the unions were not strong in Kalamazoo there was no power at the level of union boss. The managers dealt directly with the employees, independent from outside pressure. An example of this occurred during the depression.

In the 1930's it was impossible to keep employees at their regular wage levels; if they were employed at all. The industrial leaders of Kalamazoo implemented a plan to minimize poverty and unemployment. There were only minimal layoffs. Instead, the companies made uniform pay-cuts. This enabled firms to continue operating and kept people employed. This plan helped to keep the community out of the depths of the depression.

One of the advantages of a large number of locally-based companies is that owners and managers are generally outstanding citizens; contributing much to the community. There exists a feeling of reciprocity: the city helped to make the company and the company should, in turn, help the city. This feeling, coupled with the interest and generosity which has characterized the industrial leaders of this city, has resulted in positive
interaction between company and community. Besides contributions to cultural and educational institutions and the Kalamazoo Foundation, gifts were made in other areas as well. One such gift, made to the city in 1932, was 17,000 acres for community research: later to be named The Institute for Community Research.

In the 1950's and 1960's there was a trend for companies to be absorbed by large conglomerates. Several local firms moved their headquarters to other cities, and still others became subsidiaries of national firms. Allen Electric moved to Chicago in 1967 after becoming a national firm. The Shakespeare Company now operates out of a Southern state. In the paper industry, so important in the early years of Kalamazoo, the Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Company, or KVP, joined the Sutherland Paper Company in 1960 and was later taken over by the Brown Paper Company in 1966. Other companies such as Globe Casket and Kalamazoo Stove were liquidated in the 1950's after many years in Kalamazoo. These changes and others did not work in favor of Kalamazoo and its community development. Companies which became part of a conglomerate no longer have the power to decide to contribute to local institutions. The same is true of employee treatment. As only one part of a conglomerate, corporations are no longer at liberty to run their business as they please. In looking at this situation it is necessary only to look at the Upjohn Company, one of the few remaining large, locally-owned industries. The Upjohn Company's place in Kalamazoo and the prominence of the involved Upjohn family is an excellent example of the effect that home-based industry can have. The Upjohn Company provides many jobs and the
can have. The Upjohn Company provides many jobs. The president of the Upjohn Company have been of high academic status and are therefore interested and involved in the intellectual life of the city. The Upjohn family has made amazing contributions to the community, by backing civic, cultural, and political institutions.

In the last fifteen to twenty years industries have emphasized company involvement in the community. Having upper-echelon personal on a cultural board, for example, puts a company in a position to deal with and help the community. Yet, in the case of a nationally-owned firm, many of the top-level employees are filled by out-of-towners, and there is a huge turn-over as employees are transferred in and out of the city. There is no continuity and the city suffers from frequent position changes.

The trend toward non-Kalamazoo based industry has and will negatively affect the city. The backing will no longer be available for community projects and the community will no longer have the opportunity to appreciate and benefit from many outstanding citizens.

The Kalamazoo Foundation is another way through which members of industrial families have had an effect on community development. The Foundation was formed under the recommendation of W.E. Upjohn in 1925 for the "general good of the community". The Foundation was created to provide a facility for citizens and companies or "people of means" to contribute their money
to a civic institution or other public purposes\textsuperscript{13} The Kalamazoo Foundation has given over eleven million dollars towards the education, health, welfare, and culture of Kalamazooans. All of the funds are administered from a trust fund by a distributing committee comprised of five citizens selected by the senior probate judge, the senior circuit court judge, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, and the presidents of local banks which have trust funds. One of the major roles of the Foundation, as seen by the board of trustees, is to provide "seed money\textsuperscript{14}" for community projects. These grants can be one of two types: prescribed or suggested by the donor; or decided upon by the distributing committee.

The Kalamazoo Foundation is the tenth largest community foundation in the country and was established to facilitate public contributions. Although philanthropy did occur prior to the establishment of the Foundation its formation seemed to start a Kalamazoo tradition. It became easier for some citizens to distribute their wealth back into the community they had gained it from. For anonymous donors, the Foundation facilitates donations while maintaining the donors anonymity.

Although it is commonly acknowledged that the Foundation provides a service for the community, it is criticized for two major reasons. First, a private foundation takes the control of monies for the city out of the hands of the public as a whole. The people have no power to select the members of the board of trustees who distribute the funds. Second, the board of trustees is comprised of prominent local citizens,
all of high socio-economic status. This presents the possibility of a limited point of view when considering grants to the community. In response to this criticism, there is some recourse. As a private organization whose trustees are appointed by a variety of people involved in the city, the board is "free from partisan, sectarian, or commercial control." This permits the distributing committee to be more objective in their dealings. It has been said, of the Kalamazoo Foundation board, that, although, the members are all prominent citizens from similar backgrounds, their interests and differences in personality dictate a diverse set of ideas and points of view. This results in a variety of decisions which meet the different needs of the community.

Donald S. Gilmore was a member of the Kalamazoo Foundation from 1928 to 1975, serving as president from 1934 to 1975. Mr. Gilmore's leadership was undoubtedly a key to the expansion and success of the Foundation.

The purpose of the Kalamazoo Foundation, as stated in its early years was:

For assisting charitable and educational institutions;
For promoting education; For scientific research;
For care of the sick, aged, and helpless; For the care of children; For the betterment living and working conditions; For recreation for all classes; and for such other public, educational, charitable, or benevolent purposes as will best make for mental, moral, and physical improvements of the inhabitants of Kalamazoo County.

In an attempt to follow these guidelines, through the leadership and contributions of wealthy companies and individuals, has played an integral role in the development of the Kalamzoo community.
The city of Kalamazoo is host to a large number of excellent cultural and educational facilities. These institutions are outwardly signs of involvement in the community by the affluent. In dealing with these contributions to the city and its people, it is interesting to look at the different modes of involvement of different citizens. What are some of the reasons and motives for involving one’s self in the community? Is it direct or indirect participation, stemming from knowledge or interest? It is possible to ask these questions when dealing with the contributions of a personal manner. Kalamazoo's cultural and educational institutions could not survive without the help of members of industrial families. As a result, it will be interesting to see what will happen in the future of Kalamazoo.

A. M. Todd, the peppermint king, once the owner and president of his own company, is credited as being the first citizen to start a city-wide interest in art. As a collector of art and rare books, he hoped that others would have the opportunity to appreciate the things that he was interested in. Todd involved himself in the art museum, providing one third of the funds necessary for a museum building. A. M. Todd is an early example of a community minded philanthropist. His involvement resulted from a personal interest and a concern for the people of Kalamazoo.

The affluent of Kalamazoo feel a responsibility towards the community. Many people are giving quietly and personally from behind the scenes. This type of involvement usually grows out of a personal concern for an institution. Although
this is direct involvement it is not direct participation. It can be said that any donation to an institution can be of three natures: miserly; generous; or perfunctory. Affluent involvement with a cultural institution brings prowess to the institution and the institution in turn brings distinction to the contributor. All of the contributions to further intellectual life which will be considered here have been generous and have changed the community.

The Symphony Orchestra was organized by Leta Snow. She was an able organizer, dedicated to establishing a musical group for both professionals and amateurs. Leta Snow was able to see her interests applied only with the help of the affluent behind her. In this case the contributors played a supportive role, participating indirectly in creating and sustaining a cultural institution.

Tracing the history of citizens' involvement with the Art Institute covers several interesting modes of participation in community development. In 1924, the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts was incorporated. This was made possible by the hard work of Blanche Hull. She had the time, ability and know-how to organize an arts center. Her position in society helped her to get the recognition for the Arts Institute that was necessary for it to become an integral part of the community. In this case the affluent of the city served as co-leaders. Having a common interest in the arts, they used their contacts and knowledge to help establish the Arts Institute. This was done while Blanche Hull did the organizing.

From 1929 to 1961, the Art Institute was located in two
places: on Rose Street and then on West South Street. Although the Institute was continually backed by members of local industrial families, the public response was not large enough to manage an expansion of programs. Going into the 1960's, it seemed as if the Art Institute would not continue to exist. It is true that Kalamazoo's cultural institutions are dependent on financial and organizational backing. But it is also true that a cultural institution cannot survive without a broad base of interest in the general public. In the case of the Art Institute, supporters attempted to attract the public with different projects. One such project was the Clothes Line Art Show. These summer shows, held in Bronson Park truly interested the people of Kalamazoo and they came out in hordes to enjoy the art. It was at this point, when a broad base of interest by the general public was recognized that Mrs. Donald Gilmore and her husband stepped in to contribute the monies for a new art center building. The project that followed is a good example of a combined effort by certain citizens in hopes that the new art center would be a great success. Money granted by the Kalamazoo Foundation and a contribution from the W. E. Upjohn estate enabled the donation of land on Park Street to be used as the site. Mr. and Mrs. Gilmore made their decision to provide for the building of the new Institute only after careful evaluation of the situation. Their contribution was generous and grew out of a genuine interest in art and a personal concern for the community. Mrs. Gilmore was directly involved in establishing an Art Institute which has proved successful.
The Civic Auditorium on Lovell Street was completed in 1931. Built by W.E. Upjohn, the auditorium was "dedicated to the happy use of leisure." The theatre was to house the Civic Players. This acting group for both professionals and amateurs was formed in 1928 by a small group of people dedicated to the theatre. The Civic Players were headed by Mrs. Norman Carver Sr. who was joined shortly after by Dorothy Upjohn Dalton. The Civic Players have grown in size and importance. In 1972, 4,000 people supported the group which produces many plays each year. The excellent theatrical facilities of the auditorium contribute to the success and popularity of the community theatre. In 1931 the New York Times wrote "The Civic Auditorium of Kalamazoo, Michigan is probably the loveliest and best equipped theatre in America." The success of the Civic Players, however, is due to a large degree to the continuing support by Mrs. Dalton. Once a professional actress working in New York, Mrs. Dalton acted on the stage of the Civic Auditorium only two years ago.

Mrs. Dalton participates directly with the Civic Players. Her contributions to the institution stem from a personal interest in the arts. Look Magazine wrote that "The first and foremost patrons of the Art Center and the Civic Players are members of the Dr. W.E. Upjohn clan." Dorothy Dalton and Jane Gilmore are sisters, and are the daughters of W.E. Upjohn. These women have involved themselves for the purpose of bringing the arts to Kalamazoo. Mrs. Dalton and Mrs. Gilmore are known to be careful managers of their assets. When considering a contribution, they will weigh all the pros and cons in an attempt to evaluate where their money would best be used or needed. Their dedication has given Kalamazoo cultural institutions which are outstanding
and uncharacteristic for a city of only 85,000 people.

There are four institutions of higher learning in the city of Kalamazoo. One of these, Kalamazoo College; a four year, coeducational liberal arts college has benefitted greatly from the contributions of Kalamazoo's affluent. The college is better able to serve the community as well as the students as a result of these citizens. This service is one part in the community development of Kalamazoo.

The S. Rudolph Light Trust Fund has enabled students of Kalamazoo College to participate in a learning experience abroad. The period of 'Foreign Study' is a major attraction of students to 'K' College. This trust fund was set up by Dr. Richard U. Light. His concern and interest in the liberal arts education has led him to become directly involved with Kalamazoo College. Having served as chairman of the board of trustees, Dr. Light is presently an honorary board member. As a man who pursues his interests, Dr. Light participates directly in the program that he has made possible. He will meet some of the Kalamazoo College students at their arrival in Europe at the start of 'Foreign Study'. This illustrates Dr. Light's personal concern. Dr. Richard Light has done whatever he can for Kalamazoo College serving it not solely in one way, but in countless ways.

Within the past decade, Dorothy Dalton has contributed funds to build two theatres at 'K'College. Both of these theatres are connected to the Light Fine Arts building. Reflecting her interest in the theatre, the college has been able to to expand
its program. At this time four major productions and a Reader's theatre as well as many studio productions, Kalamazoo College is known for its excellent theatrical endeavors. The theatre is one of the ways in which Kalamazoo College reaches the community. The second theatre, larger than the first, which will be completed this year, will enable the College to continue to serve the community through an enlarged program. Because of her dedication to the stage and the 'K' College community Mrs. Dalton has made it possible for the entire city to become involved in the theatre.

Dewing Hall, a large classroom building on the 'K' College campus was built through the kindness and generosity of Mrs. Winifred Dewing Wallace. In the late 1960's, she left a contribution to Kalamazoo College so that others who were interested in learning might be able to share her interest in literature. Dewing Hall, built in 1968, is the translation of her interests and is currently the revolving point around which students pursue their academic interests.

These three examples are only a limited number of the many ways in which a few citizens have enabled Kalamazoo College to grow and better serve the entire community.

There have been countless contributions to cultural and educational institutions by members of industrial families. This paper has revolved around a few of the outstanding examples of involvement in the community. These contributions have changed Kalamazoo: buildings, facilities and organizations have
been formed to develop the community both physically and in spirit. In reviewing such contributions to the city, it is evident that members of the Upjohn family have dominated the cultural scene. Mrs. Dorothy, Mrs. Donald Gilmore and Dr. Richard Light with support from their relatives have changed the face of the city.

Within the past forty-five years, Kalamazoo has changed immensely. No longer is Kalamazoo the conservative city it was thirty years ago when the City Commission adhered strongly to the "pay as you go", no debt principle. No longer is the City Commission dominated and controlled solely by the elite of the town which contributed to the conservatism. Kalamazoo has grown away from the "closely knit society" that it was in the first half of the century. It has grown to encompass the needs of a diversified population. The city is no longer the stabilized city that it was when governed by the elite. The holding back effect is gone and Kalamazoo has taken advantage of its newly found freedom becoming more progressive. Although the intentions of those which led the city were good and the purpose of most of their considerations was for the good of the city their domination of city politics was not completely advantageous.

It is true that the political elite of Kalamazoo took local politics a long way during their period of control. Organization and the ability and know how to deal with the city's problems were well supplied but the dealings of the men involved had an conservative effect on community development.

Industrial life in the city has changed a great deal since the Depression. Once a city of many locally based companies,
Kalamazoo has lost many of its industries to control by conglomerates and nationally based firms. A large turn over of upper echelon industrial positions dictates a lose of continuity in the companies' dealings with the community. The age of important industrial leaders putting their all back into the city is gone. Kalamazoo loses out as a result. Companies still contribute in several ways to the city where they are located, but the liberty to do so has become restricted. Although the situation will cause further anxiety for the city in the future, there are still a few who care. The move away from locally owned firms' has had a negative effect on community development in the city of Kalamazoo. The interest that a company has to reciprocate to the city is dwindling.

Since the late 1920's, Kalamazoo has witnessed the formation of a Symphony Orchestra, a community theatre project, an Arts Institute and the growth of its colleges and university. This could not have been possible without the interest and dedication of the affluent of the city. They have helped to build up the city such that it offers many outstanding cultural opportunities. In this way have the affluent and especially the members of important industrial families had an effect on the development of the community. A generation of enthusiastic and able contributors is passing. It seems that there is no replacement for these people and it is only possible to wait and see what will occur in the future.
Kalamazoo stands at a turning point in its history. The elite no longer have the control they had during the first half of the century. This is true in industry with a reduction in the number of locally owned companies, and in politics, with the city now supporting a diversified City Commission. In cultural affairs, the members of the community which were active and involved in past years are no longer as able to participate as actively. Great contributions have been made to the city of Kalamazoo, giving it an abundance of facilities to better serve the community. In the past, the elite of the city have played an integral role in the development of the community. They have had an effect. It will be interesting to see what will happen in the future.
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Mr. Alexis Praus
Mrs. William Robinson
Mr. Win. John Upjohn
FOOTNOTES

2. Ibid. p. 25
3. from an Interview with Mrs. William Robinson
4. Elton Ham, Political Leadership, A Case Study in Policy Formation in Kalamazoo, Michigan
5. op. cit.
6. Ibid.
7. Elton Ham, Political Leadership p. 91
8. from an Interview with Dr. Richard Light
9. from an Interview with Mrs. William Robinson
10. Ford Rowe, "Kalamazoo, The Debt-Free City"
11. Kalamazoo Foundation, "The First Fifty Years"
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. from an interview with Mrs. William Robinson
16. Ibid.
17. written by W.E. Upjohn
18. A list of major contributors and subjects of contribution appears in the appendix
19. from an Interview with Mrs. William Robinson
20. written by W.E. Upjohn
21. "43 Years on the Board", Impresario Magazine March/April 1972
24. from an interview with Mrs. William Robinson
25. Ibid.