THE DEPRESSION AND THE PEOPLE OF KALAMAZOO

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the greatest achievement in historical research and writing is the subjective actualization of a time period—imparting to the reader, with facts and accounts, a feeling of empathy towards a people and the conditions they faced. Providing, in some small way, a sense of empathy for the people of Kalamazoo during the depression is the ultimate aim of this paper. Until recently, historians have focused on "great men and ideas" and their influence in directing historical transitions. Unfortunately, at times, this focus has excluded the foundation of the social superstructure, the working class, which forms by its habits, customs, and size the inertia of history; providing the impetus, when finally set in motion, to make transitions in history certain and irrevocable. "Great men and ideas" cannot be understood outside their social context. Like light in empty space, the directives and ideas of society's leaders remains latent and inconsequential until their luminousness is reflected by some body. So in essence, history is about the lives of ordinary people and how the economic, political, and intellectual conditions affected their character and felicity.

The subject of this paper is the impact of the depression on the working classes of Kalamazoo. The term working class, which traditionally has been considered as "blue-collar workers, has been expanded to include public school
teachers and other white collar workers, who, as a group, were effected as much in Kalamazoo as the traditionally defined members of the working class. The paper will focus on the general economic impact of the depression on Kalamazoo, and especially on the economic plight of the working class and the effectiveness of public relief programs. Beyond the purely economic issues, the paper shall modestly attempt, with interviews and secondary materials, to understand the psychological and attitudinal effects of the depression. Hopefully, by exploring the conditions in Kalamazoo, we can understand the problems and fears faced by people across America during the depression.
Herbert Hoover said as he accepted the Republican presidential nomination in 1928; "we in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land." "We have not reached the goal," he concluded, "But... we shall soon, with the help of God, be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation." Although these ringing words became a shibboleth of scorn and bitter irony to those who witnessed the countless Hoover-villes a few years later, Hoover's message accurately conveyed the optimism of Americans during the exuberant economic growth and prosperity of the twenties. It would be difficult to imagine what a terrible shock it was for a society that for nearly a decade seemed to thrive on "predatory invidiousness" to suddenly fall prey to the horrors of poverty after the crash in 1929. By 1933, the Gross National Product had fallen to three-fourths of its 1929 level, a level not reached again until the United States entered the Second World War in 1941. Between 1929 and 1933, investors in the stock market lost nearly 80 billion dollars, and more than 5000 banks failed, both of which shattered, for hundreds of thousands of people, dreams of economic security. In 1933, one out of every four workers was unemployed. Even as late as 1939, only one out of every six could find employment. After the smoke cleared from the crash of the stock market, millions of people who had considered themselves industrious, respectable, and even moderately prosperous were face to face with desperate creditors who were trying to
collect debts that could not be paid. The spectre of poverty, which the sanguine voices of a decade past declared would be forever banished, became a common fear accross America.

In Kalamazoo, the depression made a major impact on the people's standard of living. While the depression's economic effects were not as severe as in some other parts of the country, Kalamazoo was hit much harder than past Kalamazoo historians have led us to believe.

When the news of the stock market crash reached Kalamazoo, the people reacted cautiously.¹ They had seen the market fluctuate wildly before and except for a few investors and the Kalamazoo Gazette, which had over $500,000 worth of stock,² few fortunes were directly dependent on the stock market. Most likely, when the Sunday paper came, people flipped past the financial news to read about the gridiron exploits of Carideo and Nagurski. Within a few months after the stock market collapse, unemployment was propelled from a social peccadilo that the community accepted to a social problem of the first magnitude that became the major preoccupation of the city and its leaders until the inception of the War. Unemployment increased rapidly from the 1929 level of 499 (little over 1%) to 1,312 (5%) in April of 1930.³ In January of 1931, over 3,300 were un-

¹The Kalamazoo Gazette, November 2, 1929.
²Gazette, June 23, 1932.
³Gazette, April 4, 1930. All percentage figures for unemployment were found by dividing the government figure of 2.5 persons for every one worker into the total population of Kalamazoo County (91,329), according to the 1930 census.
employed, and by the third quarter of 1932 unemployment soared to an astronomical rate of over 7200 persons, or approximately 21% of the Kalamazoo workforce. It remained at this level for over a year. By 1934, the level had dropped, as public relief programs were in full swing, to 6,025(17%) according to Dr. E. B. Harper; a level that remained static until 1936 when the number of workless, carried downward by an upward surge in the general economy, fell to 4,500 persons. The unemployment rate vacillated mildly for the next two years. In 1938, the number of idle workers continued to remain at about four-thousand persons, as the usually optimistic Kalamazoo Gazette pronounced that "business was making steady progress and Kalamazoo was ready to call the coming year the beginning of the post-depression era."

The unemployment figures stated above are probably inflated somewhat; due to the fact that as wages dropped and unemployment increased, women and youth, who had previously eschewed work, were forced into the labor market to compensate for lower purchasing powers. This possibility is substantiated by the observation that the number of people seeking employment was higher proportionately to the population (the mean of the 1930 census and 1940 census) than it was before the depression. Nor was

1 Gazette, February 1, 1931.
2 Gazette, November 15, 1932.
3 Gazette, June 25, 1934.
4 Gazette, April 3, 1936.
5 Gazette, April 2, 1938.
there any evidence of a baby boom fifteen or twenty years before that would account for the increase in those seeking work. However, this fact does not comparatively improve Kalamazoo's unemployment rates, as this same phenomena surely occurred in other areas and probably had even a greater effect in areas of very high unemployment.

A juxtaposition of Kalamazoo to other areas shows that Kalamazoo came through the depression relatively well as far as its numbers of unemployed. In 1933, the year when both Kalamazoo's and the nation's economies had reached their nadir, Kalamazoo's unemployment rate, while far better than the state as a whole, which had a rate of 46%, was not far off the national rate of 25%. How, then, did Kalamazoo avert the incredible unemployment rates that beset the rest of the state and other communities throughout the United States? One factor that contributed immensely was the energetic leadership of Kalamazoo bankers. Although there were a few bank holidays, not a single bank in the city failed, sparing the people of Kalamazoo from the terrible trauma of suddenly losing their life-long savings; a trauma that drove many people in the country to despair and some as far as suicide. Beyond the psychological benefits, saving the banks provided business the capital and

1 Gazette, August 15, 1933.


3 Gazette, May 23, 1939.
purchasing power to continue trade and, even in some cases, to expand production. Perhaps even more fundamental to the health of Kalamazoo's economy, was the nature and fortune of its industry. The stability of the paper industry, which provided one-fourth of Kalamazoo's industrial work force,1 was a major factor in bringing Kalamazoo through the depression better than other cities. The nascent growth in the use of paper for packaging2 and mechanical improvements in handling pulp with rotary presses, which improved both the output and quality of paper products, culminated in a fecund paper industry.3 By 1936, stocks in the paper industry had gained eleven million dollars.4 Another industry in the city, the Kalamazoo Stove Company, rebounded from a slump early in the depression5 and by 1937, it was employing about 2,700 workers and producing 100,000 stoves annually.6 Later in the depression, the Upjohn Company grew rapidly; thanks mainly to the inception of sulfa drugs and the pervasive growth in the use of vitamins. From 1935 to 1940, the number of men and women employed at the Upjohn Company increased from 684 to 979.7

1Gazette, November 5, 1932.
2Gazette, May 14, 1936.
3Gazette, July 1, 1935.
4Gazette, January 1, 1936.
5Gazette, June 5, 1932.
6Gazette, September 7, 1940.
7Gazette, June 23, 1932.
Other Kalamazoo manufacturers, such as the Checker Cab Company which cut its work force by 40% and production by 50% in 1932, did not fare quite as well. In the cases of the paper industry and the Upjohn Company, fortuitous technological advances and market conditions brought economic strength, but Kalamazoo industries, on the whole, benefited from the fact that they produced mainly consumer goods rather than capital goods; during a time when the engines of industrial expansion were silent.

The strength of Kalamazoo's industry was not the only factor that contributed to Kalamazoo's relatively low unemployment rates. On the negative side, the level of unemployment achieved by Kalamazoo was partly accomplished at the expense of the purchasing power of thousands of workers still employed, through wage cuts and shortened hours. According to figures released by Harry Hopkins for Kalamazoo County, wages, in 1933, were totaled at $7,770,656 or 50.6% less than 1929 when wages totaled $15,723,452. While for the entire nation, wages had fallen by only 34%, in 1933 from the 1929 total.

The downward trend of wages in 1931 thru 1933 proceeded very irregularly, depending on the various industries. President Hoover, who saw the significance of Keynes' work, and who was a

1 Gazette, June 23, 1932.
2 Gazette, December 29, 1939.
4 Gazette, January 18, 1934.
disciple of the Ford Gospel of higher wages, was very firm in his opposition to wage cuts. He based his stand on the living wage arguments of the post-war years that stressed the importance of maintaining the income of wage earners to furnish a market for products and help business recover. But despite Hoover's pleas, the supply of goods produced during the "bull market" years far exceeded the demands of consumers, driving prices and consequently wages inexorably downward. Reacting to depressed market prices, Kalamazoo manufacturers found it advantageous to liquidate labor costs through wage cuts rather than through laying workers off. Cutting the labor force would have inevitably led to a cut in production, when, as mentioned before, the aggregate demand for Kalamazoo products had not fallen substantially. Workers, most of whom were unorganized during the beginning of the depression, watched as their purchasing power steadily eroded.

The industrial worker was not the only worker to face this wage crunch. Government employees were hit nearly as hard. In the 1932 City Commission Election, every candidate favored lower city spending and wage cuts for city employees.¹ This formula for fighting the depression was subsequently implemented and in 1933, city and municipal workers, who were employed with the city in 1929, were, on the average, taking home salaries that were 40 to 45% lower than those in 1929.² Public school teachers were also greatly effected by government cutbacks. In 1932, the City Commission devised a plan to decrease the number of idle workers by invoking a series of wage and hour reductions to

¹Gazette, November 29, 1931.
²January 3, 1934.
county and municipal employees. Kalamazoo County Schools were forced to cut $260,960 from its 1931 budget. Included in the cuts was a $60,000 slash in teachers' salaries. ¹ In 1933, the City Commissioners again voted for a pay cut for teachers ranging from $500 to $1,375. ² The salary for a teacher with five years of experience, in 1933, was $85 a month, which was roughly equal to the income of a family of four on relief. ³ With the lower incomes of the depression came widespread demand for retrenchment and lower local taxes. In many cases citizens and property owners were simply unable to pay their taxes. The burden was passed on to students in cut programs and to teachers, who practically financed the schools out of their own pockets.

In an interview, Mrs. Lockerby, whose husband was a school teacher in Kalamazoo during the depression, said "the times were hard for school teachers." The Lockerbys lived in a small house on Maple Street. Mrs. Lockerby recalled that they didn't have any indoor plumbing, which meant an outdoor privy and required all water to be pumped by hand. They bought a Ford in 1930, but as wages continued to plummet, they lost their car despite attempts to hide it in the woods from creditors. So her husband was relegated to walking and public transportation. She claimed that she knew three or four friends of theirs who lost their cars also. In order to continue teaching, her husband was taking classes at Western in the summer, which made them save all extra money. To make ends meet, Mrs. Lockerby and her

¹ Gazette, April 4, 1932.
² Gazette, May 5, 1933.
³ Contract of Kalamazoo public school teacher, 32-33 year (source) Mrs. Lockerby.
three-year old son stayed with her parents in Northern Michigan. She said that her husband made it through the summers by doing a lot of odd jobs while he was in school. "It was always demoralizing for my husband to never to be able to afford new clothes or toys. We barely kept the pantry filled. We never wasted any food. If there were potatoes left over from supper, I would cut them up and use them for American fries the next morning." She continued that the worst feeling she had was watching her son go off to school with holes in his shoes and old clothes. Things got better, according to Mrs. Lockerby, when Roosevelt became President—"he made people feel secure about the future."\(^1\)

Another group that suffered lower incomes were farmers. Diminished urban buying power and overproduction caused a precipitous fall in farm prices. In 1932, farm prices in the state were down 250% from the last pre-depression year in 1928,\(^2\) forcing many small farmers to give up their farms and equipment, earned with years of sweat, to creditors.

As dramatic as the figure of wages falling by nearly 51% was, wage reductions were offset by deflationary prices of consumer goods. After a compilation of prices in 1929 and 1933 to find a rough consumer price index, it was found that prices fell from 1929 to 1933 by 35 or 40% on the average. This includes prices for food, housing, cloths, fuel, and other normal expenses. The fall in prices was significantly less than the average fall of wages over the same time period. Here are a sam-

\(^1\)Interview with Buelah Lockerby, May 18, 1981.

ple of price changes for certain staple items:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1929</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 lbs sugar</td>
<td>49¢</td>
<td>47¢</td>
<td>50¢</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>dozen eggs</td>
<td>45¢</td>
<td>20¢</td>
<td>30¢</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 lb bacon</td>
<td>27¢</td>
<td>20¢</td>
<td>23¢</td>
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<td>24.5 lbs flour</td>
<td>90¢</td>
<td>51¢</td>
<td>54¢</td>
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<td>street shoes</td>
<td>$4</td>
<td>$2.5</td>
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<td>low aps.</td>
<td>$8-10wk.</td>
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Most people, with some sacrifice, could have managed their budgets, but to those, such as farmers, heavily in debt from purchases made at prices in pre-depression times, the decrease in income was catastrophic. Prices may have fallen, but people experienced the sorrow of losing their homes, cars, and businesses as the amount on debts did not fall while depression incomes fell short.

Kalamazoo has a long history of political conservatism and surprisingly during the 1930's the politics of Kalamazoo were not altered much. Only once, in the elections in which Franklin Roosevelt ran for President did he win a plurality of the Kalamazoo County vote, in 1936, when he received 46 more votes than Landon out of 35,000 votes cast;\(^2\) while across the country Roosevelt, riding on the support of his New Deal policies, swept past Landon by overwhelming numbers;\(^3\) Republican congressmen and state legislators were elected regularly. Never during the depression or any other time did the Democratic candidate

\(^1\)Gazette, 1929, 1933, 1935.

\(^2\)Gazette, 1932, 1936, 1940, 1944.

\(^3\)Leuchtenburg, p. 179-180.
for Governor receive a majority of votes. Knowing the political traditions of Kalamazoo aid in understanding the community's response to the depression and its methods of public relief.

At the onset of the depression, the City Commission voted overwhelmingly to decrease the city budget in order to ease the tax burden on city residents. This, along with a proposal by William Shakespeare that the city of Kalamazoo be bonded one million dollars, precipitated a bitter debate, which was analogous to the economic controversy on the national level. For many years before, Kalamazoo had run on the financial philosophy of "pay as you go," and the plan of Shakespeare's was viewed by many leaders of the city as a radical and dangerous departure the policy of a balanced budget. It was further argued by skeptical commission members that increasing public spending would divert revenues from those working and business, crippling the private sector's ability to provide jobs and recovery from the depression. But, as city leaders began to feel the pressure from the growing ranks of the unemployed, they soon began appropriating an ever greater share of funds for relief. In the first action taken by the City Commission to ameliorate unemployment, it was voted to expand the process of snow removal and enlarge the city storm sewer system. Four

1 Gazette, 1930-1940.
2 Gazette, November 11, 1930.
3 Gazette, November 15, 1930.
4 Kalamazoo City Commission minutes, November 21, 1930.
5 Commission minutes, November 28, 1930.
6 Gazette, March 18, 1931.
months later, the Commission made a major appropriation of $383,000 for a program of expanded public works. The creation of the Emergency Employment Committee, which monitored unemployment in the county and acted as a liaison between the workless and employers in both the public and private sectors, contributed greatly to the relief effort. The Commission felt that, whenever possible, men should be gainfully employed when on public relief. This view had two important benefits. First, the city's facilities, such as parks, waterworks, and roads, were upgraded, which fostered public support for relief programs. Secondly, for many men, being unemployed and on the public dole was humiliating. Public works offered, these men, a reconciliation between their pride and the material needs of their families; their relief was earned. On the negative side, public works were not as cost effective as direct relief in terms of relieving the indigent, since part of the money allocated to public works went into machinery and building materials. In the spring of 1931, Kalamazoo was aided when the State Legislature voted to increase the use of free labor in areas of critical unemployment. Money was appropriated for the addition of a new wing to the Kalamazoo State Hospital, which supplied work for over one-hundred men. In the summer of 1932, 110 men were placed at work on the construction of a water main. Later in the summer, the City Commission started a rather interesting campaign

1Gazette, March 18, 1930.
2Gazette, February 1, 1931.
3Gazette, March 14, 1931.
4Gazette, April 1, 1931.
to create jobs for as many men as possible. The residents of each city block, it was planned, would give a man seven dollars a week for doing odd jobs. Extra relief was needed very badly during the winter months when fuel and clothing bills drove expenses upwards, and when many construction and agricultural jobs were terminated. In the winter of 1931, the City Commission continued its fight against unemployment, by authorizing the opening of work on the 1931 sanitation and sewer program, which provided work, on a part time basis, for 350 men. Each worker was employed for two days of every week and received an income of ten dollars a week. Local government relief continued in this manner for the remainder of the depression. By 1933, local government was being eclipsed as a job provider by the national relief programs of the New Deal. Without the succor of these programs, it is difficult to imagine how local governments would have provided for the myriads of needy. Kalamazoo is no exception. In 1933, the CWA program, the most far reaching of the Roosevelt Administration, secured jobs on a cash basis of fifteen dollars weekly for over 1,500 Kalamazoo residents. Of these, 322 went to work for the Checker Cab Company and 104 women were given jobs as domestics. The CCC program, which gave over two-million young men the opportunity to work and acquire vocational training, provided work for 44 men at Fort Custer. After the Supreme Court ruled the programs

1 Gazette, November 5, 1931.
2 Gazette, September 1, 1933.
3 Gazette, December 3, 1933.
4 Gazette, May 3, 1933.
of the first New Deal unconstitutional, Roosevelt stirred the "alphabet soup" and served more than 900 jobs to the workless of Kalamazoo County.\textsuperscript{1} The National Recovery Act, which was intended to facilitate the cooperation of all American employers in an effort to shorten working hours, raise wages, and increase employment, received enthusiastic support in Kalamazoo as a huge celebration was launched, filled with fireworks and a parade.\textsuperscript{2} By the end of the year, nearly 10,000 people were enrolled in the NRA program.\textsuperscript{3}

Financial assistance for relief measures was rendered amiably from public charities. Raising money for relief took on an almost religious fervor among people. Charitable groups raised over a hundred thousand dollars five straight years from 1931 to 1936 for relief.\textsuperscript{4} Leading the way in organizing and fund raising was the Kalamazoo affiliation of the AFL. Under the auspices of the AFL, a soup kitchen was opened in 1931, providing food for 400 people daily.\textsuperscript{5} The success of the program lead to the establishment of another relief office on the third floor of the local police station, where food was served and sleeping facilities for a hundred men was provided.\textsuperscript{6} One man offered a poignant portrayal, in a recorded interview, of the humility involved in poverty and accepting relief.

"I just hated standing in the soup line during the winter. You would stand there for a half an hour or so freezing. The weather wasn't the worst of it though

\textsuperscript{1} Gazette, December 15, 1937.
\textsuperscript{2} Gazette, August 8, 1933.
\textsuperscript{3} Gazette, July 16, 1938.
\textsuperscript{4} Gazette, November 2, 1930.
\textsuperscript{5} Gazette, October 24, 1931.
Sometimes, somebody from the church or one of the fellows from work would see me there, and all I would want to do is crawl in a whole. They would look the other way and pretend that they didn't see me or that it didn't matter, but I knew they felt sorry for me. It was real hard to take. The relief people were the same way, they treated us like morons that couldn't take care of themselves...I think for a while there, I really was a bum, not because I was standing in the bread lines—that doesn't make anyone bum. There were a lot damn good workers standing in that line, who just couldn't find a lick of work. There wasn't any...I was a bum, because people made me feel like one. Once I really start-feeling like one I started acting like one...After I lost my job in 30 and my house in 33 I just felt numb. I didn't give a damn about to much...I spent my time just roaming around the city looking for work. I was lucky I didn't have a family...The very best memory I have of the depression is 35, I think, when the Tigers won the World Series from the Cubs and the Lions won their division. Most of my memories aren't so great. It was tough—tough on everybody.

Another man, who was chronically unemployed during the depression, complained that the remuneration of public works programs did not provide enough of an incentive to work. "Who wants to work," he complained, "when another when another guy cansit home or go fishing and get more on welfare?" Apparently, this pragmatic or perhaps lazy individual echoes the frustration felt by many others, because, in 1935, the City Commission proposed that those men on welfare, who are able to work but arbitrarily refused to do so in return for their relief, be placed under arrest for non-support charges. Another problem with public works was that it furnished labor exclusively for certain types of workmanship and for those acclimated to outdoor working conditions. According to William Shakespeare, only about half of the idle men were "fit" for outdoor manual labor.

1Recorded interview, Samuel Bowser, April 29, 1981.
2Interview, Clyde Brady, May 8, 1981.
3Commission minutes, January 1, 1933.
4Gazette, September 1, 1933.
The depression's impact extended beyond the unemployed to those still working. How then did those still working respond to the foreboding economic conditions? Farmers in Kalamazoo County, like their counterparts across the country, fought hard to remain outside the throes of poverty. The farmers' depression lasted longer, since he had not shared in the prosperity of the 1920's. Unorganized, Farmers tried to compensate, early in the depression, for low prices by increasing their yields. This, along with a record breaking crop in 1928, and a decrease in urban buying power drove prices spiralling downward. Scores of farmers in Kalamazoo County lost much or all of their capital, as relief came slowly.¹ When relief did come, it came in the form of a concentrated federal effort to manage agriculture through price supports and marketing agreements to avoid serious economic disruption. In 1933, farmers began organizing themselves. The Legislative Club was established which supplied political pressure for a state income tax to supplant sales tax, the lowering of interest rates on government loans, the reduction of school cost, and the allotment of a longer time for payment of delinquent taxes.² While the Club was well organized, it was overshadowed in Michigan politics by the sometimes incompatible concerns of industry and labor; hence it was generally unable to effectuate much beneficial legislation. It is very easy to imagine that the farmers who saw their entire life's work and perhaps that of gen-

¹Gazette, November 23, 1934.
²Gazette, February 8, 1933.
erations before them sold for a relative pittance on the auction block, must have felt like beating plowshares into swords.

The economic pressures created by the depression strained the natural tension between workers and employers to the point of breaking at times. It was in this environment of uncertainty and fear that the labor movement in Kalamazoo germinated. Organized labor began in Michigan with the Knights of Labor, who suffered from promoting strikes the membership could not sustain and for being blamed for the infamous Haymarket Riot in 1886. Moreover, nuances in the aims and interests of skilled and unskilled workers caused rift within the union. The leadership of organized labor was taken over by the AFL, which never became a strong factor in Kalamazoo until 1933, when the NRA, with its clause recognizing the right of labor to organize and bargain collectively became law. George Heath, President of the KFL, announced, in 1933, "that nine new local unions in seven crafts were in the process of organizing in the greatest flourish of organization in the city's history. The paper mill workers were leading the way and since their first meeting approximately 450 workers have joined the movement. Our goal is to double the membership in two years." That goal was far exceeded by 1936 with the Sutherland Paper Mill, itself, having over 800 workers that belonged to the AFL. The NRA and the later Wagnor Act, brought about a significant change in organized labor of Kalamazoo. Before the existance of statutes grant-

1 Shannon, p. 34.
2 Gazette, August 5, 1933.
3 Gazette, November 10, 1936.
ing labor the right to organize, the AFL was small in numbers, with only about 450 members in Kalamazoo County. Most of the workers who belonged to the organization were skilled laborers in small crafts.\(^1\) The AFL, before 1933, represented the broad interests of the entire working class, rather than, the narrow bread and butter interest of the individual worker. Although the AFL, before 1933, did not endorse candidates or engage in political campaigns, it fought hard and successfully for such reforms as, the abolition of prison labor, municipal ownership of public utilities, and the suppression of child labor.\(^2\)

When the depression hit, the AFL focused on bringing unemployment under control and assuaging the suffering of the jobless. As mentioned before, the AFL provided soup kitchens and organized charity drives to collect funds for relief, all of which was done without compensation from the government. But the aims of the AFL were not entirely altruistic. AFL leaders believed that economic hardships would create a forum, in which the voice of the AFL would be a potent one. John J. Scannell, the President of the MFL, addressed an open-air meeting of about 1,500 jobless on the merits of the six hour working day. Scannell believed that the long range antagonist of the workers was the labor saving machine which replaced men. "The machine is a challenge that cannot be met by charity and unemployment. The obvious remedy must be that if more goods are produced in less time, the benefits of this must be shared by all parties."\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Gazette, May 1, 1933.

\(^2\) Gazette, May 1, 1933.

\(^3\) Gazette, October 10, 1930.
Scannell further argued for adequate state machinery to secure accurate information of fluctuations in employment, systematic planning of public works, and the stabilization of industries by management to eliminate seasonal rush and slack periods. Scannell ended his speech by calling the community to know that the unemployed were pleading for work not charity. The audience, composed largely of the unemployed responded enthusiastically, but to trade union leaders, who represented the employed worker, the shorten work proposal was an anathema; and with good reason. In order for workers to maintain an already falling standard of living while working only thirty hours a week, wages would have had to be increased dramatically; which, given the business conditions of the day, was totally unrealistic. A month later, the President of the KFL, Lawrence Potter, in response to Scannell's address, maintained that the wage scale should be left alone, regardless of the number of unemployed. Potter later discussed the injustice of young labor having jobs that should rightfully be given to the head of a household.\textsuperscript{1} Interestingly, the issue of shortened work hours pitted the local chapter of the AFL against the state chapter and the employed against the unemployed.

One of the most striking features of the early KFL was its cooperative attitude towards business. Very seldom did the KFL take an adversarial posture towards business or the community at large. After employers were forced by law to recognize labor organizations, a marked attitudinal change was evident. With

\textsuperscript{1}Gazette, November 14, 1931.
With the growing membership, and competition from the more militant CIO, the KFL and other unions in the city began to assert themselves in bargaining tables throughout the city. The pre-occupation of the KFL with local relief and broad social issues shifted to a greater concern for bread and butter issues of the workers such as, wages, working conditions, benefits, and contract language.\(^1\) Management, while forced by law to recognize unions, resisted worker organization by harassing union leaders, discriminating against union members in wage settlements, and by fragmenting bargaining groups. The President of the Sutherland Paper Mill voiced this position to his workers in 1933. "If in our judgement, a situation should arise whereby it would no longer be possible for us to sole bargaining rights—thirty days notice will be given. We hold the right to recognize existing contracts with other employees—the right to hire, discharge or raise the pay of any of our employees, regardless of what union they belong to."\(^2\)

Albert King, a paper worker and a long time union participant, recalls the difficulty of being a union member during the thirties.

"Management would hire Pinkerton like spys from Grand Rapids to find out which workers were potential labor agitators. After they had a guy pegged, they would find some way to fire him... Those labor spys would be right on the line with you, so you had to be very wary of new guys and who you were around when you were talking about the union. There best tactic was demoralizing union members by paying a non-union worker more or by giving him a better job on the line...Starting a union was next to impossible before the NRA was passed. They simply wouldn't allow it. If you were persistant you'd be fired. They always used the sme line about we've found somebody who we think will be more productive... We never had a strike during the

\(^1\)Gazette, June 3, 1934.

\(^2\)Gazette, August 5, 1933.
depression, but a couple of times we shut the machines off and let the paper come off in heaps on the floor. That probably was our best weapon... Kalamazoo was rather wary of labor radicals. If there was a congregation of men on the street who looked like laborers, the police would make them break it up very quick... There were a few communist in the union but usually they were pretty low key. You saw a lot of Free-toilers, wearing their headbands. They were affiliated with the Communist Party. Most guys who were employed, though, weren't very radical, they just wanted to support their families not change history.¹

There were some moments of labor unrest during the depression. The city street car workers engaged in a long and bitter strike, with several men being arrested for vandalism and for threats of bombing the cars. The position of the street car workers was succinctly expressed in an editorial to the Gazette;

"During the war, when wages were soaring rapidly, the street railway men were under contract entered into during times of low wages. The men asked for an amendment granting them an increase of wages. Mr. Collins answer was you are under contract. On June 11, 1930, an agreement was entered into for two years, placing wages at 51¢ an hour. Six months before the expiration of the contract, wages were cut to 41¢. It was found in court that it was impossible for the company to pay that wage. So it was accepted. In pursuance of the court's advice a new contract was ratified. Three weeks later wages were again cut. There was no consultation on the part of management."²

Other major strikes included a strike at the Graff & Son's factory, when 160 workers sat down on the job in protest of wages and hours,³ and the strike in the construction industry over wages and safety conditions.⁴

¹Recorded interview with Albert King, April 24, 1981.
²Gazette, November 10, 1930.
³Gazette, April 12, 1937.
⁴Gazette, April 3, 1938.
Extremely central to understanding the effects of the depression on the people of Kalamazoo is the depression's effect on religion. Religious institutions felt the full impact of the financial collapse particularly by 1932. While the metropolitan churches in Kalamazoo, which had long been established, survived with vigor; a few smaller churches, which had contracted heavy debts for building programs during prosperous times, had to face the bitter fact of foreclosure. With wages cut by fifty percent, collections dropped also, which invariably cut ministerial salaries and mission programs. Many religious leaders supposed that hard times would cause Americans to be thrust naked to their spiritual needs and to seek out the comfort of religion. Their revival never came. Kalamazoo, like the rest of the country, saw no significant gain in church membership during the thirties. Nationwide, only among the extremely evangelistic Protestant groups was there any evidence of large gains. These groups were probably attractive to those financially distressed, who wanted to transcend their predicament by acquiring the eschatological hope of a better life in the future. Kalamazoo was composed largely of mainline churches that never saw the burgeoning revivalism. The question then remains; why didn't the economic calamity produce greater religious aspiration? In early times, men tended to regard their suffering as due to forces beyond their control. Their's was a religious attitude of awe and resig-

1 Gazette, April 14, 1940.
2 Gazette, April 14, 1940.
nation towards such situations, especially in agrarian societies, in which prosperity depended directly on nature. But the depression of the thirties, primed by the secularism and prosperity of the twenties was different. It was a failure of economic laws, which are man-made, not an act of nature. The solution was to be found not in supplication to a deity, but through the use of reason to modify the economic system. The secularism of the twenties was not easily forgotten. Curiously, both Mrs. Lockerby and Mr. King believed that the hard times solidified their faith. Perhaps the depression did create a revival; a revival of inner faith, which was somehow incompatible with the sensational excitement of traditional revivalism.

The depression left a distinctive mark on the generations affected by it. In order to understand these generations, a study of the depression is essential. The depression affords an especially valuable lesson for those of us who known nothing but prosperous times, and to whom the future holds no such promise of affluence.
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INTERVIEWS


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