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Steve Love, David Giffels. *Wheels of Fortune: The Story of Rubber in Akron.* Akron, Oh.: University of Akron Press, 1999. xiv + 359 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-884836-37-4; $22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-884836-38-1.

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A New History of Rubber's Home Town: Akron's Path from

As the development of the automotive industry chartered the course of history in Detroit, so the fortunes and misfortunes of the rubber industry shaped the history of Akron. In *Wheels of Fortune: The Story of Rubber in Akron*, Steve Love and David Giffels examine the relationship between the city of Akron, its residents, and the industry that remains its most enduring symbol. The central theme of the book is familiar: The evolution of a Midwestern manufacturing city from prosperous boomtown to rust belt city. The unusually high level of concentration of one industry in Akron-rubber-makes it an excellent case study through which to examine this subject. The history of rubber in Akron is the story of a Midwestern city that grew and prospered as a result of the success of one industry that emerged in the early twentieth century. The local economy in Akron became inextricably tied to the health of the rubber industry and its ability to provide jobs; thus, as rubber factories relocated, Akron entered a period of severe decline. The problems that contributed to the decline of rubber manufacturing in Akron parallel those that plagued many Midwestern industrial centers in the 1970s and 1980s. A combination of factors-increased foreign competition, changing technologies, aging and inefficient factories, and a high-wage unionized labor force-brought an end to rubber manufacturing in Akron.

Love and Giffels begin their narrative at the end of the rubber era in Akron. The first chapter, "Tire Town No More," concerns the decision of General Tire, the last remaining company manufacturing passenger tires in Akron, to close its one remaining factory. Between 1975 and 1981, B.F. Goodrich, Goodyear Tire & Rubber, and Firestone Tire and Rubber had stopped manufacturing tires in Akron. When General Tire shut down in 1982, the city's rising unemployment rate attested to the fact that Akron had already become a rust belt city. The closing of General Tire was the final event marking the end of an era.

Each subsequent chapter of f*Wheels of Fortune* is a self-contained entity that examines a particular aspect of the history of rubber manufacturing in Akron. The strongest chapters of the book are those that examine the evolving relationship between the rubber manufacturers and the their employees. Several chapters relate the stories of the founders and leaders of the rubber industry and their influences on both the industry and the city. Love and Giffels identify the guiding forces of the rubber industry-including chapters on the leadership of Paul W. Litchfield of Goodyear Tire & Rubber and the influence of the Seiberling family on the city's history. Other chapters deal with the history of organized labor in Akron's rubber factories, including chapters on the creation of the United Rubber Workers of America in the 1930s and the labor disputes of the 1960s and 1970s. One chapter examines the experiences of the West Virginians who flocked to Akron to take jobs in the rubber industry; another looks at the experiences of African Americans who were confined to the most menial jobs in the industry for the first half of this century and encountered racism from both management and co-workers. The authors also incorporate chapters on the major scientific and technological advancements in the rubber industry, including accounts of the development of airships, synthetic rubber, and new tire technology. The final chapters of the book focus on how Akron has struggled to shake off the stigma of being a "rust belt" city. Today, Akron remains a center for polymer research and the site of the world headquarters of Goodyear, but has also developed

a more diversified economy.

Wheels of Fortune is a narrative account of the significance of one industry to the development of a Midwestern industrial city. The authors neither assign blame nor evaluate the relative culpability of the factors that caused the decline of rubber manufacturing in Akron. Love and Giffels are addressing a general audience to whom the major theme of the book is likely to be familiar. The book, which originated from a year-long series of articles published in the Akron Beacon Journal, reflects its origins in journalism and incorporates dozens of interviews conducted by the authors and their colleagues. Each chapter is further documented through the inclusion of numerous photographs, compiled primarily from the archives of the Beacon Journal. Because of its initial installment nature, some segments of the book become repetitious. As a whole, however, *Wheels of Fortune* is a highly readable and well-researched account of the rise and decline of the rubber industry in Akron.

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