

This article is protected by copyright, East Tennessee Historical Society. It is available online for study, scholarship, and research use only.

Suggested Citation:

Moore, William H. "Preoccupied Paternalism: The Roane Iron Company in Her Company Town – Rockwood, Tennessee." *The East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications* 39 (1967): 56-70.

PREOCCUPIED PATERNALISM: THE ROANE IRON  
COMPANY IN HER COMPANY TOWN—  
ROCKWOOD, TENNESSEE

By WILLIAM H. MOORE

Upon hearing of "paternalism" and "company towns," a person too frequently thinks of isolated and dirty villages where "robber barons" ruthlessly exploit a restive labor force by low wages and long hours and where the inflated prices at the town's only store, owned by the company, teach the laborer but a second lesson in total frustration. While such instances of exploitation have existed, much paternalism has been less harsh because it was less complete. Some companies, preoccupied with problems of production or national marketing, neither desired nor accepted complete control of a community; many therefore frequently proved tolerant if not enthusiastic about new community ideas and institutions. Patterns of paternalism varied between the benign and the crushing, depending upon the objectives of the founders, the nature of the enterprise, and the composition of the work force.

Some of the most striking examples of benevolent post-Civil War paternalism occurred in the company towns of the New South—communities often directed by absentee carpetbaggers with varying degrees of economic control and social innovation. One such carpetbagger town was Rockwood, Tennessee, where the pattern of paternalism set by the founding Roane Iron Company reflected for fifty years as much the needs of the town as the shifting interests of the company. For the first quarter of a century the mark of the company was necessarily set deep and plain upon the town, for the carpetbaggers did not in fact find a village at all, but quite literally built it at the same time they erected their pig iron furnaces in 1868 in an uninhabited vine and boulder thicket at the base of Walden Ridge, five miles from the Tennessee River.<sup>1</sup> The guiding light in the project was General John Thomas Wilder of Indiana, who had learned of East Tennessee's mineral wealth

<sup>1</sup> The company records are apparently no longer extant, and the available Wilder papers in Indianapolis pertain almost exclusively to the period before and during the Civil War. For a more detailed treatment of both the Roane Iron Company and Rockwood, see William H. Moore, "Rockwood: A Prototype of the New South" (Master's thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1965).

by reading C  
examining th  
Union's "lig

Wilder  
wrighting w  
erected mills  
Tennessee, w  
would enter  
soon providi  
participated  
his commissi  
in hopes th  
In Septembe  
lain, an Oh  
Knoxville, p  
1867, along  
R. Forsythe,  
organized th  
pany, with  
Tennessee le

Chambe  
original sto  
Indianapolis  
to Indianapo  
teenth Indian  
foundry ope  
Manufacturi  
in the new c  
a stockholde  
own name  
pathizers, W

<sup>2</sup> Rockwood

<sup>3</sup> Samuel C  
Brigade (Bloo  
Wilder," in W  
554. The Cinc  
Gap to Chattan  
way," East Ten

<sup>4</sup> Deed Bo  
nessee, 1867-68

by reading Gerard Troost's reports to the Tennessee legislature and by examining the area while on reconnaissance raids as commander of the Union's "lightning brigade."<sup>2</sup>

Wilder, who in the late 1850's had operated a foundry and millwrighting works in Lawrenceburg and Greensburg, Indiana, and had erected mills and sold hydraulic equipment in Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee, was convinced that Cincinnati's proposed southern rail route would enter the Valley of East Tennessee through Emory Gap, thereby soon providing the area access to distant markets by rail. After he had participated in Sherman's siege of Atlanta, Wilder fell ill; he resigned his commission in December, 1864; but decided to stay on in the South in hopes that the milder climate would promote his recuperation.<sup>3</sup> In September of the following year, Wilder, with Hiram S. Chamberlain, an Ohio carpetbagger then operating a small rolling mill in Knoxville, purchased over 900 acres of Roane County land. On June 18, 1867, along with five midwestern capitalists, W. O. Rockwood, Antrim R. Forsythe, David E. Rees, John M. Lord, and Henry C. Lord, they organized the Roane Iron Company; on December 6, 1867, this company, with a capital stock of \$100,000, was incorporated by the Tennessee legislature.<sup>4</sup>

Chamberlain and Henry C. Lord were from Ohio, but the five other original stockholders were residents of southeastern Indiana and the Indianapolis area. Rockwood, a native of Madison, Indiana, had moved to Indianapolis in 1852, rose to the rank of major in Wilder's Seventeenth Indiana Infantry, and later, in 1882, established a machinist and foundry operation in Indianapolis subsequently called the Rockwood Manufacturing Company. A relative, W. E. Rockwood, was a merchant in the new community for a short time around 1870 and later became a stockholder and director of the company. Fearing that the use of his own name would prejudice the project among local southern sympathizers, Wilder directed that the community be called Rockwood for

<sup>2</sup> *Rockwood Directory*, 1917, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel C. Williams, *General John T. Wilder: Commander of the Lightning Brigade* (Bloomington, 1936), 2; *Harriman Record*, October 5, 1961; "General John T. Wilder," in William S. Speer (ed.), *Sketches of Prominent Tennesseans* (Nashville, 1888), 554. The Cincinnati Southern Railway was completed from Cincinnati through Emory Gap to Chattanooga on December 10, 1879. R. O. Biggs, "The Cincinnati Southern Railway," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 7 (1935), 100.

<sup>4</sup> Deed Book O, 354-59 (Roane County Register's Office, Kingston); *Acts of Tennessee*, 1867-68, Chapter 27, pp. 34-36.

the less spectacular Indianapolis major,<sup>5</sup> but the Rockwood family actually took little direct interest in the town's development. Rees was a member of a banking family of Lawrenceburg, Thornton, and Indianapolis and in the 1890's was associated with the Third National Bank of Chattanooga; but he had even less personal interest in the town of Rockwood.<sup>6</sup> John M. Lord, a wealthy Indianapolis Mexican War veteran, was apparently in semi-retirement by the time the new community began to develop. His kinsman, Henry C. Lord of Cincinnati, while very much alive after the war, was too involved in litigation involving his own maladministration of midwestern railroads to devote himself to his investments in the old Confederacy.<sup>7</sup> Forsythe, a railroad promoter and banker from Wilder's old home town of Greensburg, had little influence on the community personally, but relatives took part in the opening ceremonies for the blast furnace, assumed direction of the early religious life of the village, served in local supervisory capacities, and later reemerged as land speculators in the 1890's.<sup>8</sup> Chamberlain moved to Chattanooga from whence he and his sons helped direct the company until its death in 1932. Wilder and a brother, Horace M. Wilder, a millwright, and other relatives spent much time in Rockwood in the late 1860's and early 1870's and showed great personal interest in the town itself. The General sold his interests in the company by the mid-1870's, however, and while residing permanently in Chattanooga, he promoted various mining enterprises, resort areas, and railroads throughout East Tennessee.<sup>9</sup>

Little altruistic idealism went into the company's creation of Rockwood. The speculative urge certainly appealed to Wilder, who was familiar with the area's possibilities and who wished to remain in the South. The railroad rumors surely secured the support of Forsythe and Henry Lord. Others seem to have accepted without much question

<sup>5</sup> *Indianapolis Illustrated, The Capital City of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1893), 154; Microfilmed individual census returns for Roane County, 1870 and 1880 (University of Tennessee Library); *Cardiff Herald*, April 30, 1890; *Rockwood Times*, January 28, 1904, December 5, 1918.

<sup>6</sup> Logan Esary, "The First Indiana Bank," *Indiana Magazine of History*, VI, (March 1910), 147; *Indianapolis Illustrated*, 150; *Cardiff Herald*, April 30, 1890.

<sup>7</sup> Jeannette Covert Nolan, *Hoosier City: The Story of Indianapolis* (New York, 1943), 157; William Wesley Woollen, *Biographical and Historical Sketches of Early Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1883), 531; Ared Maurice Murphy, "The Big Four Railroads in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXI (June-September, 1925), 189, 196, 199, 208.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 185, 265; *Cardiff Herald*, April 30, 1890; Records of Rockwood Presbyterian Church (in possession of the pastor), 5-6; Deed Book K-2, 38.

<sup>9</sup> Individual Census Returns, 1870 and 1880; Speer, *Sketches*, 555.

Wilder  
asset  
years  
was  
mary  
rollin  
absor  
failu  
and  
cantl  
"buil  
dispo  
the r

sarily  
At t  
attra  
sona  
in go  
ment  
comp  
comp  
of th

Sept  
inclu  
"vill  
Neg  
lived

1  
ticular  
report

1  
Civil  
Morro  
tanoog  
Harris

1  
1873;

1  
1870  
percent

Rockwood family  
ppment. Rees was  
, Thornton, and  
the Third National  
al interest in the  
anapolis Mexican  
the time the new  
Lord of Cincin-  
involved in litiga-  
stern railroads to  
racy.<sup>7</sup> Forsythe, a  
town of Greens-  
lly, but relatives  
furnace, assumed  
ed in local super-  
rs in the 1890's.<sup>8</sup>  
he and his sons  
er and a brother,  
spent much time  
d showed great  
l his interests in  
le residing per-  
ing enterprises,

y's creation of  
to Wilder, who  
ed to remain in  
port of Forsythe  
t much question

apolis, 1893), 154;  
1880 (University of  
r, January 28, 1904,

History, VI, (March  
1890.

apolis (New York,  
Sketches of Early  
Four Railroads in  
189, 196, 199, 208.

Rockwood Presbyterian

55.

Wilder's judgment as to the railroad possibilities, the region's mineral assets, and the suitability of the town site.<sup>10</sup> For the first twenty-five years of its existence, Rockwood, although of considerable importance, was of but secondary interest to the directors, who focused their primary attention upon the production of steel rails in the Chattanooga rolling mill, which the Roane Iron Company had obtained when it absorbed the Southwestern Iron Company in 1870. After numerous failures the Roane Iron Company sold its Chattanooga plant in 1889 and retreated to the safer production of pig iron in Rockwood. Significantly, one year after this move, the company announced a desire to "build a city" at Rockwood by promoting civic improvement and by disposing of choice town lots—a profitably timed decision in view of the nearby Cardiff land boom.<sup>11</sup>

Although a mere stepchild for the company, Rockwood had necessarily received much early attention from the benevolent carpetbaggers. At the same time that the expanding prosperity of the company attracted numerous workers to the community, General Wilder personally undertook a number of promotional trips abroad for the state in general and for his iron works in particular.<sup>12</sup> Certainly the recruitment of the town's first citizens was an invaluable contribution of the company. And as the all-pervasive influence in the community, the company made job assignments, thereby creating the first social order of the town.

Although only about 300 persons lived around the furnaces in September, 1868, by 1870 the individual census returns listed 696, including 184 Negroes and 87 foreign born persons, as residing in the "village." A decade later 46 foreign born immigrants and 314 Negroes were among the 1,011 residents of the town. A total of 2,305 lived in the municipality in 1890.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Others saw many favorable town sites along Walden Ridge and were not particularly impressed with Wilder's judgment in selecting the Rockwood site. See the report of a traveling reporter in *New York Tribune*, July 14, 1869, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> James F. Doster, "The Chattanooga Rolling Mill: An Industrial By-Product of the Civil War," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 36 (1964), 45, 51-54; Morrow Chamberlain, *A Brief History of the Pig Iron Industry of East Tennessee* (Chattanooga, 1942), 8-11; William F. Donovan, Jr., "Real Estate Speculation at Cardiff and Harriman, 1890-1893," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XIV (September, 1955), 253-56.

<sup>12</sup> *Nashville Daily American*, May 15, 1875; *East Tennessean* (Kingston), April 24, 1873; Ethel Armes, *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama* (Birmingham, 1910), 355.

<sup>13</sup> *Nashville Daily Press and Times*, September 21, 1868; Individual Census Returns, 1870 and 1880; *Eleventh Census of the United States* (Washington, 1895), I, 325. A large percentage of the ore miners, many of whom were immigrants, employed by the affiliated

The patterns of social and economic life among these early settlers reflect the company's pragmatic community planning. Essentially five distinct groups, with different jobs and social functions, emerge from a close study of the individual census returns.

Skilled labor was provided by the European immigrant until he was gradually absorbed into the local white population. In 1870 well over half the foreign workers were Welsh and almost all were coal miners. By 1880, however, both the number of foreign born persons and the percentage of Welsh among them had declined, and mining was less predominant within the group. Other nationalities represented were English, French, Swiss, and Canadian, and the occupations ranged from supervisory work to shoe making. With few exceptions the immigrants had spent some time in other states, notably Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, before moving to Rockwood.

Negroes entered the community from the surrounding area and neighboring states in such numbers as to constitute over a quarter of the town's population by 1880. Segregation in housing was extensive, and the colored worker was largely confined to the heavy and common labor in the furnace yards.<sup>14</sup> Because foreign workers refused to work alongside them, they were excluded from the coal mines, but they won praise from company officials for their reliability, and they had little difficulty with the "native uneducated white element" who labored with them about the furnaces.<sup>15</sup>

Among the increasing number of persons coming from other states, two occupational groupings emerge. One group, the holders of "white collar" jobs, generally came from Indiana, New York, or Ohio; manual laborers, who competed with native whites for jobs, came from North Carolina, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, or one of a number of other states. Indiana, home of most of the original investing capital, and New York, birthplace of Wilder and a state shortly providing the heaviest financial support, were represented by supervisory personnel, weight masters, bookkeepers, merchants, millwrights, clerks, engineers, and telegraph operators, while the mushrooming number of persons from the other

Brown Mining Company, lived in a separate company town called Brownstown, in the mountainous area northeast of Rockwood. Moore, "Rockwood: Prototype of the New South," 29n.

<sup>14</sup> Individual Census Returns, 1870 and 1880.

<sup>15</sup> United States Senate Committee on Education and Labor, *Report upon the Relations Between Labor and Capital*, 48 Congress, 1 Session (November 11-38, 1883). IV, 170.

states  
dants,

T  
to 733

livelih

furnac

town i

gist, a

forty-e

Probab

do wit

contact

absorp

T

pany v

owned

bough

compa

store p

visions

as ear

compa

relucta

decade

was vo

and re

policy

fever s

its disp

A

early a

Mine V

16 I

Iron Co

director

Account

17 I

18 K

1873; J

Tennessee

January

ese early settlers  
Essentially five  
, emerge from a  
migrant until he  
n. In 1870 well  
st all were coal  
born persons and  
and mining was  
represented were  
occupations ranged  
exceptions the  
Ohio, Pennsyl-

ading area and  
a quarter of the  
extensive, and  
common labor  
to work along-  
they won praise  
little difficulty  
red with them

om other states,  
lders of "white  
Ohio; manual  
ne from North  
of other states.  
and New York,  
aviest financial  
eight masters,  
and telegraph  
from the other

townstown, in the  
type of the New

upon the Relations  
(1883). IV, 170.

states mentioned usually became ore miners, furnace hands, yard attendants, teamsters, carpenters, railroad hands, and common laborers.<sup>16</sup>

The number of white, Tennessee-born villagers increased from 363 to 733 between 1870 and 1880. In 1870, almost all of them made a livelihood by farming or by working in the ore yards or around the furnace, there being only three professional native Tennesseans in the town in that year. By 1880, however, there were two physicians, a druggist, a minister, eight carpenters, four blacksmiths, four engineers, and forty-eight coal miners among the state-born residents of the town.<sup>17</sup> Probably the acquisition of coal mining skill by local labor had much to do with lessening the demand for Welsh and German miners, and the contacts made among the mine workers led to intermarriage and the absorption of the distinct Welsh and German elements.

To all these ethnic and occupational groups the Roane Iron Company was the overriding factor of life. In the early years the company owned most of the housing; and although many workmen eventually bought homes and lots from the firm, others remained permanently in company-owned dwellings. Until the early 1890's the large company store provided virtually the only place for the miners to purchase provisions. Company scrip, issued between monthly paydays probably as early as December, 1873, was accepted at face value by the company store, while other establishments, when they existed, were reluctant to receive the paper at par. According to H. Clay Evans, for a decade a high company official, the worker's acceptance of the scrip was voluntary, since the employee might wait until a regular pay day and receive cash payment for his labors. Something of its paternalistic policy is evident in the company's helping remove employees from the fever stricken town in 1878 and in its transportation of twenty-seven of its displaced miners to Georgia for new employment in 1874.<sup>18</sup>

Although a Knights of Labor organization existed in Rockwood as early as 1888 and efforts at union organization, probably by the United Mine Workers, resulted in a strike in 1904, the company suffered little

<sup>16</sup> Individual Census Returns, 1870 and 1880. Since the acquisition of Southwestern Iron Company, Abram S. Hewitt of New York had been an influential stockholder and director of the expanded Roane Iron Company. Allan Nevins, *Abram S. Hewitt with Some Account of Peter Cooper* (New York, 1935), 253, 592; *Cardiff Herald*, April 30, 1890.

<sup>17</sup> Individual Census Returns, 1870 and 1880.

<sup>18</sup> *Report upon Labor and Capital*, 129; *Valley News* (Kingston), December 16, 1873; J. E. Lewis, "The Tennessee Gubernatorial Campaign and Election of 1894," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XIII (March-December, 1954), 232-33; *Valley News*, January 6, 1894.

from labor disputes. Most men worked ten hours per day, and little, if any, objection was voiced to these hours. Wages, later linked with pig iron prices, were somewhat higher for coal miners than for ore miners and furnace hands due to the added skill required in that type of work, but wage discrimination based solely on race was not practiced. In general the miners received better wages than other workers in the area, but they were an improvident lot. The thriftless often labored three or four days, accumulated enough for a week-end of drinking and fighting, and then were absent from work for the remainder of the week. Both Negroes and whites were guilty of absenteeism in days of plenty, and had not a language barrier been present, it is possible that the Brown Mining Company, a local subsidiary of the Roane Iron Company, would have sought to solve the problem by settling a colony of Italian miners in Rockwood. It was this problem of absenteeism, more than disputes with unions over wages, that vexed the company in times of scarce labor and general prosperity.<sup>19</sup>

The Roane Iron Company provided the social as well as the economic foundations of Rockwood. Indeed, the economic roles associated with the ethnic and geographic origins of the people implied a social structure already made; but the early class lines were easily crossed, the people mixed freely, and within a generation, most of the early social stratification had been destroyed. The churches, schools, and social ideals that the company promoted were not so transitory, however, and it was through them—more than in early job assignments—that the company influenced later social development. Because its early influence was so complete, the company could have attempted some novel social experiment, but the directors preoccupied with the Chattanooga steel effort, elected to follow with one possible exception, the predominant patterns present in East Tennessee as a whole.

The fact that all the early settlers were evangelical Protestants no doubt relieved internal strains and made the organization of early religious life much simpler for the Roane Iron Company. In the company sawmill E. Riggs Forsythe, a Presbyterian layman, a relative of the original stockholder, and for a time superintendent of the company, organized the union Sunday school either in late 1867 or early 1868.

<sup>19</sup> *Report upon Labor and Capital*, 129; *Rockwood Times*, January 7, 1888, April 7, 1904, January 5, 1905, November 29, 1906.

In Sept  
built b  
life, sin  
tures. V  
and the  
their b  
school  
donate

W  
compar  
constru  
1868 a  
a polic  
ested p  
While  
for edu  
moved  
was ad  
contro  
the wh  
provid  
ization  
no dou  
need f  
in the

A  
among  
and ru  
and th  
over to  
first d  
lation,

20  
ter's th  
Roll of  
Moore,  
21  
(Master  
Compan  
Herald,



In September, 1868, Forsythe's project was shifted to a "frame church" built by the company, which became the first real center of religious life, since most denominations used it prior to erecting their own structures. When each of the two Methodist denominations, the Baptists, and the Presbyterians organized churches, the company donated lots for their buildings. Negroes worshipped together in a separate church-school structure until the turn of the century, when the company again donated a lot for a separate house of worship.<sup>20</sup>

While the churches, once started, could operate on their own, the company had to patronize schools for a longer period of time. After constructing a four-room elementary school for the white children in 1868 and the church-school for Negroes about 1870, the firm initiated a policy of paying teachers for three months and suggesting that interested parents could finance the operation for at least sixty more days. While Negroes apparently continued to use the old company building for educational purposes until 1921, the white elementary school was moved to a brick building in 1885; and in 1888 a high school program was added. After its incorporation in 1890, the city apparently assumed control of the system and authorized Professor S. D. Lucas to grade the white elementary department.<sup>21</sup> Thus the company's policies, in providing the needed first impetus for religious and educational organization, illustrated its tendency to avoid social experimentation. Instead, no doubt for the sake of efficiency and because the directors felt no need for novelty, it attempted to duplicate the social patterns prevalent in the surrounding communities.

A prime target of the early schools was illiteracy, extremely rare among the foreign immigrants, but virtually complete among Negroes and running between 10 and 15 per cent among native Tennesseans and those born in other states. Nevertheless, the percentage of those over ten years of age unable to read did not decrease substantially in the first decade of existence of these schools. The overall increase in population, however, was sufficient to justify the establishment of the city's

<sup>20</sup> H. C. Wagner, *"History of Disciples of Christ in Upper East Tennessee"* (Master's thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1943), 121; *Year Book Directory and Roll of the First Presbyterian Church, Rockwood, Tennessee* (Rockwood, 1921), n.p.; Moore, "Rockwood: Prototype of New South," 60-64.

<sup>21</sup> Harold R. Heath, "A Study of Withdrawals from Rockwood High School, 1955-58" (Master's thesis, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1959), 13; Goodspeed Publishing Company, *History of Tennessee*, East Tennessee edition (Nashville, 1887), 823; *Cardiff Herald*, November 26, 1890.

first newspaper in 1880. Originally called the *Roane County Republican*, the paper was edited by Colonel Dan Coffman, who, like the schools and churches, had the financial backing of the Roane Iron Company. When his newspaper office was destroyed by fire in 1884, Coffman temporarily removed to Kingston, but returned in 1886 and published the first issue of the *Rockwood Times* in October of that year. An eye illness, his dabbling in local politics, and his holding of federal land jobs necessitated his frequent relinquishment of the editorial post, and on one such occasion the paper was published as the *Times-Republican*.<sup>22</sup> Because of its financial and social origins, the paper followed an editorial policy extremely favorable to the Roane Iron Company.

The one exception to the company's avoidance of social experimentation was its initiative in providing the early leadership for the town's first social crusade: that against the Demon Rum. And even in this regard it did not differ markedly from the policies of other company towns in the area. Under the leadership of Wilder, the company inserted in each of the deeds and leases a clause stating that "no spiritous or malt liquor shall ever be kept, sold, used, bartered or given away" upon the lands concerned. In 1871 the General unsuccessfully sponsored legislation that would have prohibited the sale of liquor within six miles of any iron furnace in Tennessee. Nine years later, after the state temperance forces in 1877 had pushed through a law forbidding liquor sales within four miles of an incorporated institution of learning in non-incorporated areas, Horace M. Wilder, the General's brother, joined with several local men to charter the Rockwood Academy. Because the academy did not go into operation, the "Four Mile" law did not apply to Rockwood, and the 1880's were years of unbridled drinking. As the direct influence of the Wilder family began to wane in the late 80's, however, local persons assumed leadership in the temperance movement, and the struggle itself became entangled in the community's fight over incorporation. After the state in 1887 extended the "Four Mile" law to both chartered and unchartered rural schools, both publicly and privately financed, the saloons in the town had to close because of the presence of the company's schools. Bootleggers and the perfectly legal "jug train" from Chattanooga continued to supply liquor to the thirsty miners, however, and in 1889, restive wets

<sup>22</sup> *Who's Who in Tennessee* (Memphis, 1911), 496; Goodspeed, *Tennessee*, 832; *Rockwood Times*, February 11, August 4, 1904, December 16, 1915, May 18, 1922.

around  
incorpor  
community  
efforts th  
rid the c  
Changin  
for the  
area also  
saloon a  
bling wa  
Adams  
porated  
"saloon  
the "jug  
statewid

The  
incorpor  
town pr  
nearby I  
metropo  
the area  
overnigh  
cumstan  
able pro  
Rockwo  
liquor se  
cipal aut  
Incorpor  
land sal  
for prop  
mammo  
heavy ra

<sup>23</sup> De  
of the Al  
Paul E. I  
(Knoxvill  
of Mayor  
pp. 231-3  
May 29, 1  
327, 193,  
<sup>24</sup> Ca

County Republican, who, like the schools, Roane Iron Company. In 1884, Coffman terminated and published the annual year. An eye illness of federal land editorial post, and *Times-Republican*.<sup>22</sup> followed an editorship.

of social experience of leadership for the Rum. And even in policies of other companies, the company is stating that "no used, bartered or General unsuccessful the sale of liquor years later, after a law forbidding institution of learning General's brother, Rockwood Academy. "Four Mile" law years of unbridled ly began to wane ership in the tem- entangled in the in 1887 extended ed rural schools, the town had to ools. Bootleggers ga continued to 1889, restive wets

eed, *Tennessee*, 832; 5, May 18, 1922.

around the Black Jack saloon succeeded in evading the 1887 act by incorporating the town of East Rockwood, a small section of the community having only twenty-five qualified voters. Despite all their efforts the dries had been completely outmaneuvered in their efforts to rid the community of liquor, and now even the saloon had returned. Changing tactics, the temperance forces in 1890 accepted incorporation for the rest of the town, and hence the return of the saloon to that area also; they hoped through municipal ordinances to regulate the saloon and to effect various other improvements in the town. Squabbling was to continue over the saloon for almost 20 years. After the Adams Act of 1903 prohibited the sale of liquor in all newly incorporated towns with populations of 5000 or less, the dries won a new "saloon free" charter. With the exception of one brief period, however, the "jug train" from Chattanooga continued to bring in liquor until statewide prohibition was enacted in 1909.<sup>23</sup>

The willingness of the temperance advocates to accept a wet incorporation in 1890 occurred at the same time that a land sales and town promotion frenzy was sweeping East Tennessee, particularly in nearby Harriman and Cardiff. Schemes for street railways for a huge metropolis encompassing much of the county became common talk in the area; hotels to house the foppish raft of land speculators sprang up overnight; opportunities were said to be limitless.<sup>24</sup> Under these circumstances, the Roane Iron Company, withdrawing from the unprofitable production of steel in Chattanooga, discovered a new interest in Rockwood's growth. The chance for a final blow by the company at liquor seems to have merged with the obvious need for a local municipal authority to organize urban services demanded by any boom town. Incorporation and municipal improvement would make a company land sale most profitable both in terms of sales and in enhanced value for properties retained; such an opportunity to serve God, man, and mammon simultaneously was indeed too good to forego. Despite the heavy rains that plagued buyers, the Rockwood auction in May, 1890,

<sup>23</sup> Deed Book R, 565-67; Ernest Hurst Cherrington (ed.), *Standard Encyclopedia of the Alcohol Problem* (Westerville, Ohio, 1930), IV, 2627; Deed Book V-1, 6-10; Paul E. Isaacs, *Prohibition and Politics: Turbulent Decades in Tennessee, 1885-1920* (Knoxville, 1965), 78, 90, 128; Deed Books B-2, 555, C-2, 349-50; Minutes of Board of Mayor and Aldermen (Rockwood Municipal Building), Book 2, pp. 164-65, Book 3, pp. 231-33; Rockwood *Times*, June 12, 1902, September 19, 1907; Chattanooga *News*, May 29, 1930; *Acts of Tennessee*, 1887, chapter 167, p. 263, and 1903, chapters 2, 139, 327, 193, pp. 5, 266, 976, 435.

<sup>24</sup> Cardiff *Herald*, April 30, May 14-21, 1890.

grossed the iron company over \$300,000 at a time when the concern's paid up capital was only \$1,000,000.<sup>26</sup> The frenzied speculation in Cardiff collapsed, but the slightly less visionary schemes in Rockwood and Harriman were not total losses. In Rockwood, a number of new streets were laid out and graded by the company; the first telephones appeared; additional newspapers made dramatic if short appearances; new hotels were built; and the more refined opera house programs began to rival the traditional rock fight as the staple of local entertainment.<sup>26</sup>

More significantly, however, the first beginnings of diversification accompanied the boom and the disposal of the land by the company. At first merchants and grocers who had formerly been associated with the company established their own dry goods centers and groceries to challenge the company store. Notable among these men were S. Blaine Leeper and D. T. Peterman, who had been in the employ of the company for several years before striking out for themselves in the late 80's and 90's.<sup>27</sup> Although the Panic of 1893 put a squeeze on these independent retailers, already operating at a competitive disadvantage since they had to charge a discount on company scrip, many survived and became a permanent part of the local economic order.

That economic structure was composed of several merchants and professional men competing for the patronage of some 2000 laboring men, almost two-thirds of whom were employed by the Roane Iron Company and its mining subsidiaries. The periodic slowdowns at the blast furnaces and the outright failure of similar iron works in other East Tennessee communities suggested to local civic and business leaders that less trafficking in local money and more diversified manufacture for export was essential for healthy economic growth. In 1902, acting upon a widely circulated petition, the mayor and board of aldermen exempted from city taxation for five or ten years any manufacturing concern subsequently locating in Rockwood and employing 50 to 100 persons, the period of exemption to depend upon the number employed. The *Times* editor specifically called for the immediate investment of local capital rather than anticipation of future moves by the

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Moore, "Rockwood: Prototype of New South," 74-75.

<sup>27</sup> Rockwood *Times*, October 22, 1887, August 4, 1904.

Roane Iron Company or the First National Bank, at the time dominated by New York and Chattanooga interests, respectively.<sup>28</sup>

The call for local manufacturing capital was answered—as could have been expected—by men whose associations with the Roane Iron Company had been long and profitable. Captain James F. Tarwater, who had once worked for the company for \$1.25 a day before purchasing stock in that concern, established in 1905 the Rockwood Mills, a hosiery operation which occupied eight acres of ground and was the first big manufacturing effort to be made since the construction of the blast furnace. Taking advantage of the available female labor present in the iron workers' wives and daughters, the mills had grown to ten times their original size by 1940 and had branches in Oneida, Monterey, and Kingston.<sup>29</sup> By providing for the mining and laboring families an additional income not so closely linked with the vagaries of the pig iron market, the mills had economic and social ramifications of immense proportions for the town. Female earning power and the inevitable domestic concessions made to the laboring women no doubt helped to tame the miners' Saturday night brawls, making Rockwood more of a city and less of a mining village. In 1916 a second local captain of industry, Sewell Howard, who had once worked in the company's coal mines, established the Rockwood Stove Works, which by the early twenties had developed extensive sales locally, north of the Ohio River, and in Latin America. Other small concerns soon appeared, giving the local economy a better balanced base than formerly enjoyed under the exclusive hegemony of the Roane Iron Company.<sup>30</sup>

While the new economic interests were slowly solidifying their positions, the company continued its old policy of donating lands and funds for obviously worthy causes. In 1898 it deeded a tract of land to the Oak Grove Cemetery Association for a non-profit public graveyard and in 1922 made a land gift to the city for its school system. Descendants of Hiram S. Chamberlain in 1917 gave \$10,000 and the company \$4,000 for Chamberlain Memorial Hospital in Rockwood. While disposing of some company-owned housing, the firm kept other dwellings and promoted beautification contests among the tenants.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Minutes of Board of Mayor and Aldermen, Book 2, p. 167; *Rockwood Times*, September 15, 1904.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, August 4, September 15, 1904, March 21, 1907, November 14, 1940.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, September 15, 1904, July 27, 1916, August 24, 1922.

Such community welfare actions did not spare the company growing criticism from local groups that, reinforced by the independent merchants and industrialists, charged the company with doing too little for the town. Particularly irritating to civic groups was the low assessment of company properties for purposes of county taxation and the deliberate exclusion of the blast furnaces from the city limits. In 1902, for example, the *Times* editor had refuted local critics who disparaged the amount of taxes paid by the company, but twenty years later the paper endorsed a resolution of the newly formed Civitan Club recommending the inclusion of the company's plant within the city limits.<sup>32</sup> It was not, however, company taxes in the 1920's, but mining accidents, that aroused the sharpest denunciation and most costly litigation for the faltering Roane Iron Company. Capping a series of accidents was a mine explosion in 1926 killing 27 miners—a disaster which brought a chorus of angry charges and an investigation by the state legislature. These accidents cost the company some \$200,000 under the workmen's compensation laws, an amount equal to nearly one-fifth of the company's total capitalization.<sup>33</sup>

The prosperity of the 1920's then did little to ameliorate the growing antagonism toward the company. That a final break between the old carpetbagger enterprise and its company town might have occurred is possible, but it appears unlikely. Indeed, imaginative local businessmen, recognizing the intertwined fortunes of company and town, sought unsuccessfully to obtain a separate state charter authorizing the construction of a bridge across the Tennessee River to the company's ore fields. The bridge, of course, would have been available to the company and might have reduced the inflated local transportation costs for the concern by almost 75 per cent.<sup>34</sup> In any event the sporadic feuding between local groups and the company never developed into an open test of strength, for the Roane Iron Company collapsed in 1929—a victim of high transportation costs, workmen's compensation expenses, and

<sup>31</sup> Deed Book R-4, 270; *Rockwood Times*, March 15, 1917, May 29, 1930, March 8, 1923.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, June 12, 1902, August 3, 1922. To some extent the preferential tax treatment accorded the Roane Iron Company accounts for the sentiment to free other manufacturing concerns from municipal taxes—a sentiment capitalized upon by Tarwater and Howard.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, October 14, 1926, March 17, April 7, 1927.

<sup>34</sup> See Moore, "Rockwood: Prototype of New South," 50-52.

the dra  
1930's u  
did not  
Corpora  
leased t  
duction

Cen  
"robber  
economy  
other ex  
sacrifices  
younger  
communi  
social in  
and activ  
were the  
impossib  
altruistic  
the contr  
in the pr  
no doubt  
be absur  
future.

If,  
pervasive  
force in  
ize some  
Yankee,  
ism. Tha  
essential  
showed s  
that the  
tions; th  
chants an  
tries in t  
in the co

the drastic reduction in demand in the late 1920's. Throughout the 1930's unemployment was prevalent in Rockwood, for the iron works did not resume operations until 1941, when the Reconstruction Finance Corporation purchased the installations from the stockholders and leased them to Tennessee Products Corporation for the wartime production of ferro-manganese.<sup>35</sup>

Certainly the founders of the Roane Iron Company were neither "robber barons" nor utopian-minded "industrial statesmen." Essentially economic opportunists, they viewed Rockwood as an adjunct to their other extensive holdings; while they were prepared to make early sacrifices by original investment and worker recruitment, by encouraging younger family members to provide temporary leadership in the new community, and by organizing primitive religious, educational, and social institutions, they apparently never expected that these expenses and activities would last for an extended period of time. So intertwined were the company's fortunes and civic reform for fifty years that it is impossible to separate selfish and cynical actions from creative and altruistic ones. The deeding of land to churches, schools, and clubs, the contributions to hospitals and cemeteries, the genuine interest taken in the prohibition movement, and in the voluntary street improvements no doubt had some justification in the gospel of efficiency, but it would be absurd to deny some measure of company concern for the town's future.

If, prior to 1890, the Roane Iron Company's influence was more pervasive than it was to be later, it was because as the only organized force in a totally new and strange setting, it was called upon to organize some social and economic structure to mould the various foreign, Yankee, native white, and Negro groups into a viable economic organism. That no novel social order was tested speaks for the company's essential conservatism and preoccupation with its own profits; that it showed some interest in a wholesome community environment suggests that the company's profit motive was tempered with moral considerations; that it acquiesced in competition for its own store from new merchants and in the threat to its total economic hegemony by new industries in the town reveals that if it had ever insisted on total control in the community, it no longer did so. Paternalism in the Roane Iron

<sup>35</sup> Rockwood *Times*, March 13, 1949.

Company's company town was not harsh by the standards of that day; the company, far from being a regressive force, provided constructive, if not dynamic, leadership in the days of its sole ascendancy. Not until the last decade of its checkered life does it seem to have run counter in any meaningful way to the community's sound development.

In a broader sense, the original stockholders and their successors appear to have been pragmatic and moral men who for a short time in the 1870's and 1880's saw Rockwood—with its iron deposits and river and rail outlets—as a mere cog in much greater schemes for regional economic development. When the regional planning dream proved as ephemeral as it was prophetic and when the Cardiff boom fizzled, there was little reason for the company, with a \$300,000 land sale under its belt, to push through its earlier promise to "build a city" at Rockwood. Preoccupied with other interests, if not actually unconcerned about its company town, the Roane Iron Company drifted onward to its fate.

foun  
this  
the C  
faith  
tatio  
ing c  
espec  
regio

later  
grou  
life.  
boys  
than  
didn'  
of at  
unbe  
built,  
and f

told  
indus  
gener

often  
of thi  
to set  
Holic  
in the  
month

\*A  
Histori