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## Industrial "Girls" in an Early Twentieth-Century Boomtown: Traditions and Change in Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1900—1920

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The Fort Wayne city leaders who dedicated the nearly one-million-dollar Allen County Courthouse in 1902 believed that their city was destined for greatness. Certainly it was true that by 1920 the city's population had nearly doubled, and its industries, measured by number of workers and value of products, had grown to make Fort Wayne Indiana's second-largest manufacturing center. The city boasted ample electrical power, a thriving transportation network of seven railroads and five interurban lines, and an industrial workforce of more than 16,300 men and women.<sup>1</sup>

Essential to Fort Wayne's rapid industrial growth during these two decades were the 6,000 women and girls who worked in dozens of its factories. In 1920 these female workers made up one-third of the city's industrial workforce, a higher percentage of women workers than in Indiana's two other leading industrial cities (Indianapolis and South Bend) and in the nation as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Despite their large presence in Fort Wayne's industries, their importance has remained largely hidden. This can be explained, in part, by a widespread tendency in the early twentieth century to dismiss the contributions of women workers and by the irregular and incomplete records of their experiences. Nevertheless, a closer look at these workers in this midwestern city from 1900 to 1920 reveals new complexities in the history of working-class women.

Like so many other female factory workers in Indiana and nationwide, the women and girls in Fort Wayne worked in low-paying, gender-specific jobs, often under hazardous conditions. However,

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<sup>1</sup>U.S., *Fourteenth Census, 1919: Manufactures*, 378, 385-86; Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, January 23, 1920.

<sup>2</sup>Women and girls working in factories made up approximately 24.7 percent of the industrial workforce in Indianapolis and 19.6 percent of the workforce in South Bend. The nation's industrial workforce consisted of approximately 20.5 percent female workers. U.S., *Census, 1919: Manufactures*, 378-79; Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, January 23, 1920; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York, 1982), 152.

three elements distinguished this group of female factory workers from a more typical American model. First, Indiana labor laws were some of the least progressive in the country in the early twentieth century. Second, Fort Wayne and its manufacturing industries grew very rapidly in this period, and third, Fort Wayne, which attracted few African Americans and immigrants, had an unusually large native-born population, about 60 percent of whom shared German heritage. This group also shared strong prejudices against married women working in factories. These factors produced a situation in which most female factory workers were young and unmarried and were expected by their families and their employers to be in the workforce only for a few years. Consequently, city leaders and business owners assumed that factory "girls" needed not better wages and working conditions, but safe, home-like lodgings and wholesome activities for their leisure hours. These needs were served (and the community's preferences reinforced) by organizations such as the YWCA, which built genteel dormitories and sponsored clubs for young female workers. Through company welfare programs, businessmen encouraged these industrial clubs in a rush to assure parents that their daughters would remain genteel and marriageable while earning an hourly wage. Factory owners also supported internal programs such as beauty contests, picnics, bowling leagues, and dance competitions. Only outside forces (that included a world war and a nationwide influenza epidemic) would change these conditions, eventually bringing many Fort Wayne female workers into the union movement and changing the employment structures and working conditions of major companies.

Fort Wayne's transformation from a small town to a modern industrial city paralleled the rapid national industrialization that brought large numbers of women into the workforce for the first time. By 1920 approximately one out of every six white women in the United States worked outside of the home. One of the primary reasons for this increase was that in the early twentieth century many more factory owners began to see female workers as essential to the industrial process, in large part because their low wages kept production costs competitive. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, studies for the United States as a whole show that women and girls in all manufacturing jobs, regardless of skill level, earned at best three-fourths of the wages paid to unskilled males.<sup>3</sup>

Employers and unions alike attempted to justify low wages. Industrialists alleged that women were neither skilled in nor adapted to the use of heavy machinery, and that they were unwilling to commit to long training programs or long-term employment. Women and

<sup>3</sup>D. H. McAbee, Inspector, "Department of Inspection," in Indiana, Department of Statistics, *Eighth Biennial Report, 1899-1900*, XIV, 21.

girls, they argued, were in the workforce either for a short period before marrying or during a temporary financial setback for their families.<sup>4</sup> The male leaders of craft unions feared that higher pay for female workers threatened their own wages and their role as family breadwinner. As census statistics and numerous studies have shown, however, working-class families frequently depended on the incomes of daughters, sons, and wives to maintain even a minimum standard of living.<sup>5</sup>

Although women in the early twentieth century were at work manufacturing a wide variety of products, they were most heavily concentrated in so-called "female" industries which included the making of textiles, hosiery, garments, shoes, and cigars, and the processing of food.<sup>6</sup> Even as the number of factory jobs increased, prompted largely by the growth of the electrical industry, gender-specific roles continued to determine women's work. Labor historian Alice Kessler-Harris estimates that the "sexual divisions in the job market" affected more than 90 percent of all female wage earners during this period.<sup>7</sup>

These female-dominated industries were, unfortunately, some of the most dangerous workplaces in early twentieth-century America. Pressured by settlement-house workers and women's club leaders, in 1907 the federal government launched wide-scale investigations into the conditions of children and women employed in factories. A nineteen-volume series of reports, published between 1910 and 1913, showed that most women's work was hazardous, even life-threatening. Operatives typically ate poorly, lacked sunshine and fresh air, and worked an average day of ten hours in a five-and-a-half-day week. Such a lifestyle, combined with unhealthy conditions in the factories, resulted in a national death rate for female workers that was twice that of women who stayed at home and more than a third higher than that of all men. Tuberculosis was commonplace. Female workers in textile mills suffered from brown lung disease at an alarming rate. Moreover, few precautions were taken to prevent injuries from machinery and to protect workers from fire. The infamous March 1911 fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York, which took the lives of 146 girls, sounded another national alarm for the need to protect female workers.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Julie A. Matthaei, *An Economic History of Women in America* (New York, 1982), 213-15.

<sup>5</sup>See Robert V. Robinson, "Making Ends Meet: Wives and Children in the Family Economy of Indianapolis, 1860-1920," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XCII (September 1996), 197-234.

<sup>6</sup>Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei, *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multi-cultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (Boston, 1996), 115.

<sup>7</sup>Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 141.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 106; Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, March 26, 1911.



FACTORY LOOPING ROOM, WAYNE KNITTING MILLS, 1914.

Boss F. Lockridge, Theodore F. Thieme, *A Man and His Times* (1942)

Both Indiana's and Fort Wayne's statistics and patterns of female employment resemble national models. In Indiana's industrial towns and cities one in every four white girls and women was in the workforce. The number of girls and women employed in the state's factories grew from 29,900 in 1900 to more than 50,000 in 1920. While more girls and women worked in domestic or personal service jobs at the turn of the century than in factories, by 1920 numbers of female workers in manufacturing jobs was almost equal to those in domestic or personal service.<sup>9</sup>

Fort Wayne's especially heavy dependence on female industrial workers was related to its well-established position as a strategic railroad hub and manufacturing center. Its largest employers at the turn of the century were the massive Pennsylvania Railroad Shops and the Bass Works, which manufactured railroad cars and wheels shipped around the world. Mirroring business practices in the East, where textile mills were established to attract the daughters and wives of coal miners, Fort Wayne industrialists drew from the families of male workers to staff their burgeoning garment factories, knitting mills, and electrical appliance factories. Theodore Thieme, who established the Wayne Knitting Mills in 1891, chose Fort Wayne in large part because of its female labor pool. Similarly, managers of the General Electric Works and Edison Lamp Works saw the daughters of male industrial workers as potential employees.

The appeal of Hoosier women and girls to factory owners was directly reflected in their pay scales, which appear to have been even lower than the national average for women workers. According to the Indiana state factory inspector's report for 1899, female workers in the state's factories were paid "usually about half what men would be paid for the same work."<sup>10</sup> Statistics collected for Indiana and for Fort Wayne factories in the second decade of the twentieth century confirm these patterns. According to the 1914 Census, the average annual income for factory workers (most of whom were male) in Indiana was \$636.<sup>11</sup> A study conducted that same year by the U.S. Department of Labor found that female garment workers in ten Indiana cities earned little more than half that amount: approximately

<sup>9</sup>Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th Century America* (New York, 2001), 37; Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (1929; reprint, New York, 1956), 25; Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920* (Indianapolis, 1968), 329; Women in Industry Service, United States Department of Labor, *Labor Laws for Women in Industry in Indiana* (Washington, D.C., 1919), 10; Elizabeth Faulkner Baker, *Technology and Woman's Work* (New York, 1964), 76; U.S. Census, 1919: *Population-Occupations*, 761. As indicative of the broader opportunities for female workers by 1920, approximately 26 percent of working women were now employed in white-collar areas. Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 224.

<sup>10</sup>McAbee, "Department of Inspection," 21.

<sup>11</sup>Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 327.

\$6.90 a week or \$358 per year. This was significantly less than the \$468 found by government investigators to be essential for a female worker to be self-supporting. Garment workers earned less than operatives in other industries, and Fort Wayne's garment workers were especially poorly paid. With statewide weekly earnings for female factory workers averaging \$7.19, the city's garment workers (most of whom were women) earned only \$6.62.<sup>12</sup>

Like other Indiana women, Fort Wayne women also reflected national trends in the types of industries in which they worked. According to the 1909 Census of Manufactures for Indiana, women across the state were most frequently employed in food processing, garment factories, and printing and publishing industries. Five years later data collected by the U.S. Department of Labor revealed that the largest employers of women in Indiana were manufacturers of cigars and tobacco products and hosiery and knit goods.<sup>13</sup> Fort Wayne's largest employers of women included Wayne Knitting Mills, Boss Manufacturing Company (a maker of industrial gloves), the Perfection Biscuit Company, and—a sign of the city's leadership in electrical manufacturing—General Electric and the Dudlo Manufacturing Company (a pioneer magnet-wire producer).<sup>14</sup>

The sexual division of labor described by Kessler-Harris is clear when jobs and the gender of those who held them are broken down within individual companies. At Wayne Knitting the most highly skilled workers were male knitters, who were trained through apprenticeship programs to operate the complex machines that knit

<sup>12</sup>U.S., Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Hours, Earnings, and Conditions of Labor of Women in Indiana Mercantile Establishments and Garment Factories* (Washington, D.C., 1914), 74, 195. Kessler-Harris cites a 1913 study that found \$9 per week (or \$468 per year) to be the minimum amount needed by a woman or girl to maintain a basic standard of living; Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 104.

<sup>13</sup>U.S., Department of Labor, *Hours, Earnings, and Conditions of Labor of Women in Indiana*, 189.

<sup>14</sup>Indiana, State Bureau of Inspection, *Second Annual Report* (Indianapolis, 1913), 93-100; Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, January 23, 1920. According to census statistics collected in 1909, 70.3 percent of employees in the nation's hosiery and knit goods industry were females. For Indiana, women sixteen and older made up 54.4 percent of those employed in these industries. In contrast, Susan Estabrook Kennedy reports that in 1905 women made up approximately 40.6 percent of textile workers in the United States. Susan Estabrook Kennedy, *If All We Did Was Weep: A History of White Working Class Women in America* (Bloomington, 1979), 122; U.S. *Census, 1909*, Vol. X: *Manufactures*, 70.

The Indiana State Bureau of Inspection's report for 1913 showed that Wayne Knitting Mills employed 1,175 women and girls, an approximately 60 percent female workforce. 595 females and 61 males produced industrial gloves at the Boss Manufacturing Company. The General Electric Company Lamp Works (also called the Edison Lamp Works) employed 149 male workers and 509 girls and women. Throughout the first twenty years of the new century, the Fort Wayne Electric Works maintained a workforce made up of approximately 25 percent females, (287 females, 1170 males in 1913 and 1,350 females, 4450 males in 1920), becoming the city's largest overall employer. By 1920 the Perfection Biscuit Company employed 663 women; 500 women worked at Dudlo Manufacturing.



"GIRLS DEPARTMENT" OF THE EDISON LAMP WORKS'  
EMPLOYEE NEWSPAPER.

Fort Wayne *Works News*, April 192

the legs of stockings. Male workers also took charge of the dyeing process. Most of the other jobs in the factory were semiskilled or unskilled and were performed by girls and women. Three or four "transfer girls" put the stocking tops onto quills that were then used to transfer the stockings onto simpler circular knitting machines, also operated by women. These operators, known as "loopers," sewed together the foot of the stocking. Other female workers shaped stockings by a process called "boarding." Women and girls also worked as sorters, inspectors, folders, finishers, and menders.<sup>15</sup>

Like female workers at Wayne Knitting, girls and women at GE and the Edison Lamp Works were not permitted to train as apprentices. Often working in all-female departments, they did "light manufacturing work" involving repetition and requiring dexterity and patience. At GE women operated "simple" machines such as drill presses, automatic screw machines, and grinders. At the Edison works, women and girls were employed in the manufacture of incandescent lamps, "winding and insulating coils, gauging and inspecting light parts and assembling small devices."<sup>16</sup>

Information from newspaper accounts and occasional studies of factories employing women in Indianapolis and Fort Wayne confirms the grave health and safety risks that plagued women workers well into the second decade of the twentieth century. In 1894 workers for the state's department of statistics reported that women working in woolen and cotton mills in Indianapolis were obliged to stand all day surrounded by the "deafening roar of looms and machinery." Poor ventilation was a common problem. The report emphasized that "the sanitary condition of buildings in which girls were working are not generally at present what they should be to insure

<sup>15</sup>Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 144; Baker, *Technology and Woman's Work*, 20-21, 134-36; Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, April 11, 1920.

<sup>16</sup>Clovis E. Linkous, *General Electric At Fort Wayne, Indiana: A 110 Year History* (Baltimore, Md., 1994); Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, March 17, 1918. For a detailed description of women's jobs in the electrical industry before World War I see U.S., Women's Bureau, *The New Position of Women in American Industry*, (Bulletin, XII, Washington, D.C., 1920), 113-16.

the best health and strength of employes." In 1899, Indiana's chief factory inspector argued that "having female employes climb stairs to the upper floors to their work is unpardonable, and should not be permitted." Furthermore, he urged employers "to furnish them with all the conveniences and accessories that will enable them to still retain their modesty, their attractive appearance, as well as health."<sup>17</sup>

Conditions in Fort Wayne's factories were at best mixed. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire inspired local labor leaders and the city's fire chief to inspect factories that employed women. While conditions at two shirtwaist factories were found "satisfactory in every respect," the main buildings of the Wayne Knitting Mills were "the worst" of any buildings inspected and required "sweeping" and immediate changes. The factories had inadequate fire escapes and workrooms overcrowded with girls "handling highly inflammable materials." Fire escapes were also inadequate at two buildings of the Fort Wayne Electric Works, and, compounding the danger, women and girls on the third and fourth floors were locked in. While both companies claimed that their workplaces met safety requirements, they nevertheless made the recommended changes.<sup>18</sup>

Reports of work-related accidents in Fort Wayne newspapers indicate that companies assumed little responsibility for improving the safety conditions of their factories. Many employees of the Wayne Knitting Mills had no easy, safe access to the company's main buildings, located off West Main Street. At noon and at the end of the workday hundreds of mill employees climbed between freight trains on the tracks of the Nickle Plate and Lake Erie and Western Railroads (located just to the south and east of the main factory buildings) during train-switching operations. Employees getting on and off crowded streetcars on Main Street to the south of the factory risked being crushed by other workers or being caught between cars. In May 1909 a sixteen-year-old transfer girl at the mills was killed by a switch engine as she hurried back to work at the end of her lunch break. For years representatives of the mill, the city's board of safety, and the railroad debated about who was responsible for building an elevated walkway over the Nickle Plate Railroad tracks, but the elevation was never built. Mill workers also appealed to the local traction company to impose greater safeguards during the loading and unloading of streetcars. Newspapers occasionally reported injuries inside the knitting mills or the GE works caused by machines that lacked protective guards and by the absence of precautions around burning metals. Women were particularly

<sup>17</sup>Indiana, Department of Statistics, "Women Wage Earners of Indianapolis," *Fifth Biennial Report, 1898-9*, especially pp. 6-36. McAbee, *Report*, 212-13.

<sup>18</sup>Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, April 4, 6, 11, May 11, 1911, August 12, 28, October 13, 1913.

at risk because their long skirts and hair could become caught in machinery.<sup>19</sup>

In 1914, federal inspectors from the U. S. Public Health Service and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in association with a state commission on working women appointed by the governor, conducted a more comprehensive study of Indiana factories that employed large numbers of female workers. Their assignment was to survey the sanitary and working conditions of women employed across the state. They inspected fourteen businesses in Fort Wayne, including textile mills, an electrical supply factory, garment factories, department stores, and a soap factory. Conditions in the main factories of Wayne Knitting were generally satisfactory, according to their report. GE's lamp manufacturing plant, despite being "a progressive factory," by its very nature created "unfavorable hygienic conditions" that allegedly resulted in frequent employee turnover. Work required "the use of a great many gas blow torches" that gave off heat, which was then blown through the workroom by exhaust fans. While the inspector did not find "much dust" from the "grinding on carborundum wheels," the wheels did not have exhaust hoods (and thus the presence of dust was unavoidable). The east branch of the knitting mills had no separate lunchroom. Despite the lack of washrooms, sanitary conditions were described as "fair." The factory's only source of ventilation, its windows, admitted "disagreeable" odors from the nearby soap works.<sup>20</sup>

The inspector recommended twelve corrective steps, which ranged from improving ventilation and controlling temperature to removing dust and lint. He advocated more rest breaks to prevent fatigue and precautions to help workers who stood most of the day or whose work involved continual rapid motions. While he found current Indiana regulations "adequate in so far as they apply to safeguards on machinery," he advocated adding regular daily exercise breaks for workers. He also recommended measures to improve basic hygiene in the workplace, such as providing adequate washroom facilities with running water and hygienic water closets.<sup>21</sup>

The federal inspector's report, however, drew scant attention, and Fort Wayne's female workers had little power to improve their own conditions. Local efforts were sometimes successful: improvements in fire prevention were made due largely to a safety committee appointed by the Fort Wayne Federation of Labor. Similar committees

<sup>19</sup>At the Fort Wayne Electric Works in June 1913, a young female worker "had one of her hands burned by some melted metal," and fainted the following day in the factory dispensary. Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, May 11, 1909, December 12, 1912, June 21, 1913, September 14, 1918, January 12, 1919.

<sup>20</sup>M. J. White, *Sanitary Survey of Indiana Industries Employing Woman Labor* (Washington, D.C., 1914), 30-32. Inspections of individual factories are given in the Appendix under "Reports on Individual Establishments." Names of factories are not given.

<sup>21</sup>*Sanitary Survey*, 6-13.

formed at GE and Wayne Knitting (several years after the 1914 inspection) no doubt helped prevent accidents. While these committees were intended to represent all departments, however, they had no women members and, until the war years, they paid little attention to the areas where most women worked.

While there were many similarities between Fort Wayne female factory workers and their sisters in Indiana and the nation, the Fort Wayne group seems to have contained fewer married women and more girls under sixteen than was usual elsewhere. Discrimination against the hiring of married women was widespread. The city's industrialists hired young, unmarried females who could be regarded as low-paid, temporary workers. Both of these practices, however, were rarely articulated and were thus largely hidden from public record.

By 1920, nearly 25 percent of all employed women in the United States were married "with husbands present."<sup>22</sup> Statistics for Indiana, while limited, reveal a markedly lower percentage of married women in the workforce. The 1914 survey of women and girls in Indiana garment factories—the only study from this period that reported on marital status—revealed that only 8 percent of that workforce were married women. In Fort Wayne the percentage was even lower: married women made up slightly less than 6 percent of the total workforce surveyed. With few exceptions, Fort Wayne's married women were employed only when they were acting as sole providers for their families or, during the war years, substituting for their soldier-husbands.<sup>23</sup>

These limited statistics become more meaningful in the context of local prejudices against the employment of married women. Most residents, male and female, of the city and surrounding rural areas believed that a married woman injured her family by entering the workplace. These beliefs reflected the German heritage of more than half of the area's residents and were consistent with the views of both German-born and German-American industrial workers in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Chicago. Although unions sought shorter work days for women, they also valued the work of union members' wives in support of the union-label movement to gain better shop conditions for male factory workers and promote the sale of union-made products. Specific company policies reinforced Fort Wayne's bias against women in the factory workforce: General Electric automatically terminated from their payrolls women who married, and this rule spread widely to other companies.<sup>24</sup>

Indiana passed several laws governing the employment of children in factories in this period, but they were inadequate and

<sup>22</sup>Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, 37.

<sup>23</sup>*Hours, Earnings, and Conditions of Labor of Women in Indiana*, 62, 10.

<sup>24</sup>Ronald W. Schatz, *The Electrical Workers* (Urbana, Ill., 1983), 125.

subject to abuse. In 1897 the state legislature prohibited children younger than fourteen from working in factories, and in 1911, at the urging of labor leaders and social reformers, it considered a bill limiting work hours for children under sixteen to forty-eight per week, eight per day. Under pressure from business leaders, the finished legislation permitted a nine-hour workday and fifty-four-hour week for such children with parental permission. In 1913 the state finally required that children attend school until they were sixteen. Children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, however, were permitted to work in factories if they showed proof of their age and permission from their parents or guardian. With few state factory inspectors and little record keeping, even these laws were hard to enforce.

Children—most of them girls—played an especially important role at the Wayne Knitting Mills. According to the 1909 census report on manufactures, employees under sixteen made up 19.3 percent of the wage earners in hosiery and knit goods manufacturing in Indiana. Only one state, North Carolina, with a knit-goods workforce of 27.7 percent children under sixteen, ranked higher.<sup>25</sup> The importance of these young workers to the industry became more evident when mill leaders fought the 1911 legislation to limit children's work hours.

Newspaper coverage of the 1911 legislative hearings reveals that two-thirds of the three thousand employees at the Wayne Mills were children, a number far exceeding even the 1909 statewide industry average. A smaller number of children reportedly worked at GE—"Between three hundred and five hundred minors"; "several hundred" children were employed by Bowser Oil Tank and Pump. It was not surprising, then, that both Theodore Thieme and his brother F. J. testified against provisions of the bill. Other industrialists opposing the legislation with "acrimonious" debate represented glass manufacturers at Yorktown and a tobacco company in Evansville, industries well known for their use of children.<sup>26</sup>

In 1919 the Fort Wayne School Board increased its attendance requirements, mandating that working children younger than sixteen attend school at least five hours a week. The number of children employed in local factories had decreased, but child labor was still significant: 1,400 children worked in city factories. Factories employing more than 50 children under sixteen were required to open their own schools. The main branch of Wayne Knitting, employing 100 girls, was one such factory. Other predominantly female factories that opened their own schools included the east branch of the mills, Edison

<sup>25</sup>U.S., *Thirteenth Census: Vol. X, Manufacturers 1909, The Hosiery and Knit Goods Industry*, 70.

<sup>26</sup>*Indianapolis Star*, January 22, 24, 25, 1911; *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, January 24, 25, 30, February 2, 3, 5, 7, 20, 23, 25, March 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 1911; Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 335.

Lamp Works, and the Boss Glove Company. Children employed elsewhere were required to attend a school near their home.<sup>27</sup>

Women older than sixteen found little protection in Indiana's labor laws. For most of the first two decades of the twentieth century, Indiana lagged far behind other states in limiting the hours of adult female workers. A typical workday lasted at least ten hours, with five full workdays a week and a half-day on Saturday. Legislation passed in 1897 limited working hours only for females under the age of eighteen. In 1899 Indiana became one of twelve states that prohibited women from working in factories after 10:00 p.m. and before 6:00 a.m., but it still maintained the dubious distinction of being one of six states with the longest women's workday. With overtime hours, women employees could be required to work from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.<sup>28</sup>

During the early years of the twentieth century, Fort Wayne industrialists had been able to draw upon the pool of local female workers to meet their demands. But as production expanded and the need for employees grew, businessmen were confronted with "the girl problem," a shortage of female workers. Too few immigrants were settling in Fort Wayne to form a new labor source. When local factories needed to attract more workers from the outlying small towns and rural areas, however, they did not offer "girl" workers increased salaries, better working conditions, or greater opportunities. Instead, they attempted to create a "happy industrial life" for their female employees with facilities and programs that reinforced the traditional premise that girls belonged in the workforce only temporarily before marriage. Backed by YWCA programs and factory-supported clubs, industrialists and community leaders created a workplace environment strongly resistant to change.<sup>29</sup>

The nativist views underlying this "happy industrial life" went unchallenged and largely unacknowledged in their time. Even in a state that absorbed very few immigrants from southeastern Europe, Fort Wayne stood out for its unusually high native-born population. Ten percent of Allen County's 1910 population was foreign-born, and two-thirds of Fort Wayne's residents shared a common German ancestry. Ten years later the Chamber of Commerce announced that the city's population was 88.73 percent "American," a sharp contrast even to Indiana's average 75.1 percent white, native-born population.

<sup>27</sup>The success of the program for children under fourteen was apparently mixed, because only fifty boys and girls had enrolled, and of this number, only twenty-eight had "completed the course with great success and credit to themselves." *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette* January 5, 24, February 14, June 16, 1918, August 23, October 7, 16, 1919, January 6, 1920.

<sup>28</sup>Woman in Industry Service, United States Department of Labor, *Labor Laws for Women in Industry in Indiana* (Washington, D.C., 1919). For an overall study of protective legislation see Baker, Chapter 21, "Protective Labor Legislation."

<sup>29</sup>Ross F. Lockridge, *Theodore F. Thieme: A Man and His Times* (Los Angeles, Calif., 1942), 63.



EMPLOYEE DINING ROOM, WAYNE KNITTING MILLS

Ross F. Lockridge, *Theodore F. Thieme: A Man and His Times* (1942)

This uniformity was "significant and interesting to manufacturers employing skilled laborers," the Chamber reported through the local newspaper. "Few cities of similar size can show a larger percentage of American and a smaller foreign population." Furthermore, racial discrimination kept African Americans from being hired in local factories, even for service or custodial jobs.<sup>30</sup>

This uniformity created a workplace that was perceived to be egalitarian. Girls and women were less likely to be assigned to jobs based on their ethnicity or on the length of time their family had been in the United States. Employers benefitted from this homogeneity because of the public perception that a workplace with a high percentage of American-born "girls" was a desirable environment. Ethnic uniformity may also have been interpreted as an indicator of greater compatibility among women workers and a lesser threat of union conflicts, often attributed to recent immigrants with strong European traditions of unionization. Native-born status did not, however, protect female workers from the least desirable jobs that elsewhere would have been assigned to the newest immigrant workers.<sup>31</sup>

Fort Wayne industrialists took advantage of local nativist values as they promoted and institutionalized a paternalistic work community. If parents were to send their daughters off to the city, they needed to be assured that the girls would be properly cared for. Unsurprisingly, Thieme, the secretary-manager of Wayne Knitting, the city's largest employer of female workers, waged the earliest and most aggressive campaigns to overcome the "girl problem."

Beginning in 1907 Thieme established branch finishing plants in four small towns within a twenty-five-mile radius of Fort Wayne. The company also opened small plants on the east and south sides of town. In 1910 the business, in the words of Thieme's biographer Ross Lockridge, "hit the big time."<sup>32</sup> Wayne Knitting opened a three-story dormitory and clubhouse modeled after facilities in knitting mills in the Northeast. Widely hailed as "a notable step in advance in the industrial sphere" and "the only building of its sort in the state, perhaps in the middle west," the dormitory accommodated one hundred

<sup>30</sup>Mark A. Rogers, "Wir Trinken und Tanzen Im Germania Park: Fort Wayne German-American Society and the National German American Alliance During World War I," *Old Fort News* LX, No. 1 (1997), 1; Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, February 22, 1920; Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 324. There is no evidence that anyone from the city's small black community was employed in the limited service and custodial positions that were available at L.S. Ayres department store in Indianapolis. Richard Lindstrom, "It would break my heart to see you behind a counter!": Business and Reform at L. S. Ayres & Company in the Early Twentieth Century," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XCIII (December 1997), 371-73. Estimates of Fort Wayne's black population in 1920 vary from approximately 1,450 to 3,000. Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel* February 1, 1919; Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, April 15, 1920.

<sup>31</sup>Amott & Matthei, *Race, Gender, and Work*, 111; see also Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 138-39; Kennedy, *If All We Did Was Weep*, 126.

<sup>32</sup>Lockridge, *Theodore F. Thieme*, 75.

out-of-town girls in single and double rooms at a weekly price of \$3.50 for room and board. The cafeteria in the clubhouse, open to all employees, could seat 500 at a time. A large lounge was a place for residents to meet with male visitors. Recreation facilities, including five bowling alleys in the basement, were open to the women twice a week. "The management of the mills" underwrote the costs, estimated at \$50,000.<sup>33</sup>

The detailed descriptions of the dormitory and clubhouse in the local newspapers created an image of middle-class gentility. In the "large and brilliantly lighted" sitting room, "[a] young, rosy cheeked girl in a pretty pink dress sat at the player piano listening to the merry tune she was playing with evident enjoyment. Above the piano was a large oil painting one would look for only in an art gallery." The room featured "comfortable chairs of mission style" and long tables covered with magazines. Unlike the dormitories in nineteenth-century New England mill towns, the Wayne Knit dormitory had no rules posted. The company expected that each girl would "conduct herself as a lady." As a security measure, a husband and wife lived on the top floor of the building and functioned as supervisors.<sup>34</sup>

In 1911 the local YWCA also stepped forward to supply housing for women workers by launching a fund drive to build a \$100,000 "Y" home. Since its founding in 1894, the Y had provided working "girls" from outside the city "the privilege of a home and protection." Dining rooms, known as the "Noon Rest," furnished low-cost lunches and dinners, and by 1910 the Y was serving an average of two hundred meals a day. In contrast, its sleeping accommodations, with space for only eleven temporary lodgers, were woefully inadequate. While staff members attempted to find decent boardinghouses for out-of-town girls, the need far exceeded available accommodations. The primary purpose of the new building was housing, but fundraisers also stressed the importance of more space for educational and recreational programs. While committees of women led the fundraising campaign, an advisory committee of male business leaders "heartily" supported the Y's expansion.<sup>35</sup>

The three-story building that opened in 1913 was described as "a place of beauty" that gave "careful attention" to "[e]very comfort of the young ladies." There was a spacious oak-paneled lounge on the first floor and a cafeteria with an oven large enough for 100 pies at a time. The basement housed a gymnasium and showers; the rooftop was intended for use as a summer garden. The dormitory

<sup>33</sup>Fort Wayne *News-Sentinel* December 10, 1919; Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, December 12, 1910.

<sup>34</sup>Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, December 12, 1910.

<sup>35</sup>Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, December 26, 1910, April 27, 1913, February 28, 1920; John D. Beatty, "Cyprians, Shanty Dancers, and Ladies of Pleasure: Prostitution in Fort Wayne from the Canal to the Progressive Era," *Old Fort News*, LXIV, No. 1 (2001), 17-20.

rooms and temporary housing on the top two floors accommodated forty young women—a significant improvement but still inadequate to meet the needs of women workers.<sup>36</sup>

The Y hired a secretary to organize clubs that offered safe activities to girls who might otherwise be led astray, as social reformers feared, by “[d]roves of blackguards” who haunted downtown streets. Since its leaders agreed with the widely shared belief that young women were only in the workforce temporarily, the Y’s programs did not focus on workplace conditions or trade union involvement, in decided contrast to the work of settlement houses in Chicago and elsewhere. Instead weekly classes taught basketry, sewing, gymnastics, and cooking. Business-like meetings introduced members to some aspects of the pervasive middle-class woman’s club culture. One popular event sponsored by the industrial clubs was Sunday afternoon tea at the YWCA. Over the next few years, clubs were organized at the Wayne Knitting Mills, GE, Edison Lamp Works, Dudlo, Wayne Box Company, and Home Telephone and Telegraph Company.<sup>37</sup> In the fall of 1919, the Y opened an annex at 207 West Wayne Street to accommodate forty more “girls,” yet still more housing was needed. By 1920 its industrial clubs enrolled more than 1,200 young women from local factories. Without doubt, the Y programs played a significant role in attracting young working women to the city’s booming industries.<sup>38</sup>

During these years of rapid industrial growth, Edison and GE built spacious lunchrooms and clubrooms to make their companies more appealing to female workers. Edison’s lunchroom, which opened in 1912, could serve 800 girls in 35 minutes. GE’s Elex Club had a room with a piano, reading tables, and comfortable lounge chairs, and the space was also used for dances and musical and theatrical performances. To entertain young female employees, GE, Wayne Knitting, Edison, and other city factories sponsored “most popular girl in the factory” contests, company picnics, Chautauqua-type music programs, style shows, athletic events, and, by 1919, screenings of moving pictures.<sup>39</sup>

Club records also reveal the existence of a small but significant group of older female workers: women with long careers that included supervisory positions as foreladies, instructors, inspectors, even factory overseers. Beginning in 1904 Wayne Knitting sponsored an

<sup>36</sup>Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, April 27, 1913.

<sup>37</sup>Allen Davis discusses at length how Hull House workers supported women factory workers in Chicago; Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890-1914* (New York, 1967), especially chap. 6. Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, March 19, 1919, February 29, 1920. For a description of the programs of the Indianapolis YWCA programs for working women see Lindstrom, “It would break my heart to see you behind a counter!,” 370-71.

<sup>38</sup>Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, February 8, 29, 1920.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, December 11, 1910; Linkous, *General Electric at Fort Wayne*, 243-45.

the party was a success in every way, for they all had a fine time, especially those who danced the “Virginia Reel.”

At the end of a perfect evening a luncheon was served, which consisted of Braunschweiger sandwiches, cheese sandwiches, dill pickles and coffee.

#### CALISTHENICS BLDG 10-2&3

This is a word to the Y’s.  
Telling ‘bout our exercise.  
We’ve started something in 10-2 and 3  
You’re interested, J. C. U. B.  
Haines, P. G., and Cora Blue.  
They are interested, too.  
While we work to seek our wealth,  
We give attention to our health.  
We throw our arms, breathe the real deep.  
Stop in sometime, take a peep.

#### GOOD TO EAT

##### TILTEN CAKE

2 cups of granulated sugar.  
¾ cup of butter or lard.  
4 eggs  
1 cup of sweet milk.  
3 teaspoons of Baking Powder sifted in  
1 cup of flour.  
3 teaspoons of flavoring.

Cream the butter and sugar. Add the well-beaten yolks of egg and flavoring, then add the milk. Sift the Baking Powder and flour together three times and add to the mixture. Beat thoroughly

and fold in very lightly the well-beaten whites of eggs. Bake in a moderate oven.

##### FILLING FOR CAKE

Boil two cups of granulated sugar until it spins a thread, then beat the whites of two eggs and add the syrup, beating until it becomes thick and creamy. Add flavoring, then spread between the layers and on the cake.

I am lucky because I live today, when all man’s brightest dreams are possibilities.—Workman.

### For Everybody—Girls In Particular

#### Y. W. C. A. SPRING CARNIVAL

Comedy Acts, Music, Dancing, Roof Garden  
‘N’everything

#### A ROYAL GOOD TIME

It is to be at the Y. W. C. A. on West  
Wayne Street

April 22nd and 23rd  
Everybody Is Invited.

Federation of Industrial Clubs  
of Fort Wayne

### A FACTORY CIRCULAR FOR FEMALE EMPLOYEES, WITH RECIPES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS OF COMPANY-SPONSORED ACTIVITIES.

Fort Wayne Works News, April 1920

organization of foremen, foreladies, and heads of departments called the Textile Industrial Club. A photograph of club members in 1916, on the occasion of the company’s 25th anniversary, depicts nine women out of a group of thirty-five. In 1918 the company formed the Pioneer Club for employees who had been with the mills for at least twenty years. A 1920 photograph of its twenty-five members includes eight women.<sup>40</sup>

While such efforts to improve working women’s lives took place away from the factory floor and during breaktimes or leisure hours, by 1917 Fort Wayne’s industrial workers began to see gains in their working conditions. The impetus for these changes came not from employers but from a broad set of political and economic circumstances affecting the entire nation. Soon after the United States entered World War I in April 1917, an additional ten million women joined the nation’s workforce.<sup>41</sup> When female workers became more valuable as a consequence of the war, limitations linked to marital status and gender roles became less important. Working hours and conditions

<sup>40</sup>Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, August 3, 1917. Photographs collected in 1913 of employees who had worked at the mill for twenty or more years included five women; *ibid.*, June 4, 1913, June 15, 1918.

<sup>41</sup>Amott and Matthaai, *Race, Gender, and Work*, 126.

also improved, largely because of Women in Industry Service (WIS), a policy-setting board established by the federal government to safeguard women in war-related industries.

Women's factory work came to be regarded as a contribution to the war effort. Florence Madden, director of the girls' and women's division of the federal employment office in Fort Wayne, announced in the local newspaper that it was "up to the women and girls to help win the war." Major employers—Wayne Knitting Mills, the Traction Company, the Pennsylvania Railroad shops, and GE—adopted policies to place women in jobs vacated by soldiers. Women took over clerical jobs and worked as railroad-engine wipers, train dispatchers, and telegraphers. Local factories also created safety rules requiring female workers to discard their "dangerous female attire." Women put on overalls and tucked their long hair into caps.<sup>42</sup>

The record of the General Electric Works provides the most complete picture of how female workers in Fort Wayne took on new roles as a result of wartime conditions. Peak employment during the war was 4,535, and while records of employees' gender are incomplete, it can be assumed that women workers filled in for many of the 748 male employees who left for military service. Quickly adjusting to wartime demands, GE became a major government contractor. Its local factories turned out "generators and transformers and power motors for driving factories," rock drills for coal mines, "bomb-releasing mechanisms for dropping high explosives from bombing planes," a wide variety of generators for surveillance and military radios, and equipment used for battleships, including the *New Mexico*.<sup>43</sup>

GE began to place "girls" in a variety of new factory roles. As preparation for supervisory positions, twenty young women were trained in a course that covered "the general working of the plant, the inter-relations of departments, and the methods of accounting." In the summer of 1918 GE offered a six-week intensive class in mechanical drawing to "carefully selected" applicants. Advertisements stressed that "a great number of women" had already proven that they had "as much latent mechanical ability as men" but had been discouraged from pursuing related fields. Here was a way to show their abilities and their patriotism. Evening classes in mathematics and mechanical studies were also opened to women so that they could acquire drafting skills. Upon completion of training, they were assigned "permanent" jobs in drafting departments at "a substantial salary."<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup>There were frequent notices throughout the spring and summer of 1917 giving information about the substitution of women in jobs vacated by men going into military service. See, e.g., *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, May 18, 1917.

<sup>43</sup>Linkous, *General Electric at Fort Wayne*, 264-66; *Fort Wayne General Electric Works News*, December 1924. It should be noted that the number of women employed at GE who left to serve as Red Cross nurses or in other war time capacities is unknown; *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, September 9, 1919.

<sup>44</sup>*Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, November 20, 1917, July 7, 1918; *Fort Wayne General Electric Works News*, August 1919.

In the early fall of 1918, GE opened a Vestibule Training School to train women for jobs using "simple" machines such as drill presses, automatic screw machines, grinders, and milling machines. The school offered evening classes in practical mathematics and blueprint reading. Following guidelines established by WIS, the company announced that women would be paid the same as men during their program and "after going into the shops," and that the workday had been reduced to eight hours.<sup>45</sup>

Following the November 1918 armistice, GE and other city employers promised returning soldiers that they would be rehired for their former jobs. At the same time, however, GE management praised women as "very efficient and desirable help" and, contrary to nationwide trends, affirmed that women now comprised a larger part of their permanent workforce. Probably because of continuing expansion of the electric works, no significant layoffs of women were necessary to accommodate returning employees. Women and men now trained together in the Vestibule Training School. A new program for clerks, inspectors, and leading operators enrolled sixty women. In August 1919 the company newsletter announced, "[I]t is obvious that the taking of the course will be an important factor in the advancement of those who have been selected." Unfortunately, most prewar gender roles were reinstated and women were once again excluded from drafting classes, although those who had been trained during the war were allowed to keep their jobs.<sup>46</sup>

The record of women at the Wayne Knitting Mills during the war is less complete, but a combination of circumstances did create new opportunities. Women served as heads of the sales and claims departments and as general overseers in the mill. Women also took over "light labor" jobs that had previously been held by men. In addition, classes were given "to about 60 foreladies, inspectors and leading girl employees" in applied psychology and advanced knitting techniques. Wayne Knitting was also the only local factory that offered university-level classes to its female employees. In the fall of 1917 professors from Indiana University Extension taught evening courses in economics, elementary French, and short story writing. In the same year the first factory-based chapter of the Nonpartisan League, the predecessor of the League of Women Voters, was formed at the mills. The league and its members, hopeful that the state constitution would be amended to allow woman suffrage, encouraged women to register to vote in the upcoming September election for delegates to the state constitutional convention. By the end of the summer of

<sup>45</sup>*Fort Wayne Works News* August, September, October 1918, March 1919, December 1924; *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, November 20, 1917, July 7, September 5, 1918. According to the Women's Bureau report on women's work in the war, women most often replaced men in machine shops; U.S., Women's Bureau, *New Position of Women in American Industry*, 93-94.

<sup>46</sup>*Fort Wayne Works News*, August 1919.

1918, noon-day meetings, led by the Fort Wayne branch of the franchise league, were held at all of the city's large factories.

Two leaders at the mills shared responsibility for these changes. The director of the company's welfare program, Ross Lockridge, taught classes in public speaking and sponsored a club for the students who took college classes. Enthusiastic about women's contributions to the war effort, Lockridge was a strong advocate of universal suffrage. Agatha Diek, general overseer during the war period, was an officer of both the local and district Woman's Franchise League and served as the first chairman of the Wayne Knit chapter of the nonpartisan league. She was also the instructor for the advanced knitting technique classes given to foreladies and "leading girl" employees.<sup>47</sup>

One of the most significant changes for women workers during this period was the rise of union activity. In March 1917, during the early months of the nation's involvement in the war, several hundred women electrical workers joined a union in response to efforts by local labor leaders and Arthur Bennett, an Illinois-based organizer for the international electrical workers. Shortly before the armistice, in October 1918, local union leaders, aided again by Bennett along with representatives of the machinists' unions, organized women from many other city factories, stressing "equal rights and privileges." "No longer will the factory girls of the city be forced to accept any terms of employment that are given to them," commented a Fort Wayne newspaper writer covering a large meeting in the Federation of Labor Hall, attended by "girls representing nearly every craft in the city." During the same period and in the same union hall, Mary Anderson of WIS met with telephone operators and "electrical girls" to stress their important wartime roles. In late November more than 700 new female members of Electrical Workers Local 608 heard James F. Barrett of the Department of Labor praise them for their "splendid" wartime work. The *Journal-Gazette* reported that their "stick-together-ness" was "binding them into one of the strongest organizations in the city, which will mean the revolutionizing of the women in industries in this city."<sup>48</sup>

During the winter of 1918-1919, the union's strength did appear to be revolutionary. On December 19, 2,200 GE employees (75 percent of the local workforce, including many women) and all members of the electrical workers and machinists' unions went on strike to protest the firing of thirty workers at the GE plant in Erie, Pennsylvania. In what became the first general strike to affect all GE plants, the Fort Wayne workers showed solidarity with nearly 18,000 fellow union members in Erie, and in Schenectady and Pittsfield, New York.

<sup>47</sup>Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, June 10, 12, 1917, August 8, 21, September 5, 1918.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, March 18, 1917, October 2, November 20, 1918, January 2, 1919.

In Fort Wayne, however, it was the level of participation by women strikers and the support they received from fellow male unionists that seemed revolutionary. The unanimous backing of the Fort Wayne Federation of Labor for the GE strikers was also unprecedented. For two weeks, women joined the pickets around the plants and forfeited their regular pay. Because their union was too recently formed to have a strike benefit fund, funds were collected "to take care of the girls . . . really in need" from sales of cards printed with the words "I believe in industrial Democracy, and am helping the GE strikers." In early January, at a meeting of GE and Edison Lamp electrical workers, women were elected as union officers and as delegates to both the local trade council and an international convention. When the National War Labor Board settled the Erie strike by ordering strikers back to work, the Fort Wayne union voted unanimously to comply. Negotiations continued as union representatives demanded the reinstatement of the fired Erie employees, but female and male members of the local electrical and machinist unions were able to take pride in having made a stand for "a lofty purpose."<sup>49</sup>

In a less successful action, in December 1920 female workers at Wayne Knitting walked out in a company-wide strike to protest the elimination of pay bonuses and profit sharing (cuts that represented a 20-percent pay reduction). Among the 800 employees on strike were transfer "girls" and members of the winding, sewing, inspecting, and folding departments. Knitters with years of experience with the company, including members of the twenty-year Pioneer Club, led the strike. As weeks, then months, passed, some of the workers returned to their jobs. Nevertheless, many departments operated at only 50-percent capacity as strikers peacefully picketed outside through the winter. From the beginning, Thieme refused to negotiate with union leaders, driving a deep wedge between management and employees. Finally, in late April 1921, Thieme ended the strike by firing sixteen of the union leaders and ordering the other strikers back to work.

While little record has survived of the participation of the female strikers, their involvement in itself suggests a new consciousness. Unlike the nationally publicized strikes of 1912 and 1913 at textile and silk mills in the East (notably in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and Patterson, New Jersey), outside union organizers do not appear to have recruited female workers at the Wayne Knitting Mills. Moreover, since women had little prior involvement in local craft unions, joining the strike meant not only financial loss and social ostracism but also taking a new public role. One onlooker captured the emotions of the

<sup>49</sup>Philip J. Leahey, *Skilled Labor and the Rise of the Modern Corporation: The Case of the Electrical Industry*, *Labor History*, XXVII (Winter 1985/1986), 52. The Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette* reported that GE workers in Lynn, Massachusetts, and Petersborough, Ontario, also participated in the strike; Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, December 21, 22, 28, 1918, January 4, 1919.

walkout when he reported that "[a] good number of the girls cried and all the men were looking very solemn and sincere." "Girls" were probably among the 300 mill workers who showed solidarity with the fired leaders by refusing to comply with Thieme's order to return to work.<sup>50</sup>

During the war women factory workers gained support on the state level from labor groups, social reformers, and Governor James P. Goodrich. Indiana became the first of thirty-one states to direct the WIS to survey the hours and conditions of women in state factories as a first step in determining needs for new legislation. Investigators inspected 110 factories in eight cities and towns (not including Fort Wayne) where over 12,000 women were employed. Their report, *Labor Laws for Women in Industry in Indiana: Report of a Survey*, published in 1919, included twelve specific recommendations that included shortening the work day and strengthening sanitation and safety regulations. To implement these changes, WIS recommended the creation of a permanent Women's Division within the factory inspection department. While employers still opposed reforms that included an eight-hour day and a minimum wage, the General Assembly succeeded in forming a department for women and children, directed by a woman, within the state Industrial Board.<sup>51</sup>

At the end of the war, Madden emphasized the "prominent part" Fort Wayne factory women had played in the nation's war machine. In contrast, a lengthy article in the local newspaper entitled "Allen County's Record of Glory Gives Victory Thrill in Great World War" lacked any mention of women's work in local factories. Similarly, GE's official publication memorializing the contributions of its employees to the war effort contained no references to women. Despite these tendencies to restore women workers to prewar invisibility, for the first time many women in Fort Wayne had asserted their right to be acknowledged and treated fairly by employers.<sup>52</sup>

As Fort Wayne factory workers entered the 1920s, it could be argued that women had made some significant steps forward in the workplace. GE employees, along with approximately 45 percent of the industrial workforce in Fort Wayne, now worked a forty-eight hour work week. Federal regulations brought about by WIS had produced some changes in state labor laws. The influenza epidemic of 1918 and 1919 had prompted employers to reconsider the importance of safe, sanitary work environments.<sup>53</sup> Greater safety consciousness

<sup>50</sup>Lockridge gives management's account of the strike; Lockridge, *Theodore F. Thieme*, 153-62. Frequent articles appear in both Fort Wayne newspapers from December 1, 1920, to April 23, 1921.

<sup>51</sup>Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 337; *Woman at Work: An Autobiography of Mary Anderson as told to Mary N. Winslow* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1951), 112.

<sup>52</sup>Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, November 22, December 22, 1918; Fort Wayne *Works News* December 1924.

<sup>53</sup>Fort Wayne *Journal-Gazette*, October 22, 1918, June 20, 1919, April 16, 1920.

even led GE to invite visitors from the community to see what the company was doing to protect their employees. Many women factory workers had joined unions, and some had participated in strikes. Unions also gave a few women new opportunities for local and even national leadership roles. In a city known for its tradition-minded, compliant female workforce, more and more women were acting to change their roles in the workplace and supporting one another in unions.

There were still, however, many gains yet to be made. The state still did little to help working women. Indiana remained one of only six states that did not restrict women's daytime work hours. Despite a new state bureaucracy for standardizing working conditions, there were few legal guarantees of safety and sanitation. Many women, still considered short-term workers, were confined to monotonous, low-paying jobs. Decent, affordable housing for female workers also remained scarce.

On August 28, 1920, bells and whistles blew for ten minutes at every church and factory in Fort Wayne to celebrate the final ratification of the woman's suffrage bill. The promise of political power gave working-class women new hope for the future. Their confidence was further heightened when Agatha Diek, a former long-term employee of the Wayne Knitting Mills, was elected president of the Fort Wayne League of Women Voters and appointed to a legislative committee on women in industry committed to a shorter work day and a minimum wage.<sup>54</sup>

Fort Wayne's industrial "girls" seemed to be on the brink of claiming adult status and significant progress towards equality. For twenty years the city's business owners, with the support of the YWCA, had attempted to reconcile the economic needs of workers and employers with the conservative social expectations of the community. They offered young women a model of work that emphasized the temporary nature of employment; they also offered them living spaces and recreational activities which safeguarded their femininity. But the wartime demand for women's labor and WIS support for unions and better labor laws created new options for female factory workers. Some women chose this alternative model of employment offered by the unions and WIS, and they began to agitate for workplace rights, higher wages, and better jobs. The dilemma of Fort Wayne's factory girls, caught between these two models of personal and public life, was solved in part over the next decades by the growth of unions, better state labor laws, and the political gains created by women's suffrage. A fuller resolution, however, would await the arrival of broader social opportunities for women, both at work and at home, in Fort Wayne and across America.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, August 28, 1920, January 2, 6, 1921. Agatha Diek left the Knitting Mills in June 1918 to found her own garment company to manufacture women's work clothes; *ibid.*, June 30, 1918. For information about Diek's company and other Fort Wayne overall manufacturers see *ibid.*, May 2, 1920.