University of Wisconsin Eau Claire

Eau Claire’s Wartime Women

Senior Thesis

History 489

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Introduction

During the early twentieth century in the United States, gender roles were changing in employment and both inside and outside of the home. The military and industrial needs of the United States and Europe drew U.S. women into the working world, the mobilization of civilian resources called for by WWI were nowhere near as great at that of WWII. With the impact of WWII upon women’s work outside of the home lasting longer.

Much like WWI, WWII called for the massive mobilization of industrial resources in the United States. As American males left to fight in Europe and the Pacific, civilians were needed on the home front to take their places in American factories. Aided by changing views of femininity in the United States and women’s increasing desire to work outside of the home, the United States government appealed to patriotism and called women to the production lines. The draw of higher-paying jobs combined with a well-executed propaganda campaign allowed the government to lure significant numbers of women from their homes and into the workplace throughout the United States.

This paper explores WWII’s lasting impact on the women’s labor movement in Eau Claire, focusing on one of Eau Claire’s wartime factories, the Uniroyal Tire Company. An analysis of census data and labor relations from the era will place Eau Claire within broader scholarly debate regarding WWII’s significance in drawing women out of the home and into the market economy. It will show how WWII impacted women as wageworkers in the Eau Claire area during the 1940s and beyond, specifically looking at women’s employment at U.S. Rubber after WWII and how the women of U.S Rubber
and Uniroyal Tire may or may not reflect scholarly debate on WWII’s role in bringing women to work.

Current scholarly debate centers upon how significant WWII was in replacing women’s traditional roles as homemakers and whether their brief stint in the labor force did indeed have the lasting impact earlier scholars once thought. Since the 1960’s, the majority of researchers agree that WWII did in fact keep women in the labor force, promoting social, political, and cultural change in the United States. However, differing from scholarly work prior to the 1960s, scholars agree that WWII did not have the lasting effect once credited to the war. Scholars are asking: Once WWII soldiers returned home, did women also return from work outside of the home as they had following WWI? Would women be content to go back to their kitchens and resume their former way of life?

After WWI women were largely replaced as wage-earning laborers. Articles written as early as 1944 such as Mary Anderson’s *The Postwar Role of American Women*, were undoubtedly concerned with how American society would react when women were not ready to return to their earlier roles in the gendered division of labor. What if women were growing accustomed to earning a substantial amount of the family income? According to Anderson’s predictions, 18 million women would join the labor force, whereas only 3 million would return to their post war way of life.¹ Women were still underpaid but were earning more than ever. Additionally, the attraction of new job titles such as welder or mechanic, and the feeling of accomplishment that came with these jobs proved equally influential in keeping women in the workplace. Anderson

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¹ Mary Anderson, the Postwar Role of American Women, *the American Historical Review* 34 (1944): 237-244.
concludes women were looking at their jobs as an adventure and were not ready to return home.

Current scholarly work minimizes the effects of WWII in keeping women in spheres of work outside of the home. Scholars agree that propaganda used by the Government such as Rosie the Riveter was successful in luring women away from their traditional way of life and into the work place. However it could not keep them there. Instead, scholars find that women would have accepted the challenge without government campaigns and appeals to serve, and were drawn in simply by higher wages and a sense of adventure.

Through the use of census data researchers today are able strengthen their arguments with extensive use of quantitative analyses. Claudia Golden demonstrates in “The Role of World War II in the Rise of Women’s Employment” how researchers today use these figures to minimize the lasting impact WWII had on women’s employment. With the Palmer Study, done by the United States Air force in 1954, Golden illustrates this effect showing that fifty percent of women working in the 1940s were no longer a part of the labor force as early as 1954 and further more only twenty percent of women working in the 1940s joined the labor force in the war years.²

Other scholars such a Julia Kirk Blackwelder uses the Women’s Bureau describe the impact of WWII on the women’s workforce. “Even though the war failed to narrow the gender gap in wages and many working women looked forward to full-time

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homemaking at the war’s end, women’s war work changed the occupational structure permanently, and it changed women’s assessment of their own abilities.”³

Women rubber workers in Eau Claire and the Midwest clearly reflect the work of Golden and other scholars. The Uniroyal Tire Plant of Eau Claire followed many of the nation’s trends prior to WWII and through the 1960s to its closing in 1991. Converted to small ammunitions briefly during WWII, Uniroyal employed increasing numbers of women in order to meet military production needs during the 1940s and at one time made up sixty one percent of the labor force at the plant. But was women’s presence at Uniroyal sustained following the war?

The Gillette Tire Corporation: A Brief History

Raymond B. Gillette founded the Gillette Safety Tire Company, in 1916. The company produced its first tire in 1917, employing 250 laborers producing 200 inner tubes and tires daily. Within one year of producing its first tire, Gillette doubled their output of tires and tubes per day, and after purchasing the Chippewa Valley Rubber Company the name changed to the Gillette Tire Company. During WWII the United States Government seized control of the sale of rubber for civilian purposes. Military demand for ammunition surpassed the demand for rubber and the U.S. Rubber Company sold the Gillette factory to the United States Government. In a letter written to the plant manager H.O. Hutchens; Mr. Reynolds sympathizes with the decreased production of rubber.

I can appreciate conditions in your city as a result of the restriction on rubber, and we of the Rubber Company are vitally interested in doing all we can to help. I must emphasize, however, that we are limited by Government regulations and restrictions in awarding Business for materials for this plant...

The factory converted to production of small ammunition, .30 and .50 caliber tracer bullets, and remained under the supervision of the U.S. Rubber Company employees. The remaining tire production equipment were shipped to other tire plants throughout the United States and the factory converted into an ordnance plant, becoming a branch of the armed forces dealing with the supply and storage of weapons, ammunition and related

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5 Letter to H.O. Hutchens, Uniroyal, Inc Records. 1917-1990, Box 21-Folder 4, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.
equipment. At the time of the plant’s conversion, women composed 61 percent of the workforce, the highest percentage in the factory’s existence.

The high demand for military ammunition made for increased over-time worked and cut into workers’ vacation time. The plant was rewarded for its extra effort by the Army-Navy with an “E” for excellence in production. However, within one year of conversion, Eau Claire’s plant was needed once again to produce rubber. The military decided it would be valuable for the plant to produce rubber for amphibious vehicle research and other research for synthetic rubbers. In August of 1943 the Eau Claire plant was converted back to a rubber production plant, re-opening within five months of this conversion. With the conversion of the ordnance plant, U.S. Rubber Company repurchased the building for $1,025,000, and was one of the first companies in the United States to shift away from WWII war production.

The United States Rubber Co. started an expansion program to increase the plant’s synthetic rubber production. The plant expansion increased employment from pre-war levels, and increased production to over 20,000 tires per day.

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6 Oxford English Dictionary  
7 During the transition of the Eau Claire plant there were approximately 2,100 workers temporarily laid off. It was not until August 17th, 1942 that the new ordnance plant was opened, employing up to 6,200 at its peak, representing about seventy percent of the plant’s original workforce. (on-line finding aid)  
The increase of production caused the U.S. Rubber Co. to expand once again and build a 70,000-foot storage warehouse. With the plant’s expansion and upgrades it was the fifth largest tire factory in the United States and touted by some as the world’s most modern plant.⁹ (See Figure One)

Employment at the plant fluctuated with consumer demands. Production of tubeless tires began circulation in 1954 and caused the layoff of 250 workers. Between 1948 and 1960 layoffs occurred steadily downsizing the number of workers but increasing efficiency. In 1965 U.S. Rubber expanded once again to meet the needs of the changing market making the Eau Claire plant the third largest tire plant in the U.S. Production was focused on large tires used for mining and farming. (Figures 2 and 3)

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⁹ ibid.
Some of the tires stood ten feet tall and weighed 5,600 pounds. It was not until 1967 that the U.S. Rubber Co. unified its plants changing the name of the plant to Uniroyal, Inc.¹⁰

Through the 1970s and into the 1990s the plant continued to change in response to consumer needs. Under the pressure of foreign tire producers, the plant began to focus on producing steel-belted car tires instead of tires for farm equipment. Michelin Tire, a French based company, purchased Uniroyal Inc., to increase its output of high quality replacement tires. Within one year of its purchase the Eau Claire plant was closed, selling all of its equipment to foreign suppliers.¹¹

Figure 2 Left, Figure 3 Right. Heavy service tires produced by U.S. Rubber Co. after the conversion back to a tire factory, 1945. Images from Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, University of Eau Claire, Box 82, Folder 10, Uniroyal Collection.

¹⁰ ibid.
¹¹ ibid.
The War Manpower Commission

The War Manpower Commission was established April 18, 1942 and consisted of twelve regions. Region VI, was made up of Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin. In 1940 the region’s population was 15,500,500 resulting in one-eighth of the nation’s total population, a population migration to the west coast to work in other booming factories and joining the service, the population declined by a 500,000. Although the population shifted slightly, twenty three billion war contracts had been served by the Government to the region, making up eleven percent of the nation’s total war supply contracts.\textsuperscript{12} The commission existed “To promote the most effective mobilization and utilization of the national manpower and to eliminate, so far as possible, waste of manpower due to disruptive recruitment and undue migration of workers\textsuperscript{**}(President’s Executive Order, December 5, 1942.).”\textsuperscript{13}

In 1942 the United States Government thought it was necessary to transform the Eau Claire plant into an ordnance plant. Various newsletters from the Wisconsin Manufacturers’ Association discuss the importance of locating factories throughout Wisconsin that would be able to fit the needs of the Government wartime production. In a newsletter to the members of the Association clearly states what the commission is looking for, “We are primarily interested in available sources to build production tools used for the manufacture of interchangeable parts of forgings and casting, of aluminum

\textsuperscript{12} War Manpower Commission Region VI, To: All Members of Regional and Area Management–Labor Committees. From W.H. Spencer, September 12\textsuperscript{th} 1944, Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

\textsuperscript{13} Objective of War Manpower Commission, Uniroyal, Inc. 1917-1991,Box 25, Folder 11, Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.
and alloy steel." Additionally, the commission was looking for anything that would help in the production of machining.

When companies shifted from peacetime to wartime production most companies were looking for engineers to help set up their factories and maintain the new production lines. Numerous letters to different factories were written as the transition took place with many workers transferred to aid in the process. To encourage these transfers, advertising and propaganda were everywhere, including newsletters published by The War Production Board. Much advertising was published for salvaged goods throughout Northern Wisconsin and Minnesota calling for companies to part with old equipment in order to make new. Job postings flooded the newsletters for subcontractors, and engineers. There was also a great concern among leaders of the U.S. Rubber Co. that the Selective Service Act would conflict with the availability and employment of their engineers, and appeals were being sought out on the local level to override the act.

(a) This Act may be cited as the “Military Selective Service Act”.
(b) The Congress declares that an adequate armed strength must be achieved and maintained to insure the security of this Nation.
(c) The Congress further declares that in a free society the obligations and privileges of serving in the armed forces and the reserve components thereof should be shared generally, in accordance with a system of selection which is fair and just, and which is consistent with the maintenance of an effective national economy.  

14 Box 25-Folder 7, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

An important section of the act dictates, “... any commission needed to fulfill research
needed in order to provide the best technological support and scientific support needed to
protect national security” should be considered. Clearly, there was a fear of the military’s
Selective Service Act throughout U.S. Rubber’s top ranking management, with managers
fearing they would lose their top engineers necessary to transform their production and
complete Government contracts.

In 1942 there was a massive campaign for employment with no mention of
women joining the labor force and more importantly the war effort. There was no
mention in any of the War Production Board’s newsletters of women joining the effort to
help mass produce military items that were so desperately needed. Campaign letters were
focused on men as wage laborers and had little or no mention of women until 1944 when
many of the men had gone to fight the war.

War production commissions mainly focused on gathering the proper equipment
needed to supply the U.S. government with enough materials to create a surplus of
wartime equipment. Commissions were focused on finding engineers who would be able
to manufacture equipment and train employees who would be operating the machines.
There is no mention of women joining the ranks as wage earners and running the
equipment on a daily basis.

In a letter from W.H. Spencer, a regional director of the War Manpower
Commission Region VI, Spencer explains the War Productions and Manpower Programs
to members of Area-Management-Labor Committees. Spencer discusses the
accomplishments of the Commission. Spencer acknowledges that women had helped fill
the void in the region and were key components to fulfill the needs of the military. Prior
to 1944 in Eau Claire there seemed to be a steady supply of male labor in the city with no mention of shortages of men at anytime documented in the letters from the WMC. However, in the letter to region VI, W.H. Spencer writes with a sense of urgency to fulfill the vacant spots in the factories with solid, long-term employees. Spencer discusses two basic problems: “the stabilization of our working force in war industries and (2) the recruitment of the new workers required to replace turnover and increase employment levels.”

Spencer and the War Manpower’s Commission goal was the retention of workers, meaning not to have a high yield of employee turnover. According to Spencer, new hire rates were equal to termination rates, making for a high employee turnover. Under a subheading of his letter “Sources of Recruitment of Needed Workers,” he acknowledges, “during the past year many women left their employment to returns to their household duties. These as well as other women must be recruited back.”

Exactly one week later local employment numbers were released at the La Crosse-Eau Claire-Wausau-Rhinelander-Wisconsin Rapids Labor Management Meeting. The meeting focused on WMC’s program on the local level to discuss potential changes needed at the local level to increase the number of employees for the area. The temporary solution explored all over the U.S. during this time, was the use of farmers during the fallow season, temporarily solving the problem. As of January 1st 1945 the area anticipated a shortage of 800 male laborers in the area, excluding the logging and

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16 W.H. Spencer, War Manpower Commission, letter to members of Area Management-Labor-Committees, Box 25, Folder 11, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire Wisconsin.

17 W.H. Spencer letter War Manpower Commission, page 5, December 13th 1944, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire Wisconsin.
lumber industry. To describe the labor problem the WMC categorized and prioritized different types of work. During wartime, work included “must” jobs, which accounted for about 28 percent of the wartime production. “Must” jobs were those directly connected with military strategic operations and were classified as “supercritical.” The WMC’s aim was to shift workers from non-essential jobs to essential war-time jobs to help gain ground on programs that were running behind, roughly by forty percent.

Another topic discussed at the meeting was the shortage of women in the labor force. “The apparent loss of womanpower, caused by women leaving the industry, and the inability to persuade more women into the industry, is reflected on war production and sets itself up as a problem of recruitment and utilization.” The committee reflects on what could be done in order to regain the women they lost in the industry. They believed that the patriotism was “wearing thin” and other arrangements must be made in order to regain crucial laborers, such as priority referral of women. At this time though, priority referral of women had not been done in the region, meaning the region has not focused entirely on the recruitment of women in the area. Eau Claire’s tire factory was not alone in seeing women diminish as patriotic slogans wore thin on its workers. Akron Ohio’s tire plant had a steady decline of women workers. According to Kathlene Endre’s book *Rosie the Rubber Worker* women were more than eager to return to their homes, and homemaking.

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18 Labor Management Committee Meeting, December, 22nd 1945, Box 25, Folder 11, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire Wisconsin.
19 Spencer Letter, Box 25-Folder 11, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.
20 Meeting held at the elks club, Dec. 22nd 1945, Labor Management Committee, Box 25-Folder 11, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.
The Eau Claire ordnance plant expected to peak its employment around May 1, 1945. There were approximately 3,953 workers employed at the plant, 2,874 male and 1,079 female. The WMC approved the number for the ordnance plant to reach its ceiling for employment earlier that year, a number set in relation to other production facilities in the area. The facility could operate at 6,200, however the WMC decided to operate at only half of its capacity.

The WMC briefly mentions recruiting women back into the labor force, however, a high demand for male workers ages of 18 to 44 outnumbered women actually being recruited. The focus of the Commission was to ensure that essential wartime factories were raising their ceiling for workers and maximizing production. The focus on war production shifted in 1944 to larger “heavy equipment” such as tanks and heavy artillery, therefore putting women once again into the background of the labor force. Letters to the local commissions plead with the non-essential factories to spare male workers to the essential factories because they are needed for the heavy manual labor.
Workers Needed

Region VI of the Manpower Commission made up one eighth of the nation’s population, however, there was still a large demand for workers both female and male. The WMC assumed U.S. Rubber Co. would need to hire 1,000 men to reach the factory’s peak performance, forecasting that production would peak some time around May 1, 1945. The WMC called for, “who can be of the unskilled but trainable type of worker to perform heavy manual labor.”²¹ The rest of the telegram states that other factories in the area, such as the Eau Claire Electric Company, would be able to sacrifice many of its employees thus increasing the number of workers that the Rubber Co. could have during the war as mandated by the WMC.

The WMC created an Adequacy of Labor Supply In Important Labor Market Areas, a document defining cities of a population over 25,000 and creating a ceiling of work for the entire nation. The four classifications follow guidelines according to the local WMC reports sent to the national level; including places of essential production and low ceilings that are not producing enough. Eau Claire ranked as a group three, being an “Area in which labor supply substantially balances demand for essential production or a moderate labor surplus currently exists or is anticipated.”²²

According to the Labor-Demand-Supply-Relationship, data for Eau Claire was divided up into the months of May, July, and September. Eau Claire typically had a surplus of workers for the region. The data was taken from the War Rations Book II of

²¹ Telegram to Howard Hutchins from the WMC, Dec. 8th 1945, Box 25-Folder 11, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

²² Division of Program Requirements, Oct. 3rd 1944, Box 25-Folder 11, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.
registrations. “The breakdown for urban, rural non-farm and farm population as of April 1943 follows the proportions found in the April 1940 Census.”

The demand for labor steadily grew for the region in 1944 and reached its peak in 1945. Although the working population of Eau Claire was great enough to meet production needs, the WMC still lagged in war production due to the plants’ slow rate of converting civilian factories into wartime factories, causing the region to fall seven to eight months behind coastal cities and Minneapolis. Although Minneapolis was not in Eau Claire and Chicago’s region, according to Elizabeth Faue’s work in *Community of Suffering and Struggle* the WMC recognized the importance of female laborers in the region. As early as 1943 factories were focusing on women and minorities to fill the vacancies in the production lines, even in exclusively male shops, “women constitute the greatest reservoir of manpower and . . . this reservoir has not been tapped yet.”

Region VI factories faced a problem of filling positions to reach their full potential arguing that the primary surplus of women workers were married and could not transfer to the factories that needed them the most. According to the commission, by July first 1945, the shortage would reach an astounding 130,000. Although the region was short of labor, the firms were able to raise employment rates by about one fifth. The number of workingwomen increased from 587,000 to 605,000, rising three percent. Overall the region’s numbers were still down by 121,600, were first presented to the WMC from the factories.

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23 Supply Relationship, Box 25-Folder11, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.


25 Letter To: All Members to Regional and Area Management-Labor Committees, From W.H. Spencer, Box 25-Folder 11, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.
finishing almost last and was short on labor, of 66,000, 34,000 were women and 32,000 were men. There was no other mention of any other region in the United States where the demand for female labor was higher than male labor.
“Bullets and Butter”

“Manning the Production Beachheads” by Charles M. Hay the Deputy Chairman and Executive Director of the WMC, released a brochure of the Management-Labor Committee of its accomplishments. According to Hay,

The men who have been taken to fight have been replaced by women, three and a half million above normally employed in peacetime, by two million considered unemployable by peacetime standards and between four and five million who have been unemployed, part-time workers, housewives and others.  

The women who filled the emptiness of the factories helped create record productions creating nearly an eighty seven percent increase in war goods production worth over eighty seven billion dollars. Although the numbers were great Hay concludes the WMC is facing a crisis. He fears civilians have lost their sense of urgency and our country was falling behind. According to many of the scholars the nation was losing its sense of urgency. There was not enough production across the nation, leaving the nation in a crisis if the manpower problem is not solved.

Evidence from the War Manpower Commission suggests that labor was not as readily available as they anticipated prior to the recruitment of wartime laborers, at least for section VI. The West and East coast adapted to the factory changes rapidly as the Midwest struggled to keep up. With the exception of Faue, many researchers may have focused on the booming industries mainly on the two coasts. For example, Shema Berger Gluck focuses her argument on California’s Douglas Aircraft using mainly oral histories to conclude that many of the women went home after the war because of being laid off by

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26 Manning the Production Beachheads, Charles M. Hay, Box 25-Folder 11, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.
the company. Furthermore women in the Midwest are following the newest theories of research. Although there were record breaking numbers there were still not enough people working, to create a surplus of what was needed, which was larger artillery and heavy duty battle equipment.
The Union

Prior to WWII women’s role in the labor unions were minimal, however, during WWII the women of America were seeking equal rights in the workforce. Workers were asked to work longer shifts and skip their earned vacation periods. The Eau Claire rubber workers were forced numerous times throughout the factory’s history to be laid off.

Women throughout the entire United States faced challenges not only from their employers but also from their unions. According to Julia Blackwelder women’s participation in the labor unions jumped from 800,000 to more than 3,000,000 because many women were now working in industrial factories formerly where men traditionally stood. Although there was a dramatic rise in women’s participation in the unions it did not come without considerable challenges. The industry’s realization for the need of female workers paved the way for their permanent place in the work force. Such improvements were childcare which were able to get the “stay at home moms” out of the house and into the factories. Prior to WWII there were not many childcare services that were provided by employers. Because childcare was being offered for the first time women were able to leave their home and their children to become a wage earner.

Many Unions feared to let women join because they did not want women to permanently replace men, although men still remained on the privileged end of the pay scale. The United Rubber Workers of America, Local No. 19 was the representative union for the Eau Claire workers. The union is responsible for the hours of work, rates of pay and working conditions. Seniority was one of the top priorities of the employees and

the union, meaning if layoffs were going to happen it would be the newly employed sent home. Prior to WWII women workers were not allowed to work night shifts by law according to an interview with Sanford Kruger a retired plant manager.28

The declaration made by the Local No. 19 union emphasizes the rates of pay. Women were being underpaid during the time period, however because of the labor movement employers, unions, and the government needed to do something to keep the women in the factories, so they implemented the “equal work for equal pay” and eventually became law in the 1960s.

The Company agrees that rates of pay for female employees will be based upon the established rates for the work performed, where such work is identical with, or substantially the same as that performed by men on the same operations, providing the quality and quantity of work are comparable, and lower standards are not established for women. All operations upon which female employees have worked or are working will be considered as female jobs but in the future change of sex on any job shall be negotiated by the Union and the company before such changes are made effective. 29

Continuing with the previous statement was list of requests made by the employees of the United States Rubber Workers to raise their wages in 1943. At the time rate of pay was broken down into male and female. According to the document, male workers earn on average seventy cents higher pay for the exact same job title. Equal to 1,426 dollars on average earned per year higher for males than females who perform the same job. The goal of the document was to persuade the U.S. Rubber Company to raise the rate of pay for wage earning women by roughly forty nine to fifty two cents per hour. With equal pay many women would want to stay in the workforce even after the war.

29 Box 29, Folder 1, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.
Women were finally gaining rights in the workforce with the unions backing them. There were no longer laws that women could work during the night, and they were finally getting closer to earning their deserved equal pay. Many women chose to work for economic gain and not just for “pin” money or fun money, as was thought at the time. It was an economic necessity for most families when the war was over. According to Mary Frank Fox, “Economic necessity is a powerful motive that accounts for the continued participation of women in the work force over time.”

Without the help of labor unions and the demand for equal pay there would not have been such a great revival of women workers during the war. The appeal of patriotism grew thin as many women were ready to return to their homes. Without groups such as the Local No. 19 it could have been a greater challenge to get women to permanently stay in the workforce for an extended period of time.

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The Royaleers Club

What are the Royaleers? In March 1948, a group of salaried girls from the Gillette Tire Plant decided they wanted to get better acquainted through forming a social group. The goal of the Royaleers was to provide social events to become, “better acquainted through various social events and carry on activities of a charitable nature.” Originally there were going to be two different girls clubs, one being a social club and the other a glee club forming at the factory. However, after some deliberation they decided there would be only one club starting at the factory, the social club. From the social club, members would be able to create their own glee club. In the by-laws the two different clubs and their functions are defined. First the Royaleers Club, “The purpose of the organization shall be to promote friendship and understanding among office employees of the Gillette Tire Plant through social and welfare activities.” The glee club is a club that sings songs and performs at the social events put on by the Royaleers. Any salaried paid woman would be able to join the club. The notion of the club started in 1948, when a number of women began to take an interest in starting a girls’ club or a glee club. In a letter from W.C. Proctor to J.E. Smith of Detroit.

You, as well as others, have mentioned to me several times the success which your Girls’ Club has experienced in Detroit. Would you please have someone give me the details of this club, as to its organization, purpose, etc. If a copy of

31 Box 70-Folder 1, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.
32 Royaleer By-Laws, Box 70-Folder 5, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.
the by-laws is available, please send one, as the girls believe they would like to pattern their organization after yours.\textsuperscript{33}

The Detroit plant had up to 400 hundred members in 1948 when the Eau Claire women were planning their own club. The United States Rubber Company of Detroit sent a detailed by-law of their glee clubs’ organization. Newsletters titled the “The Royaleers Round Up” released monthly or bi-monthly through out the year and based on the “Hi-Lites” that were done by Detroit’s organization. Sections of the Roundup included, comings and goings, fashion flashes, vital statistics and the Wailing Wall. The staff for the newsletters was made up entirely of women who worked for the United States Rubber Company. On April of 1948 the first meeting of the Royaleers Club took place in Eau Claire, with 40 members present.

\begin{description}
\item[Figure 3.] Royaleers Fashion Show, 1948. Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, University of Eau Claire, Box 70, Folder 1, Uniroyal Collection.
\end{description}

\textsuperscript{33} Letter from W.C. Proctor to J.E. Lynch, February 20th, 1948. Box 70-Folder 1, Eau Claire Area Research Center, Special Collections, McIntyre Library, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.
In 1948 there were more than enough women working in the factory to create a club consisting of forty members, by October of 1949 the club's membership increased to 100 members. Members of the club could only join once a year and after they paid the dues to the club. In 1990 there were only a handful of women still involved with the Royaleers, in one of their final meetings discussion of disbanding were found in the meeting notes. The club’s records and secretary files trace from 1948 to 1990, before the plant closed in 1991.

The Royaleers represented a major part of the female presence in the traditionally male environment factory work. It was not until 1948 that the Royaleers formed, however, equally important is U.S. Rubber Co. of Detroit’s own women’s group with numbers reaching as high as 400. Women’s clubs played a significant role, creating social bonds throughout the entire factory and the community. Prior to WWII nearly half of the women in the labor force were young and single. It was not until WWII that married mothers joined the workforce temporarily or permanently.

Conclusion

During the early twentieth century in the United States, gender roles were changing in employment and both inside and outside of the home. The military needs of the United States Government and a well-executed propaganda campaign were able to alter gender roles permanently in the United States. Changing views of femininity and an increase in wages drew women to the assembly line. Although many women would return home after the war, many intended to keep working. “The Women’s Bureau had completed a more extensive survey of working women from 1944 through 1945, it found that, among women in ten different war production areas, 75 percent intended to keep working after the war.”

The debate among scholars today is focused on how great of an impact WWII had on influencing women to join the labor force and leaving their traditional roles behind. The majority of the research since the 1960’s and presently minimizes the impact that WWII had on women permanently joining the labor force. Their arguments are focused on what happened after the soldiers returned home and needed to work. Many conclude that women would have joined the labor force regardless of WWII. Indeed many women did return home but it was not permanent. Trends show a steady increase of married women into the workforce staring in the 1940s. Many of the women were making large economic gains that were not open to them before and services such as daycare provided mothers with an option to remain a wage-earning mother.

Documents from the WMC demonstrate the national trend for the need of female workers. Eau Claire’s Uniroyal did not have major issues finding employees to reach the

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ceiling of workers needed for maximum output. Although, the Midwest with the exception of Minneapolis, did in fact lag severely behind the major cities on both coasts, the Midwest and Chicago was able to produce a surplus of women workers. Research does not indicate a surplus of women on either coast.

Women in Eau Claire did in fact join the ranks as wage earners in the factory taking on jobs that were once held by men. When Sanford Kruger a retired plant manager was asked if women did have the same jobs as men he replied “Oh yeah. Many of them did the same jobs.”

Women were key players in the success of the Uniroyal tire factory making up nearly sixty one percent of the factories employees at one point during the war. Social clubs were formed at Uniroyal such as the Royaleers, which were made up entirely of women. The Royaleers lasted until the factory closed clearly demonstrating women were sill part of the workforce in the factory even when the war ended.

Melba Bauer worked for Uniroyal during and after WWII. When asked if many of the women left the plant her response was, “not too many.” Although the trends of workers in the Midwest did not follow the trends of the nation there is no doubt that the women of the Midwest and Eau Claire answered the call and did not back down to the challenge brought forth.

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Works Cited

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


