

Elyria-Lorain Development

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Elyria and Lorain were dramatically transformed between 1890 and 1910. Both entered the 1890's as small, predominantly, rural villages populated by American born immigrants of English and German ancestry who had immigrated into the area from New England, New York State, and Pennsylvania. Both entered the second decade of the twentieth century as industrial cities with populations swelled by thousands of foreign-born immigrants from eastern and southern Europe and Russia.

Similarly, for both communities the transformation was in large part due to the energy and vision of a single individual. In Elyria he was home-grown; Arthur L. Garford was born, raised and educated in Elyria. In Lorain he was an outsider; Tom L. Johnson had been born in Kentucky, came to Cleveland for its opportunities in street railways, and would have a successful business and political career.

The population in Elyria increased by 150% between 1890 and 1910 (5,611 to 14,825). It had in 1890 seven manufacturing concerns employing approximately 1000 people, by 1910 the city boasted twenty-six manufacturers employing over 4,700 people. Products included; children's vehicles, invalid chairs, golf balls and equipment, finished machine parts, bicycles and bicycle parts, automobiles and auto parts, trucks, steel tubing, refined glycerine, lace, and telephone and phonograph components. Arthur L. Garford founded, was a partner in the founding of, or a major investor in, eleven of the twenty-six companies listed in 1910. His Garford Manufacturing Company was at the time one of the nation's largest suppliers of chassis, and other parts, for the automobile industry.

In the same period Lorain's population grew by 230% (4,863 to 16,028). The number of manufacturers grew from four to eight with the work force increasing from approximately 700 to 7,200. Tom Johnson's, Johnson Steel Rail Company (in 1898 it became the Lorain Steel Mill, a subsidiary of the Federal Steel Company; and in 1900 it became part of United States Steel, and in 1904 was renamed the National Tube Company in) was the largest employer with over 5000 employees. Johnson's company, and its subsidiaries, also built housing for mill employees, a YMCA for the community, donated 75 acres of land for a park, and developed a street railway connecting Lorain with Cleveland and Elyria. In addition to steel rails and pipe, other products made by Lorain companies included ships, steam shovels, stoves, brass plumbing hardware, and wood products.

The population of both communities in this period also became more diverse. Johnson's steel mill needed a large work force and its job opportunities and relatively good pay attracted many foreign-born immigrants to Lorain. These new residents were; Polish, Bohemian, Jew, Slovakian, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Rusin (Ruthenian), Russian (Carpatho-Russian), Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Rumanian, Greek, Italian, with some Lebanese and Syrian too. Furthermore, because the company was building housing for these new workers, and its policies mandated separate areas for housing the foreign-born the American-born work force, there resulted in the South Lorain neighborhood an "American district" and a "foreign district." In addition, not everyone who immigrated into the area in this period was able to find work at the steel mill so many of the foreign-born immigrants settled in other communities, finding work at other area industries. Many in this latter group settled in Elyria, and by 1910 Elyria had significant numbers of people from Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland, thus giving it an international flavor as well.