

This Train Is Bound for Glory The Story of America's Chapel Cars

CHAPTER 13



Daytonians, perhaps including owners, employers and employees, gaze at the flooded buildings of the Barney & Smith Car Company, builder of the chapel cars. After the flood and increasing economic problems, the company was never able to recover. (Special Collections and Archives. Paul Laurence Dunbar Library. Wright State University. Dayton, Ohio)

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In Memory of my husband and co-author
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CHAPTER 14

Barney & Smith, the Kossuth Colony, and The Flood of 1913



The surging waters of the Mad River devastated the city of Dayton, as well as the Barney & Smith Car Company. The great flood of 1913 left many citizens dead and more without homes or jobs. (Special Collections and Archives, Paul Laurence Dunbar Library, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio)

After struggling through years of financial troubles resulting from the panic of 1893 and the reluctance to give up the construction of their fine wooden cars, the Barney & Smith Car Company finally went to steel production in 1905. Michael W. Williams writes in *TIMELINE*, a publication of the Ohio Historical Society, October 1991, that Barney President Arthur M. Kittredge insisted the public would never favor all-steel cars over the woodworker's art. The decision to delay conversion of passenger cars to steel would eventually be a fatal mistake by the Barney management.¹

The fact soon became obvious—they no longer needed or could afford all those skilled workers who had labored to make the wooden Baptist cars beauti-

¹ Bruce W. Ronald and Virginia Ronald, *Dayton: The Gem City* (Tulsa: Continental Heritage Press, Inc., 1981), 59.

ful. In order to insure cheaper labor for the production of steel cars, Barney & Smith engaged J. B. Moskowitz. He was a labor contractor who had created a Hungarian colony around the Malleable Iron Works on Dayton's west side and another colony in Pennsylvania. They wanted him to create a workers' colony for



them, like the one George M. Pullman had built at Pullman, Illinois. Only this colony would be different. The Barney employees would own their own homes and would receive credit at the company store even during layoffs, whereas the Pullman colony employees had to rent their houses at high prices even when laid off.

Since he would be the one to receive the profits from colony businesses, not the Barney management, Moskowitz purchased the land and built a four-square block area now known as North Dayton—bounded by Notre Dame and Mack Avenues and Baltimore Street. Within those boundaries he erected forty doubles with five rooms to a side for eight hundred dollars each. He named the colony “Kossuth,” in honor of a Hungarian hero.

Two hundred men could sit and drink at the Kossuth clubhouse bar Moskowitz built for the workers, the biggest bar in Dayton. A bank; a travel agency, so that colony residents could bring relatives over from Hungary; and a massive grocery and general store were also in the building. The company gave the employees brass script to make their purchases in the company store, and they were not permitted to buy outside the company store. For a fifty-five-hour week, Barney & Smith paid the Hungarian workers about nine dollars, slightly less than the U. S. average, but room, board and laundry were only eight to ten dollars monthly.²

² Elizabeth M. Zimmerman, Dayton (Ohio) *Daily News*, Sunday, March 31, 1974, 15.

In spite of the “I owe my soul to the company store” concept, life in the colony flourished. For these immigrants, life had probably never been better. Families were close-knit, frugal, and continued to observe their native customs and prepare their traditional foods. The entire community participated in the lavish and ritualistic Christmas, Easter, and wedding celebrations. Church services for the predominantly Roman Catholic inhabitants were held in one of the houses set aside for that purpose² until a Roman Catholic Church was built.³

“Each day the workers walked a mile to and from the colony and the car works. One man who operated a clothing store in North Dayton said “the men looked like a flock of geese trailing by my store in the evening.”

Not everyone in Dayton thought the Kossuth Colony was a good idea. The editor of the Dayton paper launched a vigorous denunciation of the colony and of Jacob D. Moskowitz. Its chief accusation was that the colony, with its high fence that Moskowitz had built around it, was contrary to the ideals of America. The furor created by the *News* was so great that the State send a Labor Investigator down from Columbus, Ohio, to inspect the colony. Probably to the dismay of the newspaper, the investigator cleared Mr. Moskowitz of the charges and he found no infraction of labor laws.⁴



Life had never been better for the Hungarian immigrants in their company homes—forty doubles with five rooms—that Moskowitz built and sold for \$800 each, paid on credit at the company store. (Norman Thomas Taylor Collection)

³ Stanley R. Cichanowicz, “The Kossuth Colony and Jacob B. Moskowitz-An Experiment in the Settlement of Hungarian Immigrants in Dayton, Ohio,” an unpublished thesis for the University of Dayton, December 3, 1963, 26, Dayton Public Library, Dayton, Ohio.

⁴ Michael W. Williams, “The Barney & Smith Car Company,” *TIMELINE* (Ohio Historical Society, 1991), 25.

E. J. Barney Lost “just about everything” in the 1913 Flood

In 1912 the Kossuth Colony workers built Catholic Church Extension Society’s chapel car *St. Peter*, the first steel chapel car constructed by the Barney and Smith Car Works. By the time the company finally produced its first steel passenger car in 1905, it was suffering through its third straight year of losses. By 1912, the company showed a modest profit, and 1913 began as an even more promising year—until March 25 and the Great Flood of Dayton.

. . . bells rang and whistles blew, utterly failing to rouse people to a sense of their danger; . . . a brown wave of water, six feet high, rolled its foaming crest westward on the streets and meeting at each corner a similar wave from the north, piled the water into a raging torrent which filled the streets with foam and wreckage . . . and women who had sipped their breakfast coffee in serene ignorance that anything more momentous than ironing day was ahead of them found themselves a few hours later, feeding half-drowned babies or identifying bodies brought in by rescue corps.⁵



The surging waters of the Mad River obliterated restraining levees and poured into the Barney & Smith Car Works, inundating the plant under 14 feet of water. Precious hoards of rare wood for car interiors were swept away. Pieces of rare teak and mahogany were fished out of the water as far downstream as New Orleans.⁶

Allan W. Eckert’s account of the flood, *A Time of Terror*, illustrates in a touching way, the personal and corporate losses suffered by E. J. Barney, the Baptist layman who had done so much to further the cause of rail evangelism in the west by his support of the chapel cars, his fine construction and his charitable discounts.

The flood caused more than a million dollars worth of damage to the car works, dealing the already fragile company a blow from which it would never recover. (Special Collections and Archives, Paul Laurence Dunbar Library, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio)

March 30, 11 a.m. - The relief line stretched for blocks along K Street to the

⁵ Michael W. Williams, 25.

⁶ Allan W. Eckert, *A Time of Terror* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 324-325.

side door of the National Cash Register Company. A gangly, scraggly-whiskered laborer with rotten teeth and sour breath scratched himself under the arm of his filthy coveralls and complained bitterly to the man behind him in line.

"It's them damn' millionaires caused all this!" he said passionately. "They got all the money an' could' a prevented this from happenin', but they ain't about to give up none of that money."

"That so?" asked the other man, a short, rather bland-looking older individual. He, too, wore coveralls of the type given out at NCR.

"Hell, yes, it's so! You k'n bet you won't find them lousy buggers wantin' food or clothes or losing anything they got. No siree! By God, it's them millionaires. They'll make a fortune on this flood an' it'll be at our expense."

They reached the head of the line, each receiving three small loaves of bread and a sack of potatoes . . . The whiskered man slapped his companion on the shoulder and grinned. "Ummm, thought I'd never see fresh bread again. Looks like you could use a little, too."

"I have been a little hungry," the other admitted. "Your home is in pretty good shape?"

"Oh, yeah, water dint even touch it. We made out pretty good, 'cept we ain't been able to get no bread nowhere till now. You lose much in the flood?"

"Yes." the older man said softly, 'just about everything."

". . .Mebbe I'll see you again. My name's Roal Rupert. What's yours?"

"Barney. Eugene J. Barney," the older man said simply, turning away.⁷

Oak and mahogany from the production of Barney & Smith's carefully crafted private wooden interiors floated, along with their future, down the river toward New Orleans. That high wooden wall around the Kossuth Colony, which was considered so un-American, was torn down to make rafts to rescue victims of the raging waters of the Miami and Mad. It would never be built up again.

The company would rise again, to build two more chapel cars—great arks, not of gopher wood covered inside and out with pitch, as Noah was instructed (Genesis 6:14) but made of steel and great interior panels of polished mahogany and oak-Catholic Church Extension Society *St. Paul* and American Baptist Publication Society *Grace*.

⁷ Allan W. Eckert, *A Time of Terror* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1965), 324-325.