WHICH WAY EJ?: IN SEARCH OF A NEW CREATION

JOHN L. TOPOLEWSKI

For a period of three years (1985-1988), I was privileged to be appointed as the pastor of the Sarah Jane Johnson Memorial United Methodist Church in Johnson City, NY. Located in an area known as the Southern Tier, Johnson City and its historic contiguous neighbors, Binghamton and Endicott, are located just north of the Pennsylvania border about three and one-half hours' drive northwest of New York City. The church, like the community of which it is a part, as well as many of its supportive institutions, is the direct legacy of the Johnson family and the Endicott-Johnson Shoe Corporation (hereafter, EJ), which for many decades was the area's primary employer and benefactor.

The corporation, larger community, the church, and the Johnson family have held my interest and teased my imagination over the years, for as pastor in Johnson City and later in Vestal (a more recent suburban addition to the area), I have worked with and among former EJ employees and their children. Both the corporation and the family, with their experiment in “Industrial Democracy,” are, for many, if not most, remembered with both appreciation and affection.

In this essay it is my intention to share a brief history of Sarah Jane Johnson Memorial Church, the Johnson family, the Endicott-Johnson Shoe Corporation, with special focus on its personnel policies and community spirit and their parallel development with the Social Creed of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Part of the oral history of this area is that when many eastern and southern Europeans arrived in this country and disembarked at New York harbor, they passed through immigration, and as they had been instructed, asked, “Which way, EJ?” Soon, first by ferry across the Hudson River, then by train, they were transported to the Triple Cities, where they found ready employment in the shoe industry.

“Which Way EJ?” Where have you come from, where have you been, and what did you offer?

I

The history of the Sarah Jane Johnson Memorial United Methodist Church of Johnson City has its roots, or perhaps more appropriately its feet, in the development of the local shoe industry. Their histories and growth are parallel. At its inception, the church was located in an area known as Lestershire, named after G. Harry Lester, shoe manufacturer and financial ward of Henry B. Endicott, which was also the location of a new shoe fac-
tory some four hundred feet long, fifty feet deep, and four stories high, the Pioneer.¹ The community was little more than the factory and a number of homes and farm houses located nearly a mile beyond the western border of Binghamton, on the northern side of the Susquehanna river.

The Methodist Society was chartered on January 31, 1889² (less than a year following the building of the Pioneer³), under the corporate title of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Lestershire. Among the names of its seven original trustees, those of George F. Johnson and his brother Charles F. Johnson are most prominent. Fifteen months later, at the dawn of a new Annual Conference year, “on April 20 [1890] the first service was held in the packing room of the Lestershire Boot and Shoe Factory, the second at the house of G. F. Johnson, and the third in a storehouse of the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western Railroad.”⁴ Between weeks three and four, a temporary building was erected and immediately put into service. Following worship in this new structure, on May 11, the Society was organized with a membership of ten.⁵ For the first full Conference year of its life, 1890, Lestershire was served by L. B. Weeks, who also served Clinton Street, Binghamton. Thereafter, it became a station appointment.⁶

Rev. H. H. Wilbur succeeded Rev. [L. B.] Weeks in 1891. He worked with N. B. Russell and C. Fred Johnson to plan a suitable “House of Worship” for the expanding congregation. [The] result of their deliberations from plans to reality took less than two years and on January 5, 1892 at [its] dedication, C. Fred Johnson reported [that the] church, with furnishings, and horse sheds had cost $5,296.64. Conference records showed [a] membership of 82 with 35 probationers. . . . Rev. William MacAlpine’s tenure (1918-1927) was a golden time. Membership had risen to well over 1000. George F. Johnson pledged a family memorial which amounted to $438,000, if a new edifice were constructed which bore the name of Sarah Jane Johnson. Mrs. Johnson had been a devoted member of the church and was his mother as well as mother of C. Fred and Harry L. Johnson. . . . [O]n Sunday, June 12, 1927, Methodist Episcopal Bishop Joseph Berry dedicated a magnificent Gothic cathedral type structure with its 112 foot tower rising above. The golden oak sanctuary spans a height of 60 feet and its chancel area contains an Austin four manual pipe organ, the gift of Mrs. Harry L. Johnson in memory of her husband who was an officer of the church at the time of his death in 1921.⁷

In less than forty years, the church had grown from a membership of ten to more than a thousand, and from the romance of boot boxes being used for pews, with one standing on its end to serve as a pulpit,⁸ to worshiping in a

¹William Inglis, George F. Johnson and His Industrial Democracy (New York: Huntington Press, 1935), 27.
²A. F. Chaffee, History of the Wyoming Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1904), 300.
³Inglis, 23.
⁴Chaffee, 300.
⁶Chaffee, 300-301.
⁸An Historical Review.
space that even today could justifiably claim to be one of the most magnificent church structures in the region.

A review of pastoral appointments is, in part, an indicator of the important role the church has played in the development and deployment of effective leadership within the Wyoming Annual Conference. Over a span of 112 years, Sarah Jane has been served by twenty-five senior pastors, ten of whom were later appointed district superintendents, or who, following their appointments as superintendent, served at Sarah Jane.9

The nature and style of the church's mission and ministry can be described as traditional, in keeping with its sister congregations in the area. However, in the recent past two significant alterations to this pattern have emerged and are now very much a part of its life. During the pastorate of Douglas N. Akers, the church introduced “The Lord's Table.” This is an outreach ministry which provides free meals each Tuesday to all who come. By January 1, 2003, 90,450 meals were served. The need for such a program grew out of a realization that the demographics of Johnson City had changed and that there existed an underclass of individuals and families not previously reached by this particular faith community. Each week, this ministry, staffed by a core of loyal individuals from the church and the surrounding community, prepares and distributes a fullcourse, hot meal. The food comes through purchase and gift, or as a distribution from area service agencies involved in food collection.

Under the leadership of the Rev. Mark B. Marino, the church entered into an agreement with the Children's Home of Wyoming Conference, Inc., whereby significant areas of little-used space have been converted to accommodate a therapeutic after-school program for children and youth at risk. Between thirty and forty young people are transported at the close of each school day by van to the church, where under the guidance, supervision, and care of a professional staff, they remain in a highly-structured environment until early evening. They are then transported to their foster care or group home settings.

Both ministries have called into review the self-image of this congregation, and both reflect the church's sincere effort to be faithful.

II

The marriage of Francis A. Johnson and Sarah Jane Aldrich united two old established but not monied New England families. Following time spent on a whaling ship and other sea voyages, Frank came ashore and learned a new trade, that of making and treeing boots - the process of stretching new leather boots over snug-fitting “trees” and rubbing them with a dressing, thus shaping them for presentation and sale. With the outbreak of the

American Civil War in April 1861, Frank, now married and the father of three young boys, led 100 men to the recruiting station at Milford, Massachusetts, home to his young family. He went to war as a lieutenant and was soon promoted to captain. Following the war, he served for one year as the commander of Fort Wentworth in Boston harbor, then returned to shoe-treeing. "A fiery, blue-eyed, red-bearded giant, Captain Johnson worked with tremendous energy, seldom stayed in one town for more than one year, because he was always finding a better job somewhere else, tried his hand at anything that promised more profit."\(^{10}\)

Jane, who of necessity must have been a most tolerant and supportive spouse to a rather high-spirited and unpredictable husband, is remembered as the mother of five children and possessing a genteel spirit; greatly loved by family, friends, and the ever-changing cycle of new neighbors. A devout Methodist, she saw to it that her children attended both church and Sunday school on a regular basis, even if they did so without great enthusiasm. By her very nature, she was a care-giver.

Following George F., the entire Johnson family, with the exception of Oscar, the oldest child, would, over time, leave the coastal plain of Massachusetts and relocate in New York's Southern Tier. Although Oscar would not be involved in either the development of the Endicott-Johnson Corporation or the building of the church as a memorial to his mother — by 1927 he had been deceased for twenty years — his life and work are not inconsequential to this essay. Oscar E. Johnson was a Methodist minister and a member of the New England Southern Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

There is much that unites this man with his family and those values lived out in the life and example of his mother. "He was pious without cant, the . . . grace of God was not marred by religious affectation. He knew how to laugh, he enjoyed human fellowship, he felt the joy of living."\(^{11}\)

Furthermore, he was known as a pastor who focused on the needs of others.

Although separated by many miles, Rev. Johnson's daily diary for the year 1906 reveals that on two occasions he traveled to Endicott, NY. He also met twice with family members in Boston. A married daughter lived in Endicott, and he noted that March 22, 1907 would be his father's eightieth birthday.\(^{12}\) Distance was not estrangement.

C. Fred Johnson was the second child of the Johnson family. Not as forward as his younger brother George, he is remembered for his enabling and supportive, if secondary, roles.

He followed his brother to the area and worked as a boss cutter, cutting leather for shoe uppers and soles, and with the growth of the industry took

---

\(^{10}\)Inglis, 7-8.


\(^{12}\)The diary was given to the Rev. Daniel Ling for the church by Sarah Ryan in the fall of 2000.
charge of building operations. His association with the establishment of the industrial democracy was firmly and early secured when two hundred acres of farm land, six miles west of the Pioneer, was purchased in 1904 for factory expansion and home sites for the workers. C. Fred was placed in charge of laying out the streets and avenues that would soon be incorporated as the village of Endicott.\(^{13}\)

In 1916, C. Fred, on behalf of and financed by the company, organized, built, and equipped fire houses for both Johnson City and Endicott. Companies of trained fire fighters were on duty twenty-four hours every day. In addition to the church, he gave the nurses' home at Wilson Memorial Hospital as a memorial to his wife. His name was associated with C. F. Johnson Field, the home of the Triple Cities Baseball Club, known as the "Triplets," a large park and recreation complex, the junior high school, and most recently the bridge over the Susquehanna which unites Johnson City and Vestal.\(^{14}\) “Among the many activities in which he engaged were the organizations, hospitals, and churches which he aided in his quiet way. C. Fred shared the convictions, beliefs, and square deal principles of his younger brother and did everything he could to further his realization.”\(^{15}\)

The most prominent member of the Johnson family was Frank and Jane's third child, George F. Like his father and brothers before him, he had little formal education and by the time he was a teenager found himself treeing shoes. As most every community in the Plymouth area had its own shoe factory, he moved from one town to another, following his father's pattern of itineration. By the age of twenty-one, he was a boss treer, supervising the work of thirty-five men. In 1881, he received a letter, forwarded to him by his father, asking him to come and take charge of the treeing room at the Lester Brothers' factory in Binghamton, New York. It was an invitation he could not refuse, and with the aforementioned loan from C. Fred, he set out for Binghamton. Upon arrival, however, he discovered that the opportunity was intended for his father! "I'm that Johnson's son," said George F., "and I'm a first class boss. Give me a chance. You'll find that I can run a treeing room."\(^{16}\) They did, and he could.

Given his experience in a variety of settings within the industry and capitalizing upon his learnings, George F. was able to make any number of suggestions to Harry Lester, including the counsel to purchase land and build the Pioneer, thus creating a new community for the workers. It would be his first attempt at what would later be known as city planning.

This was the beginning of an ongoing vision and commitment to move the workers out of the crowded city to affordable housing where they could

---

\(^{1}\)Inglis, 48-49.
\(^{13}\)Jennie A. Frail, “Historical Background of Johnson City” (Johnson City, NY: Johnson City School District [1980]) p. 47. Available at Your Home Library, Johnson City, NY.
\(^{14}\)Frail, “Historical Background,” 47.
\(^{15}\)Inglis, 17, 19, 21-22.
live on the land, escape the slums, and lead decent, human lives. For a time, Harry Lester and his enterprises did well, but during the depression years of the 1890s it became increasingly necessary to borrow more and more from his benefactor, Henry B. Endicott of Boston. Finally, in order to protect his interests, Endicott came to Lestershire with the intention of installing new management, someone from one of his New England factories with a proven record of success. Instead, following an interview with George F., a mere treeing boss during which he shared with Endicott his vision of how to make better shoes for less money, Endicott hired him as superintendent. 17

In 1919, the company was incorporated, and in 1920, George F. became its president. He was now in a position to implement his dream of an industrial democracy which “will last as long as the leaders have in their hearts that genuine love of their work and the workers. Men reason with their minds — but they act from the heart.” 18

George F. understood that, in order for the business to be successful, guaranteeing steady labor for the workers and fair returns for investors, it would be necessary for all aspects of shoe manufacturing to be consolidated under one corporate umbrella. It took a number of years to accomplish, but the time did come when instead of “jobbing out,” i.e., sub-contracting particular segments of the process, everything, from purchasing hides in South America to tanning leather, cutting, stitching, and treeing, packing, sales, and distribution would all be done by EJ. Then, in addition to contract work for the government, department stores, etc., EJ went into the retail business as well, establishing hundreds of stores. The process was self-contained. Even during the Great Depression, EJ workers produced one hundred and seventy-five thousand pairs of shoes a day, for a total of 45,500,000 per year. 19 By the year 1937, EJ was an organization which had grown to “twenty thousand workers in twenty-nine factories located in five communities in a stretch of country-side twenty-five miles in length.” 20

Over the next decade, George F. would pass increased levels of responsibility on to his son and nephew. He and his immediate family wintered in Daytona Beach, Florida, until age and illness made the trip difficult. He died in 1948 at the age of 91.

There were two additional children in the Johnson family, Harry L. and Charlotte. Little information is available concerning Charlotte. Her nickname was Lottie, and her married name, Collingwood. This family name is also noted as being one of a small number of families who gave the twenty-six rank pipe organ built by the Austin Organ Company of Hartford, Connecticut, installed in Sarah Jane Johnson Memorial Methodist Episcopal

---

17Inglis, 28-30.
18Inglis, 63-64.
19Inglis, 161.
20Publisher’s Foreword in Partners All: A Pictorial Narrative of an Industrial Democracy. photographs by Russell C. Aikins (New York: Huntington Corporation, 1938), no pagination or author’s name supplied.
Church at the time of its dedication, and given in memory of Harry L. Johnson.²¹

Harry L. was the youngest son, born in Hopkinton, Massachusetts, and raised in Plymouth. Unlike his older brothers, he received the benefit of a secondary education. He graduated from Plymouth High School, had the ability to express himself with ease, and loved learning, music, and books. Later he would become the primary benefactor of Your Home Library in Johnson City.

Another influence which helps us to understand the character of Harry L. was his early connection with the church. When a boy of thirteen he knelt at the altar of the Methodist Church in Plymouth and thereafter publicly devoted his life to Christian service. One of his most cherished possessions was a receipt for two dollars which he gave to the church when a boy and for which he had worked and saved the money.²²

At age twenty-two, he too relocated and entered the employ of EJ, for which he would later become a director and the manager of the Johnson City factories.²³ In addition to the library, he was particularly supportive of Americanization/naturalization classes for the workers and started the tradition of giving every child in the village a new pair of shoes, of their own choosing, each Christmas.

In the spring of 1921, Mr. Johnson suffered a nervous breakdown. The burdens of the war period had weakened his strength. This was a trying period in business. It became necessary to reduce the wages of the workers. This caused him deep sorrow. He went to a physical training farm and later to the old home town of Plymouth, Massachusetts, to try to regain his strength. Worry and overwork had taken their toll. He died shortly thereafter.²⁴

Oscar had lived to be fifty-five; Harry L., only forty-eight. His memory is honored in the naming of an elementary school, a major village thoroughfare, Sundays' organ music, and a bronze statue placed just outside Your Home Library.

The story of the Johnson family is more than a Horatio Alger rags-to-riches tale. It is a story of a strong family, grounded in religious values, possessing a motivating work ethic tempered by a deep and abiding concern for the well being of the workers, their families, and the communities of which they were a part, itself an expression of new creation.

III

It is not the intent of this essay to review the history, growth, and evolving structure of the Endicott-Johnson Corporation. Our interests lie in its

²¹“Historical Statement,” Sarah Jane Johnson Memorial United Methodist Church.
²²Frail, 43.
²³It was George F.'s policy that the leadership of the company and its factories live in the same community as the workers. (See below.) Harry L.'s home, now the Barber Memorial Home, is located three blocks west of the church on Main Street, Johnson City.
²⁴Frail, 43.
personnel policies and its many contributions to the communities in which it was settled. In 1920, Mr. Endicott died, and George F. succeeded him as president of the company. He was now freed from the constraints which were an expression of Endicott's conservatism, to pursue his dream: a dream of a square deal, a work ethic based on the golden rule, an industrial democracy.

It is also important to recall the larger context in which our story is located. The early years of the 20th century were marked by labor unrest, strikes, and violence, as well as the ongoing exploitation of workers by business owners and managers. New England's textile mills, the garment industry, steel, mining, oil, lumbering, railroads, and coal were all enterprises which experienced great turbulence, ameliorated over time by the introduction of new labor laws and unionization. EJ was located less than one hundred miles north of the anthracite coal fields of northeastern Pennsylvania, the site of many disasters, strikes, and violent actions.

George F. had a different vision, one that would, along with his support of Democratic presidents and their administrations, set him apart from his fellow capitalists. Not overtly political, George F.'s preferences were nevertheless well known, including his support of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, specifically Roosevelt's National Recovery Act (NRA), which would after its enactment be declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court.

Any consideration of EJ's personnel policies must, of necessity, begin with a bit of unfinished business, i.e., workers' housing. Having failed in his efforts to persuade Harry Lester to build sturdy, affordable housing for the workers, George F. was successful in convincing Henry Endicott to move ahead on this vision. Acreage was purchased down river; streets were laid out; plots were delineated; and homes, in a variety of styles and prices, were constructed. This would become the Village of Endicott. Later, West Endicott, in the town of Union, and the north side of Johnson City would also be developed with homes and required infrastructure. Beginning at the turn of the century and continuing until the 1940's, EJ built thousands of homes, most of which are still standing in early 2002 and which often sold for prices in excess of $70,000.

In December 1904, the Endicott Johnson Company built seventy-five homes on fifteen acres of land known as Endicott Terrace, on the south side of the village, overlooking the river. Each house... had six or seven rooms and stood on a plot of fifty by one hundred feet, which afforded space for a lawn and flowers in the front and a garden in the rear. Each house was individual in design, so that tenants could suit

25 lnglis, 85-86.
26 lnglis, 157-158, 294-295.
27 lnglis, 295. A photo of FDR riding in an open car with George F. is often found in historical displays.
their tastes. The homes in the group were vastly unlike the uniform rows of melancholy “company houses” which still stand in some of the abandoned shoe towns of New England. George F. had lived in them as a boy, and he hated them. 29

Using West Endicott as our model, we now discern that the original cost of these homes, in the 1920s, ranged from $2,000.00 to $4,200.00. They were paid for by payroll deduction, at first with five percent interest, later reduced to three percent. A small bungalow with four or five rooms, bath, and furnace, which sold for $2,200.00, would cost a worker $14.58 a month. A $3,500.00 home with six rooms and bath, hardwood floors, full cellar with cement floors, heating system, graded lot, and landscaping, cost $20.00 per month. These were not slums, or row houses, rented at a profit by the industry to its workers. These were attractive, well-built homes sold at, or below, cost, complete with paved streets, sidewalks, municipal services, and without municipal taxation! 30 George F.’s philosophy concerning housing was best articulated in 1934:

I have no panacea, no formula, for industrial peace. But this I do believe: Those who control labor must live with labor. The children of the workers should grow up with the children of the employers. They should play together. The wives should have a pleasant neighborhood relationship. Executives should be familiar with the lives of their workers—not in a prying sense, but in a social sense. They should be concerned with the happiness and the prosperity of the men and their families. It isn’t all-important that the owners shall prosper much, but that people dependent on industry shall prosper in season. 31

Beyond housing, other provisions for the workers’ well-being were made by EJ. In the fall 1916, the working day was reduced from ten to eight hours, an unheard-of practice. When World War I greatly inflated food prices, area farmers were paid two dollars a day to bring their produce into the village to sell. Later, in 1926, a large market building was erected in Johnson City, followed by a second in Endicott. Workers were able to buy directly from the farmers, at considerable savings. Tuesdays and Saturdays were market days. 32

An added benefit was the construction of seven large diners in Endicott, Johnson City, Binghamton, and Owego. Collectively, the diners served up to 11,000 meals a day at minimal costs. For the evening meal, workers were able to bring their families. Each diner had its own bakery and much of the produce was purchased at the markets. 33

There were vacations with pay, free legal services, and, beginning in 1919, profit sharing. 34 The average weekly wage in 1936 was $23.40, based

---

29 lnglis, 50-51.
31 George F. Johnson, quoted in Inglis, 44-45.
32 Frail, 46.
33 Farmers All 22.
34 Frail, 46.
on forty, not fifty hours a week, which after the collapse of the NRA again became the industry standard. This average included all workers, men, women, and youth. No child below the age of sixteen was hired. This was the highest level of compensation among the five states, including New York, which had substantial shoe industries. Based upon need, and not actuarial formulas, EJ also provided its workers with pensions and death benefits. During the Great Depression, when orders for shoes fell twenty percent, instead of “laying off” a proportional number of the work force, the work week was reduced by one day, and mortgage payments due to EJ were also adjusted. No homes were foreclosed due to unemployment.

Health care or the medical plan also became a distinctive characteristic of EJ’s policy with respect to its workers. The service was financed by equal contributions by the workers and the company. Each paid $1.50 per week, a deduction not calculated into average weekly income noted above. By 1937, the average had grown to $27.32; adding medical services, $30.32. In return for their participation, the workers received care at anyone of three area hospitals, Binghamton City, Wilson Memorial in Johnson City and Ideal in Endicott. All three were equipped with modern operating rooms, dispensaries, and maternity wards. All three were staffed with physicians, surgeons, nurses, and aides. In addition, there were three large clinics; ancillary services; a convalescent home, Wagner Farm, located in Kattelville, north of Binghamton; and a large cottage at Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks for the treatment of those afflicted with tuberculosis. One memory that lingers is that prior to 1933, Mrs. George F. Johnson presented each new mother with a letter of congratulations, a bouquet of flowers, and a ten dollar gold piece in a red morocco case. After 1933, and the end of the gold standard, the gift became a ten dollar check. Coupled with an extensive recreation system provided by the company, the medical plan was a successful experiment in both self-insurance and preventive medicine.

Before we move on to a consideration of EJ’s institutional legacy, one additional observation needs to be made. EJ was supportive of open immigration policies, and while offering opportunities for Americanization and citizenship classes, encouraged and supported religious and cultural diversity. When the Ku Klux Klan attempted to organize and press their xenophobic, antiimmigrant, anti-Catholic values, EJ’s will power and the local press put a stop to it.

35 Partners All, 16, 48.
36 Inglis, 246-248.
37 Home of the Square Deal, Johnson City Printing Company, Johnson City, NY, May, 1936, 23.
38 Partners All, 48.
39 Home of the Square Deal, 36-43.
40 Inglis, 236-237.
The Klan rose in power in many northeast cities in response to the influx of immigrants. By the mid-1920's the Klan made Binghamton the center of its New York operations. Holding cross burnings, the Klan attempted to intimidate recently arrived immigrants. The KKK even tried to enter Binghamton mayoral politics, but a series of editorials by Morning Sun editor William Hill and EJ's pledge to fire any employee found to be a member, quickly ended the Klan's grip on the area. As a result, however, local ethnic groups found themselves stronger for having to fight this foe.41

There were, and continue to be, large colonies of persons of European background who reside in the area. In addition to many smaller groups, there were Italians, Poles, Hungarians, Russians, and Czechoslovaks, with their ethnic societies, festivals, and churches. George F. was recognized for aiding in the acceptance and assimilation of immigrants, particularly from Czechoslovakia and Italy, by being decorated, in 1928, by diplomatic representatives of President Jan Masaryk of Czechoslovakia, and King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy.42 Given the period of time under consideration, where else can one find such generous, liberal, and progressive labor policies?

In September 1983, the Sunday Press ran a series of articles entitled, "The Johnson Legacy." They provided a comprehensive and accessible documentation of the institutional largesse of George F. and the Johnson family.43

The Johnsons provided local communities with recreational facilities. There were three large parks given for the free use of all. Recreation Park in Binghamton and its twenty-two acres of land was purchased in 1921 by George F. for $100,000. He then gave an additional $50,000 for its development and deeded it over to the city. It remains a place of fun and beauty. CFJ Park in Johnson City was built in 1926 and purchased by the village in 1966. En Joie Park in Endicott, valued as one of the most beautiful parks on the East coast, has become the athletic fields of the Union-Endicott High School. In the late 1920s and 1930s, the twenty-four acre site contained a boat house on the river, covered picnic pavilions, two bandstands, tennis courts, stages for performances, a roller skating rink, ball fields, a track, and an inground pool which held a million gallons of water. It was well maintained and attractively landscaped.

Workers' health care was enhanced by the Johnsons' support of three local hospitals and their teaching facilities. Binghamton City Hospital was augmented by a gift of $100,000 for a nurses' dormitory. C. S. Wilson Memorial Hospital in Johnson City was purchased from Dr. Wilson's Estate in 1927 and deeded over to a board of managers. C. Fred gave $200,000 to construct a nurses' home in memory of his wife. Ideal Hospital in Endicott

---

41Binghamton Press & Sun Bulletin, Tuesday, 9 November 1999, "Square Deal Sets Tier Tone," 6A.
42Inglis, 205-211.
43Information in the following paragraphs comes from "The Johnson Legacy," in The Sunday Press, Binghamton, New York, 4 September 1983, 8A.
was built, in part, with a contribution of $150,000 from George F. His wife gave $125,000 to build the nurses’ dormitory. Of the three ancillary medical clinics, one survives on Clinton Street in Binghamton as the Community Treatment and Rehabilitation Services branch of the Binghamton Psychiatric Center.

Time, however, has a way of bringing changes to communities’ needs. Johnson Field, built by C. Fred in 1916 to serve as a home for a minor league baseball team, was taken down in 1968 to accommodate the construction of the New York State Route 17 expressway. In the early 1960s, the CFJ Pool in Johnson City, one of the largest above-ground pools in the country, was closed and removed. The Fountains Pavilion, a gift of George F. in 1906, was the venue for “Big Band” concerts every Friday and Saturday night.

The public markets and diners are long gone. During the Great Depression, EJ served free meals to the unemployed of the area; EJ workers continued to pay fifteen to twenty-five cents a meal. In the days before government-sponsored feeding programs, the diners and markets filled a real need. Of the public buildings underwritten by members of the Johnson family, Your Home Library, the Johnson City Fire Station and Town Hall, the West Endicott Fire Station, and Conklin Town Hall continue to function. The George F. Johnson School in West Endicott, built by its namesake for $300,000, was given to the school district in 1924; it remained in service until 1980.

Recognition of those who had served their country in wartime was yet another part of the Johnsons’ community-building. In the early 1920s, George F. contributed $350,000 to build three American Legion halls: Post 80 in Binghamton, Post 82 in Endicott, and Post 429 in Johnson City. A memorial monument honoring the 13,000 EJ workers and family members who served in World War I was erected in Endicott across from the high school.

Near the time of George F.’s death, EJ built two large recreation centers, at a cost of $1,000,000 each. One was eventually deeded to Broome County and continues to serve as an industrial incubator. The other became the corporate headquarters for EJ.

En Joie Golf Course, built for the workers in 1927, when they paid twenty-five cents as a greens fee, was sold to the village of Endicott in 1963. Now redesigned and rebuilt, it hosts the annual Professional Golf Association’s B. C. Open tournament.

The Johnson family’s understanding of the importance of religious life for the ethnically diverse communities of the Southern Tier found expression, notably, in Sarah Jane Johnson Memorial United Methodist Church, and extended to many other Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox churches and their corresponding ethnic and cultural centers. The Johnsons made generous contributions toward the construction and development of a great diversity of houses of worship. 44

44Information in this paragraph and the nine preceding comes from “The Johnson Legacy” in The Sunday Press, Binghamton, New York, 4 September 1983, IA, 8A.
While John D. Rockefeller of Standard Oil of New Jersey, born and raised just fifty miles to the north of the Southern Tier, was having his picture taken as he gave dimes to children, and while Andrew Carnegie of United States Steel was giving libraries and pipe organs from a fortune built on the backs of workers, George F. Johnson, the Johnson family, and EJ were concurrently divesting themselves of millions of dollars in support of their workers and the larger commonweal.

IV

During the same period that George F. was laying the groundwork for his industrial democracy, American society as a whole was undergoing a transformation of values. This period of renewal and reform was known as the Progressive Era of 1890 to 1910, and within the Protestant communities, it manifested itself as the Social Gospel.

In light of the insatiable appetites of a burgeoning population for consumer goods during the decades following the Civil War, combination or centralization increasingly became the norm for American industry. The end of the 19th century would become the age of the trusts.

At the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, approximately one billion dollars was invested in manufacturing. By 1910, this figure had increased twelve-fold. This, however, did not mean continuous growth and improvement. Boom was soon followed by bust and by industrial stagnation in a periodically-repeated cycle. During these decades, the labor force went from one and one-half million workers to five and one-half million. Many of these workers were immigrants, lured by stories of prosperity circulated by steamship companies to provide a cheap and plentiful labor supply. Concentrated wealth, coupled with exploitable labor, was an incendiary combination and led to the unionization of workers and subsequent resistance from corporate leadership. Strikes often erupted into violence. The Haymarket Riots of 1886, the Homestead Steel Strike of 1892, and the Pullman Strike of 1894 are but examples of this pattern.45

Much closer to the Southern Tier, some one hundred miles to the southwest, outside the city of Hazleton, Pennsylvania,

on September 10, 1897, a group of four hundred striking mine workers marched to Lattimer Patch, a small patch village near the Hazleton mines. The workers were unarmed and carried only the American flag. However, eighty-seven deputies and a sheriff were dispatched to Lattimer, where they waited with loaded rifles. When the mine workers came into sight, the deputies opened fire. Sixty marchers were shot. Eight died instantly and eleven died later from their wounds.46

This story of the deaths of nineteen Austria-Hungarian anthracite coal miners caused by the hostile actions of the Luzerne County Sheriff and his

45Inglis, 281-282.
deputies, is an oft-forgotten, infrequently cited act of industrial violence known as the Lattimer Massacre.

"When, toward the end of the century, the force of the revival movement was spent, the social gospel came on the scene. Its exponents explicitly proclaimed what had been only implicit in revivalism: organized Christianity has a duty not only to individuals, but also to society as a whole, to its institutions, to its laws, and to its public morals."47 It was Walter Rauschenbusch whose thoroughly evangelical theological reflection, first expressed in his classic work, Christianity and the Social Crisis (1907), who became the representative leader and greatest figure of this new movement.48

In the same year, five socially-minded Methodist ministers, Elbert R. Zering, Herbert Welch, Frank Mason North, Harry F. Ward, and Worth Tippy organized the Methodist Federation for Social Service. The federation was but one expression among many which contributed in 1908 to the General Conference's adoption of a statement on the Church and Social Problems. This would come to be known as the Social Creed:

The Methodist Episcopal Church stands—
For equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.
For the principle of conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions.
For the protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational diseases, injuries, and mortality.
For the abolition of child labor.
For such regulation of the conditions of labor for women and shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community.
For the suppression of the "sweat system."
For the gradual and reasonable reduction of the hour of labor to the lowest practical point, with work for all; and for the degree of leisure for all which is the condition of the highest human life.
For a release from employment one day in seven.
For a living wage in every industry.
For the highest wage that each industry can afford, and for the most equitable division of the products of industry that can ultimately be devised.
For the recognition of the Golden Rule and the mind of Christ as the supreme law of society and the sure remedy of all social ills... 49

The statement then goes on to say: "Upon every member rests a solemn duty to devote himself with his possessions, his citizenship, and his influence to the glory of God in the service of the present age. And thus by their works, as by their prayers, let all 'the people called Methodists' seek that kingdom in which God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven."50

The Progressive and Social Gospel movements supply the larger context in which the possible origins and implications of what was occurring

48Cameron, 284.
49The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1908 (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908), 479-481.
50Discipline, 1908, 481.
from Binghamton to Owego under the aegis of George F. and the EJ shoe company can be assessed.

Although difficult, if not impossible, to document, one is led to the intuitive assumption that there were other sources for George F.'s vision besides those which were rooted in his own experience and imagination. He was the son of a devout and committed Methodist laywoman; the younger brother of a Methodist pastor whose ministry was shaped by the environments of eastern Massachusetts, an early laboratory for socially-minded Christian experimentation; and he himself was deeply committed to his church, serving as organizer, benefactor, and formidable lay leader. So, many of his labor policies and institutional legacies parallel the concerns expressed in the Social Creed and its subsequent permutations. Even his term "industrial democracy" echoes the appeal of the bishops of the church to the General Conference on 1916, just three years prior to EJ's incorporation. They had called, in their episcopal address, for the "increasing democratization of industry."

A parallel consideration of church creed and corporate policy is most revealing:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOCIAL CREED</th>
<th>EJ POLICIES AND PRACTICES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Equal rights and justice for all</td>
<td>Equal living accommodations for workers and managers; equal treatment of immigrant populations; support of religious/cultural diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissent</td>
<td>Open-door accessibility of managers for all workers; due process for grievances; a philosophy which affirmed, &quot;A union is good; a union of interests is better.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection of workers from occupational hazards</td>
<td>In comparison to heavy industry, a relatively safe industry with provision for free medical care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abolition of child labor</td>
<td>No individual under eighteen years hired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safeguarding physical and moral health of workers, community</td>
<td>Extensive programs for recreation, medical care, housing, support of churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suppression of &quot;sweat system&quot; [sweat shops, where workers were paid by piece, not by time]</td>
<td>A diversion: actual assembly of shoes was compensated on a piece basis, within an established period of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of working hours</td>
<td>Eight, not ten hour work days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One day's rest in seven</td>
<td>Two days' rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living wage</td>
<td>Highest wages in shoe industry; profit-sharing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

52 *Partners All*, 24.
Equitable division of products | Industry highly competitive; no shoe trusts; products reasonably priced

Recognition of Golden Rule | It is a “matter of the heart as much as it is of the head. You won’t do it unless you have it in your heart, and if you have, you will easily find the way. It is as simple as the Golden Rule. It is putting yourself in the worker’s place, and doing by him as you would have him do by you. There is a good deal of talk about the machinery of industrial democracy, but it is the spirit that counts. It is the human factor that makes the machinery worth while.” 53

Whether George F.’s vision was simply a matter of his own religious, social, and economic convictions, his deep commitment to the well-being of people, his generous spirit, and his mother’s example, or rather a dream fertilized by the church in which he was nurtured, and to which he and his family remained faithful, is a matter of speculation. What is certain is, that in the Southern Tier, an experiment based on Christ’s Golden Rule and a square deal, a new creation, proved successful, to the benefit of all.

V

EJ and the Johnson family reached the summit of their largesse on behalf of their workers and the communities in which they lived during the 1930s and immediately following the Second World War. By that time, IBM was quickly becoming the area’s premier employer. By the 1960s, EJ had fallen on hard times. Wages were no longer competitive; the workforce grew smaller; factories were closed. The parks and other EJ assets were sold to local municipalities. And the manufacture of shoes increasingly became an “offshore” enterprise. It was cheaper to make shoes in Korea than in the States. In the late 1990s, the Endicott-Johnson Shoe Company ceased to exist. By 2002, with the exception of a few small specialty manufacturers catering to a “niche” clientele, there were no major shoe producers left in the entire United States.

The industrial democracy was not, however, without its shortcomings. Four are readily apparent. Wages were low; that is, when compared to those paid by IBM and other technological industries which came to dominate the area following World War II. Most laborers worked by the piece; their weekly wage was a reflection of how many pieces they had processed. When leadership passed on to the second generation of Johnsons, anti-unionism became the norm, piece work being one of organized labor’s primary objections. The last weakness is more difficult to document. It is grounded in the reality that those who had received much came to expect even more. For years the working assumption was, “Oh, well, the Johnsons will take care of

53 Inglis, 46.
it." When the Johnsons were no longer able to do so, the people began to undervalue or neglect their generosity. "Today, a large part of the Johnson legacy is already gone or threatened with extinction — the victim of changing times, economics and tragically poor stewardship on the part of the communities that were beneficiaries of Johnson's largesse."54 Even George F.'s public and private papers are no longer in the area, having been offered to and rejected by both the village of Endicott and Harpur College (now Binghamton University). The documents reside at Syracuse University.55

VI

The Industrial Democracy of George F. Johnson and the Endicott-Johnson Shoe Corporation, ca. 1920-1948, was not an experiment in utopian thought like the Oneida Community of Upstate New York or the Amana Society of German pietists, located in east-central Iowa; neither was it a coping scheme empowered by an apocalyptic or dispensational understanding of human existence. It was one successful, albeit temporary, expression of a new creation born of experience, nurtured in faith, sustained by family, devoid of greed and energized by a vision of labor and management living and working together, not defined by what was not, but by what might be. The past we celebrate is the future we envision.

54"The Johnson Legacy," in The Sunday Press, 4 September 1983, 8A.
55"The Johnson Legacy," 8A.