

# Wheels of Fortune: The Story of Rubber in Akron (Ohio History and Culture) (Ohio History and Culture (Paperback))

Steve Love, David Giffels

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Wheels of Fortune is a tale of two cities-both of them Akron. One city, built on rubber, turned itself into a model for Middle America industrial success. The other city has had to learn to live on in rubber's wake, to remake itself, to come to terms with its remade self. To tell this tale of two cities is to tell the tale of America's rubber industry. The stories interlock like tire and wheel. From its earliest days, Akron has been a city of multiple incarnations: canal boat stopover, farm machinery manufacturer, cereal maker. But for more than a century after Dr. Benjamin Franklin Goodrich came to town in 1870, Akron was the Rubber Capital of the World. Its people worked in the rubber shops of Goodrich, Goodyear, Firestone, General, Seiberling, Mohawk, and Sun. They lived in Goodyear Heights and Firestone Park, the neighborhoods fostered by their employers. Even the air they breathed was heavy with the odor of rubber. To some, it stank. To others, it smelled like money. By the 1980s, much the rubber industry and, thus, Akron had disappeared. Not into the night. Not overnight. Everyone had seen it coming for years. Union and rubber companies management squared off against each other as if the city were a boxing ring. There were no winners. Akron was the loser. First, the plants closed, the production moving south. Then the company headquarters, with the exception of Goodyear, followed. The people rubber left behind discovered they had not only their memories but also the ability to remake Akron into a center for polymer knowledge, a remnant of rubber research and a bridge between the two cities. Wheels of Fortune is their story, these people who made more than rubber. They made lives-and a city.

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