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Hal Gorby:

Victorian era Wheeling was a bustling manufacturing hub, but it also developed another reputation during the 19th century. As a riverboat town where thousands of people stopped to spend money before moving on, the city became known as wide open Wheeling. Rapid urban growth mirrored the growth in an underground vice culture. In the gilded age, Wheeling was a city of saloons, cheap gambling dens, bucket shops, athletic clubs, and houses of ill fame. While city leaders and upper-class Wheelingites might've talked about these as two distinct Wheelings, both overlapped. With its limited geographical space along the river, neighborhoods often mixed manufacturing, churches, private homes, small businesses, and saloons and other vice. The city police often tried to crack down on the houses of ill fame with impromptu raids. One such raid took place on Saturday night, April 14th, 1894.

Hal Gorby:

A general raid upon the houses of ill fame was made last night by the police force. And notwithstanding few loiters, strange to say, were found in many of the houses. The aggregate number of arrests is the largest ever made by the police in a single day. There were 99 arrests in all. And as all with possibly one or two exceptions have put up security for their appearance. The revenue to the city will approximate \$1,050, which will go to the contingent fund of the board of public works. It's an ill wind, et cetera. And in this case, the street cleaning force will reap the benefit. The pools were made between 10 and 11 o'clock, the entire force being summoned to the building at the first mentioned hour. They were sent out in squads, armed with warrants. A singular thing in connection with the Oak street houses is that, but one man was found on the street. The pool has been expected for a week or 10 days, and has had the effect of keeping the men away from the houses. Several landladies in anticipation of the raid sent some of their girls out early in the evening. And in this manner cut down the amount of fines they had to pay. While other landladies got tips from friends during the evening,

Hal Gorby:

The dragnet yielded a total of \$1,040 and 25 cents in fines. In these rates, the newspaper often listed the names of the proprietors, commonly called madams, and the young ladies who resided in the houses. The men caught in these police hauls were left unnamed, catering to an unfair gendered advantage, so as to not hurt their character. What we do learn from examining the Ohio county criminal court indictments are the unpublished names of the men found in these houses. One indictment was filed in State vs Schmulbach Henry. That's right, our protagonist, that Henry Schmulbach, was charged that he quote "unlawfully did live and board in a certain house of ill fame against the peace and dignity of the state" end quote. And he was also found to be quote "unlawfully loitering in a certain house of ill fame" end quote. While Henry's arrest might shock the modern listener.

Hal Gorby:

This incident had no effect on his business success. His name wasn't reported. He paid a small fine. That was it. In a city like Wheeling, prostitution was a reformer's nightmare but was something many citizens had just resigned themselves to. The collection of fines helped fund city infrastructure and other public services. How did a city of thriving business also operate as a city of thriving vice? What role did Henry Schmulbach play in this arrangement? And how did the tides of change finally bring a wave of reform against vice? This is Henry the life and legacy of Wheeling's most notorious brewer, a production of Wheeling heritage media. I am your host, William Hal Gorby, a teaching assistant professor of history at

West Virginia University, whose research has focused on West Virginia and Wheeling's working class and immigrant history during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Actor:

The only reason anybody from this section of the state goes to Wheeling nowadays is for something special. Nobody ever goes to bum around and have a good time like they used to. Nightlife in Wheeling was something in the old days. In this year of grace, the region below the Creek lies dark and sordid beneath the streetlights. A speakeasy or two in every block and some outward evidence of respectability and decay are all that greets the eye of the nocturnal visitor these days. But 25 years ago, after Alley C had moved over the Creek, Wheeling crooked the finger of hospitality in every direction like the temple tower in ancient Corinth pointing the way to the sailor to the city of pleasure. The steelworkers from the mills, tinsmith workers, Rivermen, cattle buyers, farmers, coal miners, horsemen, gamblers, German brewmasters, Irish saloonkeepers, politicians big and little, and boys edging out into the currents of life, as one who wades timidly into the cool waters of a mountain stream. These all and many others found Wheeling a Mecca to which they made pilgrimage.

Hal Gorby:

That reflection by C Smith of the Fairmont times in 1928 speaks to this underground culture in working class Wheeling. Life in many neighborhoods by 1900 was quite rough. The massive expansion of factories had attracted new immigrants. By 1900, the population reached around 40,000 and would continue to grow. Crammed together in grimy brick row houses and wood-frame structures, working class families endured constant flooding and unhealthy conditions. Bustling streets posed a daily adventure in survival. Most were still brick and kept in a dreadful condition. While dirt alleys were common, residents had to dodge horse carts, street cars, and even railroads on certain streets. Throughout this period, residents began to complain that political leaders were slow to act to resolve these growing problems in the city. Many went so far as to allege outright corruption was taking place. Before getting to the issue of influence over city council and the vice culture, it's important to understand how Wheeling's government operated at that time. Glenn Elliott was elected mayor of Wheeling in 2016 and we sat down for a conversation in the professional building located along market street. In our conversation, Mayor Elliott was surprised at how city government operated during Henry Schmulbach's time.

Hal Gorby:

In your position, obviously, as mayor of Wheeling, you know, you, you have certain relationships, you have to sort of manage obviously city council. I wonder if you're sort of intrigued by the way, sort of city government operated.

Glenn Elliott:

I would love to know more, you know, I've looked at city council going back, you know, a few decades, but I've not really looked at it, you know, pre 1920 or whatever in this era you're talking about. And it seems like it was very different, a different setup then than what we have now.

Hal Gorby:

Yes. Uh, so, so how big is city council now?

Glenn Elliott:

Oh, right now we have seven members if you include me as the mayor.

Hal Gorby:

Okay. Okay. Well, the mayors of Wheeling in the pre 1917 period, in 1917 is when the city had a major, a new charter that is not entirely the same as how the city works now, but it's more similar in, in many functions. Uh, prior to that, the city had two branches of city council.

Glenn Elliott:

I find that just incredible to believe. It's almost like, like a bicameral legislature, as city council.

Hal Gorby:

Yes. So, you had a first branch where, kind of like the US Senate, you would get two representatives and only two from each of the city's eight wards. And this is pre, before the pre-annexation.

Glenn Elliott:

So, the wards were more compressed then.

Hal Gorby:

So, think of like Wheeling island was ward seven, south Wheeling was ward eight, five and six were in center Wheeling, obviously. And then you had the second branch of council that likewise you would get a certain number of representatives from each of the wards, but like the house of representatives, was based on population. So some wards would have maybe six, seven representatives, the smaller ones maybe have just two or three, a total of 28 members on the second branch.

Glenn Elliott:

I cannot imagine, I cannot imagine.

Hal Gorby:

So 44 total members of council. And they had, uh, elections on the odd years, uh, like our, uh, sort of US Congress, the second branch, that larger branch of the people's branch, so to speak, uh, they that's where all financial, uh, sort of decisions had to start. Yeah. Uh, similar to the Congress, having the power of the purse. Added onto this to act as a sort of sense of city oversight uh, the first duty that city council would have once it was newly elected in an office, the first meeting in chambers would be with a quorum to choose uh, what was known as the board of public works. The board of public works, uh, was three members, uh, could not be members of council, could not be the mayor, could not be sort of any public official, uh, and they would be elected by both branches of, of council.

Hal Gorby:

Uh, and at this time I should note as well. Uh, this is a partisan council. So members are elected based on party affiliation. Um, this often led to some problems because at various times, council tended to be throughout this period, more Republican, uh, in, in domination, the first branch in particular, second branch, depending on the areas of the city that had more population, particularly the working class areas tended to have a little more democratic representation. Um, so they would pick the three members of the board of public works and their job would be to oversee all sort of, uh, infrastructure problems in the city. So things like maintaining the sewer system, which.

Glenn Elliott:

Which we spend a lot of time, energy and money on now. It's, a lot of the sewer systems we're dealing with now were built in this era, you know, because we have, uh, you know, we have the, um, a very, well being an old city, you know, we have very old underground infrastructure and it's very expensive to fix. And it's, uh, you know, we, I think our waterline running down main street right now was, was finished in the 1880s, 1890s.

Hal Gorby:

Wow. Yeah, literally at this time. Um, they handled, the board of public works, handled things like sewer systems, the street maintenance sort of supervising that, water and gas utility hookups as well, and sort of making sure that everyone had supposedly equal access to those. Um, and in Henry Schmulbach's biographies, there's often a short little mention that at various times he was a member of the board of education here in Ohio county. And as a member of the board of public works, how convenient, how convenient you are correct. Uh, he was board of public works in the 1890s, again in the early, uh, part of the 20th century, in fact, a popular history of Wheeling in 1902 lists him as a current member of the board of public works doing great and amazing things. And then shortly thereafter an investigation takes place of his influence over decisions going on between council and the board of public works. So as you sort of mentioned earlier,

Glenn Elliott:

It is, yeah. What you described is, you know, I'm trying to think forward to our city council now, you know, we, first of all, having seven members is much different from having 44. Uh, but the other thing that's, I mean, very different now is our council is non-partisan, you know, we don't run on partisan tickets, uh, which I find very helpful, especially in this era where our country is so politically divided. Sure. Um, you know, when I ran for mayor, like nobody said, you're a Democrat, you're Republican, whatever they, I got attacked for things, or I got people supported me cause my ideas and people attack me cause of my ideas, but they weren't, you know, kind of aligning with any partisan sort of, um, ideology, and I think that's helpful for city government because there's no Republican or democratic way to fix a pothole. You have to fix the pothole. And if you don't fix a pothole, someone's going to be mad. Uh, working with seven people is sometimes challenging enough, you know, working with 44 would be an entirely different operation.

Hal Gorby:

Yes. Uh, and one of the interesting reforms that happens in 1917 to aid in this sort of oversight is the mayor is made one of the three members of the board of public works to kind of act as a, a second level check on, uh, sort of, sort of what's going on, but just, yeah, you're right. Imagine having 44 members that you have to corral votes on to get any of the policies you would want to have, you'd have to have first get something passed in second branch, if it had any financial, uh, sort of interest tied to it and then get it obviously passed, uh, by the next branch. Um,

Glenn Elliott:

So and the city did not have a city manager then, correct?

Hal Gorby:

No, they went to a city manager system. Uh I'm, I'm not, I'm not sure it was during that time period. And then after 1917, they went to that sort of, so kind of having one person who's full-time duty is kind of, non-partisan the idea that they are the person doing what the board of public works would have done.

Uh, and I think that's kind of the same relationship, you know, maintaining sort of a merit system on how police are hired, how firefighters are hired, uh, before these charter reforms, during this era of Henry Schmulbach, those members of the police and fire department are basically given their job by the chief of police, the chief of the fire department with "oversight," I'm giving air quotes for our listeners, uh, by the board of public works. Um, interesting. Um, and, and even things that you would think of that are not sort of under the city purview, our streetcar system that existed in Wheeling, it was one of the great sort of, uh, you know, marvels of its time was under city government. And one of the often criticisms was that people got their jobs on the streetcar system through influence in council.

Glenn Elliott:

Imagine that happening.

Hal Gorby:

Yes. Schmulbach would serve on the board of public works on and off throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As you can probably suspect having a seat on the board was very important. And this position is what led to much of the negative criticism thrown at Schmulbach by his critics. One of the critiques was a phrase that even Mayor Glenn Elliott had heard about one.

Glenn Elliott:

One of the things, because I was thinking about, you know, when you asked me to sit down and talk about Henry Schmulbach, you know, I looked at my notes on him. I looked at his stuff out there about him and I came across this term called Schmulbachism. And I'd never heard that term before. And you know, when you read it, I mean, you try to Google it. And there's a couple of hits that come up and it seems like it's, it's not a compliment. It seems to be a pejorative that was used against Henry Schmulbach to suggest his involvement in gangs or, or a political bossism or the gangs of Wheeling at the time. What can you tell me about, about Schmulbachism?

Hal Gorby:

Well, and this is, this is part of the efforts, I think, you know, about talking about Wheeling's history, the good, the bad, and some of the ugly things too, to learn lessons from. And Schmulbachism was a phrase that was used at the time in the press to largely refer to this association with all the problems that the city elders, sort of upper-class, middle-class people, the native-born sort of population, saw that was wrong in Wheeling at this say the Victorian era turn of the 20th century. So, this association between gambling, brewing, saloon culture, problems of immigrants in the city, crime, they, it's easy for people to get an explanation of why things are developing a certain way and have somebody to point at and for some, and for, for most of the sort of, sort of upper crust, uh, of Wheeling of that time, I think it was appropriate to sort of see Schmulbach, who was a sort of convoluted character.

Hal Gorby:

He was a, I liked your phrase. He was a doer, he was somebody that had a lot of plans. He also was someone who liked Wheeling's nightlife. He liked, he liked horse racing. He liked to drink, obviously. Uh, and so I think for a lot of sort of people that were wanting to clean up the image of a city like Wheeling, as you said, that's developing almost like a Brooklyn, New York, Chicago, in its architecture, but also it's, the similar types of problems those cities had. Schmulbach sort of emerges as one of those figures. Now the other part of the equation is too, there was a lot of associations that a lot of the things that were

getting done or not getting done in the city were the result of Schmulbach as a boss who was pulling the strings.

Hal Gorby:

A good image depicting this theme is a political cartoon from 1906 we saw in episode one.

Hal Gorby:

There's a famous, a series of cartoons that were done in the Wheeling Intelligencer in 1905, 1906, talking about the city's history. And there is one of Mr. Schmulbach on top of his building, which wasn't finished at this point. Maybe Glenn, if you can just describe where, what do you see there?

Glenn Elliott:

What I see here is a picture of a somewhat older Henry Schmulbach sitting on top of his building with a street car. I know he owned some street cars, um, he's drinking or spewing out, uh, a beer there. It's, it's a mug of beer looks to be a sort of frothing over the top. Um, there's a telephone there. He owned telephones as well, right? Yes. There's a bank book there. Of course he owned banks. So yeah, it doesn't seem to be a complimentary article or cartoon without reading it, but yeah.

Hal Gorby:

Yeah, whereas a lot of the other series are sort of portraying sort of the business sort of figures in town near their, you know, their business, you know, sort of in a, in a more positive way. This is almost suggesting he, he's in control of so many things sitting on the top of his new building where he can watch over the city of Wheeling. Yeah.

Glenn Elliott:

Yeah. It actually reminds me of the, of the, uh, sort of the art style of the monopoly game and it's monopoly man esque.

Hal Gorby:

And one of the key things, as you noted here, things like street cars, telephones, these are all things that have city franchises. So these are things wrapped up in city government, city politics too.

Glenn Elliott:

And he was much more closely involved with city government than most people would think, right. He played a integral role. Um, and that was probably out of self-interest more so than some sense of civic duty.

Hal Gorby:

Yes. I mean, that was always one of the allegations thrown around in the press at this time. And then it's a little different at this time than it is now where we really have one newspaper. At this time we had, we had a German language newspaper, we had democratic newspaper, Republican newspaper. We had a labor newspaper and all of them at that time wanted to sort of highlight this image that there is some sort of boss and for each side, obviously the boss was different. Uh, whether it be in business, whether it be sort of, you know, in labor or something else. Uh, and so that sort of association of Schmulbachism, the idea that we have a city that is on the make on the rise, we have all of these people coming in. We

have all these products that are known across the nation. But if you ask the ordinary person at the time who traveled to Wheeling, what do they think Wheeling is? The common thing they would have said was this is a wide open town. Yeah. Interesting. And that association was loose from many would be something they would associate with someone like Mr. Schmulbach.

Hal Gorby:

His political control led to calls of corruption against Schmulbach and his supporters on city council. In the spring of 1902, a jury acquitted 10 Councilmen indicted for conspiring to sell votes to the city railway company of which Schmulbach had a controlling interest. A year later, Councilmen denied influence over the approval of another city contract. It was eerily similar to the franchise granted the Wheeling streetcar company, also controlled by Schmulbach. James Maxwell, president of the second branch of city council answered the obvious question posed by the Wheeling intelligencer.

Speaker 7:

Does Mr. Schmulbach, as alleged at the board of trade meeting, own the city council? I don't think these allegations were just. I don't think Mr. Schmulbach or any other man controls this council.

Hal Gorby:

By 1903 native born Republicans sought to end Schmulbach's quote "Imperial title to the bossship" end quote of the local party. The goal was to end his policy of nominating who would run for local political office in the Republican party, but also sometimes in the democratic party. In their mind, Schmulbach did not have the right to hold city government quote "in the palm of his hand" end quote. However, Schmulbach's style of saloon politics continued until his retirement. As depicted in that 1906 cartoon, he set to cement his supremacy on the skyline of Wheeling. The Schmulbach building, formerly the headquarters of Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel, is a gem of early 20th century architecture. The building is currently being remodeled into loft-style apartments. Ryan Stanton and I discussed the building from inside its 12th floor on a sweltering hot afternoon.

Ryan Stanton:

I'm actually looking right now at a pamphlet from the Schmulbach building. Uh, it opened in 1907 and they say as to beauty, heavy granite and gray brick walls, uh, roomy corridors with artistic decorations, grills, hardwood finish, and plate glass throughout. And they go on to talk about how it's also updated with the latest equipment. Um, they also go on to say that it has hydraulic passenger elevators and, uh, the toilet rooms are designed with the strictest observance of sanity laws. And, uh, they also advertise that there is a cafe, restaurant, a roof garden, and it is designed to provide superior service at reasonable rates. And so, um, you could have located your business, your offices in this building, uh, and also steel safes were provided free. Um, and so those, of course, still in the building today, they're basically like walk-in safes, that say Schmulbach building at the top of them. And it also goes on to say how it's very well connected in the city where it's located, uh, within short walking distance to all the trolley lines and you know, so on. So, uh, it's a, it's a great symbol of Henry Schmulbach. It's great to be here.

Hal Gorby:

And we rode the elevator. Uh, it was safe. It was fun. Uh, and it, it gives us a sense of that experience that people would have felt here in the early 20th century, uh, coming into this very spacious building, uh, at it's, uh, time that it was built. It was the, I believe, the largest structure in the state of West Virginia.

Ryan Stanton:

It's the largest structure and office building and the state of West Virginia and really like West Virginia's first skyscraper, you know, it was what it was perceived to be. And built at a cost of \$150,000. Uh, fun fact, Wheeling steel when they renovated the building in the 1960s, they spent about \$1.5 million on renovations in the sixties. Uh, but yes, cost Henry Schmulbach in 1907, \$150,000.

Hal Gorby:

Wow. Uh, any other interesting stories or, uh, sort of elements of the building that, uh, listeners should, uh, know about?

Ryan Stanton:

Well, as you know, the building today, when you walk on market street at street level, uh, there's basically like granite, you know, right at eye level, uh, at one time there was actually storefronts there. So you could have been walking along market street and done a little window shopping, or decided to go into the Schmulbach building for lunch or, you know, to meet with your lawyer or to do just about anything, you know, but it was, uh, intended to be a modern office building. So that's something that when, uh, we talk about the renovations that are happening here today, hopefully that's something maybe they can bring back is that storefront atmosphere that used to be at the lowest level or the street level of the building. Yeah.

Hal Gorby:

And I know just, uh, us from sort of wandering around the building, looking for a best location and other materials, uh, to do the podcast. And I should note that I am currently sitting on a Wheeling steel, uh, garbage can just to be entrepreneurial like Mr. Schmulbach was. There are relics of Mr. Schmulbach that we have seen throughout the building, particularly those interesting, uh, door knobs on some of the doors if you want.

Ryan Stanton:

Yeah, so, uh, every, basically every door, a wooden door that would lead into an office, or just about anywhere, was equipped with a Schmulbach door knob. So that door knob would actually contain the logo, uh, that you would have actually found, uh, at the brewery on signs and beer bottles with an S uh, and a pheasant flying through it with a little bit of a hops and barley kind of motif in the background. And those door knobs are still here today. Uh, and different renovations that have happened. Uh, some of those door knobs have found their way, uh, to other places. Uh, there's people that actually collect door knobs from famous buildings. And so you'll see it every once in a while, one pop up on eBay. And, uh, I've been able to get a couple myself that way just because I find myself attracted to pretty much anything I can get my hands on that says Schmulbach on it. So, um, it's a little, it's a way to own a little bit of, uh, this building.

Hal Gorby:

A modern marvel, the buildings' H pattern floors, like the other intricacies that Ryan noted, really speak to the larger than life persona of Henry Schmulbach.

Hal Gorby:



By the early 20th century, reform efforts began to take shape at the city level. Mayor Charles Schmidt's tenure saw reforms in zoning, drinking water, garbage collection, and more.

Hal Gorby:

One of the mayors during this time, that really stands out in terms of trying to, coming out of that culture of the breweries and the saloons, but then also being someone that then says, well, there are real reforms we need to do is Mayor Charles Schmidt, Charles Schmidt, all right. He was a mayor from 1905 to 1912. Mayor Schmidt gets elected as a Democrat at a time when the Republican party is pretty strong in the city and he comes in criticized that he's going to be kind of the continuance of this culture. Oh, look, he's associated with Reymann brewery, he's gonna, he's gonna continue with this. And he comes in at a time when there's all of these concerns. And as he's mayor, he really pushes a broad agenda to sort of get rid of this sort of political sort of appointment process with the police and the fire department really behind that. Uh, stricter building codes and the first sort of real push to say, there needs to be some control of some kind over the way buildings are built in the city, the way the roads are laid out and all.

Glenn Elliott:

We can thank him for a lot of buildings still standing then I guess yes.

Hal Gorby:

Fire codes in particular because the city was constantly at this time having a lot of problems with fires. Yeah.

Glenn Elliott:

Well, you mentioned that, and not to change the topic. Sure, sure. Uh, you know, in my research, this particular building from the newspaper archives, there was a fifth floor fire in 1915, 1916, that would have destroyed the building. But this building was designed with this, it was called the Bostwick steel lathing or whatever behind the plaster, which was actually made here locally in Wheeling. And I guess it held the fire long enough for the fire crews to get up there and put it out. But it was a really bad fire on the fifth floor. You could still see where they actually rebuilt the floor on the fifth floor here from a major fire. Um, and that was probably a result of

Hal Gorby:

Of these earlier, the reforms that they were starting to be reaching a crisis point when Mayor Schmidt becomes mayor. And some of the bigger issues too, dealing with sort of the lack of the city, having a filtrated water, which we don't get until I believe 1915, it was just pumped directly from the river to, yeah.

Glenn Elliott:

What, the other things from this era that I found interesting. And I did not know it. I didn't realize it until reading an article about the annexation in 1919, 1920 was, was that Wheeling Creek was for the most part used as a, as an open sewer. And you know, one of the, one of my big priorities as mayor has been to, I kind of reengage us with our waterways and Wheeling Creek would be, uh, I mean, if it were in a European city, it would be lying on both sides with little bike paths and parks and restaurants and outdoor seating. Almost all through Wheeling, you know, Wheeling Creek is ignored. There's, I mean, you can say Generations Restaurant opens up to it a little bit with its back deck, but you're still, it's like a

three-story deck removed from it. There's really nothing that embraces Wheeling Creek. And I think that's just a carry over for so many years it was either a sewer or it was industrial use. So that's something, you know, we have to look forward to reengaging ourselves with, with that Creek, because it's a great resource that for the most part is ignored.

Hal Gorby:

Yea. And it was during this time that the mayor, Mayor Schmidt at this time was really getting a lot of public criticism when he became mayor about the lack of garbage collection in the city of Wheeling. So, as you said, dumping it in Wheeling Creek, or the more common practice of taking it onto the two nearby hillsides above us here, uh, and burning it on the top of the hillside. So, if you see any of those older photographs of Wheeling at this time.

Glenn Elliott:

The hills are bare.

Hal Gorby:

And part of that was clear cutting timber, but also the continued practice of burning garbage. Interesting. Uh.

Glenn Elliott:

If there's one way to make your constituents mad, it's don't provide good garbage service. I found that early on in my term, and it's something, you know, we're always trying to do better because people take their garbage service very seriously.

Hal Gorby:

Oh, yes, yes. And the mayor at that time, uh, I think he heard it as well. I think the other big problem at that time that it was something we don't really even think about anymore in Wheeling is the problem of sort of epidemics and outbreaks, particularly typhoid fever, which until this period of time and the first sort of real innovator, Dr. McLean, who was this sort of health inspector for Wheeling had an office on the fifth floor here discovered the odd problem that, uh, these outbreaks were happening near city pumps. There were city pumps throughout the whole city, and they did a full study that found that many of these pumps were within a very close proximity of outdoor privies. And so, and when the report was filed in 1913, found that there were over 2300 outdoor privies in the city of Wheeling. Well, um, so trying to sort of, you know, uh, approach like city government in a more sort of, uh, scientific or efficient sort of way. Uh, this is a period of time where obviously people like Henry Schmulbach are being seen as, you know, a political boss, Schmulbachism, but at the same time, other sort of doers, as you've mentioned, that phrase that I'll use myself, uh, they, you have people that are really trying to say, there are other ways we can deal with this city's rapid growth in a way that will make it sustainable. We'll preserve ourselves longer uh, if we have stricter building codes, fire codes, if we have a better water system, and we don't have people dying of large and large numbers of typhoid and other things.

Glenn Elliott:

It's interesting because it sounds like, you know, one of the things, when I ran for mayor, I talked a lot about quality of life and, you know, cause people look to their mayor and their city council, you know, I

think they think our job is really just economic development, you need to go out there and find jobs, bring jobs in. And that's obviously a big piece of what you gotta do. You always gotta be looking for that. But what we found is, you know, what, when you look at younger workers today, they increasingly pick where they want to live first. And then, you know, look for the job, you know, uh, sort of within that area. And if Wheeling doesn't offer the sorts of quality of life that people expect or want, or can find elsewhere, then we're not going to compete. It doesn't matter if we have the jobs or not. So that's something it's about. It's like a quality of life thing there that Mayor Schmidt was dealing with too, you know, I, you can have all this great economic growth and jobs and development, but if you don't, actually, if you don't keep people safe, if you don't keep them in that case free from epidemics and disease, if you don't keep the water clean, if you don't have a good parks and recreation system, it's not, I mean, it's going to be hard to attract people and actually, actually, grow your economy.

Hal Gorby:

Yeah, and that, and that was another related push coming out of this reform era was also the development of the city's parks system for green spaces, which were being sort of gobbled up as the city expanded. I mean, also at this time we, you know, we have zoning laws now that prevent putting a factory in the middle of downtown Wheeling. Well at the city had developed as a city that had in factories built in places where there weren't any people. And then as the city expanded housing expanding around.

Glenn Elliott:

We have two great examples of Warwood and South Wheeling or, our neighborhoods, that grew up around it. I mean, infrastructure and industry, I think it was a great model really. I mean, you may not do it today because of the noise or smoke or whatever, but, you know, I think it makes a lot of sense to have your workers living. I mean, where they could walk to work. And I love those neighborhoods. I think they have that really historic feel in each of them.

Hal Gorby:

Oh sure. Yeah. It has a feel that you don't get in other places where maybe, you know, those changes in zoning laws, you know, wipe that out at some point, it existed here in Wheeling for a while longer. Yeah, absolutely.

Hal Gorby:

Those early 20th century changes played a role in what the city infrastructure looks like today. While initially criticized for his ties to the brewing industry and particularly Henry Schmulbach, Mayor Schmidt's legacy of reform would set a tone for trying to improve city services and quality of life. However, reformers would have a tougher time trying to change personal behaviors, whether it be with houses of ill repute or drinking in saloons. This podcast is brought to you by Clientele Art Studio, an art gallery and studio space in East Wheeling. From art shows to concerts, Clientele has event space as well as multiple studios for rent. Learn more at [clientelestudio.com](http://clientelestudio.com).

Hal Gorby:

Wheeling's rapid expansion created a host of widening social problems, especially rising crime rates. By 1902, Wheeling had 38 beat policemen walking the streets, trying to halt pickpockets, drunken fist fights or rows, and prostitution. In 1914, Wheeling had a real crime problem with 634 arrests for disorderly conduct, 410 cases of loitering to commit prostitution, 71 arrests for street fighting, 149 arrests for

gambling and 90 arrests for pistol toting. Wheeling's reputation as a wide-open town was renowned. While organized vice existed in one form or another dating back to the siege of Ford Henry during the revolutionary war, Wheeling's riverboat trade brought thousands of young men to the city seeking pleasure. The primary vice district was known as Alley C between 10th and 11th streets one block east of the upper market house. Many of the buildings that stand facing market street were saloons whose rear doors face this row of brothels. The madams of Alley C's houses often masked their true occupations. Mary Ship, who ran a brothel from 1870 to 1888 at 1923 Market Street advertised herself in the city directory as a confectionary, a term referring to a candy maker. Police would sometimes crack down on prostitutes, especially when they wandered the city at dark, part of an unwritten rule. Following a dance at the German Turner Hall in North Wheeling, the police called a meeting on March 23rd, 1904, to reiterate their policy.

Actor:

A meeting of the proprietresses of houses of ill fame at police headquarters. Early last night was the sequel to all of this. They had been notified by officers to appear. And when all were assembled, chief John S Ritz delivered a lecture laying down his regulations in a manner so plain as to make it impossible to misunderstand him. The department has handled social evil in a commendable manner. And the chief notified the women that the trouble would follow in case they did not cooperate with him in his regulations.

Hal Gorby:

This vice regulation provided needed tax revenue for the city. Some neighborhood constables demanded bribes to keep silent about the location of prostitution houses. In a telling case before the board of control in November 1910, former Constable John Madden revealed the payoff system for policemen walking what was known as the Tenderloin district in Center Wheeling. In particular, the case focused on the role of Lieutenant Bert McConnell. The following is a reading of the testimony recorded by the Ohio County Court with John Madden and male members of the board control questioning a Ms. Martha Blair, whose line of work should become quite clear.

Actors:

Martha, what state do you reside in? West Virginia. In what county? Ohio county. Where is your residence? 2628 main street. What is your occupation? What is my occupation? Yes. Why, I don't know that it's necessary for me to answer that question. You can tell us what business you are in surely. This is not for publication, but we want to find these things out. You will be protected from publicity. As far as that is concerned. You keep a house of prostitution, don't you? Yes. That is your business. Yes. Martha, just tell the board of control. What conversation between me and you and your husband. He's not my husband. He is my friend. Tell them what happened between me and you and Jordan Rigby on the 14th day of September on Wednesday. Just tell them what took place between you and me and him in the annex. The evening you came to the porch?

Actors:

Yes. In the Annex. Just tell them what took place. I don't think I can tell them everything that took place. Tell them, referring to borrowing \$5 from you on the evening of the 14th of September. Mr. Rigby, you and him was talking a little concerning when you had arrested someone. And as far as that is, there's nothing more concerning that, that with Mr. Rigby. What I'm asking you is to tell them what conversation took place between you and me. You told me you were a friend of his, I don't remember what date it

was anymore, but it was during the fair week. And you said that man was a friend of yours and you and your friend wanted to go and take a hunt and you wanted \$5. And I told you that I didn't have the money to give you. And you says, well, can you give me \$5 between this and Sunday and Monday?

Actors:

And I says, I will see about it. And that is all I think was said. And I didn't give you the \$5 that night. Moreover, just tell them, please, if I didn't ask you for the loan of \$5 and Rigby was standing there on the left. I don't know nothing about any loan. You said you wanted to go hunting. You didn't say to borrow it nor to loan it. Nothing like that was said at all. I didn't understand that part of it. And you said you wanted \$5 for you and this friend of yours, a policeman, to go hunting, to go and take a hunt. Who was the man that was going hunting with me? Mr. Moran was the friend. You said it was officer Moran. Tell what you told George in that conversation. Just tell the board of control. What you told George about me.

Actors:

You spoke something about George working with you once. Well, tell them what you said to George about me. I said anything, what I said was all right. Did you tell George I was always a good friend of yours when I was a Constable before? I don't remember whether I told him you were a good friend of mine or not. What conversation did you have with any of the officers in regard to this matter? That night with any of the offices? No, not that night. Anytime. One evening during the week. Well, this was on Saturday evening. I had a talk with officer McConnell concerning the matter. What was said? When you came up to my place and demanded the money. And you said he was going to get, even with me, you didn't exactly say what you was going to do, but you was going to get back at me. And you said you had a friend in the police force and you would attend to me.

Actors:

And the name you called me when you cursed. And when my friend wanted to go out on the porch and settle with you and I locked the door and took the key out of the door. And I said, well, I would give you \$3 when you said you would get back at me. And I have got witnesses to that. And I told Mr. McConnell about it and asked him, what right did you have to come and talk to me like that and call me violently. Mr. McConnell was in there at the time? No, sir. Just tell what conversation took place between you and me down at the annex about telling me about Sam arresting two girls in that house. It was a Wednesday, the 14th. Those two girls had wanted to fight. I don't care anything about that. Tell me what you said about arresting them.

Actors:

I didn't say anything. Didn't you say he didn't have any right to arrest? He wouldn't have arrested them. Only one of the girls was drinking and making a fuss around the house and wanted to fight and I kept them apart. That was on Wednesday. I think we had spoke something about that during the week he was in. But whether it was Wednesday or not, I couldn't say. On Friday the 15th what conversation did you have with me? I didn't see you Friday as I remember of. Wasn't I in your house on Friday, the 15th of July, Mrs. Burns came up and told you I was down there? I don't think I saw you that day at all. And you told me to come down Sunday afternoon. No, I didn't see you that time at all. I didn't tell you to come down. If I told you to come down Sunday afternoon, I don't remember it.

Actors:

Do I understand you to say that you agree to lend him \$3? He says, when I get to be a Constable again, I will fix you. And he called me all the names and my friend wanted to go out and knock him off the porch. My friend was going to go out there and knock him off the porch after he called me the names, he kept on cursing me and calling me them names. And I says, I will give you \$3. What were those names? Tell us what names he called you. Now, can't you excuse me from those names? No, I think we want those names. I don't like to call those names. He cursed me and called me those names and I says, I will give you \$3. And the \$3 was to keep him quiet. I says to him, I would just give you \$3.

Actors:

And you remember when you want to get back at me and make trouble for me or for your friend to do it, which you said your friend was Mr. Moran. That's the policemen. Yes, sir. I said, I don't have witnesses to prove it. Just the same as I told, when I called Bert in and asked Bert what right he had to do that. And he went and brought Mr. Moran there before I was dressed. I wanted to go away to Dayton, Ohio on the train that leaves about midnight. I couldn't say just what day it was, but I also was given orders to fasten up things just after fair week on Saturday, after the closing of the fair, I can't remember the exact date, but it was on Saturday night of the fair. I was in the bathroom dressing at the time. And I says, I will give you \$3.

Actors:

And when you was going to say something else I says, go on, I don't want to talk to you. And I called Mr. McConnell then and complained to him. You called McConnell in there. Yes, sir. I called officer McConnell and I explained to him and Mr. McConnell went out and brought this man Mr. Moran in. And what was your object in calling Mr. McConnell, you had already turned over the money to him then. I wanted to know if he could make me any trouble. Mr. Moran was on that beat at that time. And I was going away and I didn't, wasn't acquainted very much with Mr. Moran. And he talked about arresting two of my girls that wanted to fight in there and I was afraid he might make trouble while I was gone. Who was going to arrest the girls? Mr. Moran. And you thought he might make trouble for you.

Actors:

I thought maybe he might come back at me. We had to be awful quiet there and not make any noise. And I thought maybe if he heard them laughing or speaking loud that Mr. Moran might come in there while I was gone and arrest some of the girls, and that's why I called in Burt McConnell. And I explained it to him and he made him give me \$3 back that same night. He can call it borrowing or whatever it wants to, but that's just the way it was. Didn't you just tell a while ago that these girls were fighting there? Not that night. And Mr. Moran arrested them?

Hal Gorby:

Martha Blair's testimony reveals a lot. She was very worried that this new officer, Mr. Moran quote "could make trouble." If it was unclear, the money in question was hush money to keep quiet. Stories like this were unsettling, but the police department arranged this regulated prostitution system, following a dramatic case against a madam in 1904. We should pause first to think about the young women who entered into prostitution. Many historians have noted how prostitution should be understood as a form of low wage work. An occupational opportunity for young women when low pay factory jobs and domestic work were limited. Local reporters of the time did little to analyze what drove these young girls into prostitution in the first place, focusing more intently on the perceived moral failings of these women. With the increasing number of female wage-earners in South Wheeling's factories, many

virtuous women had to walk to work through these back alleys in the Tenderloin district. One area of concern was called paper mill alley. Here's how a Wheeling register reporter graphically described walking the area on March 5th, 1905.

Actor:

The famous paper mill alley, if reports are correct, will be cleaned out by the police department not later than April 1st. The section of the town embraced in the term paper mill alley consists of alley 19, running from water street west and alley A running north and south in the neighborhood of what was known as the old paper mill property, but now occupied by the Warwick China company. This section in the old paper mill days from the time the Cushing paper company had their plant there and later when the Metzner furniture factory was in operation was always a prolific source of disorder and trouble to the police. In the early days, this disorder took the shape of rows among the young men who made this point a loafing place, but later an undesirable class of tough men and women began to occupy the tenements fronting on these alleys.

Actor:

And the rowdyism became more strenuous until brutal fights, which sometimes ended in tragedies occurred. Of later years, Cypriots of a low class have flocked to these houses running one or two rooms more generally one until the present time it is estimated that there are between 25 and 30 profligate women residing in that immediate neighborhood. These harpies find it frequently necessary to despoil their victims, mostly beastly drunk, of the entire wages received from their hard labors in the factories in order to live. If this were all, it might be condoned or overlooked by the authorities, but there is another phase to the question that so report says compels them to act. With the building and putting into operation of the Warwick China Company a number of women and young girls were necessarily employed. These women are virtuous and only through a force of circumstances are compelled to work for a living. As it is necessary for these women and girls employed in the pottery to pass through these alleys faced by the rooms occupied by the bods, the sight of these depraved creatures dressed in negligee clothing of a flimsy material and gaudy pattern with a don't care appearance of a person who has had a good time, has a tendency to make these hard-working girls dissatisfied with their lot and easy victims for the tempter.

Actor:

The action is outlined. If taken by the authorities will meet with the approval of all citizens of the fifth ward, as the nuisance, as described, is gaining in strength, instead of decreasing.

Hal Gorby:

The exploits of Wheeling's most infamous Madam Alice Bradford led to the eventual arrangement of prostitution south of the Creek. Bradford rented out a series of five houses along Alley C from the early 1890s through 1903. However, after some police raids, she became the center of a heated trial in the summer of 1904. The public learned that three Pittsburgh minors were taken away from their homes and forced into prostitution in Alley C. The anger over the case led to renewed public outcries and forced local politicians to feel the political heat. The Wheeling register attack the arrogance of those like Alice Bradford and also the political status quo in a scathing article on July 19th, 1904.

Actor:

Without going into the noxious depths of the special case, however, there is certainly no lack of law to warrant the authorities in cleaning out this nest of vice in Alley C. The whole district should be cleaned out as the moral cesspool and pestilence breeder it is. It has far too long been a sort of Augean stable, a blot on the city, the shame and disgrace of Wheeling. Away with it.

Hal Gorby:

In November police chief, John Ritz dramatically closed the Alley C brothels. One reason might have been the upcoming municipal elections and his own reelection in January 1905. The election itself would be a referendum on prostitution and the saloons leading to the defeat of Chief Ritz and the election of democratic mayor Charles Schmidt, who we heard about earlier in the episode. Chief Ritz's vice crack down led most prostitutes to relocate to south Wheeling. As noted by the Wheeling Intelligencer in November 1904.

Actor:

Reports have it that a large number of women have rented houses along water street below 22nd. Certain houses in that vicinity have already gained notoriety for vice, only differing in the degree from that attained by the Alley C buildings. Other reports had it that a colony of the outcasts had migrated to west Wheeling. And there was consternation in that peaceful burg across the river yesterday.

Hal Gorby:

Quickly citizens realize that Ritz and the city had no intention of closing down all prostitution in Wheeling. Rather they plan to contain it. Throughout the 20th century, the area near the center market house, along water street, and a region between 26th and 27th streets became well-known as the city's new hotspot for prostitution. Urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s removed most of this district from view and the memory of many current Wheelingites. By the turn of the 20th century, Henry Schmulbach's Wheeling was starting to come under fire for polluting the city's moral character. Organized pressure came from religious groups, such as the Committee of 100. Composed of actually 130 men from both political parties and various Protestant churches, in January 1900 they began pressuring city council to ban slot machines, adopt Sunday closing laws for saloons, and close all houses of ill fame. Reformers even started getting elected to city council to push for more drastic reform.

Hal Gorby:

The two main principal brewers in Wheeling were sort of acting as the defacto bosses. Schmulbach who was more associated with the Republican party, Anton Reymann, his rival in most things. And there's some disagreement about how much of a rivalry they had. They had one in politics. Reymann was seen as sort of the influencer behind the democratic party here in the city. Um, the one thing where they had bipartisan agreement was anytime reform members got on council typically during this time, one of the first things they start pushing is to raise license on saloons and the selling of beer in the city. Every time that gets brought up, it very mysteriously goes away.

Glenn Elliott:

It goes away. Uh, one question for you at this point, I guess, at this point Schmulbach was getting older because he passed away in 15 or 16. Right. But what was his role? I assume he was involved in fighting prohibition at the state level, you know, where did he take that, was Raymond still around then, was Schmulbach still around, involved then and how did they fight that and how they lose that fight?



Hal Gorby:

I think part of the, and that's a great question. Part of the issue with that is that statewide prohibition, which happens in 1914, the year before he dies, there is this period of about 12 to 15 years before where like any political movement or reform it's starting on the local level first. So, the first years of the 20th century, you see a lot of push by religious leaders in a place like Wheeling and we'll, we'll stick to Wheeling, uh, and sort of other people becoming upset about the growth of the city saloons, which by 1904, we had 199 licensed saloons in Wheeling. Licensed, not including unlicensed saloons. Wow. Uh, so there was a lot of pushback and people began getting elected to council on this general reform push during the progressive era that we, you know, we know, uh, historically speaking during this period. Uh, and so what they initially start to push and what Schmulbach, Reymann and others in that sort of, uh, brewing industry push back on are these smaller things that come from the city level, things like raising license on, uh, the selling of beer in the city and outside of the city.

Hal Gorby:

And so that created a part of this sort of criticism from reformers to say, well, well then what's going on in these saloons, these aren't independent businesses. These are people that if you go into a certain saloon, you can ask for one of three or four drinks on tap that are all Schmulbach beer versus there would be another saloon you could go to down the street that is Anton Reymann. Um, and so this, this created a sort of concern about the fact of, well, what often happens in these saloons too, is every time there's an election cycle city election, most of the polling places are held in saloons. Interesting.

Hal Gorby:

So, if you're holding a local board election in a saloon, well, if it's a Schmulbach saloon, democratic candidates, probably not gonna sort of go there and sort of try to get votes. Uh, similarly in a Reymann saloon. So, it created a lot of concerns about this sort of influence between the brewers that existed.

Hal Gorby:

The committee of 100 particularly focused on tightening the vice on the city saloons. For years a reciprocal relationship developed where saloon keepers expected the annual liquor license renewal to be a rubber stamp process. This was an early battleground in the pre-prohibition years.

Hal Gorby:

Their way of trying to undercut that, reformers that would get into city government, they would say, okay, we're going to raise the license on the saloon keepers, make it so that they can't really operate as effectively as they want to, knowing that we're not really hurting them, we're hurting Mr. Schmulbach or Mr. Reymann. Uh, but every time it would go through the council, which had its 44 members, these, these efforts would often, often die. Uh, and there was in, in, in, almost like a bicameral legislature council had all of these different committees. So, there was a finance committee, there was a committee on license on licensing, which everybody that was ever, it seems like that's on the license committee is always opponents of raising the, the liquor license. So, over a period of about 10 years, Schmulbach, Reymann, and others are successful at kind of stunning this push for prohibition. It has to come from a statewide push. Uh, there's actually an attempt to pass a sort of law that would have done this at the state level, by one of Wheeling's state senators, George Loughlin, that once it gets to Charleston through influence of others gets, uh, sort of, uh, not passed. So, the irony being that Wheeling is this place that is very much trying to stop local, county, statewide prohibition. And when it passes, they are seen as sort of the outlier.

Hal Gorby:

Even when the state legislature mandated high license fees, the city council often lowered the fees or issued tax credits to offset the cost. In the spring of 1902 council overruled the mayor and approved all liquor licenses in mass. This led to the largest number of licenses ever issued up to that point in Ohio county, 340. In 1905, Reymann and Schmulbach brewery saw their average taxes cut by about 500 to \$600 a year. Anti-saloon forces also pushed enforcement of the Sunday selling ordinance. Police increasingly harassed violators, often targeting immigrant run saloons. Eberhardt Hoffrider's saloon at 3501 Jacob street was charged with Sunday selling an amazing 25 times between 1895 and 1902. Irish Saloonkeeper brothers Thomas and Michael Finnegan, who ran a saloon near the corner of 22nd and main streets, were indicted 14 times between 1897 and 1903. Even Polish owner John Pryzlynsky received five indictments in 1901 and 1902 alone.

Hal Gorby:

However, enforcement stalled by the fall of 1903. When rumors spread that bars were operating illegally on Sundays an intelligencer reporter telephoned several saloons on that particular day of the week. One saloonist replied coyly quote "we're closed every Sunday" end quote, while this quote mingled with the sound of many voices and the clink of many glasses end quote. Reformers' efforts seemed almost pointless behind the powerful influence of brewers like Henry Schmulbach. He didn't create this vice culture in Wheeling, but he benefited from supplying the city's growing saloons with ample supplies of his beer. However, the winds of change were coming, change that would finally bring a hammer down on the kegs of abundant beer flowing in the city. Schmulbach would be shocked, as we will see in our next episode, when in 1912, the state of West Virginia voted to go dry, ending a key period in Wheeling's history.

Hal Gorby:

It also coincided with his retirement and his building of a mysterious mansion east of the city at Roney's Point. This has been Henry the life and legacy of Wheeling's most notorious brewer. This episode was written, researched and narrated by me, William Hal Gorby. We had help in producing this episode from Wheeling Heritage. Editing done by Alex Weld. Production, music and recording done by Dillon Richardson and Johnathon Porter. Audio interviews were done with Glenn Elliott and Ryan Stanton. Voice acting done by me, TJ Hudack Hill, Travis Henline, Chris Villamagna and Ryan Hudack Hill. This podcast is a production of Wheeling Heritage Media.