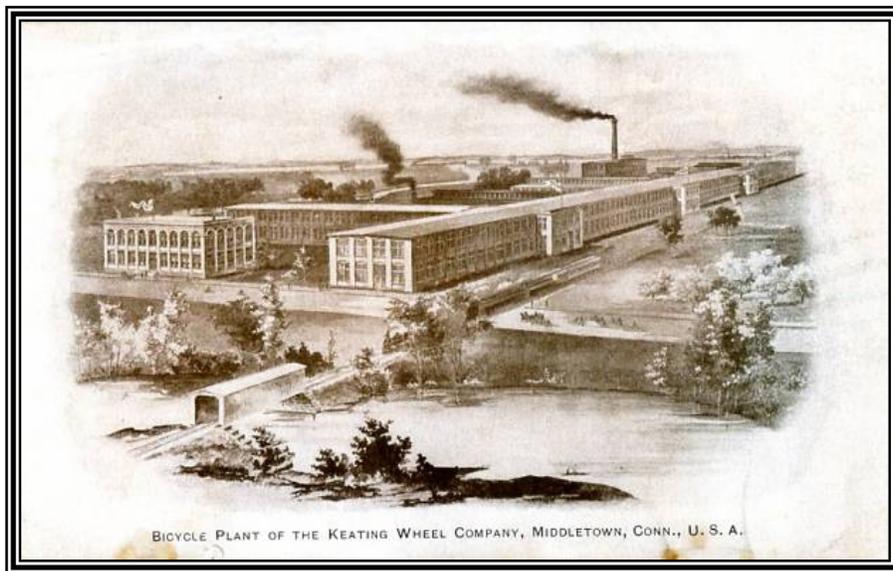


## THE REMINGTON RAND COMPLEX IN MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT

*By Faline Schneiderman-Fox, Historical Perspectives, Inc.*



**Figure 1: Advertisement for the Keating Wheel Company in 1896.**

What is locally known as the former Remington Rand complex in Middletown, Connecticut, was originally constructed by the Keating Wheel Company in 1896 (Figure 1). The complex sits immediately south of the Mattabeset River, just north of Johnson Street and the New York, New Haven and Housatonic Rail Road (NY, NY & HRR). Currently, the facility maintains three free-standing structures; a main two-story brick building with several brick ells and additions that vary in age from 1897 to 1934; a ca.1948 Quonset Hut used for storage; and, a brick boiler house built as part of the original complex. Through the success prompted Keating to search for a new site for an expanded factory, leading him to an ideally suited piece of land immediately south of the Mattabeset River in Middletown. Tax abatements offered by the City of Middletown made the site that much more attractive.

Keating played an active part in the design of the new factory, with Casper Ranger, a builder from Holyoke, undertaking its construction (McCullough n.d.). Work on the new state-of-the-art facility began in 1896, and by 1897 the factory was complete.

20<sup>th</sup> century the factory served several different companies, including the Eisenhuth Electric Motor Vehicle Company, and the Noiseless Typewriter Company. The main factory structure is now subdivided into distinct and separate work spaces, with Remington Rand – having merged with the Sperry Corporation to form Sperry Rand - closing its doors in the early 1970s.

The Keating Wheel Company, makers of bicycles, was originally established in Holyoke, Massachusetts in 1892 by Robert M. Keating. The company's immense

A brochure published by the Keating Wheel Company boasted that the main building was 1000 feet long, 50 feet wide, and two stories high with six ells. The Engine House [a.k.a. Boiler House] was 120 feet long and 50 feet wide, while an Office Building at the west end of the site was 100 feet long, 50 feet wide, and two stories high. They further touted the factory's modern amenities and efficiency, including the fact that the entire plant was run by electricity (Keating Wheel Company 1897). Although early lithographs of the complex produced by Keating show the Office Building, maps

and atlases from the 1890s and early 1900s fail to depict it, suggesting that it was never actually built or that it burned down shortly after it was constructed.

Keating was an accomplished inventor, and a number of patents for inventions that are still in use today are attributed to him. He is credited with building the first motorized bicycle, or motorcycle, in Middletown (ca.1900), and held a patent for baseball's home-base (1886), sprocket chains (1897), an electric igniter for the Explosive Engine (1900), a motor-bicycle (1901), and a spark and valve controlling device for Explosive Engines (1906). These last three referenced patents led to a 1917 lawsuit instigated by Keating against the Harley-Davidson Motor Company for patent infringement, with the lawsuit found in his favor.

In the late 1890s, the market for bicycles was becoming oversaturated as smaller companies merged to form larger ones that dominated the market.



Figure 2: Advertisement for Keating Cycles.

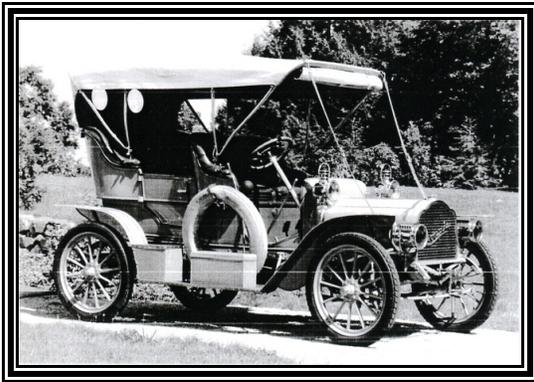
The result was a decline in market prices between 1896 and 1903 due to mass production. In response, in 1899 the Keating Wheel Company expanded their production to include motorized horseless vehicles, and reformed as the Keating Wheel and Automobile Company. The first electric automobile was completed at the factory on November 11, 1899.

Plans were made for the company to produce a Keating Motor Bicycle. In 1901 the first prototype was completed, and improvements were announced for the 1902 production year. The Middletown factory is often cited as the site of the first true production of a motorcycle in the United States (Warner 1990). Trade magazines touted the motorized cycle's design, stating that it was "one of the most original machines in all points of construction" (The Dealer and Repairman, April, 1902). Despite the expanded product base and success of the gasoline-powered cycle, company management failed to turn the financially distraught company around, and negotiations began with various competitors to purchase the plant. In June of 1901 it was successfully sold to the Eisenhuth Horseless Vehicle Company of New York.

The Eisenhuth Horseless Vehicle Company was a manufacturer of Brass Age automobiles. Brass Age automobiles, ca.1890-1915, were so named because of the brass fittings that distinguished them. Eisenhuth designed his first experimental automobile in San Francisco, and had it built in Newark, New Jersey. He claimed to have been the first to actually build a gasoline engine, and the first to adopt the use of an electric ignition (The Horseless Age, October 1898).

In 1903, Eisenhuth merged with the Graham Fox Motor Car Company, absorbing the firm and expanding their operations at the Middletown facility. Fox had produced a model known as the Graham-Fox Compound. Eisenhuth redubbed it the Compound, and continued production of the

slightly unusual vehicle that had only three cylinders; two working outer cylinders, with a third inner one designed to further expand the exhaust gases of the outer two (Figure 3). Despite the power and efficiency of the vehicle, the 1904 Compound was considered a luxury touring car at the time, and sold for the relatively high price of \$6000 to \$8000. Equipped with a tonneau – a rear seating area – the vehicle could accommodate seven passengers. Because of its high price, the Compound failed to gain hold in the market. As a result, only 384 Eisenhuth vehicles were produced through 1907.



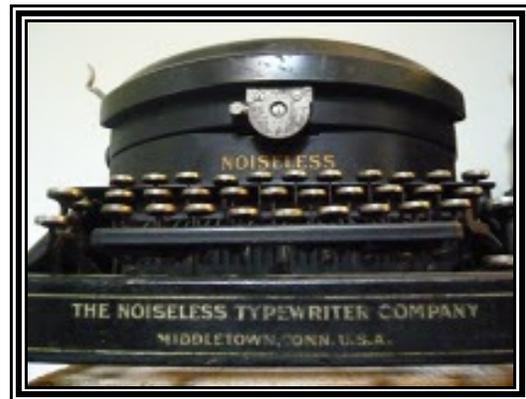
**Figure 3: Eisenhuth Compound. Today only one is known to exist.**

Eisenhuth expanded production at their Middletown Plant in 1904, and again in 1905. However, by 1907 legal problems coupled with competition from other manufacturers selling cars for far less than a Compound forced the company into bankruptcy. The factory complex remained dormant for two years.

In 1909, the Noiseless Typewriter Company was organized with the intent of producing a noiseless typewriter that was equal in other features to the best typewriters of the period (Moody's Magazine 1910). At the time, there was a high demand for typewriters that were quieter than the loud clattering machines prevalent at the time. The Noiseless Typewriter Company claimed to have created such a machine, by changing the internal action of the machine thereby

allowing pressure, rather than blows, to be made upon the paper.

The Noiseless Typewriter Company filed for incorporation in the State of Connecticut in January of 1909, and took possession of the former Eisenhuth Horseless Vehicle Company factory in Middletown in late 1909. Production of the Noiseless typewriter began in November, and the company began aggressively marketing their innovative product the following month (Figure 4). It was estimated that they would build 12,000 typewriters per year, with the potential for expansion within the factory to increase production to 36,000 units per year (The Toronto World, September 2, 1912).



**Figure 4: An existing Noiseless Typewriter Company typewriter kept at the site.**

Problems with the Noiseless Company were cited in 1913, when a reorganization plan of the bondholders fell through. At that time it was thought that financial problems would force the sale of the company (The Iron Age, December 18, 1913). As a result of the failed reorganization, the company dissolved and reincorporated with the same name in June of 1914. Another reorganization of the company occurred several years later, and in 1924, the company merged with the Remington Company, forming the Remington-Noiseless Typewriter Corp.

The Remington-Noiseless Typewriter Corporation, a subsidiary of the Remington Typewriter Company, continued production

of a noiseless typewriter at their Middletown facility. Remington had been producing typewriters at their Iliion, New York factory for over fifty years when they merged with the Noiseless Typewriter Company. They touted their merger as putting the Remington Company in a position of “unquestionable supremacy” with regard to meeting the typewriter needs of every typewriter user throughout the world (The Pittsburgh Press, March 4, 1924).

In 1927, the Remington Typewriter Company merged with another office equipment company, Rand Kardex, to form Remington Rand, marketing the Remington Noiseless under the new name. The Remington Company had been producing portable typewriters since 1920, and went on to introduce a portable version of the Noiseless Typewriter in 1931. While their early models were large and bulky, these were later replaced by more streamlined versions that were met with enthusiasm. Production increased, and the company continued to produce typewriters at the Middletown site until employee unrest climaxed in the mid-1930s.

In 1936, 1,200 factory workers went on strike at the Remington Rand factory due to growing dissatisfaction with wages and unsuccessful negotiations with management (Figure 5). The strike was apparently particularly violent, and, while no one was killed, both labor and management engaged in “beatings with fists and clubs, rock and brick throwing, vandalism, threats and physical intimidation.” At one point, the National Guard was brought in to restore order (Warner 1990). James Rand Jr., owner of the company, reacted by hiring replacement workers. When brought up on charges of intimidation in an attempt to break the strike, Rand was acquitted (TIME, March 22, 1937). The strike ended in April 1937, although the settlement was not fully implemented until the mid-1940s. As a result of the strike, Rand closed the typewriter factory for several years.

As the Remington Rand Company grew, it branched out into other endeavors, cornering the market of several very profitable products. By the late 1930s, production at the Middletown plant resumed, reopening as the Electronics Division of Remington



Figure 5: Striking factory workers at the site.

Rand. In 1949, Remington Rand introduced the first business computer, the Remington Rand 409, although this was not produced in Middletown.

During World War II, the company developed into a major military contractor and was reportedly instrumental in developing a small camera that allowed for the creation of rocket-guided missiles. "From the radio amateur's laboratories came the incentive, the original designs, applications and construction technique, and radio amateurs initiated, nurtured, developed and carried through a program of research, development and production of television camera equipment in the Electronic Division of Remington Rand at Middletown, Conn." (Early Television Org.). Both Remington Rand and Andover Kent Corporation – located in the Middletown factory in the late 1940s and early 1950s - were authorized federally funded facilities during the war.

In 1955, Rand merged with the Sperry Corporation. This time the Remington name was dropped and the new parent company was known simply as Sperry Rand, while Remington Rand remained as a subdivision. Following World War II, the Remington Rand Office Machine company produced office supplies and typewriter supplies including plaster plates, typewriter ribbons, carbon paper, Uniac ribbon, and microfilm at their Middletown plant from about 1951 through the early 1970s. The Remington Rand division of the Sperry-Rand Corporation manufactured typewriter supplies at the site through at least 1963, closing their doors in the early 1970s. Since that time, the industrial complex has changed hands several times, with several small industrial endeavors occupying the site.

The City of Middletown is preparing to remediate the former Remington Rand facility and lease space to small independent entrepreneurs, continuing the long tradition of the innovative and industrial use of the site.

*The author would like to thank Gary, Rob, and Brian Keating for sharing their extensive collection of documents and memorabilia pertaining to the Remington Rand site, and particularly the Keating Wheel Company (no relation).*

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