

Paul Frank Beich (1864-1937)

Paul Frank Beich was born in Wehlau, East Prussia (now part of Russia) on May 22, 1864. He was the son of August, a government hospital inspector and later the head of a military school, and Hulda Beich.¹

Paul received his early education from a kindergarten and a private elementary school. Later, he attended the Gymnasium (secondary school) at Culm, West Prussia for seven years.² At 18 years-old, he finished a three-year apprenticeship to learn mercantile trading.³ That same year, 1882, Paul decided to immigrate to the United States, first arriving in New York City and ending up in Bloomington in that same year.⁴ Paul bravely moved across the world, settling in McLean County with very little English language skills and no family by his side.⁵ Paul originally came to Bloomington visit his aunt, Mrs. William Schroeder, who lived on West Olive Street.⁶ That short visit ended up resulting in a permanent move and Paul Beich ended up spending the vast majority of his life in Bloomington.

After arriving in Bloomington, Paul found employment first with S.A. Maxwell & Co., a wallpaper and furniture company. He didn't care for the wallpaper business and quit after just two weeks.⁷ Next, he worked a confectionary company, Bruce & Brown.⁸ It was with Bruce & Brown that Paul was introduced to candy sales and proved his natural ability to succeed in the business. Paul's supervisor at Bruce & Brown decided to send him on a trial trip to El Paso, Illinois to practice selling candy. The town was preparing for a fair, thus vendors were looking for a candy supplier. The supervisor encouraged Paul to not get discouraged if he ended up failing to make a single sale, as the market in El Paso had historically been difficult for the company and Paul spoke very little English.⁹ According to family history, Paul was so excited for the opportunity that he found it difficult to sleep. He ended up arriving at the train station an hour early and arrived in El Paso by seven in the morning.¹⁰ Due to arriving so early, persistence with businesses, and his systematic approach, Paul performed a "clean sweep" by securing all

¹ "Paul F. Beich Rites Monday," *The Pantagraph*, September 11, 1937.

² Ibid.

³ Jacob Hasbrouck. *History of McLean County, Illinois, Vol. 2. (Indianapolis: Historical Publishing Company, 1924)*, 845.

⁴ "Paul F. Beich Rites Monday"

⁵ "City's Loss in Mr. Beich," *The Pantagraph*, September 11, 1937.

⁶ "Men Who Have Made Bloomington: No.5 Paul F. Beich," *The Pantagraph*, May 8, 1911.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hasbrouck, 845; Bruce & Brown has its roots in in the renowned candy company J.L. Green and Co. which opened in 1854 in Bloomington. Located on the so-called "Liberty Block" at 118 South Main Street since 1871, the company was noted for its diverse selection of candies, both homemade and wholesale, as well as for its ability to fill large orders in a fast and efficient manner. According to an article published in the *Pantagraph* in 1871, the company used "only the best materials," took the "greatest care in packing goods for safe transportation," and regularly employed twelve to thirteen workers at a time. "Bloomington Candy," *The Weekly Pantagraph* (December 8, 1871). The firm manufactured a variety of candies ranging from stick candy, to creams and liqueur-filled chocolates, to lozenges, while also providing its customers with a selection of fruit, nuts, and tobacco products. "Manufactories and Wholesale Houses of Bloomington—J.L. Green & Co.," *The Weekly Pantagraph* (July 11, 1873). Ownership of the company changed hands several times after J.L. Green sold it in 1877. In 1893, the candy company became its best-known incarnation, Beich's, when Paul F. Beich purchased the company; Hannah E. Johnson, "Fred and Harry Green, The Flying LaVans" biography, 2013.

⁹ "Rise of Paul F. Beich, Once German Immigrant, Told in Magazine Story," *The Pantagraph*, March 11, 1928.

¹⁰ Ibid.

vendors before his competition.¹¹ Later that evening, as he was eating dinner at his hotel, Paul overheard one of the other salesmen from a rival company say there was “not a crumb left,” and that the businesses in town “ordered of a Dutch boy, who got the job with the chickens and whose talk was more broken than a pail of candy.”¹² This event was pivotal for Paul as he was able to prove himself as naturally gifted in sales, in particular the selling of candy.

After making an impression and learning the business in the small candy world of Central Illinois, Beich pursued a new opportunity in St. Louis. In 1884, he moved on to working in traveling sales for O.H. Peckham Candy Manufacturing Company where he remained until 1891.¹³ During this period of employment, he learned the finer details of the candy making business and gained more experience in sales.¹⁴ As a salesman for Peckham, Beich was assigned territory covering the entire state of Illinois and sold more than just candy – his sales included fruit, tools for candy manufacturing, and supplies for the retailers selling their candy.¹⁵ It was also during this time that Paul Beich took the step to become a United States citizen. *The Pantagraph* reported on February 22, 1887 that he “got out his naturalization papers yesterday, and begins life as a full-fledged American citizen.”¹⁶

Although he was employed in St. Louis, he maintained a residence in Bloomington.¹⁷ While living in Bloomington was more accessible to his sales territory in Illinois, it was also convenient to remain close to his future wife, Kittie (Catherine M.) Gerken. Kittie was the daughter of William A. Gerken, a wealthy and prominent businessman in McLean County.¹⁸ William held a business stake in the Bruce & Brown company and took an interest in Paul when Paul started his career with that company. They maintained a relationship, and it was through William that Paul met Kittie.¹⁹ Paul and Kittie were married on September 4, 1888 at the home of William Gerken at 209 E. Grove Street (which William later gifted to Kittie and Paul). Their wedding announcement in *The Pantagraph* reported the wedding to be the “talk of the town” and that Paul Beich, “a first class businessman,” was to be married to Kittie, who was the daughter of Bloomington’s “best and wealthiest citizens.”²⁰

After a few years of learning the candy business and building his business relationships, Paul founded his own company in 1891 with business partner Otto F. Buffe in St. Louis, named the Beich Buffe Company.²¹ Paul and Kittie moved outside the city, settling in Carrollton, Illinois, but after less than two years, he sold the business and they moved back to Bloomington.²² Upon moving back to Bloomington in 1893, he purchased the confectionary business J.W. Gray & Co., which was, at the time, located at 223 East Front Street.²³ This company was the successor to

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Hasbrouck, 845-846.

¹⁴ “Beich Family Patriarch Immigrant of 1880s,” *The Pantagraph*, March 20, 1949.

¹⁵ Joseph E. Crawford, Jr., “The Paul F. Beich Company: 1854-1937,” M.S. Thesis, (Illinois State University, 1967), 31.

¹⁶ *The Pantagraph*, February 22, 1887, page 4, column 5.

¹⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹⁸ Hasbrouck, 846.

¹⁹ Crawford, 35.

²⁰ “Happily Mated: Mr. Paul Beich, of St. Louis, and Miss Kittie Gerken Married Yesterday Morning,” *The Pantagraph*, September 5, 1888.

²¹ Crawford, 36.

²² Ibid., 36-37.

²³ 1893 *Bloomington City Directory*, 213; “Contributes to Sweet Tooth of All Nations,” *The Pantagraph*, January 13, 1929.

Bruce & Brown, the candy company that gave Paul a chance back when he first came to Bloomington.²⁴ Paul moved the company to 107 East Front Street and eventually expanded to 109-111 East Front Street.²⁵ Paul would go on to buy a stake in the Bloomington Caramel Company in January 1899 and the two operations eventually consolidated and became known as the Paul F. Beich Company in 1905.²⁶

The Bloomington Caramel Company, first known as the Lancaster Caramel Company was owned by Milton Hershey out of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Hershey had a branch of this factory in Chicago, but it outgrew the building's capacity.²⁷ Beich, aware of the candy business in the state and aware that Hershey was a major player in the field, convinced Hershey to open another branch in Bloomington. The factory not only brought more candy manufacturing to Bloomington, but it also created more jobs – predicted to be more than 150 by 1896 according to *The Pantagraph*.²⁸ The newspaper also reported in 1895 that it was “chiefly through his influence” that the caramel factory came to Bloomington and that “Much credit is still due Mr. Beich for the public spirit which he has exercised in this matter, especially in view of the fact that he is not interested in the factory, except as a resident and business man of Bloomington.”²⁹

Paul's intentions were not solely in the interest of the betterment of Bloomington, as he eventually did buy the factory despite the newspaper reporting a lack of interest. He convinced Hershey to come to Bloomington by promising a local supply of fresh milk – a staple ingredient for the Hershey caramels.³⁰ The location, access to milk, and Paul Beich's assistance made the decision to move operations to Bloomington easy for Hershey. The factory eventually provided seasonal employment for about 200 workers from the local community. Many of these workers, anywhere from one-half to two-thirds, were women and girls (the minimum age was 14).³¹

During this time, the 1890s, Milton Hershey became less interested in the manufacturing of caramel and more interested in the chocolate industry. Paul jumped at the opportunity to purchase the Lancaster Caramel Company and brought in his old partner from St. Louis, Otto F. Buffe, along for the deal. On January 6, 1899, Paul and Otto Buffe agreed to become joint managers of the caramel factory, share the profits, and were given the option to buy the factory from Hershey after a year.³² The factory was then referred to as the Bloomington Caramel Company. Of course, Paul was still running his successful candy company on Front Street throughout this acquisition and Otto Buffe was the acting manager at the caramel company.³³

By 1905, Paul bought out Otto Buffe's stake in the caramel company and knew he needed to consolidate both the factory on Front Street and the caramel plant. The Front Street factory was running out of space, and he needed to expand to be able to continue to safely produce products. The success of both businesses allowed him to fund an addition onto the caramel factory, costing \$50,000 (over \$1.5 million in 2022).³⁴ By May 1907, the operations from the Front Street factory were moved into the caramel plant at 1302 West Grove Street (at West Grove and Lumber

²⁴ “Men Who Have Made Bloomington”

²⁵ Hasbrouck, 846; Advertisement for Paul F. Beich (back page), *The Sunday Eye*, December 19, 1897.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Will Locate Here: The Caramel Company Buys the Carriage Factory Building,” *The Pantagraph*, July 19, 1895.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Crawford, 44.

³¹ Ibid., 46.

³² Ibid., 55-56.

³³ Ibid., 57.

³⁴ Ibid., 63.

Streets). The factory, now known as the Paul F. Beich Candy Company, was one of the largest in the county.³⁵ The new addition covered “an entire block from Front to Grove streets.”³⁶ *The Pantagraph* reported on the cleanliness of the plant in an article from August 1908 commenting that the condition of the building made it “a most desirable place especially for girls to work.”³⁷ The business continued to expand and just a year later, in 1909, Paul announced another addition to the factory. The new addition made the Paul F. Beich Company “the largest candy factory west of the Allegheny Mountains, and with one or two anywhere in the country as large or larger.”³⁸ By 1911, Paul opened a Chicago branch of his company.³⁹

The size of the plant had to be large enough to not only contain the extensive manufacturing process, but also store all of the ingredients needed for candy making. Over 1,000 barrels of sugar had to be stored in a large concrete warehouse away from the factory that remained sealed and fireproof.⁴⁰ By 1910, the company had sales in every state, a sales and delivery operation out of Chicago, and exported products to other countries – they were even working on translating their price lists from English to Spanish for customers in Mexico, Central, and South America.⁴¹ Before World War I, the company made shipments to Canada, Norway, Egypt, Australia, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, in addition to their business in Central and South America.⁴² Additionally, the growing factory needed to make space for all of the candy-making equipment used by Paul’s workers. New machinery in the early 1900s allowed for faster production of candy that was formerly made by hand. For example, a machine that cut and wrapped caramels sped up production to 2,000 pounds or 160,000 caramels ready to be sold per day.⁴³

The jobs that Paul brought to the community through the expansion of his candy operation undoubtedly had a positive impact on the local economy. Importantly, though, these were *desirable* jobs. Workers were paid decent wages and it provided employment opportunities for women. *The Pantagraph* mentioned the role that cleanliness played in attracting women workers to jobs in the candy factory writing:

“In rooms where a large number of young women are at work in the different processes of candy making there is not a suggestion of disorder or anything to offend the eye, either upon the tables on which they work, the utensils they use, or upon the floor of the rooms which are as free from dirt as the parlor of milady.”⁴⁴

Several ads were placed in *The Pantagraph* over the years specifically asking for girls to work at the factory. One announcement advertised, “STEADY WORK – PLEASANT SURROUNDINGS.”⁴⁵ Another listing specifically asked for girls to work in the chocolate department.⁴⁶ A job advertisement in 1919 asking for girls and women, specifically, read:

³⁵ “The Beich Candy Manufactory is an Immense Plant,” *The Pantagraph*, August 21, 1908.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Another Large Factory Addition,” *The Pantagraph*, March 25, 1909.

³⁹ “Contributes to Sweet Tooth of all Nations,” *The Pantagraph*, January 13, 1929.

⁴⁰ “Carries Name of Bloomington Afar,” *The Pantagraph*, June 13, 1910.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Crawford, 89.

⁴³ “Carries Name of Bloomington Afar”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ *The Pantagraph*, June 21, 1915, p. 8.

⁴⁶ “Female Help Wanted,” *The Pantagraph*, November 13, 1916.

“Making and packing candy is an agreeable occupation. It is easily learned and pleasant. Our plant is bright and airy, the surroundings of the best, one’s associates congenial. Women supervisors come in contact with women employees. The work is well-paid, even while learning. Coffee is served at noon in a dining room as attractively furnished as one could wish. If you are interested in employment of the nature, come to our office and talk it over. You are under no obligation.”⁴⁷

Boys and men also worked at the factory, but it is notable the lengths Paul’s company went to advertise to girls and women, specifically, especially in their strategy to attract women to the jobs by highlights cleanliness, limited interactions with men, and friendly coworkers.

However, just like any factory job during this time period, there were risks when it came to safety. In October of 1913, a group of girls that worked in the factory were walking home in the evening along the railroad tracks. The bright lights from a train seemed to confuse the girls, or made it difficult to see, so they ran quickly to cross the tracks. One girl tripped and fell and certainly would have been killed had it not been for the quick braking by the engineer who saw the girls trying to cross the tracks.⁴⁸ Many of the workers at the factory had to cross the Chicago & Alton railroad tracks, which could prove to be dangerous especially as the morning and evenings got darker in the colder months. Another report from September 1914 told readers about Willie Zetlow, a “youth” working at the Paul F. Beich Co. The 17-year-old boy was employed in the box making department and lost a thumb after it became so mangled in the machinery that the hospital was forced to amputate.⁴⁹ While much of the coverage of the factory discussed the cleanliness of the facility, the competitive wages, and the state of the art machinery, it is crucial to remember that the labor was not always easy, and that injuries, even to those that were very young, did happen.

Paul worked to keep morale high amongst his employees by hosting several events to show appreciation for the workers as well as foster a sense of community. He would host an annual company picnic in Miller Park. At the 1917 picnic, there was a baseball game, potato sack race, ball throwing contest, a 50-yard dash, and dancing with music played by an orchestra.⁵⁰ There were also banquets held at the factory for employees including one in 1926 that included dance and instrumental performances, as well as party favors consisting of paper hats.⁵¹ In May 1928 and 1929, the annual party moved to the Western Avenue Community Center with the 1929 party hosting 250 guests.⁵² By 1934, Paul had a softball field with bleachers constructed next to the candy plant for workers to be able to play organized games. The field cost \$3,000 to construct (around \$66,000 in 2022).⁵³ It was also reported that Paul F. Beich Candy Co. provided candy as party favors for the birthdays of the children of The Pantagraph Junior Club.⁵⁴ While

⁴⁷ “Positions Open,” *The Pantagraph*, June 6, 1919.

⁴⁸ “West Side Notes,” *The Pantagraph*, October 29, 1913.

⁴⁹ “West Side Notes,” *The Pantagraph*, September 25, 1914.

⁵⁰ “Beich’s Employees Picnic,” *The Pantagraph*, August 13, 1917.

⁵¹ “Banquet Given at Beich’s Last Evening,” *The Pantagraph*, March 20, 1926.

⁵² “Beich Employees Hold Annual Dinner Party,” *The Pantagraph*, May 2, 1928; “250 Attend Beich Company’s Annual Dinner and Dance,” *The Pantagraph*, May 29, 1929.

⁵³ “Dedicate Beich’s New Softball Plant Monday Night,” *The Pantagraph*, May 14, 1934.

⁵⁴ “Pantagraph August Birthday Party to Be Held Saturday,” *The Pantagraph*, August 26, 1926.

Paul wanted to achieve national and global recognition in the business world, the Bloomington community remained at the forefront of his commitments.

By 1929, The Paul F. Beich Candy Company had 650 employees on the payroll with 400 in Bloomington, 200 in Chicago, and 50 traveling salesmen.⁵⁵ By 1936, another 100 employees would be added to the ever expanding Bloomington plant.⁵⁶ The Bloomington plant and annexes totaled over 200,000 square feet, while the Chicago branch totaling about 65,000 square feet.⁵⁷ Also by the end of the 1920s, the company produced “No less than 700 separate and distinct varieties of confectionary.”⁵⁸ The company imported some of the finest ingredients from around the world in order to make their world famous candies. They sourced,

“Wintergreen of the best quality comes from England; albumen from China; hoarhound herb from Germany; filberts from Turkey; dates from Persia; figs from Italy; almonds from Spain; lemon extract from Italy; vanilla bean from Mexico and Java; and coca beans from Africa and South America.”⁵⁹

The company also needed large amounts of corn syrup, as the company was one of the largest users of Midwest-grown corn products.⁶⁰ The import and export activity of Paul’s company made it into a major global entity. Paul F. Beich candy was tasted all over the world, and ingredients from all over the world went into the recipes.

The ingredients for the Beich company candies were key to their success. Earlier in Paul’s career, he convinced Milton Hershey to move his caramel factory, that would eventually become part of the Beich company, to Bloomington partly because of the ready access to large amounts of high-quality milk. The volume of ingredients needed to produce the Beich company candy was quite high. One batch of Opera Cremes required 60 pounds of sugar, 8 pounds of corn syrup, and 2 gallons of 22% cream.⁶¹ A batch of the Beich Butterscotch required 42 pounds of glucose, 11 pounds of clarified sugar, and 8 pounds of evaporated milk.⁶² These ingredients, sourced from all over the world, were crucial to the success of the candy company.

The candies sold by the company were meant to appeal to a wide variety of audiences. The price catalogue from 1931 lists candies for everyone. Priced for retail at \$1.00 each (\$19.49 in 2022) is a “For the Men – Para los Hombres” in a cedar box that included “chocolates with rum flavored cordials, coffee cordials, gingers and other truly new flavors. So unusual. A distinctive package for any store.”⁶³ Mrs. Catherine Beich’s personal selection included hand rolls with centers that were, “a combination of fruits, nut, chocolate, butter, cream and powdered sugar,” and each package contained, “hand rolled creams, nut and fruit centers, caramels, nougats, chips, tingalings, toffee, cream caramels, etc.”⁶⁴ The Beich company also sold “unusual gifts” like an “Ice Pail with Tongs,” which was a bucket of chocolate made to look like an ice pail, and the “Jack Horner Pie,” which was a basket made of chocolate with small wrapped candies or

⁵⁵ “Contributes to Sweet Tooth”

⁵⁶ “Beich Plant Sees Growth,” *The Pantagraph*, April 8, 1936.

⁵⁷ “Contributes to Sweet Tooth”

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *A Century of Fine Candy Making*, Paul F. Beich Co., 10.

⁶¹ Recipes, Compliments of White Stokes Co.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ “Price List: Retail,” Paul F. Beich Co., Bloomington Factory, Fall 1931, 2.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 10.

“goodies” inside.⁶⁵ Perhaps the best deal for retailers of Paul’s candies was the “Full-Value Deal.” One order of the deal was \$7.00 and included 9 ½ - pound loaves (chocolate loaves filled with vanilla cream, chopped nuts, and fruit, which could then be sliced), two 1-pound loaves, 24 Milkette Bars, 24 Whiz Bars, 31 Illini Bars, 31 Bike Bars, and supplies for the display and advertising.⁶⁶ The Whiz Bar was one of the Paul F. Beich Company’s signature treats. Made of chocolate fudge, marshmallow, and peanuts, the Whiz Bar was a fan favorite. Whiz Bar production started in 1922, costing 10 cents each (\$1.76 in 2022). During the Depression years, the price dropped to a nickel (about 97 cents in 2022). During that period, the slogan for the candy was, “Whiz – best nickel candy there iz-z!”⁶⁷

But Paul’s life was not just about candy. He was also active in professional organizations surrounding candy making and business. He served as a member of the Board of Directors of the Illinois Manufacturer’s Association from 1923 until 1926.⁶⁸ He then became the president in 1927, chairman of the advisory board from 1928 to 1929, and continued as a member of the board until his death in 1937.⁶⁹ He was also an active member of the National Confectioners’ Association. He served on the executive committee from 1907 through 1910, was the treasurer from 1914 through 1916, vice-president from 1916-1918, and the president in 1918 and 1919.⁷⁰ In 1931, he was appointed to the Illinois State Industrial Advisory board by Governor Louis L. Emmerson.⁷¹ He was also appointed as a member to the State Prisons Industries Committee and visited the Illinois State Prison at Joliet in 1932.⁷² As a prominent businessman in Illinois, Beich’s expertise on manufacturing was sought after by the state as the state prisons began to use incarcerated individuals for labor, including the development of a license plate factory in the Joliet State Prison that Beich visited.⁷³

Paul Beich was also active in the Bloomington community outside of the candy business. Early in his career, he was an active member in the Bloomington Business Men’s Association and was noted by *The Pantagraph* as being on one of the first leaders.⁷⁴ He was elected president of the Bloomington Business Men’s Association in 1908.⁷⁵ He also represented Bloomington as a National Counselor for the Chamber of Commerce of the United States headquartered in Washington, D.C.⁷⁶ He was one of 4,000 members of the National Chamber of Commerce that attended the annual meeting in New York City in 1923 and in Cleveland in 1924.⁷⁷ Paul also represented the Bloomington Association of Commerce at the United States Chamber of Commerce meeting in Atlantic City in 1931.⁷⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁶⁷ “Whiz – it’s out of biz,” *The Pantagraph*, January 21, 1973.

⁶⁸ *A Century of Fine Candy Making*, 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ “Paul F. Beich Named on Industrial Board,” *The Pantagraph*, October 22, 1931.

⁷² “Commission of Which P.F. Beich is Member Visits State Prison,” *The Pantagraph*, March 10, 1932.

⁷³ “P.F. Beich Goes to Chicago After Acting on Commission,” *The Pantagraph*, March 11, 1932.

⁷⁴ “November 22, 1900,” *The Pantagraph*, November 19, 1950.

⁷⁵ “Business Men in Eighth Annual Session,” *The Pantagraph*, January 14, 1908.

⁷⁶ *A Century of Fine Candy Making*, 5.

⁷⁷ “Beich Reports on Convention,” *The Pantagraph*, June 5, 1923; “A. Of C. Hears Three Orators,” *The Pantagraph*, May 27, 1924.

⁷⁸ “Three Will Attend U.S.C. of C. Meeting,” *The Pantagraph*, April 26, 1931.

Additionally, Paul was a founder of the American State Bank in Bloomington.⁷⁹ Originally called the German-American Bank, the name changed to the American State Bank during World War I.⁸⁰ The German-American Bank first opened May 1, 1902 with Paul serving as the first vice-president.⁸¹ It was first located in the Leader building in the 300 block of North Main Street. Paul was listed as the vice-president and on the board of directors even after the name change.⁸² The change was due to the wave of anti-German hysteria that spread throughout the United States during World War I. This hysteria made it to McLean County, and the local Council of National Defense made it a crime to print any publication in the German language. Paul, born in Prussia which much of eventually became part of Germany, was proud of his culture and even served as an officer of the local German Day committee.⁸³ However, global politics and war would eventually force Paul to fully align himself as American. German communities in McLean County were subject to “superpatriot” mobs, making it dangerous to identify with the German culture and language.⁸⁴ The anti-German rhetoric and violence made it clear to the board of the German-American Bank that their name would need to be changed to survive the era’s xenophobia. The board of directors, including Paul, met on April 1, 1918 and agreed to remove the word ‘German’ from the name in order to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States.⁸⁵ During World War I, the bank was located in part of the Unity Building in the 200 block of North Main Street.⁸⁶ In the 1920s, it moved to the old Metropole Hotel building at 513 North Main Street.⁸⁷ It continued to go by the American State Bank name after the War and it was one of the banks in the area that did not fail during the Great Depression.⁸⁸

Paul’s service to his community and country were evident during the first World War. He was the chairman of the McLean County Chapter of the American Red Cross during World War I and a few years following.⁸⁹ In *McLean County Illinois in the World War 1917-1918*, Paul was listed specifically as the chair of the Membership Committee for the local chapter of the Red Cross.⁹⁰ Under his leadership, membership went from 174 in March 1917 to 7,000 members by August of that same year.⁹¹ By the end of 1917, the membership totaled around 16,000.⁹² Paul’s wife, Kittie, was also involved and served on the Conservation Committee of the local chapter of the Red Cross.⁹³ The committee’s mission was to teach women in McLean County about food preservation in order to better support the war effort by sending mass produced food products overseas to soldiers rather than keeping them on the home front. The Beich plant would go on to

⁷⁹ *A Century of Fine Candy Making*, 5.

⁸⁰ Koos, Munson, and Wyckoff, *An Illustrated History of McLean County*, 1982, 362.

⁸¹ “The German American Bank,” *The Pantagraph*, June 23, 1902.

⁸² “American State Bank,” *The Pantagraph*, Jan 13, 2022.

⁸³ “To Observe German Day on October 25,” *The Pantagraph*, October 12, 1915.

⁸⁴ Bill Kemp, “Bank Weathered Anti-German Hysteria, Great Depression,” *The Pantagraph*, January 19, 2014.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *An Illustrated History of McLean County*, 362.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *A Century of Fine Candy Making*, 5.

⁹⁰ E.E. Pierson and J.L. Hasbrouck, *McLean County Illinois in the World War 1917-1918*, McLean County War Publishing Company, Bloomington, IL, 1921, 126.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 165.

lend their services during the second World War and devoted about 80% of their production to meet wartime demands of goods including sweets for ration kits.⁹⁴

Passionate about his community, Paul served as a director of the Brokaw Hospital board in Normal. As president of the board in 1920, he delivered a speech at the spring commencement for the Hospital's nurses, telling the new graduates that they "have chosen a profession, the knowledge of which will enable you to answer the call of the sick and suffering, one of the world's noblest life work."⁹⁵ Additionally, indicating an investment in the educational opportunities in his community, Paul was also listed as a trustee on the board of Illinois Wesleyan University in 1935.⁹⁶ He additionally demonstrated his love for McLean County by serving as the vice-chairman of the McLean County Centennial Planning Committee.⁹⁷ Set for August 27-30, 1930, the four-day centennial celebration featured exhibitions from the historical society, decorations, music, and a "grand historical parade."⁹⁸ Paul's factory workers marched in the parade on August 30, 1930 despite the horrible weather that day. 250 out of the 300 employees marched in the parade through the rain.⁹⁹ Paul was dedicated to not only bettering his community economically, but also was invested in making Bloomington a welcoming place to live.

As Paul's business status rose in the business world, his and his family's social status rose as well. Paul and his wife Kittie spent most of their married lives at the family home at 209 E. Grove Street. The home stayed in the family as Mr. and Mrs. Gerken (Kitties parents), the Beich family, and Mrs. Gerken's sister Julia Stemm all lived there for a time. Eventually, in the 1930s, the home was sold to the John A. Beck Company and it became a funeral home.¹⁰⁰ Paul and Kittie had four children, two of whom died in infancy (1890 and 1891 respectively). Those two infants are buried in the Gerken family plot at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.¹⁰¹ After losing their first two children, the Beichs welcomed a son, Otto G. Beich, into their family on December 21, 1892. Almost two years later, they had another son, Albert Beich, on September 13, 1894. Both sons would go on to hold leadership roles in the company.

The Beichs were known for their involvement in the community and Kittie was very active in the upper-class women's social scene in Bloomington. Even hosting a small euchre game made it into the paper.¹⁰² Kittie was named a patroness for an event benefiting the YWCA along with several other prominent women in town including Mrs. Letitia Stevenson (wife of politician Adlai E. Stevenson I).¹⁰³ Kittie's activities appeared frequently in the society pages of *The Pantagraph*, who would report her many instances of entertaining at the family home on E. Grove Street, including the announcement of a celebration for her mother's 75th birthday.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁴ Bill Kemp, "Williams Oil-O-Matic Plant Beat Plowshares into Swords," *The Pantagraph*, August 30, 2009.

⁹⁵ "Brokaw Hospital Nurses Graduate," *The Pantagraph*, May 13, 1920.

⁹⁶ "W.U. Trustees Meet Monday," *The Pantagraph*, January 27, 1935.

⁹⁷ "Date Setting is Next Step," *The Pantagraph*, June 1, 1930.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ "Centennial Sidelights," *The Pantagraph*, August 31, 1930.

¹⁰⁰ Clara Louise Kessler, *Home Town in the Corn Belt*. Volume 1, 1950, p. 80.

¹⁰¹ Burial Records for "Infant of P.F. Beich," Evergreen Memorial Cemetery, <https://evergreenmemorialcemetery.com/>, Date Accessed, September 16, 2022.

¹⁰² "Short Paragraphs," *The Pantagraph*, January 21, 1898.

¹⁰³ "Patronesses for Princess Bonnie," *The Pantagraph*, May 13, 1911.

¹⁰⁴ "Mrs. Paul Beich is to Entertain," *The Pantagraph*, November 19, 1920.

Kittie was involved with the European Club and the Woman's Club of Bloomington.¹⁰⁵ She sat on the board of trustees for the Orphanage of the Holy Child in Springfield and was a member of the Woman's Service League of Brokaw Hospital.¹⁰⁶ Kittie's involvement in the community speaks to the Beich's investment in the community going beyond business.

Beich was active in the operations of the company until shortly before his death in 1937. His son Otto became president in 1928 and later chairman of the board in 1945.¹⁰⁷ Paul and Kittie's second son, Albert, was Vice-President, a board member, and the manager of Chicago operations from 1928 until his death in 1948.¹⁰⁸ In the months leading up to Paul's death, newly unionized workers at the plant filed an intent to strike. On Thursday, April 29, 1937, 205 workers at the plant, 183 of them women, did not clock into work and rather peacefully picketed outside.¹⁰⁹ There were three American Federation of Labor unions involved with the strike: the Bakers and Confectioners Union, the Teamsters and Chauffeurs, and the Industrial Machinists.¹¹⁰ The Bakers and Confectioners were made of the women workers at the plant who, at the time, were working up to 10 hours a day without overtime pay.¹¹¹ The women workers asked for the elimination of piecework (being paid by how many boxes of candy they packed each day) and to receive a standard hourly pay with time and a half for hours beyond the standard 8-hour work day.¹¹² The women and the men working in the warehouse (the Teamsters and Industrial Machinists) asked for a pay increase as well as recognition as the sole bargaining agencies.¹¹³ According to Otto, the president at the time, picketing over the course of a week caused 40,000 pounds of candy to spoil and a loss of \$5,000 (\$95,000 in 2022).¹¹⁴ By Friday, May 14 1937, after much deliberation, the strike was settled as the AFL unions and the Beich leadership agreed to a 40-hour work week, pay increases, and a closed union shop policy.¹¹⁵ Agreeing to the closed shop policy meant that the Beich Co. would have to only hire union members and that those workers would need to stay affiliated with the union to be employed at the company. Women workers were still not paid at the same rate as men, but they did get a 14 percent raise. Women were also given a cent an hour raise every 30 days for five months until their minimum wage reached 40 cents an hour. Men were granted a 10 percent increase and their wage increased to 50 cents an hour within five months.¹¹⁶ After the settlement, the workers celebrated and went back to the many tasks that kept the candy factory up and running.

The celebration wouldn't last, however. Shortly after Paul's death in September 1937, 300 employees decided to strike again on December 11 that year. Those on the picket line cited the

¹⁰⁵ "European Club Tells of Great," *The Pantagraph*, November 16, 1937; "Woman's Club to Greet Miss Taft," *The Pantagraph*, February 16, 1930.

¹⁰⁶ "Orphanage Trustees to Meet at Capital," *The Pantagraph*, March 25, 1930; "Luncheon Meeting is held by Brokaw Service League," *The Pantagraph*, October 27, 1935.

¹⁰⁷ *A Century of Fine Candy Making*, 4.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ "Newly Unionized Beich Workers Ask Recognition and More Pay," *The Pantagraph*, April 29, 1937.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ "Beich Peace Parley is Scheduled Today," *The Pantagraph*, May 4, 1937.

¹¹⁴ "Beich Offer Turned Down," *The Pantagraph*, May 6, 1937; Measuring Worth, <https://measuringworth.com>, Date Accessed September 16, 2022.

¹¹⁵ "Beich Plant Opens Again After Strike Settlement," *The Pantagraph*, May 14, 1937.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

“refusal of the company to grant a closed shop.”¹¹⁷ The striking workers were women from the Bakers and Confectioners Union and picketed because they could not come to an agreement regarding their contract renewal. This strike lasted 7 weeks. On January 4, 1938, *The Pantagraph* reported that the picketing prevented a freight train from moving their loaded cars at the plant.¹¹⁸ However, the next day, the union agreed to let the freight cars be moved.¹¹⁹ The Beich plant could not produce and ship goods with the strike ongoing, so they placed an ad in *The Pantagraph* soliciting for workers. It read:

“The Paul F. Beich Co. of Bloomington, Ill., has decided to reopen its plant after a shutdown of December 11, due to a strike. The plant will reopen of January 19, 1938 at 8 o’clock a.m. and all those desiring to apply for employment should do so at that time.

The order of preference shall be as follows:

First – Persons on company payroll on December 11, 1937.

Second – Former employees of the company that were laid off prior to December 11, 1937.

Third – Any other persons who may apply.

Terms and conditions of employment shall be those contained in the agreement offered to Candy Workers Local 342 of Bloomington, Illinois, insofar as the same may be applicable. Those unfamiliar with this agreement may have an opportunity to examine it upon reasonable request.

The company will reinstate all of its employees who went on strike on December 11 without discrimination and it will not discriminate against any applicant for employment for employee because of membership in any labor organization.”¹²⁰

Despite the call for help, it appears that the strike continued to seriously hinder the operations at the plant, eventually requiring intervention by the mayor of Bloomington, Mark B. Hayes, when he pleaded with the union and Beich leadership to meet to come to an agreement. Mayor Hayes was quoted in *The Pantagraph* as saying, “I feel that it is my duty to do everything in my power to keep this industry in Bloomington.”¹²¹ Eventually, the strike was settled, and steps were made to reopen the factory on February 4, 1938. Negotiations lasted 7 hours, and together they agreed to a pay schedule, a 44-hour work week, and the right to join or refuse union membership without coercion.¹²² The Beich candy plant not only provided jobs and brought industry to Bloomington, but it also provided opportunities for labor organizing for better workers’ rights, especially among the women at the plant.

¹¹⁷ “300 Employees of Beich Co. go on Strike,” *The Pantagraph*, December 12, 1937.

¹¹⁸ “Pickets Halt Removal of Loaded Cars,” *The Pantagraph*, January 4, 1938.

¹¹⁹ “Strikers Let Cars Move,” *The Pantagraph*, January 5, 1938.

¹²⁰ “Help Wanted,” *The Pantagraph*, January 18, 1938.

¹²¹ “Mayor Calls Parley On Strike at Beich’s,” *The Pantagraph*, January 24, 1938.

¹²² “Long Conference Settles Strike at Paul F. Beich Company Plant,” *The Pantagraph*, February 3, 1938.

Otto's son, Paul M. Beich eventually became the company's president.¹²³ The candy business stayed in the family and kept producing popular treats for generations after Paul F.'s death. Production increased over the decades and by 1961, up to 75,000 pounds of candy was produced in the Beich plant each day.¹²⁴ While the plant continued to develop delicious chocolates and candies, company leaders Otto and Paul M. Beich dove into developing a research program on survival foods for armed forces.¹²⁵ Essentially, they wanted to develop high-energy foods that would survive difficult conditions, including developing food for astronauts in outer space in the 1960s. In 1937, Illinois Wesleyan University graduate Justin J. Alkonis (who received his degrees in chemistry) was first hired as a part-time consultant, and then five years later became employed full-time as the Beich Director of Research.¹²⁶ Alkonis worked with a team to develop a special formula that would counteract the pressure problem of candy that expands when exposed to high altitudes.¹²⁷ By 1967, a new Beich candy factory opened on the Southwest edge of Bloomington (located at 2501 Beich Road) and the West Grove Street location was used for caramel production and warehousing. However, by 1973 everything moved to the new plant.¹²⁸ Beich's descendants continued to operate the factory until 1984 when it was sold to the global food giant Nestle. Today, Italian candy company Ferrero owns the company (having purchased it in 2018).¹²⁹ On May 25, 2005, the vacant building 1302 West Grove Street was destroyed in a fire due to arson.¹³⁰

Paul F. Beich's life was not exclusively about business. He was a man dedicated to his family, community, and country. An immigrant, Paul found success in the United States and was able to pass down that success to his family for generations. Paul died on September 9, 1937, in an apartment in Chicago while under a doctor's care.¹³¹ He had previously gone to a sanitarium in Michigan for an "ailment with which he had long suffered" before heading to Chicago for care.¹³² He passed away with his wife and sons, Otto and Albert, at his bedside. His body was taken back to Bloomington to Beck Memorial Home (located on the site of the house where the family once lived at 209 E. Grove Street). Originally, services were planned to be held at Beck Memorial Home, however, they were moved to St. Matthew's Episcopal Church because "of the large number of business organizations in Illinois who plan to attend." Services were held at 2:30 p.m on Monday, September 13, 1937.¹³³ His death was mourned greatly by the community. *The Pantagraph* printed their own words just two days after his death that he:

"...accepted every opportunity which the community offered him to serve its general interests – as head of the Association of Commerce, as leader of Red Cross activity, as officer of his church, as servitor of the community to which he gave money and himself. Mr. Beich was the soul of friendliness, and he knew no

¹²³ "Business in Family 61 Years," *The Pantagraph*, May 30, 1954.

¹²⁴ "They Put the 'Sweet' in Sweet Tooth." *Staley Journal*, February 1961, 16.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Anthony Romanelli, "Bloomington chemist's Beich "space food" discovered in IWU time capsule," *The Pantagraph*, June 26, 2022.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 15-19.

¹²⁸ "Beich plant history," *The Pantagraph*, May 26 2005.

¹²⁹ Candace Summers, "Local candy company maker of sweet Easter treats," *The Pantagraph*, April 12, 2020.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ "Paul F. Beich, Leader in Civic Affairs, Dies," *The Pantagraph*, September 10, 1937.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid; "Paul F. Beich Rites to be Held Monday at St. Matthew's," *The Pantagraph*, September 12, 1937.

castes among men with whom he was brought in contact. His simplicity of character forbade him either bowing before the powerful or ignoring his brotherhood to the humblest worker in his own or other enterprises.”¹³⁴

Paul was entombed in the mausoleum at Park Hill Cemetery and Mausoleum, located at 1105 S. Morris Avenue in Bloomington, Illinois. His wife Kittie is entombed next to him in the mausoleum, and other members of the Beich family, including his son Otto, are buried at Park Hill Cemetery as well. Throughout his life, Paul was said to live by a few simple rules: “Be honest, work hard, and use good common sense.”¹³⁵ Paul chose to make Bloomington his home and it is through his honesty, hard work, and common sense that he made a lasting impact in the community that can be felt even today.

For a more in depth look at the Paul F. Beich Company and the candy industry of the late 1800s and early 1900s, see *The Paul F. Beich Company 1854-1937* by Joseph E. Crawford, Jr. available at the McLean County Museum of History.

By: Maria Mears, 2022

¹³⁴ “City’s Loss in Mr. Beich’s Death,” *The Pantagraph*, September 11, 1937.

¹³⁵ *A Century of Fine Candy Making*, 5.