

# THE STORY OF ESTATE

*another chapter of*

THE ROMANCE OF BUSINESS  
IN THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

By MELODIA and WALTER S. ROWE

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HAMILTON, OHIO

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HAMILTON, OHIO

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## FOREWORD

**THERE IS NOTHING I can add to the story here told. It is beautifully and sincerely written, an inspiring account of the industry, courage, integrity and vision of three brothers who built a great manufacturing concern, and of their sons who have brought it to a position of outstanding leadership in its field.**

As publisher of the *Hamilton Journal-News*, I asked my friend, Walter S. Rowe, merchandising and advertising manager of The Estate Stove Company, to write a history of the company for the Fiftieth Anniversary Edition of the paper, published December 20, 1936. Securing the collaboration of his talented wife was his own happy idea.

As a friend of both the older and the present generation of Kahns, I have enjoyed every word of the story of their inspiring lives and accomplishments. I consider it fortunate that the story is now preserved in book form.

HOMER GARD

WINTER PARK, FLORIDA  
JANUARY 18, 1937

IN 1865 when the United States was nursing its wounds and lamenting its depleted youth, then, if ever, was there need for men of fine caliber to direct the forces of industry and expansion, to build a foundation of family life and gracious living and to practice and inspire integrity of thought and conduct. How fortunate that from the towns and villages of Europe eager boys and girls, full of ambition and confidence, were looking toward America for their opportunities.

Our story concerns itself with just one family, living in Alsace in the village of Ingwiller, noted not for wealth or position but for nobility of heart and mind. David and Gertrude Kahn were the father and mother of four boys, Felix, Lazard, Sol and Sam, and three girls, Adele, Pauline and Brunette. Two older children, Maurice and Rosalie, by a former marriage of the father, had already gone to America. Maurice was in Brazil. Rosalie was married and living in Cincinnati.

Felix, the eldest, at the age of fifteen left Alsace in the year 1864 to join Maurice in Brazil. When one comes to appreciate the strong ties and interdependence of that family it isn't difficult to imagine the grief of such a youngster on leaving for so great a distance. It took all of Felix's courage to endure the separation, of which he wrote in his diary, "My principal desire was to come to the aid of my dear parents, for our family is large, my father old. I doubt if there

be parents in this world who are more concerned in giving an education to their children, or to whom no sacrifice is too great to accomplish this end."

Felix landed at Pernambuco, July 13, and found that Maurice was in the interior. He went on to Caera to join friends, one of whom—David Walter—a young man only a few years older than himself, he found dying of yellow fever. He wrote in his diary of his impressions when, away from his family for the first time, he saw many of his friends stricken with the epidemic: "My first days in Brazil were but a prologue to those I was to suffer." Mr. Heyman, a friend of the family, had taken charge of Felix. It was well, as Felix soon succumbed and was considered hopelessly ill. Felix said he always had a heart full of admiration and gratitude for this friend who cared for him so tenderly. When he recovered he went into the business of selling jewelry with his brother.

In 1870 Felix came to Selma, Alabama, again to join Maurice, who had preceded him. There he went into the retail business and in 1871 had in his line stove repair parts and utensils made in a foundry located at Hanging Rock, Ohio, and owned by Martin, Henderson and Company. About a year later he went with this company as a traveling salesman.

Lazard was the next in line for the big adventure. He, too, left home in his fifteenth year, traveling steerage to New York, his only knowledge of English being



FELIX KAHN  
1849 - 1924

the numerals one to twenty, his total wealth forty francs. One proof of his talent and industry, however, is that within two years after reaching this country he was speaking and writing beautiful English. On his many trips to Europe in later years as a successful business man and highly honored citizen of this country, he must often have thought of that lonely, almost penniless boy who had set out to make his fortune in a strange land.

Lazard went to Indianapolis and from there to Iowa, where his first business venture was selling a new type of lamp burner — the Sun Burner, and this he peddled from farm to farm for several months, but without much success. He started for Cincinnati, walking much of the way, but soon after arriving there was offered a job in Nashville, Tennessee.

This proved to be blacking stoves, which was Lazard's first contact with an industry that was to engage his lifelong attention and in which he was to rise to eminence and affluence. This experience must have given him a sympathy for the housewife of that day, as a few years later, when he had become a stove salesman, we find in his notes that he experimented with recipes for stove polish and insisted that his company include the best ones in their stove catalogues.

Lazard remained with his Nashville employer for three years, but not as a stove polisher. He became bookkeeper, and gradually acquired an interest in and



LAZARD KAHN  
1850 - 1928

management of the company. In 1872 he went with Martin, Henderson and Company, at Hanging Rock, Ohio, as a salesman. Taking on Felix at the same time this company must have decided that the next thing better than one Kahn was two of them.

These two boys could sell stoves easier than they could collect commissions from a company that had very little working capital. Interest in the company in lieu of salary was quite acceptable to them, however, which is why, in a catalogue published by Martin, Henderson and Company in 1876, we find Felix' and Lazard's names published as joint proprietors. In that same year Mr. Martin withdrew and the firm became Henderson, Kahn and Company.

A third brother, Sol, having received money from his brothers, had<sup>d</sup> come to this country and was located in Nashville in the retail stove business. He was sent for by his brothers to sell stoves for the Hanging Rock company and was given the southern territory.

During the next five years, Felix, Lazard and Sol were exceedingly busy selling their company's stoves and other wares, collecting accounts, and learning everything there was to know of stove manufacturing and merchandising. Lazard traveled, and from his notes we would guess, thoroughly, the states of Iowa, Illinois, Kansas, Indiana, Arkansas, Missouri and Ohio. Heating stoves and coal and wood ranges were in their infancy in those days and this energetic sales-

man's note books were voluminous, not only with orders and memoranda of promises for future orders, but chiefly with suggestions for improvements, accompanied by pen and ink illustrations, for every model of stove he had to sell.

Since Felix had a special interest in finance and office management, he spent much of his time at the Cincinnati office and warehouse of the company. In 1875 he had married Rachel Simon and was living in Cincinnati. He was a devoted man to his family and it suited him well to travel the nearby territory and to be in and about the city frequently. Lazard married in 1881, Coralie Lemann, from Louisiana, a girl twelve years younger than himself. She lives in Cincinnati today, and presides graciously over a household which is known for its friendliness and hospitality.

Mr. Henderson had spent forty arduous years with the stove foundry, and, as the three young men proved themselves capable of running the business he expressed his desire to retire. In 1882 Lazard wrote him a letter offering to buy that partner's share for \$21,827.52, \$10,000 to be paid in cash, the balance in two- or three-year notes. Wrote Lazard, in his typically decisive manner, to Mr. Henderson: "We do not intend to negotiate for months over this matter. The proposition made herewith is just, and the only one we have or can accept. So there remains nothing for you to do but to consider it and give us a yes or no reply. Or, if

you wish to buy our interest, I renew my proposition to sell on the same basis."

On February 21, 1882, the sale was consummated on but slightly different terms. The purchase price of Mr. Henderson's share was \$27,500, with \$15,000 paid in cash and the balance payable \$2,000.00 annually at six per cent. Lazard wrote at this time of his new property now known as F. and L. Kahn and Brothers: "Our house is well established and the prestige of our goods is such that with proper attention we can safely rely on a permanently profitable and increasing business."

So passed the small foundry amongst the hills on the banks of the Ohio into the hands of these three ambitious young Alsatians, who had all set out at about the age of fifteen to seek their fortunes. This purchase and ownership was one of life's real romances to them. The sentiment they felt toward their new possession endured throughout their lives and is strongly felt in their sons at the present time.

**T**HERE has been a lively interest in the early history of the foundry. The company was organized in 1842 by J. Scott Peebles and was known as Peebles, Wood and Company. Their trade was then largely hollow ware, skillets, ovens, lids and heavy castings, but cooking and heating stoves were

soon added to the line. The company passed through many vicissitudes and ownerships. In 1847 the foundry was completely washed out by flood and rebuilt on higher ground. The Civil War brought financial problems which were weathered with great difficulty.

Two young men with the company in 1842 were Thomas Martin and Thomas Henderson, one a salesman, the other a molder. But Mr. Henderson had perfected a stove tuyere which was cast in one piece, the first of its kind, and with the profits from his sale of this device was enabled to buy an interest in the company. For some years the company was Wood, Henderson and Martin, and after the withdrawal of Wood it became Martin, Henderson and Company. After forty years of effort and disappointments it is not unlikely that these two older men were glad to relinquish this somewhat questionable enterprise to younger, more venturesome men.

After the purchase Sol was brought in from the road and sent to Hanging Rock to take charge of the foundry. There followed letters of encouragement and advice to Sol from Lazard at the Cincinnati office. For example: "Dear Sol: You lack that element of concession and pacification so absolutely necessary . . . in dealing with men brought up in stove foundries . . . First of all secure a man's respect and friendship, learn his character, and you will know how to take him."

Evidently Lazard was over anxious with regard to his younger brother, who managed the foundry well and soon had the love and admiration of his employees. But health did not match the energy of this brusque but kindly man, and in 1887 he died, still a comparatively young man. An Estate Stove employee, who visited Hanging Rock many years later, said that Sol was well remembered there and was idealized by all the old-timers.

Lazard's letters in the year following their purchase reveal the struggles of the three boys to keep their concern going. Times were hard, collections difficult, business in the South and West disappointing; there were prospects of a molders' strike. But with unflinching optimism, he wrote in April, 1882: "Mr. Henderson having withdrawn from our firm puts us on our mettle and admonishes us to make haste slowly . . . I frankly confess that we have a strong ambition for being regarded both as a leading and a big, honorable stove manufacturing concern and we are directing our energies to that end."

Their office and warehouses continued to be in Cincinnati, as they were for a few years previous to buying out Mr. Henderson. On April 12, 1882, Lazard wrote: "We are moving into new and very commodious quarters, the S. W. Corner of Front and Vine streets, about a square and a half from the old place."

In July, 1882, capacity was added to the foundry for twenty-six more molders, making a total of eighty-two employed at that time. And with expansion came more business. In August a letter states that they were selling all the stoves they could make. Bradstreet's Commercial Agency listed the assets of the company in that year as \$137,000 ; liabilities, \$16,500.

Then came the real test of the Kahn fiber, floods for three successive years. Finally, in the flood of 1884 the entire foundry was inundated with six feet of water and the patterns were buried in mud. But the Kahn boys did not know they were beaten. They were only convinced it was time to make a change of location. Hamilton at that time was a small, thriving town of 12,500 in which Felix and Lazard had opened up some good accounts and made contracts with some leading citizens.

William Beckett, Alexander Gordon and John P. Cornell are quoted as being primarily responsible for bringing the Kahn brothers to their city. The members of the Hamilton Club, which was the Chamber of Commerce in embryo, and purely a business organization, aided the enterprise financially and the foundry in its entirety was brought from its shady dell of sycamores to the cut-over corn fields of Hamilton.

Last year was the fiftieth anniversary of an event important not only in the history of The Estate Stove Company, but in the industrial life of Hamilton. The

Hamilton Journal-News carried a feature article from which we quote :

“At three o'clock on the afternoon of Monday, February 23, 1885, the cheers of sixty stalwart molders shook the rafters of the new foundry. The occasion was the running of the 'first heat.' Most of these sixty men had come from Hanging Rock to Hamilton to cast their lot with the new venture. Recalling the 'first heat,' John Herdman, one of the original sixty still living and who, until the past year, has been active in the Estate plant, described the scene in a very interesting manner. He said, 'We jumped and danced and shouted like kids out of school. It had been a long wait and nothing ever looked so good to us as the molten iron pouring from the cupola for the first time.'”

East Avenue at that time was a country road running through the “commons” at the edge of the city. The first buildings were the foundry running from the south end of the plant about half the length of the present foundry, which fronts on East Avenue, and the mounting department, warehouses and offices, a five-story building at right angles to the north end of the foundry.

The first superintendent was William Howden from Hanging Rock, but he was soon succeeded by James Fraily, whose father, William Fraily, had been superintendent at Hanging Rock. A grandson, William Fraily, is at present time foreman of the machine shop. Ben

Donaldson was foreman of the mounting room, Shandy Driscoll, foreman of the foundry. It is a pleasure to meet O'Neal Driscoll, a son of the former foreman, who for more than fifty years has been a molder in the foundry, and to hear him recall his memories of Hanging Rock.

He tells how, as a small boy, he would wait along the road and catch a ride with Sol Kahn as he came jogging along in his surrey on his way to the foundry. The beautiful setting of the foundry, it seems, made it an attractive playground for the children of the workers. But what impressed Mr. Driscoll most after he came to Hamilton and started work, following in his father's footsteps, was the zeal with which everyone from the owners of the business down to the boy who carried water in the foundry did his job. "Felix and Lazard," he said, "worked from early morning till late at night. They had their coats off and their sleeves rolled up." They had to. Their office force included besides themselves, Abe Ballinger, the bookkeeper; George Harris, head timekeeper, and one stenographer.

The one active employee who came with the company from Hanging Rock is "Dad" Johnson, the gate watchman. "Dad" was still at the deserted foundry in Hanging Rock, scraping mud off the patterns, when the first heat was run in Hamilton. Two others of that original company who are still living but have retired