

LINDEN PLACE

MANSION SCULPTURE GARDENS BALLROOM

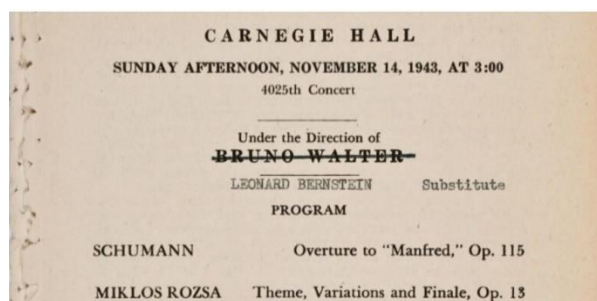


STORIES SERIES Over two hundred years of history are tucked into the corners of this house and hidden among its fascinating families. Here is Story #10.

From time to time this series will share stories of the Linden Place mansion and the people and events connected to its history. We hope that you will enjoy the diversion and learn a little history about the families, the house, and its neighborhood.

A Conductor's Historic Debut, captured live thanks to the United States Rubber Company

On November 14, 1943, a young man's career – and life – was about to change. Not only did several thousand people in Carnegie Hall witness his brilliant performance in leading the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, a nation-wide audience was able to listen in as well, thanks to Samuel Colt's company.



“Good afternoon. United States Rubber Company again invites you to Carnegie Hall to hear a concert of the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra. Bruno Walter, who was to have conducted this afternoon is ill. His place will be taken by the young American-born assistant conductor of the symphony, Leonard Bernstein.” That was the introduction to the CBS live radio broadcast.

Leonard's brother Burton recalls that age 11 he just happened to be in the audience at Carnegie Hall on that day. The family got an unexpected phone call from Lenny saying that he was going to conduct. Last minute assignment. No time for even one rehearsal. The manager of the symphony actually came out in front of the audience to announce the historic importance of the moment. Bruno recalls that he looked down and saw people leaving the building. He said to himself, “Why just give him a chance, will you? He hasn't even begun yet!” But Burton remembers that when the concert was over, it was “riotous.” The Bernstein family's lives were changed. “Suddenly,” he wrote, “we were famous all over the world.” Today we know the end of the story – between 1943 and 1990, Mr. Bernstein appeared at Carnegie Hall more than 400 times as a conductor, pianist, composer and educator.

Perhaps that radio broadcast, sponsored by the United Rubber Company, helped along Mr. Bernstein's “instant” world-wide fame.



By 1943 Samuel P. Colt was long gone. He had served as President of the company from May 24, 1901 to December 5, 1918 – serving in that capacity longer than any other man who held that office. In March of 1901 total capital and stock of the company stood at just over \$47 million. When he retired in 1918, that number had increased to \$146,967,000.ⁱ Colt died in 1921.

Around the time of the historic Carnegie Hall performance, the New York Times reported on the company's annual meeting. "The value of the United States Rubber Company's production for war and essential civilian purposes in 1944 was more than \$933,000,000, Herbert E. Smith, President, told stockholders today at their annual meeting here. War production, he said, accounted for \$756,138,730, or 81 per cent of the total --an increase of \$100,000,000 over the output in 1943."ⁱⁱ

Now Mr. Colt did not *establish* the United States Rubber Company – that was accomplished by Charles Flint. But he *did* drive the company's early growth and success. In 1889 a law in New Jersey was passed to allow a holding company to acquire the majority stock of subsidiaries in New Jersey – or in any other state. That created the plan of consolidation that Mr. Flint followed to acquire and control companies in the rubber business. By September of 1892 Samuel Colt is on the Board of Directors and is the Director of Contracts and Litigation. In 1893 Joseph Banigan of the Woonsocket Rubber Company joins the cartel and is elected president of United States Rubber. His story is a fascinating one that was presented by historian Dr. Stephen Molloy at Linden Place in 2023. Banigan resigns in 1896, Robert Evans and Frederick Shepherd serve for short terms, and in 1901 Colt becomes President.

Three business strategies stand out during Mr. Colt's tenure. The first is growth by acquisition. By the end of the fiscal year in 1902, United States Rubber owned 75% of the total rubber footwear production output in the United States.ⁱⁱⁱ That strategy continued even after he was gone, and United States Rubber diversified its production and eventually rebranded itself as U.S. Tires and then U.S. Royal and in 1967 all the company brands were under one name – UniRoyal.^{iv} In the early years of Colt's tenure it did not hurt, of course, that this was the age of the automobile. Between 1886 and 1899 there were 300 individually built autos in the United States. By 1920 200,000 vehicles were produced in that one year.^v

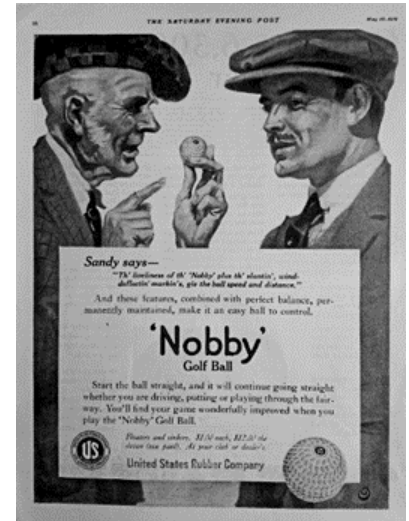
By 1912 there were five major companies manufacturing tires, and U. S. Rubber was at the top of the market share list, followed by B.F. Goodrich, Diamond, Goodyear and Firestone.^{vi}

United States Rubber Company proudly advertised in 1916 "that it owned forty-seven great factories with combined floor space of over 8,300,000 square feet, equivalent to 191 acres, and employed about 35,000 persons."^{vii}

The second strategy was a focus on the international market. In December of 1904 the New York Times wrote extensively about the E.C. Benedict party and its plan to sail 1200 miles up the Amazon to Iquitos in Brazil to evaluate the possibility of installing "wireless telegraphy" and to estimate resources available, such as coffee and rubber. Elias Cornelius Benedict, nicknamed "The Commodore," was a prominent New York City banker and yachtsman. He specialized in the gas and rubber industries.^{viii} On that business trip were officers of the United States Rubber Company – and Russell G. Colt, son of Samuel. Russell married the American actress Ethel Barrymore in 1909.

Colt also purchased rubber plantations in overseas locations. He travelled to Holland to seal the deal to buy a 52 year lease on 88,000 acres in Sumatra. This was the first rubber plantation "owned" by an American rubber manufacturer. He acquired the Canadian Consolidated Rubber Company, and opened overseas sales branches in Europe. Gradually the company moved from rubber and footwear focused production to tires, mechanical items, fabrics, and chemicals.

In 1917 after extensive market research the company also began to produce golf balls, made in a Providence RI plant. The ball was named the U.S. Nobby because its surface resembled the popular Nobby Tread on the company's tires. You can pick a ball up on E-Bay for about \$40 today. Here's an ad from the Saturday Evening Post of 1919 for the Nobby.



The third was leverage – or aggressive borrowing to achieve corporate goals. On a personal note, as a banker during the turbulent merger and acquisition periods of the 1990s (remember Bank of New England – too big to fail?) it was fascinating to read the United States Rubber balance sheets and be reminded what overextension was all about. Net sales at U.S. Rubber grew from \$21 million in 1902 to \$215 million in 1918. However, those “increased sales masked the threat to future profits entailed by excessive indebtedness.^{ix} The debt sheet grew from \$20 million in 1904 to \$25 million in 1905 and a whopping \$73 million by 1917.^x

After WWI, the U.S. economy contracted, and the new President Charles B. Seger did not seem to be able to handle that economic change. Sales fell, and for the first time the company's tire sales were eclipsed by a competitor, Goodyear Tire and Rubber. Seger's career ended in 1929 and Francis B. Davis Jr. became the new corporate President. He worked hard to close many of the plants that were below par in terms of production efficiency and tried to consolidate operations in order to lower costs.

By the time of WWII, however, United States Rubber went from using 60,000 long tons of crude rubber a **year** to 70,000 long tons of rubber a **month**.^{xi} The ton we are used to is 2,000 pounds. A long ton (British) is 2,240 pounds. Added to its extensive product inventory were self-sealing fuel cells for combat aircraft. Once in utilization, it was discovered that many failures of the cells were caused by improper handling, storage and installation. United States Rubber Company created the Fuel Cell Field Service Division and was the only fuel cell manufacturer to provide complete **on-site** service for repairs to their own products, as well as to those made by other manufacturers. Perhaps the company's greatest challenge, however, was to design and erect a massive synthetic rubber plant in Institute, West Virginia. It took 35 acres of blueprints to get it right.^{xii} When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and seized the world's largest rubber plantations in the Dutch East Indies and the Malayan Peninsula, the sense of urgency to manufacture synthetic rubber was catapulted to critical. The plant came online in 1942. United States Rubber was then given contracts to operate six munitions plants. In the late summer of 1941 there was an empty cornfield outside of Des Moines, Iowa. United States Rubber Company went to work. On January 31, 1942 the Des Moines Ordnance Works plant went into operation on that site.^{xiii} At its peak the plant employed more than 19,000 people to manufacture 30mm and 50mm munitions for use in World War II.^{xiv}



By the time of the historic concert in 1943, Carnegie Hall was already over fifty years old. The first artist to record live within the building was Enrico Caruso in 1904. The Victor Talking Machine Company paid him for a total of 10 recordings on his first day of work. The first recordings with a live audience took place in the early 1900s, under the direction of Arturo Toscanini. The United States Rubber Company's New York headquarters had been built by that time –on Broadway at West 58th, a four-minute walk from the Hall in an area known as “Automobile Row.” Although a little more research will have to be done, it's not too far a stretch to think that Mr. Colt might very well have attended a concert or two.

But it was in the 1930s that CBS paid \$15,000 to broadcast the entire season of the New York Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra. Those broadcasts continued for 38 years without interruption. William S. Paley, who became President of CBS in 1928, knew the critical importance of advertisers and sponsors. The underwriting of the live concert broadcasts by United States Rubber Company fit neatly into his business strategy.

In an interview in 1989 Leonard Bernstein recalled that day in 1943: "I never thought I would have to walk out there [the Carnegie Hall stage] on my own. When it came to the time – that very day – all I can remember is standing there in the wings shaking and being so scared. There was no rehearsal. I had just come from seeing Bruno Walter, who very sweetly and very quickly – wrapped up in blankets because he had the flu – went over the score of Don Quixote with me. He showed me a few tricky spots where he cut off here but didn't cut off there; here you give it an extra upbeat, and so on. I strode out and I don't remember a thing from that moment – I don't even remember intermission – until the sound of people standing and cheering and clapping.^{xv}



Bernstein



Herbert E. Smith

Thanks to the marketing plan instituted by President Herbert E. Smith, United States Rubber Company is now part of radio broadcasting *and* music history, and the CBS recording of that iconic event has been preserved for future generations.

To read more about Mr. Bernstein and his remarkable career, visit www.leonardbernstein.com

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This article is written by Lynn Smith, a Linden Place volunteer. Although not a trained historian, Lynn makes every effort to ensure that the information in the article is as accurate as possible. As always, suggestions, comments, corrections and input are all welcomed.

Endnotes

ⁱ ***History of the United States Rubber Company***, by Glenn D. Babcock; Indiana Business Report No. 39, Graduate School of Business, Indiana University, 1966

ⁱⁱ ***New York Times***, April 18, 1945

ⁱⁱⁱ Babcock, page 39

^{iv} Ibid, page 64

^v ***American Rubber Workers and Organized Labor***, by Daniel Nelson, Princeton University Press, 1988

^{vi} Babcock, page 114

^{vii} Babcock, page 78

^{viii} ***New York Times***, December 11, 1904

^{ix} Babcock, page 53

^x Ibid, page 64

^{xi} ***U.S. Dept. of Commerce***, Industrial Reference Service, Part 10 "Rubber"; U.S. Govt. Printing Office June 1941

^{xii} Babcock, page 398

^{xiii} Ibid, page 398

^{xiv} ***Des Moines Ordnance Plant***, by John Stratton; University of Nebraska at Kearney, 2021

^{xv} www.leonardbernstein.com