

## Obituary of Jacob Kindleberger

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**Jacob Kindleberger, KVP Founder, Dies at 72**  
**End Comes in Bronson at 9:40 A.M.**  
**Industrialist Sank Rapidly After Entering Hospital Tuesday**

Jacob Kindleberger, 72, to whom the New Year was always a challenge to increased effort in his never-ceasing drive to help his fellow men, died this morning at 9:40 in Bronson hospital, where he had been taken Tuesday afternoon. He had been in failing health for some years, a condition that induced him to turn over the direct conduct of affairs of the Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Company, which he founded in 1909, to younger hands in 1936, when he became chairman of the board of directors.

He had divided his time between Kalamazoo and the South, but he was never happier than when he was in the midst of the community and close to the mill that gave it being under his long supervision.

For sometime past he has been confined to his home under the constant care of a physician and of his wife, who was with him at the hospital when he died, as was his son Joseph B. Kindleberger. Beside his wife, Lucinda, and his son, he is survived only by three grandchildren, Ruth, Martha Jo and Lucy Marie, all of Kalamazoo. The body was taken to the Truesdale funeral home, where arrangements for the final rites are being made.

### **He Loved to Sell**

Mr. Kindleberger's life was divided into two distinct sections, as was the case with so many of the Kalamazoo valley industrialists – that before he became enthused with the possibilities of industrial development here, and that after he had established himself in the valley's paper industry. Of course, the results attained in his dynamic years at Parchment stemmed from the principles he had established in his formative period.

He loved to sell, once leaving a \$100 a week job for one at \$15 per week because the opportunities were better. He was impatient of "conferences." He considered them pure waste for the most part. "While there are a good many people banded together for good purposes, it will always be true that only one must be in supreme authority," he said once. "Action may be guided by taking counsel. But one man must decide."

Another attribute that was striking was the conviction – not mere belief – that he expressed in this manner. "Everything here," speaking of the plant, "and in all our factories from the beginning has been done on the idea that the man who gives quality is going to last the longest and go farthest."

Still another salient characteristic of the man was his deeply religious spirit and his absolute welding of that spirit with practice in conducting his business. These three factors have been the chief motivating forces of his life and can be traced through all its varied phases. From them grew the great plant that is now the Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Company's home. From them came the multitude of products that have made the company a power in the paper industry. And from them grew the monument that is the community of Parchment, a model city. A shrewd dealer, he none-the-less had a real and abiding concern for his fellows.

### **Hated "Stuffed Shirts"**

He hated "stuffed shirts." As to his place as a manager of men, "What men want is a square deal," he said. "I haven't much of a creed for dealing with them (his employees) different from dealing with any men. You never want to lie to them. You don't want to promise one thing and do another. They don't want to be high-hatted. Neither do I. Besides, what is there to high-hat about? I'm doing my job. They're doing theirs. We're on even terms as far as that goes."

Mr. Kindleberger meant it. For years the plant had the reputation of leading in the paper industry in wages. There are literally scores of persons who recount kindnesses of which Mr. Kindleberger never spoke, dozens of charities to which his gifts are anonymous. Almost from the start of his work in Parchment he conducted a Bible class which before illness forced him to abandon he had built up into a huge membership. It grew from the Sunday school he started in his own home, a practical application of the Christianity he taught and lived.

Life began for Mr. Kindleberger with more than a youth's share of handicaps. His parents, John Kindleberger, a Bavarian and Otilde Frealich Kindleberger, an Alsatian, lived at Roumbach, Alsace-Lorraine, Germany, when Jacob was born Feb. 27, 1875, the third of the family. His father was eager to get away from the compulsory service in the German army and in 1890 the family immigrated to the United States, going first to Cincinnati. From there it moved to Dayton, and finally settled in West Carrollton, Ohio.

There were three girls and three boys in the family, Mary, who became Mrs. C. O. Landis; Lena, Mrs. Henry Daub; Rose, Mrs. Harry Zimmerman, and John, Jacob and Charles. The boy Jacob was cursed with extremely faulty eyes and so got no formal schooling. To that handicap was added the fact that largely because of the intemperate habits of his father he was forced to help earn a living for his family.

### **Earned 25 Cents a Day**

He picked up coal along the railroad tracks, ran errands for neighbors, delivered washings that his mother took in, and at 10 went to work as a rag sorter in the rag room of the mill in which his father worked. It was a hard school, for he had to learn to sort by feel rather than sight, and his short-comings were often rewarded by the application of the foreman's heavy foot, which he often said "I can feel to this day."

His starting pay was 25 cents a day. By the time he was 13 years old he had risen to a job on the paper machine, and got 30 cents an hour. At 15 he and a group of “some other mill hoodlums” as he put it, went to a revival meeting to laugh at the preacher. Instead, he was converted and he said that from that moment the entire course of his life was changed.

The future had meant nothing. Now it meant an opportunity to “be somebody.” His hard childhood had brought him to that age without knowledge of reading and writing, which he said he excused on the basis of his bad eyes. People in the church encouraged him to learn to read and write and his employer in the mill, named Burns, urged him to go to school. It wasn’t until he was 19, though, that he had his eyes examined, glasses fitted and an entirely new world opened up to him. Gratitude moved him to determine to devote his life to the ministry, but he maintained his work in the mill to help his family.

At 21 he left the mill for work as a school janitor where he could attend night classes. This paid him \$20 a month, less than his mill work, but he made progress in his studies and soon determined to go to college. He started in the Ohio Wesleyan College at Delaware, and supported himself by selling books, hat racks, steam cookers and anything else he could get hold of. He finished the academy work in three years and in the fall of 1901 entered college. In his third year his eyes gave out under the strain and he had to quit his classes and give up as well his plan to become a minister.

### **Takes \$15 a Week Job**

Meanwhile his steam cooker business had boomed. He was making as much as \$100 a week from its sales when he was offered a job by his former paper mill employer, Burns, as paper salesman, at the small wage of \$15 per week. Mr. Kindleberger related often that he didn’t tell Burns until years afterward of the vast difference in pay, because at the time he could see a far greater opportunity in the paper industry.

His territory was the entire United States, Canada and Mexico. For the next 13 years he was on the road making those contacts and acquaintances that were later to be of such value. More than that, he was building an industrial philosophy and schooling himself in details of the trade that later were to go into the building of the business he later was to found in Parchment.

On Dec. 7, 1905, he married Lucinda Drucilla Faulkner of West Carrollton, daughter of a Xenia farm couple. Their only child, Joseph Burns Kindleberger, was born at West Carrollton.

Late in 1909 he received a letter from Harry Zimmerman, husband of his sister Rose, and who had come to Kalamazoo to work in the paper mills, praising Kalamazoo and the opportunity for founding another paper mill here, especially a converting mill for the manufacture of Parchment papers.

Mr. Kindleberger came to the city, saw good grounds for his brother-in-law’s enthusiasm and immediately set out to see if he could raise enough capital for the mill he envisioned. The late

J. J. Knight was his first convert and contributor. With Mr. Knight's \$10,000 at the head of the list, Mr. Kindleberger was soon able to get \$50,000 and founded the Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Company.

### **Early KVP Days a Struggle**

He had interested Knight, A. A. Wheat, Will Jones, John McLarty and Charles S. Campbell in his venture, and they became members of his first board of directors. Mr. Kindleberger was named secretary of the little company and later was made general manager as well. In 1916 he became president, a post he relinquished in 1936 when he became chairman of the board.

The job was a tough one. Mr. Kindleberger himself pitched in at laborer's jobs while the old beet sugar plant was being remodeled. He helped pour cement foundations, took his trick at firing boilers, did any job that came up which would save the wages of an extra man. When he traveled to get business he had to use day coaches. There just wasn't money for Pullman fare. He was usually first into the plant in the morning and the last to leave at night.

From that work grew the huge sprawling, but closely integrated plant. From his humanitarian and his religious characteristics grew the city of Parchment and all that it embraces in recreational and educational and cultural facilities.

Mr. Kindleberger has been a member of the Rotary club in Kalamazoo since 1915, was on many of its committees and served one term as vice president. He was elected president of the Chamber of Commerce in 1917, 1922 and 1923. He was trustee-at-large of Ohio Wesleyan College and a trustee of Bronson hospital.

He was a member of the national commission on men's work of the Methodist church. Other memberships and offices included vice president, Goodwill Industries; vice president, American Management Association; chairman, Michigan Advisory Committee for the American Youth Foundation; president board of trustees Union Methodist church of Parchment.

He was a lifelong Republican, Elk, Odd Fellow and Mason (32<sup>nd</sup> Degree and Shrine).

[author unknown]