

THE ELBERFELD SYSTEM: POOR RELIEF AND THE FLUIDITY OF GERMAN
IDENTITY IN MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY GERMANY

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, who provided me with amazing opportunities to see the world and fostered my love of history.

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ABSTRACT

The Elberfeld System is synonymous with the development of the welfare state in the German Empire. Historians underscore the Elberfeld System's "Germanness" because of its adoption by numerous nineteenth-century Prussian industrial cities. Their interpretation is useful for understanding the development of the welfare state in the German Empire, but fails to appreciate the Elberfeld System within its own context. This thesis explores the social and economic reasons that the Elberfeld System succeeded when and where it did. Elberfeld was one of the earliest industrialized centers in continental Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century. Industrialization created class stratification between workers, employers, and leading industrialists. Elberfeld itself was unusual in the largely Catholic Rhineland because of its conservative Protestant citizenry. All of these factors contributed to the structure, adoption, and realization of the Elberfeld System in 1853. The Elberfeld System's success was a reaction to revolts in 1848-1849, as well as result of economic prosperity in the 1850s. This thesis explores the development of poor relief in Elberfeld during the first half of the nineteenth century. It navigates how Protestant and Enlightenment ideals shaped the foundation of the Elberfeld System into a distinctive form of outdoor poor relief. It highlights how changing economic situations in the first half of the nineteenth century forced Elberfeld's municipal government to continually reassess its understanding of poor relief. Through archival research, this thesis places the Elberfeld System within the context of its own

time and place. These archival sources include poor relief management statements, sermons by Elberfeld's Protestant ministers, and accounts of working class individuals.

By accentuating the regional and contextual significance of the Elberfeld System, historians can better understand why it was so highly revered in nineteenth-century Prussia and by the later German Empire.

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ABBREVIATIONS

HStAD	Hauptstaatsarchiv Düsseldorf
SAW	Stadtarchiv Wuppertal
<i>Thaler</i>	Thlr.
<i>Silbergroschen</i>	Slbr.
<i>Pfenning</i>	Pfg.

Currency Equivalency	
1 <i>Thaler</i>	30 <i>Silbergroschen</i>
1 <i>Silbergroschen</i>	12 <i>Pfennig</i>

CHAPTER 1: A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE IN A NATIONAL STORY

The Elberfeld Poor Law of 1853 established a successful system of poor relief that was accepted in most major cities in Germany by the end of the nineteenth century. The Elberfeld System's widespread implementation led contemporary scholars to accept Elberfeld as the "German" example of poor relief in pre-nationalized Germany. However, this ignores the system's origins as part of the regional reaction in the Wupper Valley to the Revolution of 1848. In the years following 1848, Elberfeld's municipal government reorganized its poor relief management to mitigate future civic unrest among the working classes. The Elberfeld System achieved this because of its refocus on outdoor relief, instead of poorhouses and voluntary contributions. Outdoor relief required regular one-on-one visits of an *Armenpfleger*¹ (almsgiver) with poor relief recipients to determine the proper amount of welfare needed. The Elberfeld System split poor management into fourteen *Bezirke* (districts) with ten different *Quartieren* (quarters) within each district. An almsgiver was assigned to each quarter where he would personally meet with individuals to discuss their financial situation. Welfare disbursement was also determined by the moral character of the recipients. This meant that recipients consistently sought employment and avoided immoral activities, such as drinking. Almsgivers met on a biweekly basis with fellow almsgivers and the district *Vorsteher* (inspector), who then

¹ All translations of German secondary, primary, and archival sources are my own. These terms are my own understanding of the different terminology. I will cite the German term with my own English definition in the paper.

discussed financial needs of their district with the *Hauptarmenverwaltung* (Central Poor Relief Management). The Elberfeld System highlighted new attempts by Elberfeld's municipal government to involve its middle and upper class citizenry in government, while relying less and less upon voluntary financial contributions.

Elberfeld is situated in the Wupper Valley, a mountainous region in the lower Rhineland.² Unlike most of the German states in the early nineteenth century, the Rhineland's textile industry expanded rapidly. The increase in population, as well as the social and economic problems associated with a wage labor system, created a large poor population. In the 1850s, during a period of reactionary policies and economic growth the Elberfeld System became successful. Numerous factors, including rapid industrialization, economic prosperity, and a tradition of Protestant out-door relief, led to the Elberfeld System. The Elberfeld System achieved realization because of the regional peculiarities of early industrialization, religious piety, and willingness to reevaluate existing poor relief practices. Its creation was a result of failures of the Revolution of 1848, economic prosperity in the region in the early 1850s, and the triumph of the city's religious conservatives. This thesis explores how fluid German identity was prior to unification. It examines how Protestant values, the conservative backlash to the revolution of 1848, and the economic upswing of the 1850s were essential to the creation of the Elberfeld System.

For clarification purposes, I will divide Elberfeld's community into four different classes. The term "elites" will be used for the wealthiest industrialists and bankers of the city. Religious Protestant leaders will be included in this category because of their close

² See Figure 1.

association with Elberfeld's industrial elites. The elites in Elberfeld exhibited rigid Protestant morality in their relationship with the poor, and among their own socio-economic group. These elites supported the Prussian government during the Revolution of 1848, and were the beneficiaries of reactionary policies in the 1850s. The elites were the ones who perpetuated the idea of that the Elberfeld System was a success. This was because the elites viewed lowering poor relief costs and unemployment as the goal, and that ending poverty would follow these steps. The middle classes are split into two different groups, the manufacturing middle class and the intellectual middle class. These groups differ in their relationship with the working classes. The manufacturing middle class tended to be more conservative and aligned closer with the values of the elites. The intellectual middle class showed more liberal qualities and argued for workers' rights. There is crossover between these two groups, but predominantly the intellectual middle class was more concerned with political change, while the manufacturing middle class wanted economic transformation. The final group, the working classes, included both skilled and unskilled laborers. I distinguish between these groups in the half century leading up to 1848, but combine them during the revolution.

There are two historical viewpoints regarding the intellectual development of the Elberfeld System. The first accepts it as a continuation of religiously organized poor relief programs from previous centuries, while the second accentuates the importance of the Enlightenment in shaping Elberfeld's poor relief. Both schools of thought discuss the elite and middle classes' increased role in government and culture through the Elberfeld System, but disagree on where this form of outdoor relief is rooted. This differentiation provides an obstacle to understanding of pre-nationalized welfare since it depends on

which period historians begin their study. My interpretation incorporates both the Protestant religious tradition of individual responsibility, as well as the Enlightenment belief in separation of state and church institutions. While the differences between these two approaches alters the narrative of the Elberfeld System's origins, one cannot understand the development of the Elberfeld System without the other one.

To understand the Enlightenment's connection to the Elberfeld System, historians incorporate French and Napoleonic influences on the Rhineland. Although the ideals from the French Enlightenment influenced the Rhineland's governmental and economic structure, Germans maintained many of their own cultural practices during French occupation.³ Similar to most regional scholarship of the early and mid-nineteenth century, historians note how Catholic organizations melded their own Enlightened ideals of religious principles and citizens' political involvement through *Vereins* (Voluntary Associations).⁴ It was this meshed form of Enlightenment ideals of secularized institutions and religious duty to ones' community that shaped Elberfeld in the first half of the nineteenth century. Napoleon's occupation of the Rhineland differentiated the region from the rest of Germany where there was less governmental involvement by its citizenry. The influence of Napoleonic ideas of civic duty altered the political structure of a Rhineland society that for centuries had been dominated by princes and lords.

³ T.C.W. Blanning, *The French Revolution in Germany: Occupation and Resistance in the Rhineland, 1792-1802*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 207-254. Michael Broers, Peter Hicks, and Guimera Agustin, *The Napoleonic Empire and the new European Political Climate*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012), 173-185. Robert Mark Spaulding, "Revolutionary France and the Transformation of the Rhine," *Central European History*, 4, 2 (June 2011): 203-226.

⁴ Jonathan Sperber, "Roman Catholic Religious Identity in Rhineland-Westphalia, 1800-70: Quantitative Examples and some Political Implications," *Social History*, 7, 3 (Oct., 1982): 311. Brophy, *Popular Culture*, 91.

Incorporation of elites and middle classes into government policy during the Napoleonic Era set a precedent of public involvement that led to the creation of the Elberfeld System.

Ideals from both the Prussian and French Enlightenment influenced Elberfeld's middle class and elite populations and how they structured the Elberfeld Poor Law. Prussia, like France, instigated policies that furthered the middle classes' involvement in politics. Inclusionary policies, like the Municipal Ordinance of 1808, expanded middle class and elite citizens' roles in politics by allowing property-owning males to vote, hold town office, and regulate municipal programs like schools, police, and poor relief.⁵ The increasing role of the middle classes in politics led to greater responsibility for the well-being of each other. Civic responsibility became a prominent feature of middle class and elite identity by the mid-nineteenth century, who increasingly viewed themselves as a "public."⁶ Middle class involvement demonstrated the incorporation of French Enlightenment ideals into the Rhineland's political policies. For scholars who begin their examinations at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Elberfeld System appears largely a part of Enlightenment values. The expansion of the middle class in politics by the Prussian and French governments magnifies the importance of the Enlightenment in forming German identity in the mid-nineteenth century Germany.

Although scholars address the economic downturn in the 1840s that forced Elberfeld to restructure its poor relief, historians neglect how the booming economy of

⁵ Matthew Bernard Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism: The Transformation of Prussian Political Culture, 1806-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57.

⁶ Barabara Lube, "Mythos und Wirklichkeit des Elberfelder Systems," in *Gründerzeit: Versuch einer Grenzbestimmung im Wuppertal, Schriftenreihe des Vereins für Rheinische Kirchengeschichte, Vol. 80*, ed. Karl-Hermann Beeck (Köln: Rheinland-Verlag GmbH, 1984), 161.

the 1850s in the Rhineland impacted its initial success in 1853. Elberfeld's rise in population and poverty during the 1830s and 1840s offers an example of industrialization's impact on Germany society. Elberfeld's silk and textile industries comprises most of the discussion regarding its economic structure because of textiles' importance as a "powerful staple in the industrial activity of the Rhenish textile industry," and "staple commodity of the world market."⁷ Elberfeld's industrialization early in the nineteenth century forced city officials to address issues of poverty and unemployment. Historians emphasize the late 1840s because this period experienced "bad harvests, price rises... and rampant unemployment."⁸ While this explains reasons for why the old poor relief structure was inadequate, an understanding of why the new system succeeded in the early 1850s is missing. Historians note that other cities later emulated the Elberfeld System because of its success in economic crises, but they do not explain its initial accomplishment at lowering poor relief costs in the 1850s.⁹ The failure to link the economic crises leading to the Elberfeld System and its influence on cities' desire to implement Elberfeld's poor relief misinterprets the Elberfeld System's origins. By not connecting the economic upswing of the 1850s and the achievements of the Elberfeld

⁷ Hisashi Watanabe, "Die Wuppertaler Unternehmer in den Dreissiger Jahren des 19. Jahrhundert. Eine Analyse des Adreßbuches von 1833 unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Verhältnisses zwischen Baumwolle und Seide," *Hokudai Economic Paper*, 3 (1972): 138. For an earlier history of Elberfeld's transformation into the silk industry; Herbert Kisch, *From Domestic Manufacture to Industrial Revolution: The Case of the Rhineland Textile Districts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). For the relationship between the textile industry and Elberfeld's interconnected industrial elite families; Andres Löther, "Familie und Unternehmer: Dargestellt am Beispiel der Wuppertaler Textilunternehmer während der Frühindustrialisierung bis 1870," *Zeitschrift für Unternehmer Geschichte*, 36, 4 (1991): 217-244.

⁸ Lube, "Mythos und Wirklichkeit," 172.

⁹ Gerhard Deimling, "150 Jahre Elberfeld System: Ein Nachruf," in *Geschichte im Wuppertal* 12 (2003): 49.

System, historians miss a crucial feature of why Elberfeld effectively lowered its poor relief costs.

The municipality of Elberfeld also receives significant attention by regional historians because of revolts that occurred in 1849, but scholars do not link these events to the future creation of the Elberfeld System. During the 1840s, tensions in Elberfeld rose within the working classes, as well as between the middle classes and upper classes. The middle classes and conservative religious elites clashed over how best to combat poverty and conflicts between the government and working classes.¹⁰ Scholars highlight how substantial conflict centered around confessional differences, with the Protestant elites supporting Prussian forces, unlike the Catholic population.¹¹ Rising poverty and industrialization provide scholars a typical explanation for why Elberfeld restructured its poor relief,¹² but scholars have not connected the events of 1848 to Elberfeld's policies in the 1850s. Scholars' failure to connect the Revolution of 1848 with the Elberfeld System in 1853 misses the reasons behind this shift to municipal outdoor relief. By ending their focus in 1849 or 1850, scholars miss the impact of these regional events on policies, like the Elberfeld System, in the 1850s.

The Elberfeld System provides a continued point of reference for scholars of national welfare, but has been discussed little in the regional history of the Rhineland.

¹⁰ Jonathan Sperber, "Echoes of the French Revolution in the Rhineland, 1830-1849," *Central European History*, 22, 2 (Jun., 1987): 210. Jonathan Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and Revolution of 1848-49* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 121-122.

¹¹ James M. Brophy, *Popular Culture and the Public Sphere in the Rhineland, 1800-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 223. Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals*, 357-58. Sperber, "Echoes of the French Revolution," 215.

¹² Larry Frohman, *Poor Relief and Welfare in Germany from the Reformation to World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 89-90.

Almost all debate on the Rhineland focuses on the Catholic population and the advancement of a Catholic political base. Because of Elberfeld's predominately Protestant population, scholars tend to address Elberfeld as primarily an outlier and not part of greater trends within the mid-nineteenth century Rhineland. In historical studies of the Rhineland, Catholic associations like the *Kolplingsvereine* (Kolping Workers' Associations), dominate debate while there is no reference to the Elberfeld System.¹³ Although the *Kolplingsvereine* and the Elberfeld System began in Elberfeld at similar times, historians of the Rhineland accentuate the Catholic organizations while rarely mentioning programs developed in Protestant dominated areas. Eric Yonke offers one of the few examples where Protestant and Catholic poor relief are compared when he discusses how the "Catholic Journeyman's Association resembled Protestant and state-funded efforts to promote sobriety, frugality and industry."¹⁴ Still, there is no direct reference to the Elberfeld System. Because the dogmatic Calvinist and Lutheran elites dominated Elberfeld's politics in the 1850s, historians have neglected Elberfeld in the larger discussion of Catholic politicalization in the mid-nineteenth century. My study highlights how Elberfeld was an outlier in Rhineland religious politics, but shared traits with the whole region economically.

Although the Elberfeld System is predominately studied in connection to developing nationalized welfare, or changing middle class and elite identity, historians of religion highlight its religious foundations. Elberfeld's largely Reformed (Calvinist) elites

¹³ Jonathan Sperber, "The Transformation of Catholic Associations in the Northern Rhineland and Westphalia, 1830-1870," *Social History*, 15, 2 (Winter, 1981): 258-259.

¹⁴ Eric Yonke, "The Problem of the Middle Class in German Catholic History: The Nineteenth Century Rhineland Revisited," *The Catholic Historical Review*, 88, 2 (Apr., 2002): 271.

exemplified older common beliefs of poor relief. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Calvinist poor relief programs had little pastoral involvement and possessed a “greater focus on disciplining and reforming the poor.”¹⁵ Historians accentuate how the Elberfeld System absorbed poor relief funds from churches, but fail to acknowledge the Elberfeld System’s religious foundations. Civic responsibility and the decentralization of authority from the churches and *Oberbürgermeister* (Mayor) to the elites was not a new development in Protestant poor relief organization; Calvinists in Holland encouraged this approach in prior centuries.¹⁶ Although these characteristics of individualization and decentralization of authority existed well before the Elberfeld System itself, they share common traits with how Elberfeld’s government structured its poor relief. Historians’ neglect of earlier Protestant poor relief programs and the religious conviction of the Elberfeld System’s creators misconstrues its origins. The trivialization of Elberfeld’s elites’ religious beliefs is a result of an overemphasis on Enlightenment principles. Because historians have ignored most religious texts by the Elberfeld System’s architects they misunderstand the Elberfeld System.

The Elberfeld System’s placement as the national example of poor relief deemphasizes the role of the Protestant elites in developing the Elberfeld System. Although historians connect elites’ religious conservatism to the Revolutions of 1848, there is less attempt to link these beliefs to the Elberfeld System’s implementation. In

¹⁵ Phillip S. Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 130.

¹⁶ Charles H. Parker, “Calvinism and Poor Relief in Reformation Holland,” in *The Reformation of Charity: The Secular and the Religious in Early Modern Poor Relief*, ed. Thomas Max Safley (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2003), 114. Until the Elberfeld System, the Oberbürgermeister signed off on all outdoor poor relief cases. This proved a tedious and less effective means of outdoor poor relief distribution.

most instances historians portray religious convictions of the Elberfeld System's creators as justification to maintain control, and not as real religious conviction.¹⁷ While there may be some truth to this characterization, it veers discussion towards a more secularized German middle class identity later in the century, and away from the conservative elites governmental control in Elberfeld in the 1850s.

On the other end of the spectrum, attempts by historians to focus solely on the religious principles behind the Elberfeld System instead of those from the Enlightenment, stress the Elberfeld System's ability to lower poor relief costs, and not its proficiency in lowering poverty.¹⁸ While a discussion of Elberfeld's religious and conservative background is essential to understanding the structure of its mid-century poor relief, historians who exaggerate the religious connection ignore the failures of the Elberfeld System. A balanced interpretation that highlights the immediate success of the religious elites in the 1850s and the growing trend of civic responsibility show the true foundations of the Elberfeld System.

The Elberfeld System itself is not a hotly debated subject within the scholarship of poor relief in pre-nationalized Germany. Almost all historians address it as a precursor to Bismarckian poor relief and the middle and elite classes' understanding of poverty throughout the nineteenth century into the twentieth. However, since the 1950s, few historians address the Elberfeld System within the context of its time, with almost all other scholarship utilizing sources produced twenty years or more after its

¹⁷ Lube, "Mythos und Wirklichkeit," 179-184.

¹⁸ Gottfried W. Locher, "Herman Friedrich Kohlbrügge (1803-1875): Zeuge der freien Gnade," in *150 Jahre Niederländisch-reformierte Gemeinde zu Elberfeld*, ed. Klaus van Bürck and Heinrich Lüchtenborg (Wuppertal: Foedus Verlag, 2000): 121.

implementation.¹⁹ This emphasis on sources created after German national unification produced an interpretation of the Elberfeld System as the “German” solution to poverty, by comparing it to the English, French, or American welfare programs.²⁰

By focusing on the Elberfeld System’s connection to nationalized welfare, historians misunderstand why this poor relief system effectively lowered poor relief costs when and where it did. Greater attention is required to the religious, social, and economic situation of the Wupper Valley during the 1840s and 1850s to understand the Elberfeld System within its own time. This study places the Elberfeld System back within the context of its creation, correcting the focus primarily on its importance in developing nationalized welfare in Germany later in the nineteenth century.

My thesis seeks to restore focus on the origins of the Elberfeld System, instead of its importance later in the century. Scholars’ viewpoints on the Elberfeld System depend upon the time period in which they write. While historians in the 1950s into the 1970s tended to glorify the architects of the Elberfeld System, scholars in the 1980s overcorrected the “Great Men” interpretation with a Marxist understanding that argued

¹⁹ Gerhard Deimling, “150 Jahre Elberfeld System,” 46-57. Lube, “Mythos und Wirklichkeit,” 158-184.

²⁰ Andrew Doyle, *The Poor Law System of Elberfeld*, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons and Commands, Volume 28, 1870. A.F. Hanewinkel, Charles Stewart Loch, *Elberfeld Poor Law System: Reports on the Elberfeld Poor Law System and German Workers’ Colonies* (London: Eyre and Spottis Woode, 1888). Richard Hibbs, *Prussia and the Poor; or, Observations upon the systematized relief of the Poor of Elberfeld, in Contrast with that of England. Founded upon a visit and personal inquiring* (London & Edinburgh: William & Norgate, 1878). Emil Münsterberg. *Das Elberfelder System: Schriften des deutschen Vereins Armenpfleger und Wohltätigkeit* (Leipzig: Verlag von Dunker und Humboldt, 1903). Emil Münsterberg, “Principles of Public Charity and Private Philanthropy in Germany,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 2, 4 (Jan., 1897): 589-605.

the founders were entirely self-serving.²¹ Most current scholarship surrounding the middle classes' relationship to the poor approaches the subject with a less cynical lens than Marxist historians have. Contemporary historians critique the Elberfelder System's founders for being obtuse about the root of poverty, but do not condemn their actions as self-aggrandizing. Through examining archival material, my thesis will demonstrate how the rise of conservatism in the 1850s fit directly with the values of the religious, social, and economic values of the Elberfeld System's founders.

Historians from the 1950s into the early 1970s offered a positive interpretation of the Elberfeld System and its contribution to German society. Leaders of Elberfeld's community and the political success of the middle classes later in the nineteenth century provided the bulk of concentration by historians. To honor the centennial of the Elberfeld System's creation, Wolfgang Köllman described Elberfeld's poor relief management as "a sign of citizenship, civic responsibility, and civic enthusiasm for one's "Neighbor" in the civil community."²² In Maria-Louise Baum's biography of Daniel von der Heydt, the grandfather of the Elberfeld System, she highlights the "sacrificial sense of (Elberfeld's) warmhearted citizens."²³ Interpretation of Daniel von der Heydt provides a clear, even sentimental, viewpoint upon von der Heydt's connection to the Elberfeld System. Baum's conclusion even utilizes von der Heydt's eulogy wherein his pastor describes him as "the

²¹ Marie-Luise Baum, *Die von der Heydts aus Elberfeld*, (Wuppertal: Born Verlag, 1964). Heide Gerstenberger, "The Poor and Respectable Worker: On the Introduction of Social Insurance in Germany," *Labour History*, 48 (May, 1985): 69-85. Wolfgang Köllmann, "Das Elberfelder System, Hundert Jahre: 'Hilfe von Mensch zu Mensch'," *Soziale Welt*, 5, 1 (1954): 66-71. Lube, "Mythos und Wirklichkeit," 184.

²² Köllmann, "Das Elberfelder System," 71.

²³ Baum, *Die von der Heydts*, 73.

best citizen and tenderest friend.”²⁴ These interpretations focus entirely on the middle classes and elites of the Elberfeld, and utilize no sources from working class society. This pre-Marxist interpretation stresses the successes of the Elberfeld System and the almsgivers involved, but ignores welfare recipients themselves.

This “history from above” understanding of history shifted in the 1970s and 1980s, and it would be the same for the Elberfeld System. Middle class identity and understanding of the “social question” constitute a significant portion of historical discussion of the Elberfeld System’s relationship to future national German policy. The “social question” was how to address rising poverty in an industrializing Germany. In the 1980s, scholars addressed the middle classes’ understanding of poverty in the nineteenth century, arguing that for working class citizens, “apart from survival they had no rights under official care.”²⁵ Since the 1980s, historians regularly cite Emil Münsterberger’s 1903 report in which he praises the Elberfeld System for alleviating poverty in Germany.²⁶ Historians in the 1980s, like Heide Gerstenberger, highlight Münsterberger’s critique of the contradiction of the middle classes and elites in wanting to help the poor achieve economic freedom, yet to possess no political power.²⁷

Class divisions provided a greater focal point for historians of the 1980s because of the prominence of Marxist interpretation within scholarship. This negative

²⁴ Ibid., 80.

²⁵ Gerstenberger, “Poor and Respectable Worker,” 79.

²⁶ Münsterberg, *Das Elberfelder System*, 26. Frohman, *Welfare in Germany*, 88. Michael Stolleis, *Origins of the German Welfare State: Social Policy in Germany to 1945*, (Berlins: Springer-Verlag, 2013), 38. Diemling, “150 Jahre Elberfeld System,” 48. It should be noted that Münsterberger contributed a similar report to the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1897 where he made similar conclusions about the Elberfeld System.

²⁷ Gerstenberger, “Poor and Respectable Workers,” 79-80.

interpretation of nineteenth century elites and middle classes' understanding of poor relief was common among other historians of the time. Historians of the 1970s and 1980s utilized the Elberfeld System as an example of how future welfare programs were less about aiding the poor than maintaining a level of control over working classes. Marxist historians went as far as to condemn the Elberfeld System's grandfather Daniel von der Heydt for his "arrogant superiority" over the working classes.²⁸

The Marxist interpretation of the 1970s and 1980s accentuated the middle classes and elites' misunderstanding of the "social question" by highlighting the mistreatment of the working classes and lack of understanding by the middle classes and elites. This transition is evident in Barbara Lube's rebuke of the long-revered founders of the Elberfeld System and accentuation of the middle class secularization. Barbara Lube's study provides the most recent redefining work on the Elberfeld System. Lube argues that the Elberfeld System was a product of growing Enlightenment ideals among the middle class population and a dramatic shift from religiously organized poor relief. Typical with scholarship in the 1980s, Lube focuses on the growing involvement of the middle classes as a class, while criticizing the motivations of the Elberfeld System's creators. According to Lube, the Elberfeld System fulfilled growing middle class ideals that viewed "the poor man as an object of Christian charity and civic education."²⁹ Although Lube criticizes the motivations of Christian charity in actually influencing the middle classes and elites, she does highlight that their rhetoric remained predominantly religious in tone. The middle classes and elites incorporated values of "efficiency" and "energy" as "expression of self-

²⁸ Lube, "Mythos und Wirklichkeit," 181.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

affirmation and self-expression.”³⁰ Lube views these traits as a shift from the traditional religious viewpoints and towards enlightened ideals of the individual.

Similar to other Marxist scholarship of the 1980s, Lube deemphasizes the importance of religious beliefs, arguing that the middle classes and elites’ newfound identity and political power shaped the structure of the Elberfeld System. This increased importance of middle classes and elites’ rise in power is obvious in her closing remarks, where she concludes, “the success of the “Elberfeld System” was the success of its creators.”³¹ This meant the more the Elberfeld System expanded, the greater the prestige of its founders. Lube’s works establishes how developing middle class identity shaped midcentury poor relief in Germany, but devalues religious principles too much. Lube’s lack of examination of religious secondary or primary sources hinders her argument that the Elberfeld System was based more on ideals of the Enlightenment and not on religion. Lube’s examination, while valuable for understanding middle class identity in early nineteenth century Germany, lacks a greater appreciation for the religious background of Elberfeld’s elites in the mid-nineteenth century.

The negative perspective of the middle classes and elites as “policers” of the poor dissipated in the 1990s as historians focused more and more on middle class identity and changing role within politics. Scholars in the 1990s refrained from harsher Marxist terminology in their descriptions of middle classes’ attitudes towards the poor. These post-Marxist historians note how the middle classes blended “Christians charity and civic

³⁰ Ibid., 179.

³¹ Ibid., 184.

patriotism,” to justify their authority over the working classes.³² The interpretation of middle class attitudes towards the poor shifted because historians focused on cooperation within the middle classes later in the nineteenth century. Frohman points to the establishment of the German Association of Poor Relief and Charity (*Deutscher Verein für Armenpflege und Wohltätigkeit*) as national responses to poverty that were met with degrees of cooperation.³³ Instead of focusing on the oppression of workers, debate shifted from class differences between the middle class and working classes to how the middle class changed over time. Post-Marxist historians accepted some Marxist critiques of poor relief, like how the middle class understood poverty, but refocused interpretation on the middle class, instead of working class society. The post-Marxist accentuation of middle class society helps build a narrative of nationalized welfare in Germany, but does little to explain the Elberfeld System in its own historical context.

Since the 1990s, most social historians examine the Elberfeld System in connection with the developing national welfare programs of the 1880s and early twentieth century. Historians’ usage of Elberfeld as the “German” example and its connection to “outdoor relief,” unite it with the narrative of pre-nationalized welfare in Germany.³⁴ Historians link Elberfeld with the failures of the German elites and middle classes to understand the roots of poverty and the inability to “move beyond poor relief

³² Frohman, *Welfare in Germany*, 94. Similarly to Frohman’s example of Elberfeld is Edward Mathieu, “The Christian Love of the German Middle Class: Thuringia, 1870-1912,” *German Studies Review*, 36, 4 (1991): 217-244. David Blackbourn, *History of Germany, 1780-1918: The Long Nineteenth Century* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 212.

³³ Frohman, *Welfare in Germany*, 97.

³⁴ George Steinmetz, “The Local Welfare State: Two Strategies for Social Domination in Urban Imperial Germany,” *American Sociological Review*, 55, 6 (Dec., 1990): 894.

and deterrence.”³⁵ Historical acceptance of the Elberfeld System as the “German” example links it to future issues regarding poor relief, but does little to explain why it succeeded in lowering poor relief costs and abating the middle and working classes’ frustration with their political and economic situation after 1848. Most scholarship addresses the Elberfeld System’s problems later in the century with alleviating poverty, in particular its disenfranchisement of the working classes and lack of incorporation of working class members within welfare administration.³⁶ Although examination of the Elberfeld System is necessary for understanding how German national welfare developed, historians have failed to explore why the Elberfeld System was so widely accepted in Germany. Using the Elberfeld System as the national example of pre-nationalized Germany’s welfare system misses its relevance to mid-nineteenth century German society.

The Elberfeld System’s placement as an antecedent of nationalized welfare and not a reaction to issues of the 1840s and 1850s alters how historians understand the Elberfeld System. The relationship between workers and the middle class shifted significantly after the revolutions in 1848, with scholars noting how middle class societies’ “social policy was narrowed to ‘workers,’ more specifically the male industrial proletariat.”³⁷ While Steinmetz notes this change in middle class and elites’ perspectives, he provides no connection between this shift in thought in relation to the rise of conservatism in the 1850 or the Elberfeld System. Some historians view the Elberfeld

³⁵ Larry Frohman, “The Break-Up of Poor Laws: German Style Progressivism and the Origins of the Welfare State, 1900-1918,” *Comparative Studies*, 50, 4 (Oct., 2008): 1004.

³⁶ Frohman, “Break-Up of Poor Laws,” 987. Steinmetz, “Workers and the Welfare State,” 36.

³⁷ George Steinmetz, “Workers and the Welfare State in Imperial Germany,” *International Labor and Working Class History*, 40, The Working Class and the Welfare State (Fall, 1991): 20.

System as deviating less from past poor relief systems and instead as more of an effort to “keep pace with social change by adapting the competency regulations.”³⁸ While there is truth to this, this provides no explanation of why this was the case in Elberfeld during the 1850s.

Placing the Elberfeld System firmly within the changing social and economic landscape and history of poor relief in previous decades is essential to studying the Elberfeld System. Unfortunately, scholars neglect comparison of these two issues. The neglect of Elberfeld’s social and regional history in scholarship takes away from its significance to the community at the time. The Elberfeld System exhibited characteristics that German middle class society later accepted, but its origins come from its own community. The utilization of the Elberfeld System within a “national narrative” rather than a regional one led to both working classes men and women being excluded from the story of its origins.

The lack of inclusion of the working class, as well as the elevation of the Elberfeld System as the “German” example, diverted conversation away from the working classes’ involvement with poor relief in Elberfeld. Even with the dominance of the Marxist interpretation from the 1970s into the 1980s, scholars concentrated on middle class and elites’ misunderstandings of poverty rather than the working classes’ attitudes as recipients of relief. Since the 1990s, historians’ emphasis on middle class and elites’ understandings of poverty lessened the discussion regarding welfare recipients themselves. A few scholars, like Gerstenberger and Mary Jo Maynes, utilize sources from

³⁸ Stolleis, *Origins of the German Welfare State*, 38. Competency regulations means how poor relief managers judged the poor.

the working class that describe concerns with welfare because it “symbolized submission to public authority.”³⁹ Although these sources do not directly address workers experiences within the Elberfeld System, they exemplify issues workers faced with poor relief boards. These included the inability to receive adequate financial backing and regular intrusion of almsgivers into their personal lives. With the Elberfeld System, there is even less concentration by scholars of working class responses to poor relief. The elite and middle classes’ growing importance in policy making, particularly the *grande bourgeoisie* (bankers and industrialists), is a noted unique feature of Elberfeld System.⁴⁰ These *grande bourgeoisie*, or elites, remained the heads of poor relief management in the nineteenth century, while middle class merchants and master craftsmen continued to hold positions as almsgivers. The Elberfeld System’s connection to the rise of the elites and middle classes in Germany draws debate away from the poor and toward national policy later in the century. Similar to other scholarship of poor relief, the historiography of the Elberfeld System lacks an adequate account of workers’ view of poor relief.

Historians understand the Elberfeld System as a precursor to nationalized German welfare and the growing importance of the middle class in cultural consciousness. This conclusion is correct, but it fails to understand how Elberfeld created a poor relief program that successfully lowered poor relief costs and lessened unemployment. Regional historians ignore it almost entirely, while historians of German nationalization use it to better understand developing German identity in the nineteenth century.

³⁹ Gerstenberger, “Poor and Respectable Worker,” 77-79. Mary Jo Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road: Life course in French and German Workers’ Autobiographies in the Era of Industrialisation* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

⁴⁰ Frohman, *Welfare in Germany*, 91.

Emphasis on the Elberfeld System's importance nationally shifts conversation away from the contemporary regional issues that forced the city to reevaluate its poor relief. The Elberfeld System was a product of longstanding religious principles, the advent of the Enlightenment, and the rise of conservatism in the 1850s. Historians highlight its importance in shaping middle class identity, but do not address how it affected the working class. Similar to most scholarship of poor relief, the conversation remains fixated on the middle classes and elites. Although historians understand the Elberfeld System in context of changing ideas of poverty and poor relief, there is less appreciation of why it began when and where it did. The Elberfeld System must be understood within the context of its own time, as well as part of a regional and communal issue, before it should be adopted as a "German" example, and this thesis seeks to further that understanding.

CHAPTER 2: ECONOMICS AND POOR RELIEF: A TANGLED RELATIONSHIP

It was not until the Elberfeld System that the municipal government found a solution for unemployment that lowered poor relief costs. Historians put more emphasis on the Elberfeld System's shift away from church welfare programs towards municipal control, but ultimately, this ignores the economic situation in Elberfeld in the 1850s. Economic factors played an equally important role in Elberfeld's ability to combat poverty. Similar to the rest of the Rhineland, Elberfeld experienced an economic boom in the middle of the 1850s. The emphasis on outdoor relief, instead of voluntary contributions and poorhouses, emboldened the Elberfeld System's acceptance in the German Empire. This boost in the economy proved significant for the initial success of the Elberfeld System. Elberfeld's elites and manufacturing middle class benefitted the most from economic growth in the 1850s. With the Elberfeld System, working classes received employment opportunities, but ultimately, it failed to elevate them from poverty.

Elberfeld offers a distinct example of one of Germany's earliest industrialized cities. Even more than other regions of the Rhineland, Elberfeld witnessed early industrial growth because of its importance in the textile industry.⁴¹ Silk and linen manufacturing became the dominant source of Elberfeld's wealth and employment of workers. During the Napoleonic era, Elberfeld and neighboring Barmen exported millions of francs worth of silk and cotton products to continental European nations and

⁴¹ See Figure A.2 for a map of Elberfeld's major municipal locations.

America, while employing nearly 80 percent of the city's population.⁴² Economic improvements during the first years of the Napoleonic era saw greater employment opportunities in Elberfeld and lessened the amount of homelessness. Eventually, Napoleon's Continental System hindered Elberfeld economically, and unemployment ballooned starting in 1813. Elberfeld's sudden economic downturn was because most of the continent was cut off from British textile manufacturing during the Napoleonic Era. From 1813 to 1815 Elberfeld's municipal spending inflated by almost ten percent, while almost all forms of poor relief from care for the elderly to aid for the sick dropped seven and thirteen percent.⁴³ Economic distress at the end of the Napoleonic era resulted in diminished funds for the poor, demonstrating the failures of existing poor relief programs. Elberfeld had reformed its municipal poor relief at the turn of the century, but its newly structured program faltered during its first test of economic hardship.

During the Napoleonic Era, Elberfeld utilized a new form of poor relief that included more municipal institutions and greater involvement by the middle classes. Poorhouses and almsgivers provided an important step in the development of poor relief in Elberfeld during the first half of the nineteenth century. The Poor Law of 1800 began the transfer of power from church poor relief institutions to secular ones. The

⁴² Herbert Kisch, *From Domestic Manufacture to Industrial Revolution: The Case of the Rhineland Textile Districts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 205.

⁴³ "Einnahmen und Ausgaben der Armenanstalt 1813-1815," in Nachricht über die allgemeine Armenanstalt in Elberfeld. Die bisherigen Vorsteher derselben an ihre wohlthätigen Mitbürger am 16. März 1816, in *Historische Texte aus dem Wupperthale: Quellen zur Sozialgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts unter Mitarbeit von Marcus Puschnerat*. ed. Karl-Hermann Beeck (Wuppertal: Born Verlag, 1989), 397. The only areas of poor relief that increased in this period were the supply of clothing to the poor, by 10 percent and poor relief for travelers, by 15 percent. The surplus in clothing is best explained in Michael Rowe, *From Reich to State: The Rhineland in the Revolutionary Age, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 204-207.

incorporation of municipal poorhouses into poor relief was based on a greater emphasis on civic duty by the elite and middle classes. Workhouses offered municipal officials an easier way to distinguish between “incorrigible loafers” and workers who needed welfare “out of necessity.”⁴⁴ Almsgivers, often from the manufacturing middle class, determined whether workers could remain in a poorhouse or receive any poor relief.

Following the fall of the Napoleonic regime, Elberfeld’s government and churches effectively mitigated poverty through voluntary contributions from its wealthiest citizens, but the economic crisis from 1813 up to 1817 demonstrated the flaws in this poor relief policy. The formerly profitable silk and linen industries experienced significant setbacks during this period. Napoleon had favored the Wupper Valley’s textile production and pressed other European regions to buy from Elberfeld and neighboring cities.⁴⁵ But ultimately, stringent economic policies under Napoleon cost Elberfeld. Because other regions were now allowed to trade with England, Elberfeld did not have the dominance in the marketplace it possessed under Napoleon. The hardest hit industry was textile manufacturing. The newly appointed Mayor Johann Brüning noted that increased competition with England created “the consensus that poverty was greatest among the weavers.”⁴⁶ Increased unemployment meant increased levels of poverty among the working classes in Elberfeld. Poor relief managers believed Elberfeld’s wealthy citizens had “the good sense” to “understand the need for new subscriptions of

⁴⁴ “Die Vorsether des allgemeinen Armen-Instituts an ihre Mitbürger im Januar 1801,” HStAD Best Großherzogtum Berg. Nr. 4738. S. 1-7, *Historische Texte*, 388.

⁴⁵ Rowe, *From Reich to State*, 205.

⁴⁶ “Bericht des Elberfelder Oberbürgermeisters an den landrätlichen Kreiskommissar Graf Seyssel d’Aix,” HStAD Regierung Düsseldorf NR. 2126 Bl. 25 ff. 2.8.1816, *Historische Texte*, 135.

weekly contributions to poor relief management.”⁴⁷ These issues only increased as Elberfeld industrialized and poverty became a greater concern.

While Elberfeld weathered this economic recession, the latter half of the 1820s into the 1830s proved a disastrous period for Elberfeld’s working classes and poor relief management. Increased unemployment and poor harvests in 1827 led to higher costs for food. Workers struggled under a new Prussian tax on meat and flour.⁴⁸ The cost of poor relief management mushroomed throughout the Wupper Valley. For Elberfeld, the number of individuals on welfare grew from 2,500 to over 5,000 in two years.⁴⁹ In the suburb of Unterbarmen, poor relief management increased from 4,088 Thlr. to 7,456 from 1826 to 1832.⁵⁰

This long economic downturn demonstrated how Elberfeld’s poor relief managers had no lasting solution to an economic crisis. They still pursued voluntary contributions instead of reform. Ultimately, the number of almsgivers was inadequate to meet the number of poor, and the voluntary contributions to religious and secular institutions failed to meet rising costs. Police reports in Elberfeld highlight the growing number of beggars in the streets, often women and children abandoned by their parents or

⁴⁷ “Nachricht über die allgemeine Armenanstalt in Elberfeld. Die bisherigen Vorsteher derselben an ihre wohlthätigen Mitbürger am 16 März 1816,” S. 2-8, SAW R II 66, *Historische Texte*, 402.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and Revolution of 1848-49* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 61.

⁴⁹ “Kommentar 18,” *Historische Texte*, 409. Schwarzbrot (A common form of bread in the Rhenish region) also doubled in this time.

⁵⁰ C.W. Wilkhaus, “Die Armenverwaltung zu Barmen bedürften in einem Zeitraum zum 15 Jahren,” SAW, R I 29. Pg. 5

husbands.⁵¹ Men were the primary recipients of municipal welfare for outdoor relief. The Elberfeld municipal poor relief's unwillingness to add women as outdoor relief demonstrated the paternalistic misunderstanding of Elberfeld's elites. Although women made up a significant portion of workforce, elites believed a male worker should be able to earn enough to provide for their family. This is why Elberfeld's outdoor relief was limited to male workers.⁵² The failures of Elberfeld's poor relief management in the 1820s and 1830s forced the municipal government to reassess its approach to poverty. The inadequacy of Elberfeld's outdoor poor relief resulted in migration by working men and increased rates of women and children on municipal and church welfare programs.

The economic downturn of the 1820s and 1830s exhausted poor relief, requiring reformation of how cities addressed poverty. By the 1840s the municipal governments of Elberfeld and neighboring Barmen realized that the rise in population and the need to address systemic poverty were not part of an economic cycle, but a new chronic issue. Elberfeld and Barmen introduced new financial policies to mitigate increasing levels of poverty. These included stricter regulations on municipal spending on public events and higher taxes upon the elites and manufacturing middle class. In Barmen, Mayor Carl Wilhelm Wilkhaus encouraged stricter welfare distribution that "reduced the economic

⁵¹ "Bericht des Polizeiinspektors Ellenberger an Oberbürgermeister Brüning über eine durchgeführte Bettlerjagd und ein Auszug aus der angefügten Auflistung und dem Verhör der Bettler," SAW O VI 23, 23.7.1831, *Historische Texte*, 409-410.

⁵² Because Elberfeld's outdoor poor relief was limited to men, this has led women to be largely excluded from the scholarship of the Elberfeld System. Historians of migration and industrialization highlight how women's role in the workplace increased in the first half of the nineteenth century, but there is little exploration into how their exclusion from outdoor poor relief impacted unemployment or poor relief costs. From a today's perspective it seems obvious that if women were included in outdoor relief this would have benefitted both workers and elites who wanted to lower poor relief costs.

crisis through promotion of industriousness and support of only the needy.”⁵³ The financial burden upon the Wupper Valley shifted poor relief to target only those in horrific financial duress, which meant individuals facing starvation or homelessness, into the category of “worthy” of aid. These regulations highlight how in difficult economic periods Elberfeld’s poor relief managers used more Calvinistic understandings of poverty that placed firmer moral requirement on the poor.

Elberfeld instituted financial regulations that syphoned money from middle class manufacturers to support relief for a growing number of poor. Mayor von Carnap, who was also *Präsident der Allgemeine Armen-Verwaltung* (President of the Public Poor Relief), introduced new requirements that took funding from “deposits of public merry making,” and, “gifts during festivals of other occasion.”⁵⁴ This prioritized reducing poverty over civic events on the city. Condemnation of public secular events coincided with increased moralistic rhetoric by Elberfeld’s Protestant pastors and fellow industrial elites. These measures accentuated the growing concern for poverty, as well as the inadequacy of relying on voluntary gifts from citizens. The economic struggles in Elberfeld and the surrounding region altered how and who distributed welfare to the impoverished throughout the 1840s.

In the 1840s, Elberfeld’s municipal government incorporated more of its citizenry into welfare management. This meant more active participation of the upper and middle classes at a personal level with welfare recipients. The Poor Relief Program of

⁵³ C.W. Wilkhaus, “Die Armen Verwaltung zu Barmen,” 4. Wilkhaus also notes that Barmen’s expenditures increased over 50% and its population grew by 25% from 1827 to 1841.

⁵⁴ Oberbürgermeister von Carnap, *Armenordnung der Stadt Elberfeld* (Elberfeld, Gedruckt bei F.A. Schober, 1841), 15. SAWR II 51. Pg. 16.

1841 allowed for the “appointment, remuneration, and dismissal of assistants” and allowed decisions to be made by a selected council with the Mayor’s consent.⁵⁵ Mayor von Carnap reorganized poor relief management into ten different districts with five quarters within each district. Each district had multiple almsgivers who met monthly with their *Bezirkvorsteher* (District Supervisor) who then met with the Central Poor Relief Management.⁵⁶ Many of these initial almsgivers were middle class citizens such as carpenters or brewers, while the majority of financial support came from the upper classes.⁵⁷

Economic issues and poor harvests during the 1830s required Elberfeld’s municipal government to include more of the middle classes in welfare management. The inclusion of more outdoor relief required greater numbers of almsgivers. Although the religious overtone was heightened during this period of economic hardship, the municipal government adopted a more active approach that accentuated civic morality and included more middle class manufacturers. This incorporation of more almsgivers into poor relief played a significant role later in the decade, when middle class manufacturers and workers joined together through economic hardship against the pious industrialists of Elberfeld in 1849.

Elberfeld’s economic system was built to benefit only a few elite families. Elberfeld’s business structure centered around passing down or combining companies with other elite families. Into the middle of the nineteenth century, Elberfeld’s wealthiest

⁵⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁵⁷ “Verzeichnis der Hilfsprovisoren,” in Beilage zum Täglichen Anzeiger Nr. 135 vom 8.6.1841, *Historische Texte*, 411

families continued to maintain control over most businesses, although there was no “fully planned marriage policy.”⁵⁸ Many of these families, including the von der Heydts, Wülflings, and de Weerths, dominated Elberfeld’s banking and textile industries.

During the early 1840s, these wealthy elites became increasingly involved in poor relief management, often holding District Supervisor positions and providing the majority of voluntary contributions. Although these elites supplied the bulk of financial support of poor relief during the economic crisis in the 1840s, they were not popular among the working classes. Many of these elites later became the focus of the working class and middle classes’ criticism in 1848 and 1849 because, while Elberfeld’s wealthy businessmen provided financial aid to the working classes, they made little room for including the middle and working classes into their business management. Elberfeld’s economic system depended upon the employment and health of its workers, but provided no opportunity for their advancement within businesses or the municipal government. Even Elberfeld’s middle class manufacturers were targets of the elites’ paternalistic mindset.

The 1840s culminated in a crisis in 1848 and 1849 that reshaped the identity of Elberfeld’s workforce. Workers, both male and female, poured into Elberfeld and the surrounding Wupper Valley by the mid 1840s, swelling the labor supply, lowering wages, and ultimately hindering the existing workers’ ability to bargain for adequate pay. The overpopulation of the surrounding rural communities led to mass migration into Elberfeld. Rather than work as journeymen, many of these new migrant workers

⁵⁸ Andreas Löther, “Familie und Unternehmer: Dargestellt am Beispiel der Wuppertaler Textilunternehmer während der Frühindustrialisierung bis 1870,” *Zeitschrift für Unternehmer Geschichte*, 36, 4 (1991): 242.

established themselves as independent manufacturers. Ultimately, competition with unskilled labor lowered the middle class manufacturers' standard of living.⁵⁹ Elberfeld registered only a few hundred fulltime workers each year, but utilized far more as seasonal hires. Between 1844 and 1847, women constituted on average 60 percent of the individuals coming into Elberfeld seeking employment.⁶⁰ This highlighted the economic shift taking place in Elberfeld as women left more traditional familial roles to add to the incomes for their family. Workers' identity shifted dramatically as both male and female workers became more attuned to their economically unequal status with the elite class under the wage labor system. Elberfeld's acceptance of unskilled labor lessened the demand for middle class manufacturers and blurred the lines between the skilled middle class and unskilled labor.

Workers became more cognizant of their economic hardship during the economic depression of the 1840s. Some workers promoted a unified workforce that encouraged a single body of workers for each industry. In an article published under the pseudonym "Gewerker Gewill", Gewill addressed textile workers and encouraged them to "communicate, unite, and form unions," against the injustices of their employers.⁶¹ These calls demonstrated increased anxieties by workers, who accosted their guild masters who controlled wages and employment opportunities. While some in the workforce agreed with arguments for a united textile union, not all accepted Gewill's conclusions.

Responders, usually established masters of their craft, argued that Gewill could not

⁵⁹ Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals*, 28.

⁶⁰ Lippert Dähne, Carol Voigt, and G. Stephani, "Achter Hauptbericht über die Wirksamkeit der städtischen Anstalt für Arbeitsnachweisung im Jahre 1851," SAW R II 105. No. 2017, Pg. 2.

⁶¹ "So wie man's treibt, so geht's," in Täglicher Anzeiger Nr. 258 vom 29.10.1845, *Historische Texte*, 192.

compare a dyer and a weaver, and that the anonymous author should “Give up the vices you accuse us of!”⁶² This stratification resulted in strikes by unskilled laborers against their employers. At one trial regarding a recent strike led by a weaver named August Fichthorn, Fichthorn exclaimed, “God damn me...I have to starve at work!”⁶³ Although the number of impoverished continued to grow, middle class manufacturers worked to distinguish themselves from the working classes. Skilled and unskilled workers became frustrated by their inability to receive adequate pay and voice their grievances. Middle class manufacturers and intellectuals attempted to unite workers through voluntary associations and guilds, but the class divide was too great. By 1848, the middle classes and working classes remained divided because of inadequate wages.

The acceptance of cheaper and unskilled labor by elite industrialists and middle class manufacturers increased the number of skilled individuals placed on poor relief. By the 1840s, most elite manufacturers employed journeymen instead of full-time apprentices. This lowered costs for elite industrialists but also created tensions among workers and increased the number of individuals on welfare. Some day-laborers, like Heinrich Schnepf, a former sheepherder from Frankfurt, were hired but did not possess the necessary skills and ultimately went to the poorhouse.⁶⁴ Journeymen possessed fewer rights than local skilled laborers, and if they failed to meet their obligations, could be

⁶² “Etwas über die Rechnung des Herrn Gewerker Gutwill,” in *Täglicher Anzeiger* Nr. 290 vom 5.12.1845, *Historische Texte*, 198

“Eingefandt,” in *Täglicher Anzeiger* Nr. 291 vom 6.12.1845, in *Ibid.*, 199.

⁶³ “Protokoll einer Verhandlung des Fabrikengerichts,” HStAD Gewerbergericht Elberfeld Nr. 804/4 Bl. 200-210 31.7.1845, *Historische Texte*, 236.

⁶⁴ Report of Heinrich Schnepf to Oberbürgermeister of Elberfeld 14.9.1844, SAW R II 151.

prosecuted more easily in the *Fabrikgericht* (Manufacturing Tribunal).⁶⁵ These Manufacturing Tribunals provided a means for elite industrialists to prosecute workers without going to a municipal court. Often day-laborers were forced to either pay a fine or serve time in jail as punishment for leaving their position in search of other employment. This established a cycle of unemployment and debt that perpetuated poverty among Elberfeld's working class. When workers protested their conditions, master craftsmen prosecuted them for "disturbing the peace" and "having made a great sensation in the presence of 70 to 80 workers."⁶⁶ The existing economic system of cheap unskilled in Elberfeld exacerbated the rising poverty in the late 1840s and heightened working class frustrations with elite industrialists and middle class manufacturers. Workers were subject to a biased court that favored the elites, and as a result, were forced into deeper poverty.

The Wupper Valley struggled to address rising poverty in the region and utilized similar practices of voluntary contributions to churches and municipal governments. Different associations, like the Association for Poor Employment, Barmen's official municipal poor relief management association, utilized their own funding and organization to address rising unemployment. Similar to the municipal government, leaders of the Association for Poor Employment in Barmen sought individual contributions from its members to provide aid until workers found employment. While the Association was able to meet most of its financial requirements, the amount needed

⁶⁵ Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals*, 56-58.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 236.

continued to rise yearly. Between January 1846 and October 1847 expenditures increased by over 100 percent, increasing their deficit.⁶⁷

Because voluntary contributions remained the center of poor relief in the Wupper Valley, few other avenues existed for workers to receive aid. For those who could not receive aid from outdoor relief, the workhouse offered one of the only alternatives. Workhouses had some of the strictest regulations for workers including the requirement to attend church services every Sunday and nightly curfews.⁶⁸ Continued reliance on voluntary contributions proved increasingly insufficient to diminish the poverty rate in Elberfeld and helped only a marginal number of the impoverished population. By 1848, the municipal government's restructured 1841 poor relief initiative was failing to reduce spending on welfare. The city still relied upon voluntary contributions and the usage of poorhouses to combat poverty.

Elberfeld's poor relief managers utilized both traditional forms of poor relief, as well as new emergency approaches to alleviate poverty, but did nothing to change the current economic system. A traditional solution was to provide shoes, clothes, and bread for the needy. For example, Elberfeld's leading banking and industrialist families provided over thirty-five percent of finances for bread distribution to Elberfeld's impoverished.⁶⁹ Similarly, municipal poor relief managers hoped that providing soup,

⁶⁷ "Abschluss am 1 Januar 1847," Report by Julius Erbsloh, 27.10.1847. StaWU R I 29. "Cassen Abschluss der Armenbeschäftigung Verein's am 1. Januar 1845," Report by Julius Erbsloh, 1.1.1846. SAW R I 29.

⁶⁸ "Entwurf Hausordnung für das allgemeine Armenhaus in Elberfeld," HStAD Reg. Düsseldorf Nr. 1674 Bl. 46ff, 5.12.1843, *Historische Texte*, 416-420.

⁶⁹ "Verzeichnis der gezeichneten freiwilligen Beitrag zur Beschäftigung der brotlosen Arbeiters," STaWU R II 140.

bread, and clothing would help “manage the large number of poor.”⁷⁰ When economic instability increased workplace actions in Elberfeld, such as strikes, however, poor relief managers were willing to adopt new tactics that went to great lengths to avoid civil unrest. One District Supervisor even suggested the “removal of cottage shops” to cut down on competition between factory workers and the cottage industry.⁷¹ These were extreme suggestions for decreasing poor relief costs, and did not receive the same support as continued calls for voluntary contributions. Elberfeld’s elites continued pouring money into welfare, but the downward spiral of the economy negated additional financial support, at least in their own minds.

In sum, Elberfeld’s poor relief program was unable to effectively address rising poverty in 1848 because of increasing numbers of workers, rising food prices from bad harvests, and an unwillingness to retreat from a system that relied upon voluntary contributions. The amount of voluntary contributions for indoor relief, as well as the number of almsgivers for outdoor relief, were insufficient to combat the continued economic downturn. The 1841 reorganization of poor management lacked enough community support by the middle classes to effectively lower poor relief costs. Elites suggested different solutions, but ultimately, none received enough support to upend the continual reliance on voluntary contributions.

The economic downturn during the 1840s showed the inadequacies of Elberfeld’s 1841 Poor Relief Program. Between 1841 and 1847, Elberfeld’s poor relief management failed to adjust their understanding of poverty, or their approach to job creation. By 1848,

⁷⁰ “Auszug aus dem Protokoll der Armen-Verwaltung from 17.2.1848,” SAW R II 88, No. 1493.

⁷¹ “Auszug aus dem Potokoll der Armen-Verwaltung from 17.2.1848,” SAW R II 88, No. 1353.

Elberfeld's government was forced to reassess this position. Elberfeld instituted new work programs, like the *Arbeitskommission* (Work Commission), to provide temporary jobs for workers.⁷² Although Elberfeld's elites created more jobs through government programs, this did not change their viewpoint on poverty or poor relief. Industrial and religious elites continued to preach Calvinistic principles of morality and industriousness.

Unfortunately for the elites, Elberfeld's practical solutions were too little too late. Economic hardships would reach a boiling point in 1848 that job creation and voluntary contributions could not abate. Although Elberfeld's poor relief managers continued to offer financial support through voluntary funds, these were grossly inadequate for the everyday survival of workers. Poor harvests plagued the Rhineland, doubling the price of bread and meat. The Prussia state regulated the price of bread and meat. The amount of welfare received depended upon the worker's number of members in their family, as well as their ability to hold a job. The majority of recipients were families of four or more who received a total of thirteen *Silbergroschen* (pence) per week.⁷³ These funds were limited to households tended by male workers only. Workers on *Notstandarbeiten* (emergency work), which included deforestation, railway construction, and river regulation, received only two-thirds of what was considered enough to provide food for their families, excluding other expenses.⁷⁴ In a period of low employment and bad harvests, those who could find work and receive financial aid still did not have enough to survive. For

⁷² "Kommentar 27," *Historische Texte*, 205.

⁷³ "Arbeitsbeschaffungsmaßnahmen in Elberfeld und deren Finanzierung," Beilage zum *Täglichen Anzeiger* Nr. 164 vom 11.7.1848, *Historische Texte*, 205.

⁷⁴ "Kommentar 27," *Historische Texte*, 205. On average a family of five required 3 Thlr., 21 Slbr., and 10 and 4/13 Pf. to provide enough meat and bread for a family weekly. The average worker for a family of five working six days received around 2 Thlr. and 18 Slbr. per week.

individuals who lacked secure employment, Elberfeld's poor relief funds failed to alleviate their poverty, but did, mostly prevent its poorest citizens from starving. Elberfeld's elites continued to believe that poverty was only a temporary circumstance; this is why they did little to change their current poor relief program.

By 1848, skilled workers sought out compromise with elite manufacturers and middle class manufacturers with hopes of finding consistent work and adequate pay. Elite manufacturers accepted a greater number of unskilled laborers and ignored employing the more skilled weavers and dyers. In response, workers in the textile industry published their grievances and demanded changes in the workplace. Because the existing justice system was biased against both skilled and unskilled workers, workers vocalized their grievances against elite industrialists. The first demand by textile workers from Elberfeld and Barmen was that "work can go to outsiders once we have jobs."⁷⁵ Workers, particularly in the textile industry, grew frustrated by the employment of cheaper unskilled labor. The employment of unskilled labor hurt Elberfeld's largest industry. The quality of textile products diminished and cheap day-laborers became more expendable as the economic depression continued. Workers were also critical of foreign labor, arguing that foreigners should only be allowed to work until "German workers were permitted to work in the fatherland of foreigners."⁷⁶ From 1848 into 1849, Elberfeld's

⁷⁵ "Forderungen der Elberfelder und Barmer Weber," SAW J XI 1, März 1848, *Historische Texte*, 237.

⁷⁶ "'Antrag' der Färbergesellen von Elberfeld und Barmen," in *Elberfelder Zeitung* Nr. 112 vom 21.4.1848, *Historische Texte*, 239. Lippert Dähne, Carol Voigt, and G. Stephani, "Achter Hauptbericht," SAW R II 105. No. 2017, Pg. 3. There was an unusual influx of foreign labor in 1848 who were used as Navvies to build a railroad in Elberfeld. These Navvies were part of the Emergency Workforce, which was a new initiative to help employ the growing number of unskilled labor. This mass migration almost quadrupled the cost of employment programs in Elberfeld from 7,200 Thaler in 1847 to over 28,000 Thaler in 1848.

local workers' inability to find work led to higher rates of individuals and families in poorhouses and on welfare. By 1848, these issues created civil unrest in Elberfeld and set into motion the reactionary conservatism of the 1850s.

Elberfeld's poor relief management hit its nadir from 1848 into 1849 with a record number of citizens requiring poor relief. The conflict in the Rhineland in 1848 helped deplete Elberfeld's poor relief funds by 1849 and inflated the municipal government's overall deficit. Elberfeld's poorhouses became overrun with unemployed individuals and families, with almost 1000 families residing in Elberfeld's poorhouses weekly.⁷⁷ Along with housing the poor, Elberfeld's poorhouses spent over five times the amount on soup portions from January of 1849 compared to December of the same year.⁷⁸ Many of these costs carried over from 1848. Rather than seek outdoor relief, workers congregated at poorhouses. These poorhouses quickly became overrun and costs for food and shelter skyrocketed.

The elites' reliance on voluntary contributions and poorhouses to address rising poverty highlighted their inability to recognize the fundamental issue -- that workers were paid inadequately. Elberfeld's elites believed that workers required only enough to be "economically independent," and that poorhouses and work programs would be a

⁷⁷ "Report of the Elberfeld's Poorhouses, 7.2.1850," SAW R II 105. In total it took over 21,000 Thlr. to fund Elberfeld's poorhouses in 1849, with an average of 865 families residing there per week. The total cost estimated to provide for these families was 14 Sibr. weekly per family. "Der Vertheilung von 5000-Thaler zur Bestreitung der Ausgaben bei dem Orderungenhaus auf die Kreise und rep. die Bürgermeistereien des Regierungs Bezirks Düsseldorf Maasgabe der Bevölkerung pro 1852, 14.2.1852," SAW R II 151. In 1849 Elberfeld's county population was 126,523 while its municipal population was 47,131. This means that around 2% of Elberfeld's families lived continuously in poorhouses in 1849, although this does not account for the individual number of people in poorhouses at the time.

⁷⁸ "Im Jahr 1849 sind von den Außen-Armen abgeholt worden, an Suppen-Portionen, 11.2.1850," SAW R II 105. Elberfeld's poor relief managers provided over 163,600 soup portions in 1840, totaling 1220 Thlr.

temporary solution. By 1848 middle class manufacturers and unskilled laborers were equally requiring some level of poor relief. This led to workers and middle class manufacturers uniting in protest in 1848 and ultimately in revolt in 1849.

In 1848, middle class manufacturers and workers voiced their grievances against the Elberfeld's elites and problems with the current economic system. German nationalism and freedom of the press were connected issues with more material concerns of the working and middle classes, like better pay and housing. In March 1848, Elberfeld's middle class intellectuals held public speeches that called for "national unity and freedom," but workers responded with shouts of "What do we care about freedom of press? Freedom to stuff our faces is what we want."⁷⁹ Workers and middle class manufacturers believed changes to their political standing must include changes to their material well-being. Middle class intellectuals vocalized grievances by middle class industrialists and workers. Adolf Schults' satirical poem "*Ein neues Lied von den Webern*," (A New Song of the Weavers) blames workers for their "hunger for meat, and beer" asking them instead to "curb their greed." Schults highlights the irony of the elites' viewpoint that workers should "instead of feasting, work, so they can live a leisurely life!"⁸⁰

Workers and middle class manufacturers believed Elberfeld's elites misunderstood their suffering, but were unwilling to take any further action in 1848 other than minor protests or demonstrations. Still, this was a dramatic shift in workers' relationship with the middle classes and the elites. Economic hardship temporarily united

⁷⁹ Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals*, 150.

⁸⁰ Adolf Schults, "Ein neues Lied von den Webern (1845)," in *Leierkastenlieder*, Meurs o.J. (1848), S. 27-29, *Historische Texte*, 551.

Elberfeld's labor force in their condemnation of government and religious elites, as well as their call for better wages.

Early 1849 proved the highpoint of the middle intellectual and manufacturing classes' political success, ultimately culminating in a failed coup of the city government in May of 1849. After King Friedrich Wilhelm IV's dissolution of Parliament, Elberfeld's middle and working classes included more demands for political changes with their economic concerns. The Elberfeld Political Club led a delegation of workers and middle class intellectuals and manufacturers to Düsseldorf, stopping along the way to scold Daniel von der Heydt, with a petition to the regional governor to accept the Frankfurt Constitution built upon a constitutional monarchy.⁸¹ Economic instability, along with increased disappointment in the Prussian King, provided motivation for the middle and working classes to reject the current societal order. By May 1849, the Prussian Rhineland was experiencing multiple insurrections against Prussian rule. Elberfeld's middle and working class citizens seized weapons from the arsenal and overran city hall, building barricades in the city center.⁸² This punctuated the dire economic situation in Elberfeld by 1849. Once in control of the city, middle class manufacturers and workers failed to conclude any economic agreements with one another.⁸³ The Prussian military cut off rail supplies into the city and the insurgents surrendered by May 17th. Economic discrepancies between middle class manufacturers and workers doomed Elberfeld's

⁸¹ Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals*, 358. Daniel von der Heydt was singled out because his brother, August, was Finance Minister to the Prussian government.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 374.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 375-380.

revolt in May 1849. Any form of liberal change was extinguished after these events, as the most reactionary elites gained control of Elberfeld in the 1850s.

The year 1849 proved a revealing year for Elberfeld's conservative elites in their control of government and their relationship with workers. The elites' solution of voluntary contributions, work programs, and increased funding to poorhouses had proved disastrous. The municipal government's belief that Elberfeld's middle class citizens would continually offer financial support out of Christian charity or civic duty was nearsighted. Elberfeld's municipal poor relief relied too heavily on voluntary contributions and short-term solutions to poverty. During 1848 and 1849, Elberfeld's elites pushed a moralistic agenda that made obedience to Prussian authority and Protestant ethics more prevalent. As a result, middle class manufacturers became disillusioned with their current municipal leaders, and the working classes continued to suffer. The revolt in 1849 shocked Elberfeld's elites, but many leaders were still unwilling to concede changes to the existing poor relief.

In the initial years following the Revolution of 1848, Elberfeld maintained its established system of poor relief but could not escape high rates of welfare distribution. Although tensions between workers and the elites had subsided by 1850, poverty remained a prominent issue in Elberfeld. A year after Elberfeld's worst economic period, Elberfeld's poor relief management still required nearly forty percent of the annual budget.⁸⁴ City managers attempted to cut overall spending for the city by reducing the mayor's salary by twenty-five percent, as well as assuming that "extraordinary" expenses

⁸⁴ "Haupt-Etat für den Haushalt der Bürgermeisterei Elberfeld für das Jahr 1851" (Elberfeld: Gedruckt bei F.A. Schoder, 1851): 4. SAW R II 89.

would decline by twenty-five percent.⁸⁵ While these alterations lowered the overall budget, there were few clear solutions for the reduction of welfare distribution.

After decades of relying upon voluntary contributions, Elberfeld's municipal government finally reassessed its approach to poor relief. Elberfeld's city council discussed church parishes' inability to acquire funds, arguing that poor taxes could "retain this character in the hands of sender to the recipient," in parishes.⁸⁶ This showed a continued trend of strong Calvinistic rhetoric in periods of economic hardship, but an acceptance of a secularly run institution. Elberfeld's industrial elites stressed ethical requirements for welfare recipients, while acknowledging the failures of current poor relief practices. These shifts in poor relief paved the way for the Elberfeld System of 1853, but a growing economy played an equally valuable role, as will be discussed below.

Following the revolts of 1848 and 1849, workers in Elberfeld had alternate options for receiving welfare during periods of unemployment. The primary alternative outside of parish or municipal funding was voluntary associations. Although most political associations were shut down following the revolt in 1849, worker voluntary associations remained. Elberfeld's textile industries had the largest membership, with the *Färbergesellen-Verein* (Dyer's Work Association) membership ranging around 1,200.⁸⁷ These workers' associations strove to establish higher pay of their workers, as well as improve relations between employers and employees. Although these voluntary

⁸⁵ Ibid., 6; 14.

⁸⁶ David Peters, "Antrag in Betreff der Armenpflege," *Beilage zum Täglichen Anzeiger für Berg und Mark*, Nr. 274. Elberfeld, 16.11.1851, SAW M VI 40a.

⁸⁷ "Kommentar 22," *Historische Texte*, 487.

associations offered an alternative to municipal poor relief, workers had to meet similar requirements to receive aid. If unemployed, workers had to prove biweekly that they were seeking work. Workers were also forbidden from distributing any money to others.⁸⁸ Similar to municipal poor relief, voluntary associations were subjected to conservative oversight that required religious moral standards. In Elberfeld, associations were limited in their funding because of their lack of support by fellow workers and middle class manufacturers. Economic and class stratification remained among Elberfeld's workforce and hindered the voluntary associations' growth. This was partially because of the continued migration of foreign labor into Elberfeld. Still, voluntary associations offered workers a choice when they sought financial assistance.

A significant part of the Elberfeld System's success in 1853 was its increase in almsgivers and distancing from indoor relief institutions, like the poorhouse. Heads of Elberfeld's poor relief management such as David Peters and Daniel von der Heydt understood the flaw in relying too heavily upon voluntary donations and on too much control by the Mayor. Rather than focusing on improving the quality of poorhouses, which had been the primary place for unemployed since 1800, von der Heydt and others explored outdoor relief. In the first annual report of the Elberfeld System, the founders highlighted how "the tireless devotion (of the almsgivers) has been the crowning success (of the Elberfeld System)."⁸⁹ Instead of private financial contributions, Elberfeld's new poor management recruited more almsgivers and divided the formerly ten districts into

⁸⁸ "Statuten des 'Allgemeine-Arbeiter-Vereins' in Elberfeld," SAW J III 128 7.7.1850, *Historische Texte*, 487-491.

⁸⁹ David von der Heydt, David Peters, and August de Weerth, "Zweiter Quartal-Bericht, umfassend die Monate April, Mai und Juni 1853, 26.7.1853," SAW R II 96.

fourteen. This allowed for both more government involvement by middle class manufacturers, as well as extensive monitoring on Elberfeld's working class citizens.

The Elberfeld System's success centered on its ability to reduce the amount spent on welfare, not necessarily to rid Elberfeld of poverty. Elites' perception was that once an individual gained employment, as well as lived a moral life, they would be able to eventually end their state of poverty. The almsgivers' priority was employment and not necessarily overall living standards. Because of this, Elberfeld's poor management reduced the amount spent and number of recipients of outdoor relief by half within the first year while living standards of the poor stagnated.⁹⁰

The Elberfeld System satiated the middle class manufacturers and allowed for Elberfeld's elites to continue their reactionary policies. Middle class manufacturers gained political involvement through the Elberfeld System, but almost all municipal policy making remained in the hands of the conservative elites. Without the objection of the middle classes, Elberfeld's conservative elites pushed reactionary policies that emphasized rigid Protestant values and obedience to authority. By 1853, workers were at the mercy of conservative policies, like the Elberfeld System, that pushed a moral code upon its citizenry. Ultimately, though, the conservative policies benefitted from the economic boom in the 1850s.

Elberfeld's improved unemployment rate was a direct result of Germany's growing economy from the 1850s into the 1870s. Germany, and in particular the Rhineland, expanded its number of metal and textile factories. Even in the first years of

⁹⁰ Ibid., 6. The number of workers on outdoor relief was 7 to 8 out of a hundred in January of 1853 and was reduced to fewer than 4 by September. The amount spent on outdoor relief from 1852 to 1853 dropped from 47,563 Thlr. to 25,606 Thlr.

the 1850s, Elberfeld was constructing numerous public works. These included construction of a new weaving school and the paving of new roads.⁹¹ The Elberfeld municipal government's investment in public works helped alleviate unemployment and offered workers employment opportunities. Expansion of public works was prominent throughout all of Prussia from the 1850s into the 1870s, with "over a million new buildings" constructed.⁹² This is evident in the expansion of machinery factories from three in 1850 to over twenty in 1870.⁹³ The economic boom starting in the 1850s created jobs for workers in Elberfeld, but did not improve their standard of living. The new jobs provided inadequate pay and offered little to no opportunity for advancement. However, elites believed that because workers held jobs they could escape poverty. The Elberfeld System remained farsighted enough to avoid another workers' revolt, but was not cognizant enough to recognize that workers needed higher wages.

While the economic boom of the 1850s lowered the costs of poor relief, it failed to raise wages of workers. The economic hardships from the late 1840s and 1850s decreased birth rate because families could not afford to provide for larger families.⁹⁴ Public works, along with increased manufacturing, offered Elberfeld's working classes employment opportunities that were not present in rural Rhineland. While these employment opportunities fit the goals of the Elberfeld System, this did not mean a higher standard of living for workers. Economic growth lowered unemployment in

⁹¹ "Haupt-Etat für den Haushalt," 11, 14. SAW R II 89.

⁹² Jerrold Seigel, *Modernity and Bourgeois Life: Society, Politics, and Culture in England, France and Germany since 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 227.

⁹³ Löther, "Familie und Unternehmer," 221.

⁹⁴ Jonathan Sperber. *Popular Catholicism in the Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 39-40.

Elberfeld and fostered the Elberfeld System. But because of how Elberfeld's elites understood poverty, workers were given inadequate wages and welfare funds. The Calvinistic approach that workers' only needed "economic independence" meant that the Elberfeld System prevented the poor from homelessness or entering the poorhouse. Elites held on to the traditional religious viewpoint that personal moral vices led to poverty, but explored no further into the reasons of poverty.

Changes in Elberfeld's poor relief management tied directly to the economic situation of the city. The workhouses from previous poor relief programs were no longer the center of welfare management. Elberfeld restructured its poor relief to incorporate more personal outdoor relief at each economic recession. For almost fifty years, Elberfeld relied almost entirely upon voluntary contributions by its wealthier citizenry. After its failures during the late 1840s it became clear that greater change was needed. The municipal government's misunderstanding of workers and poor relief recipients led to revolts in 1849. Construction of the Elberfeld System was the response of the elites to how economic hardships affected the working classes. Economic factors forced Elberfeld to reorganize its poor relief distribution periodically, but it was only after its worst economic downturn that the municipal government almost wholly accepted outdoor relief. Outdoor poor relief appealed middle class manufacturers and overlapped with the elites' conservative understandings of poverty. The Elberfeld System employed workers but did not improve their wages or their standard of living. Elberfeld's newly structured poor relief was enough to mitigate workers' immediate frustrations, but did little to help them in the long run. Still, the initial achievement of the Elberfeld System correlates with Germany's rising urbanization and the economic boom of the 1850s.

CHAPTER 3: THE ELBERFELD SYSTEM: A CONSERVATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF POOR RELIEF

By 1853 Elberfeld was slowly recovering from the late 1840s economic and social instability. The riots of 1849 demonstrated the discontent of the working classes and their animosity towards the established ruling elites, in particular against the Prussian government. By 1848, most citizens in Elberfeld supported political changes that diminished the authority of the Prussian government in the Rhineland and sought to build a unified Germany not dominated by Prussia. But unlike most of Elberfeld's working class and middle classes, the piously religious industrial elites defended the Prussian government during the Revolutions of 1848 and encouraged Elberfelders to avoid protest. Those same elite industrialists who encouraged acquiescence to Prussian rule in the 1840s became the leaders of Elberfeld's municipal government during the 1850s. Prior to this time, elite industrialists had been significant figures in Elberfeld's politics, but it was only in 1850 that they dominated the political scene. Although these industrialists supported Prussia during 1848 and 1849, this did not mean they embraced Prussian militarism or its belief in a national church. Leading industrialists combined a commitment to Calvinist religious piety with strict loyalty to the Prussian king. Rhetoric about youth morality, drunkenness, and poor relief became common among religious and community leaders during each economic crisis. The Elberfeld System was part of this reactionary shift in the 1850s towards religious conservatism following the failed protests and riots in 1848 and 1849.

Two distinct ideas are important to consider before understanding the immediate reasons how and why the Elberfeld System was created: the religious and secular foundations of poor relief. Poor relief in 1800 shifted away from the “field of Christian-humanitarian compassion,” towards one “influenced by her (Elberfeld) new public character, a political and policy made by man.”⁹⁵ A more secularized municipal poor relief in the Rhineland began at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1800, Elberfeld instituted a new welfare program that incorporated poorhouse work programs that offered employment to working class citizens. A large part of this dramatic shift was inspired by Enlightenment ideals introduced by the Napoleonic government. During the occupation of the Rhineland, public service became a regular part of the upper middle classes’ understanding of their role in society.⁹⁶ Administrators and city officials encouraged citizens to contribute to new welfare initiatives through municipal programs, rather than religious organizations. City officials challenged the middle classes to, “to think of this as ‘our’ unhappiness,” and “join into weekly contracts” for the unemployed.⁹⁷ The change in poor relief at the beginning of the nineteenth century

⁹⁵ Barabara Lube, “Mythos und Wirklichkeit des Elberfelder Systems,” in *Gründerzeit: Versuch einer Grenzbestimmung im Wuppertal, Schriftenreihe des Vereins für Rheinische Kirchengeschichte, Vol. 80*, ed. Karl-Hermann Beeck (Köln: Rheinland-Verlag GmbH, 1984), 163.

⁹⁶ Michael Rowe, *From Reich to State: The Rhineland in the Revolutionary Age, 1780-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 99. “Nieder eines Referates, gehalten auf einer Sitzung der Verwaltung des Allgemeinen Armeninstituts,” SAW R II 54 undated (8.10.1802), in *Historische Texte aus dem Wuppertal: Quellen zur Sozialgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts unter Mitarbeit von Marcus Puschnerat*, ed. Karl-Hermann Beeck (Wuppertal: Born Verlag, 1989), 390.

⁹⁷ “Die Vorsteher des allgemeinen Armen-Instituts an ihre Mitbürger im Januar 1801,” HStAD Best. Großherzogtum Berg, Nr. 4738 S. 1-7, *Historische Texte*, 387.

coincided with the growing middle class involvement in government and the belief that it was the civic responsibility of citizens to provide state poor relief.

The addition of municipally organized poor relief in 1800 began the trend of including more outdoor relief in poor management. Elberfeld's Poor Law of 1800 included visitation of the poor by almsgivers within established districts, incorporation of workhouses, and an emphasis on finding employment. For recipients of outdoor relief, almsgivers visited families frequently to see if living conditions were adequate, and to check on the health of the entire family. After the examination, the almsgiver made his own decision about the family's well-being, whether they partook in "indolent work" or "had suspicious intentions in the economy."⁹⁸

This structural change to poor relief shifted greater authority to civic welfare providers, and away from parish churches. Instead of needing a parish's approval, the almsgivers created their own committees. These committees instituted their own moral criteria that encouraged almsgivers to "know them (the welfare recipient) both in terms of their moral and civic character."⁹⁹ The inclusion of civic responsibility was a new development in how the middle classes understood poverty. Like much of the Rhineland, the Elberfeld elites and middle classes began to view themselves as responsible for the poor in their city. The Napoleonic state set a trend towards more pragmatic approaches to poor relief that emphasized centralization in secular institutions. Instead of control by lords or the Church, the Napoleonic system placed greater political control into the hands of its citizens, albeit, its elite ones.

⁹⁸ "Fragen an Arme" aus dem Muster eines Abhörungs Bogens (Anlage zum Bericht der Armenanstalt von 1801), HStAD Best. Großherzogtum Berg, Nr. 4378., *Historische Texte*, 392.

⁹⁹ "Nieder eines Referates," in *Historische Texte*, 390.

Nevertheless, Protestant morality remained a dominant force in designating who received welfare. Elberfeld was unusual in the Rhineland because of its predominately Protestant population. The Napoleonic regimes' influence altered the structure of poor relief, yet the Protestant background of Elberfeld's elites continued to play an equally important role. Many principles common to the restructured poor relief shared similarities with the older Reformed ideal of poor relief. Since the Reformation, Calvinists pursued an understanding of poor relief that highlighted less decentralization, greater attention to morality, and a belief in "worldly activism."¹⁰⁰ Unlike their Catholic counterparts in the Rhineland, Elberfeld's poor relief concerned itself with reforming the immorality of the lower classes. In a proclamation by the magistrate of poor relief instituted in 1801, he describes street beggars as "the major example of moral absentmindedness."¹⁰¹ This commitment to eliminating begging from cities was a consistent principle for Protestant communities centuries before the poor relief program of 1800.¹⁰² The utilization of more secular institutions, like poorhouses, were solutions that incorporated Enlightenment and Napoleonic aspects of separation of church and state. Still, Elberfeld's newly adopted poor relief program included principles from the Enlightenment, but much of its moral basis came from the existing Protestant viewpoints of welfare.

Changes to Elberfeld's poor laws in 1800 continued Protestant ideals of poor relief from previous centuries. Stipulations of morality remained a consistent aspect of

¹⁰⁰ Philip S. Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution: Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 136-137.

¹⁰¹ "Die vorsteher des allgemeinen Armen-Instituts," *Historische Texte*, 384. By 1801 Elberfeld was now under control by Napoleonic forces. Although they were not subject to military rule by the French, they had been occupied already by Napoleon's armies.

¹⁰² Gorski, *Disciplinary Revolution*, 130-131.

poor relief, where recipients were required to maintain a certain moral standing based upon Calvinistic principles. Still, the new poor laws were a significant change from poor relief in the eighteenth century because of their emphasis on elite and middle class involvement in government and because the parish churches themselves no longer ran poor relief programs. The shift away from parish control of poor relief meant that municipal governments could centralize poor relief, rather than relying upon parishes to provide disbursement. While there is still a moralistic tone in poor relief regulations and writings, there were fewer references to religion itself, the role of the Enlightenment under Napoleonic rule dictated much of the language used regarding poor relief

Elberfeld's restructured poor relief was a result of Napoleonic governments' emphasis on greater civic involvement. Elites and middle classes gained more control of the municipal government than they had ever had. Ultimately, this provided opportunities for the elites and middle classes to influence poor relief. In periods of economic hardship Elberfeld's elites spoke of a need for greater moral responsibility from its middle and working classes. The Enlightenment created a trend where in difficult economic periods Elberfeld's elites would increase the usage of secularized poor relief institutions, like poorhouses and work programs. Still, the rigid conformity to Protestant values by Elberfeld's elites was constant throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Powerful elites accepted more "civic involvement" by the middle classes when existing poor relief programs proved inefficient or the economic situation was dire. During these same periods, elites blamed workers and middle class citizens for their immorality and laziness. Elberfeld's elites used Enlightenment ideals when they incorporated more middle class citizens into poor relief management, while at the same

time sending of a message of the need for obedience, industriousness, and observance of conservative Protestant values.

Following the fall of Napoleonic rule in 1815, the new municipal poor relief program struggled to provide effective welfare to the poor during the economic downturn of 1816 and 1817. Municipal poor relief officials continued to use Enlightenment language of “individual responsibility,” while utilizing moralist regulations.¹⁰³ Because of recent economic constraints, poor relief managers instituted more and more stringent stipulations for receiving aid. For instance, Gabriel Gillhausen, a dyer in Elberfeld who “has no shoes to go to church,” was rejected for any financial aid because he had no children.¹⁰⁴ Almsgivers viewed individual workers’ situations as less desperate because they only needed to provide for themselves and not an entire family. The almsgivers and municipal government rationalized these restrictions by continuing to highlight the idea that the poor must “be active, industrious and frugal... to help him to be able to enter the number of independent, honorable citizens again.”¹⁰⁵ The rhetoric of almsgivers and municipal officials remained consistent with Enlightenment ideals of civic duty and individual responsibility, while stipulations of moral conduct rooted in Calvinism continued to be prominent features of poor relief. Almsgivers justified their added scrutiny of workers because of the economic recession. Overall, most workers who could not receive outdoor poor relief were forced to either beg or enter the poorhouses.

¹⁰³ Tania Unludag, “Die Central-Wohltätigkeitanstalt 1818-1853: Kommentar 13-15,” *Historische Texte*, 403.

¹⁰⁴“Bittbrief des Heinrich Gabriel Gillhausen an den Oberbürgermeister, Vermerk des Oberbürgermeisters auf dem Schreiben und Gutachten des zuständigen Provisors Withof,” SAW R II 75 23.9.1826/24.9.1826/13.2.1827, *Historische Texte*, 408.

¹⁰⁵ “Adresse des Oberbürgermeisters Brüning und des Stadtrates an die Bürgerschaft vom 22.10.1827,” in *Annalen für 1827*, So. 64-75, *Historische Texte*, 406.

This combination of Enlightenment principles and religious morality institutionalized poor relief into a more liberally structured governmental body while remaining true to a Protestant understanding of poverty. Government officials highlighted the middle classes and elites' responsibility to provide aid for the poor, but at the same time told the working classes they must do all in their ability to avoid poverty, blaming workers for their poverty. For instance, in an address from Mayor Brüning and the city council, government leaders highlighted the middle classes' "solemn duty" to help the poor, while discouraging the working classes from "early marriages" which are "a terrible source of many evils."¹⁰⁶ The municipal government of Elberfeld continually pressed the importance of civic responsibility by all classes but argued that more financial responsibility should be placed upon the middle classes and more moral responsibility upon the working classes. Because of continued economic concerns, elites admonished the working classes for their inability to provide for their families without aid. Elberfeld elites, like Mayor Brüning, accentuated the failures of working class men who "shamefully abandon their wives, with many kids."¹⁰⁷ Elites' inability to recognize poverty as a systemic issue is evident in the rhetoric of municipal government officials. The failures of poor relief in the 1820s and 1830s required reforms in poor relief that shaped Elberfeld for the coming decades.

Beginning in the 1830s Elberfeld saw the expansion of *Vereins* (Voluntary Associations) that emboldened class consciousness among middle class intellectuals, manufacturers, and the working classes. These voluntary associations expanded the role

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 406-407.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 407.

and organization of middle class citizens, who acquired an organized body in which to represent them, although most workers were barred from voting in these associations. Voluntary associations provided middle class intellectuals and manufacturers better representation for their trades' economic concerns. Similar to the elites, middle class manufacturers structured voluntary associations so that workers could not advance within the organization. Still, manufacturing associations, like the *Gewerbe-Verein* (Trade Association), became a significant advocate for the workers' ability to maintain a job and have a voice. Voluntary associations encouraged manufacturers to regulate the distribution of goods and be aware of local and international changes in the market.¹⁰⁸ Unlike municipal poor relief programs, voluntary associations went further in training and keeping a workers' position. These associations expanded significantly during the 1830s and included larger membership of workers, even organizing major events such as the Hambach Fest in 1832.¹⁰⁹ Voluntary associations for manufacturing and trade highlighted middle class manufacturers' growing politicization. Although workers did not gain greater political power, voluntary associations offered a possibility for financial help outside of poorhouses or outdoor relief. It was in this period that the idea of civic responsibility in secular institutions began to contrast between the middle classes and the elite. Elites encouraged municipal poor relief programs because they controlled the

¹⁰⁸ "Verhandlungen des Gerwerbe-Vereins für den Regierungs-Bezirk Düsseldorf, Erstes Heft, Düsseldorf im Januar 1837, S. 1-4," SAW J XII 2, *Historische Texte*, 458-460.

¹⁰⁹ K. Biedermann, "Artikel 'Verein, Vereinswesen, Vereinsrecht'," in: Das Staats-Lexikon. Encyclopädie der sämtlichen Staatswissenschaften für alle Stände, hrsg. von Karl von Rotteck und Karl Welcker, 14. Band, 3. Aufl. Leipzig 1866, S. 355-370, *Historische Texte*, 442. The Hambach Festival was a public gathering that advocated a unified Germany and argued for a republican Germany. These was especially relevant to Elberfelders at the time because of its close proximity from Elberfeld.

values and disbursement of funds. Manufacturing voluntary associations complicated this power.

Parallel with the secular voluntary associations, Elberfeld witnessed a boom of religious societies during the late 1820s into the early 1840s. These religious organizations were not necessarily affiliated with one denomination and ranged in focus from temperance movements to the distribution of Bibles to workers. These religious organizations were started by local pastors and supported by elite families. Protestant organizations accentuated the importance of educating the poor about Christianity and encouraged pious living. Lutheran Pastor Strauß pressured the elites to fund printing of more Bibles because “from the poorer classes hardly anyone knows the Scriptures.”¹¹⁰ Strauß also complained of the poor’s attachment to “their sacred possessions”(material objects) and the workers continual “complaining about their poverty,” which came across as “an indictment of our (the elites or the churches) charity.”¹¹¹

These Protestant associations were organized and run by the elites and some middle class manufacturers and focused on methods to change the working classes through Biblical principles. For example, the temperance movement became a major indicator of religious groups attitudes towards the poor. Organizers of the Temperance Association argued that “intemperance is the main source of impoverishment” and that it could only be overcome by “Christian love.”¹¹² Protestant organizations highlighted the

¹¹⁰ “Rede zur Stiftung der Bibelgesellschaft vom Pfarrer Strauß in Elberfeld,” in Verhandlungen der Bergischen Bibel-Gesellschaft. Erstes Heft, Elberfeld 1814 SAW M I 118 Abschrift (1828), *Historische Texte*, 465.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 465.

¹¹² “Aufzut zur Teilnahme am Barmer Mäßigkeitsverein,” SAW P III 46 (November 1842), *Historische Texte*, 484; 485.

differences between the middle classes and the working classes through their voluntary associations. Industrial and religious elites fixated on reforming workers into pious citizens, while middle class members of the voluntary associations vocalized workers' concerns. The elites dominated religious societies who spoke *at* the workers, rather than *for* them.

In Elberfeld, Catholic and Protestant voluntary associations had distinctly different relationships with the poor. The most important of these associations was the *Kolpingverein* (Kolping Journeyman Association), began by Catholic Pastor Adolph Kolping. The Kolping Society accepted all workers “without regard of Confession, or prior lifestyle.”¹¹³ This contrasted with Protestant associations that excluded working class members and had stricter moral stipulations for receiving aid. For example, workers were forbidden from drinking at meetings, but allowed to do so outside of the meeting hall.¹¹⁴ Most of Elberfeld's Catholic population were members of the middle and working classes. The distinction between the Protestant and Catholic voluntary associations was significant because it shaped how the municipal poor relief distributed welfare. In general, Catholics accepted the everyday realities of workers, their willingness to drink, and lack of enthusiasm for religious dogmatism. On the other hand, Protestant elites believed workers needed to reform their lives by stopping drinking and attending church more. Catholic associations in Elberfeld provided a contrast with Protestant organizations, firstly, because of their more accepting attitude of the working classes, and secondly, their inclusion of working class members in the association itself.

¹¹³ Statuten des “Christlichen Vereins für junge Handwerker und Fabrikarbeiter,” SAW M I 109 (Dezember 1840), *Historische Texte*, 471.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 472.

Voluntary associations amalgamated the Enlightenment ideal of individual liberty with a paternalistic viewpoint. The middle classes and elites believed they were equal, but were unwilling to accept workers as equivalent with themselves. Protestant voluntary associations championed the belief that the upper classes had a civic responsibility to educate the working classes about their immorality and its connection to poverty. Catholic and secular voluntary associations discussed less about the moral degeneracy of the working classes, and instead focused on educating and organizing workers, where intellectual and manufacturing voluntary associations were similar was in their inclusion of the citizenry at large. This demonstrated the continuation of Enlightenment ideals of individual responsibility to the community and separation between church and secular institutions. All of these organizations contributed to the understanding of poverty leading up to the Elberfeld System. Secular voluntary associations instituted initiatives that worked to train and organize workers and industries, while Protestant groups of the elites continued to pursue a Calvinistic understanding of poverty.

Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Elberfeld's citizens struggled to solidify the identity of their city. Wealthy Protestant industrialists and their pastors pressured the community to become more religiously pious. On the other hand, middle class citizens and workers sought greater representation in Elberfeld's government through secular organizations. Wedged within this struggle was poor relief.

During the 1830s and 1840s Reformed and Lutheran pastors continued to link poverty with immorality but added a greater emphasis on the need for workers to reject secular institutions, even ones that helped workers maintain employment. Protestant sermons in Elberfeld lectured workers that they could alleviate their poverty through

church-going and the rejection of secular institutions. Preachers advocated unity through “Christian love” and emphasized the importance of educating the working classes through religious principles.¹¹⁵ Gottfried Daniel Krummacher, a prominent preacher of Elberfeld’s Reformed Church, was a main proponent for religious dominance in Elberfeld, arguing that church attendees needed to “banish the poisons (Enlightenment principles) in higher and lower schools, magazines, and journals.”¹¹⁶ Other Protestant preachers similarly condemned Elberfeld’s growing secularization among the working class population. As workers became more involved with secular political organizations, preachers spoke directly to workers on the need to change their immorality, rather than to the elites’ on their unwillingness to provide sufficient funds for poor relief. Albert Jasper’s sermon addressed indigent workers when he told them to reject communism, attend church on a regular basis, and focus less upon secular intellectual ideals while at work.¹¹⁷ The politicization of workers caused a crisis among religious leaders and their acceptance of Elberfeld’s secular voluntary associations.

For Elberfeld’s religious leaders, education proved an even more challenging area to regulate than information. While religion remained a prominent aspect of schools from the 1820s into the 1840s, middle class intellectuals advocated a more secularized curriculum for students. Still, much of the funding for schools that workers and children

¹¹⁵ “Christian Love” is based on the the principle of “love thy neighbor as thyself.” (Matthew 22:40). This idea was prominent later in nineteenth century Germany and became part of the justification for Protestants’ paternalistic approach to poor relief.

¹¹⁶ “Mitschrift einer Predigt Friedrich Wilhelm Krummachers in Barmen,” SAW M III 37 (1830), *Historische Texte*, 274. This source was among a collection of sermons intended for Mayor Brüning and other wealthy citizens in Elberfeld at the time.

¹¹⁷ “Das Evangelium von Petri Fischzug, ein Evangelium für bedrängte Arbeiter in unserer Mitte, Predigt, gehalten am 5. Trinitatis-Sonntage 1845 und auf Verlangen dem Druck überlassenvon M.A.S. Jaspis,” Elberfeld 1845, S. 6-16, *Historische Texte*, 276-278.

attended came from the elites and religious organizations. They dictated the material that students received.

Through education, Elberfeld's middle class intellectuals merged the Enlightenment and religious ideals during the 1820s through mid 1840s. School programs highlighted the "new discoveries made by physics, chemistry, and engineering" and how they aided industry, while also underscoring how schools should help with "the formation of Christians."¹¹⁸ Educators stressed how working ten hours or more made it difficult for students to retain information, and that shorter workdays were necessary to effectively teach children.¹¹⁹ In schools there was more freedom for secular exploration. However few, if any, effective poor relief initiatives mitigated the struggles of working and attending school.

Still, from the 1820s through 1840s schools experienced less control by the elites than poor relief institutions. Although the religious elites believed a primary purpose of education primarily was to instill a stronger Christian ethic, education also helped to unify the middle classes and encouraged the message of a united Germany. Nationalism and the idea of a single German people became more and more prominent among middle class intellectuals, and was present in their education. Teachers compared their education program to the English educational system that incorporated more science and

¹¹⁸ "Bekanntmachung an die Bewohner unserer Samtgemeinde in Betreff der neuen Schuleinrichtung," in *Annalen für 1829*, S. 29-35, *Historische Texte*, 328; 329.

¹¹⁹ "Memorandum Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Wilbergs über Abend- und Sonntagsschulen und Sonntagsschulplan des Lehrers Schmachtenberg, an den Elberfelder Oberbürgermeister Brünings," SAW L I 212 22. Und 18.11.1829, *Historische Texte*, 331-332. "Bericht des Lehrers Holthausen an den Barmer Bürgermeister Wilkhaus über seine Abendschule am Loh," SAW L I 69 8.11.1843, *Historische Texte*, 337.

mathematics, and pointed to the German people's failures to meet this same standard.¹²⁰ Schools developed programs that specifically taught German language and history starting from elementary school age.

Building a national identity was particularly relevant to the middle classes of Elberfeld, who became increasingly critical of the elites' governmental control. For example, in neighboring Barmen, a young Friedrich Engels excelled in his German courses and had a particular interest in "German National literature and the reading of German classics."¹²¹ The inclusion of German language and history in educational curricula molded the identity of the middle and working classes. As a result of this, workers and middle class citizens reached a breaking point with the continually domineering religious elites. Middle class intellectuals increasingly disregarded the elites' dominance of the economic and social situation in Elberfeld.

From the 1820s up until 1848, Elberfeld's middle class intellectuals and manufacturers accepted a more active approach in helping workers, while elites relied on voluntary contributions to address poverty. The elites and religious leaders of Elberfeld continued to treat poverty as a moral issue that simply required an individual to become a more pious Christian. On the other hand, secular voluntary associations were committed to training workers and helping them keep their jobs.

Since 1800, church organizations, municipal poor relief, and voluntary associations had all failed to adequately address poverty in Elberfeld. Continued economic issues and class stratification between workers, middle class manufacturers,

¹²⁰ "Memorandum Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Wilbergs," *Historische Texte*, 331.

¹²¹ "Abgangszeugnis Friedrich Engels', ausgestellt von Dr. J.C.L. Hantschke," Historisches Zentrum Wuppertal 25.9.1837, *Historische Texte*, 367.

and elites hindered any effective poor relief programs. Along with material issues was the growing divide between the religious conservative elites and the increasingly secularized middle classes and workers. This philosophical and political divide between the religious industrialist upper class and the middle and working classes shaped how Elberfeld's circumstances led up to the revolution of 1848.

In 1848 workers and middle class citizens began to voice their discontentment with the Prussian and Elberfeld governments. Through voluntary associations and social clubs, the middle classes and workers organized formal marches. At the beginning of the revolution in the spring of 1848, workers and middle class citizens accepted the idea of a constitutional monarchy, but after King Friedrich Wilhelm rejected compromise, a republican government became the only solution. Newspapers, such as *Volkstimme* (The People's Voice), argued that a constitutional monarchy was "an unadulterated picture of a full blessing of a Republic."¹²² Between the summer of 1848 and the spring of 1849, workers and middle class citizens protested and rioted throughout the city directing their anger towards city officials and upper class industrialists and bankers. Workers published their issues with the current political and economic system in newspapers and pamphlets, reprimanding their employers' greed and loyalty to the Prussian king.¹²³ The workers and middle classes in Elberfeld did not resort to violence in 1848 but instead vandalized elites' property. Although the voluntary associations were helpful in organizing protests and demonstrations, they were unable to compromise and could produce no material benefits for workers. Workers and middle class citizens failed to gain the right to vote

¹²² "Artikel aus der Volksstimme Nr. 31 vom 12.8.1848," *Historische Texte*, 536.

¹²³ Anonymus, "Der arme Urwähler," in: Beilage zum Barmer Wochenblatt Nr. 5 vom 13.1.1849 SAW B III 22, *Historische Texte*, 562.

and remained excluded from the municipal government. The newly created voluntary associations failed to provide enough political and material support for workers and fellow middle class citizens.

Leading industrialists and bankers of Elberfeld were among the most zealous Protestants and firmest supporters of the Prussian government in 1848. In March 1848, workers began marches against these elite industrialists, destroying their employers' property along the way.¹²⁴ The response by industrial elites, like Daniel von der Heydt, David Peters, and Gustav Schlieper, the future founders of the Elberfeld System, encouraged all citizens to "draw their hearts to God, He will protect and cover our dear native town."¹²⁵ As tensions between the middle classes and elites continued, religious Protestant industrialists remained fervent in their commitment to their faith and the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm II. None was more so than Daniel von der Heydt and the Association for the True Welfare of the Citizenry.¹²⁶ Protestant pastors highlighted Biblical passages that emphasized "the Kingdom of Heaven" and chastised "democratic braggarts" who did not respect God's Word as final.¹²⁷ The fervent Protestantism of the elites tied Elberfeld politically to the Prussian government. This attachment to the strict Protestantism contrasted drastically with the rest of the Catholic Rhineland that supported

¹²⁴ Jonathan Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the Revolution of 1848-1849* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 162-164. The economic reasons for the workers' protest is covered in the previous chapter. Many of the workers' grievances related to the increase of foreign workers in Elberfeld, which made it even more difficult to obtain adequate poor relief.

¹²⁵ "Mitbürger und Bewohner Elberfelds!" by Landrätliche Commissar und Reigerungs-Assessor Brecht, Oberbürgermeister von Carnap, and Der Gemeinderath. Elberfeld 19.3.1848.

¹²⁶ Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals*, 358.

¹²⁷ "Predigt über Jesaias 49, 22-26 gehalten am 29. November 1848, als am Tage der Ehejubeliefier unsres Königspaares, in der evangelische-lutherischen Kirche zu Elberfeld... von Albert Siegismund Jaspis," Elberfeld 1848, *Historische Texte*, 259.

democratic principles.¹²⁸ The religious fervor of the upper classes, as well as their allegiance to Prussia throughout the Revolution of 1848, set the stage for a reactionary government to come to power. It was in this reactionary period where the Elberfeld System found its place.

The failures of the working and middle classes in 1848 and 1849 led to the rise of a reactionary government in Elberfeld. For Elberfelder citizens this meant greater press censorship, a stronger commitment to the Prussian King, and the accentuation of a morally righteous Protestant community. Elberfeld's religious upper class appointed reactionary government officials to regulate institutions that involved the working classes. Officials altered welfare programs, exhibiting more authoritarian principles of obedience and moral righteousness. In nearby Barmen, officials neglected exploring teachers' abilities to educate students about sciences or engineering, and instead noted educators' "love of the king and reverence to authority," as well as their "god-fearing nature."¹²⁹ Elberfeld's municipal government heightened focus on religious texts and history while neglecting secular literature and science which had been more prevalent during the 1830s and 1840s.¹³⁰ Government officials connected the protests in 1848 and 1849 to the rise in secularized education among the working classes. Elites believed that their "relaxed" attitude towards secular education created the environment of civic unrest among the middle and working classes. Obedience to authority and religious studies

¹²⁸ Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals*, 359.

¹²⁹ "Bericht des Pfarrers Josephson über Amtsführung und Wandel der Lehrer an den Schulen in Wupperfeld und Rittershausen an die Barmer Schulkommission," SAW D IV 24 b 11.6.1850, *Historische Texte*, 321; 322.

¹³⁰ "Instruction für die Lehrer in den Abend- und Sonntagsschulen" (festgestellt durch die städtische Schulkommission Elberfelds), SAW L I 215 19.19.1850, *Historische Texte*, 341-343.

became the dominant principles of education in Elberfeld during the 1850s. Elberfeld's reactionary municipal government hoped to restructure the working and middle classes to be more obedient to the elites and committed to their version of religious piety.

Immediately following the Revolution of 1848, Elberfeld's conservative elites committed to restructuring municipal poor relief. Government officials believed that failures of poor relief programs in the 1840s contributed to the unrest of in 1848 and 1849. Although the worst of the economic recession was over by 1849, Elberfeld struggled to combat the rise in poverty. Individuals like Daniel von der Heydt advocated changes to poor relief as churches struggled to provide adequate care. Municipal officials believed that "the benevolent sense of citizens has grown cold," and because the poor were not attending church regularly, middle class citizens took on "a distressing demoralization in supporting poor relief."¹³¹ Elites were less financially supportive of parish poor relief programs because they did little to persuade welfare recipients to attend church. Elites accepted that voluntary contributions were insufficient in reducing the rate of poverty. Pastors highlighted how the events of 1848 hurt their congregations, arguing that attending secular events "led to pauperism where beggars must live off alms."¹³² The riots in 1848 and the revolt in 1849 demonstrated to pastors the civic unrest that came with greater secularization. After 1849, churches militantly pursued the working classes and centered many of their sermons around the evils of secular establishments, such as

¹³¹ "Denkschrift, betreffend die nachtheiligen Folen der ausschließlicb bürgerlicben Armenpflege in Elberfeld und die Heilsamkeit einer den Kirchengemeinden wieder einzuräumenden selbständigen Theilnahme an der Sorge für Dürftige," in: Beilage zum Täglicben Anzieger Nr. 76 vom 31.3.1850. SAW M VI 40a.

¹³² "An den evangeliscben Gemeinen der Kreissynode Elberfeld," in Elberfelder Kreisblatt Nr. 33 vom 19.3.1850, *Historiscbe Texte*, 287.

bars and festivals, both secular locations. Churches and their upper class members made a concentrated effort to “moralize” the working class. The dismemberment of political associations and increased control of manufacturing associations allowed Elberfeld’s religious elites to restructure poor relief according to their own viewpoint, without the competition of groups in the 1840s.

In the early 1850s Elberfeld’s poor relief commission sought to find a balance between church run and municipally organized welfare. Elites wanted a solution that lowered costs of poor relief but kept most of the power within their control. Churches and municipal poor relief organizations compromised, building a committee that incorporated both church and governmental authorities.¹³³ During 1851 and 1852, Elberfeld’s congregations and the municipal government attempted to work together to decrease the number of poor. The newly appointed Mayor Lischke commended the Dutch Reformed Church’s commitment to working with the municipal government in lowering poor relief, as “worthy of praise.”¹³⁴ Because of events in 1848 and 1849, elites were concerned with providing more political control to the middle classes. Elites wanted to keep church organizations and poorhouses at the center of poor relief, but became more aware of their inability to combat poverty.

Although the Elberfeld System placed control of poor relief in the municipal governments’ hands, its founders envisioned a program that instilled Protestant values in

¹³³ David Peters, “Antrag in Betreff der Armenpflege,” *Beilage zum Täglichen Anzeiger für Berg und Mark*, Nr. 274. Elberfeld, 16.11.1851, SAW M VI 40a. This article newspaper discussed how most of church parishes were unable to provide adequate aid to the poor and required funding. The Dutch-Reformed Church was the only congregation to not require any additional funding.

¹³⁴ Letter to Pastor Kohlbrügge from Oberbürgermeister Lischke. Elberfeld, 19.1.1854. SAW M VI 40a. Lischke had a particular attachment to the Dutch Reformed Church because his father-in-law Daniel von der Heydt, was a founding member of the congregation.

the working class, while keeping poor relief costs down. The founders of the Elberfeld System, Daniel von der Heydt, David Peters, and Gustav Schlieper, were among the wealthiest and most pious citizens in Elberfeld. These individuals supported the Prussian government during 1848, and now restructured Elberfeld's poor relief. In the first official report of the Elberfeld System's results, the authors specifically "thank the Almighty God, whose gracious sway keeps our city from famine and unemployment."¹³⁵ The Elberfeld System encapsulated two conservative features, the regulation of the poor and the commitment to religion. This is evident in the founders' continual references to their faith and commitment to both God and the Prussian government.¹³⁶ The Elberfeld Systems founders' devotion to strict Protestantism was essential to their understanding of poverty. Their commitment to decentralized municipal poor relief that focused on employment and upright moral conduct was a central feature of older Calvinist poor relief programs. Although the Elberfeld System instilled more control of poor relief in the municipal government and the middle classes, its founders maintained much of their Protestant understanding of poverty.

It was the new system's further implementation elsewhere that led to the Elberfeld System's designation as the "German" form of pre-nationalized welfare. Elberfeld's supposed success at diminishing poverty spread rapidly throughout industrial cities in Germany. In reality it lowered poor relief costs, but hardly improved the lives of workers. Daniel von der Heydt received adulation from numerous lords in Germany commending

¹³⁵ Daniel von der Heydt, David Peters, and August de Weerth, "Zweiter Quartal-Breicht, umfassend die Monate April, Mai und Juni 1853," Elberfeld 26.6.1853, SAW R II 96.

¹³⁶ Daniel von der Heydt, "Ich Daniel von der Heydt," Elberfeld 19.5.1854, SAW E I 58.

him for his “insight, work, and commitment to his fellow citizens,” and telling him that his poor relief initiatives would “continue in the same way.”¹³⁷

Part of the Elberfeld System’s national popularity was, in fact, its leaders’ ability to advertise its commitment to religious values. Elberfeld’s Mayor Lischke explained at the *Hamburger Kirchentag* (Hamburg Church Diet) that poor relief should be “practice according to His commandments,” and that the Elberfeld System “ensured the success of poor relief.”¹³⁸ Elberfeld’s elites created a program that included a amalgamated religious responsibility to the community with the Enlightenment belief in a secularized municipal government. Elites integrated more middle class citizens into poor relief management, but now provided them with a measure political or economic upward mobility. Because the middle classes gained a larger political role they accepted the strict moral requirements conservative pressed upon them. Now, middle class almsgivers who once fought for better wages for workers through more organized political associations consented to the Calvinistic approach towards poor relief.

Ironically, during the 1860s and 1870s the Elberfeld System gained prominence in Germany and began to lose its religious roots. The structure remained the same, but concentrated more upon the civic responsibility of the middle classes. Poor relief officials noted the growing concern that almsgivers were more concerned with recognition for

¹³⁷ Letter to Daniel von der Heydt from the Oberbürgermeister undn Stadt-Verodneten, Pg. 2-3 Elberfeld, SAW E I 58.

¹³⁸ Adolph Zahn, “Referat des Oberbürgermeisters Lischke auf dem Hamburger Kirchentag 1858,” in *Der Großvater (Daniel von der Heydt, Ein Lebensbild*, (Stuttgart: 1881): 97-123.

their voluntary work as almsgivers, than for their service.¹³⁹ This highlighted how almsgivers based their responsibility to their community less on religious conviction or civic duty, and more on personal advancement.

The expansion of poor relief to the middle classes shifted the foundation of the Elberfeld System from parish control to municipal regulation. Instead of working with church welfare programs, Elberfeld's municipal poor relief program accused "Christian deaconries of confronting the accusation that they were insufficient in aiding the poor."¹⁴⁰ Religious conviction was less important to almsgivers in Elberfeld only fifteen years after its original implementation. Following the reactionary era of the 1850s, the religious conservatives were no longer the dominant power in Elberfeld. It will be this Elberfeld System that will be remembered.

Whether during the 1850s or 1870s, almsgivers touted the successes of the Elberfeld System in combatting poverty. For almost thirty years, the Elberfeld System was the accepted best method of poor relief, primarily because it lowered costs. In reality, workers struggled against poverty and starvation as Germany industrialized. Poems by workers in Elberfeld and Barmen demonstrate how workers felt apathetic towards their employers. In Gustav Reinhart Neuhaus's *Die Armen*, Neuhaus writes about "The reward for untold anguish, the gratitude for their industriousness (was) hunger."¹⁴¹ The Elberfeld System's primary attention was on employment of men, and the individual care provided

¹³⁹ "Verhandlungen der Hauptversammlungen der städtischen Armenverwaltung vom 14 Januar 1867 und 30. Januar 1868: Mit den Jahresberichten für 1866 und 1867" (Elberfeld, R.L. Friderichs und Companie, 1868), 45-47. SAW R II 97.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁴¹ Gustav Reinhardt Neuhaus, "Die Armen," in *Gedichte* (Leipzig, 1856): 62-64, *Historische Geschichte*, 552.

by outdoor relief institutions. Carl Siebel, a son of a local trader, describes how children were forced into begging because their mothers could not afford to feed them.¹⁴² The success of the Elberfeld System is difficult to measure. For its founders, success was measured by the decrease in the number of unemployed men and the disappearance of beggars, and most of all, the lowering of poor relief costs. For the poor, starvation and poverty – particularly for impoverished women and children – remained a reality.

The Elberfeld System's origins combine two basic principles: Enlightenment ideals of greater secular control of civic institutions and the strict observance of Protestant values. The middle classes and elites of Elberfeld were products of the profound importance of the Enlightenment and a foundationally pious elite Protestant population. Ultimately, the religiously zealous elites' understanding triumphed in Elberfeld. The events of 1848 neutered the more secularized middle class from poor relief distribution in the 1850s. Wealthy bankers and industrialists benefitted from their allegiance to Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV, and these reactionary leaders used their unfettered power to establish a system that benefitted them economically, while aligning with their religious principles. The Elberfeld System began as an amalgamation that incorporated the secular idea of poor relief management through secular institutions with religious piety, but slowly disassociated itself from its religious background. Elberfeld's restructured poor relief encompassed the rise of the middle classes with religious conservatism of its industrial elites.

¹⁴² Carl Siebel, "Ein Bettlerkind," in *Gedichte* (Iserlohn, 2, Auflage 1859): 19-21, *Historische Geschichte*, 553.

CONCLUSION

The Elberfeld System was a conservative solution to the ongoing problem of poverty in a continually industrializing community. Social unrest caused by economic strain led to uprisings in 1848-1849 that caused panic among the elites. Although Elberfeld's elites shared a religious vision for their community, their reliance on secular poor relief continued a trend away from religiously controlled welfare. Following 1849, Elberfeld's religiously pious elites gained tighter control of the city's government and pursued their goal of molding the community into an industrious and obedient citizenry. Elberfeld's new poor relief managers utilized a system of outdoor relief that exhibited characteristics of Calvinist poor relief from previous centuries. These included the individual responsibility of the recipient, decentralized authority, and greater communal involvement. For Elberfeld's elites in the 1850s, the Elberfeld System was a way to advocate a Protestant morality for the working classes and keep welfare costs down. Ultimately, the Elberfeld System helped employ workers, but did very little to improve their lives.

The Elberfeld System was part of the city's gradual trend away from indoor relief institutions to outdoor relief. The years 1848 and 1849 showed that middle class manufacturers and intellectuals were unhappy with their economic and political circumstance. By splitting the city into more districts with more almsgivers, Elberfeld's municipal poor relief better regulated the number of individuals on poor relief. The Elberfeld System provided an opportunity for the middle classes to work as almsgivers

and participate in local government on a greater scale. Ultimately though, middle class citizens were prevented from advancing past the position of almsgiver in the Elberfeld System. By switching from indoor relief to outdoor relief Elberfeld's elites mitigated the disenfranchisement of the middle classes and found a method to regularly interact with the poor. The Elberfeld System prevented another uprising in the city because it kept workers employed and satiated the middle classes desire for more political representation.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the Elberfeld System has been categorized as the "German" example of national welfare in the German Empire by contemporaries and historians alike. Although this label is somewhat true, it fails to answer the question of why outdoor poor relief is considered successful in Elberfeld but not elsewhere. This is particularly important when understanding the differences between the Protestant Wupper Valley and the rest of the Catholic Rhineland. The Elberfeld System was much more moralistic and paternalistic than its Catholic counterparts, such as the *Koplingverein* throughout the German Empire. The whole industrial Rhineland experienced economic growth and mass in-migration in the 1850s, but only Elberfeld instituted a municipal outdoor poor relief system that lowered welfare costs for the municipal government and its elites. Without studying the events leading up to the 1850s, as well as the social, economic, and unusual religious climate of Elberfeld, the receptiveness by Prussian society of the Elberfeld System is misconstrued. The Elberfeld System displayed qualities of civic duty, separation of church and state, and Protestant morality that the Prussian government and middle classes later adopted. But Elberfeld's elites were not embracing characteristics of obedience and religious morality from Prussia but from their own community. The immediate events leading up to the Elberfeld

System demonstrate how the timing of a conservative revival and economic prosperity were essential for the system's immediate success.

What continues to be missing in the scholarship of the Elberfeld System are the experiences of welfare recipients themselves. From the 1840s into the 1850s, workers struggled to find adequate employment and provide for their families. Historians highlight how increased unemployment and famine led to the revolt of 1849 but do not follow the story of workers into the 1850s. The Elberfeld System is an essential piece in understanding Elberfeld's working classes in the mid-nineteenth century. Following the adoption of the Elberfeld System, more workers gained employment, but along with this came greater surveillance by Elberfeld's municipal government. The Elberfeld System helped workers survive poverty and hunger, but did little to improve their opportunities. Although begging and homelessness decreased, Elberfeld's working classes could hardly advance in their current economic system. The poor themselves remain a largely ignored part of the greater discussion of poverty and not just in the Elberfeld System. The Elberfeld System offers a distinctive opportunity to study the poor because of its emphasis on building a relationship between almsgivers and poor relief recipients.

The story of the Elberfeld System's creation is lost in the broader narrative of how Germany created the first modern welfare state. In 1853, Elberfeld's municipal body sought a solution to its own community's problem with poverty, not a national solution. Elberfeld was different from the rest of Prussia, because of its early industrialization, and from the Rhineland, because of its Protestantism. Poor relief costs in the late 1840s and early 1850s mushroomed because of economic stagnation and their continued reliance on voluntary contributions. The Elberfeld System offered a practical solution that allowed

greater political involvement by the middle classes, incorporated Enlightenment ideals, yet also brought Protestant judgment upon its entire citizenry. Because of its emphasis on outdoor relief, the Elberfeld System can keep its label as the “German” example for outdoor relief prior to the welfare state of the German Empire. Nevertheless, the story of the origins of the Elberfeld System requires its own contextual narrative, which this thesis provides. Elberfeld’s solution to poverty was its own. Its Enlightenment principles, with a strong undertone of Protestant piety and a stroke of economic luck highlight how the Elberfeld System was its own idea, a unique product of the mid-nineteenth century Wupper Valley.

APPENDIX

Maps



Figure A.1: Elberfeld is situated in modern day Wuppertal and is around 35 kilometers from Düsseldorf.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Lencer, “Die Wupper und ihre Nebenflüsse,” *Wikipedia*, August 2008, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Verlaufskarte_Wupper.png.

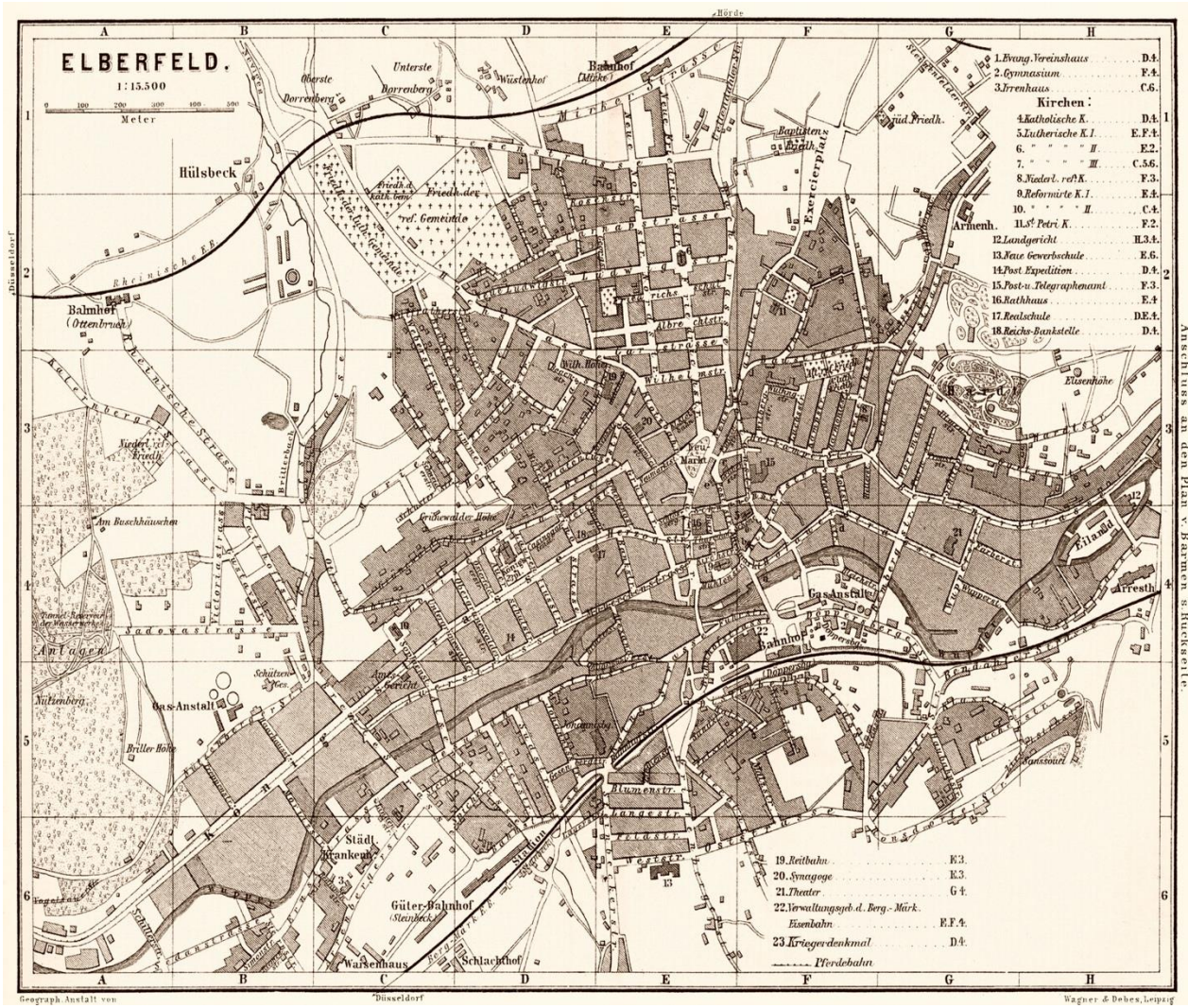


Figure A.2: This map represents the entire municipality of Elberfeld in 1887. It also labels the locations of the municipal poorhouse, hospital, orphanage, and mental institution.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ “Elberfeld (now part of Wuppertal) city map, 1887,” (Leipzig: Wagner & Debes), http://www.discusmedia.com/maps/wuppertal_city_maps/3469/.

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