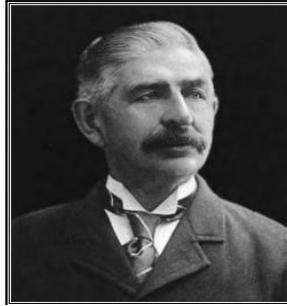


# **William Kiel**

## **Butler's First Mayor**

**By Tom Riley**



Other than the fact that he has a street named after him, few people probably know much about William Kiel and the part he played in making Butler into the community we know today.

Born in Hamburg Germany in 1842, Mr. Kiel learned his trade in the rubber manufacturing plants of that city. At the time, Hamburg was Europe's leading developer of rubber products. In 1873, he moved to Paris and became the superintendent of the Franco-American Rubber Company.

Mr. Kiel had considerable military experience. He served in the Hamburg Dragoons, a heavy cavalry regiment of the Prussian Army, and fought in the Austro-Prussian War in 1866 and the Franco-Prussian War in 1870.

Following his desire to come to the United States, he and his family emigrated to New Jersey in 1876. He was hired by S.S. Sonneborn to take charge of the materials division of the Rubber Comb & Jewelry Company in West Bloomingdale (now Butler). The principal products of the company at the time were combs, pipe stems, pistol handles, jewelry, and surgical equipment.

All U. S. rubber companies operated under patents granted by Charles Goodyear. Thanks to Mr. Kiel's inventions, the Rubber Comb & Jewelry Company had a higher profit margin because it operated under its own patents.

In 1882, the R.C.& J Co. became the Butler Hard Rubber Company with Richard Butler as President and William Kiel as Superintendent. Under Mr. Kiel, new methods of manufacturing were introduced, new mechanical devices and machinery replaced hand operations, and factory personnel were reorganized. The result was a significant increase in business.

By 1885, most of the company's old wooden structures were being replaced by modern brick buildings. At that time, a 175 ft. brick chimney was constructed and a 500 hp. Watts Campbell steam engine was installed. In 1898 a number of rubber companies were consolidated and

William Kiel became the general superintendent of all American Hard Rubber factories. Being the area's largest employer, as the company grew and prospered, so did the community.

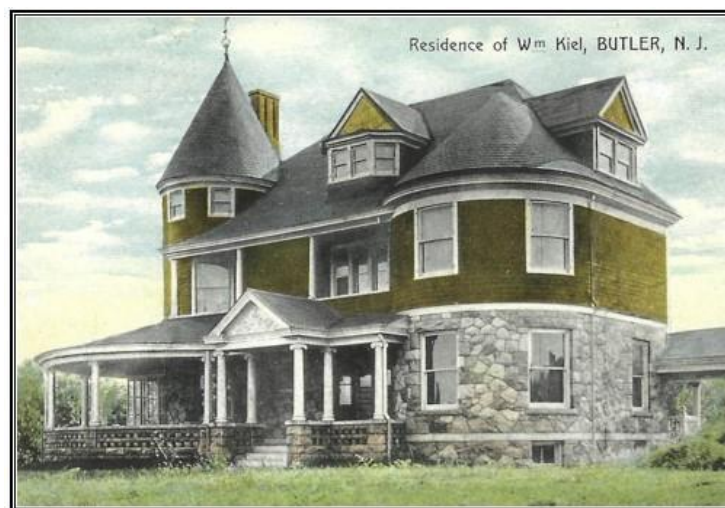
On March 13, 1901, all ties with the government of Pequannock Township were severed and the Borough of Butler was created. William Kiel was chosen 'by acclamation' to be the first mayor. One of the first actions taken by the new mayor and council was the acquisition of the land that would become the borough park. An ordinance was passed to purchase from Mrs. W.A, Robinson the area consisting basically of today's park for \$300.

The area of the future park was low and swampy because of its location next to Stonehouse Brook. As the story goes, Mr. Kiel was crossing the area when he was dumped, coach, driver, and all into a mud hole by a runaway horse. It is said that Mayor Kiel lost no time getting the approval of the Borough Council to fill in and level off the park grounds to prevent future mishaps like his own.

Mindful of the necessity of education (Butler students attended Bloomingdale School), Mr. Kiel was instrumental in acquiring a separate school district for Butler and in the construction of a \$10,000 stone school building on land donated by Richard Butler.

When local Catholics found their educational facilities to be insufficient, William Kiel aided substantially in the construction of a new \$40,000 school. In the same respect, the Methodist Episcopal Tabernacle was helped considerably by Mr. Kiel's generosity.

Sometime prior to 1890, Mr. Kiel purchased from Richard Butler an undeveloped tract of land between today's Mabey Lane and Belleview Avenue. He landscaped the property, constructed a dam for a pond, and built a spacious 20 room home for his family. They occupied the home until about 1905, moving at that time to their newly constructed home on Bartholdi Avenue, next to the High School.



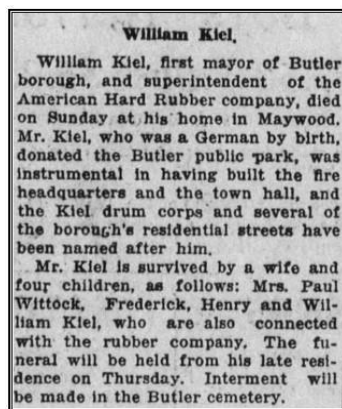
The original Kiel home has an interesting history. The building remained vacant until 1909 when it was purchased by George Gale, M.D. Dr. Gale operated the property as a sanitarium,

“The Bancroft Health Resort.” In 1919, the building was being used as a physical training institution. It was then acquired by Charles Wilson, president of the First National Bank of Butler. After his death, Mrs. Wilson sold the property in 1930 to Goodwill Industries, an affiliate of the Methodist Church, who used it as a summer camp for underprivileged children.

A controversy erupted 1962 when the property came up for sale for \$90,000. One side made up of community leaders Mayor Lawrence Brinster, Councilman Roger Struble, and R. Kennedy Carpenter advocated for the purchase of the 10 acre site by Butler Borough. The other side, including Bruyn Glann, opposed the purchase and pointed out that the Borough turned down a proposal to buy the property for \$80,000 in 1958. A referendum was held on June 6, 1962 and with a low turn-out, the purchase was voted down 464 to 289 by only one-third of the registered voters.

After Surry Homes of Pompton Lakes bought the property, both homes, a large barn, and other out-buildings were razed, and the pond was filled in. The property was subdivided into thirty lots for the construction of three bedroom homes that originally sold for \$19,900.

William Kiel died in 1918 at his retirement residence in Maywood, New Jersey. Mrs. Kiel passed away in 1935. They are buried in a beautiful classical mausoleum in Mount Rest Cemetery.



Mr. Kiel’s second home on the corner of Belleview Avenue and Bartholdi Avenue was eventually acquired by the Butler Board of Education. It was used for classrooms as well as the home of Butler High’s jazz band, the “Kiel House Kats.” The building was demolished to make room for a free-standing split-level addition to the high school campus, approved by the voters in January 1963.



Sources: *The Herald News*, June 5, 1962, *Butler Argus*, June 7, 1962,, Surry Homes Advertisement, *Paterson Morning Call*, May 19, 1918, *Ancestry.com*, *Butler in Story and Pictures*, 2001, Butler Museum Files, *The History of Morris County*, Published in 1882