

# Chapter Sixteen: Julius Rosenwald\_Illinois, 1862

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In 1862, Samuel Rosenwald left Europe with hopes for a better life, unaware his family would soon live near a future president and face the looming threat of the Ku Klux Klan. As Samuel and his wife, Augusta, welcomed their son Benjamin, they faced personal struggles, hoping their new child, Julius, would thrive. Julius, born at the Lincoln family's doorstep, would unknowingly witness significant events in his early childhood, including President Lincoln's assassination.

Julius, or JR as he preferred, left high school after two years to work in the New York garment industry. Here, he excelled in selling suits for various occasions. Upon marrying Augusta Nusbaum in 1890, the couple took a train to Niagara Falls for their honeymoon, marking the start of their life together.

Parallel to JR's journey, a young Richard Sears, raised in rural Minnesota, created a successful watch-selling venture from an unclaimed shipment at a railroad station. His business flourished, prompting him to relocate to Chicago for greater opportunities. Sears discovered the potential of mail-order selling and crafted a catalog that appealed to American consumers, establishing what would become Sears, Roebuck & Co., a giant in retail history.

In 1895, Richard Sears faced organizational challenges that hindered his business's potential. Seeking help, he approached Aaron Nusbaum, Augusta's brother, who had newly found riches from running concessions at the World's Columbian Exposition. Nusbaum opted for a partnership with Sears, and Julius Rosenwald decided to invest in the company, which he had ties to through his existing business dealings with Sears.

As the company grew, however, Rosenwald and Nusbaum faced the necessity of remaining hidden behind the business due to antisemitic sentiments in America. Despite this discrimination, Sears, Roebuck & Co. thrived, providing goods to rural communities that lacked retail options. The company built a vast shipping facility in Chicago, responding to soaring demand.

Tensions arose as Richard Sears fell ill, leaving JR in charge of the company, which propelled him into wealth. Unlike many, he faced the challenge of how to utilize his newfound fortune. JR and Gussie's philanthropic endeavors began, aligning them with prominent reformers of the Progressive Era. Amidst personal and professional success, JR was on the verge of instigating significant changes in America.