Industry Played A Vital Role

Once-Booming Factories Now Only Memory

Although Birmingham was once the industrial center of middle Ohio, many of the industries have disappeared from the city.

In fact, the name Birmingham was selected because one of the two owners, original residents, had grown up in Birmingham, England.

The first factory was a tannery built by Elijah Wilkes in 1837. It was in operation by 1838, run by John Hunter's blacksmith shop and foundry.

Later the Hunter foundry began manufacturing through various factories and other farm implements.

ALMOST all suddenly as Bir-
mington became a manufacturing and industrial center, it was trans-

ferred to a community of resi-
dential homes.

Although the town never had a fire that wiped out everything in site, a number of factories and factories were destroyed and never rebuilt.

An industry which did survive for nearly a century was the manu-

ufacturing of the Rouge River.

Although the records are not clear, indications are that Roswell T. Tuttnell and his sons owned the Rouge and built a four mill in about 1875.

In 1892 the mill was destroyed by fire, but two years later it was rebuilt by E. C. Tuttnell. It ran for a short period and then experienced the fire of Robert R. Opdyke.

FOR THE NEXT 60 years the mill was owned by a number of persons. In 1910 it was purchased by Marcus W. and Sarah A. Hamsen. The company ran the mill for about five years and then sold it to a Quantum Lake Estates group, and the building was torn down to make way for a park.

Most of Birmingham's industry today is located in a small section of the city where it is situated in the center of the city.

Generally, the industrialized land rows along the Grand Trunk railway, and the remaining mill is a large, white building located at the foot of Lincoln, Holland, Webster and Cole streets.

THE TOWN now boasts three plastic firms, a builder of new home units, an automotive company that converts cars into ambulances and other emergency vehicles, several small tool and machine companies, and a manufacturer of garage doors.

The town, itself, is the town's largest manufacturer of residential garage doors in the United States.

Birmingham is the biggest of Birmingham's main industries, a major manufacturer of plastic cases, the town's largest building materials company, and a manufacturer of plastic cases.

Employmennt in the city is built on an annual payroll of $1,000,000 per day. All workers and families have an average of $1,000,000 a year.

IN ADDITION to the three local facilities, the factory and the old mill are used by the city, which has a large number of full-service and small tool companies, including President Glenn Bailey, who is the city's largest manufacturer of plastic cases.

BERRY INDUSTRIES, INC. (LOWER RIGHT) IS LARGEST LOCAL FACTORY

Firm is the largest producer of residential garage doors in U.S. in Canada.

RAN BY BUSINESSMAN NAMED B'HAM

Grist Mill Operating in 1877

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Research in early documents and books pertaining to the history of Birmingham establishes a number of facts about the old grist mill which was located for many years on the River Rouge just north of Maple and west of Baldwin.

To go back to the very beginning, the United States Congress in 1812 passed "An Act providing for the sale of lands in the United States, in the Territory N.W. of the Ohio, and above the mouth of the Kentucky River."

It was seven years before any plantation was purchased in what is now the Birmingham area.

ONE FACT was that an early surveyor reported, adversely and in 1812, that this was a swampy land and not fit for settlement.

On Jan. 28, 1819, Benjamin K. Pierce purchased 240 acres for $1.25 per acre, a total of $600.

"The northern boundary of this land is now Maple Ave.; the eastern boundary is in new Pierce St.; Josephus and John J. Young, purchased a tract of land from Mr. Pierce and built a saw mill.

In 1830 the brothers sold the land and mill to Roswell T. Merrill. He was a prominent local business-

man at the time and owned a flour mill, worked by horsepower, that did millwork and made agri-
cultural implements and stoves.

It is likely the grist mill was built in the northwest corner of Pierce's land.

On the other hand, in a history of Oakland County, published by L. H. Everts & Co., Philadelphia, in 1877, the original site is located in the southeast corner of land originally sold to Henry Whiting (also listed as Whiting by the Census) as "Whiting" on the land!

Its southern boundary abuts the southern boundary of the Pierce land at what is now Maple Ave. and Lincoln Street. The Whiting land is now the Quartz Lake Estate subdivision.

In 1877 the history is reported that in 1832 two brothers, Josephus and John J. Young, pur-

chased a tract of land from Mr. Pierce and built a saw mill.

Smith, Sons Headed Up 1st Foundry

"The Novely Works," a foundry owned and operated by Aaron Smith in the 1860's, gave Birmingham its first reputation as a booming industrial village.

In the foundry, located east of the present Briggs building on East Maple, Smith and his sons manufactured large numbers of various kinds of agricultural im-

plements, among which was a sub-

sieve plow which Smith had inven-
ted.

As the years passed, and the business continued by Smith's sons, the Novely Works ceased to be a novelty and the property was known by the townpeople as "the old foundry."

With the sale of the foundry in 1975 to John Stovall, The Ec-

to Park company decided that the new en-

try would be in to get into operation a shop which would have been used as a foundry and a ma-

cine shop.

WALTER NICHOLS came to Griswold in 1865, purchased the old foundry and operated a wood-

working shop for a few years.

He sold the property to Steers & Steck in 1915 for $1,000.

In 1965 KATLEK sold his share of the mill to Berraw. The mill was then abandoned, and the new owners, Berraw, turned it into a business.

In 1965, while owned by Opdyke and Gardiner, the mill was des-
troyed by fire.

The site was then purchased by E. E. Trowbridge who rebuilt the mill in 1968. He sold it for several years and then exchanged it for the farm of Robert R. Opdyke.

The mill was again owned by Opdyke, this time by Robert R. Opdyke.

At the site the history was written in 1877, the mill was opera-
ted by G. K. Opdyke, the son of the earlier proprietor.

IT IS NOT YET known what the ownership of the mill changed hands.

If so, it would appear that this is the same mill, owned and run in 1899 by two men named Jones & Fred-

nicks.

At the turn of the century the mill was owned by W. E. McCollum and C. H. Styers, who also owned a grain and feed store on East Maple. Their head miller was W. A. Brown, and the flour mill, which was called Mess Brand.

Old mill was on Rouge River

Merrill also owned nearby saw mill.