

The Hercules Engine News

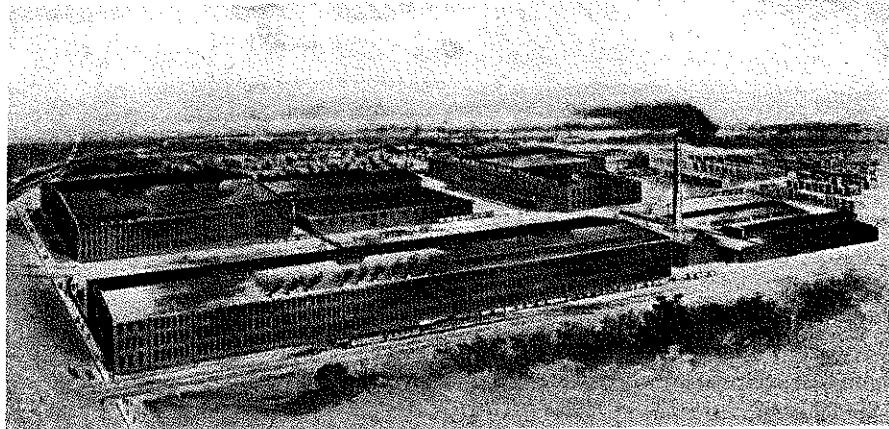
by Glenn Karch
20601 Old State Road
Haubstadt, Indiana 47639
glenn.karch@gte.net

In our hobby there are a lot of questions. How did a particular gas engine company come into being? Why did it locate in a particular place?

In the case of the Hercules Gas Engine Company, it is necessary to begin the story in 1902 even though engines were not produced until January 1914. In 1902, an enterprising buggy manufacturer, William McCurdy, saw fit to move his successful Brighten Buggy Company from Cincinnati, Ohio, to Evansville, Indiana. He moved to take advantage of the plentiful hardwood supply and abundance of skilled labor in the Evansville area. The relocated business was named the Hercules Buggy Company and started production in 1903. The reasons for the name change are unknown. A new manufacturing building was erected that extended 800 feet east and west, was forty feet wide and three stories tall. To the east end of the main building was the scrap-wood-burning power plant. The smokestack can be seen billowing smoke. The billowing smokestack was a symbol of a thriving business in those days. The first picture (from an old postcard) shown is a west end view of the first building in



#1



#2

what would eventually become a large manufacturing complex.

The second picture (again from an old postcard) not only shows the original buggy works building, it also shows the Hercules Wheel Company east of the power plant. To the north of the buggy works is the Hercules Surrey and Wagon Company building. Next to it is the Hercules Warehouse Company. Further to the east is the Hercules Body Company building. The long one-story structure attached along the side is the Hercules Paint Company. On east are the lumber piles and the wood-drying kilns. Surprisingly, most of these buildings are still standing today.

The Hercules Buggy Company built many buggies, with 90,000 being the peak annual production. William McCurdy developed a very close relationship with the Sears & Roebuck people and became a major supplier of products for the mail order giant.

During these same times Sears & Roebuck was being supplied with mail order Economy gas engines from their own Holm Machine and Manufacturing Company at Sparta, Michigan. It came to pass that various things did not always go too well at the engine factory for Sears at Sparta. William Tippet, the buggy and engine buyer for Sears, was in charge of overseeing the operation at Sparta. It was he who contacted McCurdy and suggested that McCurdy build a factory to manufacture engines. Tippet was aware that McCurdy had the ability to provide products of quality and in the quantity that Sears needed to supply customers. As a result, the Hercules Gas Engine Company was formed on November 8, 1912. In 1913 construction of new factory buildings began. Among the features were "walls of glass" and the use of the latest asbestos paint for the interior. The new buildings to house the Hercules Gas Engine Company were located immediately east of or right of the complex illustrated in picture number two. This is the story of why the Hercules Gas Engine came into being and why it was so located.

Buildings that housed the Hercules Gas Engine Company are now being modified or are disappearing from the scene altogether. Final assembly of gas engines came to a halt in early 1934, with the last castings being made in mid-October 1933. In the 20 years that it was in business, some 400,000 engines were produced, ranking it among the top producers of gas engines during that 20-year period. ○