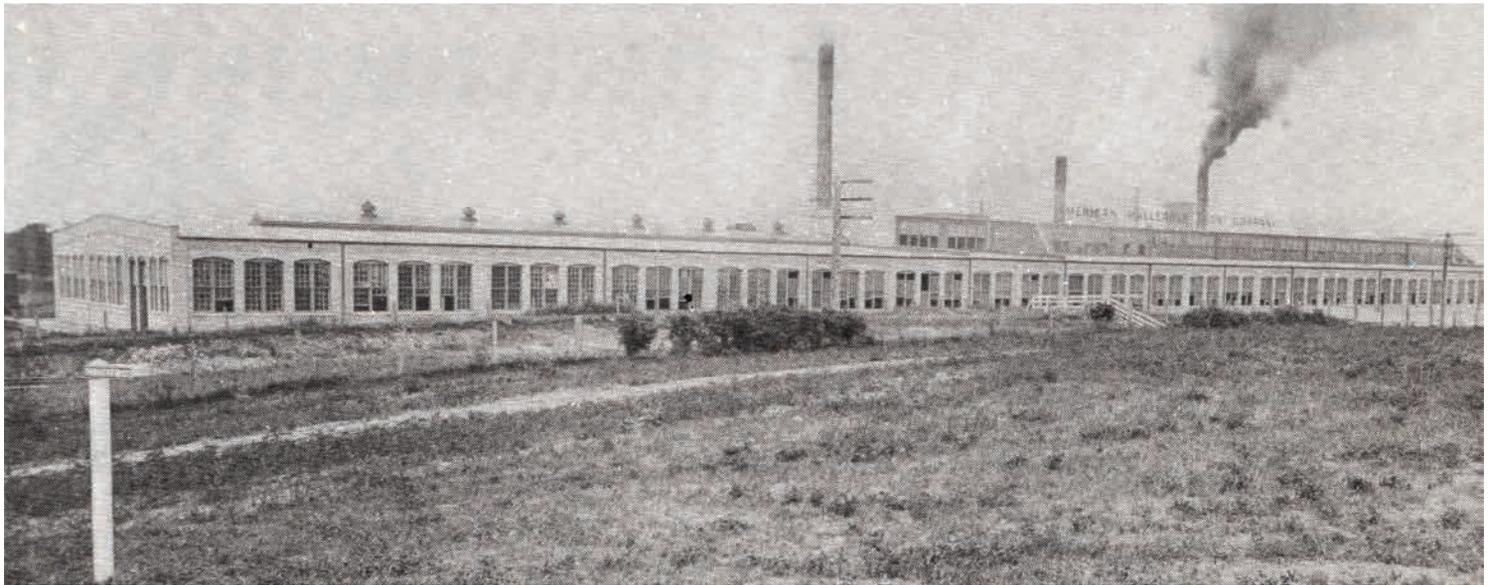


INDUSTRIOUS BARRINGTON

BY BARBARA L. BENSON



The American Malleable Iron Company, a foundry for castings, in Barrington (c. 1900). Antique photos are from "Tales of Old Barrington".

THE BARRINGTON AREA has not usually been associated with industry or manufacturing, but of necessity, from the beginning, industriousness and production are a part of its history without detracting from the livable character of the community. But its very settlement and growth depended on the grimy operations of multiple blacksmith shops with their blazing hot forges, anvils, and clanging hammers that kept the workhorses well-shod, and the wagon and carriage wheels smoothly turning to carry the commerce of the town and the surrounding areas.

Nineteenth century downtown Barrington was dominated by the blacksmiths, the wagon makers, the harness makers, the carriage and wagon painters, the livery stables, the tinsmiths, the boot and shoe makers, the carpenters and joiners, the lumber yards, and marble works. All were contained within a roughly six block area of East Main Street and photographs attest to the generally ramshackle appearance of the town center. Photographs also show that this thriving hub of smoke, noise, and horse manure gave way to pleasant residential streets, more reminiscent of those picture postcard New England towns.

FORGING AHEAD

In 1895, E.F. Wichman was a newcomer to Barrington's blacksmithing trade. His first shop was located on the northeast corner of East Main Street, then a gravel and muddy thoroughfare. But Ed Wichman was on the cusp of the transition from equine to combustible transportation, and into the 20th century Wichman adapted his business to the changing times. His story was told in the June 1943 edition of "American Ironsmith", of taking on a Chicago Journeyman farrier, Frank Malone, to continue the horseshoeing work; of incorporating automobile repair into the business, and his son, E.F. Wichman, Jr. taking over the forge, including creating the ornamental ironwork that was so popular in the 1920s.

In 1929, the Wichmans surprised the remaining blacksmithing and ironworking fraternity by building a new shop in a long, low red brick building on West Station Street. It was one of the most modern shops in the country, and until the early 1950s, was a thriving reminder of Barrington's very roots



A portion of the American Malleable Iron Company remains today and houses Pink Geranium & Co. and Artifactual Furniture Company.



Wickman's Blacksmith Shop in 1898, located on East Main Street, east of Cook Street. E.F. Wichman (left) Ed McKay.

as a town. The "American Ironsmith" article paid tribute to Ed Wichman, Jr. as "... possessing all the fine characteristics of his respected father. Courteous, popular, and a skillful blacksmith and welder who has mastered all angles of the trade, he could not be otherwise, with his father's example and instruction as his guide." The building gained new life, its forge and tools intact, when it was purchased by the Village of Barrington, and then became the first location for the Barrington Historical Society rented at \$1 a year, and in 1999, was moved to West Main Street as part of the Museum Center there.

HEAVY MANUFACTURING COMES TO TOWN

Industrial manufacturing had a tenuous, but large footprint in the Barrington countryside at the end of the 19th century when the American Malleable Ironworks built a factory about a half-mile northwest of Barrington alongside the Chicago and Northwestern Railway, and the dirt road that was the route to Fox River Grove and Cary. The Ironworks was the catalyst for the beginnings of a small community that became known as Chicago Highlands. At full production, the plant employed several hundred men, many of them Hungarian. Some came out on the early train from Chicago, which made a special stop at what is now the Hart Road crossing where the railway put up a depot and a platform. Others lived in the little cottages that were built in the swampy land on the northwest side of the intersection. There was a hotel, a brick store, and a restaurant built by William Hobein, who was the postmaster there from 1902 until 1906.

In his account of the factory, Arnett C. Lines refers to it as the Illinois Malleable Ironworks, while in the photograph that appeared in "Tales of Old Barrington" it is identified as the American Malleable Iron Company. Lines details the long, grueling, and hard labor process through which castings

emerged from molds to fill customers orders such as sickle guards, tie plates, and brake shoes.

The process moved from west to east in the long manufacturing building, now broken up into sections and housing a variety of businesses. At the west end, the two-story office building housed the pattern room run by Al Whittenberg on the ground floor. Identify it now as the location of the Pink Geranium and the Artifactual Furniture Company.

Lines wrote that, "In the west end of the foundry was an immense molding room with its furnaces and cupola with a core room attached to the south. The pig iron in the long furnace had to be brought to a certain point of liquidity determined by looking in on it through a dark smoked glass. It was the big job of the fireman to keep it roaring, the grates clean, and work at it steadily. Bob Tremble was an expert at that with few men his equal. Stripped to the waist with his tall lean body bent over in front of the firebox, he shoveled and stoked till forced into a moment of rest to swab off the sweat with a big Turkish towel, while the furnace blower was turned on to roar the fire through the iron. Then, he would open the door and go at it again till the welcome call 'Heat's on'."

There was a railway spur just south of the foundry where freight cars waited to ship the gunny sacks and barrels containing customers' orders. But competition was stiff from ironworks in Chicago, Rockford, and Racine, and by 1903, there were reports of faulty work and the company went into bankruptcy. The factory closed, the workers left, although a few stayed in the Highlands cottages. The sprawling ironworks buildings were adapted through the years for innumerable productive businesses. The Hobein store on the northwest corner of Northwest Highway and Hart Road was lastly the Barrington Feed Store, until it burned in 1984.



Pomeroy and Wesolowski's steam-powered flour mill at the turn of the century. The building burned in 1907.



Pomeroy and Wesolowski's mill on Franklin between Cook and Hough streets ground 80 barrels of flour a day.

In 1985, the builders of a new shopping center at that corner went to the Barrington Historical Society looking for some historical background to name the center. They were intrigued with the story of Barrington's foray into industrialization, and today, a bronze plaque at The Foundry of Barrington shopping center commemorates that long-ago enterprise.

BARRINGTON FARMS SUPPLY CHICAGO

Before the Village of Barrington was founded in 1854, farmers in the surrounding countryside took their produce, grain, and livestock to market in the earlier established river towns and even drove their harvest into Chicago, as noted by Francis Kelsey in a letter written in July 1842:

"I went last week to Chicago and Sylvester Salin went with me to Chicago. I drove forty bushels of wheat and got eight four (sic) cents per bushel. It is thirty-two miles ... gone one day and back the next."

But once established, Barrington provided the farmers with a thriving market for their livestock, dairy, and grain production. The horse-drawn carts and wagons rolled in along the uneven muddy tracks, first marked out by the Native Americans and the government agents like John Kinzie riding to the outlying forts. Probably they brought their bushels of grain to the Barrington Roller Flour Mill which stood on the southeast corner of Hough Street and Hillside Avenue, then known as Limits Street. The mill was built by George Sedhoff, who ran it with his brother-in-law George Froehlich. They were millers from Hanover, in Germany. They had two sets of stones, one for grinding wheat, and one set for grinding rye. The mill burned to the ground on August 5, 1884.

BARRINGTON'S GRAIN MERCHANTS

In 1885, George Sedhoff built a new mill in town, between Hough and North Cook Streets alongside the railway tracks. The new flour mill's owner was H.C.P. Sandman and his son-in-law, the same George Froehlich who had partnered with Sedhoff. Sandman, the owner of large tracts of property both within, and outside the village, and owner of a bank which carried his name

for some years, soon became the sole owner, until that mill also burned in 1895.

With grain storage and milling a necessary and profitable part of the village's evolution as a market center for the surrounding countryside, two farmers from those agricultural outskirts, Dan Pomeroy and John Wesolowski, partnered to build a steam-powered flour mill on the site. They ground about 80 barrels of flour a day. This building too, burned down in 1907.

There was one other historically noted grain merchant right in town. In the late 19th century, Horace Church owned a grain elevator at the north end of Grove Avenue where BMO Harris Bank is now. It was in the Chicago and Northwestern right-of-way and had a long ramp on its south side up onto Grove Avenue, by which the grain was raised and dumped into the top of the bins. The building and the ramp became very rickety, and a horse team even fell through it. This too was destroyed by fire.

Entering the 20th century, many of the sites which had been grain and flour mills became machine and engine shops and lumber yards, especially along the in-town north side of the railway. In fact, Paulson's lumber yard and hardware store were still on the west side of Hough Street by the tracks in the early 1980s.

For over 60 years, the grain farmers, the millers, and the merchants were an important part of the small town's self-sufficiency, along with the livestock and dairy farmers, and when local needs had been met, there was some profitability from their labors by shipping out on the railroad which then combined both passenger and freight services. Even then, raised, grown, or produced in

Barrington, Ill., carried with it a certain assurance of quality which lasts to this day. U

Barbara L. Benson grew up in Kent, England, and later moved to New York. She settled in Barrington and has walked with our history since she first arrived here in 1980.



PHOTO: SUSAN MCCONNELL