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Ohio At Work: Oil and Transportation



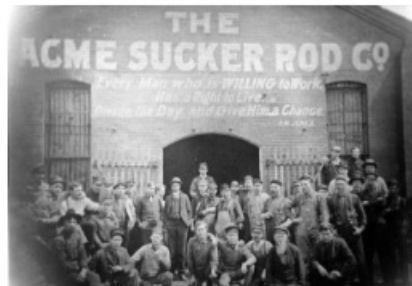
◀ At left, the wells at Jerry City seen in 1900. This view looks northeast on the present Front Street. The wells have sprouted up beside and in between houses all over the town. Shortly after this time, there was a slump in the price of natural gas, thanks to an over-supply. The oil which followed eased the economic downturn somewhat, but local residents began to look for other sources of income. Source: CAC General Photograph Collection.

Northwest Ohio's earliest business was agriculture, quickly accompanied by a host of light industries serving the needs of the farming community. It wasn't long before improved transportation in the form of canals and railroads made it easy to ship harvested crops to regional markets and bring manufactured goods to the farms and small towns in the area. The

economy might have continued in this fashion, had it not been for the discovery of natural gas and oil here just as American manufacturers began looking for a cleaner, more reliable fuel. The impact this discovery had on northwest Ohio was profound. A past issue of the **Archival Chronicle** has dealt with the the gas and oil boom itself. This issue focuses on the related businesses that grew up as a consequence of the easy availability of this resource.

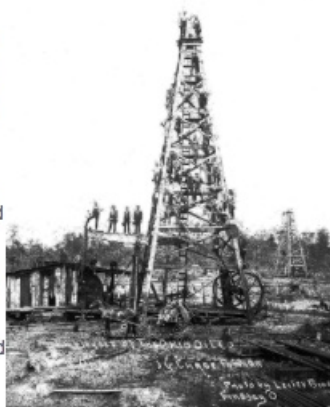
Thirty-four employees of The Oil Oil Company pose on a derrick near Findlay, in about 1890. J. G. Chase is listed as the foreman. Source: CAC General Photograph Collection. ▶

When oil and natural gas were discovered in paying quantities, thousands streamed into the northwest Ohio oil fields. It was one thing to own the land where gas and oil could be found and still another to take it from the ground, refine it, and put it to work in machines and factories. For everyone from explorers to engineers to roustabouts, the oil industry was a learn-on-the-job situation in the late 19th century. Soon, derricks dotted the countryside, and a host of industries grew up which took advantage of the ready supply of fuel.



There were fortunes to be made in supplying equipment for oil drilling. Samuel M. Jones (MS 204) first came looking for oil at Lima in 1885 and helped to found the Ohio Oil Company, one of those which eventually made up Standard Oil. Establishing the Acme Sucker Rod Company to manufacture drilling equipment in 1892, Jones went on to become the progressive Mayor of Toledo. His employees are pictured at left, posed under a quotation from Jones himself: "Every man who is willing to work has a right to live. Divide the day and give him a chance." Recalling his own difficult start in life, Jones sought to improve conditions for the working man,

and earned the nickname "Golden Rule" Jones.



With coal fields in the southeast as well as oil in the northwest, Ohio was ideally suited to become a central manufacturing area for locomotive engines, whatever their power source. Lima Locomotive Works (MS 798) was one such manufacturer. The small locomotive below is one of the products of the firm. Specifications indicate that it was built in about 1920. It featured a 36" driving wheel, with 18" cylinders and stroke. The boiler's normal working pressure was 60 pounds, but its charging pressure was 200 pounds. Its nominal tractive power was 8300 pounds. Locomotive production ceased in Lima in 1951. The American Steam Locomotives/Nickel Plate Road (MS 978) documents other steam-powered locomotive engines.



An earlier look back: above right, the "Atlantic," a steam locomotive engine built in 1832 for the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. The engine is seen in front of the France Foundry & Machine Company of North Baltimore, Ohio, a metal-working shop serving the oil industry and other businesses. The engine may have been coming through the area in around 1926, on its way to an exhibition of old-time locomotives.



The wave of the future in transportation at the turn of the 20th century was the personal automobile. It seemed that everyone with a wrench and a knack for tinkering was trying to build a car. James J. Hind had greater ambitions when he founded the Sandusky Automobile Company in 1900. Hind's idea was to manufacture a quality car for an affordable price, to capture a wide market, a concept was similar to Henry Ford's.

▶ At left, the Sandusky Automobile Company parked its featured models in front of the factory. The company was located on Camp Street.

In operation only for about three or four years, the company produced two internal combustion engine models, an open runabout with a steering lever, and the Courier, which featured a conventional steering wheel. Both seated two passengers. The body style was heavily influenced by popular horse-drawn carriages of the time. The frames were iron, but the bodies were constructed largely of wood.

Despite the high hopes and progressive marketing ideas of the company's founders, the Sandusky Automobile Company did not survive long. Even in the early years of the century, establishing a manufacturing business required significant amounts of capital and faced a long period before becoming profitable. The company was not able to produce enough cars to meet potential demand. With automotive technology rapidly improving every day, it was difficult for a start-up business to compete with the larger operations in Detroit.

SANDUSKY 1905
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A model of simplicity, QUIET, SAFE, POWERFUL and ECONOMICAL. The carriage we build has been on the road for THREE YEARS, and therefore it is experience.

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STYLE F. \$650.

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Above left, the Sandusky runabout seated two and had a five horsepower single cylinder engine, with a chain drive. It weighed only six hundred pounds. Above right, the Courier, was offered for an affordable \$650. This advanced model featured a seven horsepower, single cylinder engine, with two forward speeds and reverse.

Bibliographies

- **Business and Commerce Collections**
- **Labor Collections**
- **Transportation Collections**

Previous issues of the Archival Chronicle dealing with NW Ohio Industry:

- **Gas & Oil Boom** (December 1993)
- **The Automobile Grows Up with Northwest Ohio** (December 2000)