

The tale of Dale's developing industries

by Dean Bolin

Dale, the name given to the settlement known as Elizabeth, began as a farming community hub, providing services and products that farmers either did not have the means to create themselves or the time. As the town grew, the industrial arm of the town's economy grew right along with it.

This development led to literally hundreds of businesses, some which are still with us, but often not in their original form. One of the oldest industries still having an economic impact in the town was founded prior to the American Civil War. In 1846, land was purchased by the Wallace family in order to provide a community need – a mill. Wallace Milling shortly came into being the following year.

It was a simple affair, maintained by the family. The business featured a steam powered mill for grain products. The industry would expand throughout the 19th century, eventually changing hands several times

until 1930, when the Wittes acquired ownership, becoming Witte Feed Mill, which still operates along Medcalf Street.

Another long time business operated by a family came shortly after the war. Albert F. Brown, carpenter by trade, opened his own shop in 1868. The one room shop grew in 1900 when Brown wanted to provide employment to his sons F.T., A.J. and O.V. That became the official birth of Brown Bros. Lumber Company. The Brown family continually served the community for over 100 years. Many first businesses were utilized to provide employment for their family, both immediate and extended. The current ownership of Brown Bros. is split 50/50 between J and R Equipment (Darrel and Daniel Jenkins) and Josh and Heather Jenkins.

During economic good times, Dale occasionally found itself the beneficiary of a transferred business from other municipalities. Schum Monuments is a Dale institution

today (see separate article), but the business was actually founded in Mariah Hill in 1888. It stayed in "Maria Hilf" until 1914, when the business moved to Dale.

Many of today's businesses were developed from earlier Dale industrial enterprises. What is now Sternberg Motors is a good example. The earliest known car business was the Dale Motor Company, which began selling Fords in 1925. That business became Conner Motors, and is now Sternbergs (see article for more).

Not all businesses were "hand-me-downs" from earlier enterprises. An example of this is Lin-Gas, a propane supplier. Charles Link began Lin-Gas in 1937 as a "bottled gas" facility. Lin-Gas allows many rural residences and businesses access to gas to run their heating, gas appliances and other uses.

Dale had other gas businesses in the past, but by the time Link established his business, those businesses had been entirely defunct.

Some of Dale's largest and best known industries, beginning over a century after Dale's founding, retained aspects of the way former industrialists got their start. For example, the constructors of plastic shells for furniture began in 1967 at the humble location of a barn. Now, Thermwood has its own series of buildings and their products encompass a wide range of industries. It would also grow enough to create a spin-off business in mid-1981. What we know as Spencer Plastics was created from the Spencer Plastics Products Corporation with their plant located on Old Buffalo Road.

As this brief survey shows, the development of Dale's business community grew in a variety of ways. As Dale looks ahead into the future, one can be certain that the industrial base of the town will also be looking ahead, retaining the older, long time established businesses all the while looking for more opportunity to develop new commercial and industrial concerns.

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