

Industries

In the early years of Otsego County industry was not looked upon as a major provider of jobs and attraction for newcomers as it is today. The potato was the king in the late 1800's. Farmers moved to the area to grow the potatoes that were known from coast to coast for their fine quality and excellent taste. During the winter months many of these farmers found work in potato warehouses. Most of those who weren't in the fields hoeing potatoes were in the forests cutting hardwoods.

Northern Michigan had some of the finest hardwood trees in the country. And we must credit these trees with the birth of industry in Otsego County. From the late 1800's to as late as 1920, a large number of small mills began operation within the county limits. They manufactured a wide variety of hardwood products from chairs and brooms in the Vanderbilt area to charcoal and ten pins in Gaylord. Because of these mills, the lumberjacks in the area had a local market for the trees they cut, and area farmers could gain a small profit while clearing more forest for planting. With the opening of each new mill, more jobs were created for newcomers to settle and make Otsego County their home.



D. H. Hutchins
Potato Buyer

The first actual factory in Otsego County was known as Hindzelman and Walburn. It was started in the early 1880's and lived until about 1890. Hindzelman and Walburn was a wooden ware factory that made butter bowls, wiffle trees, and other products that could be turned from the Northern Michigan hardwoods. Located in the vicinity of North Street in Gaylord, it

employed about six people.

Also beginning in the 1880's was the Jackson, Wylie and Company Hoop and Staves Mill. For about thirty-five years the mill's thirty employees turned out barrel hoops and staves from Basswood and Elm lumber.

The Detroit Iron Furnace Company, in the 1880's, built two large kilns in Otsego County, one located two miles north of Gaylord and the other three miles in the same direction near the present sight of Ironton Spring. These kilns were used for burning hardwoods and making charcoal. Until 1896 Detroit Iron Furnace survived by buying hardwoods that farmers cut to clear farm lands. By that time most of the nearby forests had been cut and the business was no longer profitable enough to employ the twenty-five men needed to run the kilns.

Near 1890 two brothers by the name of Humphrey opened a small saw mill. They turned logs to lumber and then precision cut the lumber. This small custom sawing mill employed very few and lasted only until 1910. At that time the Humphreys leased their mill to Dayton Last Block and it was used to make railroad ties.

Dayton Last Block Works was early Otsego County's largest factory. Beginning in 1891 the Dayton Last Factory, as it was known, manufactured millions of feet of logs into shoe last blocks, dried by kiln, and shipped to various destinations where they were shaped into shoe forms. Also Dayton Last made ten pins at a large scale and other wooden materials that required Otsego County's quality Maple and Elm. Located in Gaylord,



James Hazard
Manager Jackson, Wylie & Co.