

Natural resources, community leadership have spelled sound business, industry

Abundant natural resources coupled with aggressive and capable community leadership have provided Otsego County with a favorable climate for business and industry throughout its 100 years.

In the beginning, it was the fertile farmlands and hardwood forests which attracted people to the area. By the late 1800's Otsego farmers were producing potatoes which had become famous nationwide.

While the farmers were working their fields, the forests echoed with the sounds of the lumbering industry. Numerous small sawmills converted the raw hardwood timber into lumber used for manufacturing everything from chairs and brooms to charcoal and bowling pins.

The ready availability of the hardwood lumber drew the first small factory to Gaylord. The Hindzelman and Walburn Co., located in the vicinity of what is today North Street, employed six people in the production of wooden wares such as butter bowls and waffle trees.

By 1891, major industry had arrived in Otsego County in the form of the Dayton Last Block Works. The firm's large facilities and factory stretched from Gaylord's Second Street to Grandview Boulevard.

For 40 years this company performed a vital financial function for the community. In addition to providing employment for sixty people in the factory, it also served as a ready market for the lumberjacks who needed a buyer for their hardwoods.

SHORTLY AFTER THE turn of the century, as it became more and more apparent that Otsego's lumbering era would soon draw to a close, plans were made to expand the county's economic base by introducing industries unrelated to the lumbering.

A.B.C. Comstock, a Gaylord banker, and Guy Hamilton, a machinist from Detroit, agreed that a locally-produced automobile would provide employment and find a ready market. Local businessmen supported the proposal by raising money to begin the project.

By 1910, the Gaylord Motor Car Company was in full production assembling two different models, a thirty horsepower touring car and a utility car. Consumers purchased 50 of the new cars during the first year of production.

The success of the Gaylord car was short-lived, however, and the early nineteen hundreds saw a

succession of industries moving briefly through Otsego County. Saginaw Wood Products moved in when the Gaylord Car moved out, and the McLouth Gear Factory replaced Saginaw Wood.

McLouth might have remained in the area for a number of years had it not been for the growing popularity of labor unions. Despite company warnings of dire consequences if the employees chose to unionize, McLouth's workers voted in the union and the firm's management terminated the company's operation.

After the McLouth closing, the development of major industry in Otsego County was at a standstill until the late 1930's. At that time the discovery of a natural gas essential in the manufacture of synthetic rubber used in automobile weatherstripping once more opened the way for the entrance of a new industry eager to utilize the county's natural resources.

FROM THIS DISCOVERY came the beginnings of the Standard Products Corporation. Eventually the natural gas was no longer needed in the processing operation, but the factory was well-established, diversified and operating smoothly and remained in Otsego County.

World War II brought industry to Vanderbilt in the form of Higgins Industries which manufactured rotating bands for American machine guns. At the end of the war the company converted to a redraw mill for copper and brass.

In 1958, a group of the county's businessmen formed the Gaylord Industrial Development Corporation as a means for encouraging new industries to settle in the county. The corporation has been successful in bringing numerous firms to Gaylord, the largest of them being the U.S. Plywood Division of Champion International.

By the time the 1960's came to Otsego, several developments were opening the way for major business and industrial expansion. The interstate highway system was sending a four lane expressway along the west edge of Gaylord and Vanderbilt; major oil companies discovered oil deep in Otsego's soil; and the business community performed an attractive renovation of Gaylord's downtown area.

Taking the last item first, Gaylord's downtown merchants remodeled the exteriors of their buildings in the early 60's to conform to an Alpine architectural theme. At the same time, the city began to celebrate an annual "Alpenfest" devoted to fun and good times.

Tourism had been a growing industry in the county ever since skiing became a major winter attraction in the area in the 1920's. With the attractive face-lifting on the town's business buildings and an annual celebration geared to the interests of the tourists. The Alpenfest, more and more families and individuals began to seek out Otsego County as a favorite vacation spot.

It didn't take long for the tourists to find out how easy it was to reach Otsego County on the new interstate highway, and under optimum conditions the county's tourist industry flourished.

Since the late 1960's, the oil companies have carried out extensive exploration and drilling activities throughout Otsego County. By the time the county celebrated its centennial, Otsego was the leading oil producing county in the state.

Fertile soil, abundant woods, easy transportation, oil, attractive scenery and climate together with a tradition of capable, aggressive leadership have all contributed to the century of industrial and business expansion in Otsego County.

Marking
our
100th
year.

**YOUR
100th YEAR
OUR 1st YEAR**

**We're Starting A New
Cycle Together!**

SUMMIT SPORTS
The Quiet Recreation Specialists
Old 27 South Gaylord
Hiking - Biking - Skiing - Camping

Congratulations

**to the residents of
Otsego County
on our 100th Anniversary**

**We're especially proud of
Otsego County during its
Centennial year.**

**GAYLORD STEEL
CORPORATION**