

# Studebakers Link Automobile Making Industry to Ashland, Ohio

By Lori Adams

John S. Studebaker had ambitions to move west and live in the country, so he migrated from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania to Wayne County, now Ashland County in 1835. He and his family made the trip in a large wagon drawn by four horses that contained all their worldly possessions. John's wife, Rebecca, and six children traveled in double carriages also drawn by teams of horses. Although the journey was long, the family was blessed to make it here without any serious problems.

The Studebakers settled on a small tract of land located along US 250 about five miles east of Ashland, where John S. established a blacksmith and wagon making business which was his profession. The family named their new home "Pleasant Ridge." The Studebaker family thrived with John S.'s three eldest sons, Henry, Clem and John, learning the trade of their father. Rebecca expertly spun and wove the cloth and made clothing for her family, which eventually included ten children. Friend and neighbor, George Myers, assisted with building wagons with Myers doing the woodwork and Studebaker making the iron parts. George was the father of F.E. and P.A. Myers who started the F.E. Myers and Bro. Co. in Ashland.



Studebaker Replica Shop

By 1850, economic times were tough, and the same "Go West" spirit inspired the three sons to move. Henry and Clem then started the H and C Studebaker Blacksmithing and Wagon Building Company in South Bend, Indiana in 1852.



Studebaker Wagon

19 year old younger brother John was interested in the gold rush, so he moved west to California. He and his brothers built a wagon in ten days that was exchanged for his passage and board with a wagon train company. After John arrived in California and locals learned he was a wagon maker, he was offered a job. At first, John turned down the opportunity stating he wanted to mine for gold, but he needed to earn a living so began building wheelbarrows for the miners for \$10 each.

The two elder brothers in South Bend suffered from financial difficulties and often traded wagons for livestock or crops. After five years, John returned from California at their request and invested his \$8,000 gold nugget earnings into the company. He bought out his brother Henry who preferred to become a farmer. In 1858, the company's assets were valued at \$10,000, and it was renamed the Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Company.

## STUDEBAKERS LINK AUTOMOBILE MAKING INDUSTRY TO ASHLAND, OHIO

Eventually, Henry sold his share of the business to John and also became a farmer. The fourth Studebaker brother, Peter, who was a merchant, joined the company. His professional experience assisted in building the future. By 1867, the company employed 140 mechanics, the factory covered four acres of ground, and sales totaled about \$350,000 a year. In 1870, the youngest Studebaker son, Jacob, also joined the company.

The Studebakers continued to grow and expand the company over the ensuing years. They built hundreds of wagons for farmers, miners, and the military. The company made carriages owned by President Abraham Lincoln and General Ulysses S. Grant. At the time of the United States Centennial in 1876, the Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Company was the largest producer of horse-drawn carriages in the world.

By 1902, the Studebakers entered the automotive business with electric and gasoline powered vehicles. They sold their autos under the name "Studebaker Automobile Company" and in 1913, became the third largest producer of automobiles in the United States, after Ford and Overland. The company survived financial troubles in 1933 and merged with Packard in 1954. By 1966, the company had eased all operations in the United States and Canada due to its inability to compete with the Big Three Auto Makers.



Studebaker Dealer



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