

Hercules Engine News

Including Economy, Arco, Jaeger & Thermoil

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Fred Buente, a retired farmer, worked at the Hercules Gas Engine Company from 1917 to 1921. After leaving Hercules, he became a farmer and seed corn grower some 10 miles north of Evansville, Indiana. Mr. Buente will celebrate his 100th birthday in November.

His first job at Hercules was in the machine shop, where he operated a surface grinding machine that was used to face off the bottom of the gas engine water hoppers so they would be smooth where they bolted to the cylinders. He worked on Hercules, Economy and Thermoil hoppers, noting that the Thermoil hoppers were a little different shape. He also faced off the ends of the four inch pulleys. Later on, a machine was moved into his area to drill the two

holes in the water hopper top for attaching the engine tag. His foreman was an old Dutchman named Haas who referred to the Thermoil engines as "Thermoils."

Over 100 people worked in the machine shop. His pay was 30 cents an hour to start, and it was raised to 40 cents an hour during WWI. He was paid piece work rates when he did machining at the rate of 1 cent for each pulley faced, 4 cents for each 2½ or 3 HP hopper faced, and six cents for each 5 HP hopper faced. He could do 100 to 125 hoppers in a 10 hour day. They were paid once a week in cash, with the pay envelopes being made up at the Old National Bank. Mr. Buente recalled that one day somebody tried to hold up the man who carried the pay back to the factory.

Mr. Buente talked about 200 engines being built per day. All engines were shipped out by rail car. He didn't recall seeing any ever being loaded onto trucks or other conveyances.

During the time he worked there, a six inch air pipe burst and the resulting explosion blew part of the building roof

off. He also recalled that one man lost a toe when something fell on it. In an earlier story it was reported that Mr. Buente had seen a man who had been killed in the machine shop when the handle of a large drilling machine hit him in the head.

After testing, he reported, the engines were washed with gasoline before being sent to the paint shop. One time there was a gasoline fire, but luckily there was no building damage and no injuries. After that, a change was made to a less hazardous chemical to wash the engines with.

Although Mr. Buente is well up in years, he was able to attend the 80th anniversary Hercules show back on June 11. It was my privilege to take him around the area and show him the exhibits and to let him visit briefly with several of the exhibitors. He exchanged remarks on some of his experiences while working at Hercules.

Coming next will be a story about Walter Schnake, who was an off and on Hercules employee who worked at various projects.

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