

Sparta Economy Engine News

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Once the Holm Machine Manufacturing Company was formed, plans moved quickly toward actual construction of the factory. A five acre site was obtained about three blocks southeast of the center of the village of Sparta, Michigan, along the railroad tracks. Construction was to begin on Monday November 8, 1908, but the concrete block making equipment had not arrived from Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Two days later it arrived and was set up in a temporary building and the production of 700 concrete blocks per day began. The goal was to have the factory up and running by April 15, 1909. Anyone who was willing to work was needed, but it is unknown whether the April 15th goal was met.

Four buildings were planned, including one 100 by 404 feet to house the foundry and machine shop. Another was to be 50 by 100 feet and two story for the paint shop, pattern room, crating room, testing room and shipping room. Two smaller buildings were to house the tool and stock rooms, the cleaning and rattling room, the heating plant and the blacksmith shop.

Even with all the obvious construction going on at the edge of the small village, it has never been officially announced as to just what it was for. It was said to be common knowledge, however, among the village folk that it was

to be a factory to build gas engines for Sears, Roebuck & Company.

Shown below is an artist's conception, taken from a 1911 catalog, of the factory appearance. It should be quickly pointed out that this picture is much more glamorous than that shown in early photos of the day or those of the present. Yes, these buildings are still there, along with the water tower and the railroad tracks. There have been numerous modifications and additions.

Over the years since 1913 there have been several businesses in these facilities, and today it houses the Sparta Foundry, a division of Goetz Corporation of America. An inquiry at the Goetz reception room was disappointing. There was a sign saying to use the phone on the table to get information. Somewhere in the building a lady answered the phone and acted disinterested about my inquiry. She referred me to a gentleman somewhere in the building who, likewise, was unsympathetic to my inquiry.

Just what the exact arrangements,

between Sears, Roebuck & Company and Peter Holm were, is unknown. On February 7, 1909 Sears purchased the Holm Company and announced four days later that a \$50,000 improvement was planned to the yet unfinished factory. Chicago people from Sears were put in charge, with William Tippet being named general manager. Holm was now a consulting engineer and the former secretary-treasurer was now the purchasing agent. Within the year, Holm would pack up his family and return to Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

On July 18, 1909 Holm applied for a patent on a gas engine governor regulating device. This device was used under patent pending on the first Economy engines produced at Sparta. By the time the patent was issued on October 25, 1910, Holm was back in Eau Claire and his patent was no longer being used on the engines. Perhaps Sears wouldn't pay him for it. More details on his patent will be discussed later on.

Coming up next is an old employee letter and problems at Sparta. ○

