

# Interesting Historical Facts About Old Hickory and the Nashville Industrial Corp.

From The Old Hickory News

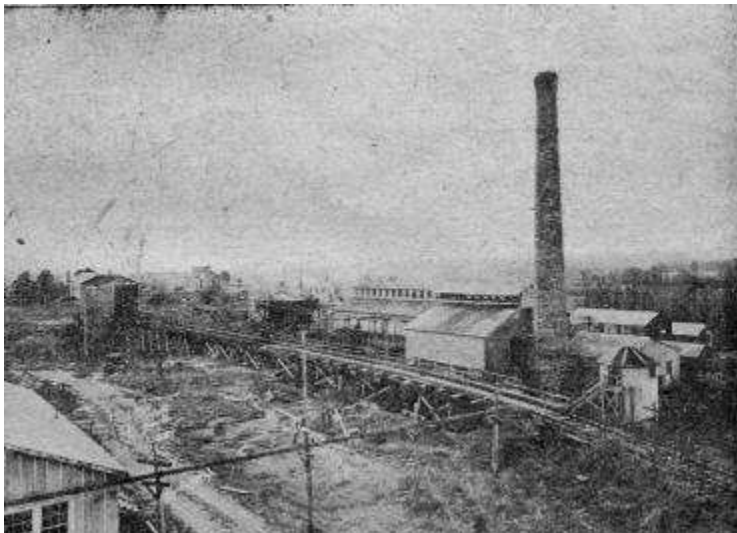
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By **William Newell**

*Assistant Manager, N. I. C.*

The actual history of Old Hickory really began with the announcement made by the War Department on January 12, 1918, that the biggest smokeless powder plant in the world was to be built at Hadley Bend. There had been much speculation as to the location of the proposed plant for weeks previous, and the definite announcement by the government on that date fixed the beginning of the development of Old Hickory. Prior to that time agents of the du Pont Engineering company, acting for the government, had purchased approximately 5,000 acres of land, comprising the entire Hadley Bend section. This was all typical Cumberland Valley farm land, some of it heavy wooded, and all lying in a horseshoe shape bend some twelve miles north-east of Nashville.

Some fifteen or eighteen of the oldest families of this section were represented as owners of the various tracts of land purchased, and deeds conveying the land from them to the government started, in most cases, with the original grant of land from the government or state to the family. Some of the land had never changed hands before. There had been no development in the Hadley Bend section, other than clearing for farm purposes. There were no roads, power lines, or telephones, and the government faced a task of building a complete plant in an isolated section and providing all construction and operating facilities.



A view of the small power house once used in connection with the larger one during the "Powder Plant" days.

## **New City Springs Up**

Almost, literally speaking, a city sprang up overnight at Hadley's Bend. Such efficiency had never been seen in the South. What had been an ordinary rural section now became as if by magic a well-planned city. Here was everything that could be found in a modern town, post office, theaters, churches, a bank, fire department, as good a sewerage system as any city boasts, Y.M.C.A. buildings, a schoolhouse.

The buildings erected ranged from ordinary dwellings to a much better class of buildings, and these were allotted to employees, according to

their position at the plant. Row after row of houses, all seemingly alike, fronted on excellent streets. Running through the "village," as it was called, were main highways of concrete and of macadam. Miles upon miles of splendid roads were constructed.

The electric system of the village was perfect in every way. In fact there was nothing lacking

in the city suddenly built that would have been in one carefully planned for many years.

An idea of the immensity of the proposition may be gathered from the fact that during the construction of the plant, the railroads had orders to bring into the yards there each day from 200 to 300 car loads of material.

### **Vogue to Work At Plant**

While things were livening up at Hadley's Bend, life was taking on added interest in the city of Nashville itself. It became all the fashion to go to the powder plant to work. A question as to where a friend had gone was usually answered by the announcement that he had joined the army of workers at the plant. Wages were excellent and naturally the competition made wages in Nashville increase.

The first run of powder was made about the first of July. From that time on till the closing of the plant, immediately after the armistice, large quantities of powder were produced. The plant was never completed, only seven of the units being finished when the armistice put an end to the profitable making of powder, as well to the immediate necessity for so much of it. Two more units had been started. Each unit had an output of 100,000 pounds of powder per day. The entire output, had the plant been finished, would have been 1,000,000 pounds of smokeless powder each day.

### **Gigantic Payroll Here**

The payroll for the employees at the Bend reached gigantic proportions. At the time when work was greatest there, the pay for a month given out to the employed reached almost \$4,000,000. The average salary was between \$4 and \$5 per day.

Trains to the scene of activity were overcrowded, and it became really a serious question finally to get on the train one wanted. When the number of girls working at the plant became sufficiently large, special trains were set aside for them, thus making it comparatively easy for them to reach their work on time. A suspension bridge, to be used as a foot bridge, was constructed over the river at Edenwold, to facilitate the transporting of employees and additional trains came out there over the L. & N. tracks, relieving the congestion on the plant railway.

### **N. I. C. Enters**

The Nashville Industrial Corporation did not become actively identified with the development of Old Hickory until October 12, 1920, when announcement was made from the War Department in Washington that the plant had been sold to that company, after due consideration of all bids that had been presented. Prior to that time the company had been organized and incorporated and had been among the seven or eight active bidders for the purchase of the plant. The decision of the government to sell the plant was made in 1919, and actual negotiations were conducted practically throughout the entire year of 1920. With the announcement of the sale in October, plans were immediately made by the government to transfer the property to the local corporation, and the transfer was made on December 15th of the same year, at which time the government officials retired and the Nashville Industrial Corporation took charge of the entire plant and village, together with all maintenance and operating work.

### **Extensive Program Developed**

A very extensive program had been developed during the period of organization and was immediately put in force. A sales department was organized to carry on the work disposing of the surplus stocks of equipment, war material, and process equipment. Another department had

as its aim the development of the industrial site and the securing of factories that could logically locate in the South and use the facilities at Old Hickory. There were hundreds of applications for industrial sites, but the policy of the Nashville Industrial Corporation was to accept only such industries as had a firm foundation and could not only complete construction work, but go into operation sufficiently financed so that they would not become a burden to the community, but an asset instead. For that reason industrial development was very slow, and more than two years elapsed before the actual securing of a permanent industry.

Industries that were basically sound, industries that had the mark of permanency, and industries that could use the raw materials native to Tennessee, around Middle Tennessee in particular, were given extreme tests which applicants for industrial sites at Old Hickory had to pass. In taking over the powder plant site from the United State Government, the Nashville Industrial Corporation had entered the deal with the single idea of developing the industrial possibilities of Nashville and its vicinity.

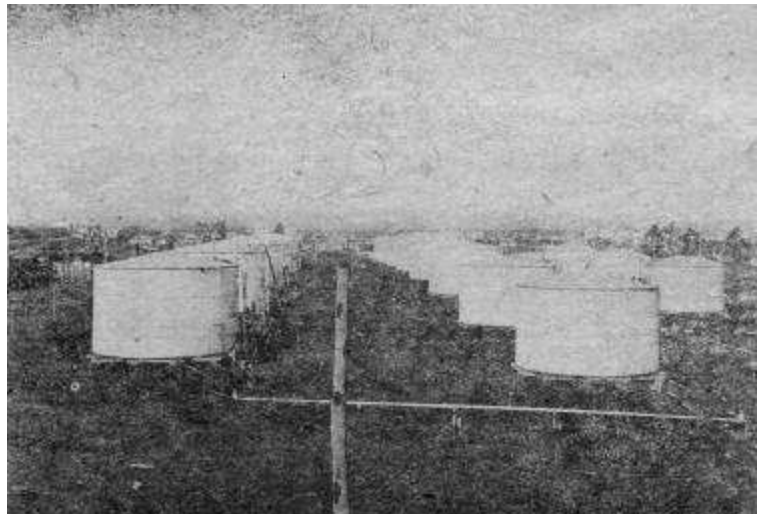
A board of directors composed, in the main, of Nashville captains of industry, took charge of a city with housing facilities for 30,000 people. Nothing that the modern municipality demanded was lacking. Uncle Sam was lavish in his expenditure and made a complete job of the largest self-contained munitions plant in the world. Paved streets, electric power and lights, water filtration plant large enough to supply the city of Boston, fire and police departments, public schools and a hospital were available. Old Hickory had been built for permanency; it had a past and its future was than obscure, but certain to be bright if even a part of the plans of its developers materialized.

### **Opportunity Here Attractive**

Old Hickory, indeed, was an industrial paradise. here was opportunity itself beckoning to the manufacturers of the United States to move in and set the wheels of their plants in motion. Naturally enough such a tempting proposition appealed to many men. Some were dreamers. Some were fly-by-night promoters. Some were in search of easy money. Some came with substantial business propositions and laid all their cards upon the table. less conscientious men that the directing heads of the Industrial Corporation might have lost their mental equilibrium with the first

rush of applications. But these men never lost sight of the fact that they were building for the future. To have permitted the establishment of industries about whose success there would be any question would have been to invite criticism which would have been dangerous to the success of the entire undertaking. So they decided to ask three questions, and they demanded straightforward answers; and where the answers were satisfactory, they conducted thorough investigations, which sometimes took months to complete, in order that no unworthy enterprise might carry the Old Hickory date line on its letterheads.

And the questions, in substance, were:



A scene showing the alcohol storage yards. This was included in the purchase made by the Nashville Industrial Corporation from the government.

1. Is your industry based upon solid ground? can it be financed properly?
2. Is your industry essential? Does it manufacture a product for which there is a demand, or for which a healthy demand can be created? Will your factory be a permanent institution?
3. Can you use the raw materials of Tennessee and the South, thus adding local interest to yours in the development of an industrial community?

Who will dispute the fairness of these questions? Who will question the sincerity and integrity of the men who answers them satisfactorily?

For the development of Old Hickory was a giant undertaking. Prudence and caution were necessary. Old Hickory was slowly battling for a position in the industrial firmament. Every step taken was being taken with the absolute knowledge that it would not have to be retraced.

Several small industries were started and used plant buildings for a short time, and it can be said that the majority of them are still operating today, but have removed their headquarters to Nashville or other points where conditions were more suitable to their needs and purposes.

During the period of 1921 and 1922 the activity at the plant consisted for the most part in the maintenance of the large village, keeping the houses and buildings intact and the roads in good repair, and the selling of machinery and equipment. Several stores and sales yards were established at various parts of the plant, from which operations were carried on. Temporary buildings were dismantled and the lumber and building materials sold locally. The immense stocks of supplies that were on hand for the maintenance of the powder were placed in stores and sold in all parts of the country. The railroad between Old Hickory and the main line of the Tennessee Central at Stone's River was operated by the company, providing an outlet for shipment of materials sold, and all other utilities, including the power line, telephone, water, and sewerage plants were operating and in good repair.

### **Small Population of Town**

During the two years of 1921 and 1922 the population of the village varied from two or three hundred to six or seven hundred persons, depending on the immediate needs of the plant and activity at that point.

Early in 1923 there were rumors of the securing of a large industry that would take over a considerable acreage at Old Hickory, including the village. These rumors were not verified until July 14th, when the announcement was made that the Du Pont Fibersilk Company, the name being changed to Du Pont Rayon Company, had purchased the village and a plant site. This announcement was greeted with enthusiasm on all sides, particularly in Nashville where the business men realized that the coming of a large industry of this kind would mean permanent development of Old Hickory and a permanent benefit to Nashville.

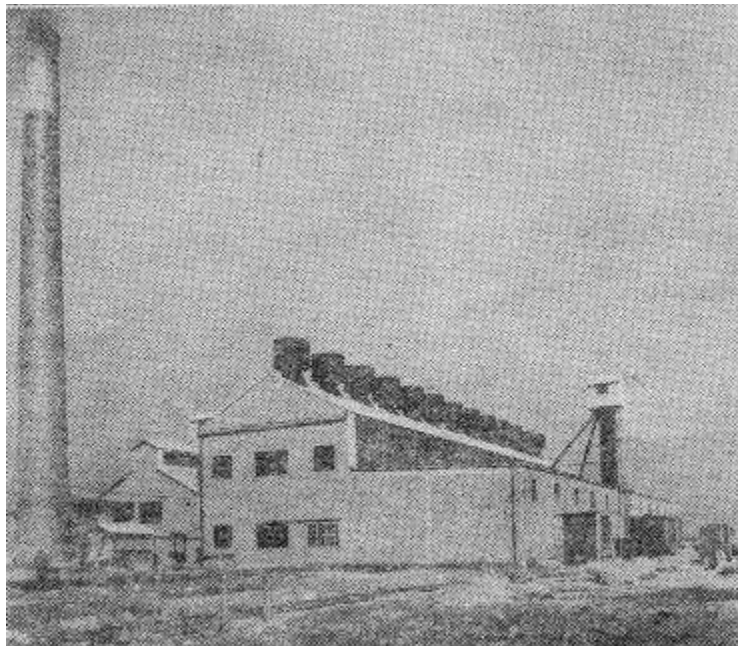
The history of the Du Pont Company from that date has been one of continued development and increased production. The plant today is more than four times larger than the proposed original plant, and the housing facilities of the village are being increased by the addition of several hundred new buildings. The Rayon Company is today one of the largest industries operating in Tennessee and the largest in Davidson County. The benefits coming from this operation alone cannot be measured in dollars and cents, but in the ever-increasing benefit that is being gained by Nashville, in business conditions, as well as increasing property value.

### **Agitation for New Bridge**

It was with the coming of the Du Pont Company that agitation for a new bridge was actively begun. prior to that time it had been known that the present one-way suspension bridge was inadequate for traffic that would serve even in a small industrial center, and there had always

been tentative plans for a new bridge, to relieve the situation. The bridge became actually necessary for the success of the Rayon Plant, and the assurance of the bridge by county officials was one of the conditions involved in the securing of the rayon Plant for Old Hickory.

Following the establishment of the Rayon Plant and the beginning of actual construction work, there was a great deal of activity in real estate development at Old Hickory, and tracts adjoining the Du Pont plant and village on both sides were sold, with the result that two subdivisions known as Dupontonia and Rayon City have been established and are becoming centers for Old Hickory. The first sub-division sold was that known as Dupontonia, which was taken over by the firm of Dabbs and Elliott of Birmingham, Ala. The growth there has been very rapid, and a large business section has been erected, together with a large number of homes. The only public hotel in the Old Hickory section has recently been built and opened in Dupontonia. The newer sub-division is Rayon City, and is quite active at the present time, with a large number of homes completed and others being erected. This sub-division is located on the new bridge approach and has been laid out with the idea of taking care of both business and residential development.



The Old Hickory Chemical Company plant furnishes carbon bi-sulphide sufficient to supply the Dupont Rayon Company, which is just around the corner. It is owned equally by the Stauffer Chemical Company and the Dupont Rayon Company.

#### **Sale to Stauffer Chemical Co.**

Following the securing of the Du Pont plant and the sale of the acreage and the village there was little more activity in the industrial line until September, 1926 when negotiations were opened with the Stauffer Chemical Company of San Francisco, Cal., for considerable acreage and plant buildings. These negotiations were consummated in May, 1927, when 500 acres of land adjoining the Du Pont Rayon property were sold to the Stauffer Chemical Company. The first activity on the part of this company was to form a subsidiary known as the Old Hickory Chemical Company, and allied with the Dupont interests. This company has just been completed and is operating a carbon bi-sulphide plant which supplies that

chemical to the Dupont Rayon plant, as well as other similar operations in the southern territory. This is the first of the Stauffer developments and other units and plants are planned for in the future. The Old Hickory Chemical Company occupies only a small acreage of the total purchased by the Stauffer concern, and it is understood there will be several other subsidiary companies organized and placed in operation within the next few years.

The Stauffer Chemical Company is one of the oldest chemical manufacturing companies in the United States and operates efficiently on the Pacific coast, as well as at Houston, Texas, Baton Rouge, La. and several points in the eastern states, manufacturing a varied line of acids and chemicals and producing sulphur, borax and other materials.

In the securing of two such companies as the Dupont Rayon Company and the Stauffer

Chemical Company, the Nashville Industrial Corporation has brought to Tennessee, and more particularly to Nashville, concerns that are of national importance, and that will remain permanently in this territory, and which will not only develop with the South, but will assist materially in that development. The industrial program of the Nashville Industrial Corporation continues along the same lines as originally planned, and only good substantial industries are being given consideration. There is still a very large acreage available, containing ideal manufacturing sites that will no doubt be disposed of during the next few years.

### **Outstanding Events in History**

Some of the outstanding points in the history of the Nashville Industrial Corporation are: The original announcement in 1918 of the acceptance of its offer by the government; the taking over of the plant in December of the same year; the opening of the sales division and stores in January, 1921; the announcement of the Dupont sale in 1923; the burning of a large number of buildings reserved by the government, together with 55,000 pounds of smokeless powder, on August 10, 1924; the voting of bonds for the building of the new bridge in 1926; and the announcement of the Stauffer Chemical Company sale in 1927. Each of these events was of special interest locally, and with the exception of the fire, of course, marked further progress of the carrying out of the original purpose of developing Old Hickory. The fire was spectacular and one of the largest occurring in the United States in recent years. The powder was owned by the government, stored in buildings reserved for that purpose, and had no permanent ill effect on any of the plans or operations of the company.

In 1923 the branch line railroad from Old Hickory to Stones River was sold to the Tennessee Central Railway and has since been operated as a part of that system. Daily freight service is maintained and spur tracts serve all the industrial developments and areas. Nashville terminal freight rates are given Old Hickory, and its industries enjoy the same railroad service given to Nashville industrial plants.

In the year just closed there has been additional activity in real estate in small parcels in tracts adjoining Rayon City and Dupontonia, as well as adjacent to the Stauffer tract. These, for the most part, have been made to individuals for the establishment of business locations and home sites.



The old retail store operated by the Nashville Industrial Corporation on the location where the Old Hickory Coal and Ice plant now stands.

### **Now One of the Largest Dealers**

As the work of disposing of the equipment at Old Hickory progressed, Nashville Industrial Corporation became known as one of the largest dealers in used equipment in the United States, and Old Hickory machinery was shipped to all parts of the country. As some of the lines became exhausted several other plants have been acquired. The first of these was the Kingsport Dye and Chemical Company plant at Kingsport, Tenn., in 1925. later the company bought and dismantled the eneha Refining Company oil refinery at Campton, Ky., the Davies County Distillery at Owensboro, Ky., the Williams Barium Reduction Company plant at Bristol, Va., and the Murphy Furnace Company's blast furnace at Rome, Ga. The last named plant was one of the oldest blast furnaces in the South and was built prior to the Civil War, making iron used in war-time cannons, and later in 1918 it again furnished iron for war purposes. The latest purchase was the Clinchfield Carbocoal Plant at Clinchfield, Va., which is now being dismantled. This was a very extensive plant and was also a government war-time job. The company maintains an organization at Clinchfield, Va., a sales office at Bristol, Va., and storage yards for equipment at Bristol, Va. and Kingsport, Tenn.