

## GLASS WORKS

*Before the Civil War the United States had been mostly agricultural. After the Civil War industry spread rapidly, railroads were extended all the way to the Pacific coast, and the factory whistle became a familiar sound all over the land. New Albany shared in this industrial growth and shipped its manufactured products to all parts of the country. The city's industrial growth started with the glass works . . .*

In August 1854, John B. Ford moved from Greenville to New Albany. He had sold his flour mill in the little Floyd County town to open an iron foundry and rolling mill in the larger city. But it is not for his iron foundry that Ford is remembered today, or for the fleet of steamboats he later owned.

He is remembered as the first successful manufacturer of plate glass in the United States and his name is preserved in the title of one of America's best known glass manufacturing companies – Libbey-Owens-Ford.

Ford first tried glass manufacturing in 1865, the year the Civil War ended. He built a small plant on the New Albany waterfront between E. Ninth and Tenth Streets. At that time glass-blowing was an old industry in the United States, but American manufacturers had not been able to master the art of rolling heavy plate glass for large windows. All plate glass was imported from Europe at a high price.

Using his knowledge gained in iron rolling, Ford was confident he could make plate glass and sell it cheaper than the European product. Other Americans had tried it and failed. And Ford failed at first. But he tried again in

1867 with a larger plant and more experienced workmen. This time he was successful and the first plate glass successfully rolled in the United States was installed in the window of a tailor shop at 318 Pearl Street.

Even though he had mastered the art of making plate glass, Ford ran into financial trouble. Shortly after he found the formula for rolling the glass, another New Albany businessman, Washington C. DePauw, built a larger glass plant next to Ford's. In 1873 Ford has to close his plant and leave New Albany almost penniless to start over again. He remained in the glass business and eventually made a fortune.

Meanwhile, DePauw's plant, the Star Glass Works, was prospering and by 1875 was one of the largest glass plants in the United States. It made window glass and bottles as well as the heavy plate glass. Skilled workmen were brought from England and Belgium, and from the eastern United States, to carry on the intricate glass blowing with long-stemmed iron blow-pipes. Sand is the most important ingredient in glass and beds of the proper kind of sand were found at Borden and in the Ohio River. The products of the glass works were shipped to all parts of the United States by river and by rail. Coal for the plant was brought down the river by barge from Pittsburgh. Profits from the glass works helped finance other New Albany industries – an iron works, a cotton and woolen mill, a hosiery mill, tanneries, and other factories. In the space of a few years New Albany changed from a boat-building city to an industrial center.

With all of the new factories New Albany needed more railroads. At the close of the Civil War a railroad had been built to connect the city with Jeffersonville and the railroad from there to Indianapolis. New Albany businessmen organized the Air Line Railroad to build across southern Indiana and Illinois, to St. Louis, a line operated today by the Southern Railway.

One of the most solid achievements was the building of the K & I Bridge to Louisville. The bridge connected New Albany railroads directly with those serving the whole South and when the bridge was opened the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad built a line to New Albany so that it could use the bridge. The bridge enabled New Albany to maintain its industrial standing even after the glass works was forced to close in 1893 after natural gas was discovered in central Indiana. With gas, the glass could be produced cheaper than with coal. The bridge was an important factor in making New Albany a leading plywood center.

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