



BICENTENNIAL BULLETIN No. 38 ***—Sheffield Celebrates 200th Birthday***

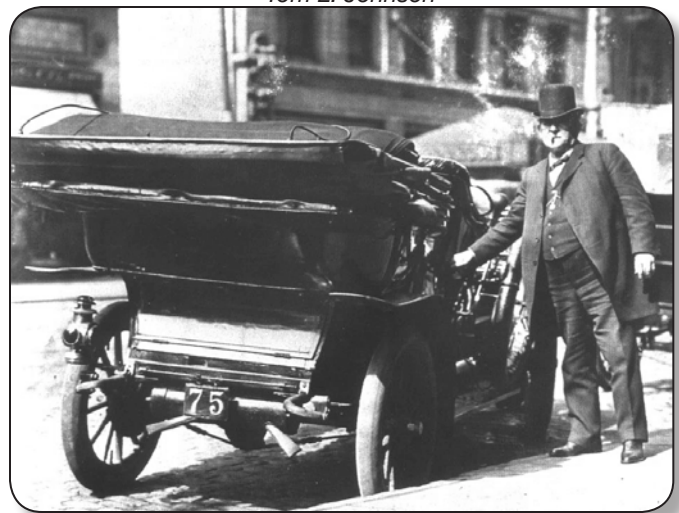
The Sheffield Bicentennial Commission will issue a *Bicentennial Bulletin* each Monday throughout 2015 that illustrates the rich heritage of our communities. **View them at — www.sheffieldbicentennial.org or sheffieldvillage.com**

JOHNSON STEEL COMPANY

In Lorain County, Tom Johnson is remembered as the man who brought the steel mills to the Black River valley, built a streetcar line between Lorain and Elyria, and created the community of South Lorain out of land annexed from Sheffield Township. He did all of these things in the span of two years, between 1894 and 1896.

Tom L. Johnson

Thomas Loftin Johnson was born in Blue Springs, Kentucky on July 18, 1854. Tom's father was a Colonel in the Confederate Army and at the end of the Civil War was bankrupt and living in Staunton, Virginia. As a boy of eleven, Tom's entrepreneurial flare helped his family survive. He convinced the Staunton stationmaster to grant him a monopoly to sell newspapers. The first month he made a profit of \$85, which was very good money for the 1860s. Within a year, the money proved to be enough for his family to move to back to Kentucky and gave Tom his first sweet taste of business success.



Tom attended school in Louisville, but at the age of 15 he left school to take a clerk position with a local rolling mill. Seeing an even better opportunity, in 1869 he accepted an "office boy" position with the Louisville Street Railway Company, owned by the du Pont family, and eventually became the firm's superintendent. While here, he invented numerous devices for street railways, including a see-through glass fare box, which earned him \$30,000. The dropping coins fell through a sequence of shelves before falling on a plate. The trolley driver could thus count the coins and determine if the correct amount had been inserted without pausing to collect the fare. Using the award from this patent, he left the du Pont organization in 1876 and purchased his own railway line in Indianapolis, Indiana. In the next several years he expanded his holdings in other street railway firms in St. Louis, Detroit, New York, and Cleveland.

In the late 1880s Johnson began to diversify his holdings by purchasing an iron and steel company in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Considerable effort was expended in modernizing the mill to make rails for his street railways. In May 1889 the renovations to the new mill were nearly complete and it was ready for occupancy when the Johnstown flood hit on the May 31st and in an hour wrought havoc on the city.

After his Johnstown experience, Tom Johnson began a search for a location to build a new steel rail mill. He was looking for site on Lake Erie that would provide access for lake shipping of iron ore, coal, and limestone, and at the same time, place his rail mill closer to the growing markets in northern Ohio. The deep estuarine waters at the mouth of the Black River proved idea for his plan.

In 1894 Tom Johnson's company acquired 4,000 acres of land along the Black River in Sheffield Township, about two miles downstream from Garfield Bridge, to construct a steelmaking plant. In June of that year hundreds of men began to clear the woods. In nine months, by April 1895, they transformed the area into a steel plant of immense proportions.

Construction of the steel mill's Pearl Avenue gate in July 1894



Johnson Steel Company's office building erected in 1895, now serves as the headquarters for Republic Steel Corporation's Lorain mills. This building is on the National Register of Historic Places

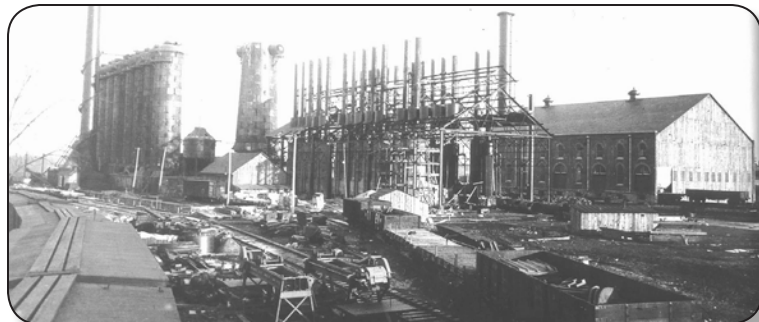


As a stipulation for the construction of the steel mill, Lorain was to annex Sheffield Township Lots 77-100 (property acquired by Johnson & Company for a steel plant) and Lots 46-50 & 53-57 (land north of the Black River and west of Root Road). The added population allowed Lorain to be incorporated as a city. The Johnson Steel Company then bought 4,400 lots in the annexed portion of Sheffield Township through its Sheffield Land and Improvement Company. This new section of the city, which came to be known as South Lorain, was laid out in orderly, rectangular city blocks, unlike the "hodge-podge growth" that characterized the northern part of the old town.

To transport steelworkers from Elyria to the mill, Tom Johnson constructed the Yellow Line streetcar service via Sheffield Township. The line began operation on September 15, 1894 with a fare of 5¢, including a transfer to the Short Line along the lake in Lorain. The Johnson Steel Company made its first "blow" of the steel from the Bessemer furnace on April 1, 1895. The mill employed 1,200 men and Arthur Moxham, Johnson's associate from Johnstown, was chosen as the first operating head of the company. In 1895, the Sheffield Land and Improvement Company, a subsidiary of the Johnson Steel Company, donated Oakwood Park in South Lorain to the city.

In 1898, Tom Johnson sold his plant on the Black River to the Federal Steel Co. and it operated as a subsidiary under the name Lorain Steel Co. (later to become U.S. Steel's National Tube Company). Under this ownership the plant expanded rapidly to become a fully integrated steel mill with the addition of two blast furnaces and construction of a 2,490-foot dock along the Black River. McMyler hoists were installed to transfer the iron ore from lake freighters to the mills. Coal, coke, and limestone were brought to the plant by rail and interchanged via the Lake Terminal Railroad, with finished products shipped out in the same manner.

Construction of a blast furnace at the Federal Steel Company in 1898



McMyler hoist ore unloader at the steel mill dock on the Black River (circa 1900)

