



On the Road

by Darrell Darst

I hope everyone will find the National Club's new handout helpful that my wife and I just finished. It has a list of the state clubs on one side and a brief summary of what we represent and intend to accomplish on the front side.

I am writing this while traveling through the Rocky Mountains on a train with my family. It is so beautiful with the snow in January. We wanted the kids to see what it was like to travel on the train and going through the mountains was an added pleasure. I had forgotten the beauty of this train trip. You go through 30 tunnels the first two hours out of Denver; one tunnel being 6.2 miles long. Everyone should have the experience of traveling this at some time in their life. Once in awhile you will see an old IH tractor in the field but getting to that spot would be hard to figure out in a car. My family makes fun of me for always packing my bag full of IH books to read and research while on a trip. So, even though I'm in Colorado, I'm never far away from my passion for International Harvester.

About three years ago my wife said she wanted to go to New Or-

leans to a fishing show for our business. Well, along the way we stopped in Memphis to see what was left of the plant. At a local flea market we found a lady that had worked in the Memphis Plant, and she directed us to the factory.

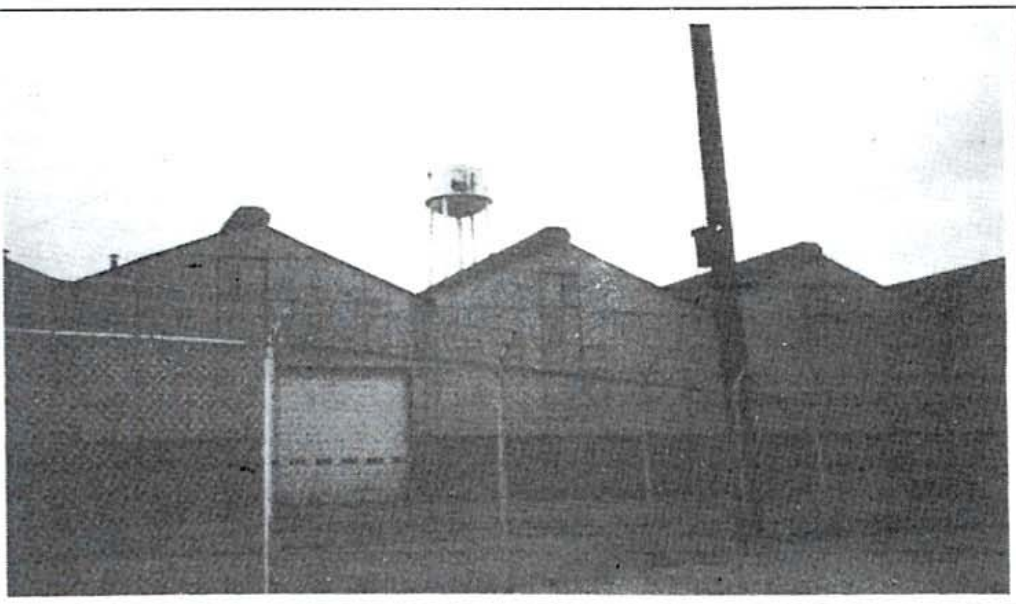
This lady also told me a little story about an incident that I will pass on to you. She worked with cotton picker spindles. These were very expensive to produce. After they are forged in the foundry, they are put in a tumbler to knock off the rough edges. To make a long story short, the man operating the tumbler fell asleep and let the machine run long enough that it completely ate a whole load of spindles. Needless to say this man received a lot of trouble out of this incident.

Another employee of the plant told me some interesting information. He said they had a special section of the factory where blind people worked. He also told me the early John Deere spindles for cotton pickers were made at the Memphis Plant. These were not designed the same as the IH spindles, making them not pick cotton as well. Ford balers were made at this plant; IH balers that were painted

Ford blue. There were special tractors made at Rock Island that were sent to Memphis to be put on cotton pickers. Every once in a while they would get behind and the special cotton picker equipment was added on at the Memphis Plant. That is why some codes are not on the serial number plate of the cotton picker tractors. I have an M with the bull gears and the high single wheel on a 120 high drum picker. I was curious as to why it didn't say anything on the tag; this explains it!

The new plant of 1947 sits on the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River in the northwest part of Memphis. There was a plant previous to this down on the river, but I haven't much information on it yet. I did find out that it had been flooded a few times. The new plant was mainly made for building cotton pickers, because this was definitely cotton country. This was a good idea having the plant right where the action took place. Now we ship hogs here in Missouri to Detroit to be processed and then ship back the finished product to our stores to sell. Somehow this doesn't make any sense to me.

The plant was still standing when we were there, including the sign out front. All that was missing were the IH signs and the equipment being built. The plant wasn't being used for anything except one small building in the back by the sheriff's department. It still had the tan color buildings and the office buildings in the front were just like the other plants. The IH was even taken off the water tower and everywhere else it might have been. If you look hard enough you could see traces where the IH had been. I do not understand why they go to so much trouble to take the IH off of everything when the building had been vacant since the early 80's. International Harvester closed this plant themselves when they were hurting for money in the early 80's. The cotton picker assembly line was moved to the



Closed in the early 80's, the Memphis Plant stands vacant. From this side you can still barely make out the "IH" on the water tower above the plant.

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combine plant in Moline, Illinois. I'm sure the plant was needing a lot of work and IH did not have the dollars to renovate. The old foundry was still standing also, but it was closed before the rest of the plant. I'm sure a lot of you have some IH trinkets from that old building.

The union hall was still across from the plant and a little place called the Harvester Inn. I just knew that inside would be someone who had worked at the plant or at least had some information. It was kind of a rough looking little bar and my wife and kids didn't want me to go in the place. Well, I went in anyway and after about 30 minutes they were getting ready to call the police when I came out. They were positive I had been shot or beat up. But, in my younger days this place was far better than some I had seen; and, yes, I did run in to a few people that had worked at the plant and some of them I think hadn't left since the plant had closed!!

The Memphis Plant was built in 1946 or 1947. There were 225 acres with 31 acres under roof. They started building the cotton pickers and hay balers, ; later, they built rakes, blades, harrows, mower conditioners, sickle bars, and bale throwers. It was raw material to manufacturing that had over 3000 people employed. In 1968, they started building riding lawn mowers

all subsidiaries of the International Harvester Corporation. Most spring and summer months were spent manufacturing cotton pickers while fall and winter were spent on balers on the 800 foot assembly line.

After writing the last issue's article, I found a book with some more information on the New Orleans Twine Mill. It was under construction in 1951 and the Chicago Plant was still operating. So, Chicago was probably closed shortly after New Orleans was opened since it the was the oldest. New Orleans was the world's largest, and had 225,000 square feet of floor space. There was also a twin mill in Hamilton, Ontario and three over seas in France, Germany and Sweden. They were

all subsidiaries of the International Harvester Corporation.

We are almost to our destination on the train, so I better close my story. It really has been fun writing about this while riding the train. Marcia, my oldest daughter, is already working over my spelling and sentence structure on the first page, so it is time to quit. Next time we will go to Evansville, Indian. That is the home of the International Harvester refrigeration plant and the IH M1 Garand rifle.



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Memphis Plant, as seen from in front of the office building.