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Cerealine Manufacturing Company Mill A
Columbus
Bartholomew County
Indiana

Photographs and
Written and Historical data
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Cerealine Manufacturing Company Mill A

Location: Between Jackson and Brown Streets,
opposite Seventh St.
UTM: 16.592960.4339900
Quad: Columbus

Present Owner:

Significance: In the last decades of the
19th century, the Cerealine
Manufacturing Company produced
a popular cold breakfast
cereal made from corn.

Historians: Robert Rosenberg and Donald
Sackheim

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In 1880 Thomas Gaff and several of his associates built a corn and hominy mill on Jackson Street in Columbus, Indiana. Following a fortuitous experiment performed by a workman in the factory, a rolled corn product was produced, called "Cerealine." Gaff committed the mill to its manufacture, and soon the product became one of America's leading cold breakfast cereals.

Thomas Gaff was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on 8 July 1808 and moved with his family to Springfield, New Jersey at the age of 3. In 1824, at the age of 16, he entered his father's paper-making shop and later learned the distiller's trade from his uncle. With the help of his brother James, Thomas established himself as a distiller in Philadelphia, but by 1843 the high price of grain forced the two brothers to leave Philadelphia for Indiana, where the price of corn was considerably cheaper.¹

Shortly after the Gaff brothers moved to Columbia, Indiana and bought a corn mill on 5th and Franklin Streets they "took in" Joseph Gent, a millwright. Gent became a partner after he adapted the grist mill to the manufacture of hominy.²

According to one account, James Vannoy, a workman in the mill, experimented with the separation of the rollers used to produce hominy grits. After placing the rollers close together, the ground hominy emerged as a long white flaky sheet. Gent considered firing Vannoy on the spot, but later he thought better of it and applied for patent rights on the new corn product.³

In 1880 the Gaff brothers built another mill at Jackson, near 7th and Washington Streets. The new mill was called mill "A" while the old mill was called mill "B". The company prospered as Cerealine was sold in bulk to brewers and in the early 1880's the company incorporated as the Cerealine Manufacturing Company. In 1884, the Cerealine Company began packaging and distributing Cerealine as a cold breakfast food and soon it became second only to rolled oats as a favorite cold breakfast cereal.

In 1886 mill "B" was destroyed by fire. Gent built another mill at 18th and White River in Indianapolis sometime in the four years following the fire so that production capacity probably did not diminish for very long. The Columbus mill "A" continued its operation and by 1886 it was housing 200-300 workers, and plant and machinery were estimated to be worth \$2 million. Following the failure of the Indianapolis plant in 1891, the Company was reorganized as the American Hominy Company. It is likely that the Columbus mill was closed sometime following the reorganization, but the move toward austerity did not greatly improve the company's fortunes, and it was liquidated shortly afterward.⁴

Cerealine Manufacturing Company--The Building

The four story brick building, 40' x 93'6", is a simple structure. Arched openings and a brick corbelling are the only decorative elements. The mansard roof is supported by a modified king post truss. An old photograph and a rendering show a sizeable wing and a smaller addition on the existing structure, but no trace of them remains. A railroad spur pictured in the rendering and photograph as passing under an eave of the building was probably the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Cerealine Manufacturing Company

Notes

- 1 A Bibliographical History of Eminent and Self-Made Men, p. 25.
- 2 Ibid., p. 15.
The Republic (Columbus) 28 May 1971, section F, p. 1.
- 3 Marsh, pl 44-5.
- 4 History of Bartholomew County, Indiana, p. 44-5.
The Republic (Columbus) 28 May 1971, section F, p. 1.

Bibliography

A Biographical History of Eminent and Self-Made Men of the State of Indiana. Cincinnati: Western Biographical Publishing Company, 1880, Vol. 1.

Citizens Historical Association--Bartholomew County. "Benjamin Thomas". Paper in Indiana State Library.

Indianapolis News. 7 November 1939, part 1, p. 12.

History of Bartholomew County, Indiana. Chicago: Brant and Fuller, 1888.

Marsh, William E. I Discover Columbus. Oklahoma City: Semco Color Press, 1956.

The Republic (Columbus). 28 May 1971, section F, p. 1.