

History of 877 West Old Lincoln Way

(Shared by Roger H Cook, son of Harold Cook)

This building was originally built in the mid-twenties as part of a two building complex for lease by the International Harvester Company as one of their company stores throughout the country. These company stores were the ones that handled both farm equipment and truck sales and service. In 1943 International Harvester decided to divest themselves of these company stores because of the lack of equipment available for retail customers due to IH's productive capacity being diverted to military production to win World War II. Harold Cook was at that time an employee of the International Harvester Truck division in Cleveland, Ohio. Employees of IH were given the first opportunity to purchase these company stores. My dad was encouraged to purchase this store by eventual partners C.W. Sommer and Don Tanner of Lodi, Ohio. This was the start of the Buckeye Truck and Implement Company in 1943.

The main building you see today originally was utilized in quarters with the southeast and northeast quarters being used as a showroom, parts department and sales and administrative offices. The southwest quarter was the truck shop and the northwest quarter was utilized for farm equipment repair. The original building was 100' X 120'. There existed a second building to the west which was originally designed as a warehouse and assembly area for knocked down farm equipment. As the business expanded this building became the farm equipment repair shop and continued as an assembly area for new farm equipment. This building eventually became a body shop following the exit of the farm equipment business in 1965. This building was totally destroyed in a major fire in the mid-nineteen eighties.

In 1960, it was decided to add the American Motors franchise to the business. With this addition, the company name was changed to Harold Cook, Inc. This cramped the space even more. It was also felt that the farmer no longer felt he was being catered to, so in 1965 the farm equipment business was spun-off to Weygandt, Inc on route 250. Weygandt, Inc was made up of primary investor Art Crocker, a local farmer, Al Weygandt, the current farm salesman, and a small investment retained by my father, Harold

Cook . Although my father came up in the ranks of International Harvester's truck division, he grew to love the agricultural business and the people who made up that community.

In 1962 I joined the business as the representative for truck sales. In 1969 the property was involved in the major flood involving the entire Wooster area. With 14" of rain in a 24 hour period the Wayne County area was devastated. This property had from three to nine feet of water covering it. The following year Harold Cook died of a massive heart attack, which I relate directly to the stress of the prior year's flood. At this time I became president and general manager of the company.

In 1971 we entered an expansion due to increasing size of the trucks and trailers we were servicing. We made an addition of a 90' X 100' on the north side of the building with five drive-through bays. This vacated the southwest quarter of the main building which in the early 1980's allowed for the conversion of this area into a showroom, accounting office and sales and administrative offices. This also allowed the expansion of the parts department to utilize the old showroom area for visual parts display. At this time the exterior was updated.

In 1989 I decided to give up the American Motors franchise, which I never felt comfortable with. One year later I entered negotiations with Ken Heisler, who had four IH truck dealerships in Mansfield, Norwalk, Sandusky and Willard. I sold the assets of the business to Heisler, but kept ownership of the building. This led to a period of leases with various businesses. Heisler sold out to Truck Sales and Service, Inc. the IH dealer in Midvale, Ohio. We continued our lease with Truck Sales and Service, Inc. Truck Sales eventually closed their Wooster location. The next lessee was Leppo Rents. The final lessee was PSC Metals-Garn LLC.

The final involvement of the Cook's ended with the sale of the property to Friends of Wayne County Fair. I am excited for the change in ownership because of the vision of this group to turn the building into a historical location for the agricultural history of Wayne County.

Roger H. Cook
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