

Sparta Economy Engine News

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It's not very often that there is information from a former employee available. Back in 1976 Ray Miller of Fort Erie, Ontario, wrote to the Sparta Township Library asking for information about the Holm Machine Manufacturing Company. They referred him to Phil Bradstrum who was still living at the time. Below is the content of Mr. Bradstrum's reply:

E. Phil Bradstrum
21 Centennial Avenue
Sparta, Michigan 49345

February 20, 1976

Ray Miller & Sons
2815 Niagara Blvd.
Fort Erie, Ontario, Canada

Dear Mr. Ray Miller,

Your letter to the Sparta Library turned over to me for a reply about the Holm's Mfg. Co. This was a new company formed by Sears, Roebuck and Company and Holm's. Money furnished by Sears and know how by Holm's. At this time, Holm's was associated with the Northwest Engineering Company, makers of marine engines and concrete machinery at Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Coming to Sparta, Michigan, a clause in the deal was that Sparta was to furnish money to build the plant. Having no money for such a purpose, they bonded the village for \$20,000 to build a park, as it was illegal to bond for

manufacturing plants in the state of Michigan at that time, so a loophole was found. We came to Sparta November 17, 1908. About 1912, Sears bought out Holm's and they operated the company until 1914 when they sold 51% of the stock to Hercules Buggy Company of Evansville, Indiana. They moved the company that same year. The Economy Engine was the only brand name in manufacturing in Sparta. I do not have information or names of the officers of the company, likewise no literature, books or parts lists on the engine.

This is all the information I can recollect and trust it answers your interest in this matter.

Yours truly,
E. Phil Bradstrum

Newspapers of that time relate a slightly different account of the bond issue and Sears' involvement. Mr. Bradstrum passed away on January 27, 1977.

The Holm Company started building Economy engines about mid-1909 beginning with the A model. Details of the various models built at Sparta will follow in later articles. Even though the Holm Company continued to grow and build more engines for Sears, there was a nagging problem at Sparta.

Electricity for the village was supplied by steam driven generators at the Sparta Milling Company. As time went on, the demand for electricity grew to the point that there wasn't enough to supply the homes and businesses at Sparta. The Holm Company added its own generators and planned to sell surplus power to the milling company. To make a long story short, things did not work out. The headline on September 30, 1910 newspaper read "Town in

Darkness." The Sparta Milling Company couldn't meet the electricity demands of the village. How it was all resolved is unknown.

By the spring of 1912, William Tippet, president of the Holm Company, contacted William McCurdy of the Hercules Buggy Company at Evansville, Indiana, and asked that McCurdy build a factory there to manufacture engines for Sears. McCurdy had been supplying buggies for Sears since 1903. November 8, 1912, the Hercules Gas Engine Company was formed and the process of building a new factory was begun. The rest is history. The Evansville Business Association put up \$10,000 to haul all the assets of the Holm Company to Evansville. Everything was moved, including employees who wished to move. A severe housing shortage was created in the area just east of the Hercules factory. Production of the Sparta type Economy engines was continued at Evansville until the entire supply of Sparta parts was used up. The first Hercules type Economy engines were produced in Evansville in mid-January 1914.

The lowest Sparta Economy serial number currently known is 526, and the highest is 40156. Serial numbers of the 316 currently known are pretty well scattered through this range except for a gap between 6,000 and 10,000. The known Waterloo Economy engine serial numbers all fall in that gap. The serial number gap was left so that when customers ordered parts for engines and gave their serial number, the supplier would know what kind of engine it was.

There will be more on the Waterloo Economy engines later. ○