

Piedmont Wagon Company ^[1]

Piedmont Wagon Company



Exterior, Piedmont Wagon Company, Hickory, NC, Catawba County, January 1972. Image courtesy of State Archives of North Carolina, call

by Wiley J. Williams, 2006#: N_72_1_254.

^[2]

The Piedmont Wagon Company ^[3] was founded in 1878 outside of Hickory by George G. Bonniwell ^[4], a mechanical engineer, architect, and builder, and A. L. (Andy) Ramseur, operator of a gristmill, an iron forge, and a sawmill. They formed a partnership and began small-scale construction of wagons, becoming one of the area's first industrial enterprises. Two years later the firm moved to the western part of Hickory for access to a railroad and to obtain additional capital. By 1890 it had an investment of more than \$100,000 in land, machinery, and raw materials, and demand for its wagons was so great that the company inaugurated a night shift (probably Hickory's first).

Under the direction of G. Harvey Geitner, plant superintendent from 1887 to 1918, Piedmont's primary market was extended throughout the southern states from Virginia to Texas and eventually to Great Britain. By World War I ^[5] the company received a contract for all-metal carts for the French army. It was said that Piedmont rivaled the work of leading wagon companies in St. Louis, the center for the industry.

Following a series of ownership changes, Piedmont Wagon Company became involved in a tax controversy and subsequent lawsuit stemming from its failure to pay income taxes from 1917 to 1919. The firm was sold to Henry Leonard in the 1940s, the era that production ground to a halt. The tax problems did not end, and a series of tax liens were placed on the property beginning in 1948. The Hickory Development Corporation bought it, intending new industrial and business sites. In August 1960 the site, which a local paper called a "rat-infested jungle," was bulldozed. Overshadowed perhaps by the tax problems was the fact that Piedmont Wagon Company was a victim of its owners' apparent failure to foresee the automobile's impact on horse-drawn wagons and carriages.

References:

Gary R. Freeze, *The Catawbans: Crafters of a North Carolina County, 1747-1900*(1995).

Lucille M. Fulbright, ed., *Heritage of Catawba County*(1986).

Additional Resources:

Piedmont Wagon Company, NC Historical Marker: <http://ncmarkers.com/Markers.aspx?sp=search&k=Markers&sv=O-80>

^[3]

Act to incorporate the Piedmont Wagon Company, North Carolina General Assembly, NC Department of Cultural Resources Digital Collections: <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/laws-and-resolutions-of-the-state-of-north-carolina-passed-by-the-general-assembly-at-its-session-1891/3889599?item=3922705> ^[6]

Image Credit:

Exterior, Piedmont Wagon Company, Hickory, NC, Catawba County, January 1972. Image courtesy of State Archives of North Carolina ^[2], call #: N_72_1_254.

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Transportation ^[11]

Authors:

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Origin - location:

Catawba County ^[13]

From:

Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.^[14]

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