

Moving Parts in the Tri-Cities

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When looking at what factors create a thriving city, there is one thing that is on every list: good jobs. When the city's citizens are out of work, that city is destined to fail and find the population leaving for greener pastures. This is the situation the Tri-Cities found themselves in during the end of the lumbering era. When lumbering was coming to an end in the 1890s due to a dwindling number of profitable trees, the Tri-Cities had a population of roughly 7,000 people. Nearly every job was tied to lumbering in some way or another. In order for the Tri-Cities to survive, new industries needed to be brought in.

Although Eagle-Ottawa Leather Company in Grand Haven and Johnston Boiler Works in Ferrysburg were thriving during this time period, they would not be able to make up for the loss of jobs from the lumbering industry. A few local businessmen recognized this as a serious problem and began working on a plan to attract new businesses to the Tri-Cities area. These businessmen, led by George "Cap" McBride and Dudley "Dud" Watson, established what would later become the Board of Trade and set to work. Their first target was the Story and Clark Piano Company. McBride had heard rumors of the piano manufacturer wanting to build a factory in Holland. After meeting with Story and Clark at their headquarters in Chicago in 1899, the Board of Trade convinced Story and Clark to build their factory in Grand Haven. The work of these men certainly paid off as Story and Clark would continue making pianos in Grand Haven until 1982.

Story and Clark was the first big company the Board of Trade reeled in. The Board of Trade brought in the Bastian Blessing Company in 1910. By the 1930s Bastian Blessing had moved its entire business to a 75,000 square-foot plant in Grand Haven where it manufactured complete soda fountains for diners, pharmacies and restaurants. While in Grand Haven, Bastian Blessing became the largest manufacturer of food service equipment in the world. At its peak, Bastian Blessing's plant was 205,000 square-feet and employed more than 230 men and women from the Tri-Cities area before closing in 1989.

These are just two examples of how the manufacturing businesses helped Grand Haven grow after the end of the lumbering era. Today, there are still manufacturers here in the Tri-Cities, such as Dake, Grand Haven Stamped Products, Automatic Spring Products Corporation, and others who continue to provide good jobs for our community. To celebrate the manufacturing heritage of our community, the Tri-Cities Historical Museum is featuring an all new exhibit for the summer titled, *Moving Parts: Manufacturing in the Tri-Cities*. This new exhibit showcases a variety of products ranging from pianos to ice boxes to car shifters. All the products in *Moving Parts* were made right here in the Tri-Cities. Come on by to learn more about the great manufacturing history of our area!