



1917

Ford's River Rouge Plant Opens

In 1915, Henry Ford purchased marshland in Dearborn, Michigan near the Rouge River for the site of the new Rouge plant. Architect Albert Kahn agreed to design the Rouge plant and the Eagle Boat Factory on the project site.

Throughout the ten years of planning and construction, Henry Ford produced Eagle Boats for the United States Navy. Within the "B" Building Ford produced tractor and auto parts and by 1919, auto bodies. On February 23, 1920 the first Fordson tractor rolled off the line officially opening Ford River Rouge Plant to auto production. The River Rouge was used to ferry supplies and parts to and from the plant and to neighboring factories. By 1927, the new Model A was put into production and prototypes were rolling off the line.

Henry Ford found himself to be completely independent in the creation of an automobile by controlling every process. Production and profit grew exponentially as a result of the plants efficiency.

¹ Aerial View of Ford Rouge Plant

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² Rouge Plant Administration Building

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³ Trade School

Courtesy of the National Automotive History Collection, Detroit Public Library

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Credits:

Biggs, Lindy. *The Rational Factory: Architecture, Technology, and Work in America's age of mass production*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996. Print.

Cabadas, Joseph P. *River Rouge: Ford's Industrial Colossus*. St. Paul: Motorbooks International, 2004. Print.

Keywords/Topics:

Work/Jobs

Questions:

1. Why did the Rouge Plant help Ford grow his business?
2. Why was the Rouge Plant innovative?
3. Would Ford's idea behind the Rouge Plant be successful today?

Links to Internet Websites:

<http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/detroit/d38.htm>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ford_River_Rouge_Complex

<http://www.hfmgv.org/exhibits/hf/>

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An aerial view of the Rouge Plant shows its immense size. In 1920, Henry Ford bought the Detroit, Toledo & Ironton Railroad Company to speed delivery to and from the Rouge plant. He built tracks from the Rouge plant to Flat Rock, Michigan. In 1928, Ford sold the DT&I railroad and created the Ford Rouge Railroad made up of 110 miles of track. In addition to the factories and railroad, the Rouge plant housed a fire department, hospital, police department, and newspaper.

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By January 26, 1928, all administrative aspects of the Ford Motor Company were carried out at the Rouge Plant.

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Courtesy of the National Automotive History Collection, Detroit Public Library

Henry Ford opened the Henry Ford Trade School in 1916 and it relocated to the Rouge Plant after it opened. The school began relatively small with only six students and one instructor. By 1931 the school had over 2,000 students and 135 instructors. Ford catered the school to needy young men. 40 percent of the boys who enrolled had no father at home to provide income and five percent were orphans. Due to financial struggles, the school closed in 1952.