

Caterpillar

Est. 1910

Murray Baker told Pliny Holt about an idle plant in East Peoria formerly owned by the bankrupt Colean Manufacturing Company. Pliny, interested in establishing a Midwest manufacturing operation for his gasoline powered Caterpillar-style track-type tractor, came to the Peoria area to see the plant for himself.

In a letter home to his family, Pliny reflected on what he saw in Peoria:

“I spent last Sunday in Peoria Illinois investigating the plant of the Colean Manufacturing Company, and I must say that I am more than enthused with the location of this plant for our Eastern Manufacturing business. The plant is as complete and perfect in every detail as I have ever seen, Has the latest type of steel plain building, brick walls, good lights, electric traveling trains, the very latest-up-to-date automatic machinery, all electrically driven individual motors, all of the most complete shop equipments, small tools, etc. and one of the best arranged plants that I ever saw...”

Pliny Holt (July 1, 1909)

Thus began the history of Caterpillar manufacturing in East Peoria. The Tazewell County Recorder filed the charter of incorporation for Holt Caterpillar Company in January, 1910. Murray Baker, a former automobile and tractor dealer himself, became a company director and vice-president and joined the twelve employees on the company payroll. By the end of the year, 65 employees were on payroll with an average salary of twenty-five cents an hour.

Expansion occurred early in the company's history with the first export order coming from Argentina in 1911 followed by military production for WWI. By then, the East Peoria plant had 50 acres under roof with 1,600 employees. Cat headquarters moved from California to East Peoria and the product line grew to include diesel engines and motor graders. WWII production helped fuel expansion of the company, and new plants were built in Joliet, Illinois and the United Kingdom in 1951. The post-war years facilitated Caterpillar's growth and, by the 1960s, the company became multi-national with a new, worldwide headquarters in downtown Peoria. On February 16th, 2010, Caterpillar celebrated its 100th years of manufacturing tractors in the Peoria area.

Congratulations to Caterpillar on becoming a Peoria Historical Society Centenarian organization.