

# Oliver Business History

## Short Version

Words in **bold** type are defined on the next page.

5 In 1845, James Oliver went to work in a Mishawaka **blast furnace** company owned by William Gillen. It was there that he learned the **molder's** trade.

When Gillen's company failed in 1847, James went to work for the St. Joseph Iron Company that made plows as well as castings. Here James seized the opportunity to improve his financial situation. James contracted with the company to produce 100  
10 **tons** of plates for \$5.00 "and five **shillings**" a ton. He completed the contract and produced 35 **tons** more in four months. James made \$675.00 for his efforts.

James became fearful about his future when the St. Joseph Iron Company changed hands, so, he decided to investigate the possibility of buying into another business. He overheard that the small **foundry** owned by Ira Fox and Emsley Lamb on the West  
15 Race of the St. Joseph River might be for sale [this building is where the parking lot of Century Center is now located].

By May 5, 1855, James and a co-worker, Harvey Little, had each purchased a quarter **interest** in the foundry from Fox and Lamb. Cast iron plows were one item the little foundry produced.

20 After 13 years of financial ups and downs, on July 22, 1868 the company **incorporated** as "South Bend Iron Works." Those incorporating were James Oliver, George Milburn, T. M. Bissell, John Brownfield, and Clement Studebaker.

On April 16, 1874 the Olivers purchased 32 acres of the Perkins farm on the southwest edge of South Bend (at present this is Chapin Street between Western  
25 Avenue and Sample Street) for \$30,000 and began construction of a new South Bend Iron Works plant.

When finished the new complex had five buildings with a total space of 200,000 square feet. The plant was put into operation January 17, 1876. Thirty to forty railroad cars at a time left the "Upper Works," (as the new factory was called) each loaded with  
30 thousands of plows for shipment from coast to coast.

On October 14, 1901, the South Bend Iron Works was **reincorporated** as the "Oliver Chilled Plow Works." Orders for plows were arriving at such a rate that, even with the plant working 12 hours a day, not all orders could be filled. Plows were leaving the factory by the railroad carload and on one day in 1902 the factory used 90 tons of iron  
35 to turn out 900 plows and 9,000 **cultivators** and riding corn planters.

In 1909, J.D. began construction to double the size of the plant. He developed plans to expand sales into Russia, and planned to build a factory in Canada. On January 1, 1911 operations began in the new plant in Hamilton, Ontario.

40 In 1929, The Oliver Chilled Plow Works merged with two other companies and became the Oliver Farm Equipment Company. The new company produced a full range of farm equipment including tractors.

In 1960, The Oliver Farm Equipment Company became part of the White Farm Equipment Company. The White Farm Equipment Company stopped production in South Bend in 1985, bringing an end to the Oliver company.

**Definitions of Unfamiliar Words**

1. Blast furnace-a large piece of equipment that smelts (to extract metal) with very hot compressed air.
2. Molder-a person who creates or carves hollow containers in which molten liquid steel is poured in and after cooling takes the shape of the mold.
3. Ton-a unit of measure...2,240 pounds equal 1 ton
4. Shilling-British coin and monetary (currency) unit, worth 1/20 of a pound (another monetary unit for British money).
5. Foundry-a workshop for casting metal products
6. Interest-buying a "piece" of a company. The more interest you have in a company the more ownership you obtain. If you own 100% of the interest of a company, you own that company.
7. Incorporated-reform and redesign your company into a legal corporation or company. Also defined as bringing other people into your company as part owners of the company.
8. Cultivators-agricultural piece of equipment used to break up hard ground.

**Activities/Questions to Use With Oliver Business History**

1. In line number 9 James Oliver contracted with what company to produce steel plates?
2. How many tons of steel plates did James contract to make?
3. In your answer to question 2, how many pounds of steel plates is that (see definitions)?
4. How much interest (see definition) did James and co-worker Harvey Lamb purchase of the Fox and Lamb foundry?
5. What was the name of the farm the Olivers bought to expand their factory?
6. How much did he pay for this farm?
7. In line 34 the Oliver company used how many tons of steel to produce 900 plows?
8. In your answer to question 6, how many pounds is that (see definitions)?
9. What year did the Oliver company end?
10. The Oliver company had a factory in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, locate this city on a map. How many miles is it from South Bend, Indiana?