

# Oliver Family History

**\*\*\*See timeline for an abridged version of this history-for quick reference.**

When James, a healthy, stocky baby, was born to George Oliver, a shepherd, and his wife, Elizabeth Irving, August 28, 1825 in the tiny village of Newcastleton, Scotland, no one would have guessed that this child of humble beginnings would become famous and wealthy as one of America's most influential inventors and industrialists.

James also was destined to become the father of Joseph (J.D.) Oliver, a business wizard in his own right who built the mansion in South Bend known as Copshaholm.

George, James' father, was born on a farm known as Bleakboneynear Newcastleton in 1770. In ancient times the village was called Copshaholm, the name J.D. Oliver gave his mansion in South Bend. Most of Newcastleton's residents were very poor. George was a shepherd, as probably were his ancestors. His wife came from an old and well-known Scottish family. As a young man George worked for them.

George was 32 when he married Elizabeth, 21, in 1802. The Irvings did not approve of the marriage, feeling that George, a shepherd like his father, was well below the standing of the Irving family. As a result the families were estranged for a number of years.

George and Elizabeth had nine children in 21 years. James, the last child, was born when Elizabeth was 42. Six years later when her brother was widowed, Elizabeth undertook raising his four children who ranged in age from an infant to 6 years old.

The Olivers, extremely religious, were Presbyterians. James learned to read and write in a church school. Cholera struck Scotland in 1832, bringing business to a virtual halt. George and Elizabeth were hard pressed to make ends meet. George, unfortunately, had been injured in 1833 while driving sheep to England. He was unable to walk without a cane.

An eldest son, John, restless and penniless, had tied up all of his belongings in a red handkerchief and gone to America in 1830, working his passage as a seaman. He found work at a dollar a day and wrote glowing letters about a home in a country where no one searched the countryside for firewood, but forests were actually in the way. He also wrote that he had meat three times a week (actually he ate meat daily, but was afraid his family wouldn't believe that). He also explained that he ate at his employer's table—unheard of in Scotland. Lured by John's letters, another son, Andrew, and a daughter, Jane, immigrated in 1834.

All three wrote letters to Scotland describing opportunities America offered. They were able to send money home to Scotland. Impressed by all this, Elizabeth, then 54, began a campaign to get the whole family to the new land. However, her husband George, who was 65, was content with life as a shepherd. He was too old to move, he declared. He was too old to try to do anything but tend sheep.

George eventually gave in.

John, Andrew and Jane had sent back enough money so that all the family's debts were paid. All the family's surplus belongings were sold at an auction while some

of the children stood by and sobbed. The old stone cottage was locked, the key turned back to the landlord, and they began their journey.

The eldest son, George Jr. had married and had a family. He remained in Scotland, so only four children, Dorothy, 20, Robert, 18, who was sick at the time, William 14, and James, 12, departed for America with their parents.

They left their village in March 1835, their few remaining belongings piled on carts. Neighbors accompanied them the first two miles on their journey to Annon, Scotland, a waterfront town near the border of England. They covered 12 miles the first day. On the second day they reached Annon. They caught a cattle boat for Liverpool the next day. The decks were so crowded with sheep and cattle that planks were placed over the animals to form a crude bridge on which passengers walked to get to their makeshift cabins.

They reached Liverpool the next morning, but the seas were too rough and the ship couldn't reach the dock. Terrified passengers were loaded into boats and rowed to shore. They were to set sail from Liverpool the next day aboard the ship "Halo" and spent a sleepless night at a public house. The Oliver family worried that they wouldn't be allowed to board the ship because William was sick. William's illness was overlooked and they sailed for America on April 3, 1835.

The trip to New York took seven weeks and four days. Severe weather caused a rough crossing of the Atlantic. For the first three weeks most of the passengers, many of them seasick, remained below deck. Two deaths occurred, one from the dreaded smallpox virus, and the bodies were buried at sea. James got in trouble by asking the captain to explain how the dead people could ever be found on judgment day. Elizabeth was forced to remain cabin-bound because of her lame husband and sick son. James, however, ran the decks, climbed the rigging, and mixed with the sailors.

One day, while the ship was being tossed in rough seas, George declared that there was no way they were going to see America. James wasn't worried, however. He explained that the sailors on deck were swearing and surely wouldn't risk eternal damnation if death were actually near.

The Olivers were accustomed to the beauty of Scotland and New York looked ugly. They spent little time there and soon took a steamboat up the Hudson River to Albany. The steamboat burned wood and stopped every few miles for fuel. The Olivers ate oatmeal, brown bread and smoked bear meat. At Albany, where an Indian sold them sassafras for tea and dried blackberries, a 17-mile railroad ran northwest to Schenectady, New York. The historic locomotive *DeWitt Clinton* was attached by a leather hose to a railcar that held large piles of wood and several barrels of water for making steam. Behind this railcar were three first-class cars resembling stagecoaches and four "emigrant" flatcars equipped with wooden benches on which the Oliver family rode.

At Schenectady the Olivers took a boat on the Erie Canal that had been completed just a few years earlier. After a three-day journey they changed boats at Montezuma, New York and continued to Geneva, New York, to the farm of James Goodwin, father-in-law of John Oliver, the first of the Oliver sons to leave Scotland. John's farm was seven miles away, but within two days the Olivers were residing in John's small log framed farmhouse.

For the first time ever, the Olivers had plenty to eat—meat at every meal, potatoes, onions, and corn on the cob. There was no corn in Scotland at that time, and James thought the corn on the ear was a new way of cooking beans. He cleaned off the cob and asked that the “stick” be refilled. By this time the Olivers had spent most of their money. Finances were a major concern.

Within a few days James was working as a chore boy at a nearby farm for 50 cents a week and board. Using a neck yoke, he carried lunch to field workers, chopped wood and did other menial tasks his employer demanded. James was ignorant of American farm life. He could not hitch a horse to a wagon, he mistakenly pulled up corn by the roots looking for the ears, he had never seen a cook stove and had no idea how to use one. However, his employer liked his energetic ways, and when James finally had to leave, his boss offered to triple his wages if he'd return.

That autumn, James moved with his family to Alloway, New York, a small town settled by Scottish immigrants, where they resided on a farm until the next summer. Prompted by the desire to obtain inexpensive land available in the Midwest, the Olivers moved from Alloway to LaGrange County, Indiana in 1836. The trip, by boat and wagon, took 21 days.

In the meantime, daughter Jane, who had left Scotland in 1834, had married Charles Roy, who owned 60 acres in Clear Spring Township, LaGrange County. Son Andrew, who also left in 1834, had obtained 160 acres of virgin land from the government. James and others in the family set about to help him clear this land.

In that era, Mishawaka was known as St. Joseph Iron Works because of what appeared to be inexhaustible deposits of bog iron from which castings could be made. In December of 1836, several of the Oliver children, including James, moved there. The reason for the move is not clear, but better opportunities might have been an influence. The St. Joseph Iron Company, for which the town was named, was attempting to build a dam across the St. Joseph River. James worked there for \$6.00 a month until the spring of 1837, when a depression left the company without ready cash.

Meanwhile he attended George Merrifield School but quit to help support his mother after the death of his father on September 6, 1837. Attempts to help his mother led to numerous jobs and adventures. He cut and sold wood, did menial chores, labored as a farm hand, and, at one time, worked for Alexis Coquillard, a South Bend pioneer, who was attempting to dig a canal to link the Kankakee and St. Joseph Rivers. Sleeping in a shanty while wolves howled nearby proved too much for him. James became ill with a type of malaria and quit.

Later James worked as a pole man on a keelboat, hauling wheat down the St. Joseph River to Lake Michigan. He liked the work but when the captain was arrested for defaulting on debts, James lost his job, wasn't paid and walked the 15 miles from Niles, Michigan to his home in Mishawaka.

James and his brother Andrew then found work in a small foundry owned by the South Bend Blast Furnace Company of Mishawaka. There James learned to scratch castings and cast molds, but the company failed in 1840. In the following years he chopped wood, dug ditches, and cared for 500 hogs that he fed garbage from a gristmill owned by the Lee Brothers. Later he worked in the gristmill, packing flour into wooden barrels for \$15 a month. The Lee brothers found him highly industrious and asked him

to take up the trade of a cooper in the shop where the barrels were made. Here he gained considerable knowledge as a carpenter.

### James and Early Married Life

Joseph Doty, a direct descendant of the Mayflower pioneers, worked with James. After the death of his wife in the East he had moved from Berrien County, Michigan to Mishawaka with his daughter, Susan Catherine. James, inclined to be bashful, became enamored of Susan Catherine, and although she rebuffed him several times, he persevered, with caution, and won her hand the following year. James went by a raft he had built down the St. Joseph River to South Bend where he obtained the wedding license. They were married May 30, 1844. James was 20 and Susan Catherine was 19.

James and Susan began married life in a slab cabin on the riverbank near Alger's Island in Mishawaka. They purchased the cabin for \$18 and paid \$7 annually for land on which it stood. While James improved the cabin (the best lumber cost \$6 per 1,000 board feet) Susan wove rag carpets on a borrowed loom. They lived in the cabin eight months, and then sold it for \$50 in a transaction that brought them a house and three-fourths of an acre of land on the north side of the river. They went in debt \$450 to obtain the house. James later described the eight months in the cabin as "the happiest days of our lives."

Meanwhile, the gristmill was destroyed by fire and James had to work for considerably less than \$15 a month for a while until the spring of 1845 when he went to work in a blast furnace owned by William Gillen. There James learned the molder's trade. In 1852 James and Susan sold their house and purchased a larger home and 10 acres of orchard on the south side of the river. The site adjoined the Lake Shore and Michigan South Railroad (later the New York Central) that had been built a year earlier.

### The Early Beginnings of the Chilled Plow

James and his wife Susan soon needed additional room in the new home they had purchased. A daughter, Josephine, had been born April 6, 1846, and a son, Joseph Doty, called "J.D.," had arrived August 2, 1850. They resided in this home until 1858 when they moved to South Bend.

After William Gillen's furnace failed financially in 1847, James went to work for the *St. Joseph Iron Company* that made plows as well as castings. Here James seized an opportunity to better himself financially. Among castings produced were 22-pound flanged plates used beneath railroad joints for strength. The company was unable to meet production schedules because of the inability of molders to cast the plates according to specifications. James contracted with the company to produce 100 tons of the plates for \$5 "and five shillings" a ton. He completed the contract and produced 35 tons more in four months. He made \$675.

James later admitted he almost killed himself doing it, but this contract and the earlier purchase of a lot in Mishawaka for \$75 where he built a house and rented it to a merchant were two events which gave him his start.

The *St. Joseph Iron Company* also manufactured cast iron plows, as did almost every foundry and blacksmith in the country. For James, plow production provided a

link between the foundry, which he loved, and the land, for which he harbored an attachment stemming from boyhood in Scotland. However, James became apprehensive about his future when St. Joseph Iron Company changed hands and he decided to investigate the possibility of buying into a small business. While waiting for a late train in Goshen, a major plow manufacturing center, he inadvertently heard that a small foundry on the west race in South Bend, owned by Ira Fox and Emsley Lamb, might be for sale.

By May 5, 1855, James Oliver and a molder co-worker, Harvey Little, each purchased one-fourth interest in this building. Cast iron plows were one item this little foundry produced. James was 32 years old, South Bend's population was less than 2,000, but the company, the town and James were destined to grow together despite considerable adversity.

Six weeks after the purchase of the foundry, it was devastated by rampaging waters of the St. Joseph River. James referred to this in later life as his "first great discouragement." Oliver and Little managed to survive and the plant went back into operation in November of 1855. Oliver and Little then purchased Lamb's half interest and renamed it *South Bend Iron Company*. That name appeared on the title page of their first book of accounts.

February 6, 1857 high water again damaged the plant, but Oliver and Little were undaunted and the plant soon was back in production. They bought scrap iron for one and a quarter cents a pound and converted it to almost anything that could be made of cast iron at a charge of five cents a pound. They made iron window weights, caps and sills for windows, kettles, spiders (frying pans with legs and long handles), pulleys, stove castings and grates. They also produced bob shoes (metal strips that fit on sled runners) for the fledgling *Studebaker Brothers Company*.

James, molder, designer, salesman and bookkeeper for the company, also continued experimenting with ways to produce a better plow. All plows of that era were "walking plows." Pulled by two horses, the plowman walked behind and guided it through the soil with two handles. Cast iron and steel plows both wore out rapidly. Dirt stuck to the moldboard and made it difficult for horses to pull. This forced the plow from the ground with a jerk, endangering the plowman. The dirt had to be scraped from the moldboard with a paddle every few minutes.

June 30, 1857, James obtained his first patent from the U.S. government, entitled "Improvement in Chilling Plow Shares." It covered a new way to process a plow point, or share, to an extremely hard surface. This was his first improvement in the plow. Many were to follow and the Oliver Plow became the most popular plow in the world.

To get nearer to the plant, the Oliver family moved in 1858 from Mishawaka to an old brown frame house purchased for \$600, on unpaved Main Street near downtown South Bend. In 1868 the house was moved to the back of the lot and a larger structure of brick was erected.

So successful were Oliver and Little that they were able to advertise a reward of \$500 to anyone who could "chill or harden plowshares with equal success without infringing on their patent." The firm was renamed "*Oliver, Little & Co.*" in 1860 when Thelus Bussell, a machinist, was taken into the partnership. Each now owned a third interest in the firm. But on Christmas Eve, 1860, disaster struck again. Fire destroyed their plant on the West Race with an estimated loss of \$4,000, a fortune in that era.

They carried no insurance. James Oliver later branded this event his “second great discouragement.”

By March 1861, *Oliver, Little & Co.*, had succeeded in erecting a building on the East Race where operations were resumed. That year they produced, in addition to plows, six “fluted columns” weighing 4,902 pounds for Saint Mary’s college, two “iron columns” for Schuyler Colfax, “brackets and vestibule cornice” for the city jail and “sewer crates,” also for the city. Window weights, more than four tons of columns, cornices and stairs were produced for a contractor. The plows sold for \$6.50 each. Business was improving and additional buildings were acquired on both sides of the race.

In 1863 Harvey Little retired from the firm. Thelus Martin Bussell acquired half interest in the company, now renamed “*Oliver and Bussell*,” and James Oliver acquired the rest. That summer approximately 20 men were on the payroll, and demand for the plows was such that the price was increased to \$7.50 and the business continued to expand.

Oliver and Bussell realized they needed more capital. George Milburn, a wealthy wagon manufacturer in Mishawaka, purchased a third interest in the company, with Oliver and Bussell retaining one third each. The company was, once again, renamed “*Oliver, Bussell & Co.*” and the work force increased to 25. Wages ranged from \$1 to \$3.50 per day.

Approximately 1,000 plows were produced and sold in 1864. Of these 100 were the patented steel share plows that sold for \$17.50 each. They also made hundreds of “double shovels” and some 25-road scrapers for which they received \$8 each. Castings were sold for 10 cents a pound. The Civil War was in progress and prices continued to rise as demands for production increased. The company that year made 70 iron columns for the Main Building at Notre Dame, after a disastrous fire consumed the old one. Some of these columns may be seen today.

From this period of the Oliver company history the expansion was phenomenal. By mid-1865 the staff again had been increased to plant capacity and all on the payroll were working overtime. Meanwhile, Joseph (J.D.) Oliver, James’ son, was getting in on the company’s ground floor.

### The J.D. Oliver Era

J.D. Oliver was eight years old when the Oliver family moved to South Bend. He first attended the ungraded four-room Madison school while his sister, Josephine, four years older, attended County Seminary at the “end” of Washington Street. Later, Joseph was sent to boy’s school at Notre Dame that owed money to the Oliver firm for cast iron columns. James Oliver, fearful the money might not be collected, credited Joseph’s tuition against the account. Notre Dame enrollment was 230.

In February, 1865, Joseph, who was 14 years old, began working part time, six days a week, cutting threads on nuts in his father’s plant. He disliked it intensely, and was relieved when his father sent him back to Notre Dame in September. He had earned \$100 in the six-month part time job.

Joseph again threaded nuts in the summer of 1866 and returned to Notre Dame in September. The company credited Notre Dame's account for \$125.57 tuition that year. Joseph later spent one semester at Ashbury College (now DePauw University), and then took a short business course at South Bend Business College. That completed his formal education.

George Milburn hired 16 year-old Joseph as a bookkeeper for the plow factory on July 1, 1867 and sent him home to lunch. After lunch Milburn opened to Joseph the first set of double entry books the company ever had. Milburn was a critical teacher, but Joseph was a good pupil. He kept the job for more than 66 years.

James tried to instill in his son his own love for the foundry but Joseph preferred to view the factory from across an office desk. He was an organizer and financial wizard. Fortunately, the talents of father, the inventor and builder, and son, the marketer and financier, paralleled each other to make a winning combination. Shortly after Joseph took over the books he realized the company's bookkeeping methods were haphazard at best. He began a campaign to collect outstanding debts and drastically changed billing procedures. In 1869 his annual salary was raised to \$1,000 and by 1871 he owned 180 shares of the company stock. He eventually became company treasurer before he was 18 and a director before he was 21. In 1878 James took his wife and daughter, Josephine, to Scotland, England and Ireland on a business-pleasure trip. Meanwhile, Joseph went east to investigate malleable iron production and later played a major role in establishing the *Oliver Malleable Manufacturing* facilities in South Bend.

July 22, 1868, the Oliver company was incorporated as "*South Bend Iron Works*" for a period of 50 years. The firm was capitalized for \$100,000 (2,000 shares at \$50). This actually was the beginning of the company that was to become the world's largest plow producer. George Milburn resigned from the Oliver firm in 1870 to devote all his resources to his wagon-building business in Mishawaka. This left the Olivers in a troublesome financial situation. However, the great Chicago fire of 1871 proved to be a blessing in disguise for the Olivers. James knew that cast iron columns supported most of Chicago's large buildings. Before the smoke cleared, Joseph was in Chicago purchasing the columns as junk. These were shipped to South Bend to be recast into sewing machine parts for *Singer Sewing Machine Company*. The profits realized not only offset Oliver's financial difficulties, but also provided the company with funds for needed expansion. In addition to buildings already owned, the company erected on the West Race a brick foundry, 40 by 132 feet, a 24-by 155-foot warehouse and machine and wood shops. A 72-inch water turbine was purchased to provide additional electricity.

James continued his experiments with the plow and in 1872 was issued an important patent to modify parts in a manner that permitted the plow to stand the stress of striking hidden roots or stones. He also changed the coulter's position and attached an adjustable plow wheel. These two innovations became standard features of the wood-beam Oliver Chilled Plow. By the close of 1872, five hundred tons of Chicago iron remained on hand. The Olivers were using it at the rate of 14 tons per day. It was a year of prosperity.

The Oliver family engaged in many projects that benefited the community. James and his son Joseph teamed up with the Studebaker brothers, who manufactured wagons, in 1882 to petition the common council for a street railway. The first horse cars were put in service in 1885 on Washington Street. An attempt to use an electrically operated trolley system on Michigan Street failed due to improper current distribution, but the problem was solved and trolleys soon gave way to horse-pulled cars. Despite the original failure, South Bend holds the dubious distinction of being the first city to use electrical power for streetcars. Among other civic projects were construction of an opera house, hotel, apartment houses, row housing and a dam.

Ground was broken December 5, 1883 for "Oliver Row," a block of row houses at Main and Market (Colfax) streets. These were described as "nine residences with a total unbroken frontage of 200 feet on Main Street, 12 feet back from the sidewalk, four stories in height, including basement and attic. The basement (ceiling) will be five feet above the level of the street. Stories will be approached by flights of stone steps." This structure was later remodeled and became the Christman Building.

Construction of the Opera House on Main Street started in March of 1884 when 100 wagonloads of stone were brought in for the foundation. Meanwhile, demolition of brick and frame buildings on the site began. The Opera House was opened October 28, 1885 with the performance of W.E. Sheridan in the role of Louis XI. The overture prior to the performance, composed by Prof. Chris Elbel of South Bend, was titled "The Oliver House Triumphant." It was played by Prof. Lorenz Elbel's orchestra.

Why did the Olivers build the Opera House? There are no known motives, only conjecture. Both James and Joseph (J.D.) enjoyed the theater and attended as often as time permitted. At the time Good's Opera House and Price's Theater were the only places for the performing arts in South Bend. Neither was considered adequate for the growing city. The Opera House was part of a business block, but profit alone apparently was not the motive. Ostentation was a corollary of wealth at the time, and the Opera House was built with a lavish hand.

### *The New Oliver Chilled Plow Works*

The Olivers purchased 32 acres of the "Perkins Farm," on the southwest edge of South Bend, for \$30,000, and construction of a new South Bend Iron Works plant there started almost immediately. Full production continued at the "Lower Works" as the old factory on the West Race (the area where Century Center now stands) was known, while warehouses were built, railroad tracks laid and water and sewer lines extended to the new "Upper Works." The new complex had five buildings with a total space of 200,000 feet. Plans called for employment of 400 men, who would cast some 50 tons of metal into 300 plows daily. A new 600-horsepower Harris Steam Engine powered the machinery. January 17, 1876 the engine was started and the plant went into operation.

Plow sales in 1878 reached 62,779. Thirty to forty railroad cars at a time, loaded with 5,000 to 7,000 plows, left the new "Upper Works" for shipment from coast to coast. James Oliver was elected company president in January 1879. Brownfield, who had been president for almost nine years after the resignation of George Milburn, had tendered his resignation in November 1878. James always had held the title of superintendent.

Meanwhile, “branch houses” were being established across the land to handle distribution of the plows. The size of the Oliver company simply overwhelmed its opponents, including the *South Bend Chilled Plow Company* that had been organized by Bissell, and allegedly used Oliver patents, in an attempt to capitalize on the reputation of the Oliver firm, still known as the *South Bend Iron Works*. The year 1880 was one of great expansion. A record was set in production and sales of plows, new buildings were erected, riding plows were being produced on a large scale, the manufacture of malleable castings was started, and additional rail tracks were laid to the Oliver property.

On May 4, 1881 James purchased the Chess and Vincent properties in the 300 block of West Washington Street. The Chess mansion was an imposing structure, only 19 years old, but James sold the interior woodwork and hired a New York architect who had designed Canada’s parliament buildings to enlarge and re-design the house. To enlarge the grounds James also sold and moved the Vincent house next door and hired an army of workmen to lay stone. The new 60-foot wide, 102-foot wide house (not to be confused with Copshaholm, which was built later by J.D.) had three stories, a slate roof, 10 bedrooms with dressing rooms, bathrooms and closets attached, and a billiard room. James and his family moved into the new home at 325 W. Washington Street on December 10, 1882, and on January 17, 1883, held a reception for 500 guests who danced in the third floor ballroom and dined on food prepared by a Chicago caterer.

James had come a long way from the simple life of a shepherd in Scotland, but in spite of affluence he remained a simple man with simple tastes who preferred the heat of his foundry and the dirt of a farm to the elegant surroundings of his new home. This was the last place of residence. His wife died in the home in 1902 and he died there March 2, 1908. The house stood vacant until 1911 when South Bend School City (presently the South Bend Community School Corporation) purchased and razed it. Central High School was erected on the site.

### *J.D. Oliver and Family*

Joseph (J.D.) Oliver was 34 when he met Anna Gertrude Wells, daughter of a wealthy family of Johnstown, New York, who had come to South Bend to visit Grace Studebaker, a schoolmate at Madam de Silva’s Finishing School in New York. She was 22, tall, aristocratic in bearing and shy, with a good sense of humor. Joseph, handsome and conservative, also had a good sense of humor. Their storybook romance culminated in marriage on December 10, 1884 in Johnstown, New York in the “north parlor of the Johnson home,” according to one report.

After the wedding banquet and dancing, a special train from the railroad of the bride’s father took the bride and groom to Fonda, New York, where they left on a two-month wedding trip to California. Newspapers printed a list of wedding gifts. Among them were solid silver tea and coffee sets, silver flatware, salad bowls, and ice cream sets, and a \$15,000 check from the father of the groom. Upon their return to South Bend, the newlyweds became the first occupants of Oliver Row, where they took up housekeeping in apartment number one.

The Olivers were staunch Republicans, and in the Democratic sweep of 1884, South Bend citizens elected George Ford, a Democrat as their representative in Congress. A graduate of the University of Michigan who had been active in local politics, he and Josephine Oliver (J.D.'s sister) had known each other from childhood. The bride and groom were both 39 when they were married November 25, 1885 in the home of the bride's parents. Ford was the first Democrat to enter the sphere of the Oliver family. He retired from Congress in 1887 and resumed law practice in South Bend. In 1888 he was elected secretary of the South Bend Iron Works. They resided in a spacious white frame house on an acre of land at 630 W. Washington Street (where the Oliver Inn Bed and Breakfast is located). They had no children. Josephine died May 28, 1914, George August 30, 1917.

### *Copshaholm*

On February 3, 1894, Joseph purchased 76 feet of land on the south side of Washington Street to add to another adjacent property he owned where he planned to build a new home. This gave him a property that had 250 feet on Washington Street, and 300 feet on Chapin Street. Exterior work on the dwelling was finished in 1895. Interior woodwork arrived in April 1896, and the Olivers moved in on January 1, 1897. J.D. resided in this home for more than 56 years.

The house contained 38 rooms, 6 full bathrooms (3 half-bathrooms), and 14 fireplaces. In the basement there was a laundry room, workroom, clothes drying room, and five storerooms. The first floor had 12 rooms, including a large central hall, reception room, library, den, music room, dining room, porte-cochere hall, butler's pantry, kitchen staff dining room, and two kitchen pantries. On the second floor there were five bedrooms, sitting room, dressing room, and two linen rooms. The third floor had nine rooms, including four bedrooms, sitting room, sewing room, billiard room, elevator, and ballroom.

The total cost of the structure was never officially revealed. J.D. was a very private person who conducted his personal business in the utmost privacy.

### *Oliver Building Projects*

In the late 1880s Oliver plows were being shipped to the British Isles, Japan, France, Germany, Mexico, Sweden, Greece, and South American countries—the list was impressive. The line of visitors to South Bend from around the globe was almost endless. James and J.D. decided to build a grand hotel to impress the steady stream of visitors who, until then, only could be housed in inadequate facilities. Difficulties in obtaining a site delayed construction until July 1898, when the first stone for the foundation was laid at Washington and Main Streets, now the site of the downtown Holiday Inn.

A gala grand opening was held December 20, 1899. The South Bend Tribune called it “the most magnificent hotel in Indiana, one of the finest in the United States.” It described the lobby and rotunda as Italian Renaissance, embellished in gold. At the top of the rotunda were painted 16 females representing the seasons, the arts, earth, water, fire, and air. The lavish décor extended to all other areas of the hotel. Among

innovations was an independent electric plant consisting of three dynamos driven by three engines to provide current for 1,700 lights in the hotel. Later electrical current was provided by the *Oliver Electric Plant* built by the Olivers on the West Race of the St. Joseph River (the foundations and part of the control gates of this plant were incorporated into the Century Center complex years later). Most of the hotel construction was under the eye of James Oliver, then in his 70s. Joseph, exhausted by overwork with the company and other matters, had been ordered to take an ocean voyage to recuperate.

Two years earlier, in 1887, James had agreed to pay one-third the cost of the proposed new Presbyterian Church, on the southwest corner of Lafayette and Washington Streets. James was not an active member of the congregation, but others in the family were. Also in 1890, the Olivers purchased land west of Laurel Street between “the two railroads” for a public park. This eventually became known as the J.D. Oliver playground.

South Bend had been attempting to find a way to finance a city hall for many years. On July 21, 1900, James offered to build the city hall and lease it to the city. In order to build this new city hall he sold the city a skating rink, a large building at 224 N. Main Street in 1897. It was razed and the city hall was erected on this site, just south of today’s South Bend Water Works.

The gratitude citizens of South Bend felt toward James and his wife Susan for their many public gifts was expressed May 30, 1900, their 56<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, when they were presented with an 18-carat gold loving cup. The 14-inch cup was engraved with portraits of the Olivers, the new Oliver Hotel, the original factory on the West Race, and the new factory that had been erected on the southwest edge of the city. That same day Joseph and Anna Gertrude announced their new home at 808 West Washington Street would be named Copshaholm, James’ birthplace in Scotland, in his honor.

### *James in His Later Life*

The death of James’ wife Susan, who had been in poor health with a heart condition, on September 13, 1902, was a severe blow. They had been married more than 58 years. Except for servants and a pet parrot he had given Susan, he was now alone in his huge home.

“It seems I can see her form in every part of the house,” he wrote a friend. He had a family mausoleum built in Riverview Cemetery and suppressed his grief with work. James’ last remaining sibling, William, had died in April of 1902. That added to his overbearing grief.

Business at the Oliver plant had been excellent. Many departments were working 12 hours a day and were unable to keep up with orders. This flood of business mostly was attributed to the “No. 1 Oliver High-Lift Gang Plow,” a riding plow developed by the Oliver father and son team. In 1901 *South Bend Iron Works* had become *Oliver Chilled Plow Works*. All stock remained with the Oliver family. The family decided to diversify, and acquired stock in a number of companies. The largest project, however, was construction of the hydroelectric plant on South Bend’s West Race.

Old mills along the race were razed, an old canal lock for ferries was dismantled, head gates to an earlier dam were replaced, and wooden flumes that had channeled water to old factories were torn out. Thousands of loads of gravel were required for the project. Despite his 81 years, James made daily trips back and forth from the race to the gravel pit on his Sample Street farm in an open buggy in the winter of 1903 to keep track of things.

Water wheels of the *Oliver Power Plant* were put into operation June 6, 1905. On June 14 the Oliver Hotel was illuminated with power running through underground cables from the West Race. By July 2, three-phase, 25-cycle current was running to the Oliver factory on Sample Street. "I never did anything in my life that I am as proud of as the work I did on the West Race," James wrote in his diary. The plant cost \$266,376.08, but had taken its toll of James Oliver. He loved the West Race, where he had made his start, and was determined that the hydroelectric plant would be built just as he wanted.

However, most of his troubles stemmed from the construction supervisor, Campbell, a tough, whiskey-drinking roughneck, determined in his ways. James was no roughneck, but just as determined, and was used to having his way. The two clashed daily. Once Campbell constructed a wall in the stream past the north end of the powerhouse. James said the wall wasn't necessary, that it would hinder the flow of water. Campbell insisted it was needed to protect the plant foundation. After a lengthy argument, James took a crew of men out with drills, wedges, picks, and crowbars and began to destroy it. Campbell and his crew came alongside in a boat. More violent arguments ended with Oliver raising his hands and daring Campbell to cut them off. It was a tense moment as the two crews of men armed with picks and crowbars stood ready to back up their determined leaders. Finally, Campbell backed off and the wall came down.

Toward the end of the project things changed, however, when Campbell, whom James kept on the job as supervisor despite their differences, came to James and said, "Oliver, I changed my mind about you. I wrote a couple of friends of mine a few days ago that I never found my match until I found an OLD MAN by the name of Oliver that was much concerned in the Oliver works. He is over 80 years old and I declare he beats me in perseverance and push."

May 5, 1905 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of James in the plow manufacturing business. He had begun experiments for his chilled plow products in 1855. June 12, 1906 he was granted a patent for his last invention, an improved method of turning out a mold. In 49 years he received 45 patents.

James continued to make trips almost daily to the rural gravel pit in severe February weather of 1907 to supervise loading of sand for molding plow points. He developed pneumonia in March, but rallied to the point of being able to return to the factory in August. During autumn he developed a shortness of breath and a heart condition. He made his last visit to the factory January 17, 1908, and died March 2, 1908, in his home at the age of 84.

After a private funeral service he was laid to rest along with his wife in the new Oliver mausoleum in Riverview Cemetery. Factories, stores, theaters, banks, and public offices were closed as a mark of respect for him, while crowds of workers stood in the street in a pouring rain to pay homage to him.

Although he gained great wealth, James Oliver basically was a simple man. He neither drank to excess nor smoked, he did not embrace religion in a sectarian sense, but had great faith in a supreme intelligence and believed the Golden Rule to be an all-encompassing guide to living. He prized good health, looked upon sickness with a touch of scorn, took a daily cold bath and followed a calisthenics routine. He was hard driving, thrifty, and obstinate. James lacked many social graces, and was not given to explanations, excuses or apologies for dereliction to duty. He enjoyed farm work, and gave high priority to family, honesty, service to community, and loyalty to fellow workers.

### *J.D. Oliver Takes Over*

At the time of his father's death, J.D. was 58 years of age and had begun working in the foundry full time at the age of 16. He had been a director of the factory since he was 20 years old, so the transition from father to son was easily accomplished. Joseph was a financial genius and it is doubtful James would have done so well without J.D.'s financial guidance. While James was frugal, J.D. realized money often was earned by spending some of it. Because of J.D.'s modesty, it was not generally known that James almost always left details of financial management to his son.

At a meeting after the death of his father, J.D. was elected president, treasurer and general manager; James Oliver II (J.D.'s son) was named vice president and Joseph Ford (J.D.'s brother-in-law) was named secretary. These three also were the directors. Thus J.D. was responsible for almost the entire issue of Oliver company stock; he had been named executor of his father's will; he was responsible for the plant and more than 2,000 employees, and he became plant manager.

Annual production at the time was very high. In 1909, J.D. launched plant expansion to double it and developed plans to expand sales into Russia and construct a factory in Canada. The Oliver Opera House block was remodeled and the Oliver Hotel Annex, now seven stories tall, was opened a few months later.

In 1911, plant operations started in the new plant the Olivers had built in Hamilton, Ontario. J.D. correctly perceived vast amounts of Canada's Northwest wilderness would be opened to agriculture, and the plant was part of a plan to get part of that business. On May 1, the first carload of plows was shipped from Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, and by summer's end, 30,000 plows had been shipped. Among buildings constructed in Hamilton that year were two large docks to provide for two lake carriers to be used for shipping Oliver products. J.D. had contracted with International Harvester Company to handle distribution and sales for the Oliver Canadian plant. This satisfactory arrangement for both companies continued until 1919 when the Olivers sold the Hamilton plant to International Harvester.

Farming in the United States was steadily becoming mechanized, and the Olivers greeted it fully. A new era had been opened in 1905 when a gasoline engine was mounted on a traction truck to pull several plows. Gasoline farm tractors and gang plows (a large plank that carries several plows) developed rapidly, and on September 30, 1911 a world's record was set when an Oliver 50-bottom (50 blades) gang plow, pulled by three LaPorte, Indiana built *Rumley Oil-Pull* tractors, turned 50 14-inch furrows at one time, a width of almost 60 feet! That same year three *International Harvester*

tractors pulling a 55-bottom Oliver gang plow set another record by plowing an acre in less than four minutes, a far cry from the days when a farmer walked eight and one-fourth miles behind a team of horses and plow to turn an acre.

When World War I broke out in 1914, J.D. prepared for troubled times. "We shall not attempt to profit by present conditions," he wrote. After the U.S. entered the war in 1917, J.D. was called to Washington to confer with the nation's food administrator, Herbert Hoover. But the war not only had to be supplied with arms and food. It also had to be financed. J.E. and Frank Hering, an Oliver vice-director, criss-crossed Indiana setting up fund-raising and bond-selling committees in every community. J.D. organized 22,000 schoolteachers to sell thrift stamps for bond purchases through school children to their parents. He often brought down the house when he spoke of "the fires of hell licking their lips in joyful anticipation of the advent of Kaiser Wilhelm" (the German war leader). In addition, to ease the food shortage for employees in South Bend, J.D. established a community garden. Fifty acres near the plant were divided into 50 by 100 foot patches. The families of 301 workers participated in the project. J.D. awarded \$50 in gold for the best crop return.

After World War I, demand for tractor-pulled farm implements increased rapidly. It was estimated that 250,000 tractors would be built in 1919. *Oliver Chilled Plow Works* expected to put 750,000 plows behind the 100,000 tractors International Harvester and Henry Ford and Son would build. To this end the Olivers launched an extensive expansion program, and in the next four years conducted the biggest building and real estate activity, exclusive of the Hamilton plant construction, in the company's history. More than \$3 million went to acquire branch house properties, \$160,000 for new buildings at the South Bend plant, and \$1 million to erect 160 greatly needed workmen houses.

An innovation at the time was the company's voluntary introduction of a pension plan, providing for a pension and automatic retirement for an employee who had reached the age of 70 and had been with the company 20 years. No pension was to be more than \$100 per month or less than \$12.

In a realignment of company responsibility to ease some of his burdens after World War I, J.D. had relinquished some of his duties, including that of plant manager. An operating committee for general management was set to be directly responsible to J.D., who retained the presidency. This committee included James Oliver II, vice-president; Joseph D. Oliver Jr., treasurer; H. Gail Davis, assistant treasurer; and C. Frederick Cunningham, secretary, a post that had been left vacant by the death of J.D.'s brother-in-law George Ford in 1917. Gertrude Oliver Cunningham and Susan Catherine Oliver, daughters of J.D., were elected to the board of directors.

When the 1920s arrived, business indicators looked good, but disaster was ahead. Farm prices began to drop. Farmers were unable to pay debts and stopped buying agricultural implements. The company held the largest stock of manufactured goods and the largest stock of raw materials in its history, all purchased at high wartime prices. Because of its strong financial condition, *Oliver Chilled Plow Works* weathered the crisis. J.D., however, had not fared so well in spite of the appointment of the operating committee. In October 1923, he fell victim to a four-month illness, described as "tired break-down," from which he never fully recovered. He resigned many of the outside directorships he held and gave up the presidency of the Purdue University

Board of Trustees, on which he had served for 18 years. He returned to his *Oliver Chilled Plow Works* office February 11, 1924, where he remained active until the business was sold.

### *The Downfall of the Oliver Chilled Plow Works and the Death of J.D.*

The Oliver company in 1933 was facing increased competition from other full-line farm implement companies and faced the choice of enormous expansion with a program to include more implements, such as tractors, or joining together with other manufacturers making different types of farm tools and organizing a full-line Oliver company.

J.D. elected to join other manufacturers. At a special meeting of stockholders February 1, 1929, he was authorized to organize a new company, to be known as the Oliver Farm Equipment Company, and take over, along with the *Oliver Chilled Plow Works*, the *Hart-Parr Company* of Charles City, Iowa, manufacturer of tractors. J.D. also purchased the *Nichols and Shepard Company* of Battle Creek, Michigan, which made threshing machines, corn pickers and combines. Soon after this merger *American Seeding Machine Company* of Springfield, Ohio and the *McKenzie Potato Machinery Company* of LaCrosse, Wisconsin, were acquired. The *Oliver Chilled Plow Works*, as such, ceased to exist on March 30, 1929. The executive office posts of the new *Oliver Farm Equipment Company* were divided among three of the merging companies, with J.D. as chairman of the board, a post he held until resigning December 13, 1932.

J.D. Oliver died August 6, 1933 in Copshaholm, the home that he had moved with his wife, Anna Gertrude, and their young family in 1897. He was 83 years old.

### *The Oliver Children*

The children, James II, Ann Gertrude, Joseph Jr., and Susan Catherine, all of whom had grown up in Copshaholm surrounded by the security of wealth, were well educated and well instructed in Oliver family traditions. Of the four children, the oldest and youngest were to deviate most from the Oliver norm.

James II, born November 3, 1885, was active and adventurous as a boy and retained those characteristics as an adult. He attended Michigan Military Academy, Preparatory School at Notre Dame, and had graduated from Phillips Academy in Massachusetts in 1908. He was elected director of the *Oliver Chilled Plow Works* in 1908 at the age of 22 and held various other positions with the firm. August 16, 1920, he married Louise Potter Yarrington, of Richmond, Virginia, daughter of an industrialist, whom he had known for eight years. They never had children and remained free for lengthy trips to Europe, where he indulged "in his passion for spending money and purchasing paintings," according to one report from that era.

Gertrude, the second Oliver child, was delicate, thoughtful, considerate, and sensitive, qualities similar to those of her mother. She was destined to become the only child to provide grandchildren for J.D. and Anna. Gertrude attended private school in South Bend and later Mrs. Davis's Finishing School at Briarcliff Manor at Briarcliff-on-the-Hudson, New York. She was considered pretty, was popular in her social set, and

frequently entertained at Copshaholm, where she met Charles Frederick Cunningham, of Paterson, New Jersey. Mr. Cunningham was a graduate of Stevens Institute of Technology. They were married September 30, 1916 in First Presbyterian Church, South Bend. Cunningham, who later played a major role in Oliver family affairs, was appointed secretary of the operating committee for general management of the *Oliver Chilled Plow Works*. Gertrude, in 1920, was named a director of the company, a post she held until the company's dissolution in 1929. The Cunningham's had three children, Joseph Oliver, Ann Gertrude, and Fredrika Jane, all of whom were to carry on the Oliver family tradition of service to the South Bend community.

Joseph Doty Oliver, Jr., the third child of J.D. and Anna Gertrude, was born January 14, 1892. Quiet and studious, he graduated from South Bend High School and the University of Chicago, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree. A month before his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, he was elected treasurer of the *Oliver Chilled Plow Works* and held that post, as well as a directorship, until the company was dissolved in 1929. He apparently inherited his father's ability to handle large financial investments and undoubtedly was his father's favorite son. After the Oliver company was dissolved he took over management of the many trusts his father had established, and, after the death of his father in 1933, he assumed total management of the family's financial affairs. In 1917, Joseph Jr. married Ellinor McMillan of Nashville, Tennessee, daughter of one of the South's best-known Democrats who had held numerous high-ranking offices in the U.S. government. She died in 1919 of injuries suffered when thrown from a horse. After his father's death, Joseph Jr., moved into Copshaholm where he resided with his sister, Susan Catherine. In later life he became a virtual recluse, living in a small apartment on the third floor of Copshaholm. He died July 6, 1972 at the age of 80.

The fourth Oliver child was Susan Catherine who was born March 6, 1896. She never married. She graduated from South Bend High School in 1914, attended the Finishing School of Mrs. Davis at Briarcliff-on-the-Hudson, and received a degree from Finch College, New York, in 1916. Catherine served in the Red Cross in World War I and also carried on a number of intellectual and physical pursuits, among them, golf, at which she excelled. She reportedly was engaged to the well known golf professional Chick Evans, but because her father objected she cancelled the engagement. Catherine became a symbol of the emancipated liberated woman of the 1920s. There were rounds of parties at Copshaholm, entertainment for as many as 600 guests at South Bend's Palais Royale Ballroom, and lengthy foreign cruises. She also served as a member of the board of directors of the Oliver company, but took no part in company management. Half her lifetime involved two men who were exceedingly different in their interests. One was an intellectual, the other more physical. For almost 50 years she saw them on alternate days.

After the death of her parents, she, like Joseph, lived out her life in Copshaholm, he in his third floor apartment and she in a suite of rooms on the second floor. They saw each other only at dinner or on a special occasion. She died April 19, 1970 in Copshaholm of vascular complications.

**\*\*\*See timeline for an abridged version of this history-or for quick reference.**