

History of Haskell-Barker Car Company



In 1852, the wagon and freight car firm of Sherman, Haskell, Aldridge & Company was founded in Michigan City, Indiana on the shores of Lake Michigan. In addition to rail cars, the firm produced Woodbury corn shelling and threshing machines and J.J. Mann reapers. John Barker Sr. was a merchant and grain broker, who had originally come from Andover, Massachusetts to Michigan City in 1835. In 1855, Barker saw an opportunity to buy in to a freight car company. Sherman was leaving the firm and willing to sell his interest in the car company. The firm's name was changed to Haskell, Barker & Aldridge. Upon Aldridge's retirement in 1858 the firm became known simply as Haskell & Barker. In 1871 the firm was incorporated as the Haskell & Barker Car Company. Haskell became president, Barker treasurer, and Nathaniel P. Rogers as secretary. Rogers had joined the firm in 1864 as an accountant. John Barker retired in 1869, and his son John H. Barker joined the firm. Haskell retired in 1883, selling his shares to John H. Barker, who then became president with Rogers as secretary and treasurer. John H. Barker and Rogers ran the company until Rogers' death in 1906. By 1907, the plant was the most complete factory making freight cars in the United States and employed more than any other manufacturing establishment in Indiana. At the time, it sprawled over 100 acres and had 3500 employees who turned out 15,000 cars a year.

Haskell & Barker initially manufactured passenger and wood-structure freight rail cars. By the late 1850s they had ceased manufacturing passenger cars and devoted themselves strictly to freight cars. The American Civil War brought a surge in business because of government contracts. This increase in business not only grew the company but made it one of the largest and wealthiest employers in Indiana.



The company at one time produced 15,000 cars a year and in 1907 was the largest factory complex in Indiana, covering fifty-one acres along Eighth and Wabash Streets. In 1907 there were 990,000 feet of factory space. The south yards consisted of 1,308,344 square feet on 109 acres. In 1913, Haskell & Barker suffered a massive fire at the south yards. In 1916 it became known as Haskell & Barker, Inc. After 1922 it was a subsidiary of the Pullman Car Company and in 1934 became known as the Haskell & Barker Shops of Pullman-Standard. It returned to manufacturing passenger cars briefly during World War II.

The factory is said to have been the birthplace of the modern assembly line, an innovation often credited to Henry Ford. The factory also produced the PS-1, the first standardized box car on American railroads. As the company entered the late 20th century, production shifted to other locations and the company announced the closing of the facility in December of 1970. At that time the workforce numbered seventy with over 1,000 workers having been laid off. The physical plant suffered a massive fire in July 1973 which totally destroyed the entire complex. Only two buildings survived, the original Haskell & Barker office built in 1914 and the machine shop next door. A warehouse on the north side of the complex also escaped the fire but was later razed.

The site of the Haskell & Barker factory site was made into an outlet shopping mall named Lighthouse Place, with the Pullman Cafe in the surviving Pullman buildings which today no longer exist. The shopping center, renamed Prime Outlets by 2007, was at the time Michigan City's biggest attraction with over three million visitors.

Places to find Haskell Barker boxcars and Pullman Standard cars

Manufactured in Michigan City.

New Buffalo Railroad Museum

(269) 469-8010

530 S. Whittaker St. Ste. B.

New Buffalo, MI 49117



Troop Sleeper Car

A troop sleeper car was a railroad passenger car which had been constructed to serve as something of a mobile barracks for transporting troops, during WWII, over distances sufficient to require overnight accommodations. This method allowed part of the trip to be made overnight, reducing the amount of transit time required and increasing travel efficiency.

Our recondition Pullman Troop Sleeper features photographs, posters and artifacts depicting the contributions made by America's "Fighting Railroads."

Minnesota Historical Society

651-259-3000 • 1-800-657-3773

345 Kellogg Blvd. West

St. Paul, MN 55102



The Minnesota Historical Society have an 1879 wooden boxcar made in Michigan City, Indiana by the Haskell and Barker Company on display.



Griffith Historical Park and Railroad Museum

Ave A and Broad Street

Griffith, IN

Pullman Troop Sleeper 8731

This car was built in 1943 by the Pullman Standard Company to transport military troops throughout the country during World War II. The car was equipped with bunks for sleeping, stacked three-high, which converted into seating for daytime travel.

Fort Wayne Railroad Historical Society

(260) 493-0765

15808 Edgerton Road

New Haven, Indiana 46774

NICKEL PLATE ROAD BOXCAR no. X-83074 – Boxcar

Built for the Lake Erie & Western in 1902 by the Haskell & Barker Company in Michigan City, Indiana as no. 43074.

This boxcar is available in the rolling stock to see and photograph phone first.

Written summer 2015 by intern Keri Jakubowski. Sources available upon request.