

Herald & Review file photos

Workers in 1931 load up a carload of table syrup, which A.E. Staley Mfg. Co., began producing in 1919.

STALEY'S LEGACY



His American dream continues to shape Decatur

HERALD & REVIEW SENIOR WRITER

Augustus Eugene Staley may have been born to Southern farmers ruined financially by the Civil War, but he dreamed of becoming a businessman.

Willing to travel and talented at sales, he saw that corn starch was more in demand than tobacco or baking power, so he went into business selling packaged starch at age 30.

The desire to manufacture his own product led Staley to Decatur within a dozen years, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Here are some of the historical highlights to be featured at a new Staley Museum opening Saturday in the longtime family home on College Hill (361 N. College St.):

1867: A.E. Staley was born on a farm near Julian, N.C., Feb. 25 to William and Mary Jane Ledbetter Staley.

1885: After losing his father at age 18, Staley begins more than a dozen years of working as a traveling salesman. Among the products he sold was corn starch.

1890s: He admires the Victorian home of William H. Ennis on College Hill whenever he is in Decatur, which was part of his sales territory.

1898: Settling in Baltimore and founding his own company the year before, he makes his first sale of packaged starch locally on March 3 and marries Emma Louise Tressler on Dec. 14 in Bryan, Ohio.

1900: One of their five children, is born Jan. 23. She outlives all her siblings, dying in 1981 at age 81.

1909: Staley buys the former Wellington Starch Co. in Decatur and re-opens the plant in 1912. He and his family initially live at 524 W. Prairie Ave.

1913: He buys the house on College Hill completed in 1884 for William J. Quinlan, secretary-treasurer of Chambers, Bering and Quinlan check rower and hog ringer manufacturers, but owned by the Ennis family since 1889. Staley spends almost as much as the \$20,000 purchase price remodeling it along Elizabethan lines.

1920: A.E. Staley and his company are a driving force behind the city's decision to build Lake Decatur.

1921: He sends his two-year-old Decatur Staleys football team and coach George Halas to Chicago. Halas re-named the team Chicago Bears the next year.

1922: A.E. Staley Mfg. Co. begins processing soybeans, con-

tributing to Decatur's moniker as the "Soybean Capital of the World."

1926: A.E. Staley Jr., third child and oldest son of A.E. Staley Sr., marries Lenore Mueller Sept. 15. On June 25, 1924, his big sister Ruth married Ebert Mueller in the Staley family home in the first wedding to connect the two prominent Decatur families.

1928: Staley Sr. is instrumental in plans to build a viaduct on 22nd Street (then Seventh Street), which is named Staley Viaduct upon completion.

1930: Staley Sr. inaugurates the Staley Administration Building, one of the most iconic structures in Decatur.

1932: He steps down as president of A.E. Staley Mfg. Co. after running the company since founding it in 1897. He is succeeded by Staley Jr.

1940: Staley Sr. dies Dec. 26 at his winter home in Miami, Fla., at age 73.

1953: His widow makes the Florida estate her permanent residence and donates the family home in Decatur, which is used for apartments for many years.

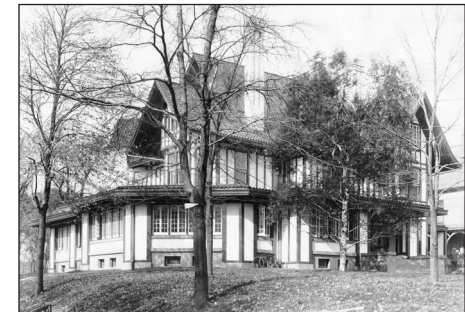
1967: Emma Staley, 91, dies in Miami on Feb. 25, the 100th anniversary of her husband's birth.

1975: Staley Jr. dies March 19 at age 71. Donald Nordlund replaces him as head of the company.

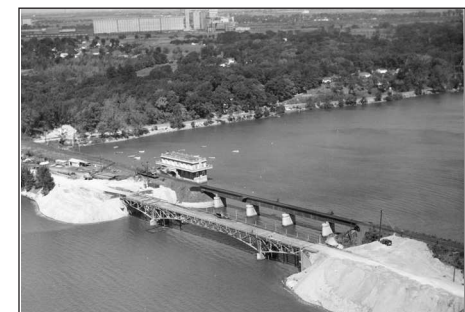
1988: British company Tate & Lyle acquires majority ownership of A.E. Staley Mfg. Co.

2001: The former Staley Mansion is featured on the Heritage & Holly Historic Home Tour of the Near Westside Restoration & Preservation Society Nov. 23-24.

2013: Staley Museum buys the largely restored home at 361 N. College St. from Dennis and Jana Drew.



Staley enclosed the original wraparound porch and gave the Victorian home at 361 N. College an Elizabethan look after purchasing it in 1913.



A.E. Staley Mfg. Co.'s need for water led to the creation of Lake Decatur in 1920.



A.E. Staley Sr.'s private offices were on the eighth floor of the Administration Building completed in 1930.



A.E. Staley Jr. in 1942.



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The Staley Viaduct, costing \$330,000 to build, opened to traffic in 1928.



A.E. Staley Sr. in 1937.



Loretta Semelka removes a case of the new "Stoy" flour from a package line at A.E. Staley Mfg. Co. in 1944.



Teresa Freeman shows off bottles of Sta-Puf fabric softener made by A.E. Staley Mfg. Co. in 1963.