

DICKINSON COUNTY HISTORY -- FORD MOTOR COMPANY – DEMOLITION OF FORD SMOKESTACKS

[Compiled and Transcribed by William John Cummings]

The Daily News, Iron Mountain-Kingsford, Dickinson County, Michigan, Friday, September 13, 2002, page 1, columns 2-4 [including a three-column colored photograph]

PHOTOGRAPH CAPTION: A CREW FROM Paschke Demolition of Green Bay, Wis., readies the former Ford Motor Co. smokestacks for destruction. The smokestacks, located in the Kingsford's industrial park area, were expected to be demolished today, said Kingsford's Acting City Manager Tony Edlebeck. City Council voted to raze the historic structures because of safety concerns.

Workers prepare old Ford Smokestacks for demolition

KINGSFORD – Work started today to demolish the old Ford smokestacks in Kingsford, according to Tony Edlebeck, acting city manager.

The Kingsford City Council had previously approved the low bidder for the work, which is T & G United Inc. of Iron Mountain at \$31,480. Subcontractor is Paschke Demolition of Green Bay, Wis.

Other bids had been received from Butch Neuens Landscaping of Kingsford and R & P Industrial Chimney of Nicholasville, Ky.

In the past the stacks have been the topic of heated discussion at Kingsford City Council meetings. The council had pursued many options, from restoring the stacks to tearing them down.

The city had abandoned efforts to save the former Ford stacks, which date to the 1920s when Ford Motor Co. operated a plant in Kingsford.

The stacks are located on a half-acre of city property. The council has expressed

concern over the safety risks that the stacks pose since they are deteriorating.

Ford has declined offers to take over the site. The city was also willing to give the stacks to other interested parties, but has received no proposals.

A group of local citizens had organized and formed a committee, Save Our Stacks, which was trying to get the smokestacks on the National and State Register of Historic Sites or be placed on the Heritage Trail in Michigan, which lists landmarks throughout the state.

The Daily News, Iron Mountain-Kingsford, Dickinson County, Michigan, Saturday-Sunday, September 14-15, 2002, page 1, columns 2-6 [including a three-column colored photograph of the stacks falling and a sequential set of six photographs documenting the demolition]

PHOTOGRAPH CAPTION: THE FORD SMOKESTACKS in Kingsford's Industrial Park, built in the 1920s, fall to the ground under the supervision of Paschke Demolition of Green Bay, Wis. The landmark stacks were part of Ford Motor Co.'s Kingsford plant, which closed in 1951. A series of six photographs of Friday's demolition is shown below.

Stacks fall into history

Hundreds watch Ford towers tumble without incident

By SUSAN ROBINSON
Staff Writer

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KINGSFORD – The Ford smokestacks came down in a rolling cloud of gray smoke at 12:10 p.m. Friday.

Hundreds of people gathered near the Kingsford Industrial Park to watch the end of an era.

Police sirens and fire truck horns heralded the explosion and fall of the 195-foot twin stacks.

The stacks fell forward towards Balsam Street, then began to crumble inward about half-way down, raising a dark cloud of smoke that cleared within a minute or two.

The stacks, subject of much debate regarding their fate, were part of the Ford Motor Co. plant built in the 1920s.

“The reason for the Ford company’s decision to build a plant in the Upper Peninsula is to manufacture the wooden parts of Ford cars near the source of raw material, ship them direct to large branch assembling plants throughout the country and relieve transportation and manufacturing congestion at Detroit,” The Daily Tribune-Gazette reported in July 1920.

The plant turned out station wagons in the 1940s; the earliest versions sported wooden sides. During World War II, station wagon production was halted and production of military gliders began.

The plant took up production of station wagons again after the war. The Kingsford plant closed for good in December 1951.

Little prior notice of Friday’s demolition was given, but hundreds of people turned out to witness it. They gathered in parking lots, in back yards, on rooftops, and roadsides.

Many observers expressed regret about the fate of the stacks. Some people openly wept as the stacks came down.

“I don’t want to see them go. I think they should fix them, they are a landmark,” said Lynda Donovan of Kingsford.

“They (the stacks) represent Kingsford. I think it is terrible,” said Kathleen Pezzullo.

“They can fix other things, why can’t they fix the stacks?” asked Louis Ringuette of Iron Mountain.

“So many people are watching this, and it is all word-of-mouth that brought them out. It is sad, but what can the average guy do?” commented a Kingsford resident.

“The last of the silent sentinels are coming down. That is the heart of Kingsford, these are landmarks,” said Bob Miller of Kingsford. “There is no foresight at all (in doing this). What took years to build took seconds coming down.”

Other observers accepted the city’s decision to bring down the towers.

“Safety-wise, I think they have got to come down,” said Lloyd Broullire of Kingsford. “Mortar does deteriorate after a while. They are so tall, they could do so much damage.”

“I’m not sure what should have been done, but I wanted to be here. It’s history, I had to see it for myself,” said an elderly lady.

“I grew up just down from here,” said Tim Moraska of Iron Mountain. “I didn’t see them go up, but I am going to watch them come down. I remember my ma used to hang clothes out, but she couldn’t hang them out some days because they would be covered with ashes from the stacks,” said Moraska.

Demolition of the stacks went safely and smoothly, according to officials.

“It went perfectly,” said Kingsford Mayor James Myers. “They dropped right where they were supposed to. Paschke Demolition of Green Bay did an excellent job, a very professional job.” Paschke Demolition was subcontractor to T&G United Inc. of Iron Mountain, who was approved as low bidder for the job at \$31,480.

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“The project went exactly as expected,” said Tony Edlebeck, acting city manager. “I want to thank the Iron Mountain Police Department who, along with Kingsford Public Safety Department and a couple of members of the sheriff’s department, did a wonderful job with traffic control. Thanks also to those that came to watch, and to Ameritech, MichCon and WE Energies,” said Edlebeck.

The bricks will be removed to a Kingsford Public Works site, then testing will be done to determine if they have any contamination. If found to be safe, the bricks will be offered to residents free of charge, said Edlebeck.

As the smoke cleared, several people hurried to the twin piles of rubble to collect a souvenir brick or two. Kingsford Public Safety officers reacted quickly, directing the people away from the area for safety reasons.

Utility trucks rolled in to reconnect lines taken down prior to the blast, and cleanup crews assessed the jumbled brick remains of the stacks.

NOTE: The classic photograph of the two smokestacks and the second power plant appears on page 272 of the book Dickinson County, Michigan: From Earliest Times Through the Twenties by William John Cummings. The caption reads as follows: This view shows the power house which replaced the original power plant which had been constructed during the fall and winter of 1920-1921. The second power plant, an imposing structure built of steel and red face brick inset at various places with white stone, stood out from the rest of the plant buildings due to its size and beauty and was centrally located with respect to the sawmill, wood drying kilns and the two buildings of the wood distillation plant. Four boilers, each rated at 1,361

horsepower and capable of a 250 per cent overload, had a combined capacity of 12,000 horsepower, more than four times that of the old plant. These new boilers burned oil, wood and other refuse. Between the new power house and the new addition to the sawmill (where the early Ford truck is parked in this photograph), a steel bridge slanted upward at a sharp angle and contained a runway and exhaust pipes conveying sawdust from every part of the plant for use as fuel in connection with the oil. Two 190-foot high smokestacks with an inside diameter of 14 feet at the bottom and 10 feet at the top, were connected to these boilers. By October, 1923, one boiler was being water tested at the new plant, then still under construction. By June 2, 1924, construction work was almost completed. [Menominee Range Historical Museum]