DeKalb Barbed Wire Factories

**Barb Fence Company** | 1875 - Located at 128-140 South Second Street, DeKalb. The former Illinois Historic Preservation Agency always considered this factory to be the world’s first barbed wire factory. Isaac Ellwood and Joseph Glidden were partners here until 1876, when Glidden sold his half interest out to Washburn and Moer Manufacturing Company of Worcester, Massachusetts for $60,000 plus royalties. The structure was original quite a bit smaller than how it is today. Used as the superior barbed wire company from 1881-1892. By 1894, William H. Bush of Chicago, son in law of Joseph Glidden, had converted the building into Bush, Simmons and Company, hat manufacturers. Various other manufacturing interests, as well as retail businesses have been here over the years.

**Site of I.L. Ellwood Manufactory Company** | 1877 – 1881. At 204 North Fourth Street, DeKalb. I tis believed that James Shannon of Batavia, who specialized in block long structures like this and longer, designed and constructed the factory. The red bricks are said to have come from the Van Galder brickyard on Brickville Road, Sycamore. The historic factory building was 600 x 60 feet, containing some 125,000 square feet. The work force of 200-400 men turned out 1,200 (120 tons) of wire a day, generally being 100-150 carloads behind demand. In 1898, Isaac Ellwood sold out to the American Steel and Wire Company, which was in business until 1938. During World War 2, the production of tank tracks took place in the former wire mill. For a few decades after the war, it was adapted for use as a series of car dealerships. It was demolished late in 2019, to make way for the Agora Tower development.

**Superior Barbed Wire Company/American Steel and Wire Company, East Mill** | Opened in 1892 at North Tenth and Oak Streets, DeKalb. Built to augment the works of the I.L. Ellwood Manufacturing Company. Designed by the C. H. Morgan Construction Company of Worcester, Massachusetts. A three acre complex, with the main building alone dwarfing the I.L. Ellwood factor, being 860x60 feet, and two stories. Besides this it had two one story additions, a 60x100 foot and a 25x125 foot, flanking it. The workforce of 150-200 men were engaged 14 hours a day, manufacturing 50,000 pounds of barbed wire every 10 hours. The factory closed in 1938, and in the early 1970s the main building and one of the additions were destroyed by fire, only their foundations remaining.

**Abram Ellwood Manufacturing Company** | Opened in 1892 at 1401 Pleasant Street, DeKalb. An agricultural implement company started by his father Rueben Ellwood in 1870. Abram patented Ellwood Spread Barbed Wire in 1882, frequently mistaken for being his uncle Isaac’s wire. After Rueben died in 1885, Abram took the business over. When looking for a new place to locate his factory, he chose to accept a $35,000 incentive to move it to DeKalb. Ironically, when he did this in 1891 he was serving as Mayor of Sycamore. The factory complex was long known in DeKalb as United States Steel’s Cyclone Fence Works. Today the plant is occupied by Sonco Alloyd Products, manufacturer or both plastics and plastic products, and fiber and fiber products.

**Jacob Haish Manufacturing Company** | 1881. Located on North Sixth Street and East Lincoln Highway, DeKalb. When the company first began, it was strictly involved in the manufacture of barbed wire fencing, on the second floor of Haish’s 18x40 food carpenter shop of 1853. In 1881 a two story brick building 300x100 feet, with the eventual address of 507 East Lincoln Highway, was erected as his wire factory. It provided employment to 100 men, operating 75 machines, turning out 50 tons of barbed wire a day. As the years went by, Haish diversified his manufacturing interests to also include Manure Spreaders, Cream Separators and Gas Engines. Some Haish Gas Engines are known to exist today in local private collections. The barbed wire factory building was the last of Haish’s plants standing, when town down in the spring of 1979, for replacement by a McDonald’s Restaurant.