

A few years ago, my father, Wesley Mack, gave me a Murray bicycle that he had fixed up. I think he believed that I needed to get more exercise since many of my work duties are now in an office position. It was not uncommon for Dad to pick up an old bicycle here and there and tinker around with fixing it up. If it was beyond repair, he salvaged any parts from it that he could. He never collected very many bicycles at any time, and they usually ended up on the garage sale if he got them done.

Dad received one of his first bicycles when he was 14 or 15 years old. The bicycle was a Big Boy manufactured by the Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Company located in Wanatah. It was purchased by Dad's parents from Byron Childress who was bound for college (his brother is Glenn Childress). One of Dad's missions in later years was to locate and purchase one of the Big Boy bicycles like he had as a youth.

The Murray bicycle that Dad gave me became even more special to me after Dad's passing. I have also taken up his quest to locate and purchase a Big Boy bicycle. To that end, I have tried to compile as much information as possible concerning the Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. The following chronology is the information that was found in the publications of the Wanatah Mirror.

January 26, 1922 - The bicycle factory for Wanatah now promises to become a reality. The company will be known as the Security Manufacturing Company, and will be incorporated for \$50,000. It will employ about 15 men to start with.

February 2, 1922 - Mr. George H. Baylor, the LaPorte bicycle factory man moved into the rooms over the Wanatah State Bank yesterday.

March 2, 1922 - Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Company organized – The stockholders of the new factory for Wanatah met at the bank building last Friday night, organized a company and elected the following officers: President and General Manager, Charles A. Baylor; vice president, Wm. V. Carpenter; secretary and treasurer, Emil E. Grieger. The board of directors are: Chas. A. Baylor, Wm. V. Carpenter, Emil E. Grieger, Clark Bunnell and A.T. Rosenbaum.

The company is capitalized for \$50,000 and articles of incorporating are now being filed. The concern will be known as the Independent Cycle and Manufacturing Co., and while in the start, bicycles will be the only product manufactured, it is the intent to eventually add the manufacture of sundry accessories.

The company has purchased the building presently occupied by the Wanatah Auto Repair Company and the machinery will be installed as soon as it is possible to get it here. Operations of manufacture are expected to begin in 60 days. The factory will start with a small force of men, but as the business increases, more men will be employed and additional machinery and buildings provided. A branch sales office will be opened in Chicago.

Mr. Baylor, president and general manager, who has practically grown up with the bicycle business and for the past 15 years been superintendent of the Great Western Manufacturing Co. of LaPorte, understands the bicycle manufacturing business from "a to z" and is capable of turning out a superior product in that line. He is a man of fine personality and he and his family, who have moved here, are a splendid addition to the residents of this community.

Much of the credit for bringing this enterprise to this place is due to the effort of Trustee L.J. Gross, who for the past four years has been almost constantly trying to locate some kind of factory in this place. Several attempts gave promises but finally failed for various reasons.

There is a good demand for bicycles at present and the outlook for future demands is very promising and we see no reason why this enterprise should not prove a valuable asset to Wanatah.

March 2, 1922 - The Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. yesterday purchased the building formerly known as the Wanatah Livery Stable of Linkimer & Levine.

April 13, 1922 - Work at the Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. plant is now progressing quite well. Much delay has been due to the arrival of the boiler. Mr. Baylor has been in Chicago purchasing machinery. The company now has large orders on hand and is eager to get started.

May 25, 1922 - The smokestack of the Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. plant is now up, most of the machinery placed and don't be surprised to hear the whistle blow soon.

July 20, 1922 - The Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. plant has been running this week to fill an order. Some of the equipment has not yet arrived which is delaying the speeding up of manufacture.

November 23, 1922 - Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. is now turning out finished bicycles completely made in the plant here in Wanatah and upon inspection, we find them of very high-grade quality. Mr. Baylor, president of the company, understands a bicycle from every angle, having practically grown up with the business, and his motto is "quality first." The company has been somewhat handicapped in its progress by its inability to secure supplies, but the prospects now are favorable for an improvement in these conditions and the output will be gradually increased. A sample bicycle in on display at Grieger's Cash Store.

January 11, 1923 - The Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. is steadily increasing their force and bicycles are now being shipped almost daily. The new bicycle with a safety lock is appealing strongly to the trade.

January 18, 1923 - The Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. has donated to the library, one of the latest models, a lock bicycle, which will be placed on exhibit in the window of the Boehlke & Wright's barbershop. Watch for further particulars.

February 8, 1923 - Library Week – Last but not least was the Boehlke & Wright window which contained the bicycle donated by the Wanatah Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. The neat sum of \$114.20 was realized from the bicycle. Miss Olive Denby holding the winning number.

June 7, 1923 - The Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. has landed a big contract with a Chicago mail order house that will take the entire product of the factory. Arrangements are being made to put on a larger force and increase the factory space.

August 2, 1923 - The Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. shipped out a car load of bicycles last week, besides making small shipments almost daily.

January 3, 1924 - The Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. is gradually increasing its output. An addition has been added to the plant recently and every effort is being made to supply the demand for its product. The force will also be increased with the beginning of the new year.

February 14, 1924 - The Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. shipped a car load of bicycles last Friday.

March 6, 1924 - The Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. loaded a car load of bicycles yesterday.

? 1924 - W.V. Carpenter moved to Chicago. C.A. Baylor moved to LaPorte.

December 18, 1924 - Bicycles for Christmas \$24 cash until Feb 1 at the Wanatah Mfg. Co.

January 1, 1925 - Bicycles for Christmas. \$24 cash until Feb 1 at the Wanatah Mfg. Co.

July 20, 1925 - A Big Boy bicycle, made by the Wanatah Manufacturing Co., was stolen from the home of Elmer J. Emond, Tuesday night. Any information leading to its whereabouts will be handled confidentially and the party furnishing such information will be rewarded.

October 29, 1925 - For sale: Big Boy bicycle, practically new. Bargain if taken at once. Box 166, Wanatah.



Wesley Mack with his Big Boy bicycle - 1928

No information was found in the Wanatah Mirror explaining what happened to the Independent Cycle & Manufacturing Co. There was no mention of it after January 1925 except for the two personal advertisements. I am continuing my research for answers to what happened to it. The bicycle industry as a whole experienced difficult times during the period and many small independent companies were unable to survive. If anyone has information that they can share about the company, I would appreciate hearing from them. If you know of where a Big Boy can be found, I would especially like to hear from you. (Contact: Jon Mack, P.O. Box 162, Hanna, IN 46340; Phone: 219-797-2805.)