

New Castle Plant is a flagship for Henry County

In 1907 when JD Maxwell and Benjamin Briscoe opened the doors to their new plant in New Castle, Indiana, it was the largest automobile assembly plant in the world. It also opened a new way of life for people in this community. A relationship of workers and owners, business and government, and community and family was built upon the activity derived from the factory at 1817 "I" Avenue. From Maxwell to Chrysler, to DaimlerChrysler to Metaldyne and names in-between, the plant has continued to provide jobs and income to generations of citizens in Henry County.

By 1910 there were 1,200 Maxwell-Briscoe employees producing an average of 5,000 automobiles each year, however, in 1911 all assembly operations were moved to Detroit. The New Castle plant was assigned the responsibility of supplying parts and still provides those today. In 1916 a Forge and Hammer Shop was erected to house large steam operated hammers. Throughout World War I, cars that were made in New Castle could be found everywhere but by the end of the war, the factory was in financial trouble.

In 1924 after helping reorganize the company, Walter P. Chrysler introduced the first car to carry his name at New York's Commodore Hotel. The immediate success of this car influenced Maxwell to voluntarily transfer stock to a new organization bearing the name, Chrysler Corporation. On June 26, 1925, the New Castle plant became one of the original six plants in the new company. Looking toward the future, a large addition was made when a Die Shop and Maintenance building was erected in 1928.

A record setting 6,700 employees worked at the New Castle plant in 1934. New Castle was one of the original seven plants to organize a union when United Auto Workers local 371 got their first agreement with Chrysler Corporation in April 1937.

During World War II, the New Castle plant played a major role in defense activities by operating at full capacity on front wheel drive systems for Army trucks, parts for weapons carriers and tank treads. The New Castle Chrysler employees distinguished themselves by receiving the Army-Navy "E" pennant for excellence in production.

Walter Reuther, President of the UAW, visited New Castle for the dedication of the new Local 371 Union Hall. Another major addition of 176 thousand square feet was added to the machine shop in 1964. From 1971 to 1974, over 300 thousand square feet was added to the plant and many existing areas were remodeled.

During the mid 70s a major downturn occurred with the switch to front wheel drive vehicles and oil embargoes. New Castle's workforce dwindled from 3,000 employees to less than 600 by the mid 80s. With the company's introduction of two new vehicles, the K-car and minivan, the corporation made a profit in 1982 and paid back a government loan in 1983 with \$500 million in interest. In 1987 the New Castle plant became a part of Acustar, a newly created division of Chrysler but returned to Chrysler Motors in 1989.

The 1990s breathed new life into New Castle Machining & Forge. As the economy began its rebound, employees who had been laid off for as many as 18 years were being recalled and the plant went into a hiring mode. In November 1998, Chrysler Corporation merged with Daimler-Benz and a new company was established in November, known as DaimlerChrysler.

Metaldyne purchased the New Castle Machining and Forge plant from DaimlerChrysler on December 31, 2003. From January until December 2003, the facility operated as a joint venture between Metaldyne and DaimlerChrysler.

As Metaldyne's largest facility, the New Castle plant is a center for manufacturing excellence, producing integrated chassis systems of Ball Joints, Corner Modules, Control Arms, Independent Rear Suspension Components, Knuckles, Independent Front Suspension Components, Manifolds, Torsion Bar Anchors and the Shock Clevis.

The New Castle plant at 1817 I Avenue remains Henry County's largest industrial employer, with over 1,000 employees. Their presence continues to affect the area in a positive way that has provided a lifestyle for the citizens of this Indiana community.