

LOCAL MANUFACTURERS

KERN MANUFACTURING

In 1884, Frank Kern, then a commercial salesman for dry goods and clothing, established a small factory in the 1700 block of Broadway. There he began producing a product he had invented: The Kern Supporter. It was designed to support hosiery for women and children. Kern used his contacts in the dry goods business to market the products. The principle item became the Perfect Stocking Supporter.



As the business grew, he moved the factory several times and in 1895 constructed the Virginia Building at 1501 Broadway. It was named for his late wife. Kern established his factory on the second floor and for awhile operated a hardware and furniture store on the ground floor, later leasing the spaces to various businesses, including the U.S. Post Office.

At the time of Kern's death in 1930, his products were being shipped all over the United States and he held over 50 patents. Shortly after his death, the factory moved to Neoga where it remained for many years.

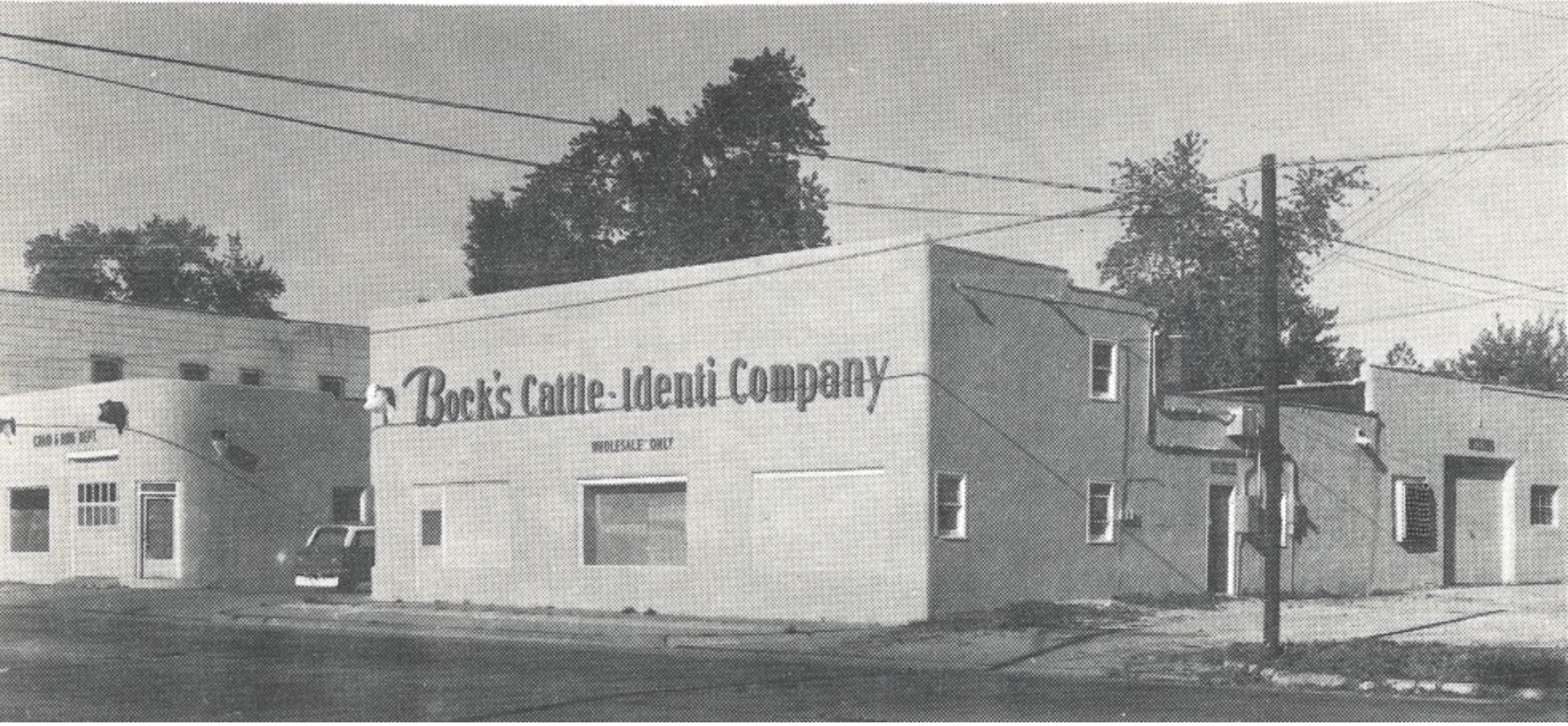
J M BRESEE MANUFACTURING

In 1911, James "Jim" M Bresee invented the "Uncle Jim" road machine to capitalize on the burgeoning effort to build both urban and rural roads. Initially he produced the machines one at a time for local use. By 1913 he had orders for more than 15 of the machines. He built a machine shop at 2112 Champaign and eventually built a factory building at 18th and Marion adjoining the IC right of way to facilitate receiving material and shipping finished machines. A 1914 Journal-Gazette article stated "county boards in various counties have pronounced the "Uncle Jim" to be the best road machine on the market." By 1916 the "Uncle Jim" was being used in 14 states. Bresee sold the business and patents to the Baker Manufacturing Company in Springfield, Illinois in 1916. Baker Manufacturing was acquired by Allis-Chalmers in 1950. Unfortunately, we have been unable to locate a photo or any other document pertaining to the "Uncle Jim" road grader.

BOCK CATTLE-IDENTI COMPANY

George W Bock started Bock's Cattle-Identi Company in 1942. Bock was an entrepreneur and owner of the Monarca Oil Company. He owned a 60 acre farm east of Mattoon, called Monarca Manor. George began making numbered tags for his cattle and other cattlemen saw or heard about them and thus the business was born. George Bock was a visionary who researched and developed new products, materials and numbering techniques. Monarca Manor served as experimental farm where products were created and tested.

In 1953 the business had grown to a point that Bock incorporated and after a series of moves, located at 609 N. 19th Street.



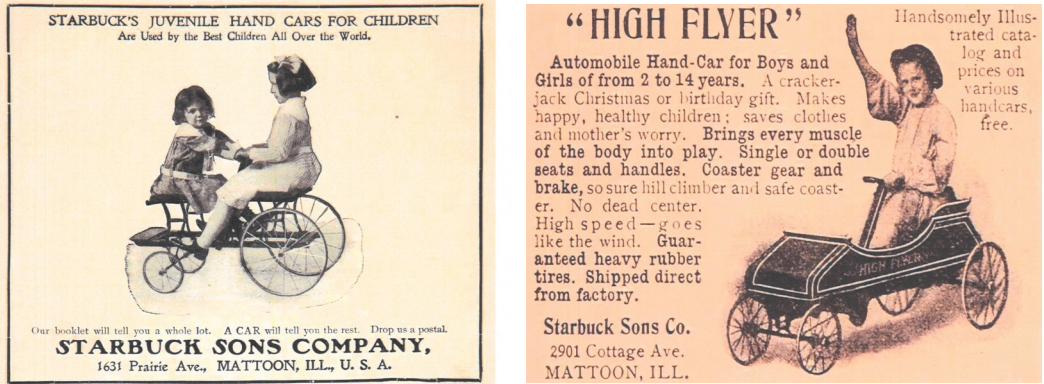
Mattoon has had many major manufacturer's over the years. Some have been national companies and a few, significantly were founded here in Mattoon. In addition to those major industries, there were several, smaller, home grown manufacturers that are worthy of mention.

STARBUCK SONS COMPANY

R B Starbuck had been the general superintendent for the Peoria, Decatur & Evansville Railroad facility in Mattoon. In 1902, his son, Charles developed a design for a children's handcar based upon the principle of a railroad handcar. Starbuck leased a small factory at 1720 Charleston and with his three sons began manufacturing them under the business name Starbuck Sons Company.

With the Illinois Central purchase of the PD&E, Starbuck became Superintendent of the Peoria Division of the IC and left the factory to his sons to operate.

A year later, they expanded to a building at 2901 Cottage and engaged in manufacturing the handcars on a larger scale.



About that time they also introduced a child's automobile handcar that was marketed as the "High Flyer." At some point the company made a final move to 1631 Prairie. By this time they were also manufacturing a baby stroller they called a "Go-Cart". Despite some success and regional sales, the company never turned a profit and was dissolved in 1910.

HOME MANUFACTURING COMPANY

J G Schrock began manufacturing wooden trellises for the local market in 1921. By 1923, demand had grown, and he established a factory just east of the Illinois Central at Marshall and 19th Street. There he expanded his product offering to include pergolas, arches, arbors and rose fans.



He sold the business in 1925 to Oscar E Swearingen who changed the name of the company to Homecraft Specialty Company. Swearingen continued the product line and in later years added screen and storm doors and window sashes to catalogue. The business continued until 1963.

As the business grew, Bock expanded the line to include ear tags, neck tags, tail, and ankle tags. The tags themselves were sourced from several suppliers that did the injection molding of the tag itself. Bock's company applied the markings by three different processes: electro welding, hot stamping, and engraving. The process was determined by the material being used and the customers preference. The products were all sold wholesale through farm and ranch distributors.

Over the years, Bock's made several innovations that were industry firsts:
1943- plastic neck chain.
1951- plastic neck strap.
1958-plastic ear tag, legible at 50 feet.
1959-identification anklet.
1963-medicated self-piercing ear tag.
1964-neck strap ID's for horses.
1964-tags especially for brisket.
1966-nose tags.



In 1976, Lester and Marianne Ketler purchased the company from George Bock and it continued to grow. In 1980, Ketler purchased the building at 3101 Cedar, where it remains today. With the retirement of Lester Ketler, his daughter, Gretchen Ketler Decker became president and operation manager in 1988. Gretchen's sister, Karen, a college professor, was a silent partner.

MATTOON STOVE & RANGE

In 1903 the Charleston Stove & Range Company was looking for a new location due to issues with a reliable water source and rail connections.

A group of Mattoon investors formed the Mattoon Improvement Company and agreed to build a \$30,000 plant on the north edge of the city for the company. The site had ample water and several railroad spurs. In return, the re-named Mattoon Stove & Range Company agreed to employ at least 70 men for a period of 12 years.



Initially, the plant thrived. A 1907 Journal-Gazette article stated: "With demand almost exceeding the capacity of the local plant and orders coming from all parts of the United States, the Mattoon Stove Works are at present time employing a work force of 125 men."

By 1910, however, the popularity of gas ranges signaled the death of the wood and coal stove. After continued cutbacks and losses, the company shuttered the plant in early 1911.

The site and building was acquired by the H W Clark Company in 1912.

MICHAELS MOWER COMPANY

In 1945, Gilbert Michaels opened Michaels Electric Shop at 709 N. 19th Street. His primary business was repairing electric motors. In 1947, Gilbert built a weed mower for a customer and soon began tinkering with the design. There were other weed mowers on the market, but Gilbert patented his design which included a safety guard and a device to keep weeds and grass from clogging up the blade.



The product took off and Gilbert made additions to the plant in 1947. 1948, 1950 and again in 1952. By 1955, The Michaels Mower had 38 dealers, primarily in Illinois and Missouri. Other major markets included Texas, Alabama, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Production was running to about 500 units a year, in 4 different models. In 1961, the company received an order for 95 units from the U.S Department of Agriculture and another order for 113 units in 1965. By the mid 1960's, Sears, Roebuck was taking about 40% of the production and thus the mowers found their way all over the country. Gilbert Michaels closed the business and retired in 1986.



The sisters sold the business in 2007 to Craig and Polly Salak. They sold it in 2013 to Aaron Bolinger. Today, the ID products are not just used on cattle, but all types of livestock as well as being used to identify other objects such as valves and switches. Accordingly the name was changed to Bock's Identi Company. Under Bolinger's ownership the company continues to innovate and adapt new products and systems for today's market.