

Aetna Powder Company Factory Photos

by Don Blyth

I was at an auction in October, and bought a series of 13 old photographs, circa 1890, supposedly of the Hamilton Powder Co. When I got them home and took the magnifying glass to them, I discovered they are from the Aetna Powder Company, Chicago, Illinois.

Factory interior photographs are very scarce. The entire series is described below, with the most interesting examples shown:

#3 "Gun Cotton Beater House" shows a worker with heavy gloves, in front of heavy machinery.

#4 "Blacksmith Shop" shows two workers with hammer and anvil by the forge.

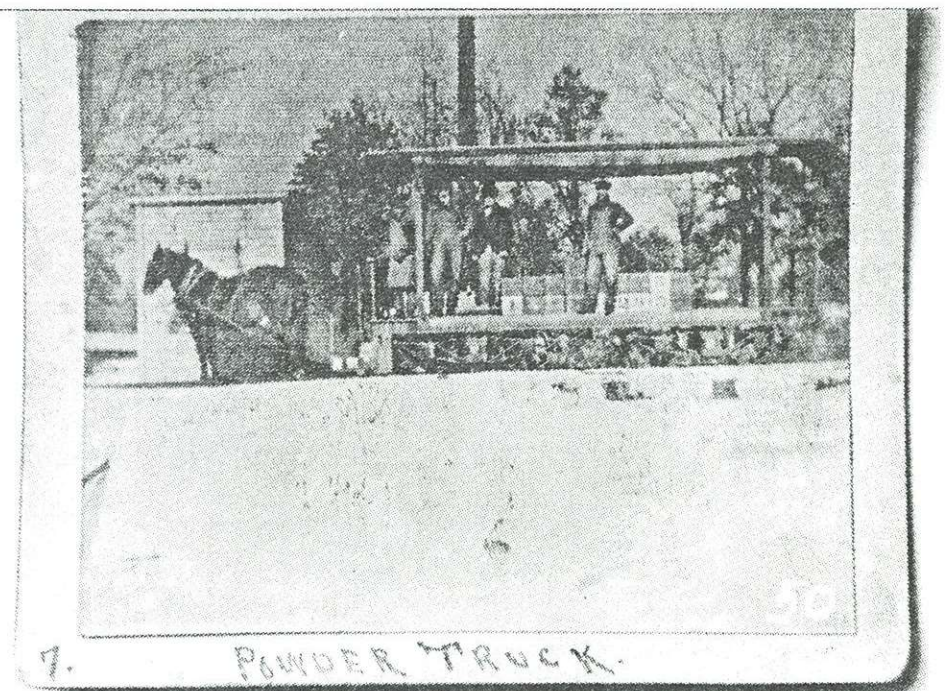
#5 "Dynamite Mix House" Two workers beside a heavy circular mill, with broom and shovel. Reverse names Roy Sherwood as a worker there.

#6 "Dynamite Shell Machines" shows man at machinery, two boys in background, and crates of paper dynamite shells. (photo shown here).

#7 "Powder Truck" depicts four men and a horse-drawn track truck, with cases of dynamite. (shown here).

#8 "Parafining House" shows a lad dipping dynamite sticks in parafin wax. (shown here).

#9 Nitric Acid Works" shows five men and equipment, looks to be under construction.



[Editor's note: Don's comment may stem from the fact that the roof of the Nitric Acid Works shed is partly open girders. This may in fact be a safety precaution, since nitric acid fumes are highly toxic when inhaled. 2 ppm in air can be lethal.]

#10 "Nitro Glycerine Machines" shows two men by open tanks and equipment.

[Yet another Editors note: when I worked at Hercules, this was the job everybody avoided, as the nitro headaches were absolutely blinding.]

#13 "Case House" shows six workmen making wooden cases. Under magnification, the original shows that one case-end can be read. Also on the workbench is the tin stencil for painting cases, which reads:

"AETNA GELATIN
AETNA POWDER CO.
CHICAGO ILL"

(photo shown here)

#14 "Case House" shows the building exterior, with tracks running past building and covered loading area.

#16 "Ammonia Nitrate House" shows a large vat in a brick building.

#18 "Sulfuric Acid Concentrator" shows a worker by machinery.

#19 "Absorbent Mill and View of Powder House" showing winter scene with snow, showing several buildings and central tracks.

