

R.I. Anderson Machine Shop Exhibit

(Plan to Visit)

The latest exhibit added to the offerings of the Iola Historical Society is a recreation of the R. I. Anderson Machine Shop, a business conducted out of a building situated on East State Street from around 1930 to 1970.

Born Rugnar (Rhinard) Isidor Andersson (Anderson) on December 14th, 1882, in Stockholm, Sweden. He emigrated to the United States with his parents as an infant in 1883 and became a citizen on June 9th, 1890.



R.I. Andersson

Having been schooled in the blacksmithing and machining at the elbow of his father, Charles (Carl). He ultimately gained a degree of local renown as a builder of fire trucks and firefighting equipment. He became engaged in this pursuit

by chance in the early 1940s, when he offered to equip a new fire truck for the Iola Fire Department, of which he had been a volunteer for more than 20 years. At that time the department was seeking to replace its 1912 Waterous pumper and 1924 Ford Model T truck.

In 1942, the Village of Iola purchased a used 1938 Reo Speedwagon chassis for conversion into a combination fire fighting pumper and hose truck. Anderson outfitted the chassis with the necessary structure and locally crafted all the accessories the apparatus required. This fire truck became the first of 25 Anderson would subsequently craft, until the late 1950s, to serve fire departments in small towns situated around central Wisconsin.

In addition to crafting the custom-made brass and bronze specialty apparatus required for outfitting the fire trucks, Anderson cast, machined and sold other fire-fighting equipment for manufacturers to use.



Replica of R.I. Anderson Machine Shop on East State Street from around 1930 to 1970.

Thus the logo:

“A (in a circle)/R.I. ANDERSON/IOLA WIS.”

After 56 years operating out of his East State St. location, Anderson determined it was time to retire. He sold the building to the Village in 1970. The building was subsequently torn down in 1971. Among the contents salvaged from the building prior to its removal were the machine tools Anderson employed in his manufacturing process. Also placed in storage were the 1912 Waterous Pumper and 1924 Ford Model T truck, which had been outfitted as a hose truck in 1926.

Information courtesy of Iola Historical Society



Horse-drawn fire truck



Model T Engine



Reo Speedwagon