

Trek down 'Tyden Trail' tells story of Hastings industrialist

By Doug VanderLaan
Special Correspondent

Hastings may have been the site of his greatest industrial accomplishment, and the betterment of the people in Barry County may have been his greatest focus, but the memory of the remarkable Emil Tyden has to be shared by the entire world.

Writing about another Swedish immigrant who also achieved great things in America, biographer Mark D. Hirsch could have been describing Tyden when he said that inventor John Ericsson's "stage was the world. To associate him alone with city or state or even nation is to demean him, to make parochial his boundless mental endowment and indomitable spirit."

The antiquated buildings on East Mill Street in Hastings are where, of course, Tyden built the famed box-

car seal, produced inventions for the Hastings Table Company and helped start Hastings Manufacturing Company and Viking Sprinkler Company. Tyden provided guidance to Detroit automakers with piston ring technology. He pioneered a "dry valve" fire-prevention system for the Viking Company, and he was a ready and willing host to hundreds of entrepreneurs and inventors who packed the Hastings Hotel on trips to Barry County seeking assistance from Tyden.

He never forgot the debt he owed his new country, either, serving to equip soldiers with modernized World War I weapons as the director of the Rock Island Arsenal base in Illinois.

To truly know the greater Tyden story, though, one needs to travel the "Tyden Trail" through states in the



Even the scale model builder misestimated the size of the barn that Emil Tyden built in 1936 on Tyden Farm No. 6. Current owners and Tyden historians, Ted and Judy Pitzenberger, believe it may be the largest barn in the state of Iowa. The scale of the first model tribute had to be reduced because the replica proved to be too big. (Photo by Fred Jacobs)

Midwest — and all the way to the Snake River in Idaho. A fast-paced weekend trip from Hastings to the Army Arsenal in Rock Island to the banks of the Mississippi River in Moline, Ill., and on to the vast and fertile farming fields of Iowa provides a glimpse of the genius that Tyden shared with everyone he met.

Upon his 1882 arrival in New York City from Sweden as a 17-year-old, Tyden traveled directly to the home of an aunt who lived at 1214 Third Street, in Moline. The home still stands in a modest neighborhood high atop a hill overlooking the Mississippi. A neighborhood with once-strong Swedish heritage is the likely reason his Aunt Ida Johanssen lived there and likely her influence with Swedish compatriots got Tyden an immedi-

ate job at the Moline Organ Company located at the bottom of the hill at 660 Railroad St.

The organ factory no longer exists nor does the company. Cross the river to the neighboring city of Davenport, Iowa, though, and a visitor will find a historical — and beautifully operational — Moline Pipe Organ in the St. Mary's Catholic Church at 516 Fillmore St.

"The parish was formed in 1867 and held its first mass in 1869," said Father Chris Young. "In 1883, the organ was purchased and installed, and it's considered today to be the oldest organ in the city of Davenport."

Given that Tyden hired in at the Moline Organ Company in 1882, just a year before St. Mary's Catholic Church took delivery on the marvelous piece, Fr. Young

agreed that Tyden likely used his craftsman skills on this very historical piece that resides in a stunning church choir loft in downtown Davenport.

Tyden's creative abilities and driving immigrant ambition soon led him to numerous and impressive accomplishments as a businessman in Chicago where he started a number of new ventures, including a cement company that contracted for the concrete needed at the world-renowned 1893 Columbian Exposition, more commonly known as the Chicago World's Fair. He garnered patents on new agriculture inventions and pioneered new cities and villages in the west as a land agent for the Union Pacific Railroad.

He even had time, after 10 years in America working and saving the money he needed, to return to Sweden to fulfill his intention of buying the farm on which his family had worked all its life as tenant farmers. Tyden spent a year in Sweden to consider that decision before opting for a return to America with its wide-open spaces and limitless promise for a dreamer with ambition.

Tyden never lost his love for the country that wel-

comed him as an immigrant. In 1914, as he saw war clouds gathering and an America ill-equipped to fight, he offered his services at the Rock Island, Ill., Military Arsenal where President Woodrow Wilson made him director of a 30,000-worker munitions effort and conferred on him the title of "Lieutenant Colonel," a moniker Tyden would wear for the remainder of his years.

At Rock Island, Tyden called on his automobile industry contact John Dodge, of Dodge Brothers fame, for the design and delivery of a recoil mechanism he needed to retrofit the two famed and powerful French-designed artillery pieces, the 155-millimeter Schneider howitzer and the 155-millimeter Filoux general-purpose field gun.

Driving and walking the 946-acre complex today — which is still the largest government-owned weapons manufacturing arsenal in the United States — and a visitor can feel Tyden's presence and gain deeper respect for the man who saw an army in 1914 with an arms cache of only weapons left over from the Civil War and

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After arriving from Sweden as a 17-year-old, Emil Tyden's first American home was here in a neighborhood dominated by Swedish immigrants. Set high on a hill overlooking the Mississippi River, Tyden walked down the hill each morning to his first job in America at the Moline Organ Company. (Photo by Fred Jacobs)



A crowd of more than 500 people attended the formal opening of the Tyden Feed and Livestock Company in 1941. Located in nearby Dougherty, Iowa, the company's lead product was a feed mixture devised by Tyden that improved the health and growth of cattle and sold nationwide. Here, Ted and Judy Pitzenberger hold a copy of an advertisement from the local weekly newspaper in 1941. (Photo by Fred Jacobs)

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Established as a government site in 1816 with the construction of Fort Armstrong on a 946-acre island in the Mississippi River, the Rock Island Arsenal is still operational today as the largest government-owned weapons arsenal in the United States. Tyden used the substantial resources and manufacturing power at Rock Island to build a manufacturing base that put America in position to fight World War I. His efforts earned him the title "Lieutenant Colonel," a label he proudly wore throughout his remaining years. (Photo by Doug VanderLaan)

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the Mexican-American War of 1846-48. Rock Island history documents how Tyden, with his engineering brilliance and organizational skills, equipped America to enter the conflict that halted the march of a growing German economic and industrial power determined to conquer the world.

St. Mary's Catholic Church in Davenport, Iowa, is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and was established in 1867. Not only does it house the grand Moline Pipe Organ, it is also the home of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin painting by renowned artist Guido Reni. Church organist Celestine Fejervary, who fled revolution in her native Hungary, obtained the painting for St. Mary's when she visited Belgium in 1893. (Photo by Fred Jacobs)

quer the world.

After America's military triumph, Tyden quietly returned to Barry County with the greatest loves of his life — his wife, Minnie, and daughter Florence — to resume not only his flourishing business career, but to apply the principle by which he lived his life: working to make others successful. He helped his nephew Aben Johnson establish the Hastings Manufacturing Company, which marked 100 years in 2015. And, following his invention of the dry-valve sprinkler system, Tyden established a dealer system in which individuals across the country succeeded with his financial backing.

A strong believer in the benefit of competition for consumers, Tyden bought the National Bank in Hastings to maintain its independence when Hastings City Bank — the organization that had been the foundation of his own success — sought to purchase its only rival.

Through his adventures across the United States and his vast accomplishments, Tyden never lost his love for the farming background of his early life in Sweden. His years of working with the Union Pacific Railroad provided ample opportunity to view the country during his countless railway trips. Tyden in 1915 bought the first of what would become eight farms in the marvelously rich farming land of Iowa. While maintaining his business interests, Tyden made his eventual 3,000-acre holding a demonstration in how farming could be conducted profitably, efficiently and beneficially to consumers.

Today, Ted and Judy Pitzenberger maintain Tyden Farm No. 6 and, in addition to running their own agricultural business on land they own and lease, have dedicated their farm to the memory of Emil Tyden. From the towering cathedral ceiling-like barn that can hold 25,000 bales of hay to the simple bedroom in the farm home where Tyden slept during his quarterly visits to monitor progress, the Pitzenbergers have recreated the man's agricultural genius.

"I think he looked at this barn as his crown jewel," said Ted Pitzenberger, marveling with a visitor at the infrastructure that climbs nearly 50 feet above and stretches 140 feet in length. The barn posts are made of cedar and rest in massive pools of concrete that anchor a building that still stands straighter than most structures in the county.

As he became concerned about animal nutrition and improved growth, Tyden invented his own protein mix to be added to cattle feed. As its value became apparent, Tyden opened the Tyden Livestock and Feeding Company, which benefited all farmers in the area. As



Installed at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Davenport, Iowa, in 1883, the Moline Pipe Organ surely carries some of Emil Tyden's craftsmanship. Tyden's first job in America began with the company in 1882 in Moline, Ill. (Photo by Fred Jacobs)

his own cattle holdings grew, Tyden invited neighboring farmers to participate in the discounts he received for large purchases of cattle, feed and farm supplies.

The Pitzenberger tours of Tyden's innovative work are becoming a burgeoning business in themselves. Often, the tours include stories of Tyden's personal warmth and heart for helping others.

On a recent visit, neighbor Dennis McWilliams shared the story of his grandfather who, when bidding to purchase a farm for his son, encountered a competing bid from Emil Tyden whose own land adjoined the property up for sale. When learning of the intent of a father to provide for his son, Tyden withdrew his bid.

"I marvel at the respect Emil Tyden had for my grandfather," said McWilliams, of the land baron who easily could have outbid any competition for prime farmland. "My grandfather took possession of the land in August 1934, and now, with my daughter and son-in-law farming it, it's become a fourth-generation farm."

Tyden's love for people was not limited by generation, either. At the grand

opening of the Tyden Livestock and Feed Company, Tyden could not be located as the event's beginning neared. Found in the neighboring soda fountain, enjoying an ice cream sundae with a group of youngsters he had encountered, Tyden replied to a reminder of his needed presence, "I'll be right there, I'm finishing some ice cream with my friends."

The story of Tyden's colorful and inspiring life is being compiled in a biography soon to be published by J-Ad Graphics Inc. Iowa farmers and historians Ted and Judy Pitzenberger are looking forward to another resource in helping them tell the story.

"It's a story that needs to be told," said Ted Pitzenberger of the work he and Judy continue on Tyden Farm No. 6, "and the more we find out, the more amazing it gets."

The Pitzenbergers can be contacted by U.S. Mail at 1145 300th St., Dougherty, IA, 50433-8011; by calling 641-426-5277; or by email to tyden6@netins.net. The Pitzenbergers also maintain a Facebook page and a website, www.tydenfarm.com.

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every day,
Still loved and missed
in every way.

Wife Mae,
Robert & Madeline,
Wayne & Linda,
Linda and Tim,
Priscilla & Doug,
Stan & Bobbie, grandchildren
& great grandchildren &
Kona II

