

Fairbury, Illinois and Honeggers' and Co., Inc.

The town of Fairbury, Illinois was platted on November 10, 1857 in preparation for the coming of the Peoria and Oquawka Railroad. The town plan appears to be virtually identical to that used to lay out Chatsworth Illinois, including the street names, and very similar to that at Gridley and El Paso – also towns on the Peoria and Oquawka. The population of Fairbury was 2,433 in 1950.

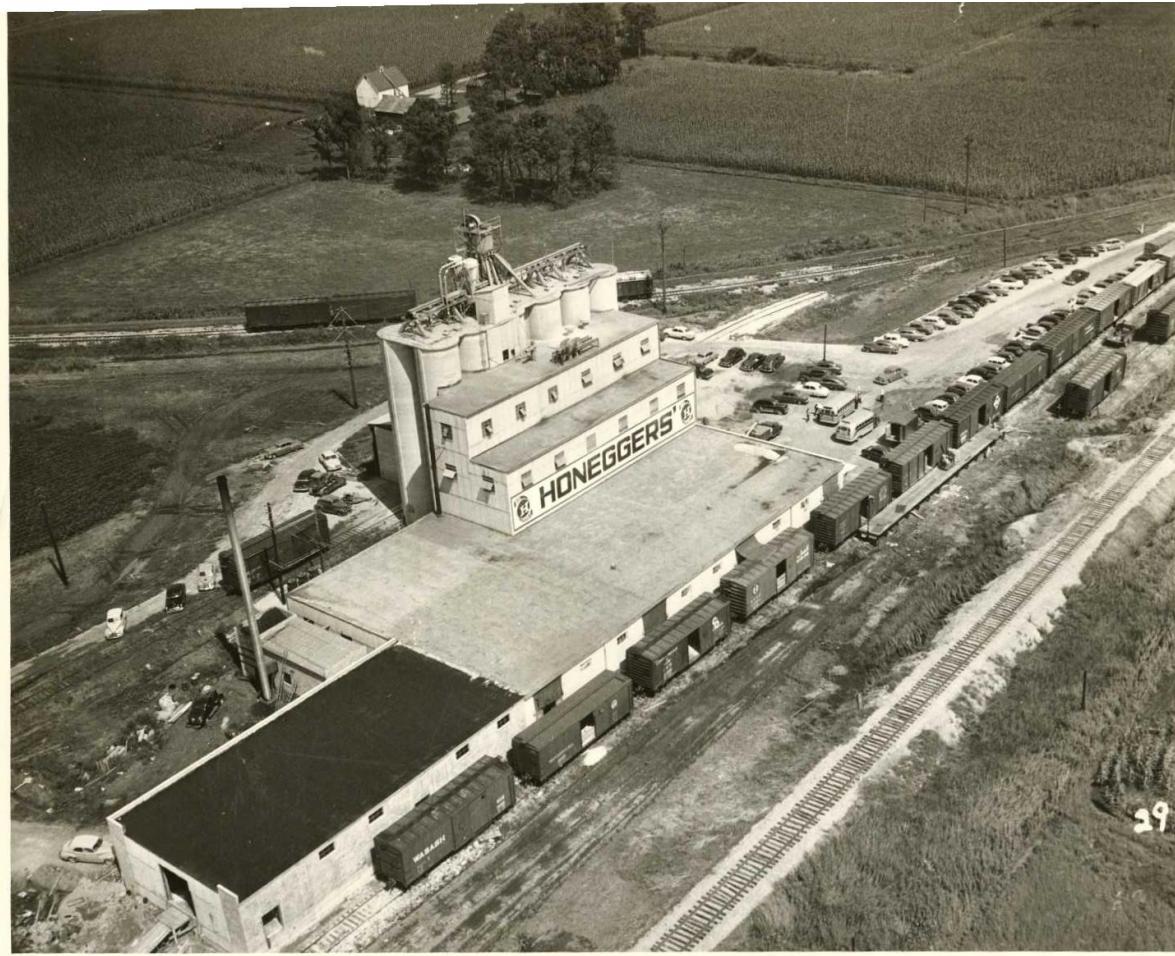
In 1864, the P&O was sold in foreclosure to the Toledo, Peoria and Warsaw Railway, which was reorganized again as the Toledo, Peoria & Western Railroad and leased to the Wabash, St. Louis and Pacific Railroad in 1880. The Toledo, Peoria & Western Railway took over the line when the Wabash turned back the lease in 1887.

The TP&W was not the only railroad to serve Fairbury. The Wabash Railroad had trackage rights over the TP&W from Forrest, Illinois, five miles east of Fairbury, to Fairbury, where it turned north to reach Streator, Illinois. The Streator Branch was originally constructed as the Fairbury, Pontiac and Northwestern Railway in 1867. The FP&N served Fairbury, McDowell, Pontiac, Cornell and finally terminated in Streator. The FP&N was consolidated with the Bloomington and Ohio River Railroad in March, 1872 to form the Chicago & Paducah Railroad, and the C&P was subsequently purchased by the Wabash, St. Louis and Pacific Railroad on April 5th, 1880 – for a time unifying the TP&W and the C&P under the Wabash banner. The TP&W regained its independence in 1887, while the Wabash retained the Streator branch.



For many years, Fairbury was home to Honeggers' Feeds – an innovative feed company formed by Sam and Frank Honegger in 1928. The Honeggers first established their feed operation in Forrest, Illinois, but soon relocated west to Fairbury. When the Fairbury plant was destroyed by a fire in 1949, Honeggers' broke ground in 1950 on a modern plant on the west side of Fairbury immediately to the west of where the Wabash's Streator branch left the TP&W mainline. The facility on Locust Street was served by both railroads and became a major generator of traffic.

Honeggers flourished throughout the 1950s and early 1960s expanding into nine other states, but by the late 1960s the company was in serious financial trouble and was sold to Petroleum Resources Corporation. PRC shed unprofitable lines and plants and restored the company to



Honeggers' mill in Fairbury, Illinois in the early 1950s. This is the second mill in Fairbury, built in 1950 after the first mill was destroyed by fire in 1949. The mill was located on the west side of Fairbury at the end of Locust Street. (The company headquarters were a few blocks east on Locust Street in the old Illinois Hotel.) With the help of Google Earth, I estimate the silos were approximately 100 feet long and 35 feet wide, the main building approximately 200 feet long and 100 feet wide, and the extension to the left of the main building approximately 85 feet long and 50 feet wide. The total length of the building appears to equal six 40 foot boxcars. Boxcars alongside the Wabash Streator branch can be seen at the top of the photo. Unless otherwise noted, the photos used here are from the Fairbury Echoes Museum and used with their permission. <http://www.historicfairbury.com/>

financial health before selling it to EHE Corporation in the late 1970s, but the company continued to experience financial difficulties before ceasing operations in 1989. Honneger's celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1978, and this piece ran in the local media at that time recalling the company's expansion and, later, its contraction.

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~barrone/babbs/nl5.htm>



Honeggers Mill in Fairbury, Illinois, again likely in the early 1950s. TP&W GP-7 number 102 was one of two on the railroad and was delivered by EMD in January, 1952, which helps date the photo. Throughout the late 1940s, half of the feed products produced by Honeggers were for poultry, but by the end of the 1950s the company had significantly expanded the number of feed products it made for hogs and cattle.

Today, little remains of the state of the art mill built by Honeggers outside of Fairbury. The concrete silos still stand at the west end of Locust Street, but the mill itself has been removed leaving only the concrete foundation, which thanks to Google Earth, I estimate to be about 470 feet long, reflecting expansion after the 1950s photos.

Thanks to the Fairbury Echoes Museum for its efforts to preserve the history of their community and Honeggers.



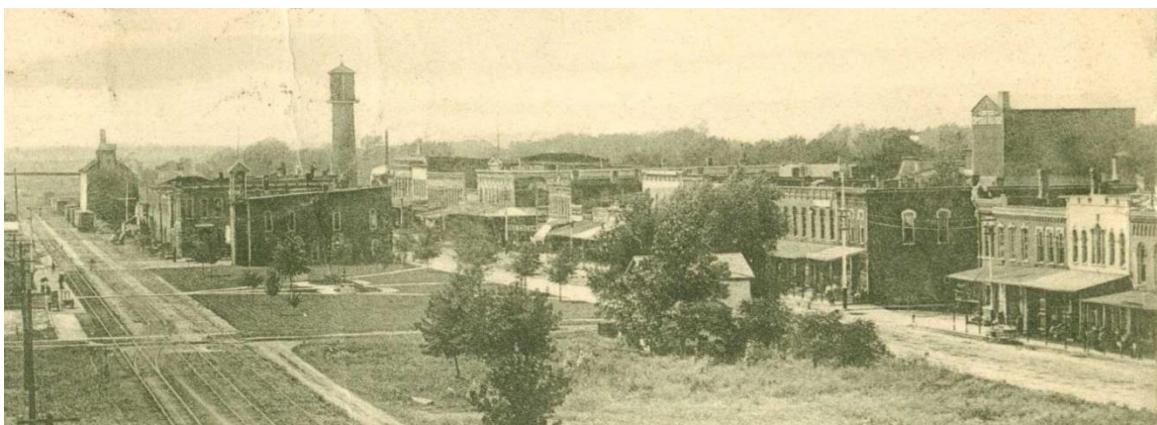
Honeggers Mill in Fairbury, Illinois looking west in this 1955 postcard view, below a similar view of the plant.



Honeggers' Corporate Headquarters



Honeggers' corporate headquarters was just over half a mile east of the plant at the corner of Locust Street and 2nd Street. The company added on to the three story Illinois Hotel and used it as its company headquarters from the 1940s through the 1980s. The building was demolished in 1995 to make way for the new City Hall. Above is the rear of the building on the north side of the TP&W tracks looking west. Note the hoppers appear to be being painted for Honeggers. Below, in a much earlier view also looking west, the elevator next to the hotel is shown in the distance on the left along the TP&W tracks – it's a block west of the old City Hall. The original depot is partially shown at the far left of the photo across the tracks from the park.





Here is another view of the old Illinois Hotel that served as Honeggers' corporate headquarters, this time looking east down Locust Street – the three story building bears the trademark “Big H”. Also shown above one block east of Honeggers is the old city hall with a clock tower – this local landmark helps to orient old photos. The Union Station depot was across the tracks from city hall to the right, but it has since been replaced by a very Spartan station shown here (top center). Still further east of old City Hall is a large concrete elevator – now Prairie Central Coop -- which is still there today. Below the Illinois Hotel before Honeggers' occupied the entire building and expanded the facility.

<http://www.historicfairbury.com/photo-gallery#>



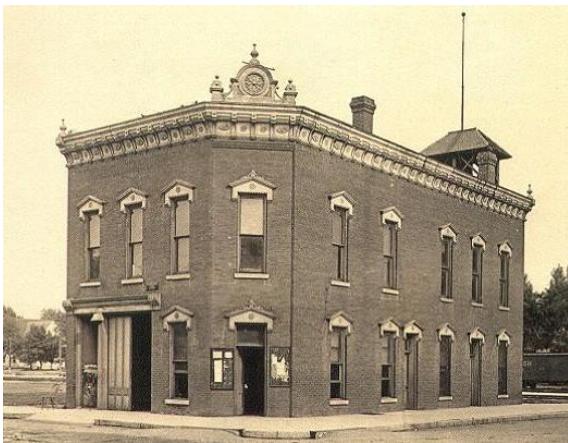
Union Station

Fairbury's Union Station depot was built in 1909 and demolished in 1934 – I believe it replaced a wood frame structure at this location. The depot was on the south side of the TP&W tracks and was named "Union Station" presumably because it was served by both the TP&W and the Wabash, which had trackage rights over this portion of the railroad.



Above, a view of "Union Station" from Central Park showing the civil war cannon that remains on the site to this day. The photo is looking west and south. The bell tower to the far right is on the historic City Hall.

Old City Hall



The old City Hall stood on the corner of Locust and 3rd Street immediately west of Central Park and north of the TP&W tracks. Built in 1892, a clock tower was added in 1912 (above). The local landmark is on the national register of historic places and visible in many TP&W photos.