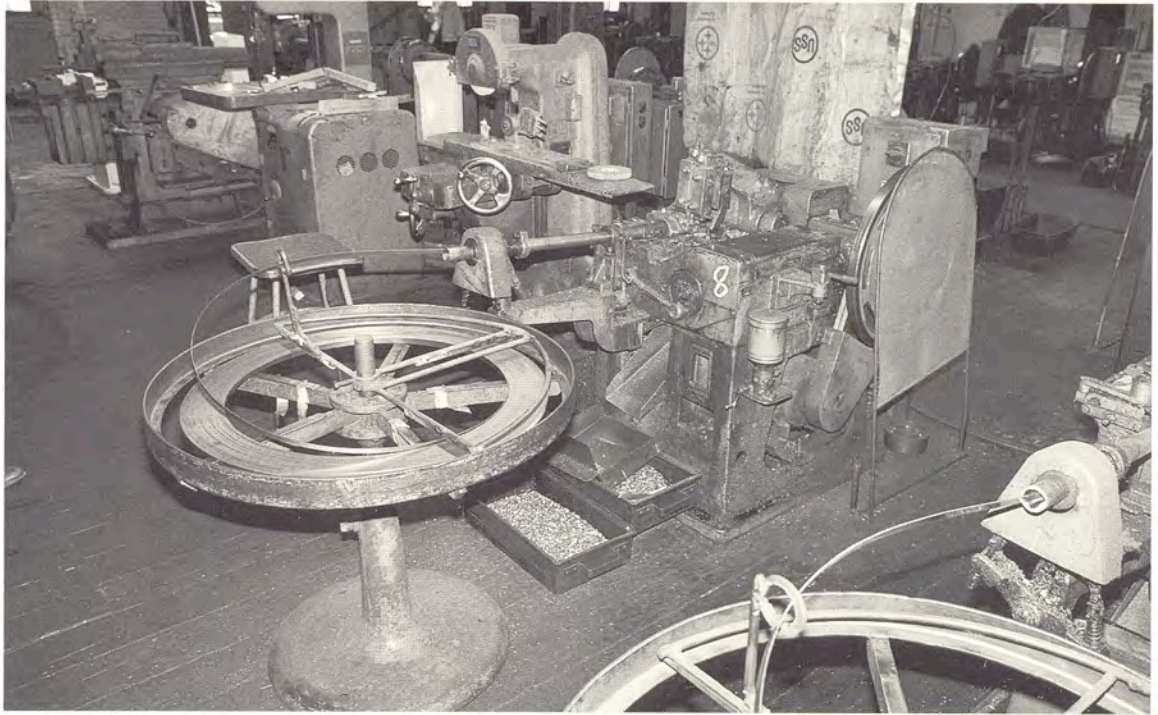


# SIA tours Madison, Indiana, & Schroeder Saddletree factory



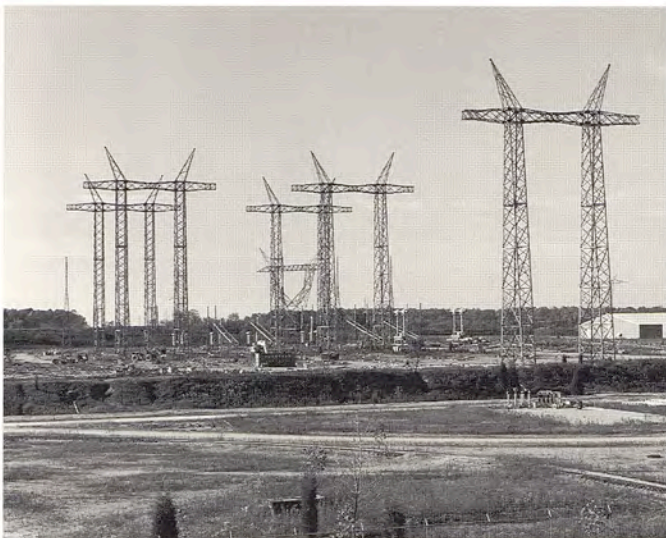
The Tower Manufacturing Co. utilizes this half-century-old tack cutting machine to convert an iron ribbon into half-inch tacks.

*Carter Litchfield photo.*

Historic Madison Foundation hosted 75 hardy SIA tourers for the Society's 1994 Fall Tour, October 20-23, in Madison, Ind.

The weekend began with a welcome to Madison's 19th-cen. manufacturing center by HMF president John Galvin. The next morning, Friday, tour buses began the day's site visits with a stop at the **Jefferson Proving Ground**, established in 1941 to test ordnance for the U.S. War Dept. The last test round was fired on Sept. 30, only weeks before the Fall Tour, and the 55,000-acre base now is being closed. Buildings visited included the shop for wear-testing gun tubes, where we watched a gun tube being bore-scoped for fractures.

The group next visited **Grote Industries'** 440,000-sq. ft. manufactory and testing lab for truck and auto lighting and safety systems. Walter Grote Sr., son of the company founder, invented the automatic plastic injection molding machine and built the first one in the U.S.



The Friday lunch stop included a walk to the remnants of a partially completed 1850s railroad tunnel, which was part of a failed attempt to provide a second line from Madison and the Ohio River floodplain to the top of surrounding hills.

In the afternoon there was a trip to **Tower Manufacturing**, one of three U.S. firms still making cut tacks. The plant is in an 1884 structure built for a starch works. The equipment was run from line shafting as recently as 1972, when individual motors were installed.

The **Marble Hill Nuclear Power Plant**, its construction halted in 1984, was the day's fourth site. Located in rural Indiana, outside Madison, the plant offered tourers the rare opportunity to explore the interior of a reactor containment building, complete with its polar crane. We also visited warehouses where materials salvaged from the project are stored. Of particular interest was the 5,000 hp. diesel engine/generator designed to provide backup power in an emergency.

Friday night videos of early Madison movies rounded out the day. Included were clips of Tower Manufacturing and a local slaughterhouse disassembly line, both in the 1930s.

Saturday was spent largely in Madison's 133-block National Register Historic District--virtually the entire downtown. The featured site was the nationally significant **Ben Schroeder Saddletree Factory** [HAER], now being studied for possible restoration. It is the last known 19th-cen. saddletree factory in the U.S. and contains a collection of wood- and metal-working equipment, including many unique pieces used in manufacturing the saddletrees, the internal wooden frames of riding saddles.

Following a drive-by of the remnants of the **Pearl Packing Plant**, Madison's last slaughterhouse, we visited the **Lamson**

Steel-frame towers, designed to carry high-tension wires, stand idle outside the uncompleted Marble Hill Nuclear Power Station, producing an eerie "sculpture garden" for the industrial archeologist. *Carter Litchfield photo.*

*Right:* The Lamson Feed Mill & Feed Store in Madison custom-grinds corn, oats, and soybeans for local farmers. The top of the 110-ft. grain elevator is visible at the rear of the mill.

*Below:* A finished saddletree manufactured at the Schroeder Saddletree Factory in Madison. This internal frame for a top-of-the-line saddle was constructed of wood and metal and then covered with raw cowhide. Both western (shown here) and English-style saddlestrees were made at the Schroeder works.

*Below right:* When the demand for saddletrees declined, the Schroeders turned to other manufacturing activities. From 1935 to 1942 they produced clothespins on this clothespin lathe, made by the Goodspeed Machine Co., Winchendon, Mass.

*Carter Litchfield photos.*



**Feedmill**, which mixes and processes feed for area farmers. Joe and Loren Lamson demonstrated the equipment and custom-built elevator and storage system.

Saturday's hardhat lunch was in the 1884 Eagle Cotton Mill, which tourers explored, along with the nearby 1929 truss bridge—for many years the only Ohio River span between Cincinnati and Louisville.

Later, tour-goers hiked up part of a **Madison railroad grade** that, at 5.89%, is the steepest section of standard-gauge, line-haul track ever constructed in the nation. Meanwhile, others visited the Jefferson County Historical Society, which includes the 1895 Madison railroad station.

The day's final visit was to the **Clifty Creek power plant** of the Indiana-Kentucky Electric Corp., which, with its sister plant near Gallipolis, Ohio, are unique in having one primary customer:

the Portsmouth Area uranium-enrichment complex. The tour included the control and turbine rooms.

A Saturday evening reception was held at the classical revival Shrewsbury House, a National Landmark site.

The Fall Tour concluded on Sunday with several optional programs. Some returned to the Schroeder factory and its artifact collection for a closer look. Others took a walking tour of downtown Madison. There also were tours to additional sites, including the **Cunningham Tin Shop**, the **Early American Trades Museum**, and several historic house museums.

Special thanks for producing the Fall Tour go to the board and staff of HMFI and tour co-chairs Bill McNiece and John Staicer. A limited number of tour guidebooks are available for \$5.25 + post. from Staicer, HMFI, 500 West St., Madison IN 47250 (812-265-2967).  
J.S.