

90 Jersey Avenue

Jersey Avenue at Sandford Street

A building is more than just brick and mortar, walls and a roof. A building houses jobs for members of the community while providing products or services. Those same products and services also impact not only the surrounding community, but can have far reaching impacts at both the domestic and foreign level. One such building is located in our City, at the corner of Jersey Avenue and Sandford Street. Within its walls local community members worked and earned a living to support their families at the turn of the 20th century, most of whom were immigrants starting a new life in America. As the country's needs changed, so did the building. And as they say, the rest is history.



In 1907, at 90 Jersey Avenue, the Simplex Automobile Company was incorporated. They quickly established a reputation for quality, exclusivity and performance thanks to its Model 50's powerful four-cylinder engine, four-speed selective-gear transmission, and double-chain drive. This reputation would be built around building cars for those wanting the experience of speed and the thrill of victory by cramming large engines with huge amounts of horsepower into the chassis. The clientele of the line would be some of the most affluent in the whole country. Just the chassis and the engine ran around \$5,000. Then there was the custom-built coach that needed to be added. It would be very easy to understand why the Simplex was reserved for only the very elite. Among the company's clients were Frederick Vanderbilt, John D. Rockefeller, John D. Rockefeller Jr., Alfred Pope and Theodate Pope Riddle.



Simplex's residency was not long lived in the building and in 1916 the Wright-Martin Company, an aircraft manufacturing business, formed due to a merger between the Wright Co. (founded by Orville and Wilbur Wright and other investors in 1906) and the Glen L. Martin Aircraft Co. Prior to the start of the first World War, production now focused on manufacture of Hispano-Suiza V-8 airplane engines for military contracts. The engine was by far the best of

the many experimental motors being tested. Production was difficult and costly. By the end of July, the company had nearly 1,000 motors on order and by the end of the year had completely re-organized the factory in New Brunswick.

New buildings were added, tools and equipment were increased and the old equipment was rearranged to allow for the ease and speed of production which would steadily increase. By May 1918, orders from the French and British governments were so large, it was impractical to add to the current plant and an additional plant was added in Long Island City.

The New Brunswick location underwent another transformation when the International Motor Truck Company opened a factory in 1919 and operated under that name until 1922 when it was renamed Mack Trucks. The plant's foundry produced iron, bronze and aluminum castings and manufactured transmissions, steering gears, driveshafts and dual reduction drive axle carriers and other parts for Mack trucks, but this was not a final assembly facility. Also housed within their 525,000 square feet were various chemical and physical laboratories. During World War II, the factory produced tank parts for the Army. The factory discontinued operations at this location in 1962.



Today, 90 Jersey Avenue serves as the headquarters for PRAB, a prolific social services agency that has provided services to the residents of New Brunswick and throughout central New Jersey for more than four decades.

"If walls could talk" is a phrase most often used meaning that many interesting things happened in a room or building, although all the details are not known. The building, and the walls within, at the corner of Jersey Avenue and Sandford Street during the 20th century has many stories to tell. Stories of local workers: brothers and friends, fathers and sons. Stories of the war effort. And stories connected to the automotive

industry. It's not just a building made of brick and mortar... it's much more than that. It's another significant part of our City's rich history!

Thank you to Joseph Pepitone (JoePep) for his knowledge, enthusiasm, insight, and assistance with this month's topic!

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- [That the 3rd public reading of the Declaration of Independence happened right here in New Brunswick in 1776?](#)
- [Why there's a street in New Brunswick called "Joyce Kilmer Avenue?"](#)
- [Our City's connection to the classic holiday movie "It's a Wonderful Life?"](#)
- [That New Brunswick has a World War I memorial?](#)