

Did You Know?

The name Moline comes from the French word "moulin", which means mill.

Moline was platted in June 1843. Due to a fire that destroyed the original paperwork, the town was officially founded in 1848.

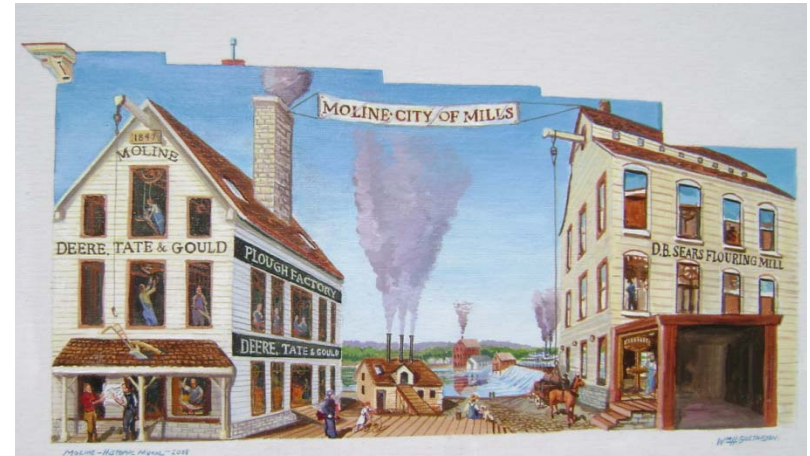
In 1852, Moline was comprised of 172 structures -- all in what today is the downtown area.

The Sears flour mill was the only flouring mill within one hundred miles.

David Sears hired James Fergus in 1844 to help construct the mill. Fergus received \$1.50 a day, as well as a place to live. He had to provide his own tools, and worked as many as 16 hours a day!

Sears' first Moline mill was built at a cost of \$30,000. That would amount to almost \$1 million today.

The Lady Franklin, the side-wheel packet steamboat depicted in the mural, was built in 1850 and was a participant in the 1854 Grand Excursion.



Moline, City of Mills

Researching the Historic Courtyard Mural

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About the Mural

The *Moline, City of Mills* Mural provides a view of Moline in the early 1850s, a time when the city's factories were powered by the largest mills on the Mississippi River. Here D.B. Sears, John Deere, Robert Tate and John Gould, among others, transformed Moline into one of the leading manufacturing cities in the United States.

The *Moline, City of Mills* mural features three main components: 1) the mill dam, the source of all early power in Moline (center), 2) D.B. Sears' flouring mill (right), and 3) the plow factory of Deere, Tate & Gould (left).

The *Moline, City of Mills* mural is based on exhaustive research of Moline's founding years. Based on artist renderings, newspaper accounts, reminiscences, and other primary sources, the mural captures the boom of early 1850s Moline.

Milldam

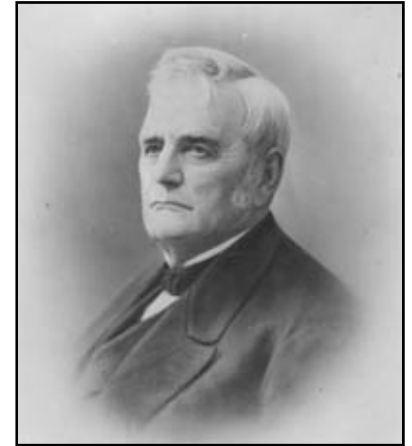
Moline's early industry was driven by waterpower, a technology made possible by the construction of a dam between Moline and the island of Rock Island (Rock Island Arsenal). In 1841, David Sears, Spencer White and John Spencer constructed the 600-foot brush dam across the slough, the channel that separated the mainland from the island of Rock Island. Bundled saplings ten to thirty feet long formed the foundation, sometimes requiring the driving of stakes into the river bed to hold them in place; sometimes the bundles were weighted down with stones. When established, underbrush was bundled with tree-tops and large stones to fill in the gaps. Straw and other material was sometimes added to the mixture to help form a water-tight seal. Admittedly, "these dams were never entirely water-tight." They were also dangerous due to the constant maintenance. Yet despite its primitiveness, the dam gave the mills, and thus the town, life. It also provided bridge access to the island of Rock Island via a 16 to 20 feet wide bridge constructed on top of the dam.

"Moline is rapidly becoming a commercial as well as a manufacturing locality. Since our first visit to the town, in May last, the business of the town appears almost doubled. The number of new stores is surprising. They all appear to be doing well...The industrial character of the town is indeed visible at the first glance."

-*The Rock Islander*, November 20, 1854

"JOHN Deere, THE PLOW KING.—A few days ago, while in Moline, we spent a leisure half-hour in looking over the Plow Factory of JOHN DEERE. Its several departments occupy a brick building one hundred and sixty feet long, forty feet wide, and three stories high. The machinery employed is of the best construction, saving much manual labor, and enabling a force of thirty-six hands to turn out from one hundred and twenty-five to one hundred and fifty Plows per week. It is propelled by water-power. The blacksmith fires are blown by air, forced to them through underground pipes. We specially admired a huge "Punch and Shears," which made easy work of cutting and punching an iron bar, three inches wide, and one inch thick. Over one hundred thousand pounds of steel are annually used by Mr. DEERE in the construction of Plows. The Centre Draft Plows, made by him, are models of workmanlike finish. They look far fitter for parlor ornaments than instruments wherewith to break the sod of our Western prairies. Nevertheless they do most efficient service, and are prized as the best implements of their kind, by the hardy men who use them, throughout the North West."

-*The Rock Islander*, January 10, 1855



Sources

The *Moline, City of Mills* mural is based on extensive research. Newspapers are one key element, offering fascinating first-hand accounts of the city and its people.

In 1849, a reporter walked through downtown Moline. Below is what he wrote about his impressions of the Sears milling operations.

"This enterprising place, although it has been greatly retarded in its business operations the present season in consequence of an extensive break in its eastern dam, has, notwithstanding, been doing quite a prosperous business, its various mills and workshops giving active employment to a large number of citizens and laborers. In consequence of the break alluded to above, we were obliged to use a boat to cross over to the Mississippi Mill, so called, which is on the western side of Rock Island, on a dam built from said island, to a smaller one in the Mississippi river. Here, Mr. H. Pitts has a large three story building, in the lower part of which we noticed one of Woodworth's Planing [sic] Machines at work dressing flooring and siding, in fine style, tonguing [sic] and grooveing [sic] the former during the same operation. These Machines are owned b Chas. Atkinson Esq. There were also upright, circular, and bolting saws at work, cutting timber into boards and planks, and the slabs into laths, all dancing merrily as propelled by the great Father of Waters. Mr. Pitts cuts up 60,000 feet of lumber and 30,000 laths per week, and that portion which does not find ready sale at home, is rafted and sent to St. Louis, and the intermediate ports. Mr. D.B. Sears has charge of the entire concern, and the way we saw him drive things, set him down at once, as an energetic, go-ahead, sort of a man. The upper stories we found, occupied as a Bedstead manufactory by Dimock & Pitts, who carry on the business quite extensively turning out from 60 to 100 per week, which are shipped up and down the river to various points, as ordered. They also do custom turning, for chair stuff, &c.; all the machinery about this establishment is of the most approved and neatest construction."



This early image of Moline depicts the milldam and the many mills constructed during the 1840s.

Image courtesy Deere & Company Archives

D.B. Sears Flouring Mill

In 1846 Sears finished construction of the "big mill", as it was called, his second in Moline, at the aptly named Mill Street, just 200 feet west of his first mill at modern day Fifteenth Street. It was the largest mill on the Mississippi River north of St. Louis, where in the previous year two smaller mills had been constructed. One of those builders had made visits to Moline to survey Sears' first mill for guidance.

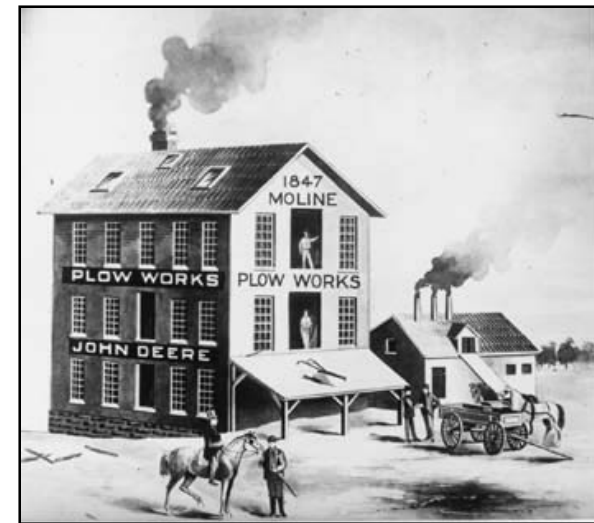
Although he was not the earliest settler to the area, David Benton Sears is largely credited for Moline's start. As one settler put it, "The water power made Moline, and D.B. Sears was the father of the water power." Sears was born in Lima, Livingston County, NY in April 1804, just two months after another important Moline settler, John Deere. Before the

age of twenty Sears had lived in Ohio, Indiana, and New Orleans, eventually finding his way to Illinois in the 1820s. When Sears and his family arrived in the area in 1836 there were three houses in what became Moline. Sears purchased riverfront property from Michael Bartlett for the sum of \$1,600, and within two years owned more than 1,100 acres. A year later he built a new house for nine family members, two hired men, and "sometimes three or four transient families overnight." The two room main floor was 600 square feet, with a sleeping loft above!

Over the next five years Moline was "going ahead" as a Rock Island newspaper reported in 1846, with one of the "great possible inducements for settlement" being the "extraordinary healthiness of its location." The thirteen buildings had grown into a thriving manufacturing district, complete with mills, stores, a school, post office, residences and more.

New
In the new Town of
MOLINE.
THE SUBSCRIBERS would inform the inhabitants of Moline and the surrounding country, that they have formed a connection for the purpose of carrying on the Mercantile Business at the
MOLINE MILLS:
and that they have just received direct from
BOSTON AND NEW YORK,
the largest stock of Goods ever brought to this country—and which, from a variety of circumstances, we are enabled to sell at a less price than any
OTHER HOUSE HAS HERETOFORE SOLD

Sears operated a general store to sell products from the mills, as well as goods shipped from New York and Boston. This ad is from 1844.



Images can be deceiving! This image of Deere's early factory was created after Deere, Tate & Gould dissolved their business in 1852. Evidence shows that the factory originally said Deere, Tate & Gould, as depicted in the mural. Image courtesy Deere & Company Archives

Deere, Tate & Gould

John Deere is the most recognizable name in Moline. Deere arrived with partners Robert Tate and John Gould in 1848. He had been building a thriving plow business in Grand Detour, Illinois, since 1837, selling as many as 1,000 plows annually. In 1848, Deere and his partners relocated to Moline, enticed by its location, as well as the incentives offered by local businessmen, which included land and waterpower rights. Surely Deere was also excited about the coming of the railroad, a project by then three years in the making in Moline.

Deere and his partners rented quarters for \$2.50 per month during the summer of 1848 while making plans for a larger factory. By 1849, Deere and his partners had doubled their output and constructed a state-of-the-art factory. Steel was shipped to Moline from England for Deere's steel plows.