

## Before Detroit made cars, it made cigars!

The town of Escanaba, Michigan will hold elections on November 6 and local attorney Richard Clark is urging voters to find leadership that will find new economic stimuli for the community and not return to the mistakes of the past. He wrote in the Escanada Daily Press that new concepts are what drive prosperity . . . and drove cigar-making out of Michigan:

“The automotive industry wasn’t always Detroit’s main industry.

“At the end of the 19th century the economic powerhouse in Detroit was ... cigars. The cigar industry began in Detroit in the middle of the 19th century. Individual mom and pop operations hired individuals, called buckeyes, to make each cigar from start to finish.

“As the 19th century progressed the cigar industry grew. Before Henry Ford developed the assembly line for automobiles cigar makers organized workers into specialized tasks. Each worker performed one step in cigar making. One person didn’t know how to make a whole cigar, only one part of the process. It was efficient and a cigar made in Detroit became a symbol of quality.

“At the turn of the 20th century Polish immigrant women became the cornerstone of the cigar-making business.

“Detroit cigar workers were in demand. To entice and hold workers cigar manufacturers provided hot lunches. To make lunch time a more positive experience companies brought in musicians to play music in the cafeteria.

“At the beginning of the 20th century cigar makers weren’t able to adequately supply enough workers to supply the demand. Soon automation came to the industry. Machines began performing the work of those Polish immigrants. Eventually cigars were made in other places and the industry so important to Detroit and Michigan ran its course.

“Fortunately, Detroit embraced a new industry, automotive manufacturing. Henry Ford used the assembly line concept to make cars. The new industry attracted talent and workers. Detroit prospered.”

Clark’s essay makes the point to look forward and not back. But the history lesson was good, too. Cigars from Detroit were all the rage 100 years ago? Who knew?