

Oldest Industry Hunter Reminisces About Early Experiences In Bringing Manufacturing Payrolls to Alabama in 1920s

By Rawdon Barnes

The term "industrial development" is one broadly understood today by most Alabamians and with the exception of a few radical environmentalists, is an endeavor generally believed essential to healthy and continuous economic growth.

Not only has the term become part of our language, but industrial development is an activity in which many groups now participate including, city, county, state and federal governments, banks, utilities, chambers of commerce, railroads, and universities.

Today candidates for public office nearly always pledge themselves to work for industrial development. This is true regardless of whether the office they seek offers any possibility for promoting industrial growth, and is further indication that the rank and file of our people favor further industrial expansion. Several years ago a man in Alabama ran for coroner on a pledge to work for industrial development.

Widespread public acceptance of the need for industrialization in the state did not occur overnight, however. In fact, 50 years ago, the reaction of most people might be described as either apathetic or hostile.

55 Years of Service

One man who remembers this period vividly is 85-year old Tom Johnson, dean of Alabama's industrial developers who resigned in October 1977 as executive director of the Baldwin County Industrial Development Board. Prior to going to Baldwin County in 1974, Johnson had served as executive director of the North Alabama Industrial Development Association (NAIDA) for 25 years. But even before his service with NAIDA, Johnson was a veteran industrial developer, who for 27 years was engaged in bringing manufacturers to Alabama in order to develop new electrical customers for Alabama Power Co.

So in all, this man can look back on 55 years of service to the state. In fact, industrial development as a full time activity in Alabama, begins with Tom Johnson. And what a difference a half century makes!

Johnson recalls that in the early 1920's, industrial development was unknown as an organized endeavor and nowhere in Alabama did there exist a group seeking new manufacturing payrolls from the heavily industrialized east and midwest. At this time, Johnson, a young Dale Countian with a degree in electrical engineering from the University

of Alabama, was employed by the Alabama Power Company.

The utility had already begun to build its chain of hydroelectric dams on



TOM JOHNSON
State's First Industry Hunter

the central waterways of Alabama as well as steam-operated facilities and was seeking customers for its electrical output. While prospective customers were being signed up, Johnson says he realized that as soon as most residential and commercial accounts were electrified, there would be little prospects for additional growth. There just weren't many manufacturing plants. Residential and most commercial customers in those days used electricity primarily for illumination which consumed only minimal amounts of electricity.

First ID Department Organized

"It was at this time that the idea of trying to bring new industry to Alabama was born," states Johnson. "At my suggestion, Alabama Power Company organized what was then called the 'New Industries Division' but which eventually would become the Industrial Development Department. I was assigned to this new division."

It is Johnson's opinion that this may have been the first organized industrial development department by a utility in the United States.

The methods of attracting new industries today are many and the industrial developer is the beneficiary of knowhow accumulated over the past half century. He goes forth armed with

mountains of printed statistical data that industrialists require for plant location. Computerized information is instantaneously available in 1977. Many towns now maintain modern industrial parks with water, electricity, gas and sewer facilities. The swiftness of air travel presently brings the farthest corners of the country within a few hours of Alabama, a great advantage over the day when trains were the popular mode of travel. Trains were even used for interstate travel in the 1920s because of the poor highways and undependable autos of that period.

The industrial developer today can turn to numerous other professionals for assistance when this is necessary for the successful location of a manufacturing facility.

No Local Expertise

In 1924 young Tom Johnson had to sally forth pretty much alone, his arsenal consisting of little more than his own intelligence and resourcefulness. There was no expertise on the local level. In addition to the lack of established procedure and informational sources, one of the problems confronting him was the abysmal ignorance of northern industrialists regarding manufacturing opportunities in Alabama. The Tsinghai province in northern China could hardly have been a more unfamiliar place than Alabama. From the beginning, Johnson says the New Industries division realized that in order to overcome this problem, there was a need for educational endeavor.

Because Alabama was one of the top cotton producers in the nation, it was decided that the initial primary thrust for new industry would be made in New England where the textile industry was concentrated, Johnson said.

To promote the State's advantages, the Power Company produced what in those days was called a "moving picture." A film, "King Cotton" was shown in theatres throughout New England.

Further educational effort came from Power Company participation in many exhibitions in New England. Johnson remembers one in particular. "At Mechanics Hall in Boston, we gave away as souvenirs 10,000 cotton bolls just popping open. I will never forget the special day school children visited the exhibition and the virtual riot that occurred at our booth when it was necessary to call the police to maintain some degree of order. All of the kids were

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Alabama Moves Up As Oil, Gas Producer

TUSCALOOSA (Special)—Alabama now stands a chance to move to the forefront after being considered the frontier of the nation's energy reserves, State Oil and Gas Supervisor Thomas Joiner says. Joiner said Alabama will have record oil and gas production when the final figures for 1977 are compiled, and he predicted an even greater increase for this year.

At the end of 1976, he said Alabama had 31 producing oil and gas fields, adding, "Today we have 50, and by later this year we should have about 70. It was a good year in both exploration and production."

Oil and Gas Board projections call for 1977 production of 60.5 billion cubic feet of natural gas, 12.9 million barrels of oil and 6.9 million barrels of condensate, a high-grade hydrocarbon.

The figures are increases over 1976 of nearly 20 billion cubic feet of gas, more than 2 million barrels of condensate and more than 2 million barrels of oil.

For 1978, the projections are higher: 13 million barrels of oil, 10.3 million barrels of condensate and 95.8 billion cubic feet of gas.

Joiner credited the near-meteoric rise in production since 1972 to increased successful exploration in southwest Alabama and in the Warrior Basin in the

state's northwest corner.

The jumps in production caused corresponding hikes in the value of oil and gas brought up from the depths of Alabama: \$25 million in 1971, \$156 million 1976, \$190 million anticipated for 1977 and a projected \$267 million for this year.

And that will bring about increases in severance taxes paid the state by producers for the minerals severed from Alabama land.

Dean of State's Industry Hunters Reminisces

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seeking cotton bolls. Such was the magic of cotton and it helped us draw attention to industrial advantages in Alabama."

Personal calls on industrialists were necessary in the early days if prospects were to be developed. Industrial development advertising was not the effective tool it is today. Rarely was an out-of-state inquiry received.

First Successful Project

According to Johnson, the New Industries program was expensive and at one time the management of the Power Company entertained serious doubts as to its value. However, they continued support of the program and gave it the continuity required for ultimate success. In time, the personal efforts, exhibitions, advertising and the assistance of bankers in New York and Boston areas began to show results.

Johnson tells of his initial success in locating an industry in Alabama...as far as is known the first industry to be located in the State as a result of the efforts of a group within the State. Industries had previously located here such as in Birmingham where the discovery of coal, iron ore and limestone brought them to Alabama.

These are Johnson's words, "I will never forget a cold Saturday in early March 1924. I was most discouraged. I had been in Boston several weeks trying to develop interest. I decided to make a final call on the late Mr. Russell Leonard, treasurer of Pepperell Mills. I went to his office and he rather scolded me and asked why I had called on him on a Saturday morning. I told him I just wanted to tell him goodbye as I was going back to Alabama. He told me to go back to the hotel as he was coming over to have lunch with me. He did.

"I will never forget that occasion, about 2:00 p.m., sitting in the dining room of the Touraine Hotel, just the two of us. After finishing lunch he looked across the table at me and said, 'Tom, Pepperell Mills is going to build a 20,000 spindle mill at Opelika, Alabama, if you

The state took in \$1.5 million in 1971 and probably will collect \$11.4 million for 1977, with a 1978 projection of \$16 million.

Joiner said Alabama ranked 18th in oil production and 21st in gas at the end of 1976, but the 1977 figures probably will raise that status.

Joiner, who also is State Geologist, said higher gas prices could be credited for the increased interest in the Warrior Basin.

can give us a site and subscribe to \$37,000 of our preferred stock. You go back home and I will meet you next week in Opelika with my lawyer and engineer."

Johnson recalls to this day that tears came into his eyes following Leonard's remarks.

"Mr. Leonard kept his promise. We spent four long days in Opelika endeavoring to work out what today would be considered a very minor proposition. In contrast to the excellent cooperation provided today by most local officials, who welcome industry with open arms, Opelika officials were beset by suspicion, cliques, jealousies...even hatred. There was no unity, no pulling together."

Prayer Meeting Required

Johnson continues, "Finally, we gave up on Opelika and departed by train for Birmingham, arriving there about 9:00 p.m. We planned to go to Gadsden the next morning at 1:00 a.m. where we knew we could close a deal promptly. Shortly after our arrival at the Tutwiler Hotel, there was a call from Mr. Ike Dorsey of Opelika. He reported that 40 of the town's leading citizens had met at the home of Mr. Will Davis, had a prayer meeting, which resulted in a change of heart and the desire to proceed with the Pepperell project.

"Would Mr. Leonard return?" asked Dorsey.

Leonard agreed to return and a second trip to Opelika resulted in the announcement of the Pepperell plant...the first industry located in Alabama under the auspices of the Alabama Power Company's New Industries Division.

Today...over 50 years later...Pepperell Mills is still one of Opelika's most valuable manufacturing payrolls and its total contributions to the economy of the area during all of this period of time have been considerable, to say the least.

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Kentucky's Carroll Heads Tenn-Tom Panel

COLUMBUS, Miss.—Kentucky Gov. Julian Carroll will preside over the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway Authority in 1978, succeeding Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace.

Carroll has named Z. C. Enix of Murray, Ky., to serve as vice chairman.

Long active in development work, Carroll has served as speaker of both houses of the Kentucky legislature and was swept into the Governor's office by a record margin.

"Governor Carroll is an extremely able and proven leader, with a national reputation for accomplishment. Tenn-Tom is in good hands, and I look forward to working with him to complete this project," said Governor Wallace.

In accepting the chairmanship, Governor Carroll said, "The governors of our sister states and the authority board have done an admirable job over the years in bringing Tennessee-Tombigbee to this point. It's a great project for Kentucky and the entire nation, and I look forward to continuing that record and tradition this year."

Industrial Development Began in '20s As Effort To Overcome Effects of Lost War, Cotton Economy

(Editor's note: Last month Alabama's oldest industry hunter, 85-year-old Thomas D. Johnson who retired in the fall of 1977 after more than a half century of bringing manufacturing payrolls to Alabama, was featured. His story continues.)

By Rawdon Barnes

When Alabama Power Co. created the New Industries Division about 1922, this did not represent a sudden decision of its corporate leadership. Rather was it based on several years of discussion within the utility and was the outgrowth of the agrarian nature of Alabama's economy. The prospects of developing major electrical customers for the fledgling utility in an area almost devoid of manufacturers were about as promising as selling sand in the Sahara.

Despite the generally prosperous condition of the national economy from the end of World War I through the decade of the 1920s, the South's economy lagged behind because it rested solely on cotton, virtually our only source of cash income. Because of this some writers have erroneously described cotton as a "curse," as if Providence somehow had visited a debilitated one-crop economy upon us as punishment for past sins.

Actually, cotton was the savior of the South because it provided our people what little income they had and it sustained what trade and commerce existed in the area, in a period when we had no industry. But alone, it could not support a balanced economy/

Legacy of Lost War

At the beginning of the War Between the States, Alabama and other southern states had small but vitally important industrial bases and these were later totally destroyed by invading Union Armies. At the war's end, there was no Marshall Plan to rebuild the South, as were Germany and Japan following World War II. Not one single bank in the Confederacy survived the great internecine conflict and there was no financial base upon which to build new industry.

If one seriously wonders why a manufacturing vacuum existed in the South from 1865 into the 1920s and '30s, let him look first to the harsh conditions imposed upon our people by the victors. When the bayonets of Reconstruction were finally removed from our bellies, they were supplanted by hob nail boots on our necks in the form of discriminatory freight rates. These protectionist devices were designed not

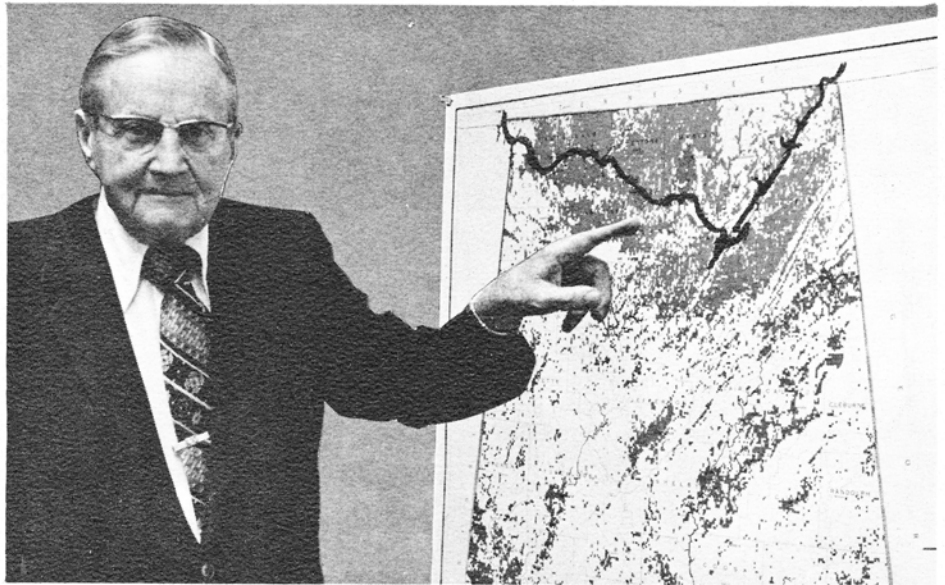
merely to inhibit the South's growth but to prevent it, thereby suffocating our people in an economic straightjacket. Diabolical and effective, they were!

Not until November 22, 1939...after lengthy litigation...did the Interstate Commerce Commission render a favorable decision to complainants in a case recorded as the "State of Alabama vs. New York Central Rail Company." In this decision, the commission prescribed levels of rates that were more just and reasonable. In the 1950s discriminatory

the history of Alabama. It preceded the creation of a State industrial development effort by about a quarter of a century.

Last month Johnson related the amusing story of how Pepperell became the first successful project of the Alabama Power Co.'s New Industries Division when a prayer meeting was required to locate the facility in Opelika. This was in 1924.

Another early plant location experience recalled by Johnson concerns the West Boylston Manufacturing Co.



ALL SECTIONS OF ALABAMA are the beneficiaries of Tom Johnson's 55 years work in acquiring manufacturing payrolls. Here he points to the Decatur and Tennessee Valley area where he scored so many triumphs. When Johnson retired from NAIDA in 1974, Aubrey Wagner, TVA chairman, was quoted in Decatur Daily as saying, "In the past decade, your area has been so successful (in creating manufacturing jobs), we often cite it as the best example in the Valley. You have twice your share. Tom Johnson will remain the hallmark of this development for many years to come."

rates were abolished and this gave real impetus to industrial development in Alabama and all southern states.

Is it any wonder then that in 1920, the estimated annual per capita income for an Alabama farm family was just \$140? In 1929, a good year until the Stock Market Crash in October, the state's per capita income was \$324, just 46 per cent of the national average. State per capita income had dropped to \$161 by 1932 and represented only 40 per cent of the national average.

So it was in this kind of federally induced economic climate that the Alabama Power Co. created its New Industries Division for the purpose of developing manufacturing electrical customers. Tom Johnson was placed in charge of the division and this became the initial industrial development thrust in

now located in Montgomery. Following several personal calls on the late Mr. F. Coit Johnson, president of an Eastern textile giant in New York, he agreed to come to Alabama. In a small town in north Alabama, a site was found and price for the land was agreed upon.

Overnight Site Inflation

As Johnson tells it, "The following morning, our intention was to close out the deal and announce the plant as a new payroll for the town. However, during the night owners of the property increased the price of the site, as I recall, to almost double the initial price. This was very disturbing to Mr. Coit Johnson and as a result we moved on to Montgomery and worked out details for the location in which they operate now in 1978.

"One of the most exciting of my
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early industrial development projects was that of Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. in Gadsden. After many months of intensive work, Goodyear had eliminated all sites except two...Gadsden and Atlanta, Ga. Goodyear management was not satisfied that there was sufficient housing in Gadsden to take care of the projected workers in the new plant," says Johnson.

"Therefore, they required Gadsden officials to guarantee something over \$500,000 for construction of new houses for Goodyear employees. After weeks of intensive solicitation to raise this amount of money, they were short approximately \$368,000. I was keeping Mr. Thomas W. Martin, then president of Alabama Power Company, informed regarding the progress of our negotiations. Anticipating a major shortage, Martin authorized me to pledge the company to the amount lacking. The final meeting to raise the guaranteed amount was held in the old Printup Hotel and a decision had to be reached. When it was finally determined that they were \$368,000 short of the desired amount, I presented the Alabama Power Company pledge.

Fire Engines - Police Sirens

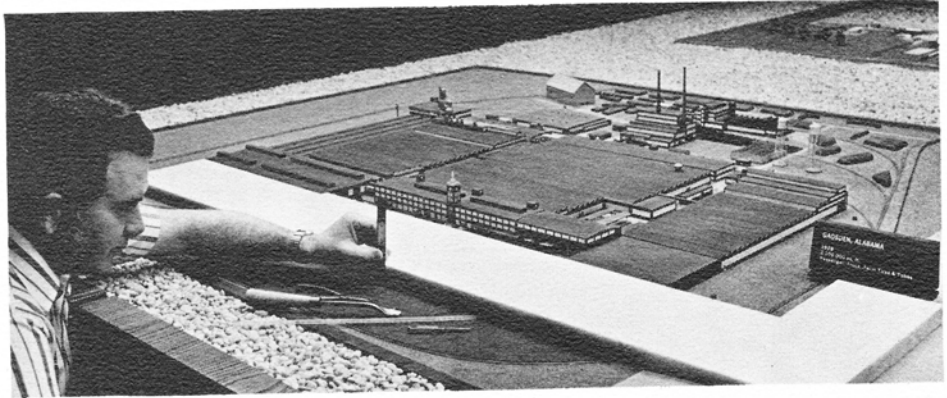
"Just a short time after the pledge was presented, the climax of many weeks of work was reached as an announcement was made from the balcony of the hotel to a lobby filled to overflowing with citizens that Goodyear would locate the tire plant in Gadsden. Immediately following the announcement, fire engines, police sirens, guns, etc. went off all over Gadsden. It was indeed a big celebration," Johnson recalls.

The Goodyear plant is said to be the largest tire plant under one roof in the world and it has helped Gadsden become one of the most industrialized cities in Alabama today. This facility is presently undergoing a \$69 million expansion.

"The location of the King Edward Cigar plant in Cullman in 1956 was a wonderful experience for me," Johnson reminisces. "During the early part of negotiations some 50 top citizens of Cullman chartered three planes for a trip to Jacksonville, Fla. where the corporate headquarters of the parent Jno. H. Swisher and Company was located. The group met with Swisher officials at the rooftop restaurant of one of the leading hotels there. The late Mr. Swisher presided at the meeting.

Cullman Spirit Praised

Johnson says, "I later learned that when Swisher officials were informed about 50 Cullman officials were on the way to discuss the location of a cigar plant for their town, they were favorably impressed. It was this community spirit



THE FABULOUS GOODYEAR TIRE PLANT at Gadsden was formally announced in 1928 and was one of Tom Johnson's early successes in bringing industrial payrolls to the State. The white area on scale model above represents a \$69 million expansion announced in 1976.

that convinced them to build a plant in Cullman. This same spirit has been demonstrated many times since and is the motivating factor behind the wonderful industrial growth that Cullman has experienced in the intervening years.

One of the most satisfying experiences for Johnson was the location of Amoco Chemicals (Standard Oil Company of Indiana) at Decatur. As he tells it, "Gen. W. E. Todd*, assistant director, State Planning and Industrial Development Board (predecessor of the Alabama Development Office), called from Montgomery regarding this prospect. He later brought Larry Smith to Decatur. At the time, I did not know the company Mr. Smith represented, but would later learn that he was vice president of Amoco. The year was 1964.

"As a result of the initial meeting, I literally spent weeks with him and his associates looking up and down the river for a site. It was rather interesting to me as we proceeded to look at sites up and down the Tennessee River from Decatur, that Mr. Smith would always come back to a site at Decatur west of the 3M facility. Finally he stated if this site could be made available, including some 660 acres, he would recommend to his superiors that a plant be located there."

After weeks of negotiations, options on this property were finally in hand, and the price was \$1 million. Johnson felt the price was unrealistic for that period.

\$400,000 Deficit

As Johnson puts it, "Mr. Smith hit the ceiling! I finally persuaded him to give me a figure Amoco would be willing to pay and the figure was \$600,000. I called a meeting of the Industrial Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, which consisted of some 15 to 20 leading citizens of Decatur. I was very frank with them and stated our problem. I told them if we could not resolve this matter that as long as I was in

industrial work in North Alabama there would never be another prospect to look at this site.

"I believe the group knew just what I was talking about. Finally, Guy Roberts, chairman of the Morgan county commission stated he would commit the county to \$200,000 of grading. Following that, R. S. Hicks, local Chevrolet dealer and one of Decatur's leading citizens said the committee should pass the hat and raise the additional \$200,000 needed to make up the deficit. This was accomplished in just a few days and resulted in the formal announcement of that wonderful company which has meant so much to the area."

It is said of Amoco that since completion of the initial facility, there has never been a time when it wasn't undergoing an expansion. Johnson says the firm has spent well over \$100 million in Decatur.

Despite Johnson's advancing years, he is still mentally alert and physically active. His memory is incredible and he can recount an almost limitless number of experiences regarding industrial development projects. It is significant that Tom Johnson has not only lived to see Alabama transformed from an anemic agricultural economy to one that is predominantly industrial, but that he helped provide the initial budge to the state's economic inertia and started the upward struggle still being waged for parity with national averages.

After helping remove the inertia of our system, Johnson contributed mightily over the years bringing some of the great names in manufacturing to Alabama which gave momentum to the state's thrust for economic growth.

Alabama Ranks 20th

Today Alabama ranks 20th in numbers of people employed in manufacturing and 21st in value added by manufacture. Over 100 of Fortune

* General Todd died in Montgomery at Maxwell Regional Hospital February 13.

Toolmaker Selects Site In Northport

TUSCALOOSA--Wallace Murray Corp. of McKeesport, Pa., announced that it has acquired a facility in Northport to serve as a research and development center and a regional service facility for its Atrax Division.

Charles V. Myers, president and chief executive officer, said Wallace Murray is a large manufacturer of building products, industrial cutting tools and power components.

The Northport project was initiated by the Alabama Development Office in April 1977. After an extensive study of the state, the company selected the Tuscaloosa area. ADO industrial representative Tony Warner worked closely with William J. (Buddy) Griffin, executive director of the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority, and others during the company's plant location studies leading to the final selection.

Wallace Murray's Atrax Division is a manufacturer of precision solid carbide tools, burs, and other carbide products. It is headquartered in McKeesport, and has manufacturing facilities there and in Newington, Conn.

According to John C. Fritz, vice president and general manager of Atrax, the new facility in Northport is needed to provide space for the division's expanding research and product development program, and will also permit the division to serve its southern customers more efficiently.

One of the prime reasons for locating in the Tuscaloosa area, according to Fritz, is its proximity to the University of Alabama's excellent engineering school, where additional metallurgical expertise is available for the division's research and development efforts.

"While the last resort of a competitive economy is the bailiff, the ultimate sanction of a planned economy is the hangman." --Friedrich Hayek.

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Magazine's 500 top companies, operate in Alabama. Among the 50 states, the state ranks second in the production of manufactured pulp; in the manufacture of paper products it ranks third. In the production of automotive tires and tubes, Alabama is assumed to rank second in the nation because only Ohio employs more people in this industry.

While no one suggests that the state

has reached the promised land or that we can rest on our laurels, a comparison of per capita incomes with national averages in the 1920s and the 1970s is convincing evidence that progress has been made. In 1976 Alabama's per capita income was \$5,106, just slightly under 80 per cent of the national per capita income. Just prior to World War II in 1940, Alabama's \$282 per capita income represented only 47 per cent of the national average.

In May 1977, the First National Bank of Chicago released a study which revealed what many Alabamians suspected all along...that when such factors as cost of living, state and local taxes are considered, northern per capita income superiority in some instances is now a myth.

According to the study net adjusted disposable income per capita for Alabama was \$3,566 and exceeded such traditionally rich states as New York, \$3,493; Massachusetts, \$3,166 and Rhode Island, \$3,535. States such as Ohio, Wisconsin and Indiana ranked only slightly above Alabama.

But regardless of whether one uses conventional per capita income figures or the adjusted figures of the bank study, there can be no doubt that the manufacturing payrolls located in Alabama by Johnson and others contributed to the state's improved status.

And while accolades are being passed out, a lot of praise is due the Alabama Power Co. for initiating the program of industrial development that has largely removed the deficiencies of the State's "iron poor blood." No matter that they did it to develop new customers; what they did helped us all. Our schools, hospitals, and roads are better today. If you're still skeptical, ask any retail or wholesale businessman who recalls when the registers jingled mostly when the cotton harvest was good.

Seldom Make Headlines

In proportion to their numbers, Johnson and the small group of professionals who followed him and today make up the Industrial Developers Association of Alabama (IDAA) have contributed more to our economic growth than any group in Alabama history. They work largely in anonymity and are mostly unknown outside the framework of IDAA and certain local government officials with whom they cooperate on plant location projects.

Seldom do their names make the newspaper stories which herald new industry. Often a year or two elapses between initial contact and formal plant announcement and this represents a lot of work; yet the reader of a new industry story may wonder if the company floated down south on a cumulus cloud and settled gently to earth without benefit of

human endeavor.

Praise From Publishers

When Johnson retired from the North Alabama Industrial Development Association in 1974, Barrett Shelton, publisher of the Decatur Daily and member of the NAIDA board said, "The Valley's industrial plants will stand as a monument to his work."

Recently when he retired as executive director of the Baldwin County Industrial Development Board, Jimmy Faulkner, chairman of the board and former publisher of the Baldwin County Times at Bay Minette praised Johnson as the "best industrial developer in the Southeast and one of the best in the nation who got us more prospects than we ever had in a comparable length of time." In addition Faulkner said, "He's a fine gentleman!"

The 85-year old Johnson now lives at Montrose in Baldwin County and until a recent operation played golf every day at Lakewood Golf Club at the Grand Hotel. After the operation, he was released from the hospital in mid-March. Johnson's doctors told him he'd be playing golf in about five weeks. No one who knows him doubts that he will.

What plant location projects gave him the most satisfaction? "There is a certain romance about all projects and I got pleasure out of them all. I take particular pride in Amoco in Decatur; Scott Paper at Mobile; Dupont Powder mill near Childersburg during World War II; Goodyear in Gadsden and Pepperell in Opelika.

Biggest Project

What was the biggest project in which you were involved? "The successful location of the U.S. missile research facility at Redstone Arsenal. This was not a private sector facility, but in dollar value to Alabama, it was the biggest. This enabled the Werner Von Braun team of German scientists supported by many American personnel to come in and pioneer the national space effort. In addition to the money pumped into the economy, Alabama has derived a lot of prestige from the research which put men on the moon. Even now that the space program in Huntsville is diminished, there is a valuable legacy for the area. Many of the space scientists are now permanent residents of Huntsville and some have inaugurated manufacturing plants that are offshoots of space technology."

Does Johnson have any regrets regarding his retirement? "Yes, I just wish I could have another 50 years in which to bring industry to Alabama and help raise the standard of living. I love the work and enjoyed every minute of it."

With an attitude like that, is it any wonder that he was successful in his work?