

CHAPTER XX

TODAY-TOMORROW

In reading these pages of the past history of this area it is easy to feel a sense of pride in the accomplishments of our forefathers.

It is not so easy to realize that our everyday life as we live it today will be read with interest by the coming generations for truly we are making history, for good or bad, just as our predecessors did.

It is with an equal sense of pride that we present the relatively short, but important, history of our present industries.

The largest Industrial complex in the area in terms of employment is now the Howmet Corporation, Misco Division, one of the world's largest producers of investment castings today.

This position has been attained with highly specialized equipment operated under strict dimensional and quality control, plus experienced personnel in engineering, experimentation, research, development, production and direct engineering service in the field.

As one of the founding members of the Investment Casting Institute, Misco has been a pioneer in the advancement of investment casting techniques.

Misco's background dates back to 1903 with the founding of the Michigan Steel Casting Company of Detroit. Their pioneering in stainless steels led to the investigation of the investment casting process. After experimentation, the company in 1948 produced aircraft components for jet engine applications. To meet the need for additional facilities to handle the expansion of aircraft requirements, the Whitehall operation was founded in 1951.

In 1953 the Consolidated Foundries and Manufacturing Corporation acquired the Michigan Steel Casting Company, and the precision casting operation was set off as a separate entity, and was named Misco Precision Casting Company, with its own officers and governing staff.

On July 1, 1959, the company became a division of the Howe Sound Company, which has holdings in aluminum, superalloy, metals/refractories and dental/medical products.

Effective November 26, 1965, the Howe Sound Company, as a leading integrated metals manufacturing company, changed its name to the Howmet Corporation, with the result that our company, as a member of the Superalloy Group, became the Misco Division of Howmet Corporation.

At the start of the Whitehall operation in 1951 the production of investment castings was satisfying a rather large sales volume of orders, and by the middle of 1963 that sales volume had increased over 300 percent.

In 1951, manufacturing areas occupied 75,000 square feet. By

1963 the manufacturing areas occupied 139,680 square feet.

Misco's Mono-Shell process was announced to the market in 1957. By 1963 a total of five foreign licensees for this Mono-Shell process were located in France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Sweden.

In 1963, Centrax-Misco, Ltd., an investment casting company, was organized in Devon, England.

In 1966, an additional 89,520 square foot manufacturing and engineering office facility was built in Whitehall. By January 1967, employment had risen to 1,775 people and by the end of 1967, employment will climb to 2,000.

The company with the longest unbroken history of operation in the area is the Whitehall Leather Division of the Genesco Company. This company started its 101st year of constant operation this year.

One of our older, modern industries which has brought much prestige to the Montague Area is the Whitehall Metal Studios.

Founded over twenty-five years ago by Thomas M. Pletcher, of Chicago, Illinois, it was originally named Lakeshore Metal Studios. Legend has it that the name Whitehall was eventually selected from the telephone prefix used in the Chicago office of the corporation, not Whitehall, Michigan, the site of the original factory - formerly Harry Young's Anvil Shop on Mears Avenue.

Whitehall is the world's largest manufacturer of weather vanes, house signs, ornaments and markers. An original line of shields and large cast aluminum wall plaques for interior and exterior use has brought Whitehall into prominence in the home furnishings market. A permanent display suite is maintained at the American Furniture Mart, Chicago, Illinois, where buyers from all over the world gather to select from the thousands of products offered.

The present factory and general offices are located at 8786 Water Street, Montague, and consist of approximately 25,000 square feet of factory area. The Studios employ 40 highly skilled workers all of whom are White Lake residents.

All stages of manufacture from foundry to shipping are performed here at Montague.

The staff of 30 sales representatives cover 50 states to sell and service 6,000 retail dealers.

In 1962 the management of the company passed into the hands of the grandson of the founder, Thomas S. Pletcher.

If, in our discussion of our present day industries, it is possible to digress for a moment, it is interesting to note that the natural resource most important to our future has lain quietly beneath our feet for millions of years...salt.

Although some early dreamers knew of it not much was done about it. Hiram Hulbert made an attempt to put in a salt well on the White River in about 1844. He abandoned the well project and built a water power saw mill at Carleton Creek.

The next attempt to capitalize on the salt beds known to be in the area was the formation of the White River Oyster Planting and Propagating Company, which was to have had \$100,000 capital and probably was relying on saltwells to provide the right home surroundings for the oyster beds. There is nothing to indicate that anything ever came of this except that some local businessmen parted with hard money for fancy-looking stock certificates.

Not until 1951 was a truly significant step taken to take advantage of this vast resource.

Thirteen years have passed since Hooker Chemical Corporation pulled the switch to start production at its brand new electrolytic plant in Montague, Michigan. A small part of the 100 years of history in the Montague area, 'tis true, but a significant part nevertheless in the making of a 100 year landmark.

Reminiscing, we recall that Arthur Meyer, a Montague plumber, was the one who first suggested to Hooker the plausibility of locating in this area adjacent to Lake Michigan. Hooker gambled \$100,000 to sink an experimental well to determine the availability of salt, a prime raw material for its operation. Out of the investigation came the assurance of a salt supply for many hundreds of years, and the decision to build a plant here. Hooker is gratified to have been the pioneer of chemical industrial growth in the area, and shares civic pride in the growth and success of the community which it first adopted in 1952, the year construction began.

Today, as the Montague area celebrates its Centennial, the company operates a \$20-million plant here, employs 150 men and women, pays approximately \$1 1/4 million dollars in wages annually, contributes well over \$1/4 million dollars yearly to the area in local and county taxes, and last year spent more than \$7 million dollars in addition for miscellaneous services and supplies.

The good wishes expressed in "Hill Top News" of May, 1953, have seen fruition. In a special issue of that publication when Hooker settled in the community, the staff wrote:

"This issue is dedicated and compiled solely to express our appreciation to Hooker, not only for helping to put us on the map, but for the many years of affiliation we hope to have. It is our most sincere wish that you will like Montague. We hope you are successful, and as you grow so shall we. Other industries will come to Montague, but only because you started the ball rolling."

As Hooker spokesman, W. Duane Colpoys, Montague plant manager, says: "The Montague Community has been our friend, and we can indeed join hands to celebrate 100 years of progress and growth."

In the middle 1950's, when Du Pont was searching for a good place to locate a planned expansion of their neoprene production facilities, the Montague, Michigan area became a leading contender early in the study.

What led the company to eventually select Montague? Many factors

were considered, of course -- a reliable supply of an essential raw material, hydrogen chloride, from the neighboring Hooker Electrochemical Company, good railroads and highways for transportation of raw materials to the plant and finished products to customers, an ample supply of good clean cooling water so essential to efficient operation of a chemical production unit, and most important, an industrious population from which a group of people capable of operating and maintaining complex chemical processing equipment could be drawn.

And so in November, 1956, construction of the Du Pont neoprene unit at Montague was completed and the plant placed in operation. Thus was another step taken in the development of Montague as an important chemical production center in Western Michigan, an industry based upon extensive subterranean salt deposits and started in this area by the Hooker Chemical Corporation in 1951.

Neoprene, one of Du Pont's synthetic rubbers, is the result of their intensive research and development and was man's first commercially successful synthetic rubber. It was first produced in 1931 at Deepwater, New Jersey, and later, during and since World War II, at Louisville, Kentucky. Neoprene is noted for its toughness and resistance to wear, oils and atmospheric attack. You have probably used it or seen it used, for example, in garden hose, rubber heels, gasoline and fuel hoses, window seals on modern cars, as gaskets and in a myriad of other applications. None of these end-use products are made by Du Pont -- the neoprene made at Montague is a raw material for other manufacturers, sold in bulk to them for conversion into finished consumer products.

In 1963 a major plant addition was completed for the production of acetylene from fuel oil. Acetylene is the major raw material used in neoprene manufacture.

In 1964 another production unit was added -- a unit to produce fluorinated hydrocarbons. These products, under the trade name Freon, are used as aerosol propellents in the pressure packaging industry, as refrigerants, and as ultra-pure industrial cleaning agents. A necessary ingredient in their manufacture is chlorine, also derived by the neighboring Hooker Chemical Corporation from salt deposits in the area.

Some idea of the magnitude of the Du Pont operation can be derived from a few statistics. The plant currently employs about 435 people, of whom the large majority were locally hired. Its consumption of electricity is more than enough to supply all the homes in the White Lake Area; its usage of steam is equal to that required to heat 700 homes in the cold of winter. Perhaps most important of all is its economic impact on the community. Plant annual payroll approximates \$3,500,000; its purchases in Muskegon County \$7,000,000. In return, Du Pont is assisted by the people of the community in the operation of an efficient plant, contributing im-

portantly to the profits of the Company and to the taxes of the local community, state and nation. The Du Pont Montague Works provides a typical example of the benefits a successful enterprise brings to customers, stockholders, employees and others in the community through a mutual cooperative undertaking, while providing the public at large with "Better Things For Better Living -- Through Chemistry".

Although the recent major industrial growth of the Montague Area has been closely tied to the Chemical Industry, several smaller companys have contributed much to our community.

The Hamm & Lederer Pattern Shop of Montague was started in 1947 by Harvey Lederer and Wes Hamm.

Their first location was in the old bank building, which has since been torn down. In 1951 a new building was built at their present location on Water Street, across from the Montague Fire Station.

After fourteen years of a very harmonious partnership, Harvey Lederer sold his interest to Wes Hamm, who has continued on in the same location. Their work consists of making both wood and metal patterns and models for local and state industries.

Old Century Forge, Inc., a Michigan Corporation, was established in 1962 by Otto J. Ernst. In 1966 Otto J. Ernst resigned because of other interests and Henry Hunt, semi-retired businessman, became President and Lyle Loughmiller employed as Plant Manager. Earle Thompson, Montague Postmaster for 14 years, resigned his post and joined the company as Traffic Manager in 1963. Harry J. Wenzel has acted as Sales Manager since the company's inception.

The company manufactures an extensive line of weather vanes, house signs and unusual wall decorations, all of which are made of aluminum. An outstanding reputation has been won by the company because of its pride in craftsmanship and the great love of producing items of the highest standards. Because of the high quality, this new company has customers who are giants of merchandising. The company operates its own aluminum foundry, located on Meinert Road. Its finishing, shipping and general processing is done at 8929 Water Street.

Slowly, but surely, the company has won the reputation as the most honored name in metalcraft.

Montague's newest and fastest growing industry is Tech-Cast, Inc., located at 8110 Whitbeck Road. The plant was built in the fall of 1964 and operations were started in the summer of 1965 with a work force of four employees. As of this date, they are employing 45 men.

Steel castings are specially made in an electric furnace for customers all over the midwest; mostly farm equipment, tractors, trucks, hydraulics, magnetic application with high magnetic perma-bility.

Clayton and Margaret Berry are guiding this new industry, and we salute them for their success.

So we have come full circle to the development of an economic structure built on another great natural resource.

We can only hope that we and our future generations will have the foresightedness to use this one with a greater degree of intelligence than our lumbermen.

It doesn't seem possible now that we could wake up some morning and find our resources depleted and our industries dying. It didn't seem possible then either.

So as our Centennial is celebrated let us all resolve to work together to keep this area as a lasting memorial to the ability of man to overcome adversity and to rise Phoenix like from the ashes of his past mistakes. Lets keep the Montague area a wonderful place to live, to work, and to play...