

HISTORY OF WEINBRENNER

The Weinbrenner history goes back to a small town in West Germany called Nassau, where, in 1827 a man named Peter Weinbrenner was born. At age 21 he came to the United States and on March 27, 1855 became a naturalized citizen in Milwaukee. As part of the naturalization process, he had to renounce his allegiance to the Duke Alphonsus who had ruled the province of Weishaden in which Nassau was located. He started a small shoe shop in Milwaukee using the manual skills he had learned in Germany. In 1865 a son Albert was born, who was to become the ~~father~~^{founder} of one of the largest shoe manufacturing concerns in the country, the Albert H. Weinbrenner company. His training started in his father's shop at age 13, where his first job was attaching leather outsoles by means of wooden pegs.

In 1892 he formed a partnership with a man named Joseph Peffer for the purpose of selling boots and shoes to the jobbing trade. They rented a small store building at 140 West Water Street in Milwaukee and went into business. Apparently that first year was only moderately successful because he related many years later to a friend that he lived very frugally during that time, but celebrated at the end of the year by indulging in a 5¢ glass of beer.

The business continued for about 8 years when the partners decided to go into shoe manufacturing. On January 1, 1900 the corporation of Albert H. Weinbrenner Company was formed and each partner subscribed 50 shares of stock at \$100 each. Two additional stockholders,

Ferdinand Knoll and John Batstone, joined the firm with 30 shares each. The four met at the Weinbrenner and Peffer office and elected Mr. Knoll president, Mr. Peffer vice-president, and Mr. Weinbrenner Secretary and Treasurer. Apparently Mr. Knoll had shoemaking experience, because the next day they voted to buy the assets of the Knoll Shoe Company for \$1500. It appears that his factory was rented by the new corporation and records show he was named manager at a salary of \$720 per year. Mr. Batstone was hired as a cutter at the same salary. By May of that year, a sole cutting room had been started and William ^{Kober} Kober was hired as the foreman and also became a stock holder.

At the end of that first year Mr. Knoll resigned from the corporation and Franklyn Rohn, a brother-in-law of Mr. Weinbrenner, became a stockholder with one share. He was immediately elected president to succeed Mr. Knoll.

There is no record of the first three years in business other than on December 31, 1902 the secretary reported that the net profit prior to that date was \$8,226.67. This was then divided between Mr. Peffer and Mr. Weinbrenner, who by that time owned all of the stock except for Mr. Rohn's one share. Production had reached 60 pair per day.

By 1904 the business showed continued progress and profits for that past two years were reported as about \$6,500 with total assets at \$54,600. During this period, three new stockholders were added including Theodore Scholl, who remained a director and leather buyer until his death on March 23, 1938. He became well known and respected

in the tanning industry.

Mr. Weinbrenner by this time was general manager as well as secretary and treasurer. He announced at a board meeting that he felt he should receive some compensation for his services and he was voted a monthly salary of \$250.

In 1905 the company moved to a larger factory in a rented building where more production could be handled and which grew to 2500 pair a day. Shipments for that year were \$333,000. Mr. Weinbrenner and Mr. Pfeffer by then were the principle stockholders of a total of eight.

For 1906 shipments were \$585,000 showing continued growth. During this year, Mr. Pfeffer retired and his stock was acquired by Mr. Weinbrenner. In 1908 Phillip Reisweber joined the corporation. He became a director and was ~~General~~ ~~factory~~ ~~Superintendent~~ until 1938. He died late in 1944. Alvin Jung also was hired this year. He became a director and general manager of a Stitchdown factory in Milwaukee and later the men's dress factory at Merrill, Wisconsin. He died in 1950. The company decided ^{at} this time to purchase the land at Juneau Avenue and Market Street for a future factory. Purchase price was \$46,000. The building was completed the next year and consisted of a four story building with two rectangular window wells in the center. A basement provided 45,000 square feet with the other four floors providing 157,356 square feet. It was built with a capability of adding another five floors if necessary. Electricity was generated in a huge power plant in the basement and provided all power and light at substantially less cost than if purchased.

On November 15, 1909 George Nemetz was hired in the cutting room. He was the only employee ever to complete more than 50 years of continuous service. His knowledge of leather was extremely helpful many years later when new factories were started in northern Wisconsin. In about 1940 he was named superintendent of the sole cutting plant in Merrill, and later became leather buyer until his retirement.

In 1914 the capital stock of the corporation was increased from \$50,000 to \$1,000,000 with Mr. and Mrs. Weinbrenner owning 6,819 of the 10,000 shares.

By 1916 there were about 1,200 employees making mens and boys shoes in goodyear welt, nailed, standard screw, and McKay process.

Styles ranged from 6 inch to 18 inch in mens and boys workshoes.

(X) Dress shoes were made only in 6 inch heights, both bal and ~~boot heel~~ ^{clicker} types, and many styles with buttons instead of laces. Button hooks were house hold items needed by the wearer to button up the shoes.

Ladies styles were made also, all with buttons and kid and kangaroo uppers.

Production was about 20,000 pair daily ranking Weinbrenner among the top manufacturers of the country. Much of the upper cutting in the industry was done by hand, but Weinbrenner had 82 clicker cutting machines, the largest number of any factory in the country. They had also 40 sole cutting machines for leather soles and this type of sole was used exclusively at that time. The first rubber soles appeared in 1924 on one style of welt work shoes. This was a Gro-cord sole which became widely used in future years. At the same time, the

Uskide sole was adopted for several nailed styles. The company made all of their own shoe cartons and were packed in wooden cases for shipping.

By 1917 the corporation had extended itself financially to the point where the banks suggested that Mr. Weinbrenner seek help in the management of the company. W. G. Hanson who managed the United States Glue Company was selected. This company was a co-operative business in Carrolville, Wisconsin to which shoe manufacturers sent their leather scraps for processing. Mr. Hanson became a stockholder and director of Weinbrenner and on March 23, 1917 was selected to the office of Vice-president and General Manager.

Later that year the Weinbrenner company entered into the first contract for military shoes. This was the year also that the "Job Fitted" concept was first used. Catalogs stressed styles particularly designed for various occupations, such as hobnailed shoes for miners and quarry workers, and manure proof uppers for farmer's shoes. Various styles were made for railroad workers, foundry workers, and an 8-inch boot for oil well drillers. It wasn't until 1950, however, that the name "job-fitted" was copyrighted. The 1917 catalog showed about 200 styles which included 6-inch work shoes and 6-inch dress shoes. No oxfords were shown and it wasn't until 1924 that the first dress oxfords appeared consisting of 3 styles of mens and 2 styles of boys bal oxfords. Work oxfords were not yet made. On May 28, 1918 the "Thorogood" trademark was registered and became widely known. By now,

(X) too, the Thorogood shoe dressing was sold ~~in~~ to the dealers in an attractive display kit for resale, retail at 10¢ per can. Military shoes were made on the munson last which soon became popular for civilian shoes also, and one style alone in a semi-dress shoe was being made at the rate of 1,000 pair per day.

It was about this time that R. J. Diekelman was hired. He started as a paymaster, coming from Shawano, Wisconsin where he taught school for a short time. Mr. Hanson decided later to replace him and offered "Diek" a sales territory in northern Minnesota where no one had been successful. His burly size and brusque¹¹²¹¹⁰⁰ together with his Scandinavian ancestry enabled him to easily make friends with the residents, and broke all records as a salesman. Later he became sales manager and developed a substantial jobbing business with large firms such as Sears and Penney's. He became widely known and trusted in the trade but sometimes was criticized by Mr. Hanson and accused of having a greater interest in the customer than in the company. It did, however, open doors for him.

On August 3, 1919 the first branch warehouse was opened in New York City as a separate corporation. It had its own sales force and shoes were shipped from Milwaukee to the warehouse in ^{car-load} ~~can-load~~ lots. During the next several years branches were opened on the same basis in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Kansas City, Atlanta, San Francisco, and Nashville. The New York City branch was moved to Newark, New Jersey in 1927 because of congested conditions in New York. By 1939 only three

branches remained and by 1947 only the San Francisco - Oakland branch was in operation. This was closed also a few years later.

On September 23, 1919 C. J. Risch was named assistant secretary and treasurer. He became well-known in Marshfield as the general manager of that plant in 1936 when it opened. He moved back to Milwaukee in 1938 to become vice-president.

In 1921 Merrill, Wisconsin, future home of Weinbrenner, was called to management's attention. A dealer in Merrill named A. M. Ross, ~~The~~ Shoeman, sent a letter to Milwaukee telling of the "proven success" of Weinbrenner shoes and was quoted in the 1922 catalog. His store was at ⁸¹⁶~~1816~~ East First Street. This was a city built up by the lumber industry with ⁸²sawmills located along the Wisconsin River. It had what was claimed to be one of the first electric trolley street cars in the country. It had also a shoe factory called Tomahawk Shoe Company and had a tannery. The shoe company was one of several which made shoes in the ~~the~~ building ~~which~~ now ~~is~~ owned by the Merrill Sheet Metal Works ⁱⁿ and which shoe manufacturers started in 1911. There were names such as Marathon Shoe Company, ^{and} Wausau Shoe Company, none of which continued beyond a few years.

During this time, business declined and losses in sales and production were reported. Dress welts were being phased out to the point that there were only 17 styles left from 50, five years earlier.

It was at this time Mr. Hanson decided to bring into the corporation, Harold R. Miller from United States Glue Company. He was named secretary and treasurer and later became vice-president

and treasurer. Mr. Hanson subsequently obtained also Fred Haas and Henry Hammes from the Glue Company to handle the accounting functions. These men added needed strength to Mr. Hanson's team and remained with the company until their retirement years later. In 1924 management decided to build a factory for children's stitchdowns. The fourth floor of the Ogden Shoe Company was leased to start production before a new factory was available. The new building was completed the next year and consisted of three stories at 33rd and Hadley Streets in Milwaukee with a capacity of 3,000 pair. Alvin Jung was made general manager and John Rindfleisch was factory superintendent. Initially 34 styles in misses, child's and infants were made in oxfords, button-straps, and high shoes. During the next few years production increased to 3,000 pair daily but the great depression in the early 1930's required changes. A ^{v-sew} ~~tee-sew~~ stitchdown was developed and patented as "Hadley Process". It eliminated the insole and the midsole served ~~as~~ that purpose, but required changes in last and midsole design. The lower cost in this construction enabled the company to produce a line of unlined barefoot sandals and unlined oxfords to sell to dealers at 95¢ and \$1.05 per pair respectively. The large demand for these low priced shoes enabled the factory to continue production at full capacity during those hard times. In 1934 this process was used to produce a low priced men's unlined workshoe, but was not accepted as well. During 1930 the children's factory was enlarged to make growing girls and children's welts and to be sold by a separate sales force under the name of Hadley Shoe Company.

The shoes did not sell well because of poor styling and the venture was abandoned. Sales losses and equipment cost caused this to be probably the greatest disappointment to the generally successful company. ^{to} Few years prior the depression, in 1927 specifically, the Weinbrenner Realty Company was formed. The object was for this corporation to acquire all real estate then owned by the Weinbrenner Company and lease it back to them. The stockholders and directors of Weinbrenner became stockholders and directors of the Realty Company. The original plants known as factory "A" as well as other small pieces of property were acquired and the factory leased to Weinbrenner for a rental of \$38,930 annually. There is no record of factory B, the children's plant, being transferred to the realty company which was dissolved in 1944.

In 1935 a delegation ^{from} of the Marshfield Industrial Foundation approached the Weinbrenner Company about locating in that city. They proposed building a factory and leasing it for a nominal amount. Marshfield, like other cities in that area, needed industry to replace the business that had disappeared and the labor supply was ample. Plans were made accordingly and the factory for workshoes was opened in January of 1936. Several months previously, a training place had been made available in the Purdy School in Marshfield with upper cutting machines and sewing machines furnished by Weinbrenner. Uppers had been partially completed by the time the factory was ready and production proceeded. The first shoes were of nailed construction with black split uppers. The United Shoe Machinery Corporation

maintained a staff of instructors to teach the operation of ^{leased} lasting and bottoming machines. Weinbrenner instructors were used for training on the other operations. Before the trainees were placed on the payroll, however, they had to ^{At factory} ~~obtain~~ a certain level of production within a maximum of three weeks. Then they were paid piece work or a minimum of 25¢ per hour. Goodyear welt production began several months later. In the meantime, work shoe production continued at Milwaukee but was phased out as quickly as Marshfield could absorb it. Eventually that factory reached a maximum of 5,200 pair per day, mostly welts.

In March of 1936, a group of Merrill businessmen invited Weinbrenner officials to visit that city to discuss building a dress shoe factory similar to the one in Marshfield. The company was interested and ^{the} Merrill industrial foundation was quickly formed. By December 5 of that year, the building was dedicated with a two day celebration by enthusiastic residents. It had a carnival atmosphere arranged by the Junior Chamber of Commerce and they called the celebration the "Shoe Bang". Miniature souvenir shoes were sold by the Jaycees and various games of chance were provided in the new factory building to raise additional money to add to ^{the} building fund. W. G. Hanson and other officials from Milwaukee and Marshfield participated in the dedication.

Production began in January of 1937 with Ed Vollbrecht, the factory superintendent and Alvin Jung, general manager. The next year the city of Antigo built a similar factory for childrens

stitchdown production which was opened in early 1938. Matt Ketter, who was factory superintendent of factory B in Milwaukee, and Carlton Henze, office manager, moved to Antigo to take over operation of the plant. Employee hiring and training in Merrill and Antigo proceeded similarly to the program followed at Marshfield. Executive offices, shipping, and sole cutting, remained in Milwaukee after production was completely absorbed at the northern factories.

Weinbrenner, up to this time had not entered into safety toe production. During 1938, the first style of this type was made at Milwaukee, and was a vamp lined 6-inch shoe with a bulky tip that could unmistakably be only of steel. It was sold to the dealers for \$3.10 per pair.

March of 1939 was a sad time for Mr. Weinbrenner when he lost his wife, Isabelle, she had been a stockholder of the corporation since 1914 and her stock was now transferred to daughters, Kathryn and Julianne.

During this year an addition was built to the Merrill plant for sole cutting and leather heel and counter production. In this year also a new line of mens dress shoes called "London-aire" to sell at \$4 retail together with the new Tom King line at \$3 retail were introduced. A new service shoe called the "Wau-king" style 1010 was developed at this time. It featured a long arch support counter, orthopedic heel, ^{added} ~~inserted~~ cork filler, and a pigskin insole. This was the first shoe designed especially for policemen and mailmen.

In August of 1940 Albert H. Weinbrenner again assumed the duties of general manager following the sudden death of W. G. Hanson. Mr. Weinbrenner had been inactive in the business even though he still spent some time at his office as President. Shortly after Mr. Hanson's death, Walter ^{K.O.}~~Kiskafer~~, the son-in-law of Mr. Weinbrenner, became a director.

At this time, the first steel toe shoes were produced at Marshfield and consisted of one number each ^{and} ~~and~~ nailed and welt construction. The next year James Childs Jr. and Martin Mitchell, officials of the H. Childs and Company in Pittsburgh called on the Weinbrenner Company to discuss the safety shoe business. The Iron Age name had been used by the Child's Company on work shoes since before World War I. It was about 1925 that steel toe caps for safety shoes first were used but not extensively until World War II. Demand was great and production limited. R. J. Diekelman, Weinbrenner sales manager, had called upon the Child's Company earlier and resulted in the visit to Milwaukee. Present at this meeting were Mr. Weinbrenner, Harold Miller, who by then was vice-president and R. J. Diekelman. As Mr. Mitchell recalls this most important visit, Harold Miller was not receptive to the idea of making steel toe shoes for a company which might drop Weinbrenner after the war was over. Mr. Weinbrenner interceded, however, indicating that he liked what he saw in the Child's organization and was anxious to do business. The safety shoe business was a separate division of the Child's Company, but was named later the Iron Age Shoe Company and became Weinbrenner's largest customer.

Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Diekelman became very good friends through the years and the business transacted contributed greatly to Weinbrenner's success.

At this time management decided to produce a line of high grade dress shoes in calfskin and named it the "Cavalcade" line. Further, the name London-aire was dropped and that dress line changed to the name Bondshire. The Cavalcade line ran into stiff competition among the established well-known names and sales were disappointing. Soon the line was changed to lower priced materials and renamed Bondshire Supreme.

By 1942 World War II was in progress and the United States Government required shoe manufacturers to convert to military shoe production. Civilian shoes were allotted to territories and travel restricted because of gas rationing. Antigo was partially converted to welt production and made combat boots the same as at Marshfield. Merrill made shoes for the Navy. The Air Force had adopted a plain toe buckle oxford and the Navy a plain toe lace oxford as official uniform wear. These patterns became extremely popular in civilian dress shoes and a good portion of Merrill's production was devoted to these styles.

Until this time Weinbrenner periodically advertised the fact that they sold their shoes only to the independent retailer and not to chain stores or house to house concerns. However, management now had some doubt as to the future of ^{the} independent retailer and authorized a survey to be made to study the question. Apparently

no decision was made to change the policy. Shoes for wholesalers made to their specifications and brand names, however, still were an important part of production.

The next two years saw little change in company affairs and the greatest effort was devoted to supplying ^{the} military.

In 1945 the Weinbrenner factory building in Milwaukee was sold to the Cuttler-Hammer Company. It had been used partially up until that time for home offices and a shipping warehouse. The children's factory had been sold earlier to the Milwaukee Saddlery Company, and after that was owned by the Ideal Shoe Company. The Juneau Avenue building having been sold, new office quarters were rented at 2025 North Summit Avenue in Milwaukee. [^]New shipping warehouse space had to be found and arrangements were made with Merrill officials to add ~~an~~ warehouse space to the existing factory. Shipping from there began in 1947.

During this year a young man named Frederick Wilmanns entered the scene. He was married to Nancy Kiekafter, a granddaughter of Mr. Weinbrenner and had served as a Navy pilot during the war. His training in the shoe business began in the Merrill factory preparing him for his future executive position in the company.

By now the company needed more work shoe production than Marshfield could provide. The city of Rib Lake, some distance from Merrill, had a suitable building available ^{and} ~~at~~ ample labor supply. Production quickly began and grew to about 600 pairs a day. By the end of 1950 arrangements had been made to enlarge the Marshfield factory and the

Rib Lake production could be absorbed. A shoe manufacturer in St. Paul, Minnesota indicated an interest in continuing the Rib Lake facilities. This was fortunate for the small community and the factory known as ~~Gem~~ Products provided continued steady employment.

In 1948 Walter ~~Kiekafer~~^{Kieckhefer} was elected president of the corporation, but Mr. Weinbrenner remained chairman of the board. Since Mr. ~~Kiekafer~~^{Kieckhefer} was an official of Eddy Paper Company and ~~Kiekafer~~^{Kieckhefer} Container Company, he relied on Harold Miller as vice-president and general manager to carry on the daily affairs of the business. Mr. ~~Kiekafer~~^{Kieckhefer} at this time brought in John Dickinson as vice-president in charge of sales and advertising. Mr. Diekelman now concentrated on jobbing sales and Mr. Dickinson managed the retail end. It was at this time that a separate division was formed to promote children's stitchdown and compo shoes. It was called the "Proud Fit" division and carried a special sales staff. A circus theme was used in carton design and national advertising with Felix Adler the famous clown of Ringly Brothers Circus, being featured.

On July 4, 1949 a colorful career came to an end with the death of Albert H. Weinbrenner. His company grew into one of the leading shoe manufacturers in the country. He was remembered as a tall and slender mild-mannered individual without bluster. His devotion to his family members was evident in his including them in the affairs of his company. Even though he could afford any luxury, he preferred to be unpretentious and somewhat frugal. As an example, Walter

Kiekafer

Kiekafer asked him to accompany him by train to the Eddy Paper Office at Chicago. There were other businessmen in the group which had reserved seats in the chaircar. Mr. Weinbrenner, as the story goes, felt that was too costly and sat in a coach seat. During the mid 1930's Mrs. Weinbrenner drove an expensive luxury car, but Mr. Weinbrenner preferred to come to the office in a modest Ford. In later years, he occasionally visited the factories up north and while in the cutting rooms, invariably picked up pieces of scrap leather from the floor, cautioning the cutters about waste. During his confinement at his home preceding his death he looked forward to having shoemaking friends from his company call on him and fill him in on happenings in the business. He look forward particularly to visits by George Nemetz, whom he had hired 40 years earlier. Mr. Weinbrenner was cared for in his later years by a nurse who faithfully stood by him until the end.

By 1950 the work shoe line had been developed further toward special shoes for each industry. In that year the name "job-fitted" was copyrighted and applied to individual styles. Names such as the *Bruiser*, *Pole-Kicker*, special service shoe, the trophy, and choreboy were used in the promotion. About 40 basic industries were supplied for their special needs in work shoes.

Production in work shoes continued to grow until a peak of 1,250,000 pair was achieved in the year 1953. Then in 1957 a line of special sportsmens boots were introduced. They were called "Wood 'N' Stream" and carried an identifying small red metal triangle fastened to the top of the backstrap.

Wilman's

In 1954 Fred ~~Wilman's~~ became Executive Vice President and Treasurer, replacing Harold Miller who had died several years before. Since his death, Mr. ~~Kickhafer~~ *Kreckerhoffer* had assumed Mr. Miller's duties as General Manager.

The era of the Weinbrenner family ownership finally came to an end, when in July 1, 1960, Textron Inc. of Providence, Rhode Island bought the company. Textron, a conglomerate of unrelated industries, however, kept the same corporate officers. Mr. ~~Kickhafer~~ *Kreckerhoffer* remained as President of the Textron Division until the end of the year when he retired. At that time, his son-in-law, Fred Wilman's became President.

During the next several years, significant developments occurred. The children's shoes were phased out and replaced with men's casual cemented shoes made at Antigo. Management had been looking at several methods of injection moulded outsoles on work shoes. There was a process developed by Ro-Search, Inc. of Waynesville, North Carolina, known as Process 82. This was basically a method of attaching a rubber sole to a welted upper by means of a heated mould. The first production began at Merrill in 1961 in the part of the factory that formerly housed the Sole Cutting Department. This became an important part of work shoe sales. One of the most popular styles in Process 8 2 was a comfortable shoe with an oiled soft leather upper and was called the "Strike," designed especially for fishermen. These were packed in a plastic box which could be used for fishing tackle, but created somewhat of a problem in filling

orders in the warehouse. The tackle boxes could not be easily stacked for carrying by the order pickers and a grocery cart was used for the purpose. Eventually the novelty of buying shoes in tackle boxes wore off and standard cartons were used.

Another important product of Process 82 was the Mulligan line of golf oxfords. These were developed ~~complete~~^{to} with the more expensive welt golf oxfords. Insulated, waterproof hunting boots too, were among the types made possible through the use of the Vulcanized Process or "Vulco" Process as it became known.

About this time; the "Boy Scouts of America" Organization was approached about creating a line of special shoes as part of the Scout's uniform. A franchise arrangement was made and Weinbrenner became the producer of the official Boy Scout "Hike N' Camp" shoes as they were named and sold only through official Boy Scout dealers.

By 1965 genuine hand-sewn moccasin oxfords had become very popular in men's shoes. That year, production on this type began in the small community of Kimball, Wisconsin, about 100 miles north of Merrill. Training in the high skill of hand sewing moccasin vamps began in a leased building and eventually production of the completed shoes was about 400 pair per day. Three years later, however, management decided to make these at Antigo.

By 1966 Textron was seeking to get out of the shoe business. Mr. Thomas Bata who was the head of the largest footwear manufacturer in the world became interested in acquiring Weinbrenner. Mr. Bata's family owned company was headquartered in Toronto, Canada, and owned over 100 factories in 89 countries. Weinbrenner was sold to the Bata Shoe Company in that year, but continued to be manufactured and sold

under the Weinbrenner name with corporate headquarters in Milwaukee.

By 1969 office facilities at Merrill had been enlarged to accommodate all of the management functions and the Milwaukee office was closed.

At this time, Fred ^{Wilman}~~Wilman~~ chose to resign rather than move to Merrill and Mr. Paul Gross was transferred from the Belcamp office of the Bata Shoe Company to take his place. In 1970 the company became a Division of the Bata Shoe Company, Belcamp, Maryland, and the Weinbrenner Corporation was dissolved.