

THE CONCRETE HERALD

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CONCRETE HERALD ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Superior Cement Plant Is Bulwark of Town

Like most small communities, Concrete's hopes and plans, its past and future, has been tied up with the fortunes of the town's largest industry - the making of cement by the plant of Superior Portland Cement, Inc. Though not the first to discover and make use of the unlimited supply of limestone in this area, the Superior Company became firmly established here early in its formation and is now as permanent as the mountains which hold its raw material.

It was John C. Eden who first investigated the possibilities of establishing a plant here. The Washington Portland Cement company had already begun operations and Mr. Eden visited the district to further probe the resources he had heard about. His findings were many and his decisions were shrewd. He found plenty of un-exploited limestone and clay, a good power sight at Bear Creek, plenty of space for the large plant - - and he wasted little time buying up all these properties for his company.

In 1906, with a capital investment of \$500,000, the company was formed with J. C. Eden, Capt. E. E. Caine, Jacob Furth, Michael Earles, W. P. Holfus, Wm. Pigott and James Hedge as principal stockholders.

First operations consisted of clearing the site for the big plant, which had been planned on a large scale and was to become one of the biggest on the coast. Clearing started in 1906, the plant rapidly taking form through 1907. The Bear Creek Dam was also

in the process of erection and the power house was fitted with huge generators hauled in on skids by teams of horses over what few roads were passable and through the woods the rest of the way.

Three kilns were being installed in 1907 and the first one was put in operation on July 22, 1908. One hundred and fifty men were now being employed at the quarry, clay pit, mill and in construction. With one kiln operating the plant had a capacity of 500 barrels a day, but with the completion of the other two kilns this was raised to 1,800 barrels.

The first shipment of cement from the Superior plant was made on August 5, 1908 when 2,000 sacks were loaded out for the Seattle market. Superior cement was then on its way to becoming one of the best cements made. However, its reputation was not fully established until a few years later when the cement for the Lake Washington canal had been given by the War Department to Superior Portland Cement, Inc. at Concrete. The contract was formally awarded Sept. 7, 1912.

At that time that company officers included John Eden as president; S. L. Barnes, secretary; W. E. Jennings, local superintendent; C. L. Wagner, chief chemist; George A. Campbell, office manager. The operations now required 215 men. The plant site included 80 acres, while the clay and limestone deposits added another 240 acres. Clay was being brought from deposits on the

west side of the Baker and limestone from the east bank over the standard gauge railway built by the company. The railroad ran back of the store buildings on the north side of Main Street, then down the Main street to the plant.

With the manufacturing process solidly established the fortunes of the company began to rest heavily on the sales department. When orders were numerous the plant ran steadily – when the sales dropped off it was the custom to fill all storage capacity and then shut down for a month or two. Still, the plant proved a steady source of income to the town and the rivalry with their competitor, the Washington plant in East Concrete, kept both companies on their toes and after every order available.

The year 1918 was a big one for the Superior Company. The war had brought many changes and the plant was also looking for new ways of doing the old job. In February of that year the handling of the rock for the kilns was changed over to the wet process, wherein powdered limestone and clay were mixed into slurry before entering the kilns. Then in May came the change from the 10-hour shift to the standard 8-hour day. In June the first women were employed – mainly in the sack house where they mended and took care of cloth bags then used. Also the burning process was modernized in a change from firing with oil to use of powdered coal. The climax of the year came in December when the Superior Company purchased all properties and interests of the Washington company. The Washington plant was immediately closed down and from then on Superior made all the cement in the upper-Skagit valley.

Closing of the Washington plant was done with the idea of combining the machinery of the two companies into one larger operation. Accordingly, in April of 1919, the two largest kilns at the Washington plant were installed as one kiln at the Superior

plant. This was a kiln 195 feet long – then the largest on the Pacific coast. Capacity was increased about 35,000 bbls a month. Two more kilns were soon added and the tall stacks to provide adequate draft. All this required more rock and by the following year a record blast was set off at the quarry, using 17,000 lbs. of powder to bring down 140,000 tons of limestone. Superior payroll had reached \$60,000 a month – the post-war boom was beginning.

All previous shipping records at packhouse were broken in September of 1921 were 123,000 bbs were handled during the month. It was in 1921, too, that the siren was first installed at the quarry to serve as a warning for blasting operations.

The year 1922 found Superior in the process of building a few more company homes west of Superior Avenue. In July they added an annex to the Superior Hotel, giving forty more rooms for workmen. By September the packhouse crew was again in the headlines – loading 70 cars (11,000 bbls) in one day!

The new Superior office was under construction in November of 1922, the two story building to cost around \$18,000 furnished and ready for occupancy.

The next few years were years of building and expansion. The new Clinker Shed was built and a huge crane borrowed from Jennings and Nestos to install the heavy machinery of the derrick. A change room and showers for the men was built in March of 1932. The same month the Superior Athletic Club was organized. Then in July the tennis courts were built. In August the contract was let for the big warehouse located between the plant and machine shop.

In April of 1924 a contract was let for a new storage building east of the factory. By 1926 more storage was needed for slurry so 6 new slurry tanks, each with a capacity of 3,000 bbls. were built.

The building of the Baker River dam

made necessary the abandonment of the old railroad line to the quarry. The first contract for the towers for the tram was let in Nov. of 1926. Other construction followed rapidly.

In August 1927, the company celebrated their 20th anniversary with a big picnic at Birdsvew, 800 were present to see Ross Zongrone present a watch to Pres. Eden as a token of appreciation from the employees.

It was about this time that the plant began to take an active interest in a continuous safety campaign. The "Siren", monthly plant publication, was started with Ken Childs as first editor. First aid teams were formed and regular safety rallies and campaigns were made a part of the policy, and are still continued today.

Pres. John Eden died in January of 1929 and E. P. Locas was named president. The depression hit Concrete and the cement plant a little late, but in 1931 a change was made to a 6-hour shift in order to employ more men in keeping the kilns and plant going. Finally in December of 1931 the plant was closed down completely for the first time in ten years. It was down three months as much needed repairs were made in all departments.

The plant ran intermittently until August of 1935, when the big news came through that the plant was a low bidder on the Grand Coulee contract. The first order for 2 million barrels came through in September. Subsequent orders of cement from Coulee, Ruby Dam, the Roza Project and others have kept the plant busy ever since.

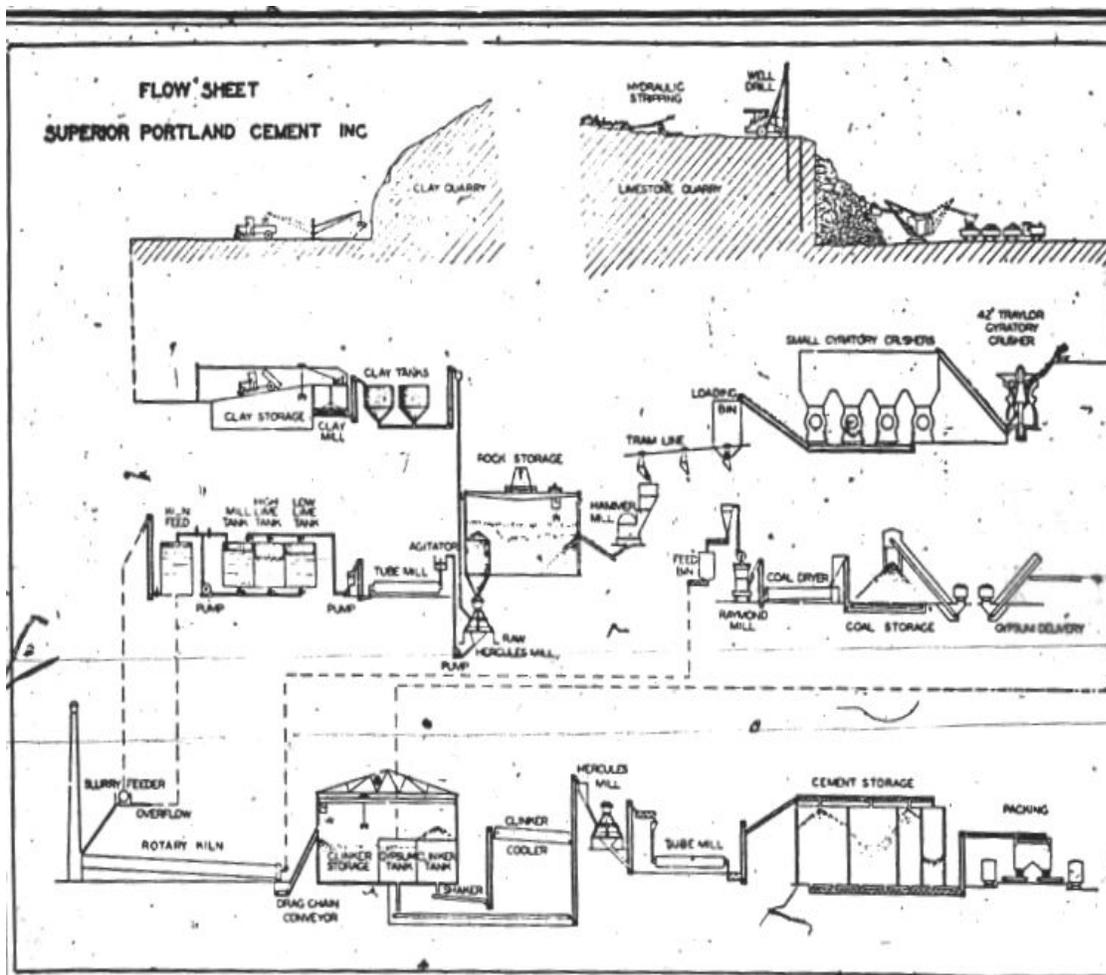
Construction and changes have continued over these years. A new sackhouse was built in 1940, new cement storage tanks constructed. The dust collectors were installed in 1947. Later the quarry was modernized with a new crusher and a change from the old locomotive and rock cars to large trucks. Much clearing and landscaping has also been done about the plant, and the office building is now in the process of being

remodeled for better efficiency.

Superior's safety program has paid off in many ways. They won the national trophy in 1931 for a full year without a lost time accident – have had it re-awarded in 1932, 1933, 1934, and after a number of near-misses again in 1940.

Employee relations have always been very good at Superior, some workers having been with the company since it started. These men, however, are now reaching the retirement age. The men voted for a union charter in 1936, now negotiate for wage and working condition contracts.

The company has been active in all civic promotions, giving liberally of money, materials and officer's time for the welfare of the community.



How Cement Is Manufactured in Superior Plant

The above drawing shows in detail the process of making cement from limestone. As this flow sheet was made up some years ago it still shows the clay quarry process which has long since been abandoned. Now the manufacture is completed without the use of clay. Other processes are essentially the same and will give a clear picture of the number of different operations necessary to produce one barrel of cement.

The process is briefly a series of grinding operations which reduce huge limestone boulders to a fine powder. This powder, mixed with water, is run through the kilns where it is burned into a clinker. Then the grinding begins again until the material is again fine enough to flow like water through a 200-mesh screen. This finished product then has to be stored, pumped into tank cars and trucks, or sacked for shipment.

The Superior plant and Town from the Air

The picture at the right, taken about 1926-27, shows the entire town and the cement plant in a single view. Also noted in the scene is the Baker River Dam and a portion of the construction camp that was built for workers building the dam. These have been taken down. Numbers of other changes have taken place since that time, but this interesting view provides an idea of the lay-out of the town that is better than any other photo we have been able to secure for this edition.

