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## Schipper, Vern Oral History Interview: Holland Furnace Company

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29 May 1986

Vern Schipper

Ben Staal - could be seen as a turncoat  
"ass kisser"  
not viewed with a lot of trust

Wesenberg - top-drawer person  
head of engineering then vice pres  
person of strong X'm principles,  
member of Emmanuel Baptist  
Vern's dad Boss  
Dad never said a negative word  
\* Good person to talk about product  
and how it was sold

Vandenberg - dead  
salesman first and foremost

Sikkell - \* Good to tell how it was sold  
Sens. vp for sales - Hawthorn

Chiff - liked to have an aura around him  
opinionated - spoke his piece  
principled.  
(Bruce Van Heuven know a bit)  
son of "Domine" Chiff - RC minister  
PP Chiff a slapper dresser  
Hope Church - prestige church; Ray Shott's went  
there.  
PT went around with money crowd  
Landwehr's lived on SW Corner 11<sup>th</sup> and Maple (red brick)

AT Landwehr - heavily insured  
When he died, new office building built on  
money from insurance.

hardware boat in accident had airplane engine

"They had the Toys."

Vern's car was in Longbank. Said fingers were pointed at AH for letting kids go too wild.

Oscar Nyström - (BVL would know)

brilliant guy.

had no social ambitions; no interest  
tinkered - work with his hands

for long time lived in Wam Friend

Can Cedar Rapids plant after divorce

Katherine - old enough to be Ted's Mom; said Vern's dad  
as foreman,

Ted worked in HF foundry; then foundry well. Vern's  
dad said never been run better.

Ted very concerned with fitness + health

Foundry work very physical, tough environment

Had rep. as best place to work → encouraged  
by JP Kolla + AH hardware.

Family chose Ted to run company

Quality-managed company.

Business Principles before WWII were envy

Co. literally built People's Bank, Wam Friend Hotel  
Used WF as focal point of activities

Early Tulp Time Brochures printed by HFC

Community-minded Company

## Sales strategy

- unique design that was an efficient coal-burner
- reputation
  - More expensive than others but efficient, effective and always installed properly -- important.
- Salesman
  - required to draw diagrams of house; floor plan mailed to HFC. Contract went to finance dept, plans would go to engineers who would approve the location and installation of furnaces.
- Had many checks.
- Quality prod. installed by quality people
- ~~Quality~~ If there was any trouble with furnace, co. in Holland would double-check local salesmen
- up to WWII, co. built reputation because of this.
- Innovation:
  - AIR-U-WELL fan - pushed heat greater distances distributed heat much more evenly. Prior to WWII.
- Made significant steps in heating industry

## Up til WWII

(Plant 5)

During WWII, northside plant produced war material

after WWII, great, pent-up demand for furnaces. Many say HFC had big day just after WWII. Probably here when this of corporate responsibility for what was going on in field fell apart.

- \* Training program for salespeople fell through
- \* Local reps hired "willy-willy"
- \* Co. didn't pour a lot of money into research and development

How much did co. in Holland know?

Salesmen would sell cleaning jobs for furnaces  
And would inspect the furnace as well as clean  
it. This was where scandal came in. The "inspector"  
who would look at furnace was a salesman who,  
if something might be wrong, would sell a new  
furnace.

Sold many furnaces this way,

BUT

Alleged guys selling cleaning jobs would sabotage  
the furnace. Wasn't anything wrong before.

Planned out strategy (not the sabotaging)

Went itself to illegal practices

At some time, amongst some division managers  
a movement to take control of co. Family developed  
strategy to counter that.

There were people in Holland who wanted PT out.  
Felt he was aware of what was going on in the field  
and was responsible for what was going on.

Harry Kolb - chief investment officer.

Challenged PT's presidency

Wanted E. Prandwiler to be pres.

Was ousted from Hazelbank <sup>after</sup> stockholders

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Henry Boersma - fired

Bill Tahaney - quit

If you disagreed with Ted, you were not going to  
be around.

Cheff enjoyed demeaning "friends" in front of others.

Laeris - Lakewood Blvd.

Tom Knight

Fellowship RC

Go past

Cheff

Larry Kolb "Raging a virgin"

"You can't tell me that  
the management wasn't aware  
that the business practices  
were going to get them in  
trouble."