5-30-1986

Wichers, Willard Oral History Interview: Holland Furnace Company

Hope College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/holland_furnace

Part of the Archival Science Commons, and the Oral History Commons

Recommended Citation
http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/holland_furnace/19
Copyright © 1986 Hope College, Holland, MI.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Interviews at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Holland Furnace Company by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.
30 May 1986

William Wickers

OTHER NAMES
1. Clarence Barker
   His father originally represented HFC in OR. He also
   later one of the organizers of Home Furnace Co. Knows
   a lot about the early days of HFC.
2. Joe Waches
   "Leading Democrat"
3. Nelson Bowman
   Knew PT Cheff well

WILLIAM WICKERS' BACKGROUND

Zealand native. Father died when he was 4 years old. He spent a lot of
place in OR as a child. His mentor was Rev. Paul P. Cheff before Cheff
came to Hope Church. He knew Rev Cheff and son Ted.

ON HFC

The company was well established and prosperous under Bella and the
landlords. "They ran small committees and boards and were very
generous."

They built the Warm Pond Tavern and the Masonic Temple (upstairs).
They also had offices in major cities throughout the country and were
selling a very fine product.

Then came the Depression, World War II and rationing. During these
years, outlets were occasionally selling new furnaces and repairing parts.
And then someone perfected the vacuum cleaning of furnaces (coal-
burning). It was a good service.

"But that's when you got some of these characters -- actually hoodlums,
today's Mafia. These were the guys who would break grades and sell
nasty stuff."

Slowly, the Better Business Bureau in larger cities began investigating --
and it ended with PT Cheff serving time in prison.

ON PT CHEFF

Was confrontational. He was boss and executives weren't to dispute
his authority.

"I can't believe that people like Mr. Takeo certainly must have
been aware of some of these shenanigans."

"How could this happen to such a successful company? It has to
do with leadership." PT's leadership was faulty.

After WW II, a lot of "revolving door stuff" -- firings.

"I think a lot of that (firing) were prompted by feelings of desperation.
I think some of these books out on the field were having a great deal
of influence on him (Cheff)."

PT Cheff loved to debate any subject (a favorite was
local and national politics). He liked to argue with Willard
Wheeler about how dull Dutch menus were.

ON HFC

"They were a very fine work force. (When the company failed) they had
little difficulty finding other employment."

(Harry Boersma - a super man, Very true)

HFC would pay for the whole Tulip Time program.

Really a civic-minded company. "That was their tradition."

"That's how Holland, MI was put on the map."

After WW II, HFC sponsored nationwide radio broadcasts
of Tulip Time.