

WILLIAM SIKKEL

INTERVIEW: 1 JULY 1986

William Sikkel worked for HFC from 1937 to 1955. He worked as a foreman and then moved up to the Home Office where he worked in the traffic department, branch accounting department, chief auditor department, the Hollanator division, was a manager of the Sanivac (the furnace cleaning division), was an advertising manager and an editor of the Fire Pot. He was also a branch manager in Grand Rapids.

ON DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS AT HOME OFFICE:

Engineering
Branch Auditing (for over 500 branches, "a pretty sophisticated system."
Finance
Office Administration
Distribution
Manufacturing/Production
Purchasing

ON SELLING IN THE BRANCH SYSTEM:

"We had trouble competing because we didn't have the latest state of the art furnaces. People wanted steel furnaces, streamlined furnaces."

"The company didn't keep up the production line. The production line didn't keep up with the industry."

"There was tremendous pressure. It was a pressure organization. The only way you would make a lot of money was to sell a lot of units. The quotas given you were excessive and you had to produce before you got any recognition."

As a branch manager, "The retail establishment in the company provided me with products, financing to operate the business, with promotional materials. They did all the bookwork for me, all the auditing, and at the end of the fiscal year, the

profits were divided between the company and myself." Salesmen and installers were responsible to him as a branch manager.

"When the company got into trouble many complaints. And the company didn't have strong discipline over these people."

"Once a year there was the President's Letter. Complaints in response (to the form letter sent out and signed by PT Cheff) were known as Cheff Complaints. Branch managers had 30 days to deal with them."

"I think it (the branch system) was fantastic if managed correctly; an excellent concept of marketing. It was unique. It would be very effective yet today. But it requires strong control, discipline and strict supervision."

"It turned out that some of the biggest producers (in sales) were the biggest thieves."

"A lot of times these sneaky guys had plans that didn't pertain to particular installations."

"A good salesman -- and we called them sales engineers -- were taught how to draw a floor plan and they could draw a floor plan in 30 minutes."

ON GOAT CONCLAVES:

Were usually in February, in more recent years in Florida. Those who attended were "The top producers from the previous year and a lot of people from corporate -- maybe 20 or 30 people from Holland."

"It was a week-long party. There was a limited amount of business conducted, but it was more a week-long party given as a reward for performances."

The Exalted Order of Goats -- given to key people for an outstanding performance.

ON PT CHEFF:

"He tolerated a number of things that should never have been allowed. He had a tendency to ignore what was happening to the company's reputation because of the sales practices going on in the field."

MISCELLANEOUS:

-- "Probably one of the greatest days of my life was when I

got on the payroll of the Holland Furnace Company. Everybody in town wanted to work there."

-- Other names: Jay Van Wieren, John Van Putten (foreman of the foundry, then sanivac manager).

-- Sime Stoel was purchasing agent.