

HENRY WEYENBERG

INTERVIEW: 1 JULY 1986

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Joined HFC as an engineer in 1932, having graduated from the University of Michigan. At the time, Victor Cherven was chief engineer. He may have died in 1936. Then, HW became chief engineer until 1954. Became vice president around 1947-48. Was also plant manager. Resigned in March 1954. Returned in 1959 and was chief engineer, plant manager, vice president. Stayed on through Stevens, Chamberlin and Athlone.

ON HFC IN THE SIXTIES:

"When Stevens came in, he immediately discontinued all the branches into independent dealers. Chamberlin didn't revert back."

The end of Stevens: "What happened is I was still vice president at the time. It was a very interesting experience. Ben Staal was in charge of running it under Stevens. I got a call to come to a meeting in Chicago. We went to Chicago to one of the hotels. The whole Stevens crowd was there. All he had was a yellow sheet of paper, and he said "Sign this sheet of paper." And it was a letter of resignation."

HW came home. The locks on the doors of the office had been changed. He was ready to retire "on the spot," but was called inside the office building to meet with Henry Hafer and the Chamberlin group.

Under Chamberlin: "Nothing was going on here. (Sold all the equipment in the plant at two big auctions and moved all production to Garwood, N.J.) We retained enough equipment so that when we started production in Garwood, we would carry enough equipment to make Holland Furnaces over there. All that was left here. . . . I was here. Sime Stoehl was here. And they left a couple of women and men to collect the old accounts receivable from the Holland Furnace Company."

After Howard Plaggemars became president and Thatcher Furnace sold, they "moved production back from Garwood and

started production up again in Holland. All equipment was moved back to the Holland Furnace Company, a couple dozen truckloads. In fact, the castings were made down in Indiana."

The plant was started up again -- the assembly department, the tin shop. "The old, faithful employees came back and we made a whirl of it. Howard Plaggemars tried real hard, but we just could not make it. The banks were on his back."

HW was in charge of production both in Garwood and then back in Holland.

② "(Harold) Miller and (Daniel) Lyons maybe worked for Prudential [incorrect]. Holland Furnace Company owed Prudential perhaps over \$10 million. The Holland Furnace Company bought out Rabinowitz, and they needed a tax loss carry forward which Holland Furnace Company had. So, they bought the Holland Furnace Company and amalgamated Rabinowitz into Holland Furnace Company. So, for five years they absorbed a tax loss. I don't believe they had too much interest in continuing the business."

ON THE PRODUCT AND LACK OF PRODUCT INNOVATION UNDER TED CHEFF:

"The Hollad furnace was still the very best on the market bar none (in the sixties). It's practically a life-long furnace. That's because it was a cast-iron furnace."

When HW came to HFC in 1932, they were making 100 percent cast iron, coal burning furnaces. After the war, they made a cast iron and a combination cast iron-steel furnace called the "dome furnace," as opposed to the A or B cast iron radiator types.

③ "I was chief engineer, but there was a fellow in the plant who was supposed to be sort of a design man -- Martin DeLinn. He developed a cast iron forced air furnace that was oil-fired. It was a big clumsy thing. And we lived with that until 1954. In the meantime, everybody under the sun was coming out with other things." But Ted didn't push anything except the coal-burning furnaces. HW released Martin DeLinn and took over complete design. "I did adapt a gas unit (for DeLinn's steel furnace). It was relatively a make-shift deal. It really was not modern."

"Ted Cheff didn't want innovations. Ted did not want any change in the product period. And by that time (the mid-50s), I think he disliked engineers. We argued with him. We discussed it with him. We had meetings. He said "We're making money on coal-fired furnaces." What finished the company was the lack of product innovation." (ADDED LATER: "Selling price was also a negative factor.")

④ "They (the old-style furnaces) were well-made, but they were bulky things. I didn't design that furnace. That was designed by Martin DeLinn (DeLinn was an alcoholic who "had some buddies

working for him. It was quite a gang in there.")

5 HW quit the HFC in March 1954 and was working in Tennessee. In 1958 or 1959, Ted "came down unexpectedly -- he and I were not on speaking terms. He came back and said, "The policies have been changed." I said, "Ted, we tried to improve the product. You wouldn't let me improve the product." Ted promised to change everything in wooing HW back. HW, partly for personal reasons, returned to HFC in 1959.

6 "They had not made any improvements when I was gone. When I left, they pulled in a branch manager to be chief engineer." Al Nutile was chief engineer when HW returned in 1959. He had previously been in sales.

HW insists that the engineering department was very capable, but frustrated. Ray Fehring -- took HW's place in 1953-1954. Left after one year. Walt Kimberly -- became chief engineer of a big stove co. in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Wayne Tice -- became an engineer for a foundry in Muskegon. Stanley (Doc) Curtis -- retired in 1957.

When HW returned in 1959, "Ted lived up to his promise completely, with respect to my duties and authority. He allowed us to make new products. As far as I could see, he changed sales practices in the field as much as he could And he gave the engineering department -- through Jay Wabeke -- authority to fire people if a man was caught in fraud. But it was too late. The company's name had gone down the drain."

7 The Miracle Iron Furnace was HW's innovation after returning in 1959. It had both oil and gas capacity.

ON SALES PRACTICES, TED CHEFF, AND THE TRIAL:

"There were still some men out in the field who were pulling this stuff largely unbeknownst to us in the engineering department. And by that time the Better Business Bureaus and many of the people in government were feretting out and keeping track of customer complaints, and were out to put the furnace company under."

"Nominally, as far as I could determine, Ted tried to keep up with the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals decision. Now, what went on behind the scenes, I don't know."

8 "The 7th Circuit Court of Appeals sent us a list of complaints. Jay (Wabeke) was given the job to dig up information to defend the complaints." Wabeke went to Cleveland and worked with HFC attorney Robert Trenkamp. Wabeke worked for HW. "I was told by Ted and Ted told Jay, "If you find anybody who violated rules, dismiss them. And Jay did. And when the answer had to be given to the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals, he worked on them."

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Wabeke fired a lot of people.

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The Trial: (As far as I -- Doug -- can understand, HW was put into a situation where he was responsible by signing papers under the advise of HFC attorney Trenkamp at a Chicago meeting witnessed by an attorney for the Chamberlin group (Mr. Charles Trynin). When the FTC found this out, HW was off the hook, although he had to go through all the rigors of the trial without knowing it.)

(QUESTION: If Wabeke worked for HW and Wabeke was responsible for firing violaters of the 7th Court order, then wouldn't HW be responsible too? Would that have already put him in a position where he too was cited in contempt of the ruling even without signing the papers in the above paragraph?)

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Originally, Ted and HW were going to get together for defense, but HW found out "They were going to pin it on me and Jay." HW and Wabeke were represented by GR attorney Wendell Miles.

Either during or after the trial, HW had access to the company files since he was still employed there. When Ted Cheff left in 1962, he took all his records, but copies of those records and memos still remained in other files. What HW found was "unbelievable. I looked for days and weeks and months, and found memos Ted had sent out."

"The Landwehrs were wonderful people. It was after World War II. By 1953, the pressure was really on (for sales). That's when the Board of Directors resigned and the attorneys resigned. I think George Tinholt resigned. They resigned because of the pressure. At that time, Ted also appointed Verne Norquist as a vice president. He was a riding buddy of Ted's. He knew all of the horrors. He was totally an amoral man."

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"He (Ted) had the control, the total control. His mistake was he didn't allow us to improve the product and because of that, he put pressure on salesmen."

"Ted treated me very well. He was good to me. His morals were good. He drank very little. He was faithful to his wife. I can't hate Ted Cheff."

MISCELLANEOUS:

-- "When I came to the Holland Furnace Company in 1932, it was the epitome of furnace companies. It was the best, the most well-kept furnace company in the country. I was proud to work for the Holland Furnace Company."

-- The Luncheons, held in what others called "The Passion Pit," are overexaggerated. "It's a grossly exaggerated situation (to call it "The "Passion Pit"). During my years all through the 40s and 50s, we had good meetings in the lunchroom. We would discuss things and argue (ADDED LATER: "such as business, politics, religion, sports, etc."), but we never got angry at one another."

-- Goat Conclaves: held once a year at Tulip Time. Often, the men picked up their bonuses. Went to Florida a couple years.

-- Sales:

junior salesmen ----- resets and cleaning orders
and repairs / senior salesmen ----- furnaces

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ON COMPANY PICNICS:

"They put on tremendous picnics. Free food. Really wonderful prizes. The employees loved them. They were great picnics." HFC picnics were primarily for the factory and office workers. HW took photos at picnics.

Building Leisure Acres: (Picnics held at Leisure Acres, after years of being at Tunnel Park. Once, "the furnace company was going to put on a picnic, a huge picnic for the fellows in the plant. About three weeks beforehand, the place we were going to have it, we couldn't have it there. Ted asked me to buy this land from a farmer. It was all scrubby stuff and we had a bunch of guys from the factory come out and clean it up."

(13) Rocky Marciano: boxer Rocky Marciano came to Holland twice to train. HFC built seats and showers for his training as well as two buildings on Leisure Acres. Once or twice he came down to lunch with the officers of the company. HW remembers him wearing his championship belt around his waist one time.

ON THE PRODUCTS:

Furnaces: "Holland Furnaces were more expensive."

"Through the years they made primarily two kinds of round furnaces. They made a complete cast-iron furnace with what they called the "A Radiator" -- where smoke comes up and goes all the way around the radiator -- and the "B Radiator" -- where smoke comes up and splits and then goes out to the chimney. (SEE DIAGRAM) They also made some dome furnaces. The dome furnace is a dome on top of the fire pots. The bottom ring of the dome is cast-iron, the top is cast iron, but the sides are steel. The heat comes up and travels around this dome and then out through the smoke pipe. That was the cheaper furnace. That furnace was not pushed until later, until after the war. Then, Ted said "Let's discontinue the A and B furnace and we'll go to the dome."

"All those furnaces could be converted into oil and gas.

They made five sizes of each -- 37, 40, 45, 50, 60 (number indicates the diameter in inches)."

"Two types of furnaces, but the first was modified in just one thing, and that's the radiator."

When HW came to HFC in 1932, they were making the A and B Radiator and the Dome.

"The coal furnaces were never phased out. As long as Ted Cheff was there we were making coal furnaces. A lot of those were sold with conversion gas or oil burners."

"After the war some time, Ted says we're going to discontinue the A and B furnace and go strictly to the Dome. So, the A's and B's were discontinued. After the war they also came out with a forced air furnace. It was cast iron and oil-fired, called the "HDFAC." It was designed by Martin DeLinn. Later on I converted. . . I put a converted gas burner into it. Later on, we started working on the Miracle Iron Furnace. I think that was '59."

"Those cast iron rectangular ones that Martin DeLinn designed were called the HDFAC. That was the name for it. I don't remember what sizes it was made. But, the Miracle Iron came out in four sizes, 80 (thousand) to 184,000 B.T.U. They were either gas or oil with a cast-iron heat exchanger. That made it practically a lifetime furnace."

"The ultimate, of course, was the Miracle Iron."

"The ordinary oil-gas fired furnaces are made out of sheet steel, when compared to cast iron are very thin -- 20 gauge on up to 16 gauge. And they buckle in a hurry. They're not able to take the heat like the cast-iron can. And cast-iron will last. It doesn't rust. Other steel furnaces would rust in damp weather."

Air Conditioning: "When I first came there in 1932, the furnace company was going into the air conditioning business. The furnace company made lots of spray air conditioners, and that was supposed to be the answer. But those spray conditioners caused oodles of trouble. They were discontinued." (HFC made spray conditioners for 2 to 4 years, according to HW. They had a huge one in the basement of the home office in Holland.)

HFC did later purchase "modern" air conditioning units, but did not manufacture them. "They did sell, but very, very few, around 100, which you might say is nothing. We had a circular on them, and we had a price list."

"Air conditioners we did not make. In 1931-1933, we made the spray conditioners, with 3 to 5 sprayers going full speed (and air passing through the water spray). If the water was cold enough, it worked, but if it was warm, it worked just the opposite. (It humidified.)"

"Unless you make your own air conditioner, you can't compete price-wise. It's impossible."

Air-U-Well Fan: "No one had the Air-U-Well like we had it. It was a good product mounted in the hood of the furnace. It was installed on gravity systems."

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Hollanator: "This was the trade name for our incinerator which burned garbage, papers, etc. It was a patented item. That was one thing I developed before I left the furnace company (in 1954). The uniqueness of that unit is it didn't require extra heat to burn the papers. There was a special basket in the furnace to burn the garbage. There were many other incinerators on the market that were gas fired, but ours didn't have (need?) any additional gas incineration."

Hot Water Heaters: Oil or gas fired. "All came in one size -- 40 gallons."

Forced Air Blowers: "This was a rectangular blower with filters. A motor and a blower in a housing connected behind the furnace or to the side. On a gravity system, you have to have sloping pipes, but on a forced-air system, it's on pressure. You had small ducts instead of huge ducts. These were rectangular ducts attached to the ceiling. When they sold a dome furnace, they could sell an Air-U-Well or they could sell a blower. If it was a new house, they would probably sell a blower because the owner would want to have it attached to the ceiling. Sometimes you would install them on existing gravity systems."

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Conversion Gas Burners and Conversion Oil Burners: I don't remember whether they had any before I left (in 1954) or not. [They did, as we later figured out.] When I came back we redesigned the conversion gas burners and the conversion oil burners."

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Control Systems: A big item of sales were control systems. With gravity and forced air furnaces, the branch would sell a control system. For coal, it would open the damper. For oil and gas it set the thermostat. That was before I left (in 1954), and that was okay with Ted. That was fine. He knew all about that."

Wall furnaces: They also had a gas-fired, forced-air, counterflow wall heater. Two sizes. That was a purchased item. You might have a room far off in the distance that you couldn't get heat to."

ON THE ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT:

"My job when I first came there was to design heating and air conditioning systems for churches, schools. Branches sent in plans they had made themselves. Doc Curtis and I and three or four others sat at tables and designed heating systems. We would receive a complete set of plans from which (we designed) a

heating system."

(The engineering department had two responsibilities in relation to designing heating/cooling systems. First, they designed systems for churches, etc., as HW referred to above, before they were sold. For example, if a school was being built, they sent out bids. Holland Furnace engineers would design a system for that school. Whether or not it was installed depended on the cost of other companies' systems. Secondly, the engineers would check the floor plans for furnaces sold by branch salesmen.)

"When you sold a furnace and sent the contract into Holland, the engineering department would check that plan that was drawn by the salesman of the branch to make sure that it would do a satisfactory job. If not, the branch would be told the contract was not accepted until they changed whatever was necessary."

"One particular function of the engineering department was, in 1933 or 1934, some engineers went out teaching the branches to balance these air conditioning installations."

"In 1932 they had a control man in the office who was in charge of automatic controls (control systems). And he bought controls from Russell Electric, and did those control systems cause trouble. Wow. So, I (LATER: "as were other engineers") was sent out to the branches trying to fix these controls. I know the company changed a lot of them free of charge to the customer."

Innovations: In earlier interview, HW talked about how frustrating it was for him and other engineers to work for a company which was not innovative with their products.

(17) "We weren't strapped to zero. Everybody was coming out with these rectangular, smaller furnaces (in shape and size, much like the later Miracle Iron furnace). We were still making these big round things."

ON THE SIXTIES:

"The first time after the plant was shut down (Stevens shut down the plant), after that, we started up the factory, but on a reduced scale. But when it was shut down the second time, we didn't start up the foundry (or factory, or both?) again."

"Stevens shut the furnace company down. Then later on it was re-started up again under Hafer (Chamberlin group). And it probably ran until the stuff was moved to Garwood (with the acquisition of Thatcher Furnace Co). After we came back from Garwood, did we start the furnace company again? I do know this: furnaces were made for us in Indianapolis, Indiana. So, we wouldn't start the foundry. And these castings were made for us in a small town in Indiana. We sent a guy down there to show

them how to do it, and they made Miracle Iron castings only, because that's all we made. Miracle Irons, that's all Garwood made. Those castings were also sent to Indianapolis."

Athlone and the end of Holland Furnaces:

Dates HW had written down. 28 February 1966 -- HFC buys Rabinowitz stock. 30 April 1966 -- Holland Furnace plant shut down. 1 June 1966 -- HW makes an agreement to work with Athlone.

For a short time, a man named Pemberton was the boss from Athlone. "He didn't know too much. Sime (Stoel) was still selling furnaces at that time, and I was doing whatever necessary to produce the stuff. We each had an office in the building we rented from Chemtron."

"They said to me, 'Sell the tools, dies to anyone you can.' I had a list of furnace companies. I finally got a hold of Glenn Way from Ryboldt Heating. I asked him if he wanted to buy our heating equipment. I met with Glenn Way on January 17, 1968. In March 1968, the furnace company patterns were sold to Glenn Way of Ryboldt Heating."

"The stuff was sold on an installment basis. They had to sue for the last \$16,000. And (in April 1971) that was settled for \$14,200.

HW'S LIST OF "GOOD THINGS" ABOUT HFC:

1. Good product of exceptional quality. "Ted never restricted us as far as quality in the product was concerned."
2. In the home office, good honorable people. Same in the factory.
3. Hard-working people.
4. They were important to the City of Holland.
5. On good terms with the FHA, a good thing financially.
6. Very good sales tools in the field. High class models, circulars. The engineering department always checked those (circulars) over.
7. Questionnaires were sent to all furnace customers -- the so-called Cheff letters.
8. HFC equipment included complete instructions, all complete specifications in every box sent out from Holland to the branches.
9. "The yearly sales and engineering meetings were conducted on a high level in every respect. They were held in

the best hotels in the country. The company spent a lot of money on those meetings. Before these were held, Fern Ault wrote up all the sales materials and I wrote up the engineering materials, and Ted approved it."

ON WORLD WAR II AND HFC:

During WWII, HFC had a plant on the north side of Holland where they produced war materials, first armor plates and then anchor chains.

"We didn't have any equipment to make armor plates. We bought the equipment, added to the factory and shipped carload after carload to Cadillac Motor Car Company, and they assembled them (the plates) into army tanks. That sort of ran out."

"To get pig-iron or scrap-iron, we had to do war work."

After that, HW went to Washington where it was requested that HFC make anchor chains. He went to Portland, Ore. where they made anchor chains, took down list of materials, and specifications of all they had there.

(18) "They (U.S.) needed anchor chains badly. We made anchor chains. We had to build a machine to test every 10 or 12th one. We shipped out anchor chains until it (WWII) ended."

ON THE RESIGNATIONS IN THE EARLY FIFTIES:

"Times were getting a little rough. Salesmen were having a hard time selling and they had to put on pressure, and that pressure came back to us in the way of complaints. And we said "Ted, we've got to change." And men known to use high-pressure tactics were promoted."

"I think George Tinholt, Fern Ault, Bill Boer and I had a meeting. We said "Look, we better go on record," and we wrote a memo. I gave it to Ted and, phew, he hit the ceiling. That was the end of the discussion, and I said that's the end of it."

In 1953, Bill Boer, George Tinholt and Fern Ault all "resigned" from HFC. HW admitted that they were let go by the management. In March 1954, HW resigned. "I handed in my resignation."

"The reason is that these fellows did not agree with company policies and let Ted know in some form or manner, either directly or indirectly. And Ted, of course, could smell whether or not you agreed."

"We always lived in hopes that Ted would change his mind. We had been there so many years and it was great. We always had

that last desperate hope that something was going to happen, and that's why we wrote that memorandum."

The Board Meeting and Larry Kolb: "There was something about a critical board meeting. As a result of that Larry Kolb was fired and Paul Chollette (resigned). And I think (George) Spatta came in. There was a new board."

"Larry was displeased with the way the company was being run. This thing wasn't done intentionally. It wasn't done overnight. It just developed out of itself."

MISCELLANEOUS:

-- George Van Peurse: A State representative from the Holland district. "I think Ted brought George Van Peurse in as a public relations manager. I would call him a public relations man. He never was in any big capacity or had any influence on the sales. I don't really know if he had any authority."

-- Allen Shaw was the secretary of Athlone.

-- Edward Tuttle was vice president and plant manager of Thatcher Furnace Co in Garwood, NJ. He wrote HW a letter and in it said that HFC had bought Crane-Thatcher. [Is this correct?]

-- Milton Stevens "fired 40 employees and closed 70 branches. He dropped some prices up to 50 percent. He stopped production."

-- Fourth St. Foundry was bought by HFC after WWII. Today it's Steketee Van Huis. HFC built onto the plant and refurbished it after the war. "I believe it was sold to Steketee-Van Huis before I left (in 1954).

(19) -- "When I came to the company, they had a small plant in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, they had a small shop in Chicago, and they had one in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. These were sheet metal shops. (They needed the one in Chicago because the installers in the Chicago area were unionized and demanded that HFC have union-label fittings. The shop in Holland did not have a union.) The Cedar Rapids and Bethlehem shops were closed down sometime in the 30s, 40s or 50s.

-- Foundry - makes cast-iron parts for furnaces.