

Fleetwood Area Historical Society Newsletter

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[HTTP://WWW.FLEETWOODPA.ORG](http://www.fleetwoodpa.org)

email: FleetwoodHistory@fleetwoodpa.org

610-944-5800

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President's Corner

Although it may seem early, the Society is gearing up to be ready to participate in the 150th Anniversary celebration of Fleetwood in 2023.

Festivities begin on Memorial Day, 2023 and will continue throughout the year. The Society expects to enter a float in the anniversary parade to be held in October 2023, and we will be releasing our "picture book" of historic photos. We expect the books to be on sale by Memorial Day. A 2023 calendar of Fleetwood's automotive history is being considered as well. We will be busy and need to begin early.

We were recently given two "time capsules" from the former Richmond Elementary school which has since been sold. If anyone wishes to view the contents of these capsules, please visit the museum on Monday mornings or the second Sunday of each month from 1 to 4 pm.

We congratulate John Rothermel as the winner of the 150th logo design. This logo will be used throughout the celebration and beyond.



The Society welcomed the Fleetwood High School class of 1960 whose anniversary celebration included a tour of our museum. We encourage other classes who hold reunions to include a museum as part

of their programs. We will do our best to meet your dates.

Our stair lift was recently serviced and is now in good shape and available for those who may need it.

A new batch of Apple Butter was recently received, so come and get it. Our price remains at \$3.00 per pint and it is delicious.

We have an interesting program for our meeting of Sept. 21. Brian Engelhardt of the Berks History Center will again join us, this time with the exciting story of Moe Berg. Moe Berg was a catcher for 15 years in professional baseball, who started his baseball career in Reading, PA. But Moe Berg was also a spy for the U.S. Secret Service during World War II. This is the last newsletter before this program, so please mark your calendars and plan to attend.

Our October 19 meeting will feature Vicki Heffner from the Berks History Center speaking about the Lenape Indians of Berks County and the larger Delaware tribe to which they belonged. We have received inquiries about a program on local Indians, so this program, delayed by Covid, is now on our schedule.

With warm regards,

Bill Strause

PINNACLE EQUIPMENT COMPANY Quality Refrigeration

This article was written by Society Director Russell Anderson whose Father, James Anderson, was a founding member of Pinnacle Equipment Co. and who worked for the company for over 14 years. We thank

him for his first-hand information about the history of the company. (A few edits were made for clarity.)

As mentioned in our last newsletter, the Fleetwood Craftsmen, Inc., made refrigeration equipment as well as mattresses until 1945 when the refrigeration division was sold to Laux Manufacturing Co., Wilkes Barre, PA. (While the division was gone, the employees and their expertise, were not.)

In 1945, a group of local entrepreneurs got together to continue the manufacture of refrigeration in Fleetwood under the name Fleetwood Equipment Corp. The group included Harel Becker, John Adam, John Achey, Tom Host and James Anderson. President was Harel Becker, John Achey was office manager and accounting, James Anderson was production manager, Tom Host metal shop design/foreman, and John Adam facilitated the shipping and receiving operations.

Becker also contributed design expertise and marketing strategies.

A year later, in response to name infringement complaints from Laux Mfg. Co. the name was changed to Pinnacle Equipment Co. Under that name the business would flourish for over 40 years.

As World War II ended, new refrigeration techniques and new designs emerged. The big clunky-looking commercial refrigeration with ice and fans gave way to freon refrigeration, gravity coils, forced air cooling and compressors to better keep products cold.

Because Pinnacle used a wooden frame for their design and wrapped it in metal, they were able to adapt to these design changes rapidly and economically.

Does this sound familiar? Fleetwood Metal Body Co. also built auto bodies with a wooden frame and wrapped it in metal. These men continued using the same skills. The interior and external metal of choice was porcelain. A

low carbon steel was easily shaped, sprayed with Porcelain and heated to a high temperature for a smooth glossy finish.



Harel Becker was the President/Sales Manager who set up manufacturing Representatives through which to contact commercial refrigeration dealers/installers throughout the United States. An exporter in New York City, H.D. Sheldon and Universal Trading started to export Pinnacle to world-wide destinations such as Cuba, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Canada, Columbia and Israel to name a few. Wally Lowenstein was the first Pinnacle manufacturing representative for New York City. Under his salesmanship, NYC and its five boroughs would receive 2 to 4 truckloads of commercial refrigerators per week.

As people moved from the cities to rural America, they needed large grocery stores. One of the major manufacturing companies of this equipment, Hill Corporation, Trenton, N.J. needed extra manufacturing capacity and Pinnacle, under a contract with Hill, began making this new type/design of equipment and putting the Hill name on it. The work force could barely keep with the influx of orders working 12-hour days and Saturday mornings. From this venue, Pinnacle was able to pick up the latest designs, refrigeration techniques, suppliers, new dealers and an increased supply chain.

As all good things must end, so did the connection with Hill Corporation, but to

Pinnacle's advantage, they had increased their dealer base tremendously and became recognized as a respected manufacturer of quality commercial refrigerators. They now had a vast dealership network from New England to Texas.

Because Pinnacle used a large gravity coil system in their delicatessen/meat cases, their equipment kept the product cold under adverse conditions. Warmer climates and non-air-conditioned stores appreciated that quality. Local farmers' markets such as Gilbertsville, Leesport, Kutztown, Reading and Muhlenberg all had Pinnacle equipment in their stands.

The refrigeration market was changing again as large grocery stores began to saturate the market, but the NYC market was still as busy as ever, receiving in excess of 500 refrigerators a year. New England, Buffalo, Rochester and Marshalls Creek, PA were also receiving truckload shipments once a month. Through a dealer in Williamsport and Binghamton, NY, most of the Northern tier of Pennsylvania had Pinnacle coolers in bars, restaurants and small grocery stores.

As the market continued to change, so did Pinnacle. Self-contained units that had the compressors inside of them were now being made. Because most refrigerators were looking alike, Pinnacle created a total new design that in 1973 was called the SC73 series: a self-contained meat/delicatessen case. This unit became the most popular unit in the Pinnacle lineup as well as the commercial refrigeration industry. A leading feature at Pinnacle was the ability to color the exterior of the cases with custom colors. Gone were the days of porcelain in black and white. As a result, Pinnacle captured the convenience store market when the fresh sandwich/delicatessen programs were initiated. Pinnacle sold their units to 7-Eleven, Sheetz, turkey Hill, Shop & Go, Cumberland Farms to mention a few. It would be fair to say that they were selling to more than 2 dozen convenience store chains.

At its peak, Pinnacle Equipment Corp. was purchasing more than 20 railroad box cars of

lumber annually as well as 4 carloads of fiberglass insulation, 80,000 pounds of stainless steel, 160,000 pounds of galvanized steel, well over 2,000 triple glass front units and 40,000 pounds of white coated aluminum. Purchases included glass doors, copper tubing coils, bulbs and plywood and 125 employees were on the payroll. The trickle-down effect on local vendors, eateries and banks was a very positive influence on the local economy.

Four trucks made regular delivery runs and the company sold approximately 3400 refrigerated cases annually.

A 48-acre tract of property on West Popular Street had been acquired by the company and a storage warehouse was built on the site.

A major change in the management of the company came about in 1980 when the estate of a majority stockholder sold controlling interest in the company and it became one of the companies of the Hahn Company in the Hamburg area. The "founding Fathers" who grew the company to its current peak production and with an excellent reputation in the industry, were no longer able to make the ultimate financial, design and marketing decisions.

Under the new company's direction, new facilities were built at the Popular St. site and the leased facility at Main and Laurel streets was closed. (This site was eventually sold to the Berks County Housing Authority, the building demolished and the new Laurel Manor of senior housing apartments erected.)

Slowly, production levels diminished as key members of the sales force left the company and morale plummeted. By 1990 the company had filed for bankruptcy and again in 1992.

In 1993, Mr. Fogel, of Fogel Refrigeration, purchased the equipment and the Pinnacle name. Production was moved to Philadelphia for a time and later was moved back to Fleetwood at the former Fleetwood Craftsmen building for a period of three years. Ironically, this location was where

the refrigeration business in Fleetwood had all begun.

By 1996 operations were moved to Topton, PA into a former Caloric Range building. Cases were sold under the name Fleetwood Refrigeration by Fogel.

When Mr. Fogel died and the family no longer wanted a refrigeration business, the company went out of business in 2002.

The passing of the Pinnacle name, its fine employees and quality products leave behind a sterling reputation in a tribute to the 56 years the company sold commercial refrigerators to the world from Fleetwood, PA.
- Russell Anderson

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Fleetwood Area Historical Society
 Suite One, 110 Arch Street
 Fleetwood, PA 19522