

History of Bennett-Clark Company Inc.

PERHAPS one of the best commentaries on bleaching clay occurred at an N.R.A. meeting of manufacturers in 1933. George F. Clark Sr., then president of the Bennett-Clark Company, was asked by an energetic young lawyer what made bleaching clay work. Clark replied that he didn't know. "Don't know!" cried the lawyer, "You mean to tell me you are president of a leading producer of this material, who has been associated with it for many years, and still don't know how and why it works?" Clark looked at the irate youth for a moment, then said, "Ben Franklin discovered electricity 150 years ago, Edison invented the electric light bulb, and still no one knows what it is."

The Bennett-Clark Company is one of the oldest producers of bleaching clay in the Western Hemisphere. It began in 1915 as the Medina Fuller's Earth Company with the manufacturing plant located beside the clay mine in Castroville, Tex., 16 miles west of San Antonio. The company produced some of the earliest domestic fuller's earth (natural clay) used in this country for bleaching oils. In 1923 the name was changed to the Standard Fuller's Earth Company, and the plant was moved to San Antonio. However in 1929 the City of San Antonio forced the company to move farther out of town because of a typical by-product of the bleaching clay plant, namely, dust.

By this time the company had become one of the world's leading suppliers of natural bleaching clay. Activated bleaching clay was still struggling for recognition because of its high price despite generally greater bleaching strength, and

natural clay was the type most used on oils.

Mr. Clark, refinery superintendent at Fort Worth of one of the largest meat packers, became a member of the company in 1924. His knowledge of the industry together with shrewd common sense and a droll, kindly sense of humor were largely instrumental in build-



G. F. Clark Jr.

ing up the company to its leading position as a clay supplier. He instilled into the company his philosophy of treating each customer, large or small, on a personal basis, which earned for Bennett-Clark a "friendly" reputation, also the respect of the industry it served.

Edwin J. Bennett joined the company in 1932, and the name was changed to the present Bennett-Clark Company Inc. Clark became president and Bennett vice president and sales manager. Bennett, an avid and excellent golfer, spent most of his time contacting customers from his headquarters in South Bend, Ind., while Clark's activities were concentrated in the South.

IN THE EARLY 1930's the company began to look for an improved clay source. After widespread exploration a better natural clay deposit was chosen near Rockland, Tex., 75 miles north of Beaumont, deep in the East Texas piney woods, which has been the source of B-C natural clay ever since. Today this is the largest open-face subbentonite mine in the world.

At that time Nacogdoches, Tex., 55 miles away, was the nearest town of any size located on the railroad leading from the mine that had both electricity and natural gas. In 1935 a clay manufacturing plant was built there, and the entire manufacturing operation was moved from San Antonio.

The company enjoyed a stable natural clay business during the depression and World War II years although Mr. Bennett passed away in 1943. However, because of the increased pressure of activated clay competition, Bennett-Clark decided to produce activated clay itself in addition to the old-line natural clay. In 1957 construction commenced on a clay activation plant alongside the original natural clay plant in Nacogdoches, and the following year marketing of both types of clay became a reality. Mr. Clark died in 1958 and was succeeded by George F. Clark Jr.

As a final tribute to the two well-known original "founders" of the business, it must be said that their beneficial influence upon the policies and *esprit des corps* of the Bennett-Clark Company will be felt for many years to come.

A. D. RICH
Bennett-Clark Company,
Nacogdoches, Tex.