

History of the French Oil Mill Machinery Company

WHEN Alfred W. French came to Piqua, O., at the turn of the century, Piqua was the center of the flaxseed-crushing industry. Six linseed oil mills were operating in Piqua, processing flaxseed grown in this area into cake and linseed oil.

Mr. French was a skilled mechanic and inventor already associated with the oil milling industry. In 1900 he formed The French Oil Mill Machinery Company with M. E. Barber and William Cook Rogers as associates. The new company first produced and sold a hydraulic cake trimmer which Mr. French had patented. The company prospered and gradually expanded into a complete line of hydraulic press machinery, including stack cookers, hydraulic presses, accumulators, pumps, cake breakers, and cake formers.

The flaxseed crop gradually moved west and north because flax was thought to exhaust the soil. None is now grown around Piqua, and the processors followed the crop. The French Oil Mill Machinery Company remained centrally located in Piqua, growing with the expanded markets for cottonseed processors in the south and flaxseed in the north. As the soybean industry grew in the midwest, ever-

increasing markets for improved processing machinery came close at hand.

Foreign markets were also a profitable source of machinery business. French equipment is found in most countries of the world wherever oil seeds are processed. Mr. French took his family on a trip around the world shortly after World War I, during which he



Assembly department

promoted the sale of equipment in various countries and visited many of our existing installations. Shortly afterwards he was killed in an automobile accident in San Francisco. His widow, Mrs. Grace A. French, was made president, and Charles B. Upton, who came with the company in 1906 as office manager and purchasing agent, was made vice president and general manager, a situation that still exists. A. W. French Jr. is very active in the company as vice president and treasurer.

The French organization of engineers, production supervisors, salesmen, and mechanics has grown steadily and securely with almost no turn-over. We are a remarkably stable organization, divided into groups of specialists handling mechanical screw-presses, solvent-extraction equipment, rendering equipment, and special industrial hydraulic presses.

In recent years applications in the paper, rubber, and other general chemical industries have been opened up by adapting standard equipment to specialized requirements.

The oil-milling equipment industry has been very competitive, to the benefit of the processors. In a small company, specializing in a single industry, it is remarkable how the principles of the free-enterprise system, which we enjoy in the United States, set in quickly. Extra effort is rewarded. Improved processes and increased efficiency are continuous, spurred on by competition. Since our company prospers only in proportion to the oilseed-processing industry, we identify our long-term interest with that of the industry and welcome the competitive atmosphere even though it keeps us hustling.

R. P. HUTCHINS, technical director, Extraction Division