The Belden Brick History. A Legacy of Outstanding Performance.
The History of The Belden Brick Company.

The storied history of The Belden Brick Company is one of American entrepreneurship, invention & innovation and a family’s unyielding dedication to excellence in the art of brick making.

Our company’s story officially begins in 1885 when our founder, Henry S Belden organized the Diebold Fire Brick Company on the Belden farm. Henry was born in Canton, Ohio on July 4th, 1840, the son of Judge G.W. Belden. Henry became an attorney in the law firm of Belden & McKelvey, of which Judge G.W. Belden was the senior partner. Incidentally, according to the biography of William McKinley by Margaret Leech, she describes McKinley’s visit to Canton in 1867, armed with a letter of introduction to Judge G.W. Belden, as the Belden law firm was well known in legal circles. William McKelvey was accepted as a partner and then went on to become a U.S. Congressman, Governor of Ohio and was elected President of the United States in 1896.

Henry S Belden also entered politics and was elected Mayor of Canton. At the age of 32 a severe throat infection forced him to move to the Belden farm with the hope that the open air would improve his health, which it eventually did. Soon on the farm, Henry discovered large deposits of coal, shale and clay. He built a small kiln to study the effects of firing temperatures on clay and shale. In 1874 he invented the Belden burner, made of clay, which gave better light than any other type then in use. He held a total of 13 patents for gasoline vapor street lights. He secured a large number of contracts for lighting cities and towns all across the United States.

In 1876 Henry went to the Centennial fair in Philadelphia and there saw the original stiff mud brick making machine. He became inspired to make paving and fire brick. Henry’s paving brick was the first known use of paving brick in the city of Canton. Brick pavements then spread quickly throughout the country and state.

Reorganization & Investment Capital

In August of 1895, stockholders of the Diebold Fire Brick Company incorporated the Canton Pressed Brick Company as the successor company to the Diebold Fire Brick Company. Officers of the new company: Henry S. Belden, President; J. Diebold, Vice President; James G. Barbour, Secretary/Treasurer; S.J. Allen, Superintendent. The first annual meeting of the Canton Pressed Brick Company was held in 1896. Henry Belden worked hard to organize the company and equip their plant for the kind of bricks that he knew how to make. He was determined to hold on to what he had. The company’s affairs were not stable. What the Canton Pressed Brick Company needed was fresh capital to operate their plant. In 1904 when Paul Belden, Henry’s youngest son, learned about his father’s financial troubles he immediately returned to Canton. Paul Belden, a former business owner, saw that his business experiences might be helpful. They arrived in Canton in 1904 and began to pick up the ruins of the Canton Pressed Brick Company. Paul Belden would clearly learn that the company needed operating capital.
In 1909, Paul Belden was authorized to obtain any capital needed to operate the business. Paul Belden met with L.B. Hartung, a well-known plumbing contractor in Canton. Mr. Belden was successful in persuading Mr. Hartung to invest money in the Canton Pressed Brick Company. In 1910, L.B. Hartung became an important shareholder owning about 30% of the capital stock.

Mr. Belden was successful in persuading Mr. Hartung to invest money in the Canton Pressed Brick Company. In 1910, L.B. Hartung became an important shareholder owning about 30% of the capital stock. From that time on, Paul was the brains behind the operation of the company. He was known throughout the brick industry for his accomplishments and received national recognition. Paul Belden was elected to the position of General Manager in 1911 and from that time on, had a free hand in running the company. He was known throughout the brick industry for his accomplishments and received national recognition.

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The directors backed his recommendation. At the annual meeting of the Canton Pressed Brick Company in 1912, W.W. Irwin was elected President, Henry Belden Vice President, Paul Belden Secretary/General Manager and V.W. Hurnig Treasurer. In 1913 the directors approved the building of two new kilns and a new dryer at the Canton plant, to handle increased business. In 1914 the Company had a good stock of finished brick on hand, which was expected to be very profitable when the building season opened up in the spring. Paul Belden had told the board that every operation in that plant that could be done by machinery should be done that way. The directors backed his recommendations.

At the annual meeting of stockholders in 1913, Paul Belden detailed some of the problems they were experiencing in trying to operate their plants in wartime. Labor and materials for plant maintenance were expensive and almost impossible to come by. Both the Canton and Somerset plants were now closed down because the company could not get coal for the furnaces or coal to ship brick. Still, Paul remained optimistic. He believed that the building era following the war would bring a staggering demand for brick.

In 1915 the directors approved the building of two new kilns and a new dryer at the Canton plant, to handle increased business. In 1916 the Company had a good stock of finished brick on hand, which was expected to be very profitable when the building season opened up in the spring. Paul Belden then told the board that every operation in that plant that could be done by machinery should be done that way. The directors backed his recommendations. At the annual meeting of stockholders in 1913, Paul Belden detailed some of the problems they were experiencing in trying to operate their plants in wartime. Labor and materials for plant maintenance were expensive and almost impossible to come by. Both the Canton and Somerset plants were now closed down because the company could not get coal for the furnaces or coal to ship brick. Still, Paul remained optimistic. He believed that the building era following the war would bring a staggering demand for brick.

In 1918, the directors of The Belden Brick Company realized there were financial problems at the Belden Face Brick Company. They now owned plants at Canton, Somerset and Uhrichsville, Ohio. They also held the controlling interest in Belden Face Brick Company at Pittsburgh, Washington. With these four plants they hoped to capture a good share of the open market for building brick. The company continued to expand its facilities, production rose steadily. Management still looked to broaden their product lines. Belden Face Brick was one of the products they decided to promote and it was very successful. Their most successful product line was Belden Acid Proof Brick. The slate of Belden Face Brick was ideally suited for making an acid proof brick of high quality and a kiln brick soon became a favorite of the industry.

At the close of World War I, the Belden management started an aggressive program to modernize their plants for increased production. They now owned plants at Canton, Somerset and Uhrichsville, Ohio. They also held the controlling interest in Belden Face Brick Company at Pittsburgh, Washington. With these four plants they hoped to capture a good share of the open market for building brick. The company continued to expand its facilities, production rose steadily. Management still looked to broaden their product lines. Belden Face Brick was one of the products they decided to promote and it was very successful. Their most successful product line was Belden Acid Proof Brick. The slate of Belden Face Brick was ideally suited for making an acid proof brick of high quality and a kiln brick soon became a favorite of the industry.

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In 1922, The Belden Brick Company held a controlling interest in The Belden Face Brick Company. After Henry’s death, W.W. Irwin sold all of his stock in the company. Paul Belden met with L.B. Hartung, a well known plumbing contractor in Canton. Mr. Belden was successful in persuading Mr. Hartung to invest money in The Belden Brick Company. Mr. Hartung was elected President of the company and W.W. Irwin was re-elected Vice President. Mr. Hartung was elected President of the company and W.W. Irwin was re-elected Vice President. Mr. Hartung was elected President of the company and W.W. Irwin was re-elected Vice President. Mr. Hartung was elected President of the company and W.W. Irwin was re-elected Vice President.
The year of 1930 was an important one for The Belden Brick Company. In March 1930 The Belden-Stark Brick Company of Detroit was incorporated as a joint venture of The Belden Brick Company and Stark Ceramics Inc. for the purpose of promoting and distributing Belden and Stark ceramic products to the Detroit area.

This was followed in June 1930 by the incorporation of The Belden Brick Corporation of New York to do the same thing in the New York metropolitan area.

These two subsidiary companies were to play a large part in the promotion of clay products and in obtaining architectural specifications for The Belden Brick Company.

The sale of Acid proof brick was a lucrative business venture, and the company was proud of its achievements. It was a useful diversification during the depression and an important factor in keeping The Belden Brick Company afloat.

The Belden Brick Company began to come out of the depression about 1936. In 1936 The Belden Face Brick Company became the Port Washington plant of The Belden Brick Company. By 1939, the economy had shown signs of improvement due to the national defense effort. During these years several personnel changes occurred within the Belden Management. At a special meeting in 1935, the Board of Directors elected Paul Belden Sr., President and General Manager.

War broke out in Europe in September 1939. Large orders for war material began to pour into U.S. steel plants and other essential industries.

Building brick was not considered essential to the war effort, and could not get priorities except on small orders. Most plants operated at minimum levels or were forced to shut down completely.

Once again, The Belden Brick Company benefited from their line of acid proof brick and tile. Steel mills needed them for their pickling lines and the government needed steel for the war. Unlike stainless steel, acid proof clay didn't require valuable alloy needed for other war material. The few brick companies making acid proof brick and tile got priorities for these orders, with material and labor preferences.

It was not long before the War Production Board realized that face brick actually were essential to the war effort. Buildings had to be re-built. Wood was in short supply and highly impractical to use. Supplies of sheet steel were critical. The ban on brick sales was lifted, and many priority-building permits were issued bringing back the need for face brick. Belden Brick would more than break even in spite of wartime restrictions on their operations.

The year 1946 was an important year for The Belden Brick Company. At a meeting of the Board of Directors, the following officers were elected: Paul B. Belden, Jr., President; P.W. Hartung, Sr., First Vice President; and William H. Belden, Treasurer.

Paul Belden Sr.'s sons grew up with the brick business. They could have no superior mentor to their father. The continual growth of The Belden Brick Company shows how well they learned their lessons.

Paul Belden had his plants back in operation by the end of 1946. His goal was to re-establish the company as soon as possible to gain the post-war market. In this critical time in the Company's history, once again opportunity came knocking. The Finzer Brothers Clay Company had two plants located in Sugarcreek, OH. During the depression their operations were stopped.

Now the war was over and the Finzers were faced with a major rehabilitation job. Plant No. 2 was in a terrible shape. Charles Finzer and Paul Belden were close friends. In 1945, Charles Finzer met with Paul Belden to discuss the possibility of Belden Brick taking over the Finzer Brothers Company. The Finzers wanted their plants to go to a reputable company that would have the best interests of their employees and the people of Sugarcreek at heart. Charles and Ed Finzer knew The Belden Brick Company was the ideal choice if the details could be worked out.

Paul Belden liked the idea and in May of 1946 Belden took possession of the Finzer Brothers Clay Company.

The newly acquired Finzer Plant (No. 2) had two very high stacks, surrounded by 20 large beehive kilns that were intended for cycle of no substitute. Thermally, the bricks would be ideal for roofing, lining, and other uses--all at a price of 30 cents and labor.

This would create maximum production with a minimum labor force.

One benefit in purchasing The Finzer Brothers Company was a vein of coal, and large deposits of very good clay. Both were needed for the kilns and Finzer Brothers had also needed to locate a price for their clay. Belden Brick would need this resource as well, as they were not immune to wartime restrictions on their operations.

The Finzer Acquisition
First Tunnel Kiln
Paul Belden, Senior died on February 13, 1970. He had been Chairman of the Board of The Belden Brick Company since 1946.

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In 1973 The Belden Brick Company acquired the assets, properties and manufacturing facilities of the Moomaw Brothers at Sugarcreek. The Shepfer-Moomaw plant was designated as plant No. 9 by Belden although they only had eight operating plants. Canton plant No. 1, which was the original Belden plant was closed down in June 1970.

On September 12, 1974, The Belden Brick Company acquired the Strasburg Brick Company of Strasburg, Ohio. Their principal product was face brick in red and other colors.

The Belden Brick Company added a packaging machine and considered adding another tunnel kiln if needed. Belden’s sales organization and agents gave Strasburg’s products a widening distribution.

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In 1955 the Belden management showed their confidence in their company by starting construction of a new plant at Sugarcreek. It would be the largest plant in the country for the production of face brick and building tile. The plant went into operation in 1957.

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In March of 1974 Belden Brick had purchased Stark’s interest in the jointly owned Detroit Sales Office. The company was also negotiating with Stebbins Manufacturing the sale of the Urichsville Plant. Stebbins was the major customer of that facility. In mid-1977, the Company was approached by Stark Ceramics with regard to the purchase of Stark’s equity in the Belden-Stark Brick Corporation of New York.

In January, Fred Morrow retired after 55 years of service. Bruce Brome was elected Secretary of the Company shortly after Mr. Morrow’s retirement. At the time, only Paul B. Belden, Sr., served the Company longer than Fred Morrow.

In April, the Company purchased the old Claycraft Plant plus 140 acres on the south side of Route 39 on the east end of Sugarcreek. The Board of Directors approved the construction of a new plant featuring a deBoer B-11 brick machine capable of producing 48 million standard brick equivalent annually in a simulated handmade molded brick configuration. This plant is now known as Plant 3.

At the Annual Meeting in April, Paul B. Belden III and William H. Belden, Jr., were elected to the Board of Directors for the first time. They were the first representatives of the fourth generation of the family elected to the Board. In November, Ed Harter, Treasurer, passed away. D.E. Engelbach was named Treasurer effective November 24, 1979.
In 1980, Paul B. Belden III leaves Belden Brick to buy Grand Rapids Building Supply Company. He remains in the Belden Brick Board of Directors.Bruce Wentz reports that Empire Coal was sold to the Company full-time in 1982. The sale includes a term coal lease with Belden Brick.

In 1985, the 100th Anniversary of The Belden Brick Company. In April, Howard Finance returns after 44 years of service. Howard now retires from the Company and goes into the waste management business.

In 1985, William H. Belden, Jr., son of William H. Belden, Sr., is elected President and Robert F. Belden, son of Richard F. Belden, was named Vice-President of Marketing. Paul B. Belden, Jr., remained Chairman of the Executive Committee.

In July 1985, the Company was looking for a new office site. They begin to move their operation to Fraser and sell the Livernois Avenue property in Detroit in May of 1992.

In mid-1989, the Company was studying the possibility of building a new plant and Belden Brick Sales in Detroit was looking for a new office site.

In 1993, Redland Brick Inc. and The Belden Brick Company and included the Cushwa Plant in Williamport, Maryland, the Harmar Plant near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the KF Plant outside Hartford, Connecticut. Redland Brick, Inc. is a “wholly owned subsidiary” of Belden Brick and its management team was led by Jeff Vane. Later in 1994, Belden Belden, Director of Purchasing, returns after 35 years of service to the Company.

In 1997 at the Annual Meeting, Jim Vinke is introduced to the shareholders and Michael H. Belden is elected to take his late father’s place on the Board of Directors.

In 1997, the four largest suppliers of brick in the United States are The Belden Brick Company, Redland Brick Inc., and the Cushwa Plant in Williamport, Maryland, the Harmar Plant near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the KF Plant outside Hartford, Connecticut. Redland Brick, Inc. is a “wholly owned subsidiary” of Belden Brick and its management team was led by Jeff Vane. Later in 1994, Belden Belden, Director of Purchasing, returns after 35 years of service to the Company.

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In 1995, the Company decided to sell 5,000,000 tons of brick to Perma-Wall for the real estate (manufacturing) owned by Belden and partner will invest in the other assets (brick and quarry). By 1996, the remaining assets are sold to The Belden Brick Company.

The 1995 Annual Shareholders Meeting saw the election of Robert F. Belden as President, D.L. Engelbach, VP-Finance and CFO, and William H. Belden, Jr., as Chairman and CEO. A new plant in Sugarcreek was being studied and plans were made to develop the Sugarcreek Industrial Park on Belden land on the eastern border of the village just north of Route 38. At the end of 1995, James J. Stoto, Corporate Secretary, announced his intention to retire in early January of 1996. David H. Hartung was named to succeed Bruce as Corporate Secretary.

In 1995, the Company was studying the possibility of building a new plant and Belden Brick Sales in Detroit was looking for a new office site.

In 1995, William H. Belden, Jr., son of William H. Belden, Sr., was named President and Richard F. Belden, son of Richard F. Belden, was named Vice-President of Marketing.

In 1996, Belden Belden is appointed to succeed Bruce as Corporate Secretary.

1996 was the worst year for housing starts since the 1930’s. The Company liquidates 5 million brick equivalent of inventory. At the end of 1995, the Belden-Stark Brick Corporation of New York makes it final payment to Stark Ceramics making it a “wholly-owned subsidiary” of The Belden Brick Company.

In 1996, the construction cycle is completed with Empire Coal with an agreement allowing Belden Brick to develop the Sugarcreek Industrial Park on Belden land on the eastern border of the village just north of Route 38. At the end of 1995, James J. Stoto, Corporate Secretary, announced his intention to retire in early January of 1996. David H. Hartung was named to succeed Bruce as Corporate Secretary.

In 1996, the Board of Directors, Joseph G. Belden was elected to take his father’s board seat.

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During the year 2000, Redland Brick Inc. begins to study the feasibility of a new plant at the Harmar site. By year’s end, Plant 2 is on schedule to start production in the first quarter of 2001 and the Board of Directors approves the authorization by Belden Brick’s board to construct a new plant at the Harmar location outside of Pittsburgh. Belden Brick offers to sell the Belden Brick Distribution Plant to Redland Brick Inc. Belden Brick Sales & Services Inc. (formerly Belden-Stark Brick Company of New York) is authorized by the Board to acquire the assets of the Atlantic Brick Corporation of Saddle Brook, New Jersey.

During the year 2000, Redland Brick Inc. acquired the Belden Ridge (NY) plant from Belden Bricks and the new Harmar plant was approved with a capacity of 60 million bricks annually compared to the 24 million b.e. capacity of the existing facility at the Harmar site. The Sugarcreek Plant 2 kiln was lit in April 2000. Later in the year, The Belden Brick Company was inducted into the Family Business Hall of Fame at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. Julia Belden, daughter of Robert F. Belden, was hired by Belden Brick Sales & Service Inc. of New York as an architectural sales representative in Manhattan.

Belden Executives in Industry Leadership Active

The Company has continued to provide leadership in the industry as it has done since the earliest days under Paul Belden, Sr. He was instrumental in promoting the founding of the American Face Brick Association in 1952. He served those terms (1952, 1953, and 1955) as President. His son, Paul, Jr., was Chairman of The Brick Institute of America (BIA) in 1966-1967. His grandson, Bill, was chairman of BIA from 2002-2004. His grandson, Bob, is currently a Director of The Brick Industry Association, which symbolized the merger of the Brick Institute of America and the National Association of Brick Distributors. Although these years, the Company and its officers have been supporters and leaders of the Mid-East Region of the Brick Institute of America, a regional association of brick manufacturers, as well as the National association. John J. Belden, son of Paul Belden, Jr., grandson of Paul Belden, Sr. is currently the Chairman of The Midwest Region which is comprised of seventeen states from Illinois to Maine. Both Paul B. Belden, Sr. and Paul B. Belden, Jr. have been honored with the industry’s Outstanding Achievement Award.

Current Day

While this history notes many significant events and individuals in the story of The Belden Brick Company, it could not mention everyone or everyone who contributed to the success of Belden Brick since 1885. Many families, in addition to the Beldens and the Siglers, have been instrumental in making Belden Brick the Standard of Comparison in its industry – families like the Swindermans, the Schrock’s, the Myers, and the Finzers. Brickmaking was and is in their blood and their members take pride in their craft. The Belden Brick Company has been fortunate to have had so many dedicated, loyal employees throughout its history whose commitment to excellence has been unwavering.

The 21st century will present us with many new challenges that The Belden Brick Company, we believe that we need to be prepared to confront and meet challenges by continuously improving our organizational systems in North America.


In February of 2002, Robert T. Belden, son of Robert F. Belden, becomes the second fifth-generation Belden in the company. Bob T. assigned the position of Assistant to the Vice-President of Operations, Larry Myers.

A third member of the fifth-generation of the Belden family, Bradley S. Belden, joins the Company on April 1, 2000. Brad is the son of John C. Belden and has been a Regulatory Affairs Specialist working with government agencies such as EPA, and OSHA and working in the field of the environment, health, and safety. Later in 2004, Redland Brick Inc. seeks authorization to modernize the Belden Ridge Plant. The Belden Brick Board grants the authorization and Network Division to execute the modernization plant.

Record high prices for natural gas characterize the middle years of the decade. The Company continues to skillfully grow as it has every year since 1973. The latest wells drilled are generally in the Bookman and Rose Run formations. The total number of wells successfully drilled since the program’s inception in 1997 reaches 174 in 2004. These wells produce enough gas to meet approximately 20% of the Company’s needs.

In 2000, Betty Ralph, Administrative Assistant to Bill and Bob Belden, retires after 58 years of service, marking Belden Women’s longevity as Belden Brick employees. Betty was hired in 1946 by Paul B. Belden, Sr. and served four generations of Belden family members. Bob Belden and Redland Brick now belong to the Balding Siding Systems LLC, a 50/50 joint venture that will license to manufacture and distribute thin brick systems in North America.

In November 2000, Larry Myers also seizes his duties before his planned retirement. Robert T. Belden is named to succeed Larry as Vice President of Operations. The Company become one of the first to be certified under the new ISO 9001:2000 standard on September 17, 2001.

In 2001, Dee Engelbach announces his intention to retire in the fourth quarter. Jim Leary is named Drummer (1st) and Bob Belden is named Vice President - Sales & Marketing. As Redland Brick Inc., the Harmar Plant project is right on schedule. Belden Brick achieves certification under the new ISO 9001:2000 standard effective September 17, 2001.

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