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 Mr. McKinley's visit to Canton in 1867, armed with a letter of introduction to Judge C.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. There he 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. Belden'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. O. Diebold, Vice-President; James C. Backstrom, 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 brick that he knew how to make. He was determined to hold onto 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, heard about his father’s financial troubles he immediately returned to Canton. He held a meeting in his house to see if his own business experience 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.

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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 capital stock of the Canton Pressed Brick Company. In 1910, L.B. Hartung became an important shareholder owning about 30% of the capital stock. In 1909, Paul Belden was elected to the position of General Manager of the company. His appointment was short-lived. Henry Belden died on April 21, 1920 after a brief illness. By then, Irwin had been ill for some time and retired as President. Once again, Henry Belden was President of Belden Brick Company. The annual meeting of the Canton Pressed Brick Company in 1912 showed that Paul Belden had notched his goal of obtaining the badly needed capital for operations. At the same meeting, due to P.D. Hardy’s failing health, Henry Belden was once again elected President of the Canton Pressed Brick Company. Mr. Belden was a small four-story Canton businessmen, and the Board of Directors believed his election as an officer and director would bring prestige to the Canton Pressed Brick Company. The company that had a corporate name and the Secretary of the State of Ohio sought his signature on permission to consolidate all of their operations under a new name. A certificate of consolidation was received on October 30, 1912 that made it official. The company would now operate under the name of The Belden Brick Company.

P. W. Irwin was elected President, Henry Belden Vice President, Paul Belden Secretary/General Manager and W.W. Hartung Treasurer. At the annual stockholders meeting in 1913, W.W. Irwin was elected President, Henry Belden Vice President, Paul Belden Secretary/General Manager and W.W. Hartung Treasurer. In 1914, Paul Belden authorized the building of two new kilns at a new site at the Port Washington plant to handle increased business. In 1916, The Company had a great 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 their plants that could be done by machinery should be done that way. The directors backed his recommendation.

At the annual meeting of stockholders in 1919, Paul Belden described 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 to run their brick ovens and to ship their brick. Still, Paul remained optimistic. He believed that the building era following the war would bring a staggering demand for brick.

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In 1918, the directors of The Belden Brick Company realized there were financial problems at the Belden Face Brick Company located at Port Washington. The shoe of the Somerset plant was ideally suited for making an acid proof brick of high quality and a solid brick would become a favorite of the industry.

Modernization & the War Years

After Henry’s death, W.W. Irwin sold all of his stock in the company. The two men came to the Board of Directors. On July 28, 1920, L.B. Hartung was elected President of the company and P.W. Hartung was elected Vice President. 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 in Canton, Somerset and Uhrichsville, Ohio. They also held the controlling interest in Belden Face Brick Company at Port Washington. With these four plants they hoped to capture a good share of the producer market for acid brick. The company continued to expand its facilities, production rose steadily. Management still looked to broaden their product line. Belden Face Brick was one of the products they decided to promote and was very successful. Their most successful product lines were Belden Roof Brick. The shoe of the Somerset plant was ideally suited for making an acid proof brick of high quality and a solid brick would become a favorite of the industry.
The year of 1930 was important 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 bricks and Starr Ceramic products in 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 Belden in operation throughout World War II.

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 materials 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 1940 was an important year for Belden Brick. At a meeting of the Board of Directors, the following officers were elected: Paul B. Belden, Sr., Chairman of the Board; Paul B. Belden, Jr., President; F.H. Cuming, Sr., First Vice President in charge of sales and service; 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 from their father.

Paul Belden had his plants back in operation by the end of 1940. He was now ready to re-establish the company on a sounder and sounder basis. In this critical time in the Company’s history, new appointments were being made.

The Finzer Brothers Clay Company had two plants located in Sugarcreek, OH. During the depression their operations were very small. The Finzer Brothers Clay Company had two very high stacks, surrounded by 20 large beehive kilns that were intended to cycle in rotation. Theoretically, some kilns would be charging, some burning, and others cooling at any particular time. This would create maximum production with a minimum labor force.

The newly acquired Finzer Plant (No. 2) had two very high stacks, surrounded by 20 large beehive kilns that were intended to cycle in rotation. Theoretically, some kilns would be charging, some burning, and others cooling at any particular time. This would create maximum production with a minimum labor force.

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Directors elected at this meeting were Paul B. Belden, Jr., Wm. H. Belden, Sr., Daniel M. Belden and Richard F. Belden. Dan and Richard were the two youngest sons of Paul B. Belden Sr.

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.

In December of 1976, the following directors comprised the board of Belden Brick: Paul B. Belden, Jr., William H. Belden, Sr., Daniel M. Belden, Richard F. Belden, Paul W. Hartung, Jr., and Burke B. Wentz. Larry Myers, whose family had owned the Strasburg Brick Company, was named Assistant General Superintendent in Belden Western.

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In 1975 the Belden management showed their confidence in their company’s future 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 1977. It is now known as Plant 6.

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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 Yorktowne Manufacturing the sale of the Utica Works Plant. Yorktowne 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 Marrone 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 45 million standard brick equivalent annually in a simulated handmade 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.
It was the VP-Production responsible for all manufacturing operations. Mr. Wentz, a Board member, nominates Larry Myers to be chairman of the Executive Committee. Mr. Wentz completed 59 years of service to The Belden Brick Company in December 1984. When he retired, Mr. Wentz was named Vice-President of Marketing. Paul B. Belden, Jr., remained chairman and Robert F. Belden, son of Richard F. Belden, was named President and Robert F. Belden, son of Richard F. Belden, was named to succeed Bruce as Corporate Secretary.

In 1985, Belden Brick reaches agreement with Redland PLC to purchase Redland’s American brick business, Redland Brick, Inc. The transaction was completed on September 30, 1996 and included the Cushwa Plant in Williamstown, Maryland, the Harmar Plant near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the KF Plant near Maple Grove, Minnesota.

In mid-1993, the Company decides to seek ISO 9000 registration. A verbal deal is struck with Portage County for the real estate development, a transfer station (Plant 2), first announced by the Mayor seven years earlier, awarded to Lingl, a German manufacturer. Brian Belden, son of William H. Belden, Jr., is elected Chairman of the Board and his brother, Thomas G. Belden, is nominated to replace their father on the Board of Directors. He is the youngest son of Paul B. Belden, Sr.

On September 1, 1992, Paul W. Hartung, Jr., retires from the Company following 42 years of service. Burke Wentz, then 83, agrees to continue for the next two years in a consulting role. They begin to move their operation to Fraser and sell the Livernois Avenue property in Detroit in the fall of 1992.

The Annual Shareholders Meeting saw the election of Robert F. Belden as President, D.E. Engelbach, VP-Finance and CFO, and William H. Belden, Jr., as Chairman and CEO. A new plant in Sugarcreek was still being considered and plans were made to develop the Sugarcreek Industrial Park on Belden land in the eastern border of the village just north of Route 39. By the end of 1993, Deere S Fiona, Corporate Secretary, announced his intention to retire in early January of 1994. Daniel J. Hartung was named to succeed Bruce as Corporate Secretary.

In 1995, Belden Brick completes the purchase of the Suburban Brick Company in Fraser, Michigan, a Detroit Builders Supply Company. He remains on the Belden Brick Board of Directors. The 1995 Annual Shareholders Meeting saw the election of Robert F. Belden as President, D.E. Engelbach, VP-Finance and CFO, and William H. Belden, Jr., as Chairman and CEO. A new plant in Sugarcreek was still being considered and plans were made to develop the Sugarcreek Industrial Park on Belden land in the eastern border of the village just north of Route 39. By the end of 1993, Deere S Fiona, Corporate Secretary, announced his intention to retire in early January of 1994. Daniel J. Hartung was named to succeed Bruce as Corporate Secretary.

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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 Production, Larry Myers.

A third member of the fifth generation of the Belden family, Bradley R. Belden, joins the company on April 1, 2004. He is the son of John F. Belden and held a B.S. in Environmental Science from the University of Delaware. The first Belden Brick employee hired in the plant is hisard. The advent of the Internet has brought about technological change throughout the Company. Plant 2 is a state-of-the-art, 21st century production facility, and the advent of the new century is adding new technology to the plant.

Robert Rairigh, Administrative Assistant to Bill and Bob Belden, retires after 59 years of service, matching Burke Wentz’s longevity as a Belden Brick employee. In 2005, Bettie Rairigh, Administrative Assistant to Bill and Bob Belden, retires after 59 years of service, matching Burke Wentz’s longevity as a Belden Brick employee. In 2005, Bettie Rairigh, Administrative Assistant to Bill and Bob Belden, retires after 59 years of service, matching Burke Wentz’s longevity as a Belden Brick employee. In 2005, Bettie Rairigh, Administrative Assistant to Bill and Bob Belden, retires after 59 years of service, matching Burke Wentz’s longevity as a Belden Brick employee. In 2005, Bettie Rairigh, Administrative Assistant to Bill and Bob Belden, retires after 59 years of service, matching Burke Wentz’s longevity as a Belden Brick employee. In 2005, Bettie Rairigh, Administrative Assistant to Bill and Bob Belden, retires after 59 years of service, matching Burke Wentz’s longevity as a Belden Brick employee. In 2005, Bettie Rairigh, Administrative Assistant to Bill and Bob Belden, retires after 59 years of service, matching Burke Wentz’s longevity as a Belden Brick employee. In 2005, Bettie Rairigh, Administrative Assistant to Bill and Bob Belden, retires after 59 years of service, matching Burke Wentz’s longevity as a Belden Brick employee. In 2005, Bettie Rairigh, Administrative Assistant to Bill and Bob Belden, retires after 59 years of service, matching Burke Wentz’s longevity as a Belden Brick employee.