



THE MUELLER RECORD

FALL 2007 NEWSLETTER



MUELLER CO. CELEBRATES 150 YEARS

Mueller Co. marks 150 years since Hieronymus opened his gun shop in 1857. Two major events commemorated the event. The company hosted a reception at the American Water Works Annual Conference and Exhibition held in Toronto in June. Mueller Co. was a founding member of this association which is comprised of major manufacturers and consumers of water distribution products. The Anniversary also served as the central theme of the September company picnic held in Decatur. A crowd of nearly 500 employees, retirees and family members enjoyed a day filled with food, games and prizes along with a tour of the plant and the Museum.

MUELLER FOOTPRINTS ON DECATUR

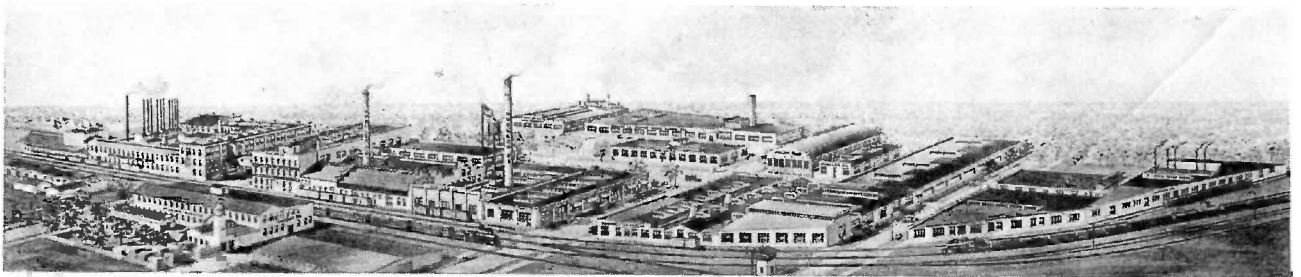
The Museum opened a new temporary exhibit on September 15 which focuses on the brick and mortar presence of the Mueller family, company and employees in Decatur. The exhibit features photos and drawings of structures showing both early and current views along with a brief history.

The first part of the exhibit traces the history of the company's growth through the progression of buildings have housed its retail and manufacturing over the years. Most of the early buildings no longer stand, including Hieronymus Mueller's first gun shop. Even the exact sites of the earliest shops cannot be determined as they predate the street numbering system of today. At least one of the former locations was destroyed in a major downtown fire while others simply were replaced in the progress of development. What can be seen from studying the buildings is the growth that occurred beginning with the small gun shop in the 100 block of West Main Street. The business soon moved to a larger building on North Water Street advertising clock and sewing machine repairs in addition to the gun shop. An expanded sporting goods line necessitated a move to larger quarters at East Main and South State Street.

The most important development in shaping the future of Mueller Co. came in 1872 when Hieronymus moved his operations into a newly constructed two-story brick building at 220-222 East Main Street. This building housed his gun shop and sporting goods business along with a newly emerging plumbing goods shop and small manufacturing facility. The manufacture of plumbing goods grew at a rapid pace requiring the addition of a third floor to this building and the displacement of the gun shop to 138 Merchant Street in 1887 and the retail plumbing business to 249 East Main in 1887. The Mueller Co. of today was really born in the shop at 220-222 East Main as the new signage on the building proclaimed "M. Mueller Manufacturing / Brass Foundry / Machine Shop". The last downtown location saw the plumbing business relocate in 1891 to a handsome new building at 237 North Main – the current site of Block's Tavern. Both the sporting goods and plumbing businesses were sold in the mid 1890's and full attention turned to manufacturing.

In 1895 Hieronymus built a new factory at Cerro Gordo and College Streets beginning a progression of building and expansion of that facility. Over the next 60 years nearly 20 buildings -- offices, shops, power plants, warehousing facilities, even a gymnasium -- would be added to a campus covering nearly five square blocks. Those years also saw the construction in 1925 of the vitreous products plant on the south edge of Decatur, the addition of an iron foundry on East Eldorado, and the 1951 acquisition and conversion of facility at 1226 East Garfield as a foundry (today's brass foundry).

The plant and headquarters building that are recognized as the Mueller Co. of today were constructed in 1961. Some of the earliest structures in the Cerro Gordo complex still stand, having been incorporated into the construction of the new building. A number of older buildings were torn down for the new construction and while others were vacated and sold.



A "bird's eye" view of the Decatur plant complex circa 1920.

The second part of the exhibit feature homes built or occupied by members of the Mueller family over the years. Hieronymus lived over his earliest shops before moving his family into rented homes. The house usually identified as the Mueller family home was a modest structure which stood at 151 West Wood Street and has given way to commercial development. Shown in the exhibit are photos of several simple, but attractive, homes in which his children began their families. It is interesting to see the dramatic change after the death of Hieronymus in 1900. Henry, Philip, Robert, Adolf and Leda moved into new homes within a few years of their father's death (Oscar left Decatur and Fred stayed with Leda when not travelling). The move to more impressive homes may have been due to greater wealth and status or simply to the absence of their frugal father's influence. In any event, Decatur's architectural landscape reaps the benefits even today as all these homes are well preserved and appreciated by current owners. Other photos in the family portion of the exhibit feature home of later generation Muellers who had an association with the management of the company – Robert H., Ebert B., Frank H., Lucien "Duke", and William Everett Mueller.



Home of Adolph Mueller / #4 Millikin Place

The third part of the exhibit deals with the homes of Mueller Co. employees. The Mueller family and company believed that employees should strive to own their own homes. The economic benefits to employee families seemed obvious and the company could benefit from a more stable work force with stronger community roots. The drive toward home ownership was especially strong in the 1920's and early 1930's when the company news magazine, *The Mueller Record*, began publishing photos of home owned by workers. Some 350 such photos were taken over a 10-year period and many are included in the current display along with the names and addresses of proud employee owners. Most of the homes were within a short distance of the factory making the commute to work nothing more than a pleasant walk. Many of today's Mueller Co. workers can identify these homes as those of their grandparents.

It is interesting to speculate how different Decatur might be if Hieronymus Mueller had not made his first footprint on this small town on the prairie. That footprint has spread in so many ways through the economic and social life of the community and, although Hieronymus is no longer with us, his footprints continue to appear all around us.

The museum invites you to visit this temporary exhibit which will remain in place over the next year. The museum welcomes your additions and corrections to the material in the exhibit as we try to fill in missing pieces of history.

EASTER SEALS RECOGNIZES MUELLER ANNIVERSARY

Easter Seals has issued a series of commemorative Christmas ornaments over the past 18 years as part of their fund-raising drive. The 2007 Easter Seals Ornament of Hope celebrates Mueller Co.'s 150th Anniversary. The ornaments are 24 carat gold over brass and are signed and numbered. The price is \$15 at the Museum gift shop with an additional \$2.50 mailing charge if you would like one sent to you. Please make your check payable to Easter Seals. All proceeds go to Easter Seals.



GERMAN GROUP TOURS MUSEUM

Hieronymus Mueller's German beginnings served as a connection for a tour group in September. Decatur's Sister City Program entertained 30 visitors from her sister city, Sevetal, Germany and included the Mueller Museum on the itinerary. The German guests and their local hosts seemed to thoroughly enjoy the Museum and were familiar with the political events that had caused Hieronymus and many others to leave Germany in the late 1850's. Another popular topic was the Mueller-Benz auto history and the role the German auto maker played in American auto development. The accomplishments of Hieronymus Mueller and his company were an obvious source of pride to our German guests.

MUELLER FAMILY TO BE HONORED

A local investment firm, Brechnitz Group of Raymond James, together with Millikin University, Decatur Memorial Hospital and The Community Foundation is hosting an evening honoring the community and philanthropic contributions of the Mueller, Staley, Millikin and Andreas families in Decatur. The event, titled "Giving Back – A Tribute to Four Cornerstones of Our Community," will be held at Millikin in late October. A short video presentation on Hieronymus Mueller and family will be a part of the evening's events. Much of this video was prepared at the Museum using current exhibits and archives. It is gratifying to know that the community recognizes the economic and social contributions made by the family and by the company they built. That, after all, is the very mission of the Museum.

THANK YOU TO AN ANONYMOUS DONOR

The Hieronymus Mueller Museum has been blessed with a donor who has chosen to make anonymous gifts to the museum. We were pleasantly surprised to receive a check through a trustee account a few months ago and have been further surprised and mystified by several subsequent checks. We hope that this generous individual reads our newsletter and will accept our sincere thanks for the support you are extending to the museum.

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