

A Century of Innovation – Lapp Insulator

by Lynne Belluscio

This past Saturday, the folks at Lapp Insulator held a party to celebrate their 100th anniversary. It's not very common in these times, to have an industry remain in the same community where it began. In December 1916, John S. Lapp, who grew up in Honeoye Falls, incorporated the Lapp Insulator Company. Within days, construction began at the end of Gilbert Street on land that John always called "Bob Heaman's potato patch." The factory was completed in less than a year and the first insulators were shipped in September 1917.

John S. Lapp was born in Honeoye Falls in 1878. He graduated from Honeoye Falls High School in 1896 and he worked part-time with his father at the Fred Locke Insulator Company in Victor. His father and Fred Locke worked together on some innovative insulator

designs. When John's father left Locke, John S. continued for a while, and signed a five-year contract. But when he became ill, Locke fired him. John sued, and won \$28,000, which he used to build his new factory in LeRoy. Soon, John's brother, Grover joined the team. Lapp Insulator was known for innovative designs and custom production.

In 1922, Grover Lapp patented the Lapp Vacuum Process that revolutionized the preparation of wet process porcelain. It removed all the air from the porcelain mixture. Then in 1925, Lapp introduced and patented the Lapp Clay Mixing Process that changed the entire industry. Lapp engineers came up with a totally innovative fog-style post insulator that incorporated horizontal "petticoats" on the outside. This design allowed the insulator to be washed clean by the rain, which prevented

flash-overs. Never the less, Lapp continued to manufacture the old pin-style single part insulators until 1957. Lapp also designed and produced special porcelain coils that were used in the Manhattan Project that led to the production of the atomic bomb at the end of World War II.

In 2013, the Historical Society had a major exhibit about Lapp Insulator. The exhibit included the rare "Stafford T- markers" which were used to mark the Tees at golf courses. There was also an assortment of Lapp Flameware, which was a white kitchenware that unfortunately could not be used on an electric stove, so it was only in production for a year. We also exhibited about twenty ashtrays and a couple of banks. But the most fascinating part of the exhibit was the large collection of "specialty" items that the factory workers made and put through the kilns, when the bosses weren't looking. Our collection of these one-of-a-kind pieces continues to grow, and includes large dogs, vases, elephants, lamp bases - even two large nudes.

The Historical Society put together a small exhibit in four cases at the anniversary party. Quite a few folks stopped by to take a look at Paul Drayo's

basketball uniform, and a maroon baseball jersey donated by Ginny Pridgeon. In the same case was a photograph of the women's baseball team, the "Lappetts." There was one case with a few early insulators, including the post insulators marked with an incised Lapp logo. The logo was notched to indicate the year and month of production. Another case held a copy of the Army E. Award given to Lapp for their service in World War II, and a list of the men from Lapp who served. Of course, the case with the specialty items drew a lot of attention. Most people had never seen a yellow glazed ashtray.

There were many members of the Lapp family at the celebration as well as John, Kitzie, and Peter Jenner, whose father became president of Lapp Insulator after the death of John S. Lapp. And the Historical Society would like to thank the Jenner family for sponsoring the exhibit.

