

Frank's Plating Firm Turns Golden

By W.W. EDGAR

PLYMOUTH

Born in the dark days of the depression after World War I, the Plymouth Plating Co. is celebrating its golden anniversary, and no one is more pleased — and surprised — than Frank Henderson, the jovial gent who started it all. Seated at his desk in the white building at the intersection of Farmer and



FRANK HENDERSON does business "the old-fashioned way" at Plymouth Plating Co. (Observer photo)

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Amelia Streets, he recalled how he and Henry Hondorp, a fellow worker at the Daisy Air Rifle plant, got started in what is now on the oldest going concern in Plymouth.

"Right across the street," he said, "was the Millard Co. that dealt in band instruments. After work at Daisy where we played brass, we'd go over to the Millard and work on the band instruments just to make a few extra dollars."

"In those days," he went on, "most things were made of brass that required a lot of polishing and buffing. The success we were having gave me the idea to form a partnership and go into business."

In a reminiscing mood, he recalled that on a Saturday afternoon in 1923, he and Hondorp cleaned a little, old place across the street from where the plant is now located, and the Plymouth Plating Co. was born.

"We've come a long way since then," he said. "We have weathered many an economic storm. But we're just an old-fashioned plant doing business in an old-fashioned way — and still enjoying it."

The company celebrated its first year in business by building the little tile building on Amelia Street. Later, in 1929, it was necessary to enlarge and another addition was built in 1948.

"Sure, we've had some satisfaction with our success," Frank went on, "but we have known some dark days, too."

I well recall one time when we had a \$2,700 mortgage on the place and only \$12.50 in our bank account. That week Henry, my partner, and I each took \$5 for my pay.

The original partnership lasted until 1945 when Henry died. His son Gerald, took over, and the partnership remained until 1968 when the son, too, died.

As he spoke, Frank walked over to the clothes rack and picked off a cap.

"Here's Gerald's cap," he said. "It has been hanging here since 1968. You see there is a lot of sentiment about this company and it always will be that way."

Thoroughly aware that the plant is unusual in this day and age when big business has absorbed many of the "little fellows," Frank said, "We manage to keep our customers by doing business the old-fashioned way. We have customers within a radius of 100 miles. We have only 12 employees and that's big enough."

Over all these years there's one job he likes to recall.

"Back in the early '30s we plated and polished all the trim on President Herbert Hoover's new Lincoln car," he said. "The piece over the cowl weighed 70 pounds, but working on that car made all of us feel proud."

While the plant is considered old-fashioned, there has been much improvement in the plating method insofar as timing is concerned.

"What we used to take 45 minutes to do we now accomplish in eight," Frank admitted.

With a broad smile, he turned in his chair and asked,

"Do you know any other business where its best customer is right across the street?"

Then he pointed to the Anchor Coupling Co. and confided he does all of the plating for it.

Plating has been his main concern through most of his

76 years, but Frank has had several other interests and hobbies.

A keen follower of sports, he likes to recall that he has held season tickets for the Lions' games through the years and always has been a booster of pro football.

"I'll never forget the day I

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told Sterling Eaton (late publisher of the Plymouth Mail) the day would come when pro football would surpass the college variety and the pros would be playing in Michigan Stadium.

Well, it happened. With a twinkle he asked,



WHAT USED TO take 45 minutes is now done in eight, says Frank Henderson, whose Plymouth Plating Co. is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. (Observer photo by Bob Woodring)

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"Do you know where we are sitting?" Without waiting for an answer he said, "We are sitting in left field of the old Lyceum Theater in Plymouth used to entertain teams from Romulus, Salem and Northville."

Music and the theater also are hobbies, and only several weeks ago he and his wife flew to New York City on a Saturday morning, attended the Metropolitan Opera in the evening and flew back on Sunday.

As the memories came rolling back, Frank recalled one of the finest evenings he ever spent.

"When I was about 16 years old, I took my mother to see a production of 'Ben Hur' in the old Lyceum Theater in Detroit. I'll never forget it because they had eight big horses on the stage."

"You don't see things like that anymore."

As he marked the actual birthday on the calendar, Aug. 23, Frank mused: "I was born in Northville, the son of a painter, and I sure came a long way, didn't I?"

No one could disagree with the jovial historian of old-time Plymouth.

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