

Morrison Bros. Co History



Some Historical Highlights

In the year 1855, the Midwestern United States was a growing, relatively wild frontier. In Illinois, a young Abraham Lincoln was vying unsuccessfully for a seat in the U.S. Senate. In Michigan, the future General George Armstrong Custer was a fifteen year old student preparing to graduate from Alfred Stubbin's Young Men's Academy. In Iowa, John Morrison was riding a ferry across the Mississippi River towards his new home in the city of Dubuque, where he would soon launch the

company that still bears his name 150 years later.

The struggle of John Morrison, a stranger in a new land, to start the small industry that has since grown to become one of the leading businesses of its kind in the country, is truly a saga of commercial enterprise. A man of less sturdy character or persistence would have given up the effort as hopeless, failing to carry his endeavor on to the ultimate success which has crowned a century and a half of continuous business.



John Morrison

The Beginning

John Morrison was born in 1816 on the classic island of Iona, in Scotland. As a young man he moved to Glasgow, where he took Martha McDonald as his bride, and remained there until 1848, at which time he immigrated to the United States. After spending a short time in Springfield, Massachusetts, he moved on to Cleveland, Ohio. In Cleveland, he toiled for the next six years at the trade that he had learned in his native Scotland, boiler making. In 1855, when the "western fever" was at its height, he moved to Dubuque, built a brick building near the corner of 7th and Main Streets, and immediately engaged in the business of boiler making.

The Civil War Years

Morrison was able to make an acceptable living by manufacturing and selling his boilers, but it wasn't long before outside influences began having a profound effect on his business. Only a few years after it had opened, the small Morrison shop, like many others of its type, began to succumb to the industrial and financial ills associated with the outset of the Civil War. In this case, however, the little plant was left to its own resources because of the patriotism of its founder. Too old to enter the war as a combatant, Morrison took it upon himself to engage in one of the most difficult tasks of the civil strife, that of transporting wounded soldiers back north from the danger zone of the front lines. Family legend has it that one of the wounded soldiers that accompanied John back from the front was his brother-in-law A.Y. McDonald, who went on to become another Dubuque industrial icon. Eventually the war ended, and the Morrison family grew to number eight children; three girls and five boys. It was these five young men who were soon to play an integral part in the emergence of the small shop into what it represents today.

The Post War

The Morrison Boiler Shop operated continuously until 1872, but never with any great advancement financially because of its small production. The several years that the founder had spent attending to the wounded in the war were an entire loss, and had left him unable to purchase power machinery, which was then coming into use as a means of increasing production. It was at this time that Morrison's two oldest sons, John and Angus, having learned the plumbing and heating trade from their uncle A.Y., started a plumbing business in addition to keeping up the boiler shop as best they could. Operating out of a shop located on 5th Street near Main in Dubuque, the plumbing branch of the business began to prosper.

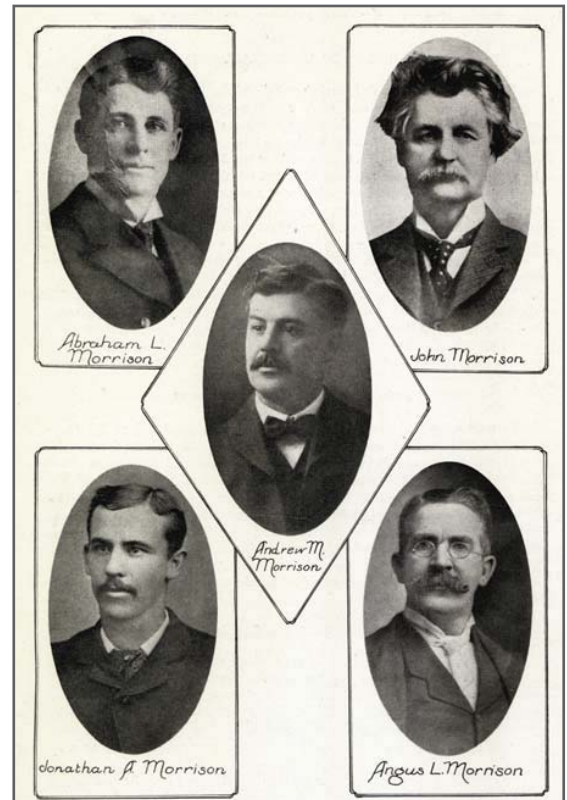
Then in 1876, the elder Morrison was injured while assisting in the erection of a piece of machinery near Santa Rosa, CA. His arm had been caught in the machinery and crushed, and while his injuries were not life threatening by today's standards, the news accounts of the day reported that soon "inflammation set in and struck inwardly, causing his death". This unfortunate accident left young John Morrison, the oldest son and now head of the family, to accept the responsibility of managing his father's business. Over the next several years, John proceeded to increase the company's output by producing a wider variety of the boilers that were in use during the late 1800's. During this period, the boiler shop operated separately from the plumbing business, and in the words of younger brother Andrew Morrison, "...proved more or less a loser". On the other hand, the plumbing branch of the brother's business was an entire success, bringing in a large amount of money in spite of keen competition.

Around 1889, the plumbing shop was sold to W.S. Molo, and the brothers turned their attention to the business of making hot water tanks and hydro-pneumatic tanks. The shop eventually was moved from downtown Dubuque to a location near the present day offices on

Elm Street. It was not long after this time, in addition to his responsibilities as proprietor of the tank shop, that John Morrison accepted the position of president of the A.Y. McDonald Company. For over a decade, he managed the affairs of the two businesses, but in 1909 he severed all ties with outside interests, and devoted himself solely to the affairs of the tank plant. He had little time to affect his plans for his family's company, however, as a short time later he passed away. Many years later, his younger brother Andrew would recall that "On August 29, 1910, he died, and since his was the largest interest, and in the absence of a corporation, his death threw the business into something of a turmoil from which, however, it quickly recovered".



Andrew Morrison



The Morrison Brothers

Beginning of an Industrial Success

It was during this period that Andrew Morrison took over the reins of the struggling business, and emerged as a leader who possessed both the intelligence and the drive necessary to finally mould

a successful business out of chaos. Shortly after his brother's death, he formed a corporation capitalized at \$50,000. Up to this time all of the tanks were riveted and caulked, six workmen making two 220 gallon tanks per day. Andrew, taking over the management of the new corporation, rearranged the machinery at a cost of \$200.00, and in three months revolutionized the product. Twenty-one tanks a day were turned out by 16 workers. After perfecting the production methods in the shop, he went out and sold the tanks to keep the shop busy.

For a number of years, Andrew had also made a study of brass valves for handling oil, and a small brass shop for the manufacture of oil handling appliances was inaugurated. The tank shop continued to grow and prosper, forcing the purchase of more land to the north of the old shop. The brass business also forged ahead, and more property to the south of the shop was secured until finally, in 1914, the entire block, 604 feet long and 100 feet wide, was occupied.



In 1920, a flatiron shaped piece of property was purchased on 7th Street. A plant was built for the purpose of the manufacture of non-pressure vessels of all kinds, and the business continued to grow by leaps and bounds. This expansion was a direct result of the hard work and dedication of the five brothers who carried on after their father's death: John, Jonathan, Angus, Andrew, and Abraham. By 1927, Andrew was left as the last surviving brother, and realized that the time had come to consider restructuring the ownership of the company. In a 1930 edition of the Morrison News, Andrew reminisced about this period in the company's history: "All of the Morrison family except myself had passed on. Recognizing the fact that younger men, who would carefully continue the business and protect the stockholders in the event of my death, were necessary to the business, we decided that a change in the actively interested stockholders was necessary. There were those in the employ of the company who had proven by their ability and loyalty that they deserved a chance to enter the business and eventually purchase all of the common stock." An agreement was soon reached with four employees to assume active and authoritative control of the company. One of those four was W.N. Glab, grandfather of the current company president, Charlie Glab.

By 1930, the square footage of the general Morrison plant facilities had increased to 100,000 square feet, twenty times its capacity of only twenty years earlier. The Morrison Bros. Co. continued working efficiently and effectively out of their two locations for nearly forty more years, until expanding again in 1968, when the foundry facilities were moved to a new location on 7th Street, near the tank shop.

A New Generation

As the decade of the 1930's drew to a close, a major change loomed ahead for the company's leadership. In December of 1938, Andrew Morrison succumbed to ill health, passing away after a two year illness. His successor would be W.N. Glab, one of the original non-Morrison family stockholders. Glab had grown up in Dubuque, was a tailback on the 1902 State Champion Dubuque High School football team, and then had graduated from the University of Wisconsin as a mechanical engineer. After graduation, he spent several years working in various positions in Chicago and Dubuque before joining Morrison Bros. Co. in 1925. In early 1939, he began his 33 year tenure as company president, a period that would firmly establish Morrison Bros. as a company identified by it's commitment to excellence.

When the United States entered World War II in 1941, Morrison Bros. Co. was called on to become a major cog in the war machine. Industries throughout the United States now had a new purpose, and like many other businesses, Morrison “re-tooled” and threw its full effort and resources into aiding the allied cause. The extraordinary effort turned in by Morrison Bros. Co. and its employees during this period resulted in the ultimate wartime recognition, the Army-Navy E-Award.

Awarded to only 5% of military contractors, the Army-Navy E-Award was the highest commendation that a business could receive from the United States military. During the war, Morrison Bros. Co. was recognized on three separate occasions for this honor. The company’s commitment to excellence became far more than just a saying; it was made tangible in the form of a seven foot long pennant flying proudly over the plant.



Army-Navy “E” Award

Through the 1940’s and 1950’s, the company continued to perform as a leader in the industry. The product line continued to evolve as the technology of the day progressed. New products introduced during this time included an assortment of pumps, valves and vents, but once again outside influences began to have an effect, when the Korean War presented yet another hurdle for industries in the United States to overcome. The U.S. government was forced to mandate the rationing of various metals, which naturally had an immediate impact on the foundry and machine shop. Morrison Bros. Co. was able to utilize nearly a century of goodwill that had been established with its customer base and once again weathered the storm, celebrating its 100th Anniversary in 1955.

The company then continued to operate efficiently and effectively out of its two locations until 1968, when the foundry facility moved to a new location on 7th Street, near the tank shop. Moving into a building that had once housed the National Guard Armory, the foundry operations were managed by longtime foundry employee Mac Langkamp. The machine shop and assembly areas, along with the administrative offices, remained on 24th Street.

The early 1970’s witnessed the first new company president in over three decades, when W.N. Glab was succeeded by his son, J. Duncan Glab.

J. Duncan Glab had graduated from Iowa State University with, like his father, a degree in engineering. Before joining the company, he served his country as an engineering battalion commander in the Pacific helping construct airfields for allied aircraft. On December 7th, 1941 he was a witness to history while stationed at Pearl Harbor. After being discharged from the military, he began his career with Morrison Bros. Co. in 1946 as a welder. Over the years he worked his way up through the ranks, serving as plant superintendent, general manager, and vice president before eventually assuming the position of president in 1972.

The seventies again were a time of change for the company. It was around this time that the tank shop on 7th Street was sold off, and company began to re-focus its efforts on brass and aluminum oil handling equipment. This decade saw the introduction of the Figure 244 vent, still a popular item over thirty years later. A few years later, during the 1980’s, Morrison’s began producing another popular item, the 305 adapter. Tried and true products like these kept the company going strong for many years, and the tradition of quality and excellence soon entered its 14th decade.

The first day of 1990 welcomed a new member of the Morrison family, as the Maquoketa Company opened its doors at a location approximately 30 miles to the south of the Dubuque plants. In the early years of the 1990's, Morrison Bros. introduced a new product that would soon be one of it's best selling lines of all time, the clock gauge. A product unique in design, the clock gauge quickly evolved from a simple device allowing a quick sight reading of the liquid level to a product using the latest technology of the day, and became synonymous with Morrison innovation. During this time, Morrison Bros. continued to re-design and improve many other existing products, and again proved to be a benchmark against which other companies in the business were measured by winning the PEI Circle of Excellence Award in 1995.

At this highpoint, Duncan Glab turned the presidency of the company over to his son, Charlie Glab. Charlie had joined the company in the 1970's, and had just assumed his position as president when a major event would once again force Morrison Bros. to respond to outside influences. On a day late in March of 1996, two young boys playing with matches started a fire that consumed a large part of the 24th Street facility.



The company was forced to move the assembly unit to a temporary location near the foundry. Not long after that, construction began on a new building located adjacent to the foundry, a location that would serve as the new headquarters for the machining unit, the assembly unit, and select office personnel. In the summer of 1998, the new 7th Street location opened its doors, and Morrison Bros. once again was able to get back to the business of excellence. The PEI Circle of Excellence Award was presented to Morrison Bros. for the second time in 1998, and then again in 1999 and 2000.

Today

The new millennium started on a high note, and the business continues to prosper. Since the turn of the 21st century, the last five years have been marked with vast capital improvements in the technology of manufacturing and plant safety. Here in the year 2005, the Morrison Bros. Co., 150 years old and going strong, has continued to maintain its reputation as a committed leader in the petroleum marketing equipment industry.