COLOSSUS IN CLAY:

Acme Brick Company

The Story of the Largest American-owned Brickmaker

By Edwin E. Lehr, Ph.D.

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Acme Brick Company is practically an institution in the Southwest and is known for its leadership, its stability, its adaptability and its tenacious desire to be on top. This book attempts a balanced treatment, seeking to capture the flavor and personality of the firm by pulling various areas, such as finance, production, sales, leadership and management, into focus as the story unfolds.

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Contents

George Bennett

Preface

Any American business enterprise that successfully completes a century in our fast-moving age of leveraged buyouts, corporate raids, foreign takeovers, and economic uncertainty should have its history known. Unfortunately too few histories of lasting corporations have been written, and even fewer on brick companies that have been so much a part of the American heritage. Most of the studies that have been made of brick companies are unpublished theses or sections of local histories, so there are several compelling reasons for writing this book—the first of which is to help fill a significant void in our neglected brickmaking history. Another reason is that Acme Brick Company wants to record permanently its one hundred years of success and to share this collective memory with its employees and friends. Still another reason is that there is a need for a publication on an outstanding Southwestern business whose roots are deep in nineteenth-century capitalistic entrepreneurship. Finally, Acme Brick Company, a colossus of the American brick industry deserves to have its story told.

Acme Brick Company is the oldest face brick manufacturer in Texas, and the largest American-owned producer of face brick in the world. Founded in 1891, Acme has a long and colorful history. Indeed, separate histories could be written about its various functions, internal departments, innovations, administrations, or its leadership in the industry. But to present separate studies of these areas would not express the spirit or essence that is Acme. For Acme Brick is practically an institution in the Southwest and is known far and wide for its accomplishments, its competitive spirit, its leadership, its stability, its adaptability, and its tenacious desire to be on top. So this book attempts a balanced treatment, seeking to capture the flavor and personality of the firm by pulling various areas, such as finance, production, sales, leadership, and management, into focus as the story unfolds.

Acme's story is one of evolution and change. For its first three decades Acme was strictly a Texas-based company. Its majority ownership was traditionally located there, and its operating head-

quarters has always centered in or around Fort Worth, Texas. As a result, this narrative concentrates to some extent on Acme's Texas operations, especially during the first few chapters. But as Acme grew, expanding into other states, out-of-state operations became increasingly important and, accordingly, they receive their just proportion in this account. Significantly, Acme Brick has adapted to its environment, competition in the industry, and the times. It has expanded its range of products greatly over the years, growing from being the manufacturer of only two types of dry-press brick, to today manufacturing several hundred blends of brick. The company has undergone at least ten basic organizational changes, at one point splitting into four Acme Brick Companies (independent operating divisions) and becoming a conglomerate. Although the company went public with its stock offering many years ago, the makeup of the controlling interests has varied only slightly since 1891. This, however, is in keeping with brick companies in general, the vast majority of which has been controlled through the years by families or a small group of stockholders.

For the first half of this century, brick was the king of building materials and had few rivals in the permanent construction market. But over the past half century other construction materials and changing fashions have drastically cut into the market. Although brick is still widely used in homes, the overall market for its commercial use has shrunk; today's brick industry remains tied to the homebuilding market, which is geared closely to government spending and credit policies, thereby making the industry very cyclical. So far, the nature of the brick business has dictated that no one company has been able to monopolize the national or world market.

The knowledge that perfection is impossible has had a beneficial effect on both the industry and Acme, which are both still striving for growth. The public too has profited from these efforts to produce a better, less costly brick. From the beginning the company has sought both growth and progress, believing them to be healthy objectives. Through the years, Acme has acquired some two dozen brick and six concrete concerns, while hundreds of other brick companies entered bankruptcy. Acme's objective has been to enhance its market, to vary its production, and to improve its product. Seldom have expansion moves been for mere survival; mostly they have occurred in order to create more efficiency and to serve the customer better.

Acme Brick Company started as one of a hundred and forty-three Texas brick plants a century ago. The company weathered many crises, but only a dozen or so of these have been emphasized in this book. By the end of the 1920s, Acme was the largest brickmaker in

Texas; by the mid-1960s it was the largest such concern in the United States, operating a six-state system with nationwide sales. Acme went on to form Ceramic Cooling Tower and bought several concrete concerns. As a conglomerate, Acme was able to market a variety of goods worldwide building on its previous success with its refractory brick. Acme subsequently became a holding company, merged with the Justin Companies, and finally became an operating division of Justin Industries which it remains today.

No one person occupies a dominant position in this story, for it is the story of hundreds of people in management, production, and sales. As a result of the number of years it has been in the business and the extent of its operations, Acme has been built by thousands of people. In 1891, Acme Pressed Brick employed three people in management and fourteen in production (most of whom were temporary help); today, Acme employs about fifteen hundred people. Understandably, then, within the confines of these pages, it is impossible to mention every individual who has contributed to the company's progress. For this reason, the author hopes that for those people deserving fuller attention but not receiving it here will bear with him. These men and women, however, may perhaps be assured of a greater satisfaction, though: they have contributed to a lasting and important structure—Acme Brick Company.

To the author's knowledge, four other attempts have been made to write a history of Acme Brick Company since 1960, none of which has ever been completed. Mr. Locksley Fife's research—much of which was published in the company house organ, *Inside Acme*—was the most complete, but still was only an overview. Charles Sewell's notes dealt only with Malvern, Arkansas; Duron Stubblefield collected notes, but these were never pieced into a story. Likewise an attempt made by the company to write a history in 1975 never really got off the ground. This author's dissertation, "From Kiln to Conglomerate: A History of the Acme Brick Company," (1972), utilized Fife's, Sewell's, and Stubblefield's material, but was written at a time of considerable change of direction in the company. Time has settled many uncertainties; consequently, I welcomed the chance to update and complete my earlier work.

The process of research and writing this history presented some unique challenges and opportunities. The main challenge was to give proper coverage to as many elements of Acme's operations as possible without presenting an out-of-balance treatment. A good deal of time was involved in order to do the subject justice, with such time being constrained to a certain degree by the author's full-time employment as a college administrator. The task was fur-

ther complicated because Acme is now a seven-state system, with sixteen plants and dozens of sales offices each having its own story. In addition, a centennial history poses its own special demands for the writer who wishes to keep the work at a scholarly level and at the same time include as many people and events as possible in its coverage. Since this history will probably be read by Acme employees and their relatives for some time to come, and perhaps by others not connected with the brick industry, the book has been written in the past tense. At times, the author may have also oversimplified some of the technical processes involved in brick manufacturing, so, he asks the indulgence of those who are still doing what he presents as having been done, as well as, the pardon of those technicians who know that their manufacturing processes are more complicated than depicted here.

Readers may be bothered by what could appear to be diversion into local history or geology, but the author hopes they are not, since each plant has played an important economic role in its locale and, in turn, has been influenced by its environment. In addition, these sketches, including the brief section on early brickmaking, provide a setting for the stage upon which the various plants performed and hopefully break up some of the required chronology and lengthy details.

Spread out over two decades and involving about two years of actual research, some of this history was written in 1971 and 1972, with the remainder being written in 1990 and 1991. Circumstances within the conglomerate changed considerably over these twenty years, and limitations imposed by a hostile takeover attempt in 1990 made certain financial data unavailable. Nonetheless, by using statistics available from the building materials group and by reviewing the information that could not be put in print, the author believes the conclusions presented in this book are valid. Other than the few restrictions on financial information, Acme gave every consideration and assistance to this effort.

In the following pages, with much help, the author has sought to tell, in logical and historical fashion, the story of Acme Brick Company, encompassing its growth from a single Texas kiln to the largest American-owned brick company in the world.

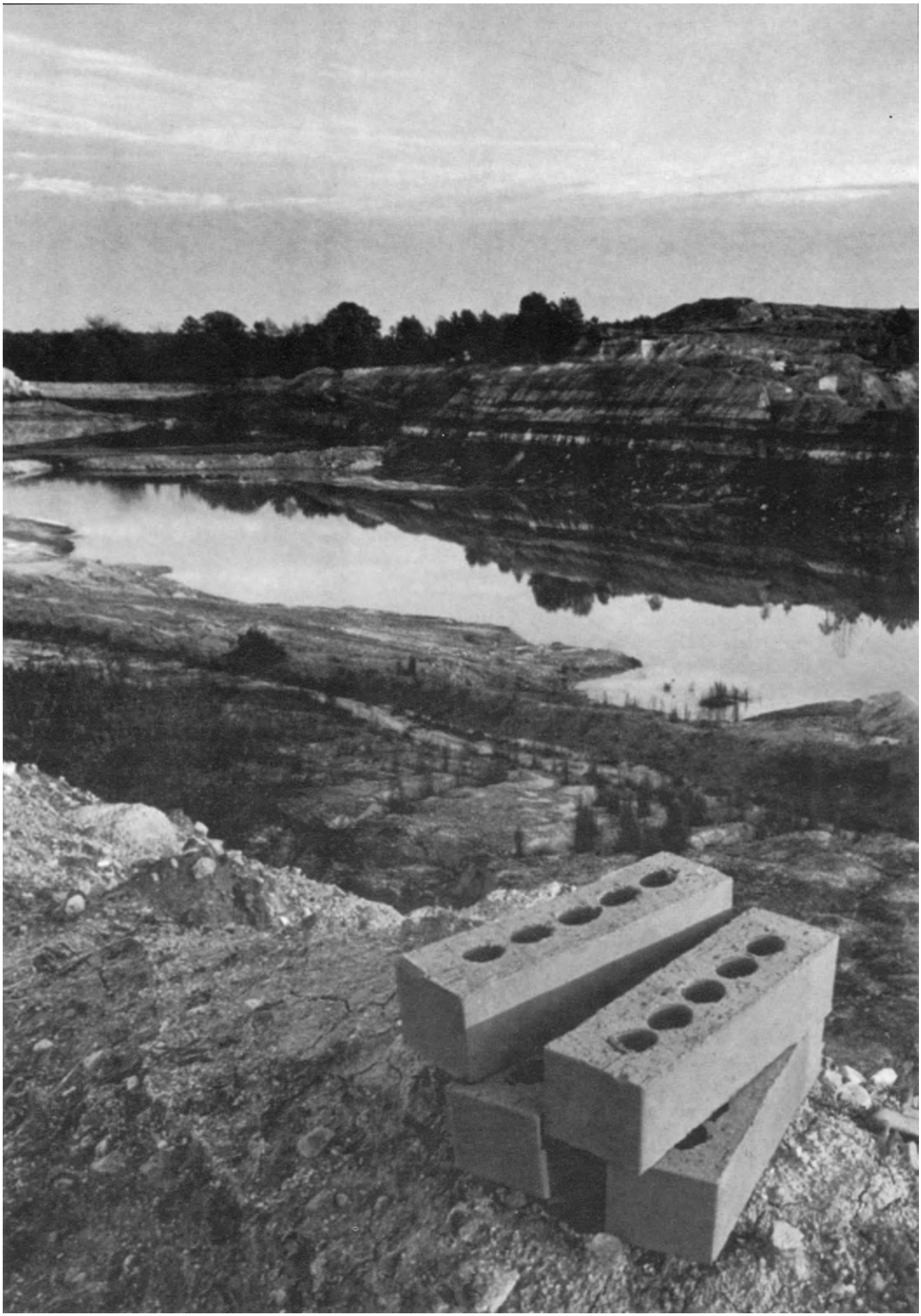
Edwin E. Lehr, Ph.D.

Acknowledgments

Those persons who helped me in my earlier study, "From Kiln to Conglomerate," were dutifully thanked in my acknowledgments at that time, but I wish to mention some of them again since their influence on me extended well beyond that time frame. Both Dr. Nevin E. Neal, now deceased, and Dr. Ben H. Procter assisted me in many ways as teachers, mentors, and friends when I was a graduate student and later when I became a college administrator. Without their patience, guidance, and encouragement I would not have completed the first Acme study. For whatever its worth, this centennial history was inspired as partial repayment to them for their kindness.

For editorial assistance, I appreciate the constructive criticism of Annamarie Williams, Former Economic Development Director, North Channel Area Chamber of Commerce; Dr. Harrold Melton, Vice President, Sales and Marketing, Acme Brick Company; John Koch, Vice President, Production, Acme Brick Company; Bill Seidel, Marketing Director, Acme Brick Company; and Fayette Ellis, retired Acme marketing executive. But any errors made in judgment or content, however, I must claim as my own.

In addition, I wish to thank John Justin, who assisted me so much in my earlier study, and Edward Stout, who placed his staff at my disposal for this later study. I wish to thank nearly one hundred other Acme employees for their friendly and enthusiastic cooperation in providing many essential materials and their patient explanations of Acme's operations. Some of these folks consented to more than one interview to help me glean the finer points of procedures or events from the maze of information available, while others spent considerable time with me over the telephone adding information. Among these were Harrold Melton, Bill Seidel, Scotty Freebairn, Bill Hurlburt, Bill Lemmond, and Emmett Lawless. Still others, such as Leonard Hicks, Mike Vickers, Joe Spence, and Greg House, stayed after hours to explain their operations.



Two important gentlemen played similar roles in this study, albeit twenty years apart. In 1971, Dwight Alexander, then assistant to Ed Stout, arranged or coordinated almost three dozen interviews. He also helped me find materials and photographs used in both studies. Then, in 1990, Fayette Ellis did much the same. In addition, he provided a sales and production profile of the last twenty years of the company and collected helpful correspondence from a number of the departments. Messrs. Alexander and Ellis made easier what would have been an overwhelming task.

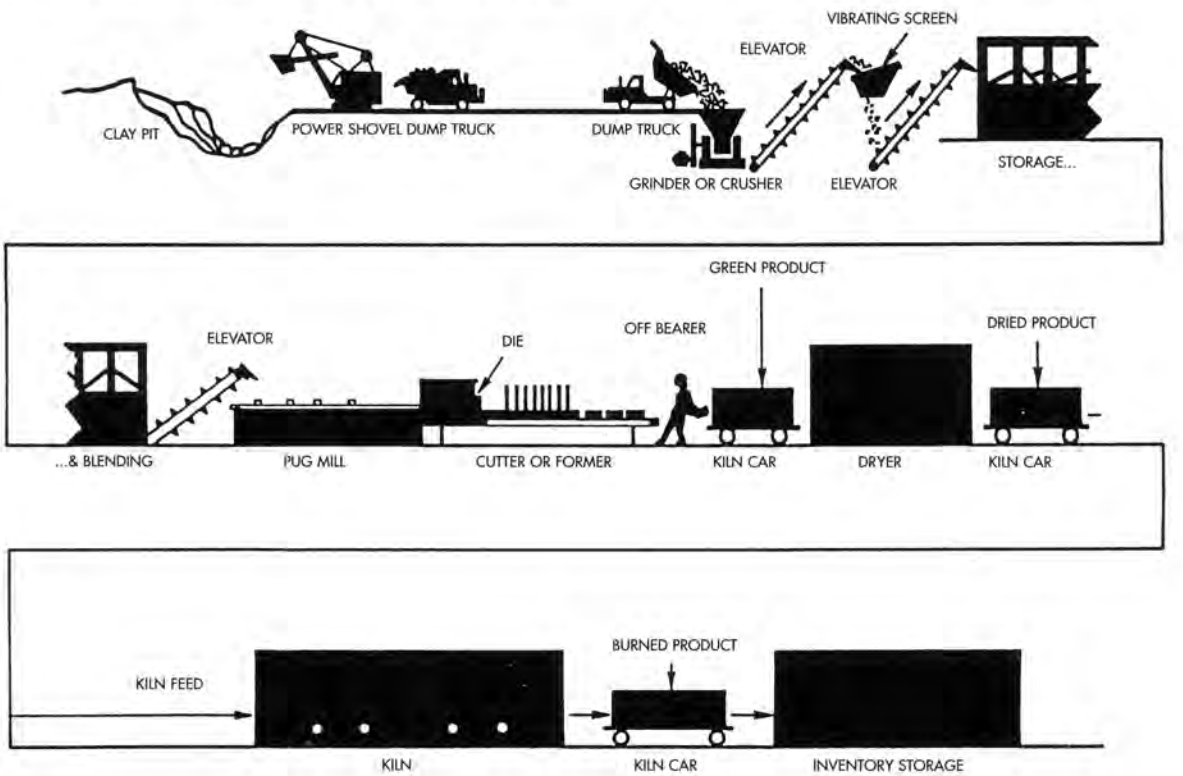
Special thanks are due to Mrs. Walter R. Bennett Sr. and Mrs. James Ernest Fender Sr., wives of early Acme presidents who, in 1971, kindly consented to interviews, supplied copies of early company magazines, and allowed the use of some personal materials of their eminent husbands. Likewise, I wish to thank their sons, Walter Bennett Jr. and James Ernest Fender Jr. for their cooperation in numerous interviews, and for supplying the many photographs and materials that enriched this study twenty years ago.

Also, I am much obliged to Duron Stubblefield Jr., a former Acme employee, for the use of his father's notes and photographs, and for the interest he showed from the beginning of the project. Similarly, Mrs. Griff Bean, Mrs. James Long, and Mrs. W. A. Osborne supplied many rare photographs that gave valuable insights into early Acme history.

Several people outside Acme who gave valuable assistance were: two San Jacinto College North librarians, Jan Crenshaw and Hugh Poland, who helped me do computer research for bibliographic references; also Ellen Everett, who typed this manuscript on weekends and nights; my son, Ed, who helped on my personal computer; and Charles Farley of the Brick Institute of America, for permitting the use of his schematics and up-to-date information on the brick industry.

Finally, I am grateful to my wife, Dovie, for her encouragement, forbearance, and patience while I engaged in this enterprise, for without her support this book would never have been completed.

RAW MATERIAL BRICK & TILE CLAY–FIRE CLAY–SHALE



The basic flow of materials in the manufacture of brick in a modern plant. Courtesy of Brick Institute of America.

1

An Aristocratic Heritage

Brickmaking may make a legitimate claim to being the aristocrat of the building materials industry. The fine art of brickmaking meets all the qualifications of nobility: it has ancient and honorable lineage; it has gained strength and refinement through trial and difficulty; and it is an industry engaged in the worthwhile pursuit of transforming the lowliest of nature's gifts into some of its more useful and beautiful forms. As the leader in this regal craft, Acme Brick Company can best be understood through the following brief description of its origins and of its progress.

Acme Brick Company carries on an artistic tradition that has evolved over thousands of years; during which time many changes in production techniques and fashion have taken place. Brickmaking predated the great civilization of the Tigris-Euphrates River valley, making the industry one of the oldest known to man. In fact no one knows just how old it is. A statement recorded on a brick tablet from the time of Sargon the Great (circa 2700 B.C.) reveals that sun-dried brick had been in use for many centuries prior to his reign, and recent excavations have unearthed bricks made at least nine thousand years ago. Trademarks on these brick indicate they may have been of even more ancient origin.[1]

Sun-dried brick continued to be used for several thousand years, but by the time of Nebuchadnezzar (604–561 B.C.) Babylonians were familiar with burning and glazing methods. The question of whether pottery or brick can claim to be the first burned clay product remains unresolved. Primitive man may have discovered that the burning process caused hardness in clay material by observing the effects of fire on the pots used for cooking or on the crude adobe bricks of the oven. By the sixth century B.C., only the poor or underdeveloped areas used the old methods of brickmaking. Poor people everywhere still dug the raw clay from the river banks, mixed it with straw or dried grass, pressed this mixture into crude molds, and allowed the newly formed product to dry in the sun for months before use. Rich people and royalty only used this adobe material for backing, and faced the walls of their buildings with

Left: The basic flow of materials in the manufacture of brick in a modern brick plant. The process differs from the ancient methods mostly in the speed and volume of production. Until the Industrial Revolution, clay was mined or dug with picks and shovels, transported by animal power, mixed with water (sometimes with a binder such as straw added), and made into a mud. When the right consistency was reached the mud was cast into molds, allowed to dry, and then burned or sun dried prior to use.

shaped, burned, and glazed brick. Unlike the modern manufactured clay products, these early bricks were large and unduly cumbersome and far from uniform in size and shape.[2]

Doubtless the ancient Sumerians and Babylonians taught their successors in Mesopotamia the art of making fired brick, a skill they took with them when driven to the Orient. In this way, the craft spread slowly across Asia to Persia, India, and China. The Great Wall of China, which was constructed mainly during the reign of Chinese ruler Shin Huang Ti (255–206 B.C.), is fabricated in part with large grey bricks that were made in the style of those of ancient Sumer and Babylonia.[3]

In Egypt, stone quarries were abundant and fuel scarce; therefore, the use of brick was limited. Biblical references tell the story of the Hebrew bondage in Egypt and how, after the days of Joseph, the Pharaohs compelled the Jews to make brick and furnish their own straw for binder.[4] So Egyptian brickmaking dates only from the fifteenth or sixteenth century B.C., as witnessed in the Bible and in the two pyramids of sun-dried brick found a few miles south of Cairo. But the industry must have been highly prized there, since the Pharaohs monopolized the business and stamped their names on the product. Yet, elsewhere in Africa, stone, grass, and mud huts apparently dominated until the time of Christ, and only recently has brick supplanted stone as the durable building material south of Ethiopia.[5]

The Greeks had an abundant supply of building stone and made little use of brick, although the Byzantine or East Roman Empire utilized considerable amounts of brick and tile. It is easy, therefore, to understand why the Romans accepted the Greek myth that only the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water existed, since these "elements" are the basic ingredients for the manufacture of brick. Next to the Babylonians and the modern nations, the Romans made the most use of brick. These great builders of antiquity left splendid and extensive monuments to their skill as brickworkers in nearly every part of their vast domain, with their favorite mode of construction being a wall of concrete faced with brick.

The Romans introduced a number of innovations in kiln design which endured basically to modern times,[6] and they taught the rest of Europe the art of brickmaking. But, due to the confusion of the barbarian invasions that followed Roman civilization (a circumstance that launched the so-called dark ages), permanent construction declined until the era of castle building dawned. With the advent of modern states, town building became increasingly popular and greatly spurred the growth of brick industry. During the gothic and baroque periods that followed, brick was used freely

with most effective and artistic results notably in northern Europe, where the rich and growing burgher cities built numerous brick churches, city gates, town or guild halls, and mansions.[7]

The use of brick in American building practices was borrowed from England. The Romans brought brickmaking to England and popularized it during the almost three centuries that they occupied the island. Although brickmaking declined in England, as elsewhere, the English brick industry revived in the thirteenth century; however, it was not until the reign of Henry VII (1509–1547) that brick manufacture again flourished, probably as a result of Flemish influence. Brick began to be more uniform in size and shape about 1625. Tragic though it was, the great London fire transformed that city from a wooden town into one made of brick, giving added impetus to brickmaking and building in general. Nevertheless, it was only during the reigns of Queen Anne and the first three Georges that a marked brick vogue almost supplanted all other kinds of building material.[8]

In North America, Anglo-European colonists very naturally followed the European rather than the native building practices, except for temporary purposes. Seventeenth-century colonists on the eastern seaboard built their first brick houses of material brought in from Holland and England, but domestic brick factories sprang up in Virginia as early as 1612 and in New England as early as 1629. Still, other colonies, such as Maryland, imported more brick than they made, even though their clay was suitable for brick production. Since Maryland actually exported brick by 1789, the real reason for importing brick was to solve the bothersome problem of ballast needed in westbound merchant vessels.[9]

Cargo vessels from Europe usually carried light manufactured articles to the colonists and returned with the bulky, weighty, raw materials needed for European industry. As a result, a heavy material was required to stabilize ships on the voyage west, which often took the form of stones and gravel loaded into the bottoms of vessels. Once the cargo arrived in the colonies and was unloaded, this ballast became a nuisance; so captains frequently dumped this material over the side in American harbors. By the time of the American Revolution, every colony levied penalties against shippers who rid themselves of their ballast in such a manner, with each colony having regulations requiring that this waste cargo be set ashore above the high water mark. Because compliance with these laws was difficult, shippers came up with the idea of using valuable ballast such as brick and cut stone. These materials could be disposed of profitably and more readily than the objectionable sand and gravel generally used.[10] The cost of transportation limit-

ed the use of foreign brick to the coastal towns, therefore, because money was scarce and timber plentiful, the manufacture of brick in the interior developed very slowly.

After the Revolutionary War domestic production of brick increased, and the use of brick became more general. As Americans prospered, they began to demand more substantial building materials. This in turn stimulated the manufacture of better products, the development of newer shapes and sizes of brick, and the invention of faster, more efficient machinery to supply the market. Indeed, although the basic processes remained the same—mining, shaping, and burning—more progress was made in the last century than in all those centuries before.[11]

Patent Office records show that the first brickmaking patent was issued on May 15, 1800, for "a brick and tile machine invented by G. Hadfield, residence not recorded." Other patents for similar apparatus were issued by the United States about the same time to E. Miller, July 12, 1802; N. and P. W. Miller, January 5, 1804; W. Hodgson, Richmond, Virginia, May 22, 1805; and J. F. Gould, Newburyport, Massachusetts, March 1, 1806. The first patents granted for a kiln and dryer were granted to a Mr. H. Read, June 17, 1840, and to S. M. Parish, August 16, 1864, respectively.[12] The dean of the nineteenth-century brickmakers, J. W. Crary, held a half-dozen other patents on kilns and brick machines by 1862, one of which was for a dry press patented on January 5, 1861.[13] Furthermore, in 1857, the *Scientific American* ran an illustration of the forerunner to the stiff-mud machine, complete with pug mill, pressure extrusion of clay, and hinged wire cutters—all power-driven by steam.[14]

After the Civil War, American industry expanded at a tremendous rate. Brickmaking kept pace with this universal trend toward increased production. In 1850, some 2,121 establishments were engaged in manufacturing clay products, and a decade later, at the outbreak of The American Civil War, the number had increased to 2,240. Between 1860 and 1870, the number jumped still higher to 3,959—an impressive 76.7 percent increase. The next decade showed nearly as dramatic an upturn, with clay products concerns increasing by 61.2 percent. We can surmise that the consolidation of a number of new plants must have occurred between 1880 and 1890, since the number of producing units increased only 2.4 percent to 6,535, while capital investment in such enterprise grew from $35,039,939 to $108,705,670—a 210.2 percent gain during a time of deflation. Comparatively speaking, brickworkers' real wages appreciated in the interval from 1850 to 1890, for while the number of workers grew to six

times what it had been in 1850, the dollar amount of salaries increased eight times over. Due to better machines, worker output amounted to a figure eleven times greater than the 1850 amount of $8,189,359.[15]

Texas, and the Southwest as a whole, did not share in this tremendous expansion in brickmaking, for their resources were largely undeveloped in 1890. Texas, however, was the leader in all the Southwest, ranking twentieth in value of brick and tile produced, but it still only contributed 1.5 percent of the national total. Kansas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma in the Midwest and the South were after Texas, and their combined output barely exceeded that of the Lone Star State. Even so, these states manufactured less than two-thirds the amount of brick produced by another Midwestern state, the sixth ranked Missouri. Yet by 1900, Texas had 171 clay products plants, compared with Oklahoma's 36; Arkansas's 65; Louisiana's 61; and Kansas's 60—a total of 393 brick, tile, and pottery works! Still, these states maintained the same relative production positions as in the decade before.[16] Subsequent developments in meat packing, oil discoveries, and transportation improvements helped to alter this arrangement so that within sixty years the region was producing one-seventh of the country's brick and tile shipments.[17]

But the Southwest had long been familiar with brick and brickmaking. The adobe plastered structures of Indians in the Upper Rio Grande valley and pottery made throughout the Southwest showed that native peoples knew how to form bricks from adobe, and these works predate the white man by many hundreds of years. Spanish officials constructed missions among them of adobe brick and stone, and French colonists used burned brick at New Orleans early in the eighteenth century. Anglo colonists used burned brick for house foundations along the Texas coast, going on to produce common bricks on a large scale in the 1840s.[18] The industry was still in its infancy and was little understood, for even as late as 1890 only common brick was manufactured in the Southwest.[19]

It was this undeveloped Texas market that the founder of Acme Pressed Brick Company, George Ellis Bennett, sought to supply in 1891 when he started his face brick business west of Fort Worth.

2

Beginning Again

Left: Mining shale at the Bennett plant in 1896. Shale was drilled, blasted, and hauled away in carts. The man standing on a platform near the center of the photograph holds a long "breast drill" used to drill the shale bank in preparation for dynamiting.

Although he was only twenty-four years old, George Bennett had already made and lost a fortune when he arrived in Galveston, Texas, some time in 1876. Born on October 6, 1852, to Benjamin and Anna Bennett of Springfield, Ohio, George was one of several children. He sought his fortune early, leaving home at age sixteen and finding employment in St. Joseph, Missouri, with a wholesaler named James McCord.[1] After helping to build this business and gaining some experience, Bennett went into merchandising for himself in Butler, Missouri.[2] But times were hard in 1874, and his business did not weather the post–Civil War depression. Within two years the young merchandiser had lost practically all that he owned. Disappointed, but not defeated, Bennett scraped up what cash and courage he could and left Missouri for Galveston, Texas, and a new beginning.[3]

Bennett did not stay long in Galveston. After making some contacts, he decided that Dallas offered the best opportunity for his trade.[4] In this he was correct, for North Texas was just beginning to open up, commercially speaking. The Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad had just completed its line to Dallas,[5] and the first Texas and Pacific locomotive came puffing into Fort Worth the same year.[6] Reconstruction ended the year he arrived, as Texas farmers gained control of the state government and drafted a new constitution. Farming was the main industry at the time, and Texas was soon to be the number one cotton-producing state in the union.[7]

With the arrival of mechanization and the cash crop system, opportunities abounded for the sale of farm machinery.[8] Within a year or so after moving to Dallas, Bennett went to work for the McCormick Reaper and Harvester Company. He was quickly appointed state sales manager, a position he held until 1884. During his employment there, he traveled widely both in and out of Texas and became familiar with the state, making many contacts that proved valuable later. Apparently prosperous, and having learned much from his experiences, Bennett quit McCormick and went into the merchandising business for himself. All through

the next six years, he also acted as general manager for the Tomkins Implement Company of Dallas.[9]

Bennett's travels brought him frequently to Fort Worth, which was not a very large city at the time but one bursting with ambition to be the "Queen of the Prairies."[10] On one of these trips in 1882, George Bennett met and began to court a lively young belle whose father, Harrison G. Hendricks, had been instrumental in bringing the railroad to Fort Worth. In spite of their age difference (Octavia Hendricks was twelve years younger than him), the romance moved along well, for George Bennett seemed years younger than his actual age.[11]

In 1873 Octavia Hendricks's father died leaving his family of three girls and three boys to their mother's and grandfather's care. Octavia's grandfather, Judge G. A. Evarts (a signer of the first Texas State Constitution), had moved to Fort Worth in 1867 to practice law with Mr. Hendricks. Despite his advanced years, Evarts—a very successful lawyer—still contributed to the support of the family.[12] Miss Hendricks and her family were among the old "400" of Fort Worth so there were many social events to attend. She and Bennett went to cattlemen's galas where she danced and he talked. They attended several musicals and plays, but they enjoyed buggy rides most of all. George made many decisions while driving, and on one of these excursions he proposed. As a result, on September 19, 1884, George Ellis Bennett and Octavia Ann Hendricks were married.[13]

The marriage was successful, and over the next few years they had five children: four daughters and one son. Bennett changed companies, settled in Dallas, and strove to take care of his family and accumulate something for them. In this he was successful, for within four years he had conceived an idea that would lead to the realization of his ambition.[14]

Bennett wanted to start the first successful pressed brick factory in the state to meet the growing demand for this construction material. Texans were quickly moving out of the frontier stage, cities were growing, and people were demanding something besides log cabins in which to live.[15] With the advent of the railroads, more and more towns were springing up, and, of course, with rail transport came commerce and growth in population. The Texas and Pacific Railroad was a good example of this trend. As it moved across the state, it opened up farm land; it directly inspired coal mining; it encouraged immigration; it caused the creation of towns; and it actively promoted industrial development.[16] The huge cattle drives had been forced farther westward, and the rail-

roads were increasingly used to ship cattle to market.[17] With this newly formed ability to market their goods, farmers were able to raise crops for cash and to purchase ready-made clothes and manufactured items. This led to an increase in local manufacturing, which in turn caused city populations to grow. Statewide industrial and population figures reveal that Texas had only 983 factories to serve a population of 604,215 in 1860, as compared to 5,268 factories for 2,235,527 people by 1890.[18] The demand for brick kept pace with the general economic development in Texas, with the gain in "value of brick produced" growing to about $100,000 a year for the entire decade of the 1880s.[19]

Several important factors determine whether brick may be produced profitably. Aside from good plant facilities, adequate knowledge, and continuing demand, the most vital items needed are: clay or shale, fuel for burning, a favorable labor market, good transportation, and proximity to a growing market area where competition is not too keen. These were just the conditions George E. Bennett set out to find in 1888 when he began to survey Texas's natural resources.[20]

For the next two years, Bennett traveled most of the state seeking the ideal spot to set up shop. Then, early in 1890, he began investigating the area west of Weatherford in Parker County. After arranging with Texas and Pacific Railroad officials for a handcar and crew, he proceeded west down the T-P Railroad line from Millsap.[21] In less than an hour his party had reached Rock Creek, a tributary of the Brazos River.

Starting in the gullies and washes of Jack County over twenty-one miles north of where it joins the Brazos, Rock Creek twists and turns its way southward along what was once the coastline of a prehistoric ocean, but is now a region covered by a vast Cretaceous era outcrop. The creek is joined by dozens of smaller tributaries before it links up with the mighty Brazos River at Littlefield Bend on the western edge of Parker County.[22] Near its junction with the river, Rock Creek cuts through a ridge of Pennsylvanian Age rock, limestone, and shale, which surrounds, in saucer-like fashion, a triangular delta formed by the alluvial deposits of the creek and river.[23]

The delta and low hills, bounded on the south by the Brazos, form a flat valley six miles southeast of Mineral Wells. A one-mile equilateral triangle lying north of the river, this valley is divided by Rock Creek, which flows from the gap in the north point of the valley to its midpoint, then turns east for a half-mile, then south again to the river. West of Millsap, the T-P Railroad line crosses over the

Rock Creek gap, swings inside along the western rim, and then turns west again at the river.[24] This area was once the site of Commanche camps and raids, but by 1890 the banks of Rock Creek were lined with camps of peaceful rock quarry workers, a small commissary, and a number of farms huddled together under the protection of the hills.

As his handcar came into this valley, Bennett was attracted by what he saw. Stopping at the Brownlee quarries a mile from the river, he searched for clay in the level creek bed. Here he took samples from the soil and creek bank, returned to the quarries (at Lakota), and then hurried back to Dallas. He rushed these samples to Chisholm-Boyd-White, a brick machinery company at Chicago, for testing. In a short while, Bennett's raw samples were returned in the form of brick "of good quality and color."[25]

Satisfied that he had finally discovered the place and material he sought, Bennett set out to raise the necessary capital to form a pressed brick company and to go into production. Although he had accumulated some savings, Bennett did not have enough risk capital and experience to go into business alone. Reassured by a wealthy brother-in-law, Augustine K. Root, that adequate funds and help would be forthcoming, Bennett confidently proceeded with his plans even before their agreement was put into legal form.[26]

Bennett moved his family to Fort Worth[27] and spent the next few months scurrying back and forth from Texas to Illinois buying machinery, testing samples, attending to legal matters, overseeing plant construction,[28] and taking bricks to be tested. Finally, after he had succeeded in producing a marketable brick on March 26, 1891, he applied for a license to do business in Texas.[29] On April 17, 1891, he submitted a statement of expenses to his partners, and that same day chartered the Acme Pressed Brick Company at Alton, Illinois.[30]

The charter of Acme Pressed Brick called for $52,000 worth of capital stock valued at $100 a share, most of which was issued to George Bennett for his expenses. The original officers of the firm were George Bennett, president; George Eaton Root, vice president; and Henry E. Root, secretary and treasurer.[31] All officers were members of the board, including Augustine K. Root. The elder Root, who had officially retired in 1887, had spent many years selling hardware, cattle, and agricultural implements, and had also served as president of Alton Roller Milling for a number of years.[32] All his sons—George, Henry, and Ralph—served as officers of Acme at one time or another; and A. K. Root himself served as vice president, when Henry died shortly after the company was formed.[33] The Roots made their most important contri-

bution to the company during its first two years, when they aided in construction of the plant.

Immediately after receiving the brick made from his first samples, Bennett began buying up land for the proposed brick plant. His first purchase consisted of three 160-acre tracts from J. M. Gilbert on April 19, 1890. This land had been settled by John Wesley Meek in 1859, then sold to R. W. Littlefield, who in turn had sold the property to Gilbert between 1879 and 1880. Bennett got the property for just over $4 per acre. Eventually, Acme and its officers came to own the entire Rock Creek valley as far as the Brazos River, although during the depression in the 1930s, a change in company policy led to the sale of a section of this land to Wesley Strain, a local rancher.[34]

Construction soon began on buildings to house the machinery, horses, mules, and tools, also a blacksmith and repair shop for their upkeep. John Sanders (who would become a longtime Acme employee) along with two small crews of helpers, built the roofs over the updraft kilns and most of the houses in the little company town, which took the name of its founder, Bennett.[35] Some of these two- and three-room structures still stand today, but among the buildings long since gone is the original Acme office building, a small one-room planked structure[36] located just east of the Bennett Baptist Church.[37]

A view of the Acme Pressed Brick Bennett plant in 1898.

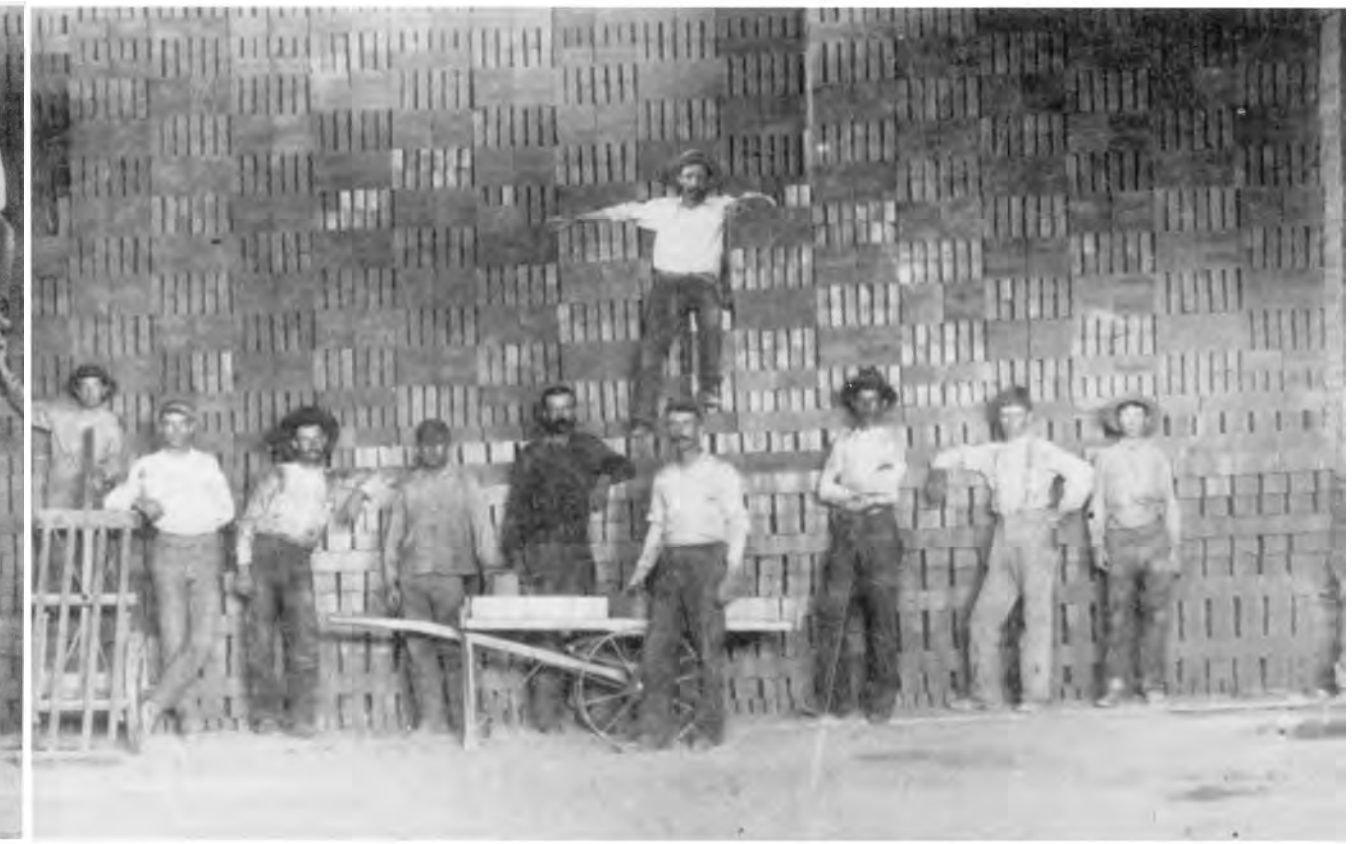
With the most important building completed between Rock Creek and the railway, the first stumbling attempts to produce brick began. When the first kiln of brick made from clay obtained at the testing site had been finished, it was found that the brick was so inferior as to be a complete loss. This gave rise to rumors that the sample brick received was not made from the clay that had been sent for testing.[38] Another attempt was made, but this time the company used about 50 percent sandy alluvial clay and 50 percent shale, which were taken from the bank of Rock Creek. Since this mixture resulted in a better brick, it was decided to try the next kiln from shale only.[39] When this kiln was burned in January 1891, and tested the next month, the product was rated superior. Finally, in March 1891, the plant went into full production.[40]

The plant consisted of one two-mold and one three-mold Boyd dry-press brick machines, one 120-horsepower automatic Atlas Engine, two return tubular boilers (52 inches by 14 feet), one 8-foot Frost dry pan, and one 9-foot Frost dry pan for grinding. The company also installed all the pumps, belts, shafting, pulleys, and

A view of the first Acme machine room at the Bennett plant in 1894. George Bennett is the large man with the wide-brimmed hat (first from the right). Mr. Griff Bean is the operator of the machine in the foreground.

tools necessary for manufacturing operations. In addition, mules, horses, wagons, carts, harnesses, plows, and scrapers were ready for mining clay.

Manufacturing methods used in 1891 were crude compared to those of today, requiring much more animal and human muscle power. Shale was obtained by blasting. Holes were drilled with a long breast drill that could penetrate to a distance of six feet into the shale bank.[41] These holes were then packed with both dynamite and black powder and set off. Once the bank was shot down, workers separated shale from topsoil by hand and loaded it into dumpcarts with hand shovels. A big horse or mule tugged the cart directly to the grinders, or to a large storage shed if the shale was wet from the rains. At first men moved the shale from storage with tray wheelbarrows, but later they used a team and scraper.[42] After the shale had been ground and screened, it went into one of the two dry presses, and under tremendous pressure was molded into brick. Since one of the advantages of the dry-press process was that brick formed in such a manner required no drying,[43] offbearers hand loaded the brick onto carts that went directly to the updraft kilns.[44]



A view from inside one of the huge updraft kilns at Bennett in the 1890's. Note how the brick were carefully hand stacked in a predetermined manner for proper burning.

Preparing the brick for burning was a back-breaking chore in the heat. As the bricks were wheeled into the kilns, "tossers" threw or handed them to "setters," who meticulously stacked the brick in a predetermined manner to get the best burn. Bricks from the three-mold press were set in the first fourteen courses to "turn the arches and six courses on top which would not burn out hard in the updraft kilns." These were sold as common backup and building brick. But bricks from the two-mold press were "set in between the courses where the heat was greatest, and sold for better-priced select face brick." Wood was used for water smoking and for drying the dry pressed brick in the kilns. A cheap grade of coal from the Strawn and Thurber mines was used to burn the brick in the finishing stages. This process required several days for the kiln to cool down enough for men to enter it and remove the brick to be loaded on cars, carts, or to be stacked.[45]

Bennett brought in experienced brickmen from the outside to help solve the problems of getting started. George and Henry Root worked at the plant the first two years. Henry acted as secretary for a slightly longer period of time, but once production started, these men seldom were active, except as salesmen. One experi-

enced brickman was J. Jackson, a bricksetter, who remained with the company until at least 1897; another was H. B. Fling, who also began as a brickman. Fling subsequently ran the company store from 1906 to 1914, whereupon he became superintendent of the plant until 1919. When a formal sales organization was established, Fling was sent to Fort Worth as city sales manager and served in that position until his retirement in 1924.[46]

To a very great degree it was experienced workers from the Bennett plant who shaped the destiny of Acme Brick Company, for the Bennett plant has been the training ground for most of the company's superintendents and many of its executives. Not until the 1960s were the key production people brought in or moved to the more responsible positions without first serving some time at the oldest Acme plant. Most of the early superintendents and key people who stuck with their jobs through the stages of periodic production and shutdowns therefore deserve admiration. After the initial operations began under H. E. Root, John McEver served as the first superintendent. A Mr. Stalnaker served as plant bookkeeper. When McEver was transferred to the Strawn mines in 1901, Ed Conway became superintendent. Later, Conway was replaced by Ed Wells, who served in this capacity until W. R. Bennett took over management from his father in 1906. Then A. B. Kelly, who had been a burning foreman since 1893, became superintendent until 1913, when he was transferred to the newly acquired Denton plant. Mr. Fling then ran the plant until 1919. John A. Elders who replaced Fling became the Bennett superintendent until 1944.[47] At one time or another, in one capacity or another, the majority of key men in Acme who were tested here later headed production, sales, traffic, or plants. Among these men were: D. J. Stubblefield, Joe P. Hobson, Jess Keahey, Herbert Watson, Charles Sewell, Ray Pafford, W. R. Bennett, W. R. Bennett Jr., Ernest Fender, Ernest Fender Jr., Wythe Poyner, D. J. Shaughnessy, Harland Jones, W. A. Osborne, and Bennett Abercrombie.

Rock Creek supplied water for the plant as subterranean water was too high in mineral content. In the beginning, and for several years thereafter, a steam pump placed in the bank of the creek delivered water for drinking and operating the boilers. Although the pump was protected from floodwaters by retaining brick walls, problems were often encountered in getting it started, since steam lines ran a great distance from the plant boilers to the pump. At any rate, the problem was solved in 1894 by building a small lake just north of the present plant. Topsoil and rock from the first shale pits became the dam for this lake. Large underground cisterns provided drinking water at the plants, but water had to be hauled from the creek for home use until this first lake was made. Eventually,

the plant supplied water for the community that sprang up around the plant.[48]

Sales and supervision personnel were housed in the first Acme office building. Kerosene lamps provided the light, and the telegraph was the main communication link for sales and news. Office equipment consisted of a letterpress; there were no typewriters, computers, adding ma-chines, or telephones. Letters were written with indelible pencil, and if copies were desired, the letter was placed in the letterpress and squeezed against thin copy paper. Such copies could then be read from the reverse side.[49]

Built in 1890, Acme's first office building was located near the Texas-Pacific Railroad tracks at the northeast corner of Bennett, Texas. The office was used until 1907, then abandoned for better quarters in Fort Worth.

Near boom conditions existed from 1890 to 1894 in North Texas, and Fort Worth in particular seemed to share in the prosperity. The city boasted of having seven national banks with a combined capital of $3 million, an eight-story office building (built of Millsap stone), and sixty industries in 1890 as compared to none in 1880. Eleven rail lines served one hundred inbound or outbound trains daily.[50]

And yet North Texas suffered from a shortage of good face brick. Even though Bennett was making his first successful burn of pressed brick, imported pressed brick from St. Louis, Missouri, was used to build a new courthouse in Clarendon, Texas.[51]

Once production began, however, the Bennett plant had more orders than it could fill. Over the next three years Acme built four additional kilns, but production was still slow and uncertain, and the company barely broke even. It was 1894 before Bennett solved one of his most costly problems—fuel. Expensive high-grade coal was used for burning good face brick until he found a way to use cheap "slack," a fine almost pulverized coal.[52] The process was so successful and business so improved that in 1894 Bennett decided to build a new plant across the tracks west of his first plant, exactly where the modern facility is now located.[53]

This new plant, equipped with a six-mold Boyd Press and a two-mold Boyd Press,[54] brought the capacity of the brick plants at Bennett Station[55] to 75,000 bricks a week.[56] Since so much work was done by hand, about three hundred workers were required to keep the operation going. Many workers from the rock quarries came to work for Acme when Bennett bought all the equipment of the defunct Texas Stone Company late in 1892.[57] Farmers from miles around cut and hauled cord wood for the plant and the domestic needs of its employees. Some of these "woodcutters"

Above: Acme Pressed Brick Company's new six mold Boyd press when it was installed in 1894.

Right: Acme Pressed Brick's company store as it appeared in 1900.

lived in tents and dugouts. A few lived in lumber or log houses, which were small—usually two rooms with a hall between, or one large room with a lean-to room for a kitchen.[58]

Immediately after the establishment of the first brick plant, the little village in Rock Creek Valley began to grow. And since accommodations were substandard, Bennett attempted to improve living conditions for Acme employees. His first step was to buy the original commissary owned by the Brownlee quarries, which was called the Lakota Merchandising Company after the Lake family who had bought out the Texas Stone Company in the mid-1880s.[59] Shortly after the completion of the first plant, Bennett constructed a larger commissary just west of the tracks. This commissary supplied the entire neighborhood with almost everything needed—from food and clothes to farm implements, buggies, and wagons, and at a fair price. Ice was shipped in by the carload and stored in sawdust. This building also served as a freight depot, a passenger station, and rural post office.[60] Then, in 1898, a new brick structure was built, which is part of the presently unused company store.[61]

One other main reason for the growth of the town was its distance from any sizable community. Right after finishing the commissary, Bennett built a hotel just west of the present store building. Mr. and Mrs. Dock Cruce managed the hotel and also operated two farms owned by the company.[62] The hotel was a convenience for the single men who had no place to stay, as well as for Mr.

Bennett and other company officials who often came on temporary visits to the plant. Bennett, however, quite often lodged and ate with his workers.

Even as late as 1961, over sixty company-owned houses surrounded the plant property.[63] Today, approximately twenty remain. The company houses were better than the lean-to buildings, tents, and dugouts. At first they were frame structures, but by the 1920s most of them were made of brick. One section, located west of the plant and off the main road to Mineral Wells, was composed entirely of frame structures. It was, however, an uninviting place to live because a southerly or easterly wind blew soot from the plant in its direction. This addition, nicknamed "Smoky Row," was the "live spot" on Saturday nights.[64]

A school became necessary, and a small one was built just north of the company store. But, in 1916, Acme donated land and contributed brick for a new two-story schoolhouse, which was used until the early 1940s. When several local school districts consolidated, the company bought the abandoned building and converted it into apartments for workers.[65]

The third Saturday of each month was a big day at the Acme plant in the 1890s since that was the day Acme paid woodcutters, haulers, and plant employees for the previous month's work. Mr. Bennett brought the bills and silver and gold coins out from Fort Worth to take care of the payroll. Wage rates for adults ranged from sixteen to twenty-one cents an hour. Boys earned five cents an hour as screen beaters and clean-up men.[66] Workers considered wages of $50 a good month's pay.[67]

Loyal employees were rewarded with promotions. John Elders was an exemplary case. Orphaned in 1897 at the age of eight, he worked between school terms, starting as a screen beater (knocking clods and dust through the screens into the grinding machines) and gate tender; he earned a nickel an hour. In 1904, he was promoted to helper on the six-mold press, off-bearing 15,000 bricks a day at ten cents an hour. It meant a big jump in pay for him to move to dry-pan operator that same year and earn a man's pay of sixteen cents.[68] Even in 1914, these rates had not changed much.[69]

Partly because saloon keepers drove out from Mineral Wells to the Bennett settlement on paydays, their buggies loaded with their wares, and partly because bookkeeping was a chore, the company issued its own money. Rather than use script, as the mine operators at Strawn and Thurber were doing, Acme minted soft metal coins called cupies. They were in five cents, ten cents, twen-

ty-five cents, fifty cents, one dollar, and two dollar denominations. All were round except the hexagonal two dollar piece. Cupies were issued against earned wages for use at the store. Nearby farmers accepted them in payment for their produce, as did merchants in Millsap; however, since the merchants devalued their value by 10 percent, few people used them outside Bennett.[70]

Travel was slow and difficult before automobiles came to Bennett in 1912, and most people could not afford a good buggy or wagon, or the time to ride into Mineral Wells. They, therefore, fell back on their own resources for entertainment. Parties and dances within two or three miles of the plant were well attended. Local talent, usually a string band, provided the music for these occasions.[71]

Although hunting, fishing, swimming, along with horse races, foot races, and rodeos provided most men with recreation, the baseball team, which nearly every small town had at the time, was also popular. It competed with teams from the surrounding communities, even as far away as Thurber and Fort Worth. Other men enjoyed a favorite place called "Poker Knob." Here, on this large hill east of the plant, big rocks afforded shelter from the elements, wives, and law officers for those inclined to shoot craps or play poker. But peace officers eventually discovered what was going on and activity declined thereafter.[72]

More respectable and less clandestine social events were horseshoe pitching, croquet contests, church services, and the annual circuses. A notable number of people attended church and Sunday school regularly. Once or twice a year a revival meeting, lasting two or three weeks, gathered crowds for Sunday baptisms and gospel singing. Most Octobers a big circus came to Weatherford, and the station would be packed with people at 4:00 a.m. waiting to catch the train, which would then return them at 11:00 p.m. Frequently, the train would not get them into Bennett until 3:00 the next morning. In spite of such difficulties, people enjoyed trips to the circus because Christmas and July Fourth were the only legal holidays in the community.[73]

To some extent life was regulated by the old steam whistle which, except on Sunday, blew one long blast each morning at five o'clock to wake everyone for miles around. A short warning blast fifteen minutes before starting and quitting time gave notice to the teamsters to hitch up and move their first load of clay to the empty grinders. And the same signal in the afternoon notified them to send their final load to the hoppers before quitting time. One long, one short, one long blast let everyone know it was time to start work or to quit, either in the morning, at noon, or at night. Four long blasts from the whistle called in the superintendent from the pit or farm for

emergencies, or for a telephone call from the Fort Worth office. When electricity replaced steam as the power source, a siren replaced the whistle and could not be heard very far away.[74]

Acme Pressed Brick's baseball team in 1906. They are: Top row (left to right); Jack Robinson, John A. Elders, Tran Wallace, Jim Lowe, Joe Wallace, and Luther Hatfield. Seated (left to right); Nathan Lee, George Lee, John Pollard, Doc Elders, and Joe Cox.

Local farmers such as John Young, who lived a couple of miles away, awoke with the company whistle, did chores around their farms, and ran to work to be there by seven o'clock.[75] Fred Young even swam the Brazos to get to work on time.[76] But the local community had an additional time check each morning when the Texas and Pacific train came rolling through Bennett at 4:00 a.m., blowing its whistle so loudly that it woke up everyone in the village. A few old-timers joke that this accounted for the remarkably large families around Bennett since it was too early to get up and too late to go back to sleep.[77]

The depression in the mid-1890s gripped the nation and hit Fort Worth particularly hard.[78] Acme Brick survived this period, in spite of losses from earlier years. New sources of competition also threatened the company. For years, Bennett had relied on cheap Thurber coal as a source of fuel. Without warning, Colonel R. D. Hunter, who owned the Thurber Coal Company, raised the price fantastically and announced his entry into the brick business.[79] Mrs. Octavia Bennett in a letter to her children explained the problem her husband had to face:

> You see they [Thurber] had the coal and also your father's experience. They also had the clay. Your father was desper-

ate as Col. Hunter would no longer sell that coal to your father at a reasonable price.[80]

But Acme Pressed Brick was saved by the quick and decisive action of its owner. Bennett moved swiftly to buy W. W. Johnson's mines at Strawn and Lyra. Texas and Pacific Coal (under Thurber's ownership) expected to pick these up any time it wished. Its attempt to buy came a few hours late, just after Bennett and Johnson had concluded their agreement. Now Acme could get all the coal it wanted at a more reasonable price.[81]

W. W. Johnson had earlier pioneered the mining of coal at Thurber and had sold out in 1886 to the Texas and Pacific Coal Company, owned by R. D. Hunter and H. K. Thurber. Johnson then moved to Strawn and opened shafts there and opened other mines at Mount Lyra and Mount Marion.[82] In November 1894, he formed the American Coal Mining Company at Strawn with a capital stock of $600,000.[83] It was this company that Bennett, in league with A. J. Roe and William Burton, bought out in March 1897 and incorporated with the Strawn Coal and Mining Company, Strawn, Texas.[84] The Mount Marion Mining Company formed by Johnson was absorbed by Bennett's company and became part of the Strawn Coal Company of Fort Worth on February 21, 1914.[85] Until his death in 1907, Bennett acted as vice president and general manager for the Strawn Coal and Mining Company.[86]

Bennett's battle with Hunter and Thurber proved to be a prolonged one. In February 1897, Hunter brought down L. M. Ramsey and James Green, the owners of the Leclede Fire Clay Works, from St. Louis. They tested Thurber clay and found it to be excellent for drainpipes, roof and floor tiles, and pressed and vitrified brick. The same factors that had enabled Bennett to be successful also aided Hunter. A recent decision by the federal government to use only shale brick drew Hunter into the brick business.[87] So the Green and Hunter Brick Company was incorporated in March 1897, with a capital stock of $100,000 and, by the end of the summer, was producing good brick day and night from its new, well-equipped facilities. Although bought out in 1900 by the Texas and Pacific Coal Company, under the leadership of Hunter who was a large stockholder, the plant operated under the Green and Hunter banner for three years.[88]

Later, the above organization, known as the Thurber Brick Company, advertised their product as the best brick on the market and supplied brick for many important jobs around the state.[89] In July 1899, in addition to the tile, face brick, and other vitrified brick he already manufactured, Hunter began producing paving brick on a large scale.[90] By the 1920s Thurber was making only

Postcard dated June 13, 1899 from George Bennett to his Strawn, Texas coal mines. Bennett's use of slack coal from these mines, in which he was part owner, created a temporary vertical organization that saved his brick company from being driven bankrupt by his Thurber Brick Company competitors. Contributed by Charles Senning, DeSoto, Texas.

paving brick; however, because of this specialization, in spite of very large clay reserves, the company did not survive past 1930. Even with a nationwide reputation and a beautiful product, its market gradually fell off. Good examples of the durability of Thurber brick are still to be found in the walls around the Fort Worth stock yards[91] and the old smoke stack at Thurber. These are now monuments to the enterprise.

Comparisons of Thurber and Acme Brick (frequently called Rock Creek Millsap brick) were constantly made with the aid of geological and clay products studies. In spite of touted claims that Thurber was larger and made the better brick, most tests showed the pressed brick Acme made at Bennett to be superior in several categories, particularly in low water absorption and shrinkage. Acme Bennett brick usually burned red, grey, or a dark color, while the Thurber brick burned almost blue and usually a deep maroon.[92]

Competition between the two companies remained stiff until Hunter's retirement in 1903. Then his son-in-law, E. L. Marston, ran the business a little less harshly and restored better relations with the Thurber coal miners and brickworkers.[93] Since Acme did not experience labor strife during George Bennett's tenure as president, it could take advantage of labor strikes at Thurber.

In July 1901, for the first time, Bennett advertised Acme Pressed Brick Company in a journal for the manufacturers of high-grade pressed brick, common brick, and face and ornamental brick. He listed some of the buildings that had been constructed with Acme brick over the past ten years. This list included such Dallas buildings as the Texas and Pacific Office Building, McCormick Office Building, Union Depot, Santa Fe Depot, Avery Building, and Maroney Building; Sherman churches and factories; the Paris Federal Courthouse and Post Office; and the Bowie Courthouse and jail. The advertisement ended with these cryptic words: "All buildings of any consequence that have been built in Plano, Greenville, Terrell, Waxahachie, Ennis, Corsicana, Hillsboro, and Fort Worth for the past seven years have been built of these brick."[94]

Workers outside a large updraft kiln at Bennett in 1908. This was the crew that worked during the strike of that year.

Yet Acme did not receive a single really big order until Fort Worth began to boom, which did not happen until the city became a meat-packing center. Since the 1870s the city had struggled to become a "Cow Town": first, by welcoming trail drivers and later, because cattle were being shipped from Fort Worth by rail.[95] Finally, after a decade of trial and error, the Union Stockyards opened in January 1890 and began processing meat.[96] But this venture did not turn out as expected, and, during the next decade, Fort Worth despaired of becoming a leading packing center. Ultimately, the city did gain the cooperation of Armour and Swift and became the "greatest packing house center of the Southwest."[97]

When, at 11:35 p.m. Monday night, October 7, 1901, citizens of Fort Worth finally raised enough money ($100,600) to assure that Armour and Swift would establish a huge packing plant in the city,[98] they also assured Acme's survival. The new buildings required so many bricks that no one company could supply the job. William Bryce, a well-known builder, was awarded the contract to erect the packing houses. Although he owned the Denton Pressed Brick Company, Bryce sublet the largest portion to Acme and accompanied George Bennett to Millsap for the inspection of the plant and the selection of his brick.[99]

A view of the Acme Pressed Brick Company's plant at Millsap (Bennett), looking toward the northeast in 1902. Note the mule-drawn cart trudging from the shale pits to the material shed at the rear of the factory.

This was really the first big rush order Acme had ever received, and the Bennett plant really came alive. Previously, production of two million bricks per year was considered pretty good business, but workers had never dreamed of an order of two million *a month*.[100] In order to meet the demand, both the old and the new plants had to operate day and night. Without electricity, normal brick production was limited to daylight hours, but the working day was extended from sunrise to sunset by adding three to five extra hours to the normal ten-hour work day. Even so, the repair work—removing platen from the top of burned brick, laying platen on top of "green" brick, and building and removing doorways to the kilns—was done at night by the light of coal oil torches.[101]

John Elders recalled that the workers resembled coal miners, since the smoke from the torches blackened their faces and hands. And he also remembered getting as much work as he wanted—a total of three hundred and six hours in one month. This was prior to time-and-a-half and double-time pay; the twelve-year-old screen beater earned $15.30 for his month's wages.[102]

Acme and Denton supplied the materials and construction on the packing plants, which went up quickly. Work began in January 1902, and the cornerstone was laid three months later.[103] But building did not stop there, and new additions over the next decade kept both brick companies busy.[104] The temporary partnership of Bennett and Bryce developed into a working agreement, each helping the other when and where he could. Eventually this cooperative spirit, which lasted long after Bennett's death, became the basis for a merger in 1912.[105]

George Bennett, founder of Acme Brick.

Despite his success in the brick business, after 1903 George Bennett devoted more and more time to his coal interests.[106] His plant superintendents, Conway and Wells, increasingly shouldered operating burdens at the brick plants. Bennett formed the Strawn Merchandising Company in 1904 and moved his family to Strawn in 1906.[107] Here his son, Walter Root Bennett, learned both the mining and brick business. Walter took a great interest in brickmaking and soon became the manager at Bennett under his father's tutelage.[108]

In time, Walter was chosen to run the company's affairs. A. K. Root had died July 13, 1906,[109] and his sons had taken no interest in the brick business, even though the Root family still held a considerable amount of stock.[110] The decision to have Walter head up the company was made none too soon, for Mr. Bennett himself died a little less than a year after A. K. Root.

George Bennett was busy to the very end of his life. Being an active Mason, he had been made a Master Mason in September 1902, at Fort Worth Lodge No. 148, and over the next two years took both the York and Scottish Rites.[111] He was also a member of the Elks for many years and an enthusiastic supporter of nearly every Fort Worth improvement program.[112]

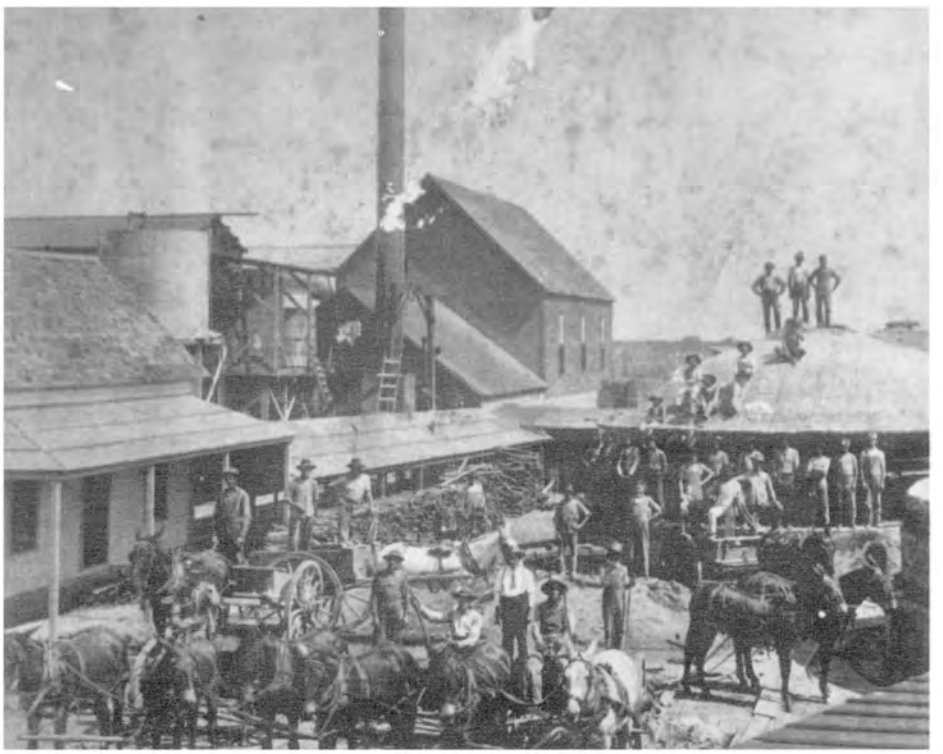
His life in Texas had begun in Galveston a little over thirty years before and ended there on July 3, 1907. Late in June 1907, en route to Galveston from Fort Worth on a business trip, he became ill two days into the trip. His stomach had been giving him trouble before he left, but no one thought it a serious matter. George Bennett died in a Galveston hospital Wednesday evening, July 3,[113] and was returned to Fort Worth and given a Masonic funeral July 5, 1907.[114]

Bennett was not quite fifty-five years old when he died. He had, however, accomplished most of his life goals—and more. Having wrenched success from failure, he left three operating businesses to his heirs, which would soon be worth more than a million dollars each. All three concerns lasted longer than their nearest competitors, for the Strawn Merchandising Company, which still exists, became the largest company of its kind in West Texas during the early 1920s;[115] the Strawn Coal Company, the largest coal business in Texas, survived two decades longer than its rival at Thurber;[116] and Acme Brick Company grew into the largest face

Workers pause for their photograph to be taken circa 1900 before resuming their task of shoveling coal into one of the huge updraft kilns for burning pressed brick. The man seated to the left (two children to his right) is A. B. Kelly. Later, Kelly would be superintendent of a number of Acme brick plants.

brick company in America today.[117] Lending truth to Emerson's statement that "an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man," Bennett's exemplary public and private life set a standard for his successors.[118] As a businessman, he established a tradition of honest business practices, fair labor policies, high-quality workmanship, lasting friendships, and ethical principles that from its earliest days, gave Acme its enviable reputation. As a leader, his energy and sound decisions set the pace for other Acme executives that came after him. As an entrepreneur, his innovations and imaginative actions gave a character to his company that it still reflects. As a brickmaker, Bennett pioneered new techniques of manufacture, met and beat the market odds, and established the first successful face brick company in the Southwest.

Finally, as a citizen, Bennett's interest in brickmaking created the little town southwest of Millsap that bears his name and imprint. Visiting his community today is like stepping back at least eighty years into the era of the company town. The hotel is gone, as are most of the houses, the depot, and the old plant. But his spirit is still there—present in the company store, the lake, the superintendent's home, the workers' houses, and the ever present limestone hills, silent sentinels guarding a valley of enterprise.



3

The First Expansion and Reorganization

Shortly after George Bennett's death, stockholders held a meeting at Alton, Illinois, in order to determine the fate of Acme Pressed Brick. Young Walter R. Bennett, after securing many proxy votes, including those of his mother, traveled from Texas to the meeting, which was held on August 20, 1907.[1] Although his age disability had been legally removed a year before so that he might manage the Millsap plant, young Bennett had not yet turned twenty-one. In spite of the fact that he had been thoroughly trained by his father—he "grew up on the brickyard," and he had actually run the business for over a year—the Illinois stockholders decided that an older, steadier hand was needed at the helm. They, therefore, elected Ralph S. Root, the youngest son of A. K. Root, to the presidency and sent him to Fort Worth to take charge.[2] Bennett was made vice president and general manager.[3]

Above: Mr. Ralph Root, President of Acme Brick from 1907 to 1917.

Left: Views of the Denton pressed brick plant in 1907.

Ralph Sellew Root, president of Acme Pressed Brick from 1907 to 1916, was a strikingly handsome man in his late thirties when he came to Fort Worth. Well-educated, suave, accustomed to money and country club living, Root immediately built himself a fine home in the Riverside addition, joined the proper social groups, and moved the company office from Bennett to Fort Worth.[4] Earlier, he had married Cynthia Hope, the daughter of Illinois Judge Alexander Hope, and they had two children, Hope and Ralph Eaton.[5] Apparently not thrilled at being hurried off to Texas, Root spent very little time at the brick plant and only a half-day at the office.[6] He spent most of his time selling brick by telephone, signing the reports sent to him, or approving customer orders. His most active years seem to have been from 1911 to 1913. Thereafter, his name appears less and less frequently on company papers. He left the company in January 1916.[7]

Meanwhile, Walter Bennett struggled to keep the company alive. The Panic of 1907 had hit just before his father's death, and business slowed considerably.[8] In response, Acme curtailed the Bennett plant output and laid off some workers. Angered by economic developments, layoffs, and wage cuts, the plant workers

went on strike in 1908.[9] Bennett's reaction was one of dismay, even disillusionment. How could he face such difficulties? Markets were shrinking so greatly that he simply could not comply with his workers' demands. Discouraged, he closed the plant.

A long stalemate ensued in which both workers and owners suffered. Eventually enough young men were secured from around the immediate countryside to reopen the Bennett plant in 1909. But, even then, the production schedule was highly erratic since most of those workers were also farmers who could not work full time until their crops were "laid by." Unfortunately, much of the building season corresponded to the planting and harvesting season.[10]

Unions have never been very popular with independent farmers, and this instance of local farm labor breaking the union at Bennett serves as a good example of such sentiment. Local people looked upon unions as intruders. They viewed the brick plant as partly their own—a neighbor in trouble, and neighbors helped one another. This attitude has been responsible for keeping the Bennett plant "unorganized" since that time, in spite of major attempts every decade to unionize.[11] Today, the unions have in effect written off the prospects of unionization there.[12]

Company animal barn at Bennett in 1910. This barn was located northeast of the brick plant near the Texas and Pacific rail line where coal could be unloaded from railroads into carts. Mules were used until the late 1920s at Bennett for hauling shale, brick, and other material well after the plant itself was electrified.

Hardly had the crisis of a strike passed than another had to be faced. Irregular production during 1908–1909, along with a recession, had almost killed the Acme Pressed Brick Company, and the next year proved to be bad also. So in the fall of 1910 Acme closed down production. Walter Bennett took an inventory, locked the plant office, left the keys with the timekeeper, J. E. Fender, at the company store (the Lakota Merchandise Company) and returned to Fort Worth seeking a buyer—not for bricks, but for a brick plant.[13]

Several weeks passed and nothing developed. Then, one day in December, a Texas Pacific train made an unscheduled stop at Bennett. From the time George Bennett had borrowed a handcar and explored for clay, Acme and the Texas and Pacific had maintained friendly relations. Now this friendship really benefited Acme. The train conductor knew of the company's plight and stopped to inform Ernest Fender that a West Texas town, Midland, had been almost completely destroyed by fire and needed building materials desperately.[14] Fender realized that if he got there fast he could sell a lot of brick, perhaps enough to put the plant back into full production.

Wasting no time, Fender walked to Millsap, got a banker to lend him enough money for expenses, returned to Bennett nearly exhausted, ran into the store, grabbed a pencil and writing tablet, and caught a fast freight headed west. He returned with a tremendous order,[15] and talked to Plant Superintendent A. B. Kelly, who in turn spoke with the workers. Enough men were secured from around the village to reopen the plant, and its kiln fires were roaring brightly when Walter Bennett came out to see what had happened.[16] Thoroughly pleased, Bennett placed Fender in charge of sales. For the two men it was the beginning of a lifelong friendship, and for Acme the start toward a growing sales organization.

Although Acme Pressed Brick Company had gradually extended its sales territory to all of North Texas, at that time it had a sales office only in Fort Worth.[17] Fender's success in selling such a large order under those special circumstances showed Bennett that a stronger, more aggressive sales force might keep Acme in continuous operation. This, in turn, would provide more stable employment for his workers, lessen the possibility of market unrest, and give the company a better income. Up until this point, salesmen had been merely order takers.[18] Consequently, the plant never knew what to produce until an order was received. As Fender and others realized, if Acme had a greater variety of products to offer, the salesmen would sell even more.

William Bryce, owner of Denton Pressed Brick and later a president of Acme Brick Company.

The opportunity to add variety came in December 1910, when William Bryce offered to sell his Denton operation to Acme. Perhaps this idea resulted from Bennett's and Bryce's original discussion about the proposed sale of Acme Pressed Brick. Bryce had long been a close friend of George Bennett, and the two had several of the same business partners and interests—Willard Burton, W. E. Guthrie, A. E. Newell, for example.[19] As a builder, Bryce used Acme brick as well as his Denton brick, and he was the kind of man who helped many other young men in business.[20] Maybe the Denton works also had experienced difficulties during the poor construction cycle; perhaps these were the reasons he decided to sell.

At any rate, Bryce wanted a flat cash amount which Bennett and Root declared they could not raise. Finally Bryce offered to settle for stock in the new company that would be formed.[21] Acme accepted the terms, but it required over a year to negotiate a settlement with other stockholders and nearby landowners. Ultimately, Acme was recapitalized at $150,000. To raise the $60,000 in cash needed to complete the refinancing, Acme negotiated a loan from Elmo Sledd, a prominent Fort Worth banker. On January 6, 1912, William Bryce, president, and W. E. Guthrie, secretary-treasurer of Denton Press Brick, signed the papers finalizing Acme's first external expansion.[22]

The new Denton plant was located about one mile south of the public square where the city of Denton had been founded on January 10, 1857.[23] It was situated on land that had been granted to a veteran of the Texas Revolution who lost his land grant during reconstruction and regained it in 1878.[24] Subsequently, the land changed hands several times; it had not been until just before the turn of the century that any one had realized how valuable property was as a source of clay. Then a local plant began to produce crude, common brick of a beautiful color.[25]

Soon Coffeyville Vitrified Brick and Tile, of Coffeyville, Kansas, built a dry-press plant about one-third of a mile north of the present Acme plant. This firm, however, failed to tap the potential of the clay and closed about 1905. Shortly afterwards, the Coffeyville plant was dismantled. When Acme bought the site, old kiln walls, boiler settings, shafting, pulleys, and an old boiler were all that remained. These too disappeared by World War I, for the old bricks were sold as backup material and the metal for scrap to aid the war effort.[26] Finally, in 1925, the Kansas concern sold the last of this land to Acme.[27]

While engaged in building a structure at Denton in 1900, William Bryce, one of the South's leading contractors at the time, had

become interested enough to examine the rare clay deposits there. Wishing to develop these resources, he organized the Denton Press Brick Company in 1901.[28] Bryce's main associates were A. E. Newell, W. C. Weeks, and Scott Wilson, who later became Acme stockholders and friends of George Bennett. This company soon began to produce a distinctive, light-colored, dry-pressed brick at a capacity of a little over one million bricks per month.[29]

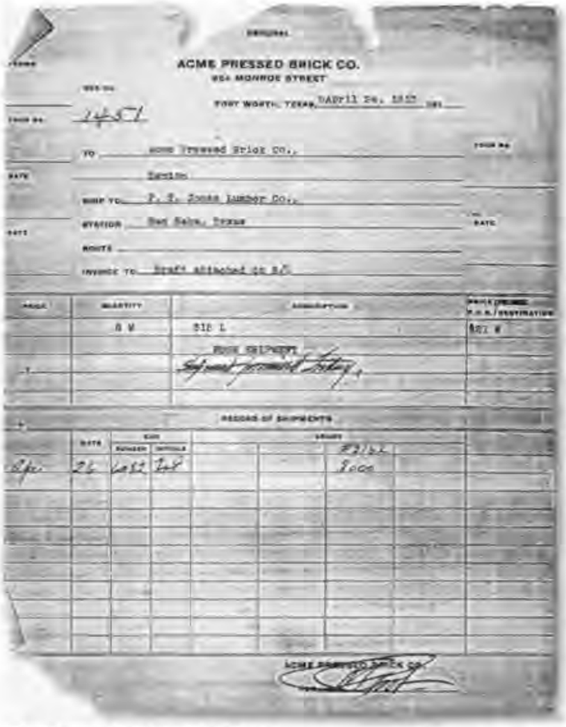
Denton brick found a ready market. For over two years after Acme's purchase, no particular changes were made in the Denton plant. Neither Henry Brandenburges, superintendent in 1912, nor his successors, Bret Thetford and W. M. Whalen, did much more than keep the plant running.[30] But this they did, producing about 40 million bricks in the period from 1912 to 1914.[31] Such production pressure without good maintenance was bound to take its toll, and in January 1914, the plant was shut down for extensive repairs. Indeed, the new superintendent in charge of the renovations said it took nearly three years to "put it in jam-up, first class shape." And just when it was finished "and running good . . . it caught fire and burned completely."[32]

Superintendent A. B. Kelly called W. R. Bennett at six o'clock the morning following the fire and told him about the disaster. Bennett caught the next train to Denton, and upon arrival at the plant he walked around, looked at the tangled, smoldering ruins and said, "Kelly, we will build her bigger and better than ever."[33] And this they did. Within sixty days the Denton plant was back into production. The "new" Denton, however, was still a dry-press plant. But plans for stiff-mud conversion were already being talked about while the rebuilding was going on, and in 1918 stiff-mud machinery was installed.[34] From that day forward, the Denton plant was destined to take its place as one of the best face brick plants in Texas.[35]

Mr. H. L. Frost, General Manager of Bryce's Denton Pressed Brick at the time of it's merger with Acme Pressed Brick.

In the meantime, important modernizations had occurred at the Bennett plant. Nine months after the Denton purchase, the Bennett plant ceased making dry-press brick, and started conversion to stiff-mud operations under the combined direction of Bennett, L. E. Rogers of the Rogers Engineering Company of Chicago, and Roy G. Smith, who was to become vice president of production. By the end of December 1913, the conversion had been completed.[36]

In anticipation of the merger and the need for coordination between two plants seventy-five miles apart, Acme finished moving its offices from Millsap to Fort Worth in 1911. The new offices at 824 Monroe, a one-room affair, housed a staff composed of Ralph Root, Walter R. Bennett, J. E. Fender, and a Mrs. Johnston.[37] About the same time, the sales force in Dallas was strengthened by the addition of Locksley Fife, who, from then on,


ACME PRESSED BRICK CO.
FORT WORTH, TEXAS
TO
SHIP TO
STATION
ROUTE
INVOICE TO
QUANTITY
RECORD OF SHIPMENTS

A shipment order that Acme president Ralph Root handled in 1913. Note the $21 per thousand price.

devoted his life to selling Acme brick or otherwise serving the company.[38] Daniel J. Shaughnessy also continued in Fort Worth for a time, but went to Bennett in June of 1911 to replace J. E. Fender, who had moved into the sales department at Fort Worth. Shaughnessy worked as a shipping clerk at Bennett and a year later came back to Fort Worth. Shortly afterwards, Roy G. Smith was hired as a production manager to oversee changes and operations at both the Denton and Bennett plants.[39] With Smith's right-hand man, A. B. Kelly, acting as a supervisor on stiff-mud installations, modernization proceeded rapidly.

Experiments with stiff-mud machinery had been going on for the past fifty years, but little progress was made until adequate power for driving the required machinery was developed.[40] At the time George Bennett founded his company, dry press was the most modern and economical method of making face brick because this operation required no dryers and less fuel to turn machinery and burn the brick. But stiff-mud brick production had its advantages too, once fuel and power sources were improved. For one thing, more brick could be made by establishing a more continuous operation. Furthermore, varying the shale mixtures would more easily produce several shades and textures, and changing die settings made it possible to produce new shapes and types of brick.

Converting to the stiff-mud process required considerable changes in the Bennett plant, but some aspects of production remained unchanged for some time. For example, the mining of shale was the same until the late 1920s, and plants still used coal and wood as fuels until around 1920. Loading and shading functions were to go much longer without essential method changes. In short, the beginning and end processes would be the same for many years to come.[41]

But it was the middle process, forming and burning brick, that changed most spectacularly when stiff-mud operations began under the direction of Superintendent Fling in 1912. This new method called for the shale to be ground as fine as cornmeal, then coarse screened and carried high into an elevator. There, the shale was allowed to fall through another finer screen. After the second screening, the powdered shale was carried to the pug mill by conveyers. Here, water was mixed into the dust by a series of blades; and when the mixture became a mud of proper consis-

tency, it was forced through a mold of the desired size so that a continuous column of clay emerged from the machine onto a moving belt. Wire cutters then sliced the ribbon of clay into bricks of the desired length, which off-bearers separated by hand and stacked onto steel transfer cars.[42]

Worker is shown loading brick into boxcars by wheelbarrow at the Bennett plant in 1910. This method was used to load cars until the fork-lift came into use.

From there, the steel cars, loaded with the "green" brick, were placed one at a time in the single dryer shaft, where the heat increased gradually from low to high from one end to the other. Then the car entered the dryer tunnel at the end of low temperature and by progression, passed through the shaft, finally reaching maximum temperature before it was shoved out by succeeding cars. After the brick was thoroughly dried, it was removed, cooled, and taken to the kilns for burning. While the brick remained in the downdraft kiln for nine to eleven days, being subjected to a maximum temperature of 1800 degrees Fahrenheit, a burning foreman carefully watched over the process and maintained proper fires for burning the brick to the desired color and hardness. After this was achieved, workers removed the door walls on the kiln, allowed the brick to cool, and then moved the brick to a shader, who removed the culls, selected and graded the various types, and otherwise prepared the brick for market by either stacking it on the yard or loading it for shipment.[43] The movement of the brick seemed endless, for it was repeatedly being handled by workers in the following sequential processes: off-bearing, unloading dryer cars, stacking in kilns, removing from kilns, blending when desired, selecting, stacking on the yard, and loading in carts or boxcars.

Prior to adopting this method, only eight basic types of brick had been made at the Millsap plant.[44] With the conversion to stiff-mud these types numbered at least a hundred,[45] ranging from light red (Millsap Red) to almost black (Acme No. 113). The variety increased even more when Bob Goen invented the texture process.[46] As long as the Denton plant was dry-press, it produced only seven types: smooth vitrified, Aztec A, Aztec B, Aztec AB, Denton light Flemish, Denton dark bronze, and Denton dark fire flashed. These bricks, however, were far superior to those made by a nearby competitor, Denton Brick and Tile.[47] Denton fire brick found customers everywhere in Texas, including the Thurber Brick works, the Millsap Plant, and several other brickmakers who did not produce a marketable fire clay product.[48]

Some of the orders and instructions received during this period were unique. For example the order from Abbott and Abbott at Hillsboro totaled 35,000 bricks on February 28, 1913. That firm

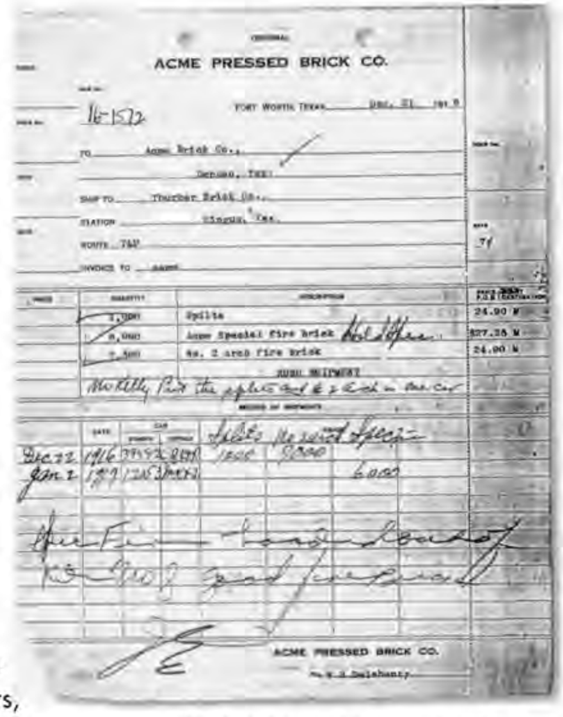
requested Acme to "ship a nice lot of 330s and be sure that the entire shipment is alike. Dust the sand from the brick." Another order for 720 bricks was received the month before, with instructions to "pack in barrels and ship promptly 600 stringers and 120 headers, via M. K. & T."[49] Such orders must have given headaches to shipping foremen Shaughnessy and Elders, but still Acme tried to satisfy the smallest as well as the largest customers.[50]

Denton Plant work force in 1914. Note the faded sign on the sales building shows that fire brick was produced at this facility.

Acme's acquisitions and modernizations soon led to the need for more office space. The one-room office was overcrowded. So, early in 1913, the headquarters was moved to the tenth floor of the First National Bank Building at Seventh and Main. Two rooms were rented, one for display and one for clerical work. Over the next six years, Acme expanded and leased every vacated room that became available. Then in 1919, the company rented the entire third floor of the new Neil P. Anderson Building.[51] Acme remained here until 1952, when it moved into a new four-story office building of its own on West Seventh Street.[52] Company growth necessitated the hiring of more personnel and the further delegation of duties. One valuable addition to the office force came in 1913 when a young man named W. T. Johnson applied for the position of stenographer.[53] Orphaned at an early age, he and his sister had been raised at the Odd Fellows Orphans Home

in Corsicana. Lacking funds until he drew his first pay check, "Little John" Johnson wore hand-me-down trousers that were much too short and high-topped shoes.[54] He was "quiet beyond description" but worked very hard, and in 1920 he became Acme's first official credit manager.[55]

W. H. Delehanty, another notable person, joined the office staff about the same time and replaced the secretary, Mrs. Johnston, who had retired. Delehanty, a New Englander, had previously worked for the Locomobile Company and as regional sales supervisor for General Acoustics Company. It was not unusual for Easterners to view Texas as the state of opportunity during the first three decades of the twentieth century, and Delehanty was no exception. At first he worked as a secretary, then as purchasing agent for several years, and finally became an officer of the company serving as auditor and sales manager. Since departmentalization was incomplete for several years, Delehanty handled everything from telephone calls to individual plant orders, including the expediting of major correspondence for the company.[56]


ACME PRESSED BRICK CO.
FORT WORTH, TEXAS
TO Acme Brick Co.,
SHIP TO Thurber Brick Co.,
Splits
Acme Special fire brick
ACME PRESSED BRICK CO.

W. H. Delehanty, the new controller, signed this shipping order for Acme in 1913. This order was for Acme's old rival Thurber Brick Co. who needed fire brick to produce their paving brick. This high quality fire brick cost $2.35 per thousand more than common face brick.

Still another new employee was added to the Acme sales force in August 1915. Carlisle Martin became the company's first branch manager when he opened the San Antonio office in 1916. He was a brother of Mrs. J. E. Fender. Apparently, some of Mr. Fender's sales enthusiasm rubbed off on him, for Martin became one of the company's best salesmen.[57] After a short interval, during which he operated his own brick plant in Oklahoma, he sold out to Acme and rejoined the firm as a salesman.[58]

The climax of all these changes occurred in 1916, when Acme Pressed Brick Company underwent a complete reorganization. The entire character and operational methods of the company had changed considerably since its founding twenty-six years earlier. As a result of the Denton merger and subsequent redistribution of the company stock, its ownership also had changed. Formerly, the company stock had been divided about fifty-fifty between the Bennett and Root families, with the Bennetts having a slight majority. After the Denton merger, the Bennett interest constituted exactly one-third, the Bryce interest slightly less, and the Root interest slightly less than Bryce's stockholdings. The remaining 7 percent was scattered among other company officers and Illinois stockholders. Root's activity in the company had been on the wane for some time, and he had sold part

of his stock already. The result of all this was that, at a stockholders' meeting held on March 22, 1916, President and Chairman of the Board Ralph S. Root called for discussion of the advisability of revising the company's by-laws and incorporating such changes as would "best suit conditions of the company today." Bennett and Bryce were asked to draw up specific proposals and their recommendations were approved at the next meeting.[59]

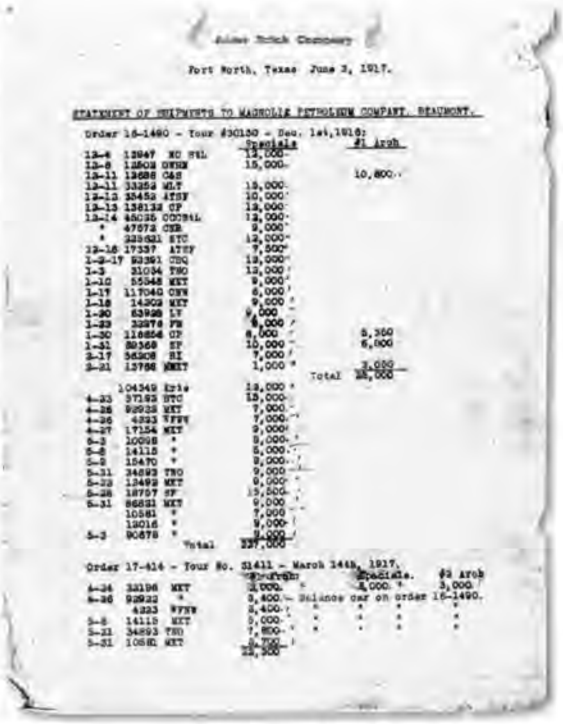
One of their suggestions called for removing the technical headquarters from Alton, Illinois, to Fort Worth, Texas, and for changing the company name. Upon final approval by both stockholders and directors at Alton, Illinois, on April 13, 1916, Acme Pressed Brick elected new officers and applied for a Texas charter.[60] The secretary of state granted Acme Brick Company its charter on April 29, 1916. Eleven days later, Acme Pressed Brick officials signed the papers approving actions of its new president and dissolved the old company.[61] Not only had the word "Pressed" been eliminated but also the Illinois interests had been purchased.[62]

Stockholders elected Walter R. Bennett the first president of Acme Brick Company, just as George Bennett had been the first president of Acme Pressed Brick. Walter proved to be a greater business genius than his father. Although only twenty-nine years old, he had had ten years of executive experience in the brick business, had gone through many frustrating experiences in the earlier years of the company, had served as general manager, and had contributed to Acme's success.

His demeanor and training marked him as a potential leader, for he was a quiet man, even-tempered, and energetic. His education, both formal and informal, made him fit to play a leading role when, as was certain to happen, Acme ultimately became involved in national and world trade. While only a child, Walter frequently went with his father to the brick plant; and, as Walter grew older, he worked at every task at the plant.[63] He customarily spent each summer there, but, when he was fifteen, his father sent him on an extraordinary world trip. He went first to the Far East and worked with an uncle who was an engineer and an explorer.[64] After spending nearly a year in Siam, he returned to Europe in 1902, visiting India, the Near East, the Mediterranean area, and Latin countries en route to England.[65] Shortly thereafter, he returned to the United States and went to work for his father.[66]

In the interval between his return and his father's untimely death, Walter also learned the coal business, but he knew and loved brickmaking better. When his father died, the family interests were split; Walter had dropped the coal business and devoted himself exclusively to brickmaking when he was made vice presi-

dent and general manager of Acme Pressed Brick Company. Because of his choice both the consumer and brickmaking benefited. For while the Texas coal industry died in the 1920s,[67] Bennett made tremendous strides in producing brick of remarkable colors, blends, texture, strength, durability, and overall beauty. Under his open-minded leadership, dozens of new types of brick and tile were developed and patented.[68] Bennett borrowed ideas from wherever he could and encouraged his employees in both sales and production to do the same. Somehow Bennett and Acme put ideas and effort together for a winning combination. It was Bennett's forward-looking strategy and expansionist ideas that set patterns for the company, perhaps for the rest of its history. Furthermore, the basic organizational structure, which he adopted soon after becoming the company president, lasted into the 1960s, and even then it could not be scrapped completely.[69]



Acme Brick Company

Fort Worth, Texas June 3, 1917.

STATEMENT OF SHIPMENTS TO MAGNOLIA PETROLEUM COMPANY, BEAUMONT.

Order 16-1490 - Your #30130 - Dec. 1st, 1916:

			Specials		#1 Arch
12-4	12947	[illegible]	12,000		
12-8	12502	[illegible]	15,000		
12-11	12688	C&S			10,800
12-11	33253	MLT	12,000		
12-12	35452	ATSF	10,000		
12-13	138132	CP	12,000		
12-14	45035	[illegible]	12,000		
"	47572	CNR	9,000		
"	225621	STC	12,000		
12-16	17337	ATSF	7,500		
1-2-17	93391	CBQ	12,000		
1-3	31034	TNO	12,000		
1-10	55548	MKT	9,000		
1-17	117040	CNW	6,000		
1-18	14202	MKT	9,000		
1-20	63928	LT	9,000		
1-23	32278	PB	6,000		
1-30	118854	CP	8,000		5,300
1-31	89368	SF	10,000		6,000
2-17	56208	RI	7,000		
2-21	13766	MKT	1,000		3,000
				Total	25,000
	104349	Erie	12,000		
4-23	37193	STC	12,000		
4-26	92932	MKT	7,000		
4-26	4223	TPNY	7,000		
4-27	17154	MKT	9,000		
5-3	10098	"	9,000		
5-8	14115	"	5,000		
5-9	15470	"	9,000		
5-11	34893	TNO	9,000		
5-22	12492	MKT	9,000		
5-28	18757	SF	15,500		
5-31	86821	MKT	9,000		
	10581	"	7,000		
	12016	"	9,000		
5-3	90878	"	9,000		
		Total	237,000		

Order 17-414 - Your No. 31411 - March 14th, 1917.

			#2 Arch		Specials.	#3 Arch
4-24	32196	MKT	2,000		2,000	3,000
4-26	92922	"	3,400	Balance car on order 16-1490.		
	4223	TPNY	3,400	"	"	"
5-8	14115	MKT	5,000	"	"	"
5-11	34893	TNO	7,800	"	"	"
5-31	10581	MKT	2,700			
			23,300			

A statement of shipments to Magnolia Petroleum Company, Beaumont, from Denton over a four month period. Note the number of different rail cars used.

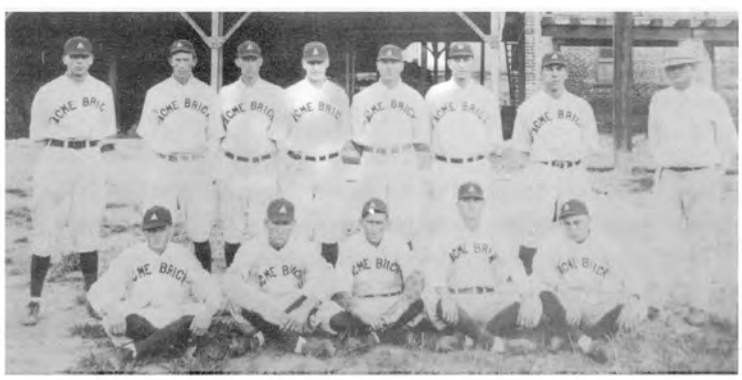
Bennett's enthusiasm for brick was shared by members of his family. His wife, the former Ethel Evarts, daughter of a prominent Fort Worth merchant and livestock dealer,[70] became active as a member of Acme's Board of Directors seven years after her husband's death.[71] The couple had three children: two girls, Lena and Ethyl, and one son, Walter.[72] Their daughter Ethyl and her husband, Dr. Fred Rehfeldt, took an active interest in company affairs, and W. R. Bennett Jr., who worked for Acme from youth to retirement, served as assistant to the vice president in charge of production during the 1970s.

Walter Bennett's energy and determination seemed boundless once he gained command of the Acme ship following Ralph Root's departure in 1916. He revamped and rebuilt the Denton plant just in time to get into World War I production, and restructured the finances and organization of his new company. Immediately after his election, Bennett began to open branch sales offices, first in San Antonio, then in Houston, and in West Texas. Acme stock was recapitalized twice before 1920, bringing it from $150,000 to $600,000.[73]

World War I left Acme and many other industries short of labor and short of markets because demand declined with the termination of institutional and military construction. Thus little could be done until after the great conflict ended.[74]

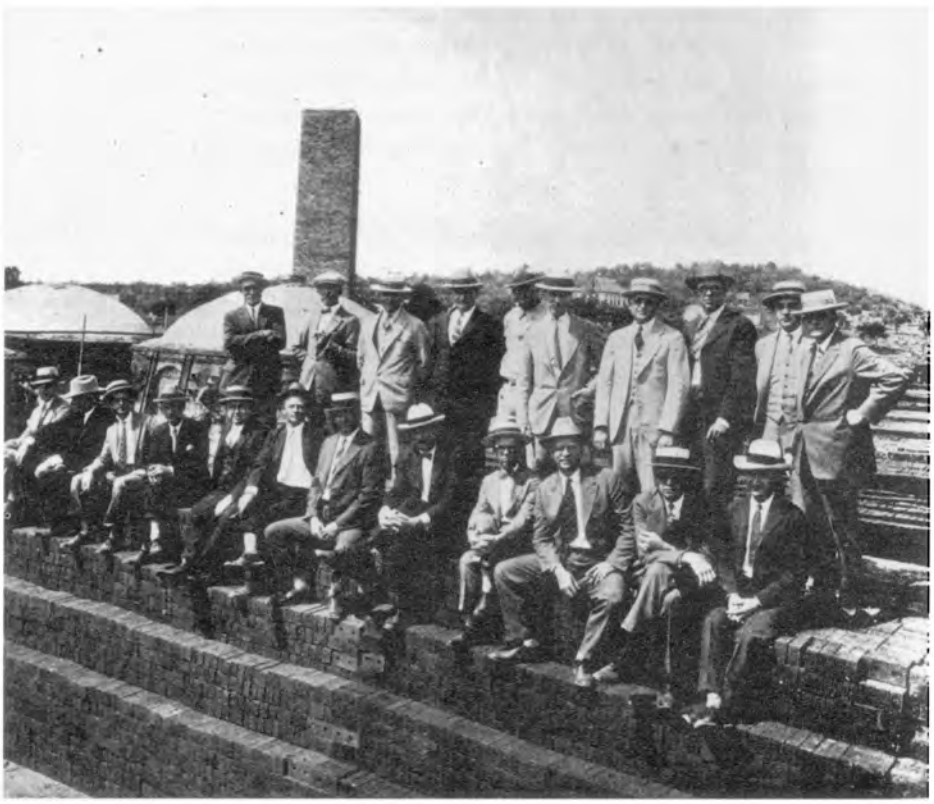
Above: The Bennett plant just after electrification in 1919. Notice the buildings just above the plant include housing, a school, and a hotel.

Right: Acme's baseball team in 1919.



But during World War I, Acme did its part for America's war effort. Bennett and Fender became "dollar-a-year men."[75] Old equipment was sold for scrap, and the company bought large amounts of savings bonds; it also made payroll deductions available to employees who wished to use this method to buy war bonds and stamps.[76] Acme supplied brick for many key industries, and military bases—Camp Bowie among them.[77] Most of the young male employees, such as Johnson, Delehanty, and Martin, joined the service.[78] Acme's war taxes amounted to $45,535.95, a sum that was promptly paid. Just before the war ended, Bennett ordered the Denton plant converted to the stiff-mud process. Acme had done its part, now it was getting ready for the "peace and plenty" of the 1920s.[79]

Much had been accomplished during the previous dozen years: Acme had withstood the vicissitudes of strikes, and shutdowns, the loss of its founder, the destruction of its plants by fire and flood, reorganizations, and modernization. It emerged a stronger company with two of the sixteen operating face brick plants in the state[80] and with stronger leaders, alliances, and an organization that would be the precursor to its unrivaled enterprise of the next decade.



4

Plants from Texas to Arkansas and Oklahoma

Following Germany's surrender in 1918, Texas and the rest of the nation entered a tremendous boom period in spite of the sharp rises and declines of 1919–1921. By almost any economic indicator, urbanization and industrialization of the state had been phenomenal during the preceding three decades. Now, while Congress debated the merits of signing the peace treaty and joining the League of Nations, officials of Acme Brick, like most of the nation's business leaders, talked of a return to normalcy and prosperity.

Left: Walter R. Bennett, son of the founder George Bennett, (standing first from the right) showed a group of prospective buyers how brick was made at the Bennett plant in the late 1920s.

The greatest industrial expansion between 1899 and 1919 had occurred on the West Coast and in the Southwest.[1] In Texas and elsewhere, however, the number of operating brick plants had decreased. In 1899, Texas had 143 such plants, but by 1919 only 58 were still in operation, of which 16 made face brick.[2] Acme's two plants had fought the trend, because while nationwide brick production over the last decade had dropped an astonishing 20 percent,[3] Acme's production quadrupled.[4] A partial explanation for this lay in the fact that face brick was in greater demand than common brick. But over the next decade, the entire economic picture changed for all industries, including that of clay products. America underwent stupendous economic changes following World War I; Texas and the Southwest shared in most of them. For one thing, the automobile came into its own, necessitating better roads for "Sunday drivers"; the oil industry emerged from its infancy and grew into a giant; rising standards of living for everyone created a demand for better and larger homes; and electricity not only brought lights for homes but provided more efficient power for factory machinery. All this meant growth and wealth.

In nearly every respect, the brick business and Acme were to share in this prosperity and change. Paving brick became an answer to muddy streets and roads. The oil industry demanded more fire brick and additional office buildings. Homeowners everywhere clamored for better and more spacious quarters. National new construction figures for the period between 1919 and 1925 showed a rise of $3.4 billion. By 1926, residential construction in

the Southwest represented 64.6 percent of the total.[5] Besides this, homeowners began covering their frame houses with face brick, a trend which Acme promoted with success. The oil industry with its major spin-off industry, natural gas, provided brick plants throughout the Southwest with cheaper, more efficient fuel. Acme and others also began transporting brick by gasoline truck, and like most other industries they developed and utilized power provided by electricity.

That Acme was able to share in the tremendous wealth and progress that characterized this period was the result of careful planning. While the war was still in progress, Bennett and Company had begun to lay plans and move with confidence toward expansion and reorganization in preparation for the expected boom. Acme spent most of 1919 and some of 1920 in planning, studying potential plant sites, and researching market areas. Simultaneously, Acme recruited several top salesmen and production men for testing markets and new product lines.[6] As a part of the expansion picture, Walter R. Bennett turned his attention towards establishment of a brick plant in Arkansas.

A panoramic view of the Bennett plant in 1919. This photograph shows the 7,000,000,000 brick carried on the yard. The office building at the right burned in 1938, and all records were destroyed. The current plant office occupies the exact same site. Just above the office, in the distance the barn can be seen and to the left of it, on the hillside, one can see the company hotel, the Lakota school, and the plant superintendent's house.

Acme's first out-of-state venture came early in 1919 when Walter Bennett became interested in the clays around Malvern, Arkansas.[7] The whole state was abuzz with speculators and rumors of oil discoveries. Malvern, a town of 3,864, was no exception. It was quickly caught up in the enthusiasm of getting rich quickly. Land prices were skyrocketing, and a *laissez-faire* policy prevailed.[8] Even the *Malvern Daily Record* added its voice to the growing din by demanding abolition of "that dangerous, gigantic enemy the Arkansas Corporation Commission."[9]

Primarily, Malvern was a lumber and clay products town. Located at the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains about twenty-five miles south of Hot Springs, Arkansas, Malvern and its suburb Perla grew up along a junction of the railway lines.[10] Two brick plants

were already in operation there when Bennett made a preliminary investigation and decided on a 120-acre tract, half-wilderness and half-cotton patch, next to the Atchinson Brick Works, a small plant that manufactured a variety of clay products ranging from pottery to bricks.[11]

The site, which Bennett selected, offered an interesting index to land values and settlement patterns. Originally, the state of Arkansas and the federal government had sought to foster development by granting the land to the Cairo and Fulton Railroad Company in 1853. Little progress was made, however, and during the period of Reconstruction the land was taken by the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railway Company, which in turn sold most of it in order to pay off debts and complete its line construction. In 1898, the Perla and Preston Southern Railroad Company bought the right-of-way through the tract, and, ultimately, all rights-of-way went to the Missouri-Pacific Company in 1919 for $80. With the aid of J. E. Young, Bennett also bought what was left of the entire tract for $500 an acre in 1919. The rights-of-way had been sold at a sheriff's auction twenty years earlier for a paltry sum. On March 21, 1921, Bennett conveyed the land to Acme Brick Company.[12]

Construction began on the Perla plant during the spring of 1920, under V. Z. Mitchell, construction superintendent. By October 1921, the plant was completed, and Bennett announced that Perla would begin trial production. Estimating that they would start by producing a million bricks per month, he predicted that production would ultimately reach two million a month. As he noted at the time, there was only one larger brick concern in the United States producing similar material.[13] As a result of modernization and expansion through the years, Bennett's estimate proved to be too low, for in a single week in May 1971, Perla produced more than three million face bricks—it had become the largest single face brick plant in the United States, as well as the most highly automated.[14]

Bennett's original interest in Perla had been stirred by the possibility of using the strata of lignite that is found sandwiched between the layers of clay in the area west of the plant.[15] He also stated to the press at the time that he intended to develop a complete line of fire brick and refractories, as well as face brick.[16] As a result, the first kiln of brick set was fire brick. For some obscure reason, however, this was never burned. The next kiln, burned the last week of October 1921, was of smooth face brick. Since this turned out so well, fire brick production was dropped for a while, and almost the entire first kiln was shipped out to sales offices, architects, builders and would-be customers.[17] The first real order for the plant was for

twenty tons of crude fire clay to be shipped to Motive Power and Equipment Company of Houston, Texas, on November 9, 1921. Almost a month passed before the second order was received. It was an order for 17,000 Acme Ruffs, number two stock, from the Fort Smith Brick Company. The words on order P-100 prophetically announced, "We're off."[18]

The next year, however, proved to be a hectic one. Product shrinkage was a major problem and grog, a calcining material, was needed to improve the structure and shrinkage factor. At first, large chunks of clay, sometimes so large they barely cleared the kiln doors, were burned in the brick kilns. Such an expensive way to calcine did not last long, however, and crushed rock and gravel were hauled in and burned. But this material caused so much cracking and exploding of bricks that a number of kilns were emptied with No. 2 scoops rather than wheelbarrows. Finally, in 1923, a used rotary kiln was installed, thereby solving the problem for face brick production, which was to be the main product line until the Great Depression.[19]

All through the 1920s, the face brick business boomed, and Acme's Perla crews worked twelve to fourteen hours a day loading cars of brick. Workers spent nearly all of 1922 working out blends and giving them specific numbers and names, such as Aurora, Sunset, Sungold, and Honeysuckle. All types of grey brick were assigned names like Light Mission Blend, Medium Mission Blend, and Full Mission Blend. Most of these names were trademarked. Although the Perla shipments were scattered across the country, Houston, Dallas, Tulsa, and Oklahoma City took the bulk of the plant's inventory.[20]

While Bennett and Denton still used mules to haul blasted or fresnoed clay, Perla hauled its tractor-harvested clay over a mile-long,

Aerial view of the Perla plant in 1926.

company-owned railroad from its gleaming, white pits.[21] Work at the pits must have been a fascinating operation to watch, and for nearly thirty years the scene remained the same until locomotives stopped running in 1951.[22] Looking from any nearby hill, there would have been a beautiful contrast between the towering green pines and bluffs surrounding this dazzling, bright pit and the dark strip of lignite sandwiched between white and yellow clays and sand.[23] An impressive amount of work was required to obtain usable material, for this part of the Wilcox formation, which extends all the way from Arkansas through Texas, is beneath almost a hundred feet of overburden that must be removed before high-class brickmaking material can be reached.[24] In the 1920s, once the overburden was removed, a five-ton caterpillar tractor drawing a harrow-shaped plow loosened the exposed clay so that smaller tractors could gather the material for loading into four-yard scrappers. These scrappers then dumped their cargo into steel cars, to be towed from the pit to clay storage by steam locomotives.[25] In the 1950s and early 1960s, a half-dozen Le Torneau fifteen-yard Diesel scrappers and dump trucks did this job. By 1971, all this was done by one twenty-one-yard self-loader, one bulldozer, and three eighteen-yard scrappers. Five men and their machines at the pits did three times the work of ten men and their equipment forty years before.[26] In the 1980s one operator could do the same.

Loading a Perla rail car in about 1925 prior to the use of tractors and scrappers.

There is no need to go into further detail on the Perla operation, except to point out some things that made it unique and that every year contributed to its success. From the day Perla started, all machinery in the plant was electrically driven, thereby affording great flexibility in machinery adaptation and usage. Perla also used natural gas from the beginning, which required no fuel conversion, and foremen kept careful records of blend operations and burning procedures.[27]

Thus, after years of experimentation and changes, effective programmed production was possible. Even loading and blending records were kept in files so that duplicate shipments could be made many years later.[28] In short, officials at Perla attempted to standardize operations in all phases of production. This procedure has paid dividends, both for the company in getting "match jobs" and for the customers who always receive a better-looking building when making additions to the original structure.[29] In the 1920s,

Acme made certain important changes that deserve mention. First, in 1926, Acme purchased the nearby Arkansas Brick and Tile plant, the old Atchinson Brick Works, which became Perla Unit No. 2 under the supervision of W. J. Schweitzer, manufacturing foreman, and C. A. Williams, superintendent. L. L. Buchanan was its first shading and loading foreman.[30] Extensive repairs had to be made to the plant. The dryer had to be remodeled, and a new machine room, a grinding room, new dry pans, and a clay shed added. A Bonnot brick machine was moved from Denton and installed. This plant was quickly converted to the production of building and face tile.[31]

At this same time, District Superintendent Charles Sewell and Plant Superintendent Henry O'Neil sold W. R. Bennett and Smith on the idea of a tunnel kiln, a type of kiln that was a relatively new innovation and that would greatly increase production. So, in 1929, while business was still good, V. Z. Mitchell installed a Harrop Tunnel Kiln ("A") at Perla Unit No. 1. Four-hundred-feet-long, gas-fired, with the capacity of fifty-nine cars, this kiln burned 2,223 bricks per hour. With fourteen burners, seven to the side, bricks were subjected to a maximum temperature of 2,350 degrees Fahrenheit at the middle of the kiln and gradually cooled as they moved through the tunnel. This was a continuous operation, for as one car left the end of the kiln another car entered the front. The largest single order this kiln filled before the depression was for the Jesse Jones Gulf Building in Houston, a structure that still stands. Jack Bennett, manufacturing foreman, supervised operation of the kiln, and W. W. Timberlake oversaw the shading and loading process.[32] Kiln "A," though somewhat modified, was in production for almost sixty years.[33]

Elsewhere in Arkansas, Bennett had been busy. Even before Perla went into operation, Acme's president had begun to negotiate for the purchase of both Fort Smith Brick and Tile and Arkansas Brick and Tile. It was for protection as well as expansion that he bought these companies, for while the Perla plant was under construction, two other brick companies were attempting to go into business at Malvern. Always a threat, Coffeyville Vitrified Brick and Tile already held key clay areas at Malvern and Fort Smith. Several Missouri companies were threatening to move in, and salesmen from Tennessee and Mississippi companies invaded the state.[34]

Finally, on April 13, 1923, the Fort Smith brick company agreed to a merger, based on a small amount of cash and a significant stock increase.[35] With this acquisition, Acme added two more plants, one at Fort Smith and another at Mansfield, Arkansas. After a brief trial, the Mansfield plant was shut down, never to be reopened. But the

Fort Smith plant, then the largest paving brick plant in the South, also made brick of the same type produced in Mansfield. So the Fort Smith plant was converted to face brick operations instead, and much money was spent working out the problems of texture, which "was extremely rough," and a size variation that was "terrible."[36] At that time, production of a smooth, perfect brick involved serious problems. Ultimately, however, Fort Smith "Heritage Brick" of mixed textures, irregular shapes, and otherwise defaced brick became a "best seller."[37]

Acme's Fort Smith plant in 1921 as viewed from the railroad track that passed over a major public street that divided the pit area from the main plant. This situation exists today. Notice the company houses on the hill next to the plant.

Fort Smith, the county seat of Sebastian County, Arkansas, is located within a large bend in the Arkansas River on the Arkansas and Oklahoma state line, about 165 miles northwest of Little Rock and 305 miles northeast of Fort Worth, in the midst of the Boston Mountains. The Acme plant is about two and one-half miles southeast of the main business district, convenient to rail, highway, and water transportation.[38] The brick works sit on 130 acres of company land, originally granted to a Mexican war veteran, Sergeant David Fenter, by Franklin Pierce in 1854.[39]

Historically, Fort Smith dates back to 1817 when General Thomas A. Smith established a frontier fort at the junction of the Arkansas and Poteau Rivers. In 1836, Arkansas became a state, and the town became a wagon train center.[40] The first bricks were burned there in the 1840s.[41] Fort Smith prospered during the big railroad construction era following the Civil War. By 1920, it had a population of 28,860 and six rail lines converged on the budding metropolis, which boasted factories producing glassware, furniture, and clothing as well as brick.[42]

Prior to 1900, however, no sizable brick plant existed. Then, in 1907, the city of Fort Smith decided to pave approximately seventy miles of street with bricks. Investigation showed that suitable material was right at hand, if only someone could make the brick. So a company was organized that erected the first, well-equipped, paving brick plant in the Southwest. When the city paving contract was completed, the Fort Smith Brick Company decided to produce large quantities of common brick and some face brick to take advantage of the high-quality shale, its unusual color, and the demand for building brick. The company was on the point of modernization so that it might increase face brick production when Acme Brick Company bought it out and completed the needed conversions itself.[43]

Because the blue shale at Fort Smith was extremely hard and the original grinders inadequate, all the equipment had to be replaced. A special seventy-ton Bucyrus steam shovel was used to dip shale from the banks, with a small Thew shovel employed to work the softer shales that were mixed with it. Four individual crushings were necessary before the material was fine enough to be used, and much of this had been rerun several times. After grinding, the shale was used to make face brick and hollow building tile in the downdraft kilns and common brick in a Hoffman Continuous Kiln. Color variation in the product from this material ranged nominally from brown to red, but by increasing temperature, cutting off air, and adding salt, darker colors of grey to black could be made. Blends of Fort Smith face brick "fairly melted into each other in the wall." This hard shale was sold under such names as "Tudors," "Harvards," and "Ruffs."[44]

Incidentally, a 500-horsepower Corliss steam engine provided the entire Fort Smith plant with power for all its machinery, and a 150-horsepower Skinner engine provided the electric current. The Bonnot pug mill (1913 vintage) was the original used at the Bennett plant when it was converted to stiff-mud. In 1926, Van Zandt Mitchell was the plant superintendent; James N. Lowe, manufacturing foreman; R. Frank Long, burning and setting foreman; and Herman B. Smith, shading and loading foreman.[45]

Ten months before Mitchell wrote his article on the Fort Smith plant, Walter Bennett finally concluded purchase of the Arkansas Brick and Tile Company for $600,000 cash. On January 21, 1926, Acme agreed to pay $300,000 in four bimonthly notes of $75,000 each at 6 percent interest as well as to assume Arkansas Brick and Tile debts amounting to $300,000. By April 26, 1926, all these notes had been paid off.[46] Locksley Fife described this maneuver as a "masterstroke" that gave Acme the competitive edge over brick "imported" from St. Louis, Missouri.[47] Certainly, some stock watering had been necessary to accomplish this, but Bennett's actions cannot be condemned, for he could see a great market developing in the Southwest, that he was determined to reach.

The Bucyrus steam shovel used at Denton prior to 1920. Such steam shovels were widely used to mine clay for brick plants until the late 1930s when they were replaced by diesel- and gasoline-driven machines.

Besides the Little Rock plant, which was the largest common brick plant in the South, Acme bought Arkansas Brick and Tile Company facilities at Perla, Malvern, and Pine Bluff, Arkansas. Only two of these plants remained in operation: the plant at Pine Bluff was closed in 1929 and the one at Little Rock in 1930. The Little Rock plant, how-

ever, was reopened following World War II, and then closed again in 1952. Still, the cost was worth it for the sake of the strategy and the added values of the Malvern and Perla situations.[48]

The operations of the Pine Bluff and Little Rock establishments were suspended for valid reasons. The Pine Bluff factory operations hearkened back to the days of the ancient Sumerians, for all its bricks were soft-mud, hand molded from poor-grade surface clays, and burned in five up draft kilns. Even the beauty of the product could not offset the fact that 40 to 50 percent of the bricks were lost in the burning stages. So despite their good market value, Acme stopped making pink to purple Pine Bluff Hollanders.[49]

Although it had better machinery and an excellent location, the Little Rock operation lasted only a year longer than the one at Pine Bluff.[50] There was no lack of skilled workers. The first bricks had been successfully burned in Little Rock in 1840 to build a United States arsenal,[51] and brick production had continued from that time forward, occasionally using state prison labor. This particular plant had been in operation since 1897, and Acme retained nearly all the Arkansas Brick and Tile employees. Physically, this was the largest plant in the Acme system. Its modern dryer, composed of thirty-three 154-foot-long tracks, utilized a patented automatic transfer car device that was driven and controlled electrically. Its continuous kiln, nearly four city blocks long, was equipped with automatic brick setters (80 feet by 1,250 feet) and fired with natural gas; its machine room (316 feet by 68 feet) also housed a boiler room (88 feet by 77 feet), powered by a 1,200-horsepower Corliss engine. This behemoth produced only common brick and building tile.[52] Both products were losing popularity in the market. Acme's Little Rock operations were run by E. A. Welch, superintendent; E. C. Reid, shipping foreman; P. W. Leming, burning foreman; E. A. Red, machine foreman; and S. J. Romsnell, pit foreman. Maybe it was a subconscious fear that led Welch to write: "The plant is in full operation with no immediate prospect of shutting down."[53] He was wrong. The depression and labor strife combined with a shrinking market to bring plant operations to an end.

The Malvern endeavor met with more success. Originally, the Clark Pressed Brick Company had made brick on this site until 1912, when it was sold to Arkansas Brick and Manufacturing Company (later Arkansas Brick and Tile). The Malvern plant was producing in 1926 when Acme acquired it. Bennett had coveted this plant for seven years, and in 1921–1922 he bought land near the site from the Malvern Lumber Company.[54]

Malvern also had problems to solve, part of them geographical. The pits were two and one-half miles from the plant, and the clay

had to be moved vertically sixty feet from ground level at a forty-five-degree angle, after reaching the plant.[55] By August of 1926, Malvern's two round kilns were abandoned for the use of its Youngren semicontinuous kiln of sixteen chambers. Each chamber held 65,000 bricks. Workmen fired two chambers simultaneously in order to heat the next two chambers, the idea being to use heat from these to dry and water smoke the next set.[56] Because of continuous heating and cooling, the kiln crowns constantly caved in. Finally, installation of a Hoffman kiln improved production.[57]

The leaders of Malvern's manufacturing force, Joe R. Oesch, George Kyle, and D. B. Grey, kept the plant alive, but not until the 1950s did Malvern witness any significant improvement.[58] After experimenting with various Ouachita River bottom clays, which produced a wide range of beautiful colors, Emmett Lawless built five new round kilns in the 1950s. This put Malvern on a more secure footing.

By 1926, the Perla addition was almost as old as the Little Rock plant. O. C. Atchinson had been the first man to develop a successful brick enterprise at Perla. He came to Arkansas from Iowa in the late 1870s and operated a pottery plant at nearby Benton. In 1887, he moved to Perla, then a seven-year-old lumber town, and bought another pottery factory. Three years later, he stopped producing jugs and crocks and switched to brickmaking. His son, Tom N. Atchinson, operated the brick factory until 1917, until he sold it to A. B. and T. The Atchinsons made fire brick first, then went on to make building brick from clay hauled in from pits about a mile southeast of Perla. The first bricks were red, but later Atchinson learned how to make a distinct buff brick, which A. B. and T. and Acme improved.[59]

In 1923, Acme had made its first out-of-state purchase—the Fort Smith Brick Company—and proceeded to secure Arkansas Brick and Tile. Meanwhile, negotiations were underway to move Acme much farther up the Arkansas River, in readiness for the 1924 purchase of American Brick and Tile Company for about $300,000, a company that had plants in Cleveland and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.[60]

American Brick and Tile, with its home office in Oklahoma City, had been organized in 1901. The company's nearby plant produced about 20,000 bricks a day until 1904, when Kee R. McKee took over command of the facility. The following year, McKee was elected president of the company. In 1919, a merger was effected, whereby the American Brick and Tile Company acquired the plant and goodwill of the Cleveland Brick Company of Cleveland, Oklahoma. During the nineteen years of McKee's leadership,

American Brick and Tile improved its products and its markets. Already quite important locally, during the 1920s McKee's forces steadily made inroads into market areas in North Texas, Kansas, Arkansas, and even west Tennessee. Acme acquired the properties and goodwill of this company in June 1924, and proceeded to improve and enlarge the plant.[61]

Cleveland, Oklahoma, situated on the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railway (M-K-T) and the Arkansas River, was a thriving town of between 4,000 and 5,000 people in 1925. An old oil field town—old for Oklahoma at the time—Cleveland is in Pawnee County, about a hundred miles northeast of Oklahoma City and forty-five miles northwest of Tulsa. Acme's plant there was located one and one-half miles northwest of town on the M-K-T Railway.[62] The Cleveland plant was anything but modern when Acme acquired it. All the equipment was line-shaft operated—that is, all machinery was driven off of one long shaft turned by a single steam engine, and only a fifty-kilowatt direct-current machine provided electricity. Often the canvas belts from shaft to machines gave difficulty when the weather changed. At Cleveland, ground shale prepared by three dry pans was the base raw material. Obtained by blasting, this blue-and-yellow shale was moved to the plant by an electric locomotive. There the material underwent final processing in eight round downdraft kilns, one long downdraft kiln, or the eighteen-chamber Hoffman continuous kiln fired with natural gas.[63] This plant, functioning under the direction of H. M. Van Cleave, the superintendent, and his foremen, E. C. Schindler, J. P. Wagnon, and F. L. McClaflin, manufactured only building tile during the 1920s and early 1930s.[64]

The Oklahoma City plant was the proud recipient for some new delivery vehicles in 1924. Note the use of tandem trailers.

Acme's Oklahoma City plant, however, produced a greater variety of products and had a greater potential. Located about three miles northwest of what was then the state capital's business district on the Rock Island railroad, the plant rested on a site that had once been the scene of cattle drives up the Chisholm Trail. The ground here yielded a red clay, which, when harvested by a relatively new Eagle shale planer, was made into dry-press and stiff-mud bricks. In spite of "zero" drying time, it took fifteen days to process the dry-press products, and only five to six days for the stiff-mud products that required drying. This factory produced about 100,000 bricks per day—40,000 dry-press and 60,000 stiff-mud—through its large continuous kiln, two up draft kilns and six round downdraft kilns. And its face bricks, which ranged from soft reds

and browns to copper and light olive tones, were well known in the trade as Dry Press Round Edge Reds and Oklahoma Chiefs.[65]

In the fall of 1926, the Oklahoma City plant was run by A. B. Kelley, Charles David, John McKinney, Joe P. Hobson, and David M. Alexander, whose son, Dwight Alexander, became assistant to the vice president in charge of production. David M. Alexander, later superintendent of other Acme plants, was the superintendent of the Oklahoma City plant when Acme purchased it from American Brick and Tile. Alexander stayed with Acme overseeing other plants until his death twenty-five years later.[66]

In 1925, while negotiating the purchase of the American and Arkansas Brick and Tile companies, Acme started construction on an entirely new facility at Tulsa, the "oil capital of the world." Tulsa was a dynamic growing city. Its population in 1910 was only a few thousand, but when Acme started its plant in 1926, Tulsa had more than 120,000 people. Bennett located his plant four miles east of the city on the St. Louis and San Francisco Railway, within the switching limits of three other railroads.[67]

In 1926 some Oklahoma City plant personnel posed for a photograph to be published in the company magazine *The Pug Mill*.

Twenty-one years after the first brick plant was built at Tulsa, Acme opened its first sales office there. Seeing that Tulsa had only two brick yards, Owen Park and Greenwood, it soon became apparent that the company should have a plant to serve the "ever increasing demand for its product." So, in 1925, after a careful investigation of raw material sources, a site was purchased for the erection of "a most modern brick plant." Construction began in November 1925 and was completed the following summer.[68] Modern in every respect, the Tulsa Plant was constructed from plans drawn up by a company vice president, Roy G. Smith, and supervised by G. M. Giltinan and A. B Chappell. W. D. Cooper, the manufacturing foreman, handled all the labor, raised the steel, and placed the machinery. Bert D. Lee did the brickwork and Eugene Atterbury looked after carpentry.[69]

Chappell was formerly the plant accountant at Oklahoma City, and Cooper was formerly manufacturing foreman at American's Oklahoma City plant. Giltinan had previously worked for American also. The burning foreman at the new factory was Jack S. David, who had worked under A. B. Kelly at Oklahoma City. Duron Stubblefield, who grew up in Bennett, Texas, and joined Acme in 1918, handled the shading and loading for both Tulsa and Cleveland.[70]

The pit at Acme's newest establishment was unique. The pit and plant site, about twenty acres surrounded by buildings, adjoined a large coal mine. Acme hoped to use shale that had been removed as overburden to get at the coal. About twenty to twenty-five feet thick, this shale was under five to twelve feet of sandy clay. Already mixed during removal, this material also benefited from a long weathering process. After getting the right burn in the eighteen-chambered Hoffman Continuous Kiln and its four downdraft kilns, this shale was manufactured into about 25,000 common bricks and 20,000 face bricks per day. Since the face bricks were so similar to the Bennett product, they were given the same numbers and used as duplicates.[71]

Meanwhile, in Texas, Acme was continuing its policy of updating machinery, methods, and products at Denton and Bennett. In 1925, the company discontinued using coal and lignite as fuel at Denton and also stopped the dry press operations altogether.[72] The Denton clay pits were covered by only three feet of overburden, which was easily removed by tractor-drawn scoops. A tractor scarified the clay, plowing about three inches deep, while men with teams and fresnoes loaded the clay into hopper cars, which were in turn towed by hoist cable to the clay sheds and returned to the pits by gravity. Calcining was done with a sixty-foot rotary kiln, but clay was still dumped into the dry pans with slip scrapers. Otherwise the stiff-mud process was the same as at other plants. By 1925, Denton too had standardized its blending and shading for match jobs.[73]

Personnel at the Denton plant in 1926 consisted of: J. W. Kelly (A. B. Kelly's son), plant superintendent; J. C. Ray, manufacturing foreman; S. M. Canafax, burning foreman; A. M. McMath, pit foreman; and Joe P. Hobson, shading and shipping foreman. In 1926 Hobson, who spent from January 1920 to April 1926 at the Bennett plant as a timekeeper, transferred to Oklahoma City. Late in 1929, Hobson returned to Denton as its superintendent, a post he held until the mid-1940s when he became the Texas district superintendent.[74]

By 1920, the Bennett plant had already been converted to stiff-mud and natural gas. Its mining methods (blasting, then hauling with

Some key office and production personnel in the 1920s. They are left to right (top to bottom): C. L. Wilson, Secretary; W. T. Johnson, Credit Manager; Luther Jordan, Chief Accountant; V. Z. Mitchell, Construction Superintendent; D. J. Stubblefield, Superintendent, Fort Smith plant, Arkansas; John A. Elders, Superintendent, Bennett plant. Below from left to right: Bob Goen, Manufacturing Foreman, Bennett plant; C. L. Sewell, District Superintendent, Arkansas; J. W. Kelly, Superintendent, Denton plant.

mule-drawn carts) were still the same, but the burning methods had changed by 1925 to a pyrometer system. This method enabled the burning foreman to take readings of kiln temperatures right from his desk in the superintendent's office.[75] Frequently, during the rush of the 1920s, Bennett's cars were loaded directly from the kilns while the brick was still hot.[76] This plant overcame a major setback in 1922 after another bad flood at Rock Creek backed up water over two feet into the kilns and dryers.[77] During the 1930s, Acme replaced its mules with a steam locomotive. Later, two Ford straight-eight engines and a multi-hundred horsepower Plymouth diesel powered the pit locomotives. During the 1930s, the Bennett plant also began to use a shale planer for the first time.[78]

During the late 1920s the town of Bennett reached the peak of its prosperity and social organization. Inhabited entirely by Acme Brick employees, the town now had its own physician, barber shop, lake, orchards, gardens, hotel, shoe cobbler, string band, voice teacher, and movie house. The old brickyard area had slowly disappeared, replaced by a ballpark, rodeo grounds, and a new housing addition for Mexican workers who began to arrive in about 1916. The company also operated a ranch, running between 100 and 200 head of cattle. Entertainment came from visiting medicine shows, Charleston contests, dances at the houses of Dolph Owens, Henry Irland, or George Pierce on Smokey Row, school plays, and rodeos, in addition to fishing, hunting, and church services.[79]

At the start of the 1920s, John A. Elders replaced H. B. Fling as plant superintendent; Bob Goen was manufacturing foreman; Ed Wells was pit foreman; Oscar Wharton was burning foreman; Albert Johnson was loading and shading foreman; Joe Hobson was timekeeper; and Ed Tarbet was store manager.[80] John Henderson was the carpenter and bricklayer, Wily Thomas the barber, John Issom the cobbler, and Doc Harvey the company physician.[81]

Not pausing to rest, Walter Bennett also saw potential in the Texas Panhandle area. Since the Pine Bluff plant was not proving to be profitable, Acme bought out Wichita Falls Brick and Tile in Wichita

Falls, Texas. This plant was large and, having operated over a decade in that area, had a good market for its products. In 1927, Acme bought this facility and made both dry-press and stiff-mud brick, but within a few years stopped the dry-press method. Wichita Falls operated well until the depression, with a capacity of about twenty million bricks a year.[82]

Above: Aerial view of the Perla plant in 1926.

Below: Pictured here are the Elgin Brick Company's cottages, commissary, and the owner's apartment in 1927. This photograph also shows a partial view of the factory. Acme and Elgin marketed each others' products for over fifty years. The two companies signed a letter of intent to merge in October 1991. The merger was complete by 1994.

But with the purchase of the Wichita Falls factory, Acme's expansion ceased for a considerable period of time.[83] The company spent the next few years consolidating gains and improving existing facilities to meet new market demands. Including its affiliate at Elgin, Acme had the capacity to produce 170 million face bricks a year in its eleven plants scattered across the Southwest.[84] Yet, each year over the decade, its capacity was taxed to the utmost. In 1928, when Acme sold over 165 million bricks, no one expected it to be nearly twenty years before this peak would be reached again.[85]

Acme's production rose steadily from the end of World War I through 1928. Starting in January 1919, that year's shipments were just under 16 million bricks from the two basic plants, Denton and Bennett, which were pushed hard to ship eighteen million bricks in 1921. These basic plants too were modernized between 1918 and 1921. When Denton was converted to stiff-mud operations, most of this production fell on the Bennett plant, which in turn had to wait until after Perla was completed before it could get a new pug mill, grinder, and some new continuous kilns. But, from 1922 to the end of 1926, shipments rose by an average of 23 million bricks a year. This leveled off in 1927 at a high plateau of around 140 million bricks, produced by approximately 900 employees. Then, from January 1927 to January 1929 another tremendous spurt in production occurred (with all plants working at full capacity), and finished goods rose from 140 million to 165 million. Acme's storage yards were nearly cleaned out, in spite of the fact that each plant attempted to keep approximately 2 million bricks in reserve stock. In 1929, sales and shipments began to slip a bit, but this was hardly perceptible as the company was still shipping out over 155 million units.[86] No wonder optimism was the order of the day.

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Well Burned Clays Never Decay — Specify "ACME"

Photogravure supplement to Acme Brick Company's monthly magazine, "The Pay Mill", August Issue, 1927

5

Strategy, Structure, Sales: The 1920s

Left: "Mission Blend," First Congregational Church, Houston, Texas, August 1927. Note the number of plants and sales offices that changed from 1927 to 1929.

The years immediately following the transformation of Acme Pressed Brick Company in 1916 had been used to develop, test, and implement plans for further growth. Early in 1917, Acme's directors evidently decided to set aside funds for more expansion, as they began to put profits into reserves for that purpose.[1] At the start of World War I, Acme's total assets had amounted to $386,129.58; by Armistice Day, 1918, this sum had nearly doubled.[2] The war had stimulated production and inflation, but it had also left Acme with a great backlog of unfilled orders. The balance sheet at the end of 1919 showed Acme's total assets to be $1,109,751, which included two completely new plants and about a quarter of a million dollars in reserve. Net profits for that year had totaled $153,528, in spite of federal taxes ten times as great as the company had paid in 1915. Although 1919 marked the year Acme became a million dollar company,[3] neither net worth nor sales reached that figure until 1922.[4] Finally, when the company reached its peak in 1929, Acme's net worth was $3,666,970—ten times what its total assets had been in 1916.[5] How this came about is the subject of this chapter.

Companies develop strategies to reach their goals. The goals are usually rather ill-defined at first, but take a more concrete form with each intermediate step. Whatever the ultimate goals, whether they be financial security, financial survival, personal gratification, or a set position in the market, they are seldom attained by accident. Acme Brick Company, desiring to achieve all those objectives, created the means to do so. The company, relying on its astute leaders and loyal employees, implemented its strategy by developing a stable structure, a sound financial position, modern sales techniques, and wise plant acquisitions. Basically, the company's strategy was successful because the company's leaders were characterized by flexibility, reasonableness, vision, and daring. Since Acme is today an extension of its past experiences, it may be valuable to know what was accomplished in the 1920s.

The essence of progress is the inception of an idea in the mind of a leader and its widespread implementation by hundreds of people. How this growth is brought about is frequently a mystery. In the case of the Acme Brick Company, however, the development is easy to trace. Walter R. Bennett Jr. was the genius whose successful innovations and guidance brought Acme from a one-plant company to a three-state system that catered to a nationwide market. But no one man could have all the ideas, or do all the work. As Andrew Carnegie had done in the steel industry, Bennett surrounded himself with successful men who spurred each other on to heights that none of them individually could ever have reached. They masterminded the progress of Acme Brick Company for over two decades. This inner circle comprised both the board of directors and the company officials. Early in 1919, they included W. R. Bennett, president; William Bryce, senior vice president; R. E. Harding, treasurer; and J. E. Fender, secretary.[6] All these men had been members of the board when Ralph S. Root left in 1916. Willard Burton and A. E. Newell had also served on the board of directors.[7]

Later in 1919, the board adopted an organizational structure that endured without basic change until 1935. Under this set-up Bennett served as president; Bryce as senior vice president; Fender as vice president for sales; Locksley Fife, vice president for regional sales; Roy G. Smith, vice president, production; R. E. Harding, treasurer; and C. L. Wilson, secretary. Fife was put on the board shortly after becoming an officer and Roy G. Smith replaced A. E. Newell in 1927. At the time Fife joined the board, Bryce retired from the construction business to devote more time to companies in which he was interested and to his multifarious civic affairs.[8]

Besides adopting a new organization at the top, Acme's leaders acquired additional help and added some new positions within the company. Not only did W. T. Johnson, W. H. Delehanty, and Carlisle Martin return to the office staff in 1919, but Acme also hired E. R. Jordan as an accountant, C. L. Wilson as assistant auditor, Q. C. Webb as chief clerk, and George H. Harmer as accountant and cashier.[9] At the same time, the company advertised for salesmen and moved some of its production people into Fort Worth to handle sales out of the home office.[10] Over the next few months, Acme hired several new sales people and promoted a number of valuable production men to the positions vacated by those who had been shifted into sales. For example, the following personnel moved into more responsible production positions: D. J. Stubblefield, who had started as a shipping clerk a few years earlier; Ray Pafford, who had aided in Perla's construction; and

Van Zandt Mitchell, who all through the 1920s had been a company troubleshooter.[11] Acme also went on to create the positions of credit manager and traffic manager, assigning these jobs to W. R. Johnson[12] and Dan P. Harris Jr., respectively.[13]

Some of the other key men in Acme's sales team during the 1920s. Left to right (top row): Earl Bolenger, Waco, Texas; Lubbock Davies, Enid, Oklahoma; C. A. King, New Orleans, Louisiana; and Victor Anderson, Fort Smith, Arkansas, D. J. Shaughnessy, San Antonio, Texas; Carlisle Martin, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Left to right (bottom row): Ray Plumb, Abilene, Texas; John A. Huebner, Houston, Texas. Neill Boldrick, Dallas, Texas; Duer Waggoner, Fort Worth, Texas; O. C. Webb and George Harmer. Webb and Harmer worked in the home office as Chief Clerk and Cashier, respectively.

In each instance these new positions were filled by experienced men of proven ability. At first L. R. Jordan served under Fender as bookkeeper; but when C. L. Wilson was hired as accountant and auditor, Jordan became cost accountant and assistant auditor. Educated at Fort Worth and Tyler Business College, Jordan had previously worked for the Fort Worth and Denver Railway Company.[14] Wilson, soon to become the company secretary, had worked for the Fort Worth and Denver Railroad in accounting after receiving a civil engineering degree from Cornell University. He had also been a design engineer for Texas and Pacific Railroad, an estimator for Drake-Bramu Construction, and had worked as a consulting engineer before joining Acme Brick Company in August, 1919.[15] O. C. Webb, who was hired the following month, had also worked for several railroads, banks, and mercantile houses.[16] G. H. Harmer, educated at Sam Houston Normal, the University of Texas, and the University of Arkansas, started as an accountant and became a cashier in 1927.[17]

Van Zandt Mitchell, a handsome man who moved fast, was hired to rebuild the Denton and Bennett plants. A local boy and schoolmate of Walter Bennett, Mitchell was well qualified for the job. Prior to joining Acme in 1920 he had worked for Swift and Company, the Texas Building Company, the Bryce Building Company, and had, as an independent contractor, built Camp Bowie, an army installation at Fort Worth. He had built Perla No. 1 and served as its first superintendent until 1923. Then he rebuilt the Acme facilities at Fort Smith, Malvern, Little Rock, and Wichita Falls.[18]

Duron Stubblefield, who moved from production to sales became a leading Acme Brick salesman in the 1920s and 1930s.

Duron Stubblefield was associated with Acme nearly all his life. In 1905, when he was only four years of age, his father, J. R. Stubblefield, had gone to work at the Bennett plant. When his father transferred to Denton in 1912, young Stubblefield worked during the summers at the Acme plant under shipping foreman John A Elders. Upon graduating from Denton High School in 1919, he became Elders's full-time assistant. Later that year, he went to Bennett, where he was made responsible for a variety of jobs. In 1923, he married Irene Elders, who was employed at the company store. Following the acquisition of the Cleveland plant, he worked there, and in 1927 became superintendent at Fort Smith. During the 1930s, he supervised several Acme works; and although he left Acme briefly, he rejoined the company in 1942 and was placed in charge of the Fort Worth sales office.[19]

The employment of these additional workers had become necessary when Acme expanded its sales and service crews and began to wrestle with complicated financial problems. George Bennett had started the first plant on a $15,000 loan, which he borrowed to get its machinery into operation. Walter Bennett had financed the Denton merger by the same method.[20] One loan from Elmo Sledd for $35,000 (part of the cash required to complete the Denton merger) was held in 6 percent demand bonds which Sledd converted to preferred stock in 1916.[21] After the new Acme Brick Company was chartered with $150,000 capital stock in April 1916, the company immediately recapitalized at $200,000.[22]

At this point, six men owned 93 percent of the voting stock, for the bond holders had no voting rights. In February 1917, the board voted to increase the capital stock by adding $50,000 preferred with a fixed accumulative dividend of 7 percent per annum.[23] On this preferred stock, in reality a loan, Acme held the option to redeem anytime it wished at $103 a share.[24] Although this issue had no voting privileges, its owner could convert it to common stock at company book value. At the same time, the board set aside enough money to provide a surplus of $100,000.[25]

Gross sales climbed during the next three years as new sales offices were opened in San Antonio, Shreveport, Dallas, and Fort Worth, with increases in dealers centered at Austin and Houston.[26] At the 1920 stockholders' meeting the directors voted to increase the capital stock again, this time by $450,000,[27] and adopted an amended company charter.[28] This action was probably stock-watering but may have been justified, for company assets amounted to more than $1 million, gross sales had topped the half-million mark during the past year, while the debt for improvements stood at only $200,000. Acme's net worth was

nearly $900,000, after the company paid a $125,000 note.[29] The board's action released more capital for expansion, research, and improvements. Acme increased its capital and reserves over the next three years to the point where another $450,000 recapitalization could be carried out in the same way.[30]

The availability of greater financial resources made possible the establishment of plants outside Texas. Bennett had for some time been interested in developing a lighter-colored brick and explored Arkansas for the possible production site. Such a brick would sell well (the brokerage of the Elgin Standard's light brick proved this), especially if the newly patented texturing processes and the specially molded lighter-weight bricks would meet construction standards and prove popular with the public. Company records show that considerable sums were spent on investigating land at Malvern in 1918 and the purchase of that land in 1919.[31] At the same time, negotiations were started toward the purchase of the Arkansas Brick and Tile and the Fort Smith Brick companies.[32] A sizable investment was made at Perla, and the net worth of the company amounted to over $1 million by late 1921. Then, in April 1923, Bennett called one of the most important stockholders' meetings in the history of the company. Fourteen people with fourteen proxies representing 85 percent of the shares decided to absorb the Fort Smith Brick Company by recapitalization. Acme paid $125,000 for the Arkansas company in the form of 1,250 shares of the new Acme stock, and at the same time paid a dividend of 2,000 shares ($100 par value) to its stockholders—a generous 30 percent dividend "against surplus and undivided profits."[33] On this momentous occasion, Bennett wrote: "The intention of course, was to increase the common stock from $600,000 to $1,000,000, which leaves the preferred stock as it is now, that is, $50,000."[34]

Walter Root Bennett, the son of the founder George Bennett and third president of Acme Brick.

Even though the expansion had been soundly financed, it produced some problems. The new Perla plant enabled Bennett to penetrate the Arkansas market to a considerable extent. However, Arkansas Brick and Tile had a working agreement with Acme's other Texas competitors.[35]

But Acme had its foot in the door now, and by the Fort Smith merger the company "inherited" the sales organization, personnel, and top executives of that enterprise. M. W. Hardy of Little Rock, C. J. Mansfield of Warren, and H. C. McKinney of El Dorado, Arkansas, now became active participants in Acme Brick Company. Immediately following this merger, Hardy and Mansfield joined Acme's board of directors, and McKinney became a member in 1929.[36] Four of the seven families owning

The Perla, Arkansas plant, circa 1923.

the Arkansas company personally participated in the next few years' stockholders' meetings, and the others voted by proxy. Most of them actually increased their holdings in Acme and supported Acme against its old competitor, Arkansas Brick and Tile.[37]

Although business was good, competition in Arkansas continued to pose real problems. Brickworks opened and brickworks closed all over the state. Because of the desirable raw material there, Malvern companies were especially competitive.[38] At the time Bennett announced the opening of Perla, two other companies were in the process of being formed there.[39] One of these, the Malvern Brick and Tile Company, had been a major competitor since its formation in 1925.[40] Complicating matters even more, the new giant, United Brick and Tile from Kansas, and another huge company from Tennessee started moving in, threatening every brickmaker in Arkansas.

Acme was in a strong competitive position, however, for by 1925 it was a $2 million corporation with a net worth of $3 million.[41] Then, in 1926, Acme Brick Company again recapitalized, this time at 2.5 million dollars in order to meet requirements for the Arkansas Brick and Tile purchase.[42] Once again, Acme inherited a market and valuable employees. W. W. Dickenson, president of Arkansas Brick, however, decided he was "entitled to a little more leisure"[43] and took his cash without becoming active in Acme. Bennett, too, thought Dickenson deserved a rest, for he said:

> He has been just as much a pioneer in the development of the manufacturing resources of this state (Arkansas) and community as were our forefathers of a hundred years ago in its agricultural development. The public cannot pay too much homage to Mr. Dickenson.[44]

In the meantime, just a year after the Fort Smith purchase, Acme's interest in Oklahoma culminated in a purchase of the plants of American Brick and Tile. In the summer of 1920, Carlisle Martin was sent from the Shreveport office to open Acme's first branch office in Oklahoma City.[45] Business was so good that Martin and Fender convinced Bennett the company needed a plant closer to this market area, for rail rates were so high that Acme products could not compete effectively in either the Oklahoma or the Missouri trade area. Bennett himself negotiated the contract of purchase, which, in June 1924, was approved by 96.18 percent of the stockholders (sixty-six persons). By this contract, American Brick Company agreed to grant the right of way through other property at Cleveland for the more economic transfer of raw material to the Cleveland plant, and guaranteed the quantity, quality, and accessibility of the clay deposits at both the Oklahoma City and Cleveland operations.[46]

As soon as the deal was consummated, Acme began rebuilding and renovating the run-down plant it had acquired. At a special meeting in July 1924, stockholders voted to increase the capital stock by $50,000, to cover the possible purchase of a tile plant at El Reno, Oklahoma. But in anticipation of spending considerably more on renovations at American, the expectation of progress with Arkansas Brick and Tile, and the start of construction on an entirely new plant at Tulsa, stockholders amended the charter to authorize a $2 million capital stock early in 1925.[47] Although the El Reno deal did not go through, Acme paid nearly $300,000 for American's fixtures and began construction on an entirely new plant at Tulsa (TUP). Furthermore, in late 1927, the Wichita Falls plant was purchased for approximately $180,000—a cash deal that required no charter changes.[48]

Because of these financial transactions and purchases, the company assets quadrupled in the decade prior to 1930, but so likewise did its liabilities. Debt climbed from $136,500 to $586,240, and income taxes kept pace with other increases.[49] Prior to the adoption of the wartime excess profits tax, Acme's largest federal tax bill had been $5,657.[50] Before the removal of this drain on resources under Harding's administration, this tax had cost Acme a little over $100,000.[51] During the 1920s, Acme's taxes leveled out at around $40,000 a year, but in the peak tax year, 1926, the sum amounted to $64,291.[52] By contrast, Acme's taxes dropped nearly to pre–world war levels during the depression that followed.[53]

All through the1920s, the dividend picture looked good for the Acme stockholder. Before real expansion started, Acme Brick Company had paid but few dividends. In 1918 and 1919, however, 8 percent dividends were paid, amounting to $12,000

each. During this period of large cash outlays (1920–1922) Acme paid no dividends. In 1923, the company distributed $200,000 worth of stock to its stockholders, a 30 percent increment. During the next four years, the company declared no dividends. Then, in January 1927, Acme granted three dividends: one for $69,255 to those who owned stock prior to March 1, 1923; another of $128,844 to all who had acquired shares since that date; and a stock dividend of $85,896 payable to all stockholders—an outlay of well over a quarter of a million dollars.[54]

With a lull in expansion in 1928, Acme paid a cash dividend of $138,441, but 98 percent of this amount went to those who had purchased their stock prior to March 1, 1923. Only 2 percent was paid to the other stockholders.[55] The next dividend was for 6 percent ($135,588) granted in January, 1931.[56] For example, a stockholder who had bought one hundred shares of Acme at the time the company was chartered and retained them until 1931 would have earned an average of almost 6 percent a year on his investment. Someone who bought the stock in 1920 would have earned 7.3 percent.[57]

As a growing company, Acme poured most of its surplus funds back into research, development, and acquisitions, which further strengthened its position in the market. Throughout the 1920s stock ownership was broadened, until Acme finally had 186 stockholders.[58] Acme never became an object of speculative investment, however. Had this occurred, it is doubtful that the company could have weathered the depression successfully. Indeed, it probably would not have survived those dreary days, and its stockholders would have realized little, if anything, on their investments. Even when capitalized downward, once the worst was over, the company had resources upon which to build an even greater future.[59]

Acme was able to survive the depression partly because it had diversified its products. In 1919, Acme had been producing only a few types of clay wares. Although they were marketed under almost a dozen trade names, Acme only basically produced two kinds of face brick, one kind of fire brick, and one kind of common brick. These were given various numbers, depending on their grade and shading. As a result of experimentation at Bennett and Denton, those plants produced a large variety of products. For example, in the brick line there were smooth, rough, vitrified, and sand brick in hundreds of colors, types, and blends. In the building tile line, Acme manufactured textured and scored hollow building tile, fire clay tile, a patented lock-in-wall type tile, facing tile, drain tile, and paving tile. Supplementing these, Perla, Denton,

and Elgin fire brick broadened still further Acme's offerings to builders.[60] Bob Goen is usually credited with developing the original texture process,[61] while Bennett is credited with the idea of molding brick with holes to strengthen the mortar bond and reduce shipping weight. And the industry acknowledged Bennett's contribution to the development of fashions and color schemes in face brick usage.[62] Builders recognized that Bennett's textured products afforded a finish which provided eye relief from the flat surface while retaining the practical virtues of smooth brick.

These efforts earned Acme the highest merit award at the 1927 Texas State Fair manufacturers' show.[63] In short, Acme produced "a brick for every type—and for every color scheme."[64] This flexibility and constant introduction of new product lines kept competitors off balance. What was Acme going to do next? Few companies could surmise the answer or meet Acme's challenge. Fraser Brick and Tile, which held patent rights from the Heath Tile Company, tried to block Acme tile production with a patent suit, but Acme fought this through the courts and won all its points in a landmark decision that ruled hollow clay cubes were unpatentable.[65]

One of the cheapest and most profitable enlargements of offerings came in cooperation with other companies. As a result, by 1926, Acme was acting as a broker for much backup and other material, which it did not manufacture.[66] But the most profitable arrangement came from an understanding between Acme and the Elgin Brick Company of Elgin, Texas. Strangely enough, this agreement, which lasted fifty-four years, started when Acme and Elgin bid for the same job in Amarillo, Texas, in 1918. Ernest Fender was trying hard to sell Acme's Denton product. The buyer was impressed by Acme's reputation, but he liked the lighter-colored Elgin product and could not make up his mind. G. W. Prewitt, owner and salesman for Elgin, discussed the matter with Fender over a nickel beer. Both recognized that Fender could make the sale if he sold a lighter-colored brick. Ultimately, Prewitt allowed Fender to offer the Elgin product under Acme's name, and Fender closed the sale. Furthermore, Prewitt and Fender agreed that each company would broker the other's products in the future.[67] This agreement was finalized with a handshake, and, during the 1920s, the tie between the two companies was so close that Acme could run an article in its magazine about "The Elgin Plant" and receive no criticism.[68] This handshake and "nickel beer" agreement lasted until 1964, when Prewitt's son, J. K. "Buddy" Prewitt, sold the business to Butler Brick Company, also of Elgin, Texas.[69]

Expansion of plant facilities and products necessitated a modernization of marketing practices. In the early days the company had

had to depend primarily on local sales. Even in 1911, when Ernest Fender and Locksley Fife were moved into the sales department, Acme was limited in just how far these men could travel and with whom they could establish contacts. Unwilling to confine his efforts to such a restricted trade area, Fender attempted to sell Acme brick to the redoubtable Jesse H. Jones. In 1912, Jones had reluctantly begun to rebuild the Rice Hotel, making it an eighteen-story structure. The young, self-assured Acme salesman Fender made a tremendous effort to sell Jones the brick needed for that job, an effort that failed. Sensing the disappointment of the young salesman who was convinced that he had the better brick for the better price, Jones said, "Don't worry son—I'm going to build some more buildings."[70] And Jones, of course, did build more. That same year the multi-million-dollar contractor built five new structures in Fort Worth.[71] Fender and Acme supplied the brick for all of them—the Fair Building and Department Store, The Worth Hotel, the Worth Theater, and the twenty-story Medical Arts Building. In fact, Acme brick was used in every large building Jones erected from then on through the 1950s, and Jones built dozens, renovating and enlarging dozens more.[72] Most of the Jones structures are still standing as monuments to both enterprises.

Paralleling the growth of plants, and most often preceding them, Acme's sales organization seemed to mushroom during the 1920s. Starting with the opening of the Shreveport office in 1919, the next few years saw the establishment of sales offices all over the Southwest. The company soon had twenty-eight sales offices in principle cities in Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Tennessee, in addition to maintaining dealerships in Nebraska, Missouri, Illinois, Wisconsin, New York, Florida, Virginia, and North Carolina.[73] In 1928, Acme advertised in national architectural journals as a company that shipped nationwide, selling brick from coast to coast.[74]

By the late 1920s, Acme's sales organization had been broken up into five divisions under J. E. Fender and his assistant, George Puls.[75] Guy Dickerson in Little Rock; Locksley Fife in Dallas; W. B. Mills at Memphis; Edward Podmore at Tulsa; and Edward G. Martin in Wichita Falls, headed sales in their respective areas. Then under these divisions, twenty-nine branch offices were opened and staffed with salesmen such as Shaughnessy, manager in San Antonio; Ray Plumb, manager in Abilene; Victor Anderson in Fort Smith; John A. Heubner at Houston; C. A. King at New Orleans; T. H. Ruffin, branch manager in Shreveport; Duer Waggoner, Ft. Worth city salesman; Lubbock Davies, branch manager in Enid, Oklahoma; E. G. Bolenger, branch

manager in Waco; and Neill Boldrick, city salesman in Dallas. These men were the core of the sales force from 1925 to 1930.[76]

Acme's sales force met strong competition whenever it moved into a new territory, and sometimes this took a strange form, especially if local boys were in danger of losing business to Bennett's company. One such struggle took place before the Interstate Commerce Commission over freight rates from Texas and Arkansas to Tennessee. Here, Traffic Manager D. P. Harris Jr. got his metal tested, but won the case for Acme with the help of a traffic management expert from Texas Christian University, E. A. Starr. In the famous *Southwestern Brick Cases*, Acme contended that interstate rates on brick and other clay products were discriminatory when shipped in carloads from points in Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Kansas to points in Louisiana and Tennessee, and from plants in Acme's three-state area to points in southern Missouri. The commission agreed that the rates were "unreasonable and unduly prejudicial," but denied the company's request for reparations or damages.[77]

Also in this same case, the Interstate Commerce Commission found that intrastate rates on the same commodities, "except common brick," in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and southern Missouri were "unduly prejudicial and unjustly discriminatory against interstate commerce."[78] Since Acme was primarily a face brick manufacturer, this meant that the company did not have to pay a higher rate merely because it made a higher-grade article.[79] Furthermore, this decision forced the adoption of a rate structure more favorable to Acme by eliminating artificial boundaries within its operating territory, resulting in the adoption of a rate schedule that was more reasonable. Acme had been paying prejudicial "short haul" rates that sometimes were twice that of its Kansas and Tennessee competitors. For example, revenue per ton mile from Perla to Memphis was 15.5 cents, while from Chattanooga, Tennessee, to the same point, 139 miles farther, the rate was 8.6 cents.[80]

In another case decided the following year, Acme succeeded in getting fairer rates from different points in Arkansas and Oklahoma to points in Texas. For example, Acme paid two cents a mile less while carrying heavier loads from Fort Smith than from Perla to the same Texas city. Acme received reparation in this instance, but the real purpose of the suit was to get the same uniform rate system established west of the Mississippi as had previously been set up in the East.[81] And likewise in *Acme Brick Company versus Central of Georgia Railway Company, et al*, the brick company sought and received damages for unreasonable rate charges.[82]

Then, in a 1929 case, Acme clashed with the Fort Smith and Western Railway, an ally of the United Brick and Tile. This decision, handed down on December 11, 1929, held that United was favored by eleven cents a hundred weight for tile shipped into Arkansas and Oklahoma from its plants in Missouri and Kansas. Again, Acme received reparations with interest, but in this case, as in the others, reparations were small (the largest was $249.10). Clearly the principle involved was more important to Acme than the actual amount of damages involved.[83]

Some leaders of Acme Brick's successful sales force in the 1920s. Left to right: George Puls, Assistant Sales Manager; W. H. Delehanty, Assistant Sales Manager; Guy Dickerson, Division Sales, Little Rock, Arkansas; W. B. Mills, Division Sales, Memphis, Tennessee; T. H. Ruffin, District Sales, Shreveport, Louisiana; and Edward Podmore, Division Sales, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The success of the Acme sales force is reflected in its efforts to change the skyline of the Southwest. Landmark buildings faced with Acme brick became as familiar as oil wells in the Southwest by the end of the decade. In addition to the structures Jones built in Fort Worth, Acme supplied the bricks for the Abilene, Texas, City Hall; the Mayer Hotel, Amarillo; The Mayo Hotel, Tulsa; the Dallas Cotton Exchange Building; the Fort Worth Club and Office Building; the new (Jones addition) Medical Arts Building and the new Worth Hotel, Fort Worth; the Texas Technological College Group, Lubbock; the Texas Christian University Library, Fort Worth; the University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston; the New Roosevelt Hotel and the Jung Hotel, New Orleans; the Neils Esperson Building and the Gulf Building at Houston. All of these were faced with Perla brick.

Advertising and public relations were part of the well-developed overall sales strategy of the time. But Acme's sales techniques seldom employed direct pressure and price cutting. The company always kept its prices in line with the prevailing market price and depended on its reputation for prompt delivery of high-quality merchandise to assure sales. Acme never used direct mailings or newspaper advertisements.[84] They did advertise in professional, architectural, and clay products journals, and in the company house organ, *The Pug Mill*, which was distributed to architects, contractors, and other major customers, as well as to Acme employees. Company sales offices were always well designed, built of brick, and contained display rooms. Advertising brochures often included reprints of articles from journals.[85] The

company always stressed personal contact with the buyers. Acme also required its staff to have personal memberships in clay products, architectural, and builders organizations.[86] Company films illustrating plant production techniques, homebuilders' guides, bricklayers' instruction manuals, and consulting services enabled salesmen to do a professional job. Even plant tours for customers were a part of the Acme educational program.[87] And, as an aid in training and communication, Acme salesmen held periodic meetings at Fort Worth. The firm encouraged all employees to participate in professional, civic, and community affairs and to assume leadership positions when they were offered them.[88]

Acme tried to serve both the large and small customers. Competitors, however, complained because Acme was almost invariably successful in bidding for large contracts that involved the construction of schools, skyscrapers, and large apartment complexes. Jobs of that sort required a tremendous number of bricks, and Acme had the capacity to supply them promptly whereas other Southwestern companies could do so only over an extended period or by completely wiping out their inventories.[89] This was part of the reason Acme kept at least two million bricks on each plant yard during that time. In short, few companies could continuously supply customers with the needed amounts, and still fewer could come back later and match these with additions.[90] For example, an ordinary skyscraper of the 1920s required an average of 1.25 million face bricks, the equivalent of nearly a month's production for most brick plants.

On the other hand, Acme stressed and promoted home building, remodeling, and veneering with brick. Likewise, Acme pushed sales to smaller institutional groups such as churches, lodges, and schools. Indeed, most of the Acme brochures or one-page advertisements in journals displayed homes and institutions much more often than skyscrapers.[91] The effectiveness of this approach was demonstrated in the fact that hardly a community in Texas or Arkansas is without at least one building today that is constructed of Acme brick.[92]

The Museum collection of brick was another interesting public relations and educational device, which particularly attracted Bennett. This collection of brick from around the world originated with Bennett's first world trip while he was still a boy. Perhaps it was a hobby, but it was one that proved invaluable. At first, Bennett collected brick on each trip he made and got his friends to collect brick for him. In 1923, he began to request brick samples from foreign consulates.[93] Aided by his personal friend, Congressman Fritz G. Lanham,[94] Bennett succeeded in collecting brick from around

the globe. Of especial interest were the brick from ancient Babylon, the Great Wall of China, the Roman Forum, Vesuvius, ancient Egypt, ancient Mexico, and India. Succeeding management added to this collection and placed it on permanent display at the Fort Worth office. But the Museum brick exhibit has traveled to many clay products meetings, fairs, schools, and libraries. By 1971, the display consisted of bricks from ninety-two countries.[95]

The Walter VerHalen home in Dallas, Texas, July 1927.

To a great degree the success of Acme must be attributed to the high morale and strong company spirit Bennett was able to develop. By spirit, in this case, is meant the cooperative attitude, the enthusiasm, the desire to reach common goals, and the pride shown in all the company's efforts. Undoubtedly, this spirit and what Bennett called a "brick psychology" was a reflection of Bennett's own attitudes, for he "believed in brick" and it's usefulness. "I make my living from people's prosperity; not their troubles like many other professionals," he often said with pride, and he firmly believed that brick was the most economical building material available to man.[96] His slogan was, "A brick of every type and for every purpose." Lifting a title from a 1912 issue of *House Beautiful*, he wrote a series of articles in *The Pug Mill* entitled "The Romance of Brick," in which he traced the origin, uses, and methods of brickmaking from ancient times to the 1920s. In these articles he emphasized the beauty, strength, and durability of brick as a building material and the efficiency of modern manufacturing methods.[97]

From this emphasis came other company slogans such as: "Acme Brick—Everlastingly Beautiful"; "Brick—the Noblest of Building Materials"; "A Well-burned Clay Never Decays—Specify Acme Brick"; "Face Brick Walls Require No Upkeep"; "A Brick for Every Type—A Color for Every Color Scheme"; "There Is No Substitute for

Brick"; and "Build Insurance into Your Homes with Fire-resistive Burned-clay Products."[98] Other slogans stressed the stability and traditions of the company through such phrases as: "Build for the Centuries with Acme Brick," "Thirty-six Years in the Art of Brickmaking," "Manufacturers of the Products We Sell," "A Complete Service from Pit to Kiln to Job," and "A Southern-wide Service from Ten Acme-owned-operated Plants."[99]

The Petroleum Building, Houston, Texas, October 1927.

The decade ending in 1929, saw Acme Brick Company become a "winner" and reach the zenith of its golden era. During that period, Acme had purchased four other brick companies with their nine plants and had continued all but one of them in operation. Acme had modernized its two original Texas plants and built two more, Perla No. 1 and Tulsa. Additionally, the company had formed an alliance with Elgin Standard. This expansion had broadened the offerings of the company, brought in valuable personnel, and enlarged its markets. Acme redesigned its financial structure several times as well as its secondary level of administration to keep pace with its growth in other directions. Consequently, sound finances and operating procedures became established while company assets quadrupled during the period. To penetrate previously unopened markets, Acme extended its base of operations from North Texas to include all of the Southwest and established strategically placed service outlets throughout the nation. Furthermore, by adopting and developing modern sales techniques and tactics, Acme successfully met its competition. Finally, Acme inaugurated excellent internal and external public relations programs which strengthened friendship ties and employee loyalty; these were the crowning efforts that led to an inspired working team. That team, working as a unit, changed the face of the Southwest and left a tradition of cooperation to its heirs.

The Milam Building, San Antonio, Texas, May 1928.

THE MILAM BUILDING
San Antonio, Texas

GEORGE WILLIS
Architect

L. T. WRIGHT & CO.
Contractors

COTTER BROTHERS
Masonry Contractors

Faced with Varying Shades of Acme Ivory, Buff and Gray Tones from our Petit Edna

ACME BRICK.....the Color Medium Employed in the "Art of the Skyscraper"

THE "Art of the Skyscraper"—the cathedral of commerce, towering with majesty and colorful contrast toward the blue of the sky—typifies the genius of the American architect to give to the utilitarian an investiture of exquisite form and color harmony. With this art, said to be America's greatest gift to architecture, Acme Brick finds favor as a color medium suited to any architectural type.

The Milam Building is another noteworthy instance in which Acme Face Brick has been employed in the "Art of the Skyscraper." Its colorful walls in varying tones of ivory, buff, and softly contrasting grays, grace the skyline of San Antonio. The name Milam brings to mind one of the heroes of Texas' Cradle of Liberty—the sacred Alamo, situated within shadows' length of this modern colorful skyscraper. One exemplifies the sacred traditions of the past, the other typifies the splendid progress of the present.

Let Us Help You Solve Your Color Problems

Thirty-seven years in the art of brickmaking and ten Acme owned-and-operated plants enable us to offer you face brick that means greenstone of any architectural type or period.

ACME BRICK COMPANY

ESTABLISHED 1891

"Manufacturers of the Products We Sell"

"A Brick for Every Type—A Color for Every Color Scheme"

PLANTS OWNED AND OPERATED

Perla, Fort Smith, Little Rock, Malvern, Arkansas; Bonham, Denton, Wichita Falls, Texas; Cleveland, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

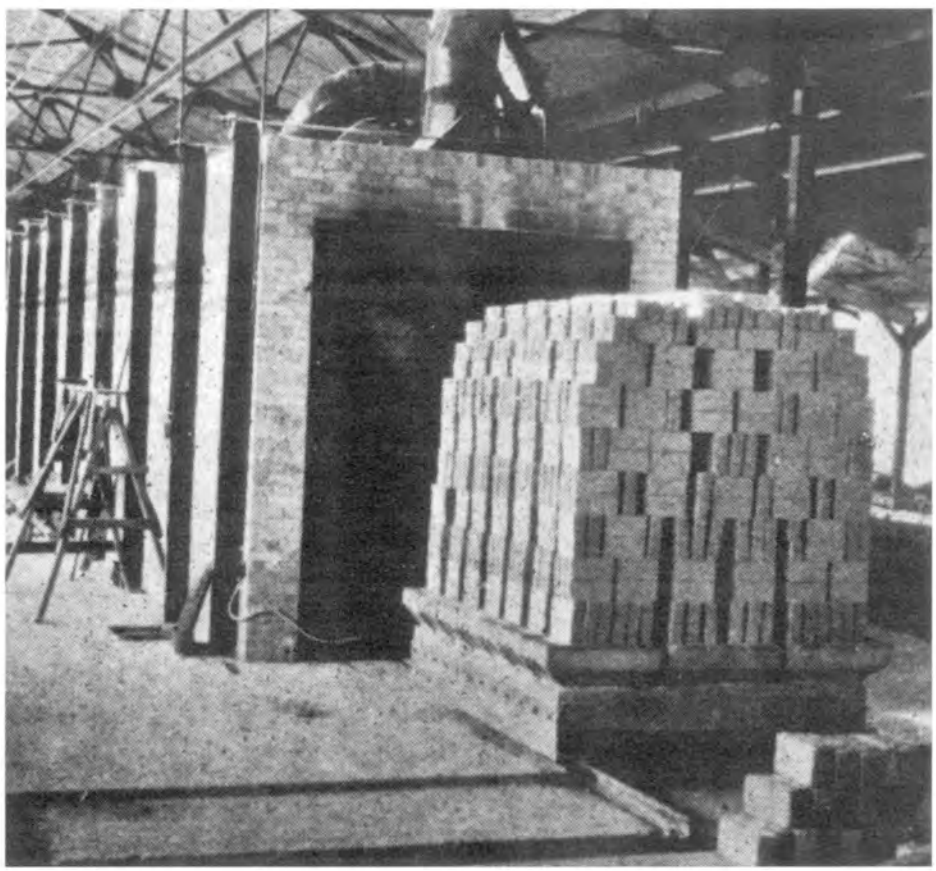
OFFICES AND DISPLAYS THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH

Abilene, Amarillo, Beaumont, Cookson, Dallas, Perris, Fort Smith, Fort Worth, Galveston, Houston, Greenville, Little Rock, Memphis, Monroe, New Orleans, Oklahoma City, Perla, Port Arthur, Shreveport, San Antonio, Tulsa, Waco, Wichita Falls.

BUILD FOR THE CENTURIES WITH ACME BRICK

The Gulf Building, Houston, Texas, March 1929.

Acme Brick Company entered the next decade as a large, modern, efficient, and prominent clay products enterprise. It had weathered many vicissitudes but its many successes had sustained it. Despite its strength and excellent organization, Acme, like other large firms and the American public in general, was about to meet its most severe test. The stock market crash of 1929 signaled the close of a prosperous era and the opening of one of the most economically depressed times in American history.



6

From Crash to War

Acme's volume of sales continued at high levels throughout 1929. Meanwhile, however, another kind of volume was reaching its peak. On October 28 of that year, stock sales hit 16.4 million shares on the New York exchange and 7 million on the curb outside. Ticker tapes ran hours behind schedule.[1] Panic had hit the exchange, but it would be some months before Acme really felt the effects of the depression that was to follow in the wake of the stock market crash.

Above: Setting the brick removed from the dryer cars onto the kiln cars in 1930.

Left: The Perla tunnel kiln ready to receive a kiln car loaded with brick to be burned. One of the old tunnel kilns built at Perla in the 1930s was still in operation in 1990.

Indeed, President Herbert Hoover's words, reassuring the country that business was sound and prosperous, were taken to heart by Acme officials. Everyone in the company believed that they were experiencing only another mild recession like the one in 1921.[2] Walter Bennett, echoing the country's president, predicted in *The Pug Mill* a year later that "today's condition is a forecast of tomorrow's prosperity."[3]

Furthermore, he said:

> The time for a pessimistic attitude is not therefore for this hour, but rather belongs to the hour when business is at its pinnacle. The very lull about which there has been so much babble is in itself a positive and reliable forecast of good things to come, . . . for the world has way of catching up. How else could our growth and development of today have come about? Thus, we progress.[4]

But there were signs that Acme could not avoid being caught in the downtrend. At the stockholders' meeting held early in 1929, Bennett himself had noted some alarming signs. Sales for January and February 1929 were only about 50 percent of those for 1928.[5] Home construction nationwide had fallen for three years—yet the Southwest was actually doing better than elsewhere. That summer the Pine Bluff plant closed, never to reopen. By the end of 1929, shipments had slipped by about thirteen million bricks below the

1928 peak. The next year, Acme experienced the most drastic drop yet in sales, for in 1930 they shipped only ninety-eight million brick—seventy million fewer than in 1928. Actually, nearly half of the company plants could have shut down and their loss would never have been felt.[6] Brick began to stack up in the yards. The Perla plant, however, continued to do well in 1930, since a number of large buildings erected by the Jones's interest were still in the process of construction, and Perla was supplying the bricks to complete them.[7] Shortly after the building season started in 1930, however, the Little Rock plant closed down completely and did not reopen until after World War II. Dealer sales fell off sharply as fewer and fewer orders were received from outside the Acme region.[8]

Harvesting Acme Perla clay in 1930.

As sales fell, Acme closed some of its many sales offices. In 1929, Acme had twenty-eight sales offices, but by October 1931, these had shrunk to twelve. Slowly but surely the company was having to withdraw from its radial sales network. The only remaining sales offices were Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Fort Smith, Little Rock, New Orleans, Shreveport, Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, San Antonio, Wichita Falls, and Houston.[9]

Acme's advertising began to reflect the slump in construction. At mid-summer *The Pug Mill* became a bi-monthly publication, and the company dropped national advertising early in 1931. To stimulate sales, Acme urged customers to "build now while labor and materials are economically available."[10] With the Christmas 1931 issue *The Pug Mill* was discontinued. No company publication appeared again for many years. Something was lost when this magazine stopped—everyone knew it, everyone regretted it, but the worst was still in the offing.[11]

As sales continued their downward trend, the company management tried further belt-tightening. Plants were put on temporary schedules, some shutting down for a few weeks at a time, others for a few months. Wages finally were cut in half. At the end of 1932 a sort of bottom was reached, for sales had fallen to twenty-four million bricks—the production capacity of the Bennett plant. A little over twelve million bricks were stacked up at Denton alone, awaiting shipping orders that were not forthcoming.

The Denton plant afforded a good example of the disastrous effects of the depression on the brick industry. Joe Hobson, who became its superintendent that fateful month of October 1929, recalled:

> There seemed to be no end to laying off men. By about the first of 1932, the four foremen were night watching half-time making $10.50 per week. I was day watching at $100.00 per month—all this was seven days a week—we were all very thankful to have any kind of job. I remember very well (that) in January 1933 total sales at the Denton plant was 500 common brick.[13]

Company finances reflected the disaster that had befallen Acme, for assets dwindled from a high of $4,253,210 to $2,040,437 in 1933.[14] And, at the same time, the company was recapitalized downward for the only time in its history. On July 26, 1932, Bennett called a special stockholders' meeting, not to announce an annexation or increase in holdings, but to request that the $100 par value stock be sliced to $50 a share and that new preferred stock be reissued at a lower rate of interest.[15]

Company officials strove mightily to keep Acme from collapsing, and they succeeded. The company paid its bills, reduced its debt, maintained adequate reserves, and invested in federal securities. Its net worth decreased in comparable manner to recapitalization; however, this was maintained at around the 1925 level. Paralleling the other indications of prosperity or depression, income taxes fell to World War I levels from an average of about $40,000 a year to $7,000. Acme's customers apparently were doing worse, and the company wrote off $90,231 in bad debts.[16]

Yet, Acme fared better than many other brick companies, for many went completely bankrupt, and there were few prospective buyers for closed brickworks. In the 1920s, due largely to consolidation and mergers, the number of brick plants in the United States shrank from 2,414 to 1,846.[17] In the 1930s, however, due largely to bankruptcy, the number declined to 783.[18]

Somehow Acme avoided such a tragedy, although 1933 and 1934 were to be the worst years in the financial history of the company. Economic conditions worsened generally in 1932 and 1933, but 1934 was the worst of all, in spite of the promised "New Deal." In that year, the company went into the red by $120,632, the first and last loss Acme ever showed on its balance

Loading clay into cars for delivery to a clay storage building. Tractors dumped the clay from above into hoppers that filled rail cars.

sheet.[19] In part, this was due to the fact that sales slipped to a mere twenty million bricks. The company had to take up some of its stock, thus cutting its surplus to about $260,000, the lowest since 1920.[20] Still another reason was the assumption of the debts and assets of a nearby company.

Cured clay was stored inside a building waiting for processing.

One of Acme's allies against out-of-state competition, the Bridgeport Brick Company, had been forced into bankruptcy in 1930. Acme did what it could for this stricken friend, even continuing to broker Bridgeport brick at a profit for its owners. But eventually Bridgeport could not stave off the courts and was delivered into receivership. Acme took up the debts of most of its plants—those at Ferris, Bridgeport, and Mexia, Texas—but left the affiliate Bayou Brick Company, Cedar Bayou (Baytown), Texas, to be sold to creditors.[21] It was some time before these plants could be brought into operation, but Bridgeport resumed production in 1935 and Ferris shortly afterwards. Although an attempt was made to reopen the Mexia plant, it did not succeed.[22] The inauguration of the "New Deal" by President Franklin D. Roosevelt helped revive Acme officials' confidence in the future. Acme joined the government's National Recovery Administration's (NRA) "Blue Eagle" program and cooperated with its efforts.[23] The NRA was short lived, but its impact on industry in general, and Acme in particular, was great and lasting. The NRA led ultimately to the strong union movement and, in effect, made labor a partner with business, albeit an unwelcome one at first because of the strikes it fostered. For Acme Brick and Walter Bennett, it was a palliative that instead gave a headache, but, as one writer said, "It gave businessmen something to do while depression pursued its weary course."[24]

Weighted down by the cares of the company and the mountains of government busy work, and crushed by the burdens of responsibility thrust upon him, Walter Bennett's health began to fail. Normally a robust, energetic man, his weight dropped dramatically and his vigor declined. Even while in the hospital for several months before his death, he attempted to run the business by telephone and conferences.[25] When he succumbed, and died on January 15, 1935, in Dallas, Acme suffered its greatest loss of the depression.[26]

The public had lost a friend and benefactor, too, for in addition to his business career with Acme, Bennett had contributed in various ways to many civic enterprises. He had been the first chairman of the Tarrant County Water Development Board and was instrumental in improving and developing water resources; Eagle Mountain Lake is one of his many achievements. He had been an active member of the Fort Worth Club, and the River Crest Country Club, as well as the Royal Arch and Knight's Templar

Masons and Shrine. He also served on the board of directors for the Texas and Pacific Railroad and the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce. In like manner, he had been active in just about every major charity activity in the city.[27]

Bennett's death left a void in the company that was difficult to fill. His longtime friend and business associate, William Bryce, the senior vice president, immediately assumed the legal duties of president and board chairman.[28] But Bryce was seventy-four years old and had other pressing obligations. Consequently, a new administrative structure had to be set up if the company was to be operated effectively. After discussion among company leaders, a new plan was submitted and approved at the next stockholders' meeting.[29]

Dried brick being moved to be loaded onto kiln cars in 1930.

The new structure provided for a president of the board of directors, who would also be president of Acme Brick Company, and a senior vice president and general manager, who would actually run the company.[30] The man selected for the latter post was J. E. Fender, another longtime official of the company. This arrangement was adopted by those who wanted to see Fender direct company affairs and Bryce act as general supervisor.[31] Fender really cared little for the title, but did wish to run company business.[32]

Since Bryce had played such a big part in Acme's success and had one of the longest associations with the company and its founders, a closer look at his affairs is justified. William Bryce was eminently qualified for his new position. "The record of his work would present a satisfactory sketch of the building, growth, and improvement of this city (Fort Worth) during this period of nearly four decades," wrote Paddock in 1922.[33] Born in Lanarkshire, Scotland, on February 14, 1861, the son of a masonry contractor, Bryce emigrated with his parents to Canada in 1869. When he was nineteen, he went to Winnepeg, Manitoba, where he learned bricklaying. In 1881, he immigrated to the United States, and two years later settled in Fort Worth, where he worked as a journeyman bricklayer before going into business for himself. Beginning with "a shack on Main Street with capital painstakingly saved from wages and no credit," he built his business into one of the largest building firms in Texas and the South.[34]

While still a brick mason, Bryce entered the real estate business and "rose to prominence through sheer ability, application, and character." In the 1890s he formed the Bryce Building Company.

Among the structures his firm constructed were the Texas Brewing Company, Burris Mills and Elevators, the Hendricks Building, one of the large Armour plants, the Exchange Building at the stockyards, the Fort Worth Club Building, and many residential subdivisions such as Park Hill, Arlington Heights in Fort Worth, and several other subdivisions in Dallas.[35] In addition, he was active in several other corporations, serving on the board of directors of the Fort Worth National Bank, Miller Mutual Fire Insurance Company, the State Reserve Life Insurance Company, and Texas Electric Service Company. He also served as president of the Drumon Seed and Floral Company.[36]

Bryce occupied an office in the quaint Bryce Building, that was couched in the recess at the rear of the Fort Worth Public Library, across from City Hall and just around the corner from several office buildings which housed businesses in which he had an active interest. Always active in civic affairs, as well as in his numerous business enterprises, Bryce served on the Fort Worth City Council in the 1920s and as one of a thirty-five member commission that drew up the city charter, helped to secure the adoption of the Council Manager form of government in 1925. He was drafted for mayor and succeeded H. C. Meacham as mayor of Fort Worth from 1927 to 1933. Although a quiet, ruddy-faced, retiring man, Bryce was much in the public eye as mayor, councilman, and director of the Southwest Exposition and Fat Stock Show.[37] In December 1933, however, Bryce retired from politics because of his ill health and the serious illness of his wife, who died a few months later of injuries she had received over a year before in an auto accident.

Bryce also contributed generously and nonostentatiously to many charities and not until his death, in 1944, was it discovered how greatly he had helped many churches and the Children's Hospital. Other groups to which he lent his support were the Masons, Elks, and Knights of Pythias.[38]

Associated with George E. Bennett, first as a customer and then in the joint enterprise of building the Fort Worth stockyards, Bryce became interested in Walter Bennett and aided him considerably through the years before and after the Denton merger. "He was a gentlemen in every sense of the word," Mrs. W. R. Bennett declared, and he "set an admirable example for all who associated with him."[39] An example, which to a great degree, was followed and implemented by all the top Acme officials from the beginning. Only one photograph of Bryce,[40] one of Walter Bennett, and none of J. E. Fender appeared in five years of *The Pug Mill* publication, because "they did not wish to project themselves above their workers."[41]

After Bryce "retired" in 1919, he actually served Acme as an adviser rather than as a field officer, leaving most of the daily operations to Bennett and the other vice presidents. Although Bryce gave as much time as he could spare, Fender took care of actual company business until 1941 when Bryce really did retire.[42] Aside from electing W. K. Stripling to replace Walter R. Bennett, the board in the 1930s remained essentially the same as that of late 1929.[43]

After the death of Walter Bennett, Bryce and Fender guided the company through the final years of the depression. Buoyed by anticipated government programs, they reopened the Bridgeport and Ferris plants in 1935 under the supervision of Ray W. Pafford, then in charge of production. Roy G. Smith had been fired shortly after Fender took the reins of management.[44] They expanded the refractories department, as the company turned to institutional markets, both industrial and commercial, and sought less and less residential business. By making this change, management hoped to stabilize Acme's finances and economic position. Although the company had completely closed the plants at Pine Bluff, Little Rock, Cleveland, and, in 1937, Wichita Falls, facilities at Bridgeport and Ferris helped offset their loss. The plants that continued to operate could easily fill any production gaps.[45] Under Fender's leadership, gross sales rose to $2,023,657 by the start of World War II. The company's net worth, however, did not rise comparably because of debt reduction and large outlays in dividends. Assets of the company did not reach the 1929 level until 1948, but reserves were maintained at $600,000 and $700,000 during the period. The amount of stock issued also did not change appreciably. The preferred stock, however, was gradually bought, so that by 1946 all shares outstanding were common shares. From an investor's viewpoint the rise in book value from $50 a share to $80 in six short years was gratifying, and 8 percent dividends (average) must have improved investor confidence.[46]

Acme was not without its problems with labor in the 1930s, as both the Malvern and Perla as well as the Bridgeport plants became unionized, with the latter striking near the end of the 1940s. This strike lasted some months, but Acme finally reached a settlement favorable to the company; Bridgeport has not experienced a strike since that time. Acme's policy then and now was not anti-labor but anti-union, for its leaders have been staunch supporters of better-than-average wages and treatment of employees.[47]

The Bridgeport plant has a long history of ups and downs. Bridgeport, Texas, located in Wise County, about forty-five miles northwest of Fort Worth, undoubtedly owes its existence to the deposits of coal that underlie the area. The zone is part of the same geologic formations that exist at Thurber and Bennett and was created at the same geologic time. It rests on the shoreline of an ancient ocean that has long since disappeared.[48] In the 1880s Bridgeport sprang up as a coalmining town, although a necessary amount of farming and ranching lent support to the local economy. As at the Tulsa operations, a certain amount of coalmining refuse was brought to the surface and piled into large mounds. Much later it was discovered that these mounds were of high-grade shale, ideal for the manufacturing of clay products.[49]

A group of Acme employees at the Perla plant in 1930. Third from the left is Van Zandt Mitchell, Acme's construction superintendent.

A brick plant was first built on the Acme site in 1906—a dry-press plant that soon became a stiff-mud operation. The name of this company was the Wise County Brick Company, and J. C. Moncrief was in charge of plant construction. In 1911, this company purchased a tile plant in Nebraska, then dismantled it and moved it to Bridgeport in 1916. Then in 1918, the plant was moved again, this time to the site of the present Acme plant. The principle owner at this time was C. W. Martin. He went on to form the Bridgeport Brick Company in 1921. By 1924, this company had purchased the Diamond Brick Company plants at Ferris, followed later on by one at Mexia, Texas, and the Bayou Brick Company at Baytown. Martin's company went under in 1930, and Acme took all its plants in North Texas, while retaining its employees.[50]

Of course, the policy of Acme Brick Company was to "make them better," and Mann, under Ray Pafford's supervision, conducted renovations before operations began in 1935. Eventually, the surface shale was used up and, in 1953, after the plant had been rebuilt in 1952, Pafford installed a shale planer. The plant now uses open pit operations and, for a time, supplied tile for Acme and the Ceramic Cooling Tower Corporation.[51]

Different plants suffered different fates during these depression years prior to World War II. Although the Bennett plant nearly stopped production in 1933, men were kept on the payroll there, grinding useless bats for roads and making brick, while grass literally grew in the kilns at Perla, Denton, and elsewhere.[52] Since

1936, the Bennett plant earnings never dropped below $50,000 a year, while other plants made little or no profit for the company. In 1935 and 1936, when Denton was on steam operations,[53] its profits did not meet the payroll, although it exceeded production at Bennett. The Tulsa plant operated at near full production after 1936, except for 1938 and 1940, when its product fell to less than twenty thousand tons. The Fort Smith and Oklahoma City plants likewise had bad years in 1938 and 1940, but the one at Wichita Falls had the lowest production and profit record of all the plants in 1936 and 1937 and was closed out. Perla and Malvern each did about the same, although they were closed down completely in 1934, except for the experimental refractory production that Bennett and Smith had started at Perla late in 1933. Since Perla and Malvern were in the throes of labor trouble, Perla records for 1936 are not clear; but it continued to use about as much fuel as the Bennett plant, which would indicate that it remained in production. Of the two Bridgeport Brick Company plants, only the Bridgeport plant really made any profits in the 1930s. It was not until near the end of World War II before the Ferris plant did little more than cover its expenses. Most of the time, it made less money than the Wichita Falls plant had before it was closed. Parenthetically, by the end of the decade, only Fort Smith remained on steam operations.[54]

Acme steam trains hauled the mined clay to storage bins at the Perla plant. Most Acme plants went to the use of locomotives in the late 1920s and 1930s, but this system was used at Perla as early as 1924.

The sales department began to revive in 1935, and Acme attempted to reacquire sales territory lost during the slump. Salesmen, who were now supplied with automobiles, hit the road trying to cover larger amounts of territory. By 1939, Acme was hiring additional salesmen and trying to enlarge its share of the residential construction market.[55] With the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939, there was a brief upsurge in sales, but orders fell off again during the period of the "phony war." Then, with Germany's blitzkrieg attacks in 1940, America's industrial output surged back, and Acme's refractory business began to go into high gear. Production went back up to the 1925 level, and, by the time America became involved in the war in 1941, Acme had sold eighty-five million bricks—the largest amount since 1930. But even at that the company still ran at only half capacity.[56]

Times were changing fast in response to these almost unbelievable happenings in the world. And Bennett, Texas, changed more in the period between the two world wars than it had in the previous half century. The coming of the automobile brought additional change. The company had shielded the community to a great

The inside of a machine room at Perla in 1931.

extent, spreading the work on a rotational basis to prevent unemployment. For a while the company extended credit to workers through the company store. The village got the reputation of being a place to get handouts, and as hoboes by the thousands rode into town on the railroad, they became such a serious problem that trains ceased to stop there anymore. The company, however, provided these destitute travelers a campground across the tracks from the plant instead of driving them out as trespassers. With the start of World War II and the movement of more industry to Texas, people began to migrate from the valley to larger towns. And with this exodus, the population figures for Bennett began to shrink. By 1971, only about sixty people lived there.[57] In 1990, approximately thirty workers resided in the village.

Another result of the depression was that Acme sold off nearly two sections of land, which had been painstakingly procured over a forty-five-year period by A. K. Root, George Bennett, and Walter Bennett. In October 1935, Bryce and Fender sold 1,230 acres of their Parker County holdings for $50 an acre. By this action, Acme retired completely from the farming and ranching business, which had been so much a part of the old Bennett system. Later, however, in the 1950s, Acme bought a lake near Bennett, which the Texas Pacific Railroad had built in 1934, and in 1960 bought back another acre of shale reserves.[58]

With the outbreak of the Second World War, Acme's machinery was back into production. The financial crisis was over. Sales were reviving, and stockholders' confidence was restored. So, in 1941, at the stockholders' annual meeting, the temporary structure that had been set up in 1935 was replaced by one that was to serve the company during the next two decades of tremendous growth. The new structure abolished the position of vice president and general manager and created a chairman of the board. Under the new system William Bryce became chairman of the board, and James Ernest Fender assumed the responsibilities and title of president of Acme Brick Company, a position he held until 1959.[59]

7

War and Cold War: Acme, 1941–1959

In 1940, the board of directors of Acme Brick Company drew up a proposed change of structure that was adopted by the stockholders early in 1941 and remained basically unchanged for twenty-one years. The board at this time consisted of William Bryce, Willard Burton, E. R. Collier, J. E. Fender, Locksley Fife, R. E. Harding, Mrs. Corrine M. Hardy, Joe B. Hogsett, and H. C. McKinney. Under the new arrangement J. E. Fender became president; R. E. Harding, vice president; Jack Pickens, vice president; and C. L. Wilson, secretary-treasurer.[1]

Left: Plant Superintendent Chris Ohmsieder and Mr. Dee Hartman, loading foreman, inspect brick prepared for the Weir plant tunnel kiln in 1948.

With each passing year of the war, more and more responsibility devolved upon the vice presidents and managers, with the result that by 1946, the lines of authority had become more formalized and clearly defined. The new structure embodied an operational arrangement that had existed for nearly ten years. Fender, during that time, still called himself "President and General Manager" and relied heavily on subordinate managers who acted in the capacity of vice presidents.[2] This manager-vice president concept had evolved out of Fender's long experience in sales with Acme Brick Company.[3]

In 1941, Fender was the oldest executive from point of service in the Acme organization, having been with the company since 1907.[4] He was born in Terrell, Texas, on January 17, 1883, to John W. and Mattie A. Fender, who had four other children: three daughters and another son, Robert W., who was seven years older than James Ernest.[5] In 1887, the Fenders moved to Fort Worth, and in the following year, the father of the family, a lumberman, was killed in a railroad accident. All of the children made their way through high school; Robert worked for the First National Bank and later became one of the executives there.[6] When James finished high school, around the turn of the century, he was employed by the Nash Hardware Company, the firm for which he had previously worked several summers. While serving as a bill collector for the Nash Company, he attended the old Fort

Worth University and was active in a men's choral group, the Arions, who practiced during lunch hour.[7]

In 1903, the Fender family apparently was getting along very well, so the young James Ernest sought his fortune in California. He stayed there only a short time, however, and then went to Seattle, Washington, where he found employment as a laborer for the Renton-Holmes Lumber Company. In Seattle, he attended church, sang in the choir, and became friends with the Getty sisters, whose father was a prominent businessman connected with Renton-Holmes. These sisters aided his advancement in the company by securing letters of recommendation for him from mutual friends in Fort Worth. Fender became a clerk for the lumber concern, then a buyer, and finally a salesman, a position that required him to travel extensively at home and abroad.[8]

In early 1906, while waiting to board ship for Hamburg, Germany, Fender received word that his mother was seriously ill and was expected to die at any moment. He wrestled only briefly with the problem of whether to make the trip or return to Fort Worth. He immediately gave Renton-Holmes termination notice and left for home. Upon arrival at Fort Worth he found his mother lingering between life and death. Gradually she improved, and Fender sought employment in Fort Worth so that he could remain with her during her convalescence.[9]

A friend, Eddie Newell, who was associated with William Bryce and George Bennett, arranged for Fender to meet Walter R. Bennett, who had just taken over the management of Acme Pressed Brick. Although Fender was a few years older than Walter, the two had known each other earlier in high school. They became the best of friends and complemented each other very well—Fender, the extrovert salesman, and Bennett, the businessman and thinker.[10] Fender began working as a timekeeper and bookkeeper at the company store on January 5, 1907.[11]

For the next thirty years, much of Acme Brick's history could be written around these two young men and their efforts to build the company. While Bennett managed the company as vice president, Fender was timekeeper, bookkeeper, salesman, and shipping clerk. When Acme merged with Denton Press Brick, Fender became the secretary of Acme Pressed Brick; and along with Andrew Kelly and W. R. Bennett, he handled the land purchases in Denton that shortly preceded the consolidation.[12]

In 1910, Fender met Miss Katilee Martin of Weatherford.[13] Her remarkable father had served as attorney for Parker County when only nineteen years old. In 1903, he was appointed assistant

attorney general of Texas by Governor S. W. T. Lanham. He died at the age of thirty-six, leaving a wife and five children to fend for themselves.[14] So in the fall of 1910, Katilee, anxious to help with the family income, took a part-time job teaching at the Bennett Lakota School. She lived at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Sanders, walked to the nearby school, and returned to Weatherford on Friday evenings.[15] One weekend, shortly after she began teaching, she met Fritz G. Lanham, who was accompanied by two young men. Lanham introduced the young men as Walter R. Bennett and Ernest Fender. It was not long before Fender began to accompany Miss Martin on her trips between Weatherford and the school. Less than three years later, in June 1913, they were married.[16] The couple had two sons, Howard Martin and James Ernest. Howard became an attorney. His firm handled Acme legal affairs for years, and he also served as district attorney for Tarrant County. James Ernest Fender Jr. started to work for Acme in 1936, eventually becoming a sales coordinator in the home office at Fort Worth.[17]

Fender remained a salesman and secretary until after Acme Pressed Brick Company was rechartered; then he became vice president and general sales manager, as well as secretary of the board of directors.[18] Locksley Fife, also a vice president, was in charge of sales in North Texas and Louisiana until his retirement in the early 1930s.[19] During the 1920s, it was Fender's efforts that shaped the expanding sales department, and as senior vice president and general manager, he ran the company during the last half of the 1930s before becoming president in 1941.

To understand the company structure as it evolved during the war period, the following summary of the system inaugurated by Walter Bennett will prove helpful. Prior to 1910, Acme Pressed Brick had only one plant. The plant superintendent and the company president decided when to make brick, basing their decision on the orders received from contractors, lumber yards, and other concerns. Occasionally, George Bennett made agreements with various building materials and supply companies to broker Acme Brick. In this way, additional outlets were developed, but even under those conditions, orders were uncertain and sporadic. Walter Bennett at first made no changes in the way the company was run. But with the Denton merger two plants had to be coordinated, and a larger variety of brick had to be sold. At this time, W. R. Bennett turned the Dallas area over to Locksley Fife and his brother,[20] while Fender attempted to develop other areas and to coordinate all sales. By 1918, several salesmen had been added, and orders had greatly increased, thus necessitat-

ing the establishment of a sales manager and an office staff of about fifteen people.[21]

During this period and throughout the 1920s, officers of the company, board of directors, and management committees were almost synonymous.[22] The company finance committee was composed of Bennett, Fife, and Fender, while the production department committee was Bennett, Smith and Kelly.[23] All but Kelly served on the board. As the company expanded during the 1920s, many former officers of the annexed companies became stockholders and officers of Acme.[24] These multifarious elements were held together by W. R. Bennett "who played the role of peacemaker."[25]

Soon after Bennett's death, this type of owner-director-officer organization began to erode. Several other officers had previously died or retired, and Roy S. Smith left the company when Fender was made general manager.[26] By 1941, the only company officials on the board were Bryce, Fender, and Harding—a minority. Management was tending to become more professional, rather than owner-operated, in spite of the fact that company officers were also stockholders. With William Bryce's death in September 1944, another change became necessary, and Joe B. Hogsett, a prominent Fort Worth investor, was elected chairman of the board.[27]

As early as 1939, Fender had a well-oiled machine. All the procedures for sales, production, and office operations had been worked out and were not to be revised until 1958 and 1959. In the mid-1930s, Fender, as general manager, had promoted Ray Pafford to the position of general plant manager; George Puls to general sales manager; W. A. Barber Jr. to auditor and controller; and E. J. Robinett to traffic manager. When Puls, a crack salesman in the 1920s, became ill, Fender called upon Neill Boldrick, then in charge of sales at Houston, to replace him. When he had recovered, Puls returned to Acme in the early war years and became general sales manager for refractories.[28] In 1945, the board designated all officers of the company vice presidents. These redoubtable men, along with Joe B. Hogsett, the board chairman, worked together like a three-team tandem pulling for the progress of the company. Fender was able to hold the reins until he was seventy-six.[29]

Board of directors' composition also changed somewhat during the 1940s, mostly due to the death of previous board members. Mrs. W. R. Bennett joined the board in 1942, followed by Guy Price and Van Zandt Smith, who were appointed to replace Willard Burton and William Bryce, both of whom had died. Price was a businessman, and Smith was the head of the law firm that

handled Acme's business. Mrs. O. G. Murphy replaced Corrinne Hardy, representing the old Arkansas interests. In addition to these four, there were Fender, Fife, Harding, Hogsett, McKinney, and William H. Tyler, a wholesaler, who joined the group in 1949.[30]

Fender himself set the example for his staff by becoming vigorously involved in affairs outside the company and urging his officers to do the same. He was active in Rotary and Masonic affairs and served on the board of directors of the National Manufacturers Association. He was elected president of the Texas Manufacturers Association, a director of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, a board member of Trinity University, and a trustee of the First Presbyterian Church. He also served as a board member of the Belt Line Railway Company and as a member of the Trinity River Improvement Association. Socially, he was active in the Rivercrest Country Club, the Fort Worth Club, and the Dallas Athletic Club.[31] Each officer was also an active member and leader in some industry-related organization—Puls in a refractories society, Pafford in the American Ceramic Society, Boldrick in the Standards Society, and Fender and others in the Structural Clay Products Institute.[32]

Shortly after Fender became Acme's president, America entered the Second World War. Fender had to do triple duty: first as the company's chief officer, second as a dollar-a-year man heading the fuel administration, and third as president of the Structural Clay Products Institute.[33] All three positions were demanding, but with the cooperation of the company officers and personnel, Fender successfully carried out his duties, and Acme Brick Company emerged from the war stronger than ever. In 1942, Acme sales passed the 100 million mark for the first time since 1929. During World War II, the growing refractories business and tile manufacturing accounted for the greater part of production. Face brick sales surged briefly after Pearl Harbor. Then, in 1943, the government set priorities for building materials, and few face brick were sold or produced.[34]

Labor, again, was in short supply to produce the badly needed clay products that went into industrial furnaces, war plants, and military construction. This gap was partially filled by hiring women to handle, truck, and off-bear brick, as well as to do clerical work formerly done mostly by men. In late 1943, prisoners of war from the European and North African campaign were brought in and put to work in many Acme plants. Considerable numbers of prisoners of war worked at Perla, Fort Smith, Bennett, Denton, Bridgeport, and Oklahoma City.[35]

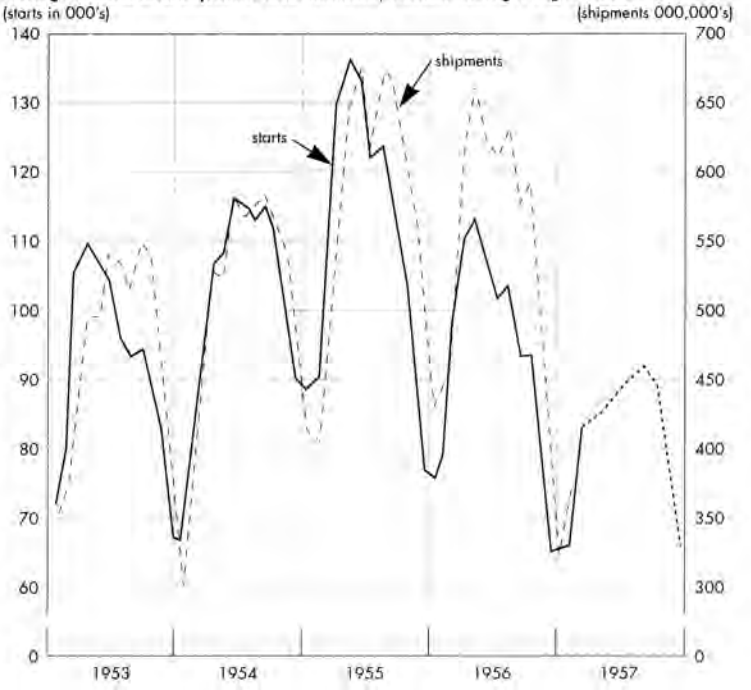
These people made good workers at some plants and poor ones at others. Asa Goodman, superintendent of Perla, said that "they only got in the way and often got hurt."[36] But, according to Dwight Alexander, the prisoners "had good records at Denton, and other plants with only one known attempt at escape, and that, at Denton."[37] Here, one prisoner worked in his trench coat, whether it was hot or cold. Eventually fellow workers and guards accepted his eccentricity. This man used his coat to hide excess food and water, which he stored for an escape. But the evening of his attempted escape, he and his food cache were found hidden in a smoke stack. On one occasion at Bennett, a prisoner refused to work in a hot kiln with a man who never washed his overalls.[38] These were really only minor incidents. At the Garrison plant, a plaque on one of the kilns commemorated the fact that it was constructed by prisoners of war.[39] Organized labor at Fort Smith complained that the use of these POW's deprived them of work.[40]

Garrison plant in 1946. This plant was a site where German prisoners of war were used as labor during World War II.

During 1944, Perla suffered a very costly fire. Its origin was unknown, but the fire burned down the clay sheds and a good part of the machine and grinding rooms.[41] Acme soon rebuilt these structures, however, and made additions to the plant. In 1945 and 1946, the company constructed a new office building and two new tunnel kilns, both of which quickly paid for themselves.[42]

In 1951, Acme added another tunnel kiln for burning fire brick, which by now had become a booming business. Perla manufactured all kinds of fire brick, hand-molded shapes for rotary kilns, and special shapes for American Arch Company and locomotive fire boxes. It had been the refractory business that had sustained the Perla plant during the war years.[43] In the 1950s, refractories became an even more tremendous business, and this department came to occupy the entire fourth floor of Acme's new office building. Acme fire brick were used all over the world.[44] At one point, the refractories department had an office in New York on Wall Street, with Kurt Karcher as its manager. Mrs. Fender recalled that, while on a trip to the Near East, she saw sixty car loads of Perla fire brick being unloaded at Haifa.[45]

One of Acme's research programs had helped refractory development. Leo Franz developed a substance called "Everset," a patented sealer for use in fire clay products and furnaces. But with the coming of diesel locomotives, new boiler designs, and available electricity, refractory sales began to decline, so Acme discontinued this production in 1963.[46]



Housing starts and brick shipped in the United States from 1953 to start of 1957. This figure shows how closely the housing market is correlated to brick manufacturing.

Near the end of the war, Acme once more laid plans and took steps to meet the anticipated boom in housing and con struction materials. In 1944, Acme made its first brick plant purchase in a decade, buying the Clinton, Oklahoma, plant from Ray Corner, who owned the Western Brick Company.[47] N. P. O'Neal, president of Hope Brick Company, Hope, Arkansas, had contemplated buying it, but decided not to because Corner had experienced so many difficulties with the clay there. After overcoming numerous problems, Acme ran the Clinton plant with satisfactory results.[48] A few years later, O'Neal regretted his previous decision and wrote Fender: "Every time I think of Clinton, I want to throw up!"[49] A short while later, however, he took a more philosophical view. In a letter to Fender he declared:

> Now that I am getting up in years, and have tried to retire it comes home to me that we should have been much closer together than we have in the past, and had it not been for you I don't think that anyone of us in the brick business would have been doing any too well at this time. So here is (sic) my best wishes for a long and happy life . . .[50]

Acme was in an expansive mood, and on V-J Day, Ray Pafford and Dwight Alexander went to Houston to inspect a proposed purchase. There was so much pandemonium with victory celebrations going on that the deal could not be concluded, but later, in September 1945, Acme bought the Bishop Brick Company.[51] The Houston plant, which had been built in 1935 by Roy G. Smith after he had left Acme, formerly belonged to the Ferris Brick Company. In 1938,

The Garrison plant in 1942. Note that the sign at the entrance still reads that it is an Athens Brick Company plant.

it had been purchased by Russ Mitchell and John Bishop, building contractors, who formed the Bishop Brick Company. Originally, it had been a dry-press plant, but Acme installed stiff-mud machinery and experimented with stiff-mud tile while making dry-press brick. Fire destroyed the stiff-mud operations, which were later rebuilt. On October 1, 1950, all dry-press production ceased, and tile and "Ruff Face Brick" became the plant's prime production until 1958. Because of lime found in the clay, tile manufacturing stopped and Houston produced only used effect brick (UEB).[52]

Some of the original Houston crew still worked for Acme in 1959. They were Albert Elam, L. L. Smith, Arthur L. Smith, P. J. Murphy, H. B. Crawford, Dave Woodruff, L. P. Watson, V. H. Mayes, C. R. Peace, J. L. Dockens, and Keith Alexander.[53] The workers at the plant lived in houses on the site and conditions were very overcrowded. In 1945, the plant was ten miles from the city, but, by 1959, it was in the heart of the Oak Forrest Addition—not exactly ideal for such a brick plant.[54]

Shortly after the Houston purchase, Acme became interested in the Garrison plant, which belonged to Athens Brick and Tile. That plant was very old, dating back to Garrison Vitrified Brick Company founded in 1893.[55] Located at the edge of the pine belt in the northeast corner of Nacogdoches County, Texas, and sixty-three miles southwest of Shreveport, Louisiana, Garrison was a pulpwood and agricultural community.[56] Acme bought the Garrison plant in 1945 and following company tradition, modernized it in the 1950s with a new clay shed, grinding rooms, machine room, and an additional kiln. After the calcine department was added in 1954, this plant which made face brick and tile, could produce at the rate of twenty million a year.[57]

Later, in 1946, Acme rebuilt the Little Rock plant, which had been idle since 1930. This factory was rather poorly equipped with old

An aerial view of the Houston plant in 1951.

machinery that had been moved from other plants and stayed open only long enough to eliminate the possibility that a "foreign" brick company might move into the area. The Little Rock plant closed in 1952, when the threat was removed. But Little Rock did add to Acme's production in 1946, helping the company to reach a new record of 176 million brick shipped in that year. Not since 1928 had Acme made and sold so many brick.[58]

One of the big reasons Acme officials could think once more of expansion was that the financial condition of the company had steadily improved over the past decade. In 1940, Acme's net worth had again reached $2 million; and its debt was a net $52,969. None of this debt was long term, and most of the preferred stock had been retired. By 1946, the company's net worth was well over $2 million, and assets with the new purchases were over $3,372,000. By the end of the war, sales exceeded $5 million.[59] Fender's *laissez-faire* policy toward competitors in the region had proved to be wise. According to Pafford, Fender's philosophy had been that "anything good for the brick business was good for Acme." Many times he had told Pafford that "there is nothing poorer than a poor competitor."[60]

Because of this cooperative attitude, many brick companies survived the depression and war years that otherwise would have gone under.[61] The depression taught many bitter lessons, and one of them was that brick companies that fought each other went broke, while those who merged or cooperated stayed alive. Because of this, a tacit unwritten gentlemen's agreement existed between the majority of brickmakers not to cut prices. This agreement accounts for the remarkable lack of competitive brick prices during those years. Furthermore, few consolidations occurred unless an owner was ready to sell. For instance, all the factories Acme bought after 1934 were purchased upon offers first made by their owners. One owner wished to dispose of a "headache,"

another retired, and another wanted to get out of brickmaking.[62] Although some plants changed hands, no large brick concerns opened or built plants in the Southwest until after World War II.[63]

One agreement worked out by John Doughty illustrated both the competitive and cooperative spirit prevalent at the time. In 1958, Doughty met with Stan Judd of the Endicott Clay Products Company at the Muhlebach Hotel in Kansas City to resolve some difficulties both companies were having. With a "nickel beer" and a handshake they agreed that Acme would represent Endicott in southern Kansas. Over the years this informal tie has been strengthened, and in the 1990s Acme sold valued Endicott products over a wide territory through Acme's system.[64]

Top: A shale planer at Fort Smith, Arkansas in 1946.

Bottom: Storm damaged this planer at Fort Smith in 1946.

Fender made Acme a solid dividend-paying company and showed little desire to do more than improve existing facilities. That is not to say the sales force was not aggressive, but that Fender stressed research and improvement in marketing techniques rather than invasion of another brickmaker's territory. Because Acme had a difficult time asserting itself in Missouri and Louisiana during the 1930s and 1940s due to the political situation in those states, the company had to be, and was, aggressive there.[65]

Acme officials turned their attention to developing a well-founded company that minded its own business, earned dividends, paid debts, and pursued a practical goal—the maintenance of a strong position. Acme did well by its investors between 1936 and the end of 1946. During this period, book value increased from $50 to nearly $80 a share, stock splits were authorized at one new share for one previous share, and dividends varied from 6 to 8 percent. The accumulation of these increments approximated an 11 percent yearly return on investment. But the company did not appreciably increase its net worth until it recapitalized in 1947. Then net worth approached the $3 million mark, and the company paid over $1,150,000 in dividends for that ten-year period.[66] Several developments forced Acme out of its comfortable "chute" in the late 1940s. The major factor was the tremendous demand for brick. As sales skyrocketed from $3 million to $9 million between 1945 and 1950, the sales force was increased. Also, additional plants were needed to meet the post-war demands. Not until 1948 when Homer Bryce set up the very modern Henderson Brick Company in Henderson, Texas, did prices come down due to competition.[67] This really hurt Acme until the Henderson Company could no longer produce enough brick to meet demand.[68]

Acme sales and profits continued to rise in the early 1950s but less dramatically than in the first five years following the war. By 1955, gross sales reached a plateau of around $16 million.[69]

In the same period, Acme's net worth had nearly doubled from what it had been in 1949. During this interim, $800,000 had been set aside for contingencies because federal taxes more than tripled between 1945 and 1955. The company's cash surplus paralleled these developments, growing from around $700,000 to $3,588,000, while the company continued to pay generous dividends to its stockholders. Between 1946 and 1957, the company granted an amazing $4,376,870 in stock and cash dividends, almost equal to the entire assets of the company in 1929.

Acme regional sales meeting at Dallas in 1955.

But if finances were satisfactory, the company labor picture was not, for in 1949, Bridgeport workers went on strike for a wage hike; the next year, Perla workers went on strike when contract negotiations broke down. The primary issues were vacation pay and "check off," union dues through payroll deductions. The Perla strike lasted thirty months and cost both the workers and the company heavily. O. Z. Benton estimated that this strike cost the United Brick and Clay Workers over $200,000, even though all the men were eventually rehired.[70] Acme officials, however, contended that it was years before the company overcame the loss at Perla, since the new employees hired during the strike were kept on, in addition to those who were already on the payroll when the strike began. At any rate, "check off" was gained, and a contract equitable to both parties was negotiated.[71]

At Bridgeport, the company fought back by bringing in workers from other plants, building them homes at the site, and running the plant with this new labor force. Eventually, the company won the strike, but again at a high cost to all concerned.[72] The strongest weapon Acme possessed was its policy of paying higher wages than any other brick company. Whenever Acme granted higher wages at one plant, the same raises were given to workers at all the other plants. This was what made the company so tough, one observer declared. They were "tough" but "fair," he added.[73]

The outbreak of the Korean War in the summer of 1950 brought a new fear of shortages, which stimulated the brick business. The results illustrate the cyclical effects that war can have on the brick

business. Once more refractories increased output, and face brick sales fell off. The existing housing shortages accentuated the trend. Having experienced the effects of World War II, which produced an amplified fall and rise in building materials needs, Acme sought to take advantage of market demands through a lease purchase arrangement and bought plants at Monroe and Baton Rouge, Louisiana.[74]

Years before the United States acquisition of the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803, the present site of Monroe was an Indian trading center known as the "Prairie of Canoes." This place became the seat of parish government in 1785, when Don Juan Filhiol obtained a 2,000-acre grant from the King of Spain and established Fort Miro as the community center of Ouachita Parish. In May 1819, the first steamboat, the *Monroe*, arrived at Fort Miro, and an impressed Filhiol issued an official document renaming the town Monroe in honor of President James Monroe and the steamboat.[75] It was not until 1861 that the first rail connections were made with the outside, and the Civil War disrupted them. But, in 1870, rail service was restored, and the establishment of a line to Shreveport in 1884 placed Monroe on a national route.[76]

Acme's Monroe plant, purchased from the Frizzell Brick Company, was at first operated on a lease agreement pending the settlement of the Frizzell estate. The original plant site consisted of 38.8 acres, but Acme soon added 98 acres in order to gain more clay reserves, since deposits on the smaller tract were nearly exhausted. The company bought this brickyard not so much to gain another plant as to gain the wide trade area Frizzell Brick Company controlled. The Monroe plant was of small value as a brickmaking facility, for when fully operated it produced no more than 10 million brick per year. Only about thirty men were required to operate its five kilns at full capacity.[77] Acme was making Red Heritage and common brick in the four periodic kilns of the Monroe plant when it closed in 1966.[78]

The Baton Rouge plant was also located on a historic spot. In 1719, French settlers had established Baton Rouge as a military outpost on the Mississippi bluffs about eighty-five miles northwest of New Orleans. Originally the name came from a red post set in the ground dividing two Indian nations. Incorporated in 1817, the city became the capital of Louisiana in 1850. By 1971, Baton Rouge was a rapidly growing industrial center, the farthest deepwater port on the Mississippi River.[79] The Baton Rouge plant was twice as valuable as the one at Monroe and, from the time of purchase to the mid-1980s, has remained in continuous operation. Baton Rouge is situated over one of the nation's largest clay

deposits, and common bricks were first made there in the 1820s. The plant used several periodic kilns and made the same type of brick as the Monroe plant. Acme added two tunnel kilns, and, by 1965, the plant capacity reached 20 million brick. This purchase crowned a thirty-year effort to get Acme manufacturing facilities into Louisiana.

Acme continued to increase its investment by purchasing the Alexandria, Louisiana, and the Waskom, Texas, brick plants from the Tri-State Brick Company. Both factories were part of the same lease purchase agreement made in October 1954. Waskom was the better of the two plants,[80] making, with a work force of more than sixty, four times the four-million bricks that Alexandria produced with twenty-one employees. Each plant was located in an important trade area. Alexandria, at the geographic center of Louisiana, was a lumber area, and Waskom, eighteen miles from Shreveport in Harrison County, was an oil-producing and refining center.[81] Both plants were old and inefficient, and each of them had to be remodeled. Both were operated for about eight years, and both were closed down by mid-1962.[82]

This copy of the 1954 annual report from Acme Brick shows the distribution of plants and sales offices.

Shortly before the Tri-State purchase, Acme broke into the long-forbidden Kansas-Missouri area with the purchase of Buffalo Brick and Tile Company at Buffalo, Kansas. This plant had been operated since 1903 and was sold by the widow of its owner. Capable of producing about eleven million brick of the Bennett type, the Buffalo plant was built inside an Oxbow bend of Buffalo Creek in southeastern Kansas. Because of its location, this plant was subject to frequent flooding and had to be diked in, thereby limiting its expansion. Buffalo produced its own electricity but operated on the old line shaft system. Its one great asset, however, was its tremendous clay reserves, which were estimated to be sufficient for five hundred years of production.[83]

Further expansion into Kansas occurred four years later, when Acme became the owner of brick plants at Kanopolis and Great Bend. Formerly owned by Great Bend Brick and Tile, founded in 1947, the Great Bend plant could produce fifteen million brick annually. This plant was located ninety miles west northwest of Wichita, situated on a site less than a mile north of the city limits of Great Bend, an agricultural trading center and oil capital of Kansas. Plant operations ran in the conventional manner of hand stacking onto dryer cars and into the kilns. But forklift trucks

removed the brick, a practice not generally in use at Acme at the time. In September 1959, the superintendent, Sherman Q. Lee, wrote concerning its clay reserves: "While it should be re-emphasized that our basic information is meager in the extreme, it is probable that the Great Bend plant will have raw material beyond the foreseeable future."[84] Just over two years later this plant closed, but its sister plant located in the center of Kansas continued to operate.[85]

The Kanopolis plant was located near a historic route and community. Following the Civil War, the government established Fort Harker at the site which later became Kanopolis. In 1866, Fort Harker was an important Western guard post in United States efforts to provide settlers and stage lines much-needed protection from Indian attacks and raids. For a time the famous scout, Wild Bill Hickok and Colonel George A. Custer with his Seventh Cavalry were stationed there.[86] Already, before the Civil War ended and Fort Harker was established, the federal government had made tremendous land grants throughout the area to the Union Pacific Railway Company " . . . for the purpose of aiding in the construction of a railroad and telegraph line from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean and to secure for the government the use of the same for the postal, military, and other purposes . . . "[87] The railway thus was given alternate sections of public land for twenty miles on each side of the center of the main track. The Kansas and Pacific Railroad also came into the area in 1876, further opening the region to farming and trade.

In 1887, the city of Kanopolis was founded by visionary citizens who hoped that, by virtue of its railroad junction and central location, the new city would soon become the state capital.[88] Instead, for many years, Kanopolis was to be the salt capital of Kansas, as evidenced by the presence of several large salt processing and packaging companies that established facilities along the Union Pacific and Missouri Pacific lines. Morton Salt, Crystal Salt, Royal Salt, and Western Salt located there prior to Great Bend Brick and Tile building its modern brick plant in 1953.[89]

The Kanopolis plant, in Ellsworth County, Kansas, was both new and modern. Here workers stacked brick directly onto kiln cars, and dried and burned them in an Allied Tunnel Kiln 305 feet long. Forklift trucks did all the intraplant transportation work as well as the loading and unloading of kiln cars, trucks, and railroad cars. The thoroughly modern procedures at this plant helped to set standards for other Acme operations, although the Kanopolis facility was only a year old when Acme obtained it. Acme leased most of the clay deposits here, but one lease alone was estimated to con-

tain a 1,513-year supply, a good ecological argument for building with brick rather than lumber. Kanopolis pit operations then consisted of two power shovels (one Koehring yard and a half and one P&H yard and a quarter). The plant also had an additional experimental kiln. Other rolling stock was less modern than its forklifts; the latest model truck was a 1955 Ford; the oldest, a 1938 International dump truck.[90]

With such expansion, Acme Brick Company found, by 1951, that it had outgrown its office space in the Neil P. Anderson Building and began construction of new office quarters on West Seventh Street in Fort Worth. When completed in October 1952, this four-story structure was unique. Windowless, except for four decorative windows and a glassed-in front lobby, its 22,800 square feet of office space was air-conditioned, had a 100-seat assembly room, boasted a snack bar for its eighty-five employees, and was built entirely of brick and tile.[91] All outside noises were cut out, and distractions from the outside were few. This alone has probably saved the company thousands of dollars. The Denton plant supplied all the building brick, which were pink and buff colors of all the various shapes made by Acme.[92] Because of the way the building was designed, the company estimated it had saved $16,000 in construction costs and would save an additional $1,780 annually in rent and maintenance—a total of $70,000 by 1978. The cost at the time was about $400,000.[93]

The 1950s witnessed an attempt by Acme Brick Company to improve its internal and external public relations. There was no dearth of advertising. Most of the company selling was done on a person-to-person basis through sales personnel who used company samples and brochures. A one-page advertisement announcing the opening of the new general office building or branch sales offices was to be expected, but otherwise the company made practically no use of newspapers as an advertising media.[94] The company placed signs at some job sites which advertised the Acme brick used[95] and also sponsored journeyman bricklayers training courses. Fender's activity in the latter program earned him two gold card (honorary) memberships in union locals.[96]

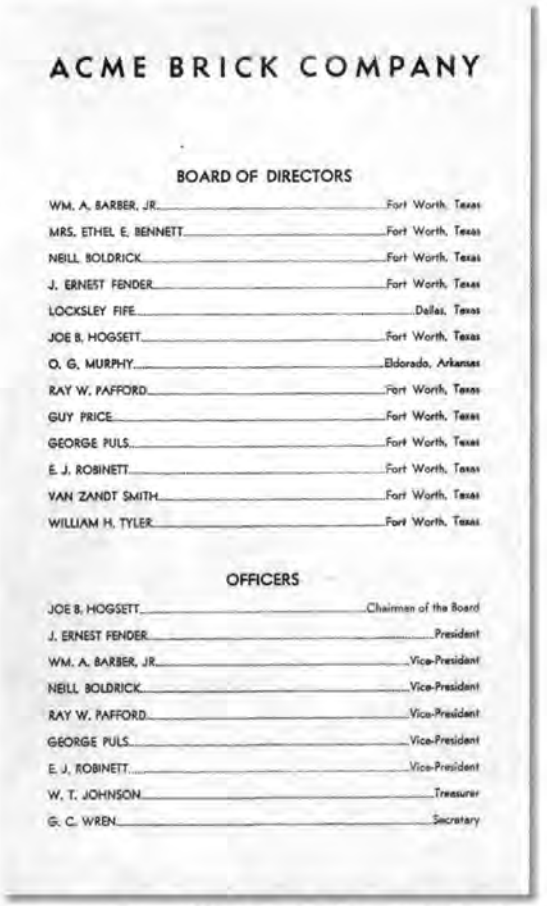
Frequently, Acme employees and customers used the recreation facilities available at the Bennett plant. These consisted of a very large clubhouse and two well-stocked fishing lakes called "Fenderlaken."[97] After the clubhouse burned in 1966, it was not rebuilt, much to the regret of the many salesmen who used it extensively for family and customer recreation.[98] Many an effective sales meeting were held there in the 1950s and early 1960s.[99] Still another employee relations benefit was a retirement

Bennett plant addition in 1956. These downdraft kilns increased the capacity by twenty percent.

program worked out by Vice President Pafford and adopted in 1955, along with an employee health insurance plan. The retirement plan had a unique feature: it provided that when a person reached sixty years of age he or she could not be fired without receiving full retirement benefits.[100] The payment of bonuses was another technique designed to promote loyalty and effort. Top-level personnel, from Fender to his managers, were paid relatively low salaries, but they were granted good bonuses if the company made a profit. For example, vice presidents received only $10,000 a year base pay, and Fender got slightly more. But a vice president considered it a bad year when he did not take home several times his salary in bonus money.[101]

The bonuses distributed by the company reflected Acme's growth and economic stability. As 1960 approached, the company had nineteen manufacturing plants and thirty-two sales offices in its five-state area, producing and selling about 300 million bricks a year. The net worth of the company had advanced to nearly $10 million, only a million shy of its total assets. Profits averaged about $1 million a year, in spite of an off-year in 1958; and, following well-established policy, the company paid about $2 million in dividends over the five years. At the same time, company debt stayed at a level less than 15 percent of total assets.[102]

By this time also, a new and expanded board had developed. Now the board consisted of thirteen people, including Fender, all five of the company vice presidents, and all of the old board members, except J. N. Heishel, who had replaced O. G. Murphy for the Arkansas interests.[103] Early in 1959, Fender asked to retire, a desire dictated by the fact that he was increasingly playing the role of conciliator among the officers and directors. Fellow officers persuaded him to stay on a while longer, however.[104] Fender finally retired the summer of 1959, as a result of a proxy fight at a called stockholders' meeting. He was seventy-six years old and had served the company for nearly fifty-three years. His replacement, Neill Boldrick, would lead the company into the 1960s.[105] An era had ended.



ACME BRICK COMPANY

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

WM. A. BARBER, JR.	Fort Worth, Texas
MRS. ETHEL E. BENNETT	Fort Worth, Texas
NEILL BOLDRICK	Fort Worth, Texas
J. ERNEST FENDER	Fort Worth, Texas
LOCKSLEY FIFE	Dallas, Texas
JOE B. HOGSETT	Fort Worth, Texas
O. G. MURPHY	Eldorado, Arkansas
RAY W. PAFFORD	Fort Worth, Texas
GUY PRICE	Fort Worth, Texas
GEORGE PULS	Fort Worth, Texas
E. J. ROBINETT	Fort Worth, Texas
VAN ZANDT SMITH	Fort Worth, Texas
WILLIAM H. TYLER	Fort Worth, Texas

OFFICERS

JOE B. HOGSETT	Chairman of the Board
J. ERNEST FENDER	President
WM. A. BARBER, JR.	Vice-President
NEILL BOLDRICK	Vice-President
RAY W. PAFFORD	Vice-President
GEORGE PULS	Vice-President
E. J. ROBINETT	Vice-President
W. T. JOHNSON	Treasurer
G. C. WREN	Secretary

Directors and officers of the Acme Brick Company in 1954.

8

Finishing the 1950s and Starting the 1960s

The events of 1959 sent shock waves throughout the Acme organization. Never before had the company witnessed such a rapid turnover in top-level personnel and management. The board itself was reorganized, and many people were embittered by the change. Joe B. Hogsett, trying to placate both factions, began the next annual stockholders' meeting by calling it to order and requesting that a chairman be elected immediately from among the stockholders. Neill Boldrick was duly elected; whereupon, he took the chair and presided over the meeting. One ruling adopted at that time reduced the size of the board from ten to seven members; another created the position of advisory director for each retired president of the company. The stockholders also set up an executive committee, consisting of the chairman and two other board members who were given authority to spend up to $100,000 at any one time, not to exceed an accumulated total of $300,000 in any one year. The new board of directors reflected managerial realignment: Mrs. W. R. Bennett, Neill Boldrick, Locksley Fife, Guy Price, Hub Hill, W. W. Coates Jr., and Dr. F. C. Rehfeldt.[1] The first four had previously been board members; Hill soon became the new chairman, with Dr. Rehfeldt and Boldrick serving with him on the newly authorized executive committee.[2]

Within a few months, all the vice presidential positions were abolished, and Pafford, Puls, and Barber left the company. After this exodus, W. R. Johnson remained as treasurer, Gerald C. Wren as secretary, and Neill Boldrick became president of Acme Brick Company. E. J. Robinett served a while longer as director of operations services, and then retired.[3] By 1960, Boldrick's new organization emerged as a line organization consisting of several new positions (recommended and, to some extent, filled by a consult-

Left: Architects' meeting in Fort Worth in 1962.

Below: An aerial view of the Fraser plant in 1959. This plant was later renamed the McQueeny plant located near Seguin, Texas.

ing firm). Under this system President Boldrick with his assistant, Thomas Martzloff, headed a staff composed of Director of Plants Joe Hobson; Operations Services Director E. J. Robinett; Controller John Rutherford; Director of Personnel and Industrial Relations Marshall Vaughan; Industrial Department Manager Gibbs Slaughter; and Director of Marketing Bill Darwin. Except for Martzloff, Rutherford, and Vaughan, and Luke Gresham, the assistant director of plants, all the above-named officers had served for long terms with Acme. Another new officer, Assistant Director of Marketing John McIntire, helped in getting the new structure established.[4]

Boldrick launched a general improvement program with the avowed purpose of strengthening the company so that it might "have the vitality to increase its stature as an industry leader in our changing economy."[5] Operating on the premise that not enough money had been spent on internal improvement, he laid plans to reduce the company bank debt and to plow more money back into capital improvements and research. Within a short time bank debt was reduced to zero, and $745,010 was put into capital improvements, most of which went into modernizing the Malvern plant.

Neill Boldrick, President of Acme Brick from 1959 to 1961.

President Boldrick had first joined the Acme organization as a salesman in 1925. This native Texan was born in Denison on September 7, 1901,[6] and finished high school there in 1918. Upon graduation, Boldrick attended the University of Texas, interspersing his study with work at a Denison bank. In 1923, he received the degrees of bachelor of arts and bachelor of business administration. The next year, while working for a Dallas cotton firm, he married Miss Laura West. Then, the following year, he went to work for Acme Brick Company as a subordinate to Locksley Fife in Dallas.[7] With Fife's retirement in the early 1930s, Boldrick became a regional sales manager, and within a few years he was placed in charge of the Houston area. When George Puls became too ill to handle the duties of general sales manager, Boldrick replaced him and eventually attained the position of vice president. Upon Fender's forced retirement, he became president.[8]

Under Boldrick's leadership a number of changes were made. Among others, Acme adopted a new salesmen's incentive plan; approved more market research; spent $800,000 on modernizing Malvern facilities; completed a plant evaluation survey; purchased new mechanical handling equipment for drayage operation; introduced a machine accounting system; opened a new sales office in El Paso, Texas; completed a temporary laboratory at Denton; eliminated the fifth-floor penthouse at the General

Acme's Officers and Board of Directors in 1961. Left to right (top to bottom): Mrs. Walter R. Bennett; W. W. Coates Jr.; Locksley Fife; Guy Price; John F. Cox, Controller; G. C. Wren, Secretary and Treasurer; Hub Hill, Chairman; D. O. Tomlin, President and CEO; Fred C. Rehfeldt, M.D., Director and Member of the Executive Committee.

Office Building; moved the engineering section into the newly vacated spot; contracted for broad advertising and public relations programs; and established the Ceramic Cooling Tower Division. Late in 1960, the company installed a new teletypewriter system to provide a closer-knit communications system, tying a north-and-south zone network into the Fort Worth office. And, also late in 1960, the company began negotiations for the purchase of the Fraser Brick and Tile Company of San Antonio. This transaction, consummated early in 1961 at a cost of about $750,000, gave Acme twenty operating brickworks.[9]

Unfortunately, 1960 and 1961 witnessed a significant drop in sales that changing accounting systems could not disguise. Net profits fell to the lowest level since 1947, due largely to a back tax bill of $337,000 which the federal government claimed Acme owed. This came at a time when the company was buying one plant and remodeling three others.[10] In spite of the new incentive program, Acme sales turned downward due to a general decline in construction. Mechanization reduced the number of employees engaged during the decade of the 1950s from 2,600 to 1,700, but manufacturing costs rose.[11] Furthermore, the company lost a number of valuable people who knew the brick business well. By early 1961, many older employees were out of the top positions—either retired, fired, or by-passed.[12] Several of them had accepted jobs with competing companies; others such as Ray Pafford, found success elsewhere in unrelated fields.[13]

At the February 1961, stockholders' meeting it was noted that Acme now had the largest number of stockholders in its history. From a partnership of two men in 1890, the number had increased to 186 by 1930, to 300 by 1950, and to 596 by 1961. Also noted was the retirement of Joe Hobson after forty-three years with the company and the promotion of Luke Gresham, a former assistant, to general plant manager. Particularly noted was an attempt by former officers and directors to oust a board member. But this move was blocked by Chairman Neill Boldrick who held 73 percent of the proxy vote thereby preventing another upset.[14] The board took decisive steps to move forward on its

improvement programs by installing a new president and a new finance officer the following summer.[15]

The board selection placed the new duties of management on relatively young D. O. Tomlin, an energetic executive, who at age forty-six brought an outstanding combination of academic preparation and experience to Acme. Tomlin, like Boldrick, Fender, and W. R. Bennett before him, was a native Texan. As a youngster, Tomlin had moved from Comanche County to Fort Worth, then to Dallas later, where he graduated from Southern Methodist University in 1936, with a major in money and banking. Following this he completed two years of graduate work at the Harvard Business School, majoring in sales management. His first job was with the American Zinc, Lead, and Smelting Company, in 1937, where he gained experience in plant management. He became treasurer for the Briggs-Weaver Machinery Company of Dallas in 1946. Prior to coming to Acme, Tomlin had been president of the Dearborn Stove Company, the Lone Star Boat Company, and several professional associations, such as the Outboard Boat Manufacturers Association, the Dallas Manufacture and Wholesale Association, the Texas Manufacturers Association, and the Dallas Personnel Association. His outside interests were broad and varied, for he served as a director in several banks and a half-dozen civic associations. Tomlin also acted as an advisor to the board of the University of Dallas, the Boy Scouts of America, the Highland Park Methodist Church, and a school for the deaf. Upon coming to Fort Worth he joined the River Crest Country Club and the Fort Worth Club,[16] a traditional move with Acme presidents.

Admittedly a "raw rookie" at the brick business, Tomlin had not seen the inside of a brick plant when he reported for duty on August 15, 1961. But it did not take him long to size up the situation and to begin to make changes. He saw both a great challenge and a great opportunity and made it clear from the outset that he would lean heavily on his key executives to help develop and execute his plans for realizing Acme's potential. Promising no miracles, he wrote: "If our goals are well defined, our strategies . . . sound, and our efforts . . . vigorous, progress is very likely to come."[17]

If the new Tomlin administration had one continuous theme throughout the eight years of its existence, it was change. "Be ready to change for improvement," he wrote in the first issue of the new company house organ, *Inside Acme*, "but not merely for the sake of change." And change the company did. Within the first nine weeks, Tomlin set up a completely new structure, both in management and sales (now called marketing), to implement new plans for increased profits and improved customer service. Within

the same nine weeks, Acme settled its long and expensive battle with the federal government over depletion allowances for clay reserves, consolidated manufacturing activities in Kansas at Kanopolis, granted some authority and flexibility to branch managers, reshuffled the home office physical arrangement, revised staff positions in marketing, launched the first company magazine in thirty years, created an executive management team, and paid a cash dividend of thirty cents a share. While inaugurating these changes, Tomlin visited all the plants and sales offices in five states, to completing a very busy two months.[18]

At the same time that the board hired Tomlin, they also hired John F. Cox as the senior financial officer and controller, in an effort to standardize and improve the company's financial operations. Cox was well qualified, having seven years' experience as assistant controller for the complex, highly diversified Dresser Industries. He also had six years' experience with the large accounting firm of Price, Waterhouse Company and two years as a controller treasurer for Rexall Drugs. Cox was only thirty-nine when he joined the Acme management team[19] and forty when he left.[20] It appeared that he was at cross-purposes with Tomlin's program.

The other members of Acme's management committee were also young but experienced. The average age of the members of Tomlin's team was thirty-nine. Bill Darwin, the oldest at forty, had worked for Acme since 1939 and remained director of marketing services, a post to which Boldrick had appointed him in 1959. Burdett Henry, age thirty-eight, the new general manager of operations, had spent fourteen years at U. S. Gypsum before coming to Acme in 1960. Henry was a graduate mining engineer from the Missouri School of Mines. Marshall Vaughan, the youngest of the Tomlin quartet, was Acme's manager of personnel and industrial relations. Vaughan, a native of Michigan, had never been to Texas before he joined Acme in 1959, but he had twelve years prior service as director of industrial relations for a multi-plant, decentralized, piston ring company.[21]

Since sales were of primary concern, Darwin's marketing division was the first important section to feel the energetic thrust of change. As an immediate result, Darwin created several new

A Brick and Clay Record Monthly Report
BRICK PRODUCTION PER CAPITA

PER CAPITA BRICK (BUILDING OR COMMON AND FACE) PRODUCTION BY REGIONS AND STATES. (Quantities of brick in thousands; 2-1/4" x 3-5/8" brick equivalent.)

REGIONS & STATES	Total 1962	Jan-Oct 1962	Jan-Oct 1963	Oct 1962	Oct 1963	% Change Oct., 1962 Oct., 1963
UNITED STATES, TOTAL	37.70	31.59	33.84	3.62	4.01	+10.8
New England, Total	13.22	11.32	9.46	1.03	1.01	- 1.9
Connecticut	34.10	28.22	26.15	2.98	2.77	- 7.0
Massachusetts, Other (Maine, N.H., Vt., and Rhode Island)	6.48	5.87	4.07	0.41	0.44	+ 7.3
Middle Atlantic, Total	26.93	22.27	21.86	2.61	2.60	- 0.4
New York	15.25	12.83	11.59	1.42	1.45	+ 2.1
New Jersey	19.96	16.88	16.25	1.99	2.03	+ 2.0
Pennsylvania	48.07	39.22	40.18	4.73	4.63	- 2.1
East North Central, Total	30.67	25.61	27.88	3.17	3.72	+17.4
Ohio	65.83	54.80	58.17	6.49	7.32	+12.8
Illinois	28.52	24.25	28.37	2.98	3.79	+27.2
Other (Ind., Mich., & Wis.)	11.23	9.23	10.25	1.31	1.54	+17.6
West North Central, Total	24.30	20.16	20.20	2.41	2.53	+ 5.0
Nebraska	30.61	25.03	25.99	2.95	3.11	+ 5.4
Iowa	30.32	25.57	24.32	3.33	3.25	- 2.4
Missouri	21.34	17.76	17.70	2.12	2.32	+ 9.4
Kansas	51.80	43.11	42.66	4.87	4.95	+ 1.6
Other (N.D., S.D., & Minn.)	8.94	7.15	8.09	0.86	1.02	+18.6
South Atlantic, Total	72.01	60.52	68.08	6.91	7.92	+14.6
Maryland	43.07	36.17	37.60	3.82	4.32	+13.1
Virginia	71.09	59.64	66.76	7.08	7.66	+ 8.2
West Virginia	39.23	32.28	37.66	4.04	4.21	+ 4.2
North Carolina	149.10	125.93	139.10	14.41	16.63	+15.4
South Carolina	123.86	104.55	121.28	11.77	14.54	+23.5
Other (Ga., Fla., Del., and D.C.)	41.14	34.40	39.60	4.05	4.41	+ 8.9
East South Central, Total	71.04	59.68	68.03	6.67	7.83	+17.4
Tennessee	72.36	60.36	65.30	6.56	7.28	+11.0
Alabama	97.79	82.64	97.66	9.35	11.54	+23.4
Kentucky	29.72	25.36	26.80	2.82	3.28	+16.3
Mississippi	86.07	71.70	85.29	8.19	9.55	+16.6
West South Central, Total	52.50	44.01	48.75	4.67	5.36	+14.8
Arkansas	74.66	62.39	81.75	6.99	8.84	+26.5
Texas	56.45	48.93	53.68	5.15	5.92	+15.0
Louisiana	29.33	25.22	22.89	2.31	2.47	+ 6.9
Oklahoma	43.55	36.05	39.56	4.21	4.47	+ 6.2
Mountain, Total	47.08	40.01	36.47	3.96	3.65	- 7.8
Colorado	84.90	71.53	67.13	7.87	6.51	-17.3
Arizona and New Mexico	29.80	26.21	22.09	2.19	2.10	- 4.1
Other (Montana, Idaho, Wyo., Utah, & Nevada)	38.05	31.99	29.45	3.01	3.16	+ 5.0
Pacific, Total	13.25	11.27	11.00	1.38	1.48	+ 7.2
California	14.10	12.08	11.51	1.48	1.62	+ 9.5
Washington	15.16	12.73	12.64	1.56	1.65	+ 5.8
Oregon	8.90	7.06	9.11	0.89	.58	-34.8

Note: Population figures taken from the 1962 Statistical Abstract of the United States. (1961 pop. est.)

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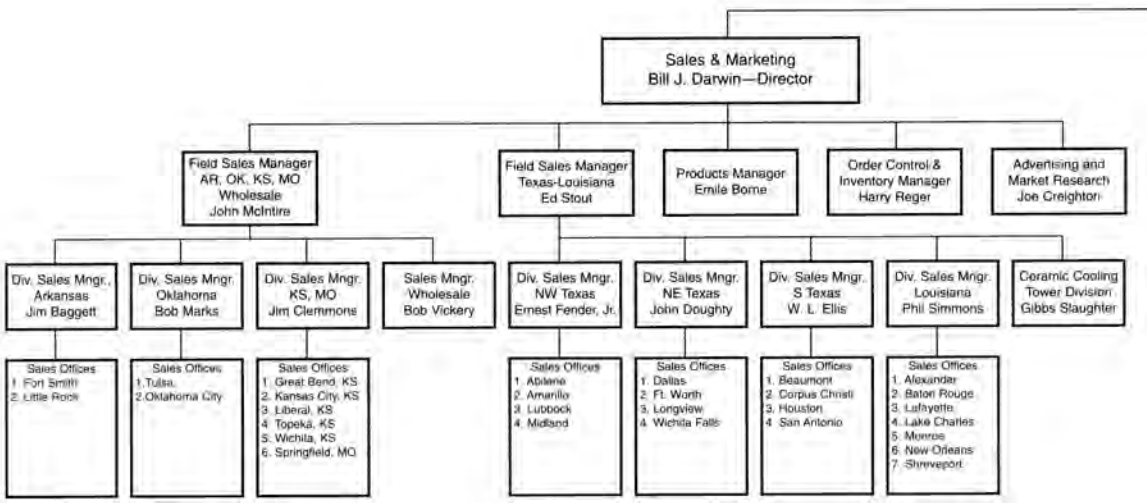
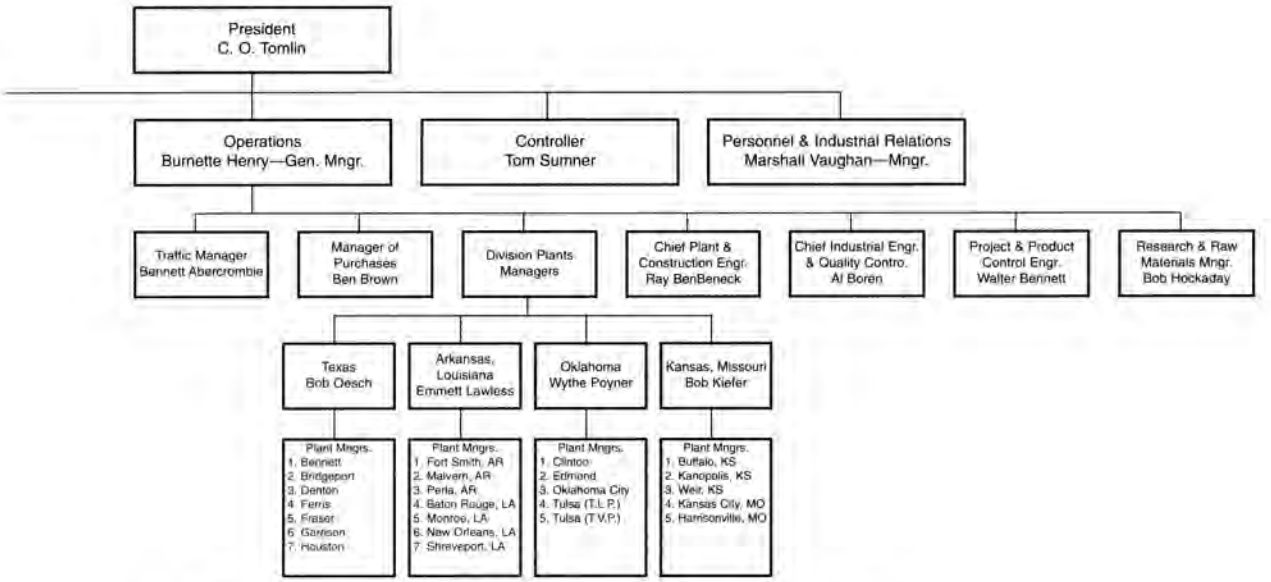
Brick use across the United States in the 1960s.



D. O. Tomlin's organization chart.

positions and intensified sales efforts. The responsibility for coordinating and supervising daily selling was assigned to John McIntire, a twenty-two-year Acme veteran, formerly the Arkansas division sales manager, who now became field sales manager. Joe Creighton, new manager of marketing services and formerly assistant director of marketing, became responsible for promotion as well as for service "follow-through." Darwin recognized the need for specialized attention to major projects and the necessity for selling. He assigned Ernest Fender Jr. to the new post of sales development manager. In the fourth position, assistant to the general sales manager, Emile Borne, with twenty-five years of service, assumed responsibility for the marketing aspects of selling, the refinement of product lines, and the creation of new ones. Finally, in order to increase sales and to service customer complaints, Harry Reger, a former branch manager in Kansas, set up Acme's first control center operations and served as sales control manager.[22]

The above changes necessitated several shifts and promotions in sales positions in Arkansas and Kansas. As Don White and George McCarthy were promoted to branch sales managers in Topeka and Great Bend respectively, Jim Baggett became Arkansas division manager; and Carroll West, an Acme salesman since 1952, replaced Baggett as branch sales manager at Fort Smith.[23] D. J. Stubblefield, Fort Worth branch manager, who went to work for Acme in 1919 and moved up through the ranks to responsible positions, died after a brief illness. As a result of his loss, J. D. Woodward was assigned the position of sales manager for the Fort Worth Branch. Stubblefield had begun to collect



notes for a production history of Acme, but unfortunately had written only a few pages when he died.[24]

Other major changes at Acme occurred during the fall and winter of 1961. After consolidating the Kansas operations, the company closed down the Great Bend plant in November and the Waskom plant three months later. Both of these old factories had poor safety records and duplicated products made in other company units. The funds previously budgeted for these plants were spent on other facilities, such as the Fraser tile facility. Kanopolis developed a new product line that went over very well, and the Fort Smith plant successfully marketed its new rustic-styled Heritage tile. Continuing the mechanization of product handling, forklifts replaced hand work at several Acme plants that year.[25]

Financially, in 1961, Acme's profits were the lowest they had been since the depression. This was due in great part to the federal tax bill for $575,830 the company had to pay. The company, however, was able to declare dividends roughly equal to its net income. Purchases of Fraser Brick and Tile and modern equipment, plus previous expensive modernizations, consultant fees, and increased payroll, brought the company debt at the year's end to over $13 million, the highest in the company's seventy-year history.[26]

The winter of 1961–1962 also brought changes in the board of directors. Shareholders voted on February 19 to enlarge the board from seven to eleven members once more and filled these extra places with men who gave not only added dignity and knowledge but also more adequate geographic representation.[27] These four men, Raymond A. Young, John Pickens, T. H. Ruffin, and Clifford

King, were all prominent Southwest businessmen. Three of the four, Pickens, Ruffin, and King, were former Acme employees. Pickens, who had been an Acme vice president for some time before he resigned in the 1940s, had founded his own construction company, the Pickens-Bond Construction Company of which he was president. He was also a vice president and director in four other corporations. In addition, he served as chairman of the Arkansas Police Commission and as a councilman in Little Rock, Arkansas. Truehart H. Ruffin, who had began as a school teacher and principal, became an Acme salesman in Shreveport, Louisiana, in November 1925, moving up to the position of division manager before he retired in 1960. Another successful Louisiana businessman who sold Acme brick for a long time, Clifford King, was president of two companies and secretary-treasurer of a third when he joined the board. The fourth new Acme board member, Raymond A. Young, came from Oklahoma and was president of T. G. & Y. stores and vice president and director of City Products Company, which owned T. G. & Y. as well as the Butler Brothers chain. Young also engaged in a number of civic pursuits in Oklahoma City.[28]

The Oklahoma City plant in 1962. Notice how close the clay pit is to the main highway through town. This was one of the factors that caused Acme to close the plant and open another factory in a nearby town.

While the board gained several new members, it lost J. E. Fender, its only advisory director. The man, who had guided the company through the last years of the depression, through the tragic Second World War, and through its most prosperous years, died on January 11, 1962. He had served the company for more than fifty-four years, a record few could match. Still fewer could say that they had served the industry as well. He was unique in that he held a gold card from the Bricklayers International Union and had served two consecutive terms as president of the Structural Clay Products Institute. His family, Acme, the industry, and the community would miss him, for he had remained active until shortly before his death at age seventy-eight.[29]

In keeping with his patterns of change, Tomlin introduced economy measures during the first year and a half of his administration. He closed some plants and consolidated others. When the Waskom plant closed, Tomlin urged salesmen to redouble their efforts to sell its stock in the area to save moving it to other sites.[30] Next, Acme discontinued operations at the Alexandria plant.[31] The consolidation of the Great Bend operations with those of Kanopolis led to production difficulties, but by the end of the year

these had been overcome. Acme closed the sales offices at El Paso, Texas, Hot Springs, Arkansas, and Houma, Louisiana. El Paso sales thereafter were handled through brokerage, and sales in the Hot Springs and Houma areas were handled by nearby sales offices.[32] The El Paso sales office always seemed to be the first to go in any economy move. W. R. Bennett opened and closed it in his time, J. E. Fender did the same, Boldrick reopened it, and Tomlin closed it.

Safety promotion in the plants and in drayage was pushed from the start. Each issue of *Inside Acme* related the plant standings in safety competition; Kanopolis won the first-year safety plaque. Another program inside the plants was an extensive cost-study analysis, which resulted in the development of a profit plan for each unit. Acme, of course, encouraged individuals to economize, and every presidential message in the company magazine contained some reminder or urging to save.[33]

Other belt-tightening measures came with each passing month. Revised credit department operations, directed by the new credit manager, Frank Phillips, brought gains in collections, and Ben Brown inaugurated quarterly requisitions for materials, shifted surpluses from one installation to another, and centralized stocking in some areas. Brown, the purchasing department director, also adopted a supplies inventory control and streamlined the paperwork involved.[34]

Marketing received the greatest attention during the Tomlin regime. New product lines were placed on the market nearly every quarter, starting with the Heritage blends from Arkansas. The Company also adopted a new packaging system throughout its network.[35] In Oklahoma, Acme introduced an entirely new king-sized brick, 9 5/8 inch by 2 5/8 inch compared to the conventional 7 5/8 inch by 2 1/4 inch, designed to appeal to the homebuilders market by offering a wide variety of colors while reducing construction cost. Salesmen promoted this brick by using the medicine show theme, banjos and all.[36] Acme's Denton plant marketed a new "Classic" line, which featured an englobe spray coating over unique indentations.[37] The "Classic" brick became so popular for home and apartment construction that it soon was imitated by several other manufacturers. Kanopolis, after solving production problems, also introduced new lines that sold very well in that area.[38]

Acme's marketing division used several means to promote company products. Salesmen attended builders conventions, held sales contests, cooperated with Structural Clay Products Institute programs, and for the first time in company history used news-

paper advertising extensively.[39] Wholesale and brokerage programs pushed by manager Bob Vickery, showed results as Acme sales increased in national and international markets.[40]

Darwin also introduced economies into his division. Besides carrying the packaging system from plants to yards, the marketing division adopted a new single-order entry system in June of 1962. By October, the company had discontinued teletype service to many points and, in December, went over to the newer WATS (Wide Area Telephone Service) system.[41] Teletype, put in at considerable cost, had lasted a little more than a year, but WATS was still in use decades later.

The success of Acme's marketing plan was due to the work of several men. These were the division sales managers. Among them was Ray Plumb, who joined Acme as a Fort Worth salesman shortly after serving as a naval aviator in World War I and served as Oklahoma division manager from 1937 until his retirement in September 1962. Plumb had opened the first Little Rock office, and was replaced by Bob Marks at Oklahoma City. Jim Clemens, an eight-year Acme man, headed the sales force in Kansas. Then John Doughty, who had taken part in setting up and opening at least six branch offices since 1948, led the northeast Texas division sales team. Arthur Stroeck was Doughty's counterpart in northwest Texas, and William Murray handled the South Texas region. Next, Jim Baggett, a veteran from the 1920s and a division manager since 1940, looked after Arkansas. Last, but not least, energetic Edward L. Stout, who joined Acme under T. H. Ruffin in 1949, oversaw Louisiana sales.[42]

Evidently the marketing program yielded good results. Sales volume began to pick up in March, and from then on broke all preceding monthly records. Although sales did not reach the $20 million goal (this came the next year), the company did gross more than in any previous year.[43] The downward swing was broken. When the year ended, Acme had shipped 340 million bricks.[44]

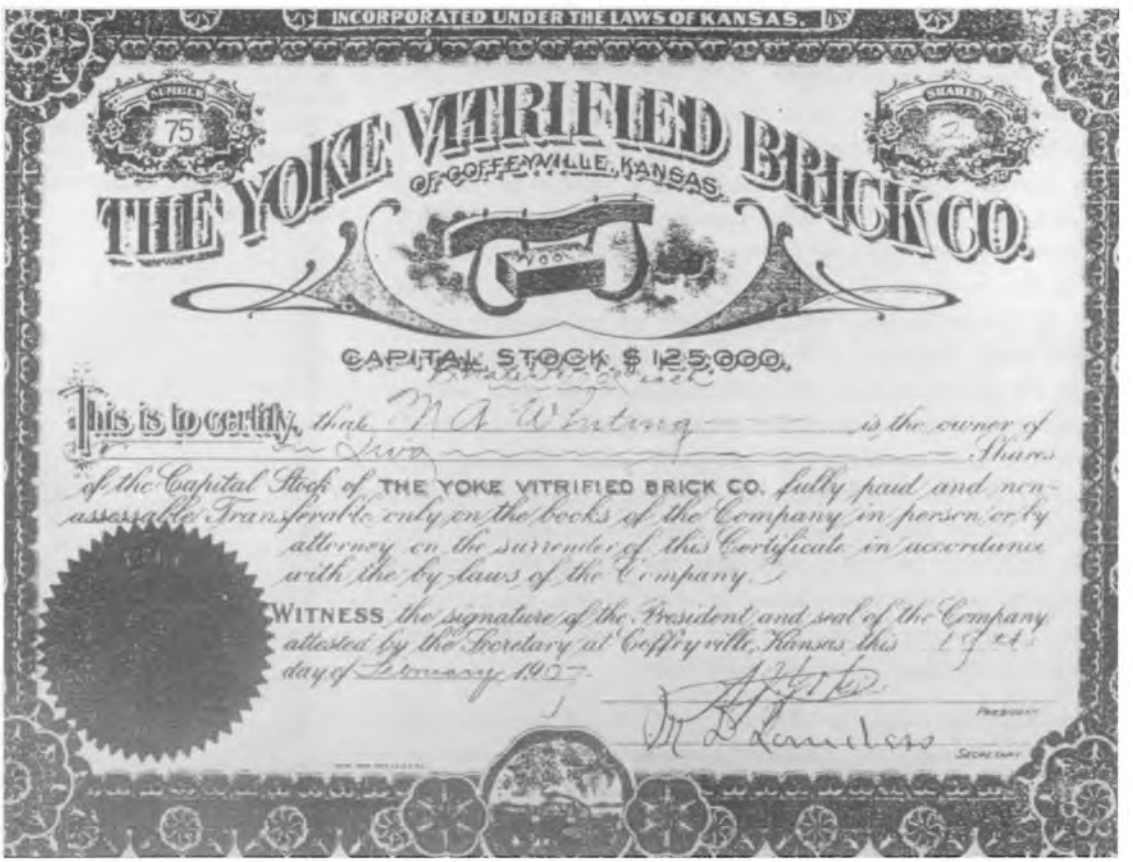
With such volume, the production team worked hard to catch up. Under the able Luke Gresham, a ceramic engineer from Louisiana, employed by Acme since 1950, four division superintendents met the challenge. Ray Ivey, the most experienced superintendent, had begun his career in 1916 at a pre–Civil War Georgia plant. A graduate of the University of Georgia, he worked for Elgin-Butler and Elgin-Standard prior to joining Acme as a construction superintendent in 1946. Next most experienced, but first in years of service with Acme, T. W. Poyner had begun his career at age sixteen in 1927 with Acme's Perla plant. Working up through the ranks from a laborer on the loading docks to the position of division

superintendent for the Oklahoma area, he later managed the Kansas division following the Buffalo purchase. The other two men, Alvin Houdek of the East Texas Louisiana Division, and Emmett Lawless of the Arkansas Division, were both ceramic engineers and University of Texas graduates who began their careers in 1949. Lawless, however, had more brickmaking experience, coming to Acme from a St. Louis Brick Company in 1959. Houdek moved from a ceramics firm in 1960.[45]

An aerial view of the Bennett plant in 1964. This photo clearly shows on the right-hand side the workers' housing, the Lakota school, and the plant superintendent's house.

The company's attempt to tighten the purse strings was under the direction of C. T. Sumner, who replaced the former senior finance officer and controller, John F. Cox. Sumner, age forty-two, named by D. O. Tomlin to the vacated post, had had an impressive career as an accountant with R. G. Tourneau, Inc.[46] After he came to Acme, the company paid off all short-term loans ($1,608,900) and contracted a $2.25 million, long-term financial agreement with an insurance company and a bank. The terms of this loan agreement provided, among other things, for certain minimum requirements as to working capital, restrictions on additional indebtedness, payment of cash dividends, and purchases of company stock. Meeting these requirements, the company slashed dividends from $1.20 to $.75 a share. Under the less liberal depletion laws, Acme could claim only $82,961, as compared with the $515,000 depletion allowance two years previously. In spite of this, the company increased working capital by more than a million dollars and began talking about expansion once more.[47]

When Boldrick supplanted Fender in 1959, the top-level management promised to implement a general improvement program. It accomplished this between 1959 and 1963, through many changes in staffing, production, capital improvements, and marketing. But the program was not completed. In 1962, Acme laid plans and made a start on building a new Denton plant and entered negotiations with the Martin Marietta Corporation of Chicago to buy its subsidiary United Brick and Tile.[48] A new epoch was beginning.



INCORPORATED UNDER THE LAWS OF KANSAS.

NUMBER 75

SHARES

THE YOKE VITRIFIED BRICK CO.

OF COFFEYVILLE, KANSAS.

CAPITAL STOCK $ 125,000.

This is to certify, that M A Whitney is the owner of Two Shares of the Capital Stock of THE YOKE VITRIFIED BRICK CO. fully paid and non-assessable. Transferable only on the books of the Company in person or by attorney on the surrender of this Certificate in accordance with the by-laws of the Company.

WITNESS the signature of the President and seal of the Company attested by the Secretary at Coffeyville, Kansas this 19th day of January 1907.

PRESIDENT

SECRETARY

9

Acme Brick Company: A Six-state System, 1963–1968

Left: A stock certificate from Yoke Vitrified Brick of Coffeyville, Kansas. Yoke was one of the United Brick Company affiliates that was absorbed by Acme in the 1960s. Ironically this company was a competitor of Acme and Denton Pressed Brick at the turn of the century, nearly sixty years before it was annexed and closed down.

Early in his administration, D. O. Tomlin found that the brick industry was not only old but also slow to change. The industry, he wrote in 1964, had "come to life in recent years, but only in recent years." For a long time Acme, "along with the rest of the industry," he declared, "had no formal marketing plan, no planned modernization program, no planned clay exploration program, no organized research and development program, (and) no accurate production cost data or cost controls."[1] By 1963, Tomlin had established a five-year plan designed to remedy this situation and immediately set about implementing it.

Like the ground-breaking charge of dynamite set off at Denton in December 1962, Acme began 1963 with a bang, purchasing the United Brick Division of Martin-Marietta Corporation. In February, Acme took over United's seven plants in Kansas City, Missouri; Harrisonville, Missouri; Weir, Kansas; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Collinsville, Oklahoma; and Coffeyville, Kansas. Acme never put the Coffeyville and Collinsville plants into operation because they could not be run economically.[2]

United Brick and Tile Company of Independence, Kansas, had previously been bought out by the Martin-Marietta Corporation; and the management of this Chicago firm expected a profit of nearly 12 percent. With the construction slump of 1960–1961, the holding company did not get what it expected. Unfortunately, United Brick had become part of a conglomerate that was interested only in profits and had little concern for the long-term growth of the brick industry. Fortunately for Acme, Martin-Marietta decided to sell United Brick and Tile at the first opportune moment. Acme, for a long time, had wanted a stronger sales position in the Kansas-Missouri market area and now found its opportunity.[3]

United Brick and Tile was an old company that had once been Acme's great rival. United owed its existence to a consolidation that had taken place in the 1920s. The core company in that merger was Coffeyville Vitrified Brick and Tile, a company that

had competed with Acme Brick so often in the early days of their history. The Coffeyville Vitrified Brick plant at Coffeyville in southeast Kansas had been an important part of the brick industry since 1894. Coffeyville had at least six other brick companies at about the same time, all of which marketed brick all over the world, to as far away as Tokyo, Japan. This profusion of brick companies was due to the combination of cheap gas and unlimited, high-quality blue shale. Heavy competition ended in 1925 when thirty brick companies merged into an organization called the United Brick and Tile Company.[4] By 1927, the company, calling itself the United Clay Products Corporation, had thirty-four operating brick plants, had formed an alliance with another major Acme competitor, Reliance Brick Company of Texas, and had sales offices in Dallas, San Antonio, and Amarillo.

United's brick plants were scattered from Iowa to Arkansas in a six-state system under the command of President Harry Allyn and Vice President Fred Lafountain.[5] During the depression, like Acme, United's influence shrank so that by the time Acme bought the company out, only five plants were operational.[6] Unfortunately, Acme inherited a labor problem and ill will at some of the plants. The Coffeyville operations were uneconomical at best. The plant produced roofing tile, a product for which there was little demand. Consequently, Acme never attempted to operate it. The United Brick and Clay Workers demanded an arbitration. Acme refused on the grounds that there was nothing to negotiate. Since they were not operating the plant, there was no union to recognize. Local arbitrators ruled that Acme must run the plant. Acme appealed and won at the district level, but the union fought the case all the way to Washington and got a favorable hearing—not on the question of operating the plant but on Acme's refusal to talk.[7] Fees and other expenses cost both sides considerable sums, a wasteful procedure in view of the fact that "all the union wanted was to talk since it realized that the Company could not be forced to operate a too expensive plant."[8]

Of the five operational United plants, only the Weir plant was to survive beyond another decade of operation. This plant, as with many of Acme's facilities, was located on a historic site. Founded by T. M. Weir in 1871, the village of Weir, located in the southeastern corner of the state, is only a few miles from the site of Kansas's earliest American settlement (around 1825) on U.S. Highway 69 (called the military road) which ran from Fort Leavenworth to the Marais des Cygnes, to Fort Gibson and on to Fort Smith, Arkansas. Fur-trade was the best known industry in the area until the Indians were forced out when Kansas was opened to settlement by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. From

The Weir plant in 1945.

then until the end of the Civil War, this area, in particular, was in turmoil. Agriculture subsequently became the economic mainstay until, in 1870, the Missouri River, Fort Scott, and Gulf Railroad came through and more areas opened to settlement.[9]

No serious attempt to make brick came until 1890, when the firm Tiernan and Dennehy attempted brickmaking for a few years.[10] Then, in 1908, the brick plant reopened, and a second kiln was built. In 1912, Vogel Clay Products took over and improved its capacity and performance. When United Brick and Tile acquired the plant in 1918, the Weir plant could produce 30,000 bricks per day, mostly consisting of paving brick for the Kansas and Missouri markets.[11]

The Weir plant in 1955.

People at Weir maintain that it was their plant that started the unique practice of imprinting "DON'T SPIT ON THE SIDEWALK" in their pavers at the behest of the governor of Kansas.[12] Folks in Coffeyville say that it was their mayor's wife, tired of dragging her long skirts through expelled tobacco juice, who prevailed upon her husband to "do something about the disgusting habit." So legend has it that the dutiful mayor passed an ordinance requiring Coffeyville Vitrified Brick to make the imprint.[13] Still others maintain that state health officers requested the new law. Whoever was the first, it was a good idea.

In 1926, United Brick Company merged with United Clay Products Corporation but the resulting company failed in 1931. In 1933, the plant was incorporated into a new United Brick and Tile Company, which became a part of the American Marietta Company in 1952. Ultimately, in 1963, Acme took possession of Weir and the other United plants.[14] With this purchase, Acme added two hundred and thirty new employees and gained the market areas of the United plants. This acquisition gave the company access to Missouri. Acme opened a new sales office at Springfield and made Don Withers the sales manager there.[15] Acme retained most of the United production staff and some of the United sales forces in the same positions.[16]

Throughout the year Acme continued its program of updating equipment, kilns, and rolling stock. Automatic dories for loading and unloading trucks were installed on sixty plant vehicles, and packaging replaced hand pallet stacking in at least six plants. Construction progressed at Denton, and finally, in October, the plant was ready for opening.[17]

And what an opening it was! Not since the Barnum and Bailey Circus came to town had Denton seen such a show. The advertising department used every gimmick it could think of and enlisted popular local people to help with the dedication. Among them were the local sheriff's posse, "Miss Denton," the North Texas State University's AFROTC band, a color guard, and even the lieutenant-governor, Preston Smith. The Denton newspapers carried banner stories about the opening. Acme provided refreshments, guided tours, and held an amateur and professional bricklaying contest for guests. Of course, local dignitaries such as Mayor Warren Whitson, Chamber of Commerce President W. C. Orr, and Acme officials took part in the opening ceremonies. The five-hour event climaxed at 7:30 p.m. on October 31, 1963, with a tremendous fireworks display.[18] As they frankly admitted, Acme officials had "pulled out all the stops" in promoting the new plant. Their ultimate goal was to get the public interested in the brick industry and make them aware of its importance to the community.[19]

Acme had a right to be proud of its new establishment, for it was one of the most modern plants in the nation. Encompassing more than 160,000 square feet of manufacturing floor space, the plant had an annual capacity of over 25 million brick;[20] later, with new kilns, it produced close to 60 million brick a year. Intended to be the ideal brick plant, the Denton plant was equipped with all the latest machinery and a specially designed Harrop kiln more than 380 feet long. A 72,000-pound grinding machine ground clays brought in from pits located eight to twelve miles distant. Then,

twenty-four-inch-wide belts carried the clay to a screw blender, a dry-mix device, before it went into the pug mill and out to the newly-designed cutter. From the cutter, the bricks were taken to a holding room that automatically maintained consistent atmospheric conditions before firing. Evenly and consistently dried, the bricks were then removed by hydraulic kiln cars into tunnel dryers, and thence to the tunnel kiln after about seventy-two hours. Timing was automatic: every hour a car full of 3,500 standard-size brick moved into the tunnel kiln and pushed out a similar car. While in the kiln, the bricks continuously moved from a low-temperature zone of about 700 degrees Fahrenheit to a fire zone near the middle of the kiln controlled by thermostatic devices at from 1400 degrees to a peak of 2,150 degrees. Next the bricks went through an end zone, where they gradually cooled down to the 700–800 degree range before they emerged from the end of the tunnel. Here, the transfer cars moved them to fired brick storage tracks, and later to the packaging area.[21]

Early in its operation, the new Denton plant encountered problems in shrinkage control; therefore, the huge rotary kiln operated continuously. Eventually, shrinkage and cracking problems were solved by bringing in clay from the Athens pits. In July 1965, Denton Tunnel Kiln "B" was added, and in March 1967, Tunnel Kiln "C." So it was that, after production problems were finally solved after nearly four years of efforts, the old Denton plant, which had operated since 1917, was closed down forever.[22]

In the month following the opening of the new Denton establishment, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in nearby Dallas, and two strange circumstances became linked. The dying president was taken to Parkland Hospital, a structure built of Acme Denton brick.[23] As officers put the accusing finger on Lee Harvey Oswald, they checked out every possible angle concerning the case. Unfortunately, Lee Harvey's brother worked at the Denton plant and was picked up for questioning. Acme officials protected Bob Oswald, a sales coordinator at the plant, and did their best to help clear him of any complicity. At the same time, they guaranteed his job and paid him for lost time. Bob Oswald, however, felt a change of scenery was in order. After he was cleared of any involvement, he transferred to Wichita Falls sales and left the company a short while later.[24]

Almost unmentioned in the company magazine, but generally noted by hundreds of employees amidst the clamor of the Denton opening, Acme closed out its refractory business at Perla. Throughout the 1950s, many changes were taking place in the refractories market. Refractories became more specialized as the

market declined and face brick markets grew.[25] Since some of their most valuable raw material went into this business, Acme officials felt that the materials could be more economically utilized in making a better face brick. When they were forced to lay off forty-three men who worked in refractories, the company once again was threatened with labor trouble,[26] so they had no regrets about closing the refractory and subcontracting this portion of the business.[27]

Fort Smith plant employees in 1965.

Other expansions and closings came about as product lines were narrowed still further in 1964 and 1965, and king-size brick production became more fully developed.[28] As long as sales were on the upswing, all plants continued to operate. Shipments reached a peak of 433 million in 1965, over two and a half times the 1928 high, and then began to slide downward.[29] Fate soon overtook the old Denton plant and the one at Kansas City. Finally in July 1968, the Houston plant discontinued production, just as sales for the year began to move upward toward the 440 million mark.[30]

Acme reached an important milestone in 1965, when it became a six-state system that extended over four regional areas. The company then operated twenty-three brick and tile manufacturing installations in Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Texas. Twenty-nine branch offices served as direct sales outlets in this area, among which Texas still accounted for the greatest production (36.2 percent) and gross sales (38.7 percent). Arkansas was next in production (26.8 percent) but fourth in sales (13.5 percent). Louisiana held second place in sales, accounting for almost exactly one-fifth of Acme's sales but only one-sixteenth of its production. Then came Oklahoma with 16.9 percent production and 16 percent sales, followed by Kansas-Missouri with about 14 percent production and about 12 percent sales. Ownership of Acme's 300,000 shares was distributed among 504 stockholders in nineteen states, the Bahamas, and the District of Columbia, but most of the owners lived either in Texas or Arkansas. Texans owned approximately 78.23 percent, and stockholders in Arkansas accounted for an additional 13.33 percent. California and Louisiana stockholders held about 2 percent.[31] The breakdown by states as to plants, products, employees, and payroll is shown in chart form in tables 1 through 6, which follow.

Arkansas Plants

Information	Perla	Malvern	Fort Smith
Date Acme Acquired	1921	1926	1923
Replacement Value ($M's)	4,940	1,997	1,273
Number of Employees	236	53	56
Annual Production Capacity (MBE)	78,000	29,100	19,584
Number of Periodic Kilns	25	6	10
Number of Hoffman Kilns	0	9	1
Number of Tunnel Kilns	4	1	0
Number of Acres	1,029	232	137
Product Line*	W, C, B, G, HBT	P, R, Hg, Br	R, Br, Bl, Hg., HBT
Number of Delivery Trucks	7	6	4
Extra Features	Testing Lab State Trucking Center	Rebuilt 1961	
Shipments (MBE) 1961	56,511	10,889	17,319
Shipments (MBE) 1962	64,496	25,303	17,018
Shipments (MBE) 1963	64,342	22,142	16,399
Shipments (MBE) 1964	68,412	24,343	17,151
Shipments (MBE) 1965**	73,185	30,473	21,080

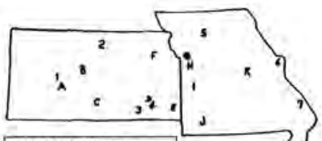
ACME BRICK COMPANY AND COMPETITIVE PLANT LOCATIONS

A Acme Fort Smith Sales Office
B Acme Fort Smith Plant
C Acme Malvern Plant
D Acme Perla Plant
E Acme Little Rock Sales Office

1 Clarksville
2 Malvern Brick & Tile
3 Hope
4 Jonesboro

Kansas-Missouri Plants

Information	Buffalo	Kanopolis	Harrisonville	Kansas City	Weir
Date Acme Acquired	1953	1958	1963	1963	1963
Replacement Value ($M's)	741	973	749	908	803
Number of Employees	49	55	48	86	47
Annual Production Capacity (MBE)	11,400	14,976	11,520	13,968	12,350
Number of Periodic Kilns	9	0	8	4	5
Number of Hoffman Kilns	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Tunnel Kilns	0	1	0	1	1
Number of Acres	180	18	30	114	58
Product Line*	R, Hg; Acitex	C, R, P, G, R, Br, Bl.	R, P, Hg.	R, Hg, Br.	C, B, P, R, Br, G, Hg.
Number of Delivery Trucks	1***	2***	6***	1***	2***
Shipments (MBE) 1961	7,492	11,012	–	–	–
Shipments (MBE) 1962	6,108	17,275	–	–	–
Shipments (MBE) 1963	11,378	17,595	8,973	10,865	10,127
Shipments (MBE) 1964	10,361	14,325	9,359	14,157	11,330
Shipments (MBE) 1965**	10,411	15,149	9,834	12,193	11,767



ACME BRICK COMPANY AND COMPETITIVE PLANT LOCATIONS

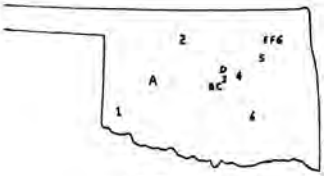
A Acme Great Bend Sales Office
B Acme Kanopolis Plant
C Acme Wichita Sales Office
D Acme Buffalo Plant
E Acme Weir Plant
F Acme Topeka Sales Office
G Acme Kansas City Division Office
H Acme Kansas City Plant
I Acme Harrisonville Plant
J Acme Springfield Sales Office
K Acme Jefferson City Sales Office

1 Kansas Brick and Tile
2 Cloud
3 Fredonia
4 Humboldt
5 Midland
6 Alton
7 Paston

EMPLOYEES AND EXPENDITURES BY STATE

Arkansas	391	$ 3,773,000
Kansas-Missouri	279	2,463,000
Louisiana	138	2,303,000
Oklahoma	270	2,829,000
Texas	773	6,783,000
TOTAL	1,851	$18,151,000

Source of these tables: Acme Brick Company, Special Report to the Board of Directors, December 1965



ACME BRICK COMPANY AND COMPETITIVE PLANT LOCATIONS

A Acme Clinton Plant
B Acme Oklahoma City Plant
C Acme Oklahoma City Sales Office
D Acme Edmond Plant
E Acme Tulsa #1 Plant
F Acme Tulsa #2 Plant
G Acme Tulsa Sales Office

1 Mangum
2 Davies
3 Oklahoma
4 Stroud
5 Sapulpa
6 Ada

Oklahoma Plants

Information	Clinton	Edmond	Oklahoma City	Tulsa #1	Tulsa #1
Date Acme Acquired	1944	1963	1924	1926	1963
Replacement Value ($M's)	1,289	1,009	1,112	883	834
Number of Employees	54	37	50	51	43
Annual Production Capacity (MBE)	19,530	15,520	17,100	13,580	12,825
Number of Periodic Kilns	6	0	6	7	0
Number of Hoffman Kilns	0	0	0	1	0
Number of Tunnel Kilns	1	1	1	0	1
Number of Acres	143	64	14 & 37	92	24
Product Line*	P, Hg.	R, Br, Hg.	R, Br, Bl, Hg.	R, Hg.	R, Hg.
Number of Delivery Trucks	3	2	8	4	4
Extra Features			Okla. Div. Headquarters		
Shipments (MBE) 1961	16,460	–	12,335	12,367	–
Shipments (MBE) 1962	18,649	–	17,056	15,282	–
Shipments (MBE) 1963	19,368	13,268	14,493	10,333	12,436
Shipments (MBE) 1964	17,962	14,147	15,792	13,490	14,166
Shipments (MBE) 1965**	17,559	14,835	14,411	12,960	14,336

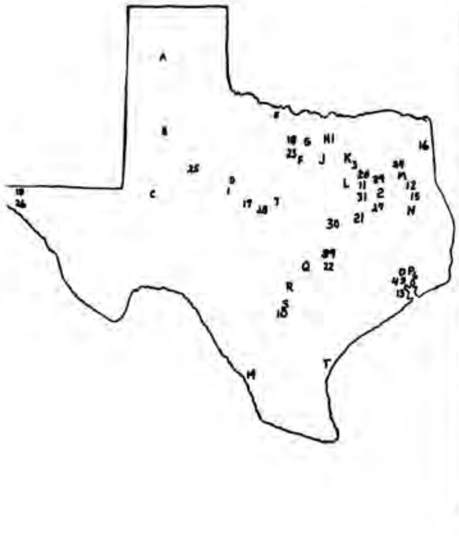
Louisiana Plants

Information	Baton Rouge	Monroe
Date Acme Acquired	1953	1951
Replacement Value ($M's)	1,301	610
Number of Employees	58	31
Annual Production Capacity (MBE)	30,013	9,384
Number of Periodic Kilns	8	4
Number of Hoffman Kilns	0	0
Number of Tunnel Kilns	2	0
Number of Acres	105	157
Product Line*	R, Hg.; Common Brk.	R, Hg.; Common Brk.
Number of Delivery Trucks	6	3
Extra Features		
Shipments (MBE) 1961	11,564	6,799
Shipments (MBE) 1962	13,772	7,834
Shipments (MBE) 1963	16,212	7,804
Shipments (MBE) 1964	15,669	8,058
Shipments (MBE) 1965**	17,562	7,973

ACME BRICK COMPANY AND COMPETITIVE PLANT LOCATIONS

A Acme Shreveport Sales Office
B Acme Monroe Sales Office
C Acme Monroe Plant
D Acme Alexandria Sales Office
E Acme Lake Charles Sales Office
F Acme Lafayette Sales Office
G Acme Baton Rouge Sales Office
H Acme Baton Rouge Plant
I Acme New Orleans Sales Office

1 Natchitoches
2 Mike Baker
3 Hammond
4 St. Joe



ACME BRICK COMPANY AND COMPETITIVE PLANT LOCATIONS

A Acme Amarillo Sales Office
B Acme Lubbock Sales Office
C Acme Midland Sales Office
D Acme Abilene Sales Office
E Acme Wichita Falls Sales Office
F Acme Bennett Plant
G Acme Bridgeport Plant
H Acme Original Denton Plant
I Acme New Denton Plant
J Acme Fort Worth Sales Office
K Acme Dallas Sales Office
L Acme Ferris Plant
M Acme Longview Sales Office
N Acme Garrison Plant
O Acme Houston Plant
P Acme Houston Sales Office
Q Acme Austin Sales Office
R Acme Fraser Plant
S Acme San Antonio Sales Office
T Acme Corpus Christi Sales Office

1 Abilene
2 Athens
3 Crown
4 Cordell
5 Cordell
6 Cordell
7 DeLeon
8 Elgin Butler
9 Elgin Standard
10 Elmendorf
11 Ferris
12 Henderson
13 Hockley
14 Laredo
15 Major
16 Marshall
17 Martin
18 Mineral Wells Clay
19 New-Tex
20 Palmer
21 Palmer
22 Payne
23 Reliance
24 Reliance
25 Snyder
26 Southwestern International
27 Teague
28 Texas Brick
29 Texas Clay
30 Waco
31 Whiteselle

Texas Plants

Information	Bennet	Bridgeport	Orig. Denton	New Denton	Ferris	Fraser	Garrison	Houston
Date Acme Acquired	1891	1934	1912	1963	1936	1961	1945	1945
Annual Production Capacity (MBE)**	22,560	23,550	14,100	45,825	12,480	18,375	19,820	12,600
Number of Periodic Kilns	23	4	15	0	4	0	10	0
Number of Tunnel Kilns	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0
Number of Acres	302	187	73	91	355	104	229	38
Product Line*	R, Br, Hg	R, Hg, HBT, R	Hg	W, G, B, R, Br, Bl, Hg	P, Hg, common	Hg, HBT	B, P, Br, Hg	Hg
% Capacity Shipped in 1965	90%	98%	89%	65%	100 %	85%	88%	100%

* Product Line Abbreviations

W—White	R—Red
C—Cream	Br—Brown
B—Buff	Bl—Black
P—Pink	Hg—Heritage
G—Gray	HBT—Hollow Building Tile

** NOTE: MBE — Millions of Brick Equivalent. A brick equivalent is one Standard Modular Brick 2-1/4 x 3-5/8 x 7-5/8 inches in size.

From the charts on page 137, it can readily be seen that Acme was a heavy investor in each state in which its facilities were located. Acme was most strongly competitive in Texas, where, according to company estimates, it controlled about 25 percent of the market.[32] Region-wide, Acme accounted for 35 percent of the total brick sales, and nationwide about 6 percent at the time it reached its peak in the mid-1960s.[33] The completion of the fully automated East Gate plant at Perla boosted that plant's capacity to nearly a hundred million brick equivalent (MBE) by 1967, which placed Acme in an even more favorable market position.[34]

A close study of the company during the 1960s reveals several noteworthy facts. First, the company's gross percentage sales did not reflect the exact profit level of each regional division. For example, the Arkansas-Oklahoma area contributed far more to company profits than the gross sales would indicate, due to different competition levels and the price of brick in that region. Apparently, this was due to the fact that Acme's competitive sales department had not yet begun to operate fully in all of the regions.[35]

Secondly, Acme ranked ninth in sales nationally for all clay products companies.[36] Acme was the leader in face brick sales, but ranked behind General Shale Corporation, Tennessee, in profits.[37] Although national face brick sales climbed slowly during this period, Acme's six-state region showed tremendous gains. It is to the credit of Acme personnel that they kept pace regionally and even showed increases beyond the national average, for at the start of the decade, the region produced between 7 and 8 percent of the national total, and by the end of it was producing approximately 17 percent. Acme's sales increased proportionally in the region; when compared with the rest of the nation, it showed a gain of 2 percent.[38]

A third notable development was that the wholesale department and Ceramic Cooling Tower began to take on more importance. By the mid-1960s, national distribution through wholesalers amounted to 8.3 percent of total Acme sales. Ceramic Cooling Tower, also national, did 130 percent more business in 1964 than in 1963, accounting for 2.4 percent of Acme's total. By 1967, wholesale accounted for more than 13 percent and the Ceramic Cooling Tower division over 3.5 percent.[39] So nearly 17 percent of Acme's business was national.

Also notable, but unfortunate, was the collapse of the long-standing friendship and cooperation between Acme and the Elgin Standard Company. Several times *Inside Acme* carried reports of this friend-

ship, which dated from the time of Ernest Fender Sr. and G. W. Prewitt. In 1964, J. K. "Buddy" Prewitt indicated that he wished to sell the Elgin Standard Company and retire and offered his plant to Acme at a good price. Just as the papers were being signed, however, Prewitt changed his mind. Apparently he made some last-minute demands or insisted on retaining some part of his property and privileges at the plant, which Acme officials, particularly Bill Darwin, were not willing to grant. The next year, Prewitt sold out to his old rival, the Elgin-Butler Brick Company, located literally just across the road.[40]

Thus, Acme lost one of its most valuable allies and then, had to start work on the market areas formerly held by Elgin Standard. Ultimately, in the years that followed, Acme also developed a strong friendship with the expanded Elgin-Butler Company, to the benefit of both. Acme, however, gained some valuable help with this task when several former top officials and salesmen from Elgin Standard joined the Acme staff. One of these was Clay Davis, who had been an officer of Elgin for more than forty years. Davis, assisted by Glen Watkins, opened the Austin sales office in July 1965. Starting as a cordwood hauler, Davis had advanced to a vice presidency with Elgin. When the company changed hands, he and Watkins worked less than a day for their new bosses, and then came over to Acme. Davis retired from Acme after about five years. Watkins then supervised sales in the Austin area with one sales assistant and about four other helpers.[41]

In an effort to secure greater uniformity of production, Acme officials experimented with the regional organization of the company. First, Acme President D. O. Tomlin reorganized company installations in Louisiana and made this an entirely separate operating division known as Acme Brick of Louisiana. To oversee this new division, Tomlin appointed Stout as the general manager, to be located in Baton Rouge. Stout had responsibility for all the manufacturing, shipping, sales, and administrative functions in his state. Well qualified for the task, Stout, a licensed engineer and a native of Louisiana, had gained valuable sales experience since he first went to work under T. H. Ruffin at Shreveport in 1949. Although having virtually a free hand within his province, Stout was, however, required to coordinate certain activities with the Fort Worth office.[42] Under this system and Stout's leadership, Acme sales nearly doubled in Louisiana during the first year of operations.[43] Stout's team consisted of a number of able men. Phillip R. Simmons, formerly Acme's Louisiana division sales manager, retained that title; and C. A. Caffarel, former Baton Rouge salesman, was named administrative manager for Acme Brick of

Louisiana. Al Houdek and Emmett Beeson continued as managers of the Baton Rouge and Monroe plants respectively. With modernization in the territory, Stout located his head office at 924 Joplin Street in Baton Rouge and launched a drive to effect general improvements.[44]

Meanwhile, in Fort Worth, Tomlin experimented with the company structure. At first, he used his top executives as managers, but soon scrapped that plan in favor of a president-vice president type of structure. Five men were named as vice presidents of Acme Brick Company in December 1965: Bill Darwin, in charge of marketing; Burdett Henry, operations; Ed Stout, manager of Acme Brick of Louisiana; Tom Sumner, vice president and secretary-treasurer; and Marshall Vaughan, personnel and industrial relations. Gibbs Slaughter remained Ceramic Cooling Tower manager for the time being.[45]

By the end of Acme's 75th anniversary year, company officials created a separate operating Kansas-Missouri Division analogous to the previously decentralized Louisiana Acme Brick Company. Bob Vickery was selected as general manager of this new company. Vickery, an eighteen-year Acme employee and native Texan, held a degree in business administration from the University of Texas and had previously been assistant to Vice President Henry. Serving under Vickery in the new set-up were Claude Yaun and James Clemens, managers in charge of production and sales. At the same time these changes were announced, the company started plans to decentralize its operations completely by the end of 1968.[46]

But this decentralization process moved more swiftly than anticipated and was completed by the end of 1967, entailing the shifting of a number of officials again. By this move, Acme Brick Company now became four distinct companies, although they were called divisions rather than companies.[47] The Southwest Division (Texas) was headed by B. J. Darwin as vice president and general manager; the Southern Division (Louisiana) was under vice president and general manager, James Gillander; the Central Division (Arkansas and Oklahoma) under vice president and general manager, Ed Stout; and the Midwest Division (Kansas and Missouri) under Robert Vickery, vice president and general manager. The other general company officers were Hub Hill, chairman of the board; D. O. Tomlin, president of Acme Brick; C. T. Sumner, vice president, finance; and Marshall Vaughan, vice president, personnel and industrial relations. The Ceramic Cooling Towers division was a separate organization that covered the United States with fifty sales representatives and held three foreign licenses to do business abroad.[48]

D. O. Tomlin and his management team. From left to right: D. O. Tomlin, President; Bill Darwin, Director of Sales and Marketing; Burdett Henry, General Manager of Operations; Tom Sumner, Controller; Marshall Vaughan, Manager of Personnel and Industrial Relations.

Since financial and structural reorganizations occurred so rapidly over the next two years (1968–1969), it would seem advantageous at this point to review the previous five years, with reference to financial developments and board activities before Acme became a conglomerate. From 1963 to 1968 the board membership remained essentially the same. When Mrs. W. R. Bennett retired early in 1963, she was replaced by Vernon Giss, president of two finance companies in Arkansas, and Sproesser Wynn, a senior partner in the law firm of McDonald, Sanders, Nichols, Wynn and Ginsburg. Wynn was also a director of the First National Bank, Fort Worth, Texas, and the Justin Companies.[49] This brought the board membership to an even dozen. In 1965, Paul R. Davis, a noted natural gas executive, rancher, and land developer in Louisiana and Texas, replaced the retiring T. H. Ruffin. During the previous July, the longtime friend and associate of Acme Brick Locksley Fife passed away and was replaced by Wesley Sowers, a management consultant who also was a director of several companies and a Wichita, Kansas, bank. This group, then, constituted the board during the three years prior to the conglomerate move.[50]

The period from 1963 to 1968 was one of the most prosperous ones in Acme's history. Following the purchase of United Brick and Tile Company in 1963, Acme's assets were valued at $16,553,000, and this figure grew to $22,075,000 at the end of 1967. At the same time, profits averaged a little over $1.1 million a year, and the company was able to increase its surplus by some $2,547,000 and its net worth by approximately $3,457,000. The company paid out about $2.5 million in dividends. Net annual sales for the period averaged slightly over $22 million a year.[51]

While working capital had increased only $594,455, the book value of Acme stock rose from $35.55 to $45.13 per share. Not a believer in short-term debt for significant capital improvements, Tomlin usually maintained the company's long-term debt at a level of around $5 million. At the end of the period, both in long-term and short-term debt, the company owed just over $7,419,000. This made the net worth to debt ratio about 2 to 1 and the surplus to debt ratio 10.7 to 7.4, or about 1.5 to 1.[52] Based on these estimates, Acme was a very sound company in 1968—one that any stockholder could point to with pride.

Central Division Meeting held at Fort Smith in January 1968.

During the significant five-year period ending in 1968, Acme sales climbed and several new lines of brick were introduced. Some of these were: the "King Size" brick, "Classic," "Old Time," Osage, Sierra Sand White Englobe, Autumn Gold, Flash Sandcraft, Gray, Buff, Pink, and White Lines, Black Angus, the Plantation Blend, Desert Dawn, Rose Towne, Pebblestone, Autumn Sand, Marble Gray, and Antique Silver Tile. During the first part of the 1960s, Acme emphasized home construction pushing the King Size brick, *Treasure Homes* (a copyrighted advertisement), and also significantly developed the idea of double-wall construction entirely of brick for building multistory apartments and for buildings without use of steel and concrete frames.[53]

An outstanding example of this kind of construction was a high-rise Holiday Inn in Austin, Texas.[54] Some other outstanding architectural structures incorporating this idea and using the new blends and kinds of bricks were a 187-foot tower at the University of Dallas; the Trinity University addition, San Antonio; the First National Bank Building in Tucson, Arizona, in which the walls, floors, and ceilings were of Acme products; and buildings in the Seminary South Shopping Center, Fort Worth, Texas.[55] In 1967, as home construction declined slightly due to high interest rates, Acme placed more emphasis on institutional building.[56]

Nineteen sixty-eight marked the end of a busy five years. During that time Acme had developed a formal marketing plan, a profit plan, a modernization program, and a cost control program. It had successfully decentralized its structure. Upon purchasing United Brick and Tile—an old competitor with many employees—Acme integrated United into its own system. Management continued to improve facilities and equipment by building the highly automated Denton plant, completing the new automated East Gate plant (Perla No. 3), and purchasing fifty new trucks equipped with self-loading

The Perla plant, an aerial view in 1968.

devices to handle the new strap-packaging system. Acme also dropped the production of fire brick and concentrated on developing its face brick lines. Production soared, and by 1965 Acme was the largest producer of face brick in the nation, making and selling over two and a half times the number of bricks it had produced in 1928. The Ceramic Cooling Tower Division and Wholesale organizations continued to prosper, adding approximately 15 percent to Acme's total sales. Indeed, by 1968, Acme was a well-financed organization ready for further expansion.

10

Conglomerate: From Bricks to Boots

Left: John Justin and D. O. Tomlin signing the merger agreement that was to make Acme a part of a great conglomerate.

Over the years, the roster of brick producers had been thinning as many small companies went out of business. In 1968, about four hundred fifty companies produced nine billion brick annually. This was in strange contrast to the little more than five thousand brick plants that produced ten billion brick per year in 1891, when Acme was founded.[1] The declining output of the brick industry was a result of intensive competition from substitute building materials and changing architectural preferences. Starting in the 1920s, builders turned to the use of steel and concrete for high-rise construction and only used brick for facing. In the 1950s, brickmakers saw curtain-wall office buildings with huge expanses of glass take away some of the facing market.[2]

Then, in the 1960s brick began to receive intensive competition from concrete, asbestos cement, aluminum, steel, plastic, and cheap imported adobe. Many people, however, still desired brick homes, and architects rediscovered the decorative advantages of the lowly brick. Consequently, brickmakers began to cater to the home construction market.[3] By 1968, many of the smaller companies had found themselves unable to compete and had gone out of business. Many of the larger brick manufacturers sought security in diversification, while simultaneously increasing brick production. This step was necessary if they were to deal effectively with competing materials such as lightweight aggregate blocks and cinder blocks, and precast and pre-stressed concrete.[4]

The decentralization project had hardly been completed when Acme, following the trend toward further diversification, created a conglomerate. At the same time, Acme attempted three major mergers and tried to get a listing on one of the public stock exchanges. Continued efforts to expand into the building materials industry and to secure a position on the American or New York stock exchanges led Acme Brick Company to change its name and become the central part of a huge conglomerate, with worldwide markets and net sales twice that of the 1967 brick company.

D. O. Tomlin, President of Acme Brick from 1962 to 1969.

In fact, while decentralization was still going on, Hub Hill began negotiations with John D. Fredericks for the merger of Acme Brick Company and Pacific Clay Products of Los Angeles, California. On May 8, 1967, the chairman of the board for Pacific Clay announced the contemplated merger of the two companies as equal partners.[5] There were, however, big differences to be resolved. Pacific Clay, a manufacturer of vitrified clay sewer pipe, sold only $12,428,299 worth of products in 1966, compared to Acme's $21,967,630, and had a net income only half as large as Acme's; on the other hand, Pacific Clay's common stock of 661,013 shares was listed on the American Stock Exchange, while Acme's 314,000 shares were traded in the Over-the-Counter (OTC) market.[6] Acme's intention was to get on one of the exchanges, and Pacific Clay's position there would be an asset hard to measure. Finally, after over a year of talks and a threatened anti-trust suit, the matter was dropped by mutual consent in June 1968.[7]

Meanwhile, Acme was beginning negotiations for the purchase of Ferris Brick Company, one of the largest common brick manufacturing concerns in Texas. Ferris Brick was the result of six brick companies that had incorporated in 1923. J. C. Hurlburt was president of Ferris Brick Company when Tomlin began purchase negotiations in early 1968. But this proposed merger fared no better than the Pacific venture, and during the summer Ferris sold out to a competing Texas brick company.[8]

While these negotiations went on, Tomlin feverishly sought out likely concrete companies that might be for sale. A brief history of concrete production and uses paralleled that of brick, dating back to about 2500 B.C. when clay was first added to lime mortar in the Near East to make a better binding substance. Ancient Egyptians used a lime-and-gypsum mortar as the binding agent in some pyramid construction, and the Romans utilized such mortar. During the Middle Ages, however, these fine bonding agents disappeared. The Roman process was rediscovered in 1756 by John Smeaton, an English engineer, while he was translating an old Latin manuscript. Another giant stride came in 1824, when Joseph Aspdin, an English bricklayer and stone mason, discovered how to make a cement from a prescribed formula of lime, silica, iron oxide, and aluminum. This mixture so closely resembled the color of stone quarried on the Isle of Portland that it came to be called "portland cement." By 1850, portland cement rivaled natural cement in usage everywhere in Europe; and, like brick, it was first shipped to America as ballast in 1868. First manufactured in America in 1875, Portland cement did not come into common use until the 1890s. But, by 1910, producers were manufacturing 93.5

million barrels of cement, each weighing 376 pounds. Fifty-seven years later production reached 374.2 million barrels.[9]

Much the same as calcining brick clay, the mixtures of lime, silica, and small amounts of iron oxide and aluminum are burned in a rotary kiln at 2700 degrees, then ground into a fine powder. As in brick manufacturing, the size of the rotary kilns and other manufacturing equipment requires a large capital investment. In both industries, the location of the source of raw material near a market area is a prime determinant in selecting a plant location.

In Texas, the cement production areas were concentrated in twelve counties. One plant was located in each of the following counties: Bexar, Dallas, Ector, Ellis, El Paso, McLeman, Nolan, Potter and Tarrant. Six plants were located in the coastal counties of Harris, Nueces, and Orange.[10] "The desire to achieve the maximum economics accruing from large scale capital investment and the limitation of the market area that can be served profitably" has led to intense competition in the cement industry.[11] Overproduction or underconsumption is reflected in the fact that between 1954 and 1967 the industry operated at only 70 percent capacity. Actually, the Texas concrete products industry produced exports considerable in tonnage, and the ready-mix concrete business made up about 60 percent of total cement production.[12]

Nonetheless, it was into the concrete products market that Acme next moved, hoping to gain two main advantages. First, Acme wished to utilize the vertical organization that concrete production afforded. For example, it gave Acme a good talking point with the customer and also enabled the company to offer a package price for several product lines—brick and concrete, or either. Secondly, Acme already had a sales force that could handle the new line.[13]

The first acquisition Acme made outside the brick industry was the purchase of Nolan Browne Company of Dallas on March 1, 1968.[14] This concrete block company had begun operation in 1934, when Nolan Browne Sr. bought the equipment of a defunct concrete company for $3,400. At that time the only products made were sand-and-gravel concrete blocks. Later, they recapitalized upward and grew into a thriving business with annual sales in excess of $1 million.[15] The Browne Company possessed the unique virtue of holding patents on "Featherlite" (expanded shale aggregate) and a "Spectra-Glaze" manufacturing license. "Spectra-Glaze" was a specially coated block resembling tile, and Acme hoped to develop the sales of that item as part of its major sales program.[16]

Acme's next purchase was the McDonald Brothers Cast Stone Company, a Fort Worth enterprise originally founded in 1920 as the C. J. Sutton Company. At first, the company manufactured only concrete block. When Acme purchased the company in 1968, however, McDonald was the largest manufacturer of engineered precast products in the Southwest making precast concrete panels and cast stone products. This purchase was financed partly by cash, liberal stock options, and guaranteed employment for the three principle owners, A. E. Eisemann, J. W. Knight, and J. H. Puckett. Since the McDonald Company owned 50 percent of ACF Precast Products, Inc., of Lubbock, Texas, Acme bought out the remaining stock of that company also.[17]

Prior to completing the ACF deal, Tomlin announced he had completed arrangements for acquiring the United Cement Products Company, Inc., and the Born Block Company, Inc., both of Wichita, Kansas. By this transaction, Acme got one of the best local Wichita concrete block companies and a statewide franchise on Spectra-Glaze block and other precast products. "Putting the block and brick business together there enables us to serve our customers much more efficiently and effectively," Tomlin told the stockholders, and he predicted that the move would increase Acme's "Kansas operating profit significantly."[18] A month later, Tomlin announced the acquisition of ACF, as well as the Concrete Casting Corporation of Arkansas, a company located in north Little Rock, which supplied precast concrete panels and prestressed concrete products to a statewide market. President Tomlin also expressed the belief that these new additions would "make a meaningful contribution to company performance during the exciting period . . . ahead."[19]

The addition of so many new lines led to the inevitable change of Acme's name, for Acme Brick Company was no longer descriptive of the firm.[20] As the public relations officer, J. K. Creighton, wrote in a letter to Tomlin, the name had ceased to "reflect the scope of the business" and did not "provide an individuality upon which to develop greater recognition for the true nature of operations." Creighton suggested the name Acme Brick Company be phased out of usage slowly and that the new name be a broad, descriptive term that had personality and could serve as an "umbrella" for several non-related ventures.[21]

Creighton proposed some three hundred different names. The question of a name change was also discussed by the board, which added a dozen names that all sounded like those of insurance companies.[22] Among their proposals were such names as Southwest American, Great Southern, Southwestern, American

Republic, Republic Enterprises, First Republic, First American, General Republic, and American Continental.[23] Creighton's favorites were Meritage Corporation, Excellex, Consortia, Veriteed, and Consonair.[24] Names suggested by others included XLX, Prospects, ProFuture, Acme Form, Acme Blox, Formcraft, Acmerge, Acmetron, Acmetex, and at least two hundred others with Acme in the syllabication.[25] At a special meeting, the stockholders approved the new corporate name of First Worth Corporation.[26]

The First Worth Building (formerly known as the Acme Brick Building) became the new headquarters for Concrete companies, Ceramic Cooling Towers, Justin Boots, as well as Acme Brick Company. In 1972 the building was renamed for Justin Industries.

With the adoption of this new name so soon after Tomlin had expressed a desire to hold back a while longer,[27] it was obvious that Acme directors had more in mind than simple diversification into the construction materials industry. Although Tomlin feared that the company was moving too fast,[28] the new company name did meet standards required for corporate identification: brevity, clearness, and distinction. At the same time it implied that the company was progressive and reliable; "First" reflected the feeling of prominence and strength, while "Worth" conveyed the idea of reliability and value and suggested the close association of the company with Fort Worth. Some thought it sounded like the title of a bank or savings and loan company, but most of the officials concerned liked the way it lent itself to alliteration—First Worth of Fort Worth. The choice had the merit of avoiding the "silly symbols syndrome" so often employed in industry.[29]

With the change of name went a change in structure. Acme formalized the independence of Ceramic Cooling Tower (CCT) and promoted Gibbs Slaughter, its founder, to vice president. Slaughter had directed progress of the cooling tower division since the late 1940s and was the first to see possibilities in the use of tile as a material for permanent air conditioning towers. After much experimentation by the research department, Slaughter succeeded in constructing two such towers in Fort Worth—one at a chemical company and the other at the River Crest Country Club. Company researchers continued to study the problem of using ceramic towers to cool the salt water that industries must treat to prevent thermal pollution. Ceramic Cooling Tower (CCT) builds towers for hospitals, schools, universities, and other huge complexes, "where they are planning to be in business for fifty years."[30]

Before joining Acme in 1940, Slaughter had worked for brick companies elsewhere. A native of Dallas, he earned an architect's degree from Chicago Technical College in the late 1920s, became

an expert on cooling towers, and supervised jobs around the world.[31] In 1971, Slaughter retired as President of CCT, but his retirement lasted less than a day, for he was named one of First Worth's assistants to the president.[32]

Following the establishment of CCT as an independent division of the company, Tomlin and the board submitted an exciting proposal to the Acme stockholders. This proposal called for action on a plan of reorganization aimed at creating the First Worth Corporation, a holding company, having as its subsidiaries Acme Brick Company, Ceramic Cooling Tower, and other companies management thought "necessary or proper." Furthermore, the plan provided for recapitalization to increase the number of shares of common stock from 600,000 shares (par value $10) to 2.5 million shares (par value $5), and to split two for one the current $10 par value shares outstanding. Moreover, the plan called for the authorization of 1 million shares of voting preferred stock of the company, at a par value of $5.[33]

Changes in board membership accompanied diversification. Hub Hill, Vernon Giss, W. W. Coates, C. A. King, P. J. Pickens, and Guy Price sold their holdings about the time the expansion program was launched. Wesley H. Sowers, a lawyer and management consultant who had been trained at Harvard University Graduate School of Business, became the new chairman of the board in April. Two new directors were elected to membership on the board. Both were experienced businessmen. The first of the two, Trammell Crow, a native of Dallas, was a public accountant and prominent real estate developer who had built and leased more than six hundred warehouses and small factories in North America and Europe. Crow owned the Dallas Market Center and was a partner in the Atlanta Merchandise Mart in Atlanta. With John Portman of Atlanta, Cloyce Box of Dallas, and David Rockefeller of New York, Crow was also a partner in the building of the Embarcadero Center in San Francisco. The other new member, Inge Grant, was chairman of the board and president of Wyatt Industries, Inc., Dallas, director of the Great Southern Life Insurance Company, director of the Austin Steel Company, and director of the Bank of the Southwest—all in Houston, Texas.[34]

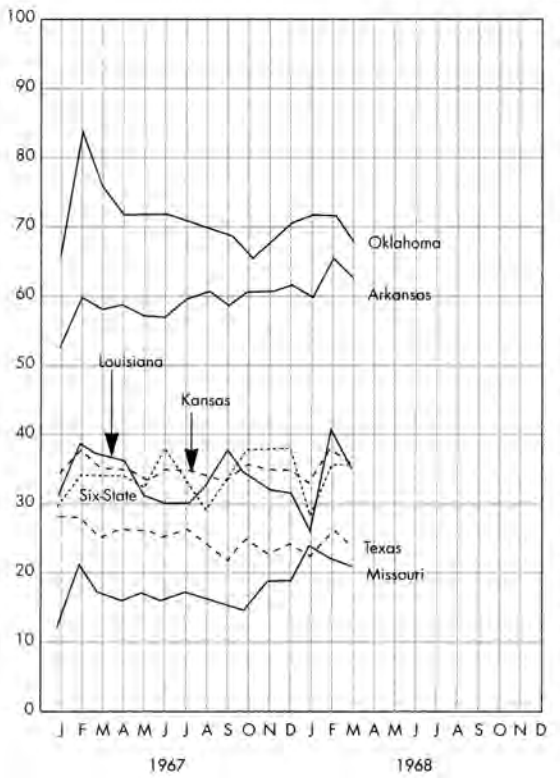
As a result of these changes, the board consisted of eight members instead of twelve. Besides Crow and Grant, the board members were Davis, Rehfeldt, Tomlin, Wynn, and Young. Of these, Tomlin was the largest stockholder, holding almost as much stock as the six members who had resigned. None of the board members had been associated with the company as directors for more than nine years.[35]

The articles of incorporation adopted for the First Worth Corporation amended those of Acme Brick Company and were extremely broad. Under Article Two, which created the holding company, the new corporation was authorized to own, hold, manage, and buy "personal property of every description, including its own stock and stock in any other corporations." First Worth could also manufacture, distribute, buy, sell, and deal in goods "of every kind and description." At the same time the company could act as a general contractor and builder. Moreover, the company could "engage in and carry on the business of buying, leasing, and otherwise acquiring lands and interests in lands of every kind and description as wheresoever situated." It could also engage in the operation of any buildings or structures built on its land and could invent, franchise, and deal in anything it discovered or invented, including copyrights.[36]

The first important move following state approval of the new charter[37] was the completion of negotiations for two mergers, one of which involved the Justin Company. By the terms of the merger, John S. Justin, president and manager of the Justin Companies, became the owner of 35,000 common shares, plus 75,000 voting preferred stock. At the same time, a merger with Louisiana Concrete Products Company was consummated, bringing acquisitions and mergers of Acme and First Worth to eight within one year.[38] At the next annual meeting, the board of directors selected John Justin to replace R. A. Young. Justin also retained his position as chief executive of the Justin Companies, which were now operated as subsidiaries of First Worth. James E. Gillanders became the chief executive of the other new subsidiary, Louisiana Concrete Products.[39]

With these acquisitions, Acme now found itself the core company in a new financial structure. Assets of the First Worth Corporation were about $10.5 million dollars (50 percent) greater than those of the former Acme Brick Company. Company debt had increased about $7 million (100 percent) and the surplus about $2.6 million (25 percent). The net worth had advanced nearly $3.4 million (23 percent) above what it had been before the expansion and consolidations took place. The net sales margin widened by just over $15 million, but net income was barely over that of the single brick company the year before. This net profit was greatly affected by the expenses involved in effecting the mergers, lawyers' fees, and bad stock acquired with ACF company of Lubbock. To make matters worse, the federal surcharges tax in 1968 on the resources of First Worth was nearly as much as the total federal taxes paid by Acme Brick the preceding year.[40]

In the months that followed, a severe slump in construction developed, and sales from the building materials divisions declined. Acme's shipments for 1968 were at a new high of 440 million brick equivalents (MBE), but by the end of 1969, this had fallen to 400 MBE. Acme management closed its Oklahoma City, Harrisonville, and Ferris brick facilities in 1969.[41] These actions caused a shrinkage in company assets of nearly $2 million and a cutback in inventory. The inventory and cost control programs previously instituted at Acme Brick were not applied to its concrete concerns, and Acme made several key personnel changes at that time. Experienced concrete management personnel were replaced by experienced brick men. The result was a loss in concrete sales at the company during the last quarter of the year.[42] The management of First Worth, therefore, decided to make a public offering of 300,000 shares of common stock in addition to the $2 million convertible debentures and 214,000 common shares that had been placed on sale five months earlier.[43]



Acme's share of brick shipments, 1967–1968.

This move proved to be neither popular nor profitable. Consequently, in July 1969, the First Worth Corporation abandoned plans for its public stock and bond offerings absorbing $138,978 in consultant fees and other related costs.[44] Another unforeseen expense, was the foreclosure and write-off on one of the concrete purchases. Still another expense came in the form of an antitrust suit that, although was dismissed by the courts, further drained company finances.[45]

To reduce costs and increase sales, officials reorganized Acme's wholesale operations. In July, Bill J. Darwin became the full-time president of Acme Brick Company, while D. O. Tomlin remained president of First Worth. In other moves, a manager assumed directions over all three precast plants.[46]

Ceramic Cooling Tower, however, did a great deal better in 1969 than the year before. During 1969, Ceramic Cooling Tower Company enjoyed the best year in its history. Profits were higher, new orders were nearly triple those of 1968, while backlog orders doubled in the same period. Some of the major jobs that CCT completed in 1969 included central plant cooling towers for the Pennsylvania State Capitol Building, National Cash Register Company, St. Joseph's Hospital in Memphis, the University of Maryland, Stanford University, California, and Brigham Young

University, Utah. CCT also tested its PSM (Power Spray Module) system for control of thermal pollution and found the device usable for any size plant located on channels, ponds, or lakes.[47]

The Justin Companies contributed significantly to the brightening profit picture. The incorporation in 1968 of the three Justin companies as wholly owned subsidiaries marked First Worth's initial venture into the consumer products field. This also brought into the corporate family a brand name famous nationally and worldwide for its high-quality cowboy boots. The company also made a variety of other casual footwear, including the popular Wellington-style boot. Besides the boot company, founded in 1879, Justin owned the Justin Leather Goods Company, founded in 1919, and the Justin Belt Company, organized in 1938. These other leather goods companies produced western dress and casual belts, in addition to handcrafted wallets, purses, key cases, and several other leather items. Justin products were marketed through a network of approximately nine thousand authorized dealers. From the standpoint of sales and profits, 1969 proved to be one of the Justin Companies' most successful years.[48]

Unfortunately, the profits of these two divisions were offset by losses elsewhere. Near the end of 1969 it was evident that First Worth was losing ground. Net sales increased by more than $4.6 million, but net profit was being eaten away by expenses. Assets declined by $2 million, debt shrank by $1.3 million, net worth dropped $700,000, and the surplus by over $200,000. Dividend payments alone, over the period since First Worth's formation, ran over $1.1 million. Debt exceeded surplus for the second straight year. Profits dwindled to their lowest level in six years, in spite of 42.2 million net sales, the best in the company's history.[49]

Such events alarmed John S. Justin, who saw assets slipping away and the dissipation of what he and others had built. There was also a very real possibility that he might lose control of his own companies in much the same way as former owners of the concrete companies had done. So, in November 1969, in the midst of a difficult period of readjustment and when competition was particularly keen and business conditions difficult, Justin took the reins of leadership from Tomlin. In part, it was an act of self-preservation.[50] Tomlin's association with the company ended in January 1970. As with many other large companies that had become part of a conglomerate, Acme Brick found itself annexed by the smaller one. So it was that First Worth entered 1970 with a new, vigorous, aggressive, and skillful management team, dedicated to reversing the downhill trend of sales, production, and profits.


ACME BRICK COMPANY STORE

11

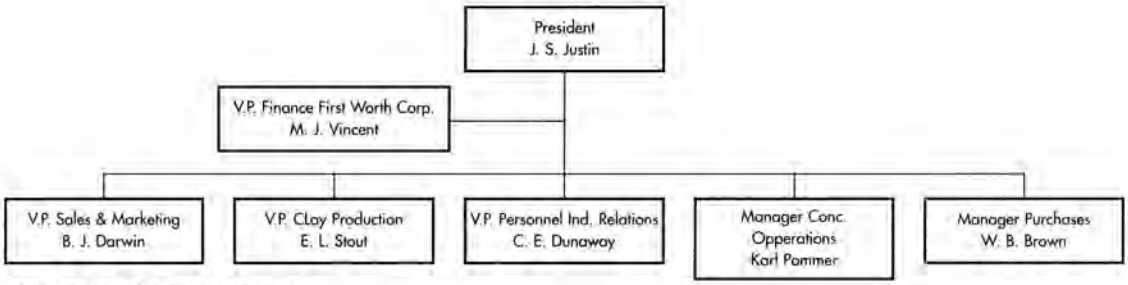
Acme Brick Company: A Division of First Worth Corporation

Left: Acme Brick Company Store in 1971.

Acme officials found that decentralization worked unevenly, the degree of success depending largely on how its leaders adapted and what the prevailing conditions were in each company area.[1] The home office was seriously affected by the changes, for officials had difficulty adjusting to the idea of four Acme Brick companies.[2] Many departments found that their functions had narrowed. For example, only two issues of *Inside Acme* were published in 1967, and by mid-1968, it had ceased publication entirely. *Inside Acme* no longer served its original purpose, for each division now put out its own safety newsletter.[3] Departments that had previously coordinated various levels of service, such as rail traffic, now came under a special services department.[4]

By July 1969, it was clearly apparent that far-reaching structural changes would have to be worked out. In an effort to secure greater efficiency and a reduction in expenditures, Acme's three precast concrete plants were placed under the control of one general manager. Darwin became president of Acme Brick, and a new vice presidential arrangement was established. It provided for a vice president of production, a vice president of concrete production, and a vice president of sales. This new centralized structure, Justin hoped, would provide the control needed in all divisions of the conglomerate.[5]

With the change in structure came changes in leadership. Six new directors were elected to the board between 1969 and 1970. To the leadership core composed of Justin, Sowers, and Rehfeldt were added Robert Glaze, real estate investor, and Dean P. Guerin, president of Eppler, Guerin, and Turner, who joined the board early in 1969. In December 1969, John Justin became president of First Worth Corporation, and at that time four other prominent men came into the company as board members. The first of these was Bayard H. Friedman, an attorney and former mayor of Fort Worth, who was then serving as senior vice president of the Fort Worth National Bank. The others were: Howard W. Jennings of the Aztec Manufacturing Company and the



The First Worth's organization in 1971.

Tarrant State Bank; Richard C. Newkirk, owner of Newcourt, Inc., Texarkana, Texas, who was also a practicing certified public accountant in the firm of Newkirk, McGee and Moor;[6] and Jerry L. Brownlee who had served as city manager for Fort Worth from 1963 to 1967 and was vice president of Kimbell, Inc., a diversified Fort Worth Company.[7]

The First Worth Corporation and Acme were particularly fortunate in their choice of a new president. John S. Justin Jr. brought to the company a broader and more varied background than any of its previous chief executives. Born in Nocona, Texas, on January 17, 1917, to John S. Justin Sr., John Justin Jr. studied at Oklahoma A&M College and Texas Christian University. In 1938 he went into business for himself, pooling the $1,000 he had borrowed from a bank with the capital supplied by his partner, W. O. Barton, to form the Justin Barton Belt Company. The business prospered from the start, and in 1943 Justin bought out Barton, and changed the firm's name to the Justin Belt Company.[8] During World War II, Justin served in the U.S. Merchant Marines, and at the war's end returned to resume direction of his business.

In 1950, he was invited to join his father's company, H. J. Justin and Sons and, in October of that year, became vice president and general manager of the older firm. Two years later, when his father became chairman of the board, John Justin Jr. assumed the presidency of H. J. Justin & Sons, Inc.[9] This company was older than Acme Brick, for Justin's grandfather established it nearly a dozen years before George E. Bennett chartered Acme Pressed Brick.

John Justin Jr.'s grandfather, H. J. Justin, had come to Texas in 1879 from Missouri. Settling at Old Spanish Fort on the Red River, he made a pair of boots for a cowboy who was so pleased that he spread the word of Justin's skill among his friends. The demand for boots increased, and Justin set up shop on the Chisholm Trail. With the coming of the railroad in 1889, he moved to Nocona, and in 1925 transferred his company to Fort Worth.[10] By that time the Justin Company was doing over $200,000 worth of business, whereas a dozen years before they were fortunate to gross $12,000.

John Sullivan Justin Sr. went to work for his father in 1901, at the age of twelve, and became a full partner in the business seven years later. By 1931, the firm was making shoes as well as the boots that already enjoyed a continental market.[11] Among Justin's boot customers were the Northwest Mounted Police, the National Park Service, the Texas Rangers, the U.S. Border Patrol, several military schools, a store that catered to celebrities in New York, and one that supplied lumberjacks in Walla Walla, Washington.[12]

Mr. John Justin in 1970.

In 1939, the Justin firm moved to its new quarters at 610 W. Daggett, and it was there that John S. Justin Jr. received so much of his training. Upon taking command of the H. J. Justin firm from his father in 1950, the youngest Justin, applying principles that had made his own enterprise successful, proceeded to double the company sales.[13] He increased outlets, began marketing Justin products in South America, and formed the Fort Worth Boot Company, which distributed children's cowboy boots.[14]

John S. Justin Jr. was not content to be just a successful businessman. A man of numerous civic interests, he contributed generously of his time to the Fort Worth YMCA, Community Chest, Better Business Bureau, Sales Executive Club, Export-Import Club, Opera Association, First Methodist Church, Fort Worth Club, and Ring of the International Brotherhood of Magicians. Justin was also an active member in the Rotary Club, the Double-G Club, the Colonial and River Crest Country Clubs, and the Steeplechase Club.[15] His interest in civic affairs led to his election to the Fort Worth City Council and then to mayor of the city.

Upon completion of his term as mayor, Justin did not seek re-election. Politics and civic duties had taken up most of his time for four years, and he needed to devote more attention to his business. He was rewarded for his efforts in May 1966, when his company won the American Shoe Design Award. This award was presented not for a single design but for a group of boots in the industrial and sports category.[16] But Justin has never lost his interest in politics and civic affairs and has remained active in political campaigns and served on dozens of educational and charitable projects.

Upon assuming leadership in the First Worth Corporation, Justin made it obvious that he intended to institute important changes in Acme and to increase its working capital. The methods he used were a mixture of the old and the new. He eliminated waste and unnecessary functions and adopted a system of centralized authority. At the same time, he employed modern research techniques to develop better equipment, processes, and products and made efficient use of all the capital, labor, and resources of the

entire company. He firmly believed that "a man should be able to sell anything that he knows is a good product,"[17] and consequently bent all his efforts to see that the conglomerate's products were of prime quality.

Soon, Justin eliminated a number of the high-salaried positions, and himself became president of Acme Brick Company, Louisiana Concrete, and the Justin Companies, as well as the First Worth Corporation. The geographical divisions of Acme Brick Company were abolished, and vice presidents were put in charge of the major operations, such as sales and manufacturing, and managers took charge of other functions. This basic organization was in effect by late 1970. Officers of the First Worth Corporation then were Dr. Fred C. Rehfeldt, chairman of the board; John Justin, president and chief executive officer; M. J. Vincent, vice president of finance and secretary-treasurer; Les McClure, assistant secretary; and D. J. Kelly, general counsel and assistant secretary.[18]

Justin's reforms saved over $200,000 a year, and more efficiency was gained by the centralization of positions and functions. First Worth thus became a service company for the major operating subsidiaries: Acme, Louisiana Concrete, the Justin Companies, and Ceramic Cooling Tower. Vincent became the chief financial officer for all these divisions as a vice president of First Worth Corporation.[19] C. E. Dunaway, vice president of personnel and industrial relations, directed labor matters for all the subsidiaries.[20]

Chief officers of Acme Brick Company, in addition to Vincent and Dunaway, were Bill J. Darwin, now vice president of sales and marketing; Ed Stout, vice president of clay production; Karl Pommer, manager of concrete operations; and W. B. Brown, manager of purchases. Darwin's Sales and Marketing division was broken down into four regions, roughly corresponding to the former old divisional lines. And production was divided into three regions, (Central, Midwest, and Southwest), while functions of plant engineering and research were controlled centrally in the Fort Worth General Office.[21]

By contrast, concrete operations, headed by Pommer, were somewhat less clearly defined. He was in charge of the concrete products division with various plant and production managers beneath him. He also technically supervised Louisiana Concrete, although the Louisiana concern had its own general office and general officers, consisting of a chairman of the board, assistant secretary, assistant treasurer, and concrete block manager. This division also had a vice president-manager, Carrol A. Clark, who was in charge of technical services for concrete production at Baton Rouge and in five other plants.[22]

Above: Officers of the Acme Brick Company in 1971 were (left to right): John S. Justin Jr., President; Edward L. Stout, Vice President-Clay Production; C. E. Dunaway, Vice President-Personnel and Industrial Relations; and M. J. Vincent, Vice President-Finances.

Four regional sales managers directed sales and marketing. Jim Baggett managed the Central region, which was divided into three districts. His district sales managers were Carroll West, Fort Smith; Scotty Freebairn, Little Rock; and Jim Taylor, Springfield, Missouri. The Midwest region, under Bob Marks, had five district managers: Jim Gard, Kansas City; George McCarthy, Topeka; Joe Morris, Wichita; Jim Clemens, Oklahoma City; and Don Hesser, Tulsa. The Southern region had seven districtmanagers. Under Fayette Ellis were J. W. Delaney, Alexandria; Leonard Bales, Baton Rouge; Bob Laborde, Lafayette; Phil Simmons, Lake Charles; Roy Posey, New Orleans; and Homer Adams, Shreveport.[23]

Below: In 1971 Acme Brick regional sales managers were (left to right): R. K. Freebairn, John Doughty, Robert G. Marks, and W. L. Ellis.

Texas, which had the most district offices, made up the entire Acme Southwest region. It was headed by John Doughty. In far West Texas, Leland Lane was in charge of the Lubbock district; and Jim Duckworth, the Amarillo district. Willis Upchurch, Houston; Howard Green, Beaumont; and August Mueller, Corpus Christi, comprised the managerial force along the coast. Glen Watkins and Harry Reger represented the company in Austin and San Antonio respectively. The Dallas district manager, John Moeller, not only had charge of Dallas but also supervised managers at Texarkana and Longview. Arnold Bachschmid controlled the Fort Worth sales office while R. C. Dudley held a similar position at Wichita Falls.[24] Production in Acme Brick's three manufacturing regions was headed by manager Gene Yarborough of the Central region, T. W. "Wythe" Poyner of the Midwest region, and Bill Hurlburt of the Southwest region.[25]

The First Worth Corporation suffered severe losses the first quarter of 1970, but this was stopped in the second quarter, was reversed in the third quarter, and was overcome completely in the

fourth quarter. In spite of a decline in sales, caused primarily by a general slowing down of the economy, the company registered a year-end net income of $744,278. Having met some of his objectives, Justin applied this money to increasing the working capital of the corporation by nearly $1 million, and to satisfying the debt requirements already contracted.[26]

In 1971 Acme Brick regional plant managers were (left to right): Gene Yarborough, W. E. Hurlburt, and T. W. Poyner.

When construction began to pick up in 1971, First Worth was able to take advantage of the occurrence. The concrete division and Acme Brick Company registered their best three quarters. Acme's brick plants operated at maximum production all through the spring and summer, and in spite of a tremendous inventory accumulated during the winter, yards that were stacked full of brick in May became almost bare by August. Justin's insistence that it costs more to let a plant sit idle than to run it seemed justified. The rate of production and sales was such that all divisions of the First Worth Corporation enjoyed a banner first three-quarters of 1971.[27] Looking forward to an even greater demand for brick in 1972, the company continued its modernization efforts and also reopened the Oklahoma City plant at year's end. First Worth finished 1971 with net income of $2,187,271, and raised working capital $1,141,000.

The progress of the company that year was shown by the increased demand for First Worth's unlisted stock. In January and February of 1971, the common stock prices fluctuated between $10 bid and $12 asked; in the spring this moved to the $15–$17 bracket; and in early fall, the price rose to the $19–$20 range, nearly doubling its value in less than a year.[28]

The future appeared promising for the First Worth Corporation as the company moved into 1972. Justin believed in flexibility and in the need to develop new product lines and equipment. He saw the value of automated plants. Since the types of brick produced by either the older or the new methods would fit some market need, he wanted to be ready to make and sell what the customer demanded. In fact development of a special new kiln was underway that could address this need.[29]

The Justin administration stabilized operations at Acme Brick Company, which was once again developing the spirit it needed to meet competition. Justin believed in home leadership for hometown companies, and the makeup of his board of directors reflected this. He had proven the success of this idea with the Justin

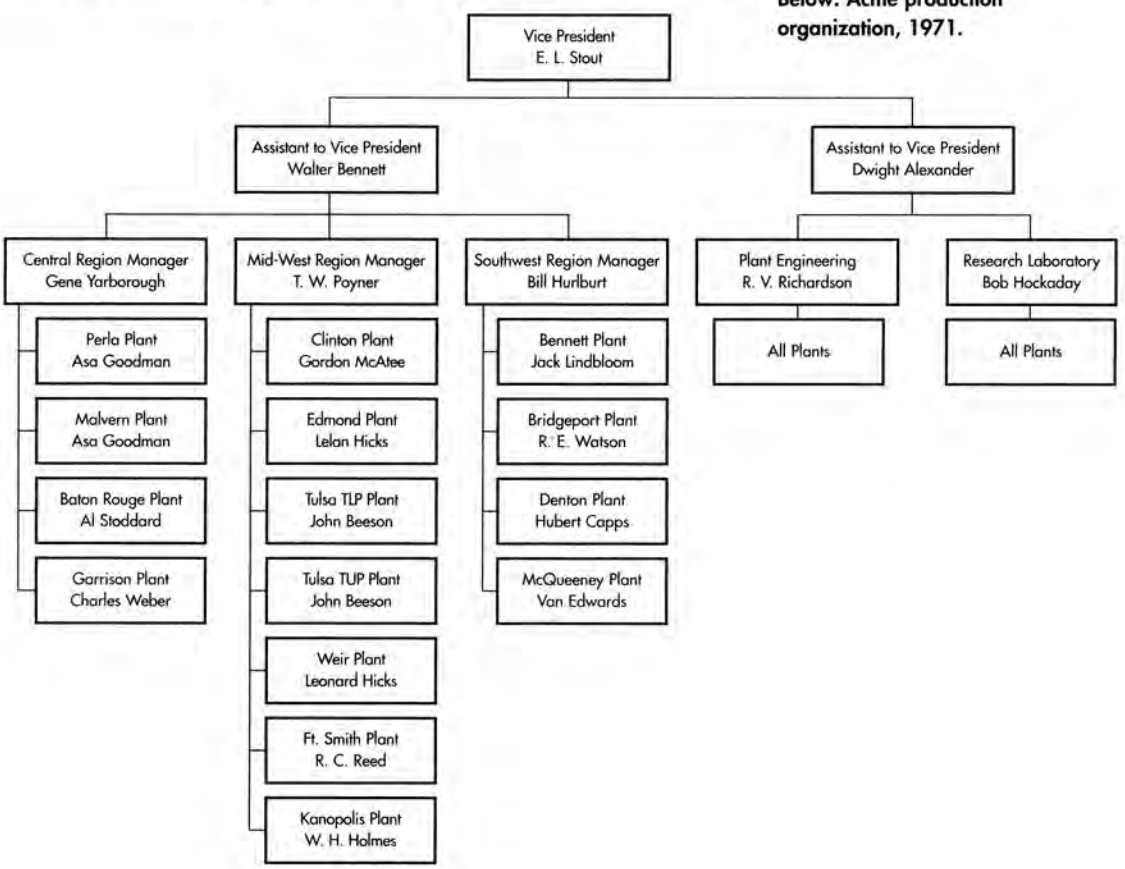
Companies and felt it could also be applied at First Worth.

"In the economic sphere at home, the United States did a lot of things right in 1972. As a result, its economy expanded throughout the year in a broad, solid, accelerating upturn to the highest (peaks) ever achieved by any nation."[30] "But it did not (win) the battle against inflation which slowed from a . . . galloping rate of 6 percent to . . . a jogging rate of 3.5 percent. The Federal Reserve System pursued an expansionist monetary policy all year and poured billions of dollars into the banking system to meet the credit demands of business and individuals."[31]

Above: The company hotel/ apartments at Bennett in 1971. This building was the school building in the early 1900s until the late 1930s.

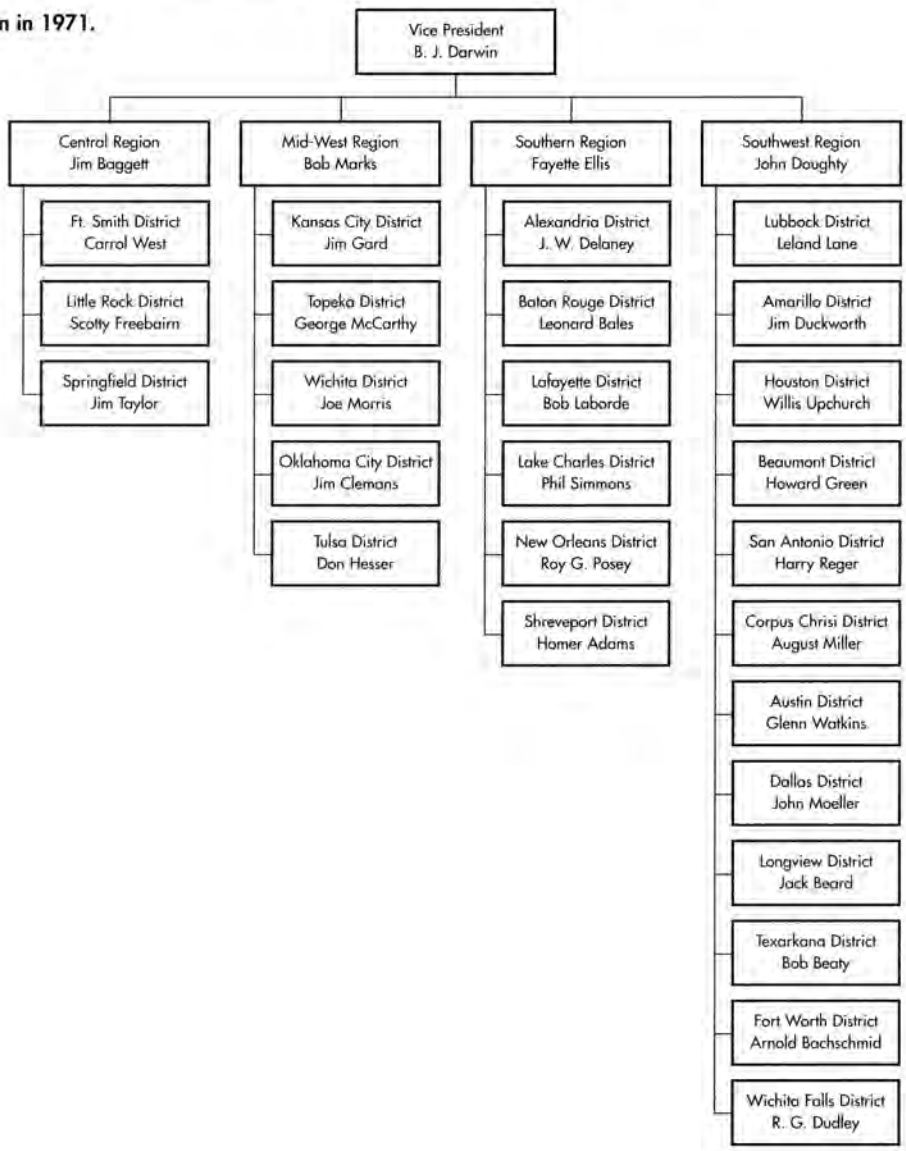
Interest rates continued to fall from a prime rate of 8.5 percent in 1970 to a low of 4.75 percent in the early summer of 1972. Lower

Below: Acme production organization, 1971.



interest rates stimulated borrowing and building, as evidenced by housing starts, which went up as rates went down in Acme's region of influence. Only 213,746 units were started in Acme's primary market territory in 1969, and grew only about 3 percent the following year, but reached 296,849 units in 1971 and 330,637 units in 1972.[32] As it turned out, this high figure was not to be reached again until 1978, and then not to be greatly surpassed until 1983—an all-time high for the region. While commercial construction increased roughly parallel to housing construction, significant changes in housing types emerged as apartments and condominiums began to make up a larger segment of housing construction than ever before.

Acme sales organization in 1971.



But a good market does not always signal success for a business. The enterprise must be ready and capable of making the proper response. Nine-teen hundred seventy two was Acme's finest year to date. Sales and profits reached new highs for the second consecutive year, influenced to a great extent by increased output and efficiency throughout its operation. In short, Acme was ready to take advantage of such opportunities as the economy provided.

Significantly, much of Acme's success in this record year can be attributed to the efforts of its marketing force. Acme maintained one of the largest direct sales forces in the brick industry, selling Acme products from New England to the far West through direct sales and distributor concerns. It is interesting to note, that in 1972, the sales force was reduced and much of that time reported to the four regional sales managers. They, in turn, reported directly to Justin, since Bill Darwin resigned that year. In the Central sales region, Jim Baggett had retired the previous year, after forty-six years of service, and was replaced by Robert K. (Scotty) Freebairn, who had come to Acme as a teenage mail clerk. From Oklahoma City, Robert G. Marks managed the Midwest regional office, and John T. Doughty operated the Texas sales region from Dallas, while W. L. (Fayette) Ellis ran the Southern sales region from Baton Rouge. Also at this time, the Shreveport sales territory, under Homer Adams, was reassigned to Freebairn, and LeLand Lane moved from the Lubbock office to become the district manager of the Little Rock sales office.[33]

Justin and Stout immediately recognized the need for additional production and instituted the beginning of a new company-wide production effort. Asa Goodman was placed in charge of the Perla expansion and Ed Stout, as vice president of production, undertook to increase production with the assistance of the regional managers. At the time, Gene Yarborough served as regional production manager for the Central region (Arkansas), Wythe Poyner for the Midwest (Kansas and Oklahoma), and Bill Hurlburt for Texas. Their achievement resulted in production of 30 million more brick company-wide and gave the sales force more marketable products.[34]

The Acme research lab developed several new distinctive brick in response to changing market demands. These innovations enabled the company to present the broadest product selection available anywhere. New building codes were being adopted across the nation, and the building public was becoming more conscious of the need to conserve energy. Acme emphasized that brick was one of the best building materials available to conserve energy. Fire safety was another important requirement, about which architects

were becoming increasingly aware, particularly when designing hospitals and nursing homes. Acme could boast that brick provided added safety for such buildings.[35]

A number of factors made it possible for Acme to provide this positive production response. Although a good deal of available capital had been used for purchases, merger requirements, and debt service since 1968, in 1970 the company started a more long-range modernization program. Acme hoped this would enable it to take advantage of a significant upsurge in construction. The new Perla Eastgate plant, was modified with more efficient burners. The Oklahoma City plant was improved and reopened in late 1971. Acme installed a new, company-designed and -developed, periodic kiln system at Bridgeport and implemented minor improvements at the Tulsa, Garrison, and Malvern plants. These changes broadened the product lines and increased output by 30 million brick.[36]

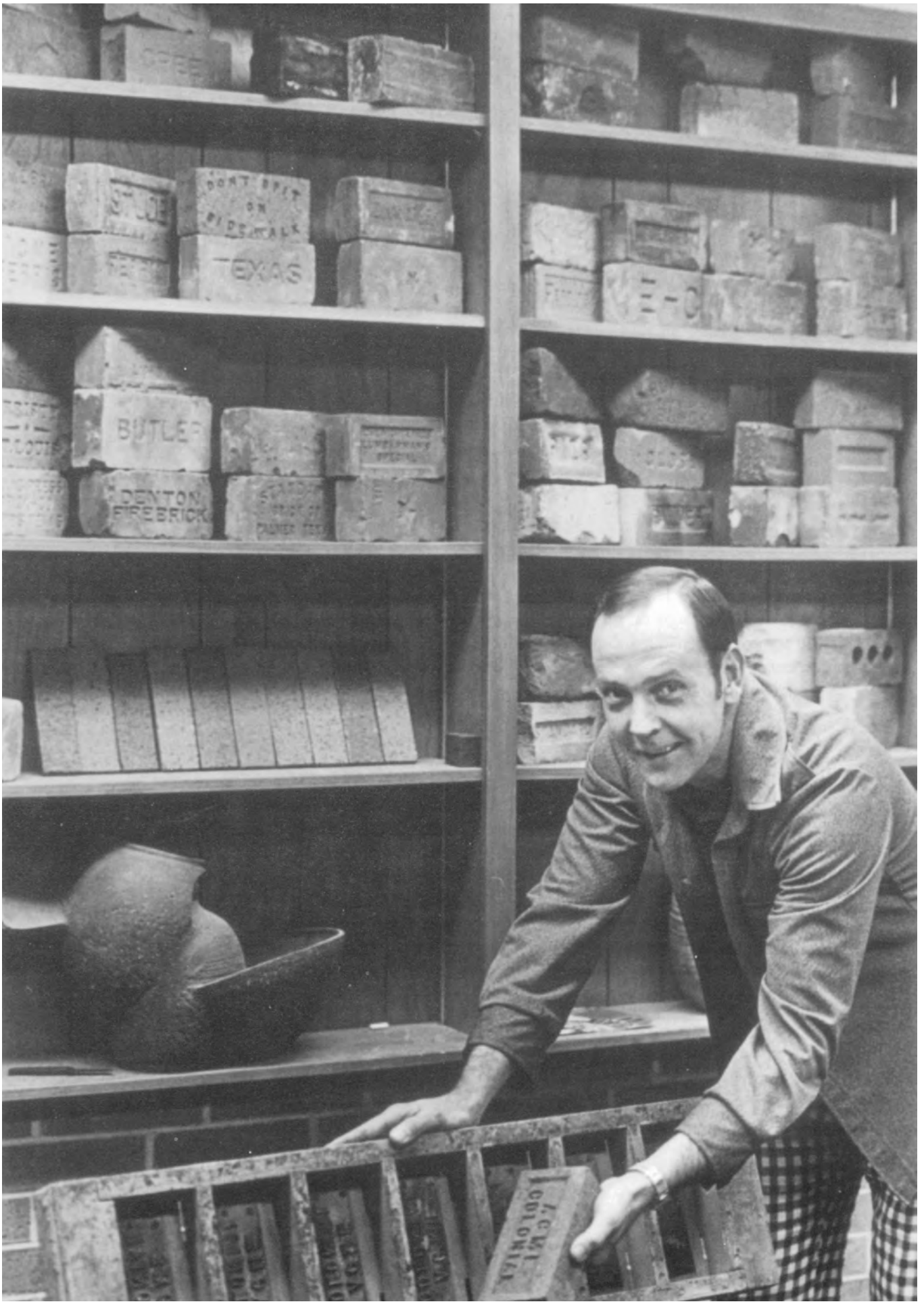
Justin was "pleased to report" in his annual letter to shareholders on February 20, 1973, that 1972 sales had increased to over $63 million and that the net income increased a dramatic 65 percent over 1971. He also reported that after a stock split of 2 for 1 during that year, earnings per share were $2.33, as compared to the previous year's $1.38; in addition to meeting debt requirements, the company had resumed dividend payments of $.30 for the last two quarters. This was particularly good news, since dividend payments had stopped in 1971. This phenomenal performance Justin properly attributed to the corporation's positive response to opportunities presented by a healthy economic climate.[37]

For a conglomerate to be a real company, "not just a pile of things," it must be organized around some principle or concept that makes sense.[38] Otherwise, few of its employees can be expected to understand or develop a system that will work or work the system that has been developed. It was to their credit that the people at Acme Brick Company were capable and had a record of accomplishment—not just in making money but in producing quality goods. Acme Brick Company was the sun around which all the construction materials divisions were gathered. Although legally and managerially it had been called the First Worth Corporation since August 1968, Acme remained the same established, respectable, Southwestern brick company it had always been—it just had a new name.

Left: An Acme Bennett plant kiln under repair for use in 1971. Note that it was metal banded then.

Right: Some other round kilns at Bennett in 1971.

Indeed it was the First Worth Corporation that was to change while Acme Brick as an operating division remained essentially the same and continued to move forward. Under the leadership of Justin, 1972 had been a record year for all the operating divisions. As Justin continued to learn more about the previous Acme organization, he became president of not only the Justin Companies and Acme but also the concrete products division. Later in 1972, he replaced Dr. Rehfeldt as chairman of the board, and, in October became the first chairman and C.E.O. of the renamed conglomerate, Justin Industries, Inc.[39]


DON'T SPIT ON SIDEWALK
TEXAS
BUTLER
DENTON FIREBRICK

12

Acme Becomes a Colossus

To the casual observer, Mr. Justin's organizational moves, starting in late 1969 and continuing through 1972, would appear unusual; but by early 1973 it became clear that his strategic moves were based on very sound business judgment. His expertise was in selling and marketing boots and leather goods, not in building materials. While the former industries were subject mainly to fashion trends, the latter were dependent to a greater extent on the economy and the building cycle. Although selling techniques were much the same, brick and concrete production and sales were subject to outside influences and not controlled by the industry or its employees.

Admittedly, John Justin had a lot to learn about the First Worth enterprises when he assumed its leadership in December 1969. He immediately began that educational process by assuming gradual control of the different levels of the company, starting with corporate operations, then the board, followed by the chief operating positions in the various companies, until he had the proper feel for the industry, its personnel, its problems, and its capabilities. In other words, from the top he stepped down the corporate ladder to the lower executive levels, learning what he needed to know. Once he was ready, he moved back up the ladder leaving the organization in the hands of those he found competent and trustworthy. Such was the case with Acme Brick Company, and, like W. R. Bennett fifty years before him, John Justin Jr. began to surround himself with the most competent, energetic, and dedicated team he could muster.

Above: First Worth Corporation's Board of Directors in 1970. (Left to right, seated): Howard W. Jennings, John S. Justin Jr., Fred C. Rehfeldt, Jerry Brownlee. (Standing): Robert E. Glaze, Richard C. Newkirk, Bayard Friedman, and Dean P. Guerin.

Left: John Koch with Acme's brick collection. Mr. Koch is showing off Acme's Colonial Brick made from a press mold.

As any good administrator knows, the best day's work he can do is to find the right person for the right job, then let the person do what he is hired to do. This is exactly what happened when Justin appointed Edward L. Stout, a twenty-five-year Acme veteran, to be president of Acme Brick Company on February 12, 1973.[1]

Edward L. Stout Jr. was appointed President of Acme Brick Company in 1973. He still serves in that capacity in 1998; this gives him the longest tenure of any Acme president.

Stout's well-deserved appointment could not have been better timed in light of the enormous difficulties the brick industry faced both in the near term and in the decades ahead. To meet these challenges Acme's officials needed to use every means at their disposal and make a strong team effort to survive the competitive environment in which the brick industry found itself, and which showed no signs of going away. With each passing year, new obstacles to progress seemed to be around every corner necessitating more knowledge and new leadership skills from the corporate managers at Justin Industries and Acme Brick. Luckily, Justin chose the right man to pull Acme's resources and personnel together.

Edward L. Stout Jr. was born in Minden, Louisiana, on November 26, 1925. After completing high school in the midst of World War II, he enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps. After the war ended, he enrolled at Louisiana Technical University, where he received his bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering in 1949. Soon he was offered a job with the then-fledgling Tenneco Corporation, but instead chose Acme Brick when T. H. Ruffin offered him a job. Some said "because the Acme offer included an automobile" he chose the brick company. At any rate, as far as Acme was concerned, he made the best choice and has never left Acme's employ.[2]

After five and a half years working as a sales engineer out of the Shreveport office, Stout was named branch manager of the New Orleans sales office and four years later division sales manager for Louisiana. In 1963, he moved to Fort Worth to head field sales for Texas, Louisiana, and New Mexico. Within two years, Tomlin promoted him to vice president-general manager to set up and oversee the Louisiana division. When the corporation decentralized, Stout moved from Louisiana to Little Rock to head up the Central region of Acme Brick Company. Justin made him the vice president-general production manager in 1971, with responsibility for the entire company, a move that necessitated his return to Fort Worth. When Justin gave up the post of president of Acme Brick, Stout was named vice president-brick operations for Justin Industries, Inc. and president of Acme Brick Company, a post he holds at the present writing.[3]

Stout's personality, training, and experience make him well suited for the job. As an engineer, he understands many of the problems and processes of the plants, but, having been in sales and having subsequently been responsible for both ends of the business, he knows how to successfully mesh these major elements. Having served as an active member and officer in several brick associations, he has excellent knowledge of the competition and can take

a broad view of the brick industry. Ed Stout is a team player and often modest in the extreme; however, he is anything but an introvert.

Always open to suggestion and discussion, Stout can, nonetheless, give orders and expect them to be carried out. Yet another strength a chief administrator must have is a sense of humor, which Stout is said to possess. One story has it that he got a call from a doctor friend complaining about his new Dallas house. The doctor's temperature was up over "ulcerated" brick and a "rheumatic" foundation, among other ailments. Stout patiently heard the doctor out and then said, "Take two aspirins—and call me tomorrow."[4] The combination of these characteristics makes for a good communicator both up and down the corporate ladder—an asset he has brought to the task of being president of the Acme team. Following his appointment, the new president spent the next three to five years dealing with negative economic forces, creating the right team, and rebuilding Acme's production facilities.

Significantly, many of the government policies and programs initiated in the 1970s carried over into the 1980s, and some severe crises were destined to repeat themselves at least three times in less than two decades. Still other problems, having their origin in the 1970s, or earlier, became chronic, casting a constant shadow over the noblest production efforts. Some of these difficulties may continue into decades to come. Indeed, some of the trends that emerged in the 1970s as minor blips could yet emerge as major threats to Acme and many other enterprises. So, before taking a detailed look at how the new Acme team was put together, what specific production improvements the company made, and how, during these disturbing times, Acme fared within the conglomerate, perhaps a brief recounting of the decade's most prominent economic events will help outline the business climate in which Acme operated during the 1970s.

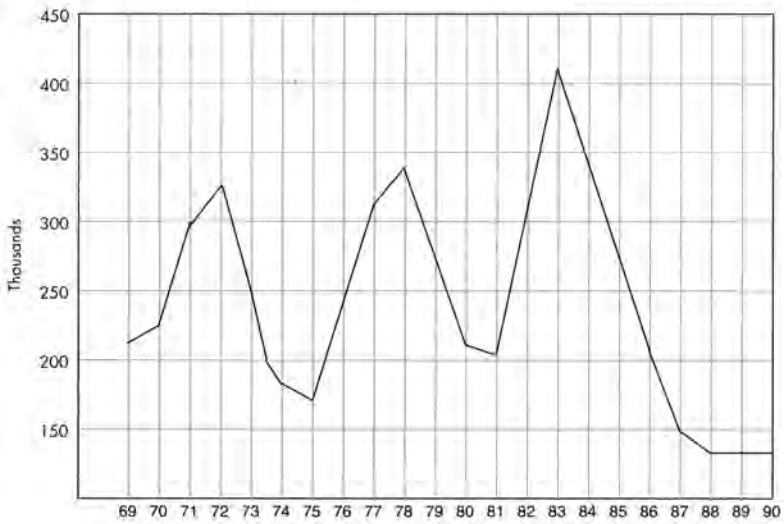
Toward the end of the first Nixon term the nation faced recession, which was followed by a temporary restoration of prosperity. Nixon's wage/price freeze in August 1971 stimulated buying and helped drive interest rates down. Inevitably, lower interest rates stimulated borrowing and led to a nationwide increase more than 50 percent in housing starts for 1972. After years of sending dollars overseas in the form of foreign aid, loans, wars, and grants, American dollars began to remain at home. Thereby fueling the national economy's inflationary tendencies. Inevitably, signs of an overheated economy developed late in 1972, as the government spent more money and relaxed controls. The economy, which had been running flat out for months, slowed by the end of 1973.

Nonetheless, cost of living went up 8.5 percent, interest rates reached crisis levels, and the dollar was devalued again. Then, in October, the Six Day War broke out in the Middle East, followed by a total Arab oil embargo, causing gas shortages which in turn increased inflationary pressures. Prices skyrocketed.[5] While the Watergate Scandal grew, inflation soared, as did unemployment, corporate debt, private debt, fuel prices, and interest rates—an outright disaster for the housing, auto, and appliance industries.

After President Gerald R. Ford took office, a slow economic recovery emerged, brought about by a rise in the real Gross National Product (GNP) after five quarters of decline. By year's end, the 1975 GNP registered nearly a 6 percent gain. It seemed as if production was coming back up; as a result, the stock market soared 56 percent.[6]

Meanwhile, a process called "disintermediation" had begun. Although initially under control, within a decade the flight of money from mortgage companies emerged as a crisis of disastrous proportions in the Savings and Loan industry, causing construction spending to drop by 17 percent to $124 billion. Fuel prices continued to rise moderately, but without critical shortages, while inflation remained at high levels and the United States trade deficit grew. Following President Jimmy Carter's election in 1976, the bright spot of 1977 was the economy, which continued to expand, so that by December it averaged a 5 percent growth. On the surface, 1978 was a good year for expansion, since housing expenditures went up $12 billion dollars and all construction grew 13 percent. But costs and wages increased while the dollar's value continued to fall at an alarming rate—once more, interest rates rose.[7]

Housing starts, 1969–1990.



Conversely, as the trade deficit grew, the United States worker's productivity shrank (our productivity rate of 1.6 percent was less than one-fifth that of the Japanese). These danger signals warned of an impending recession, and all that was needed was for a negative outside impetus to set a downturn in motion.[8]

In the difficult year of 1973, Acme Brick moved aggressively to improve its operations and future. Starting with management changes, Stout, as Acme's new president, appointed Gene Yarborough to fill the general production manager post. Since 1972, when Bill Darwin had left the company, Acme's regional sales managers had been reporting to Justin. Stout immediately promoted Bob Marks to general sales manager, making another major step toward putting together a new team.[9]

Bill Darwin, vice president of sales in 1971.

Acme's objectives for the next few years were aimed at capitalizing on the opportunities for expansion of the brick market brought on by the energy crisis and ecological concerns. At the same time, Acme worked on improving company productivity. Slowly, over the next three years, in spite of a weak housing demand and inflation, the company strengthened its sales organization and production capabilities. Even as brick shipments slowed to a low point in 1975, the company still made good profits—far above those of 1971. It also continued its aggressive recruitment programs at leading engineering schools, a move calculated to assure the company a reservoir of talent for top managerial and technical positions expected to open in the future.

When Bob Marks was promoted to general sales manager, John Doughty transferred from Dallas to Oklahoma City to be the Midwest regional sales manager. Then Marks split the sales responsibility for Texas into three regions. Assigning the South Texas region (Houston, Beaumont, Corpus Christi, Austin, and San Antonio) to the reliable Fayette Ellis, Marks took the northeast Texas region himself. Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, and Longview became part of this northeast region but Marks left West Texas (Abilene, Midland, Lubbock, and Amarillo) as part of the old midwest region.[10]

Other shifts Marks made were to move Phil Simmons from Lake Charles to become district sales manager in Houston when Willis Upchurch resigned in 1974. August Mueller, who had been at Corpus Christi since 1957 and temporarily at San Antonio, transferred to become the Lake Charles branch sales manager. Mueller, however, did not stay long in Lake Charles. By 1976, as the company reorganized Louisiana sales, he had moved back to San Antonio, when Harry Reger was reassigned to the Fort Worth general office. Mike Waldrop moved from Baton Rouge to take

the sales job Mueller had vacated. Len Bales, who had served as the Baton Rouge district sales manager, then left the company, and Bill Fairbanks assumed that role. About that time, also, Jimmy Fontenot was hired as a salesman to work for Jim Delaney out of Monroe, Louisiana.[11]

The Texas sales organization continued its evolution between 1975 and 1976 and Acme was soon to be once more temporarily without a general sales manager. In August 1975, Harrold Melton returned to Acme Brick as northeast Texas regional sales manager. Melton, who had started selling brick for Acme as a young man in western Kansas, had left the company for an academic career in 1968. Upon his return, he also assumed responsibility for sales in West Texas. John Doughty moved to Austin to take the new position of director of Texas resources and markets. As such he provided a liaison for Acme to the state government and various Texas state agencies. This post lasted until Doughty retired in 1987, at which time the position was eliminated.[12]

Still in a state of flux, Acme's sales organization continued changing. Bob Marks transferred back to Oklahoma City as Midwest regional manager when Doughty was moved to Austin. About the same time, John Moeller asked to be relieved of management duties so that he could work full time selling to architects; Allen Barks replaced him as Dallas district sales manager. Then, Harry Reger, who had been branch sales manager in San Antonio since 1969, was transferred to the Fort Worth general office to look after marketing services for the entire company. Reger's move left San Antonio open for Mueller to move back from Lake Charles. Soon, Allen Barks left the company and was replaced by Fred Clayton. At this time, in order to gain more cohesion in the sales units and to place salesmen where they were needed most, Melton assumed the responsibility for sales in the South Texas region, leaving Fayette Ellis in charge of the Southern region which, by now, extended into southern Mississippi.[13]

Melton's move now placed Texas entirely under one sales manager. Since residential construction and sales boomed across most of the state, Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio needed more salesmen and better organization. A residential sales manager was particularly needed in Dallas, so the company promoted Jerry Thomas to this job. Howard Green transferred from Beaumont to Houston, and Dale Scott moved from Wichita Falls to Beaumont as branch sales manager while R. D. "Rocky" Rankin transferred from Waco to be district sales manager in San Antonio.[14]

In January 1977, Stout appointed Dr. Harrold Melton to the position of general sales manager. Dr. Melton had taught finance and

marketing at West Texas State University after graduating with his Ph.D. in finance from Louisiana State University. He had previously worked for Acme in Louisiana, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Melton left his branch manager position in Monroe, Louisiana, in 1964 to return to school. While continuing his education at the University of Oklahoma and LSU, he worked part time in sales and production.[15]

The new general sales manager immediately began to implement changes in the sales department. Melton thoroughly understood sales, the brick business, and especially marketing, but he needed expert help. So he transferred Fayette Ellis to Dallas to be his assistant. Unlike any of his predecessors, Melton elected, with Stout's concurrence, to establish the general sales office in Dallas. Together with this move, Melton rehired Gerald Jewell, who had once worked for Acme in Oklahoma, to locate in Baton Rouge as the Southern region sales manager.[16]

For the past four years, the production branch had been improving its performance, upgrading plants and machinery, and devising new techniques to increase productivity. Now Melton wished to establish a sales arm for the company second to none, in satisfying Acme's customer needs. This required pulling together a number of marketing elements—technical services, sales, brokerage, training, promotion, research, and advertising—into a single operating team marketing its products with a better sense of direction. In order to accomplish the broad general goals set by the company, new departments would have to be created, others reassigned, and employees convinced to buy into a new marketing approach. Of course, such changes often lead to personnel changes and realignment; most of the changes came within a couple of years.

Jim Clemens, Oklahoma City district sales manager, left Acme to go to work in Colorado, and Doug Reeves, who came to Acme from the concrete block business, replaced him. Dennis Ledbetter, who had been in training for a management position, was appointed South Texas regional sales manager, the position surrendered by Melton. A few years later Ledbetter chose to leave the brick industry. Ed Norquist filled Ledbetter's vacated regional sales job, and, at the same time, R. D. Rankin went to Houston as the district sales manager. Harry Reger, who supervised marketing services until late 1978, and Larry Ricker left Acme to start their own brick company. When Tom Dunn also left the company in 1978, he was replaced by Peter Grandjean as Austin district manager.[17]

Sales continued to climb all through 1976, 1977, and 1978. To strengthen the North Texas region, Tom Syler, who had represented Acme in the Denton area, established Acme's branch office at Denton and became its manager. In Springfield, Acme had rent-

ed several sales offices at various locations in the area—much of the time without an adequate showroom and office. So, as part of a continuing effort to improve sales locations, the company completed a new Springfield office and yard in 1977, placing Dave Martin in charge as the district sales manager.[18]

In other related moves, early in 1978, Floyd Lumley, formerly the sales manager for Malvern Brick and Tile Company, joined Acme's brick distributor sales force. Bob Marks was assigned to Dallas to take over the position of northeast Texas regional sales manager and the newly-hired (1977) Doug Reeves assumed the Midwest regional sales position Marks vacated. Shortly thereafter, the Amarillo sales office developed into a district sales office under Jim Duckworth.[19]

Harrold Melton greatly desired to increase the sales of "brokerage" materials (anything Acme purchased for resale was called "brokerage") which had been the responsibility of Ernest Fender Jr. since 1969. Items such as fire brick, flue lining, metal lintels, and dampers had been sold for many years along with quality products of other brick manufacturers, such as those of Elgin Standard Brick and Endicott Clay Products. Melton was convinced that Fender's expertise in the brick business qualified him to seek out brick for company purchase that would compliment Acme's line. Fender agreed to work full time to expand face brick purchases as a leading part of the brokerage department, while Mort Straubmueller, a Melton staff member, took over as brokerage products manager. Fender remained in the position until his death in June 1980.[20]

From the outset, Harrold Melton made it clear he wanted to reestablish a fully manned technical services group, with regional engineers who would place emphasis on selling brick as a structural material, in addition to selling brick as simply a veneering material. This strategy benefited architects, builders, and the public by giving them another structural design choice other than concrete and steel. By 1978, Acme had made considerable progress in this regard.

Melton also wanted to develop a formal marketing approach that included a system for salesmen to establish consistent ways of maintaining good community relations with local civic leaders, school boards, and city and county officials. While many sales areas had established consistent customer entertainment and recreational activities, some had not. Melton wanted to get an organized program going in all sales areas. Many marketing activities, while good and apparently generally effective, were inconsistent throughout the organization.

To assist with this, Stout and Melton created the position of director of marketing communications and assigned this to Fayette Ellis, whose task it was to bring together group marketing activities such as the revised technical services, advertising, price list maintenance, marketing statistics, and sales training.[21] Although not all their goals were accomplished to their satisfaction, Melton's team definitely was one upon which Stout and Acme could depend on moving the company into an enviable position at the start of 1979. As far as sales were concerned, most of the new regional structure and personnel were in place to meet the challenges of the coming decade.

Although 1973, 1974, and 1975 were difficult years for the building construction industries in general, Acme continued to make some improvements in its production facilities. A new brick plant was built in Tulsa and other plant improvements allowed greater brick output. Natural gas conservation efforts began to bear fruit in 1973. Technological improvements, developed by the company, reduced consumption per brick produced by 50 percent, and did much to ameliorate the rising cost of natural gas. And, even though the company was able to maintain adequate gas supplies, it also began developing sources and means to use alternate fuels.[22]

Coal burning was the main alternate fuel system Acme Research studied, but true conservation and efficiency were the main focus of operating plants. Between 1973 and 1975, Acme invested capital funds at Clinton for a new grinding system and replaced inefficient burners with new high-velocity burners; funded, at Tulsa, automatic green brick setting on kiln cars (eliminating transfer of green dried bricks to kiln cars) in periodic kilns (the first in the industry); funded similar renovations to the burning process at Bridgeport; and provided at Garrison, three new (Acme built and designed) "thin wall" metal clad, round, downdraft kilns. Following the further automation of Acme's Denton plant, major plant expenditures were temporarily halted in 1975.[23]

Following Stout's appointment, production personnel also changed. In 1974, Acme transferred Jack Lindbloom from the Bennett plant to manage the renovated Clinton plant, while closing two older facilities—the old Oklahoma City plant (OCP) in the heart of downtown and the old Tulsa plant (TLP). Early in 1975, Jim Miles became manager of the Edmond, Oklahoma plant. Significantly, an era seemed to have ended in December 1975, with the retirement of T. W. Poynor, Midwest region production manager, after one-half century of service to Acme. His most able successor, who also became legendary in brick production, John Koch, (pronounced "Coke") immediately transferred the regional

production office to Tulsa from Oklahoma City. Another dedicated brick man, Bill Hurlburt, who had been production manager in Texas, became manager of the Denton plant—now the largest brick plant west of the Mississippi River. In yet another early 1976 personnel assignment, Acme hired Mr. Tom Poston, to oversee the Baton Rouge plant.[24]

That same year, Gene Yarborough, general production manager, suddenly left the company. So Stout asked Hubert Capps to accept this vacated post. Capps, who started at Acme in 1963, as had Hurlburt, at the time of the United Brick and Tile purchase, was certainly well qualified for the job. He had served in a number of capacities in the plants and had managed more of them than any other employee, but he suffered from a serious illness and didn't want the position permanently.[25] In holding the job for the next three years, he was to oversee the largest plant renovation program in the company's history.

Significant production leadership changes also came to Arkansas. Shortly after the new year (1977) started, Stout appointed Bud Adams as regional production manager for the Central region. Adams began to work for Acme in 1946 at the Denton plant while he was still a teenager. Soon after the appointment of Adams, another Acme veteran, Asa Goodman, retired. Goodman had started work for the company during the darkest hours of the Great Depression. Although Goodman was difficult to replace, his job was filled by Winston Simms, who had been plant manager at Garrison for many years. Like many other plant managers, Simms had begun his career at Bennett and had then gone on to manage Garrison.[26]

These managerial changes came at a critical time, for Acme was soon to launch into the greatest internal expansion in its eighty-five-year history. These improvements would increase the company's brick production by at least 25 percent and set the stage for Acme's continued progress. Indeed, by the end of 1976, the company was not only the industry leader but also the nation's number one brickmaker, in both sales and production—a position it held until foreign brickmakers purchased many American brick plants with millions of cheap U.S. dollars during the 1980s.

Throughout its history, Acme Brick Company has focused clearly on the future. Even in periods of economic downturns, Acme has strived not only to fight the trends with appropriate economic measures, but also to strengthen its position, so that once conditions improved it could take advantage of better markets. Most downturns in the business cycle since the depression had lasted from eighteen to thirty months. The downslide from 1973 to the

Source: NCNB, Pasadena, Texas

Prime Rate Averages, 1940–1990.

last quarter of 1975 fit this pattern, and by the end of 1975 company officials talked of an expected upturn. Although brick shipments had dropped from the previous high by about 30 million units, the firm had spent considerable sums on plant improvements, permanently closed two outdated plants, temporarily closed McQueeny, and restricted capital expenditures severely in 1975. Not only falling housing and construction starts but rising fuel prices, shortages, and inflation evils further complicated matters. As a result, Acme's approach to these problems had to vary from previous ones.

Most of the internal improvements made in 1973, 1974, and 1975 were aimed at cutting energy costs while increasing plant and sales productivity. These efforts kept Acme profitable and were successful. At the lowest point of the downturn, shipments were still fifty million units above the 1970 low, and gas consumption per brick burned was reduced by as much as 50 percent. All this was accomplished while adding to production capacity. Other significant actions Acme took during this period included acquiring a plant site near Athens, Texas; buying lignite deposits; purchasing new clay reserves; and successfully participating in drilling productive gas wells near Garrison to hedge against future gas shortages. Additionally, the company bought new transportation equipment and increased efficiency in its truck fleet operations.

Early in 1976, it became obvious that sales were outstripping production; Acme's fourteen plants had to implement new plans for

expansion. After extensive reviews of each plant's operating methods, and months of research into new production technology, the company finalized its plans in December 1976. These proposals called for a $10 million budget that included related

Bridgeport employees in 1976.

improvements in such areas as the trucking fleet, sales offices, and anticipated increasing Acme's brick production by 25 percent within eighteen months to meet market demands.[27]

The record sales and profit year of 1976 highlighted which types of bricks were in demand and which markets were growing. All plants were scheduled for improvements. Three plants were immediately scheduled for enlargement, intermediate term expansion was slated for two others, and long-range expansion was planned for all plants. The rapid plant improvement schedule called for Bennett to add 12 million units to its capacity, Garrison to double its capacity, and McQueeny to quadruple output to 45 million brick per year within six months. The company also expected to triple the capacity of the Baton Rouge plant and to bring Perla back up to its former position as Acme's largest plant. Within two years, the nation's largest brickmaker hoped to be producing brick at a rate of almost a billion a year. What steps did Acme take to accomplish this ambitious program?

As stated above, the focus was to be on certain plants—Bennett, Garrison, McQueeny, Baton Rouge, and Perla—but six others also met Stout's expansion criteria and became objects of intensive

upgrading efforts. The remaining three simply did not meet the criteria or were already producing for a specific market niche.[28] Sam May, plant manager, and Fred Andreatta, the Midwest region plant engineer, made major modifications at the Kanopolis factory bringing it up to the 25 million brick range. In Oklahoma, Jim Miles supervised renovations of the Edmond plant as it improved output to 26 million brick. In addition, construction began on a much-needed Oklahoma City plant (OKP), which Miles was also to supervise, along with the Edmond plant. Meanwhile, Jack Lindbloom managed to increase the Clinton plant's output by 25 percent bringing it up to 20 million units annually. Upon Lindbloom's transfer, Jewell Godi became manager at Clinton in June 1978. Acme purchased the Malvern Brick and Tile Company in Malvern, Arkansas. Acme later built its Ouachita plant on the Malvern Brick site, a quarter of a mile from Acme's old Malvern plant managed by Hiram Kuykendall. Acme then purchased the Seminole Tile Plant in Seminole, Oklahoma for future raw material requirements.[29]

Together with these purchases, work proceeded under Adams and Simms to improve the Perla facility. They demolished old kiln 40 at Perla Westgate and installed a new twelve-brick-wide kiln, which cost $2 million. That same year, Plant Manager Leonard Hicks led the refurbishment of the Weir plant in Kansas. These Weir modifications included changes in the tunnel kiln and the waste heat recovery system to the dryer, as well as installing a new grinding and feeder system to the improved kiln. The Bridgeport plant, under Bob Reed's leadership, installed a reciprocating heat flow system costing $544,000 to deal with a similar dryer problem. While this system was unique, in that it electrically reversed the hot air flow periodically, it closely duplicated the results achieved by the waste heat dryer at the Bennett plant.[30]

An extensive article in the February 1978 *Brick and Clay Record* spotlighted the case histories of three Texas plants that were examples of how to increase brick production for less cost and time. The article featured the Bennett, Garrison, and McQueeny plants and stressed the advantages of refurbishing versus building new plants.

> The cost . . . is significantly less than . . . a new installation. Another . . . was . . . time. The present program at 10 of the 14 plants required only 12 to 13 months, some were completed in five months . . . with an increase in production up to 130 million brick per year.[31]

It is worthwhile giving a snapshot version of what Acme did at each of these plants. First slated for renovation was the Bennett plant, which had been producing about 24 million brick per year. Most of this plant's construction activity was concentrated into

1976 and centered on completing a waste heat recovery system, building a new machine room, and adding six new periodic thin-wall kilns. These additions brought capacity up to more than 40 million brick equivalents.[32] Twice as much brick production capacity was obtained by adding a new recirculation system boosted by heat from the additional kilns, and installing a new 90 size J. C. steel extruder, pug mill, and vacuum pump. These changes necessitated the addition of an eight-sided carousel packaging unit, in addition to other improvements in the packaging area, just to keep up with Bennett's new output of nearly 50 million red-bodied brick.[33]

Next on the scheduled improvement list was the Garrison plant, which a few years before had been producing 18 million brick annually. Although this facility produced only one texture, one size, and one blend of brick, it was very popular and remains so at the time of writing. Garrison produced an eight-inch, pink-buff, Old Chicago blend, which sold very well but, as with the Bennett plant, had problems with breakage in the drying process. Both factories found it useful to regrind their rejects and mix these with new clay. With the addition, in July 1977, of another thin-wall round kiln, Garrison had six round kilns and one rectangular kiln, all gas-fired. A booster furnace, blowing heated air into four new tunnel dryers, which were both temperature- and humidity-controlled, assisted in greatly reducing the number of lots to be reground and also raised output. One more important process cut fuel requirements and contributed to quality improvement: the addition of sawdust to the clay mixture. Not only did mixing sawdust with clay make the brick fire better, thereby reducing losses, it also made the brick 20 to 25 percent lighter and just as strong. As an added incentive, sawdust was easily obtained from nearby sawmills at low cost. These renovations, as at Bennett, soon required additional packaging refinements as Garrison's production more than doubled.[34]

The third plant for immediate upgrading was the McQueeny plant (MQP) located near San Antonio, Texas. Acme acquired this plant with the Frazier deal in 1961 but had not spent much on improving it. Furthermore, in 1968, the company had closed its outdated Houston plant as the metropolis engulfed it. At the lowest point of the 1973–1975 downturn, the firm closed MQP. This move left South Texas and the Gulf Coast wide open for competitors and competing materials. Later in the decade, Acme was hard pressed to get low-cost production into South Texas and the growing markets around Houston, San Antonio, and Austin. In the period lasting from 1976 to 1979, cheap Mexican brick poured into the area because no American manufacturer could keep pace with the immense demand. Naturally Acme turned to its only plant in the

area—McQueeny—hoping to regain lost ground. So it was that, in January 1977, the enterprise began construction that would advance MQP's production from the 18 million it originally produced to 45 million brick. The complete renovation took twenty-two months, with the plant reopening after only sixteen.[35]

Extensive rehabilitation and new construction were necessary to bring MQP back on-line. Altogether this general overhauling cost just over $2 million. The company had to practically rebuild both its tunnel kilns, outfit the machine room for direct-to-kiln car setting, build modern kiln car dryers, construct a holding room for pre-conditioning green brick, install a monorail for the packaging line, and conduct other general facilities repairs. The plant office was in a major state of deterioration, as was the parking lot and storage yard. Acme spent $95,275 building a new plant office and parking lot. A month before construction finished, in November 1978, Gregg Sublett began his eight and one-half year tenure as the plant manager.[36]

Unlike the Bennett and Garrison plants, the McQueeny plant used two tunnel kilns rather than periodic kilns, but, similar to both, waste heat was transferred from the kilns to the dryer tunnels, where both heat and humidity were controlled through recirculation zones. Resembling somewhat the Garrison operation in clay mixing, the MQP also used wood waste as an additive using up to 20 percent by volume. The wood waste was in fact a by-product from a process that removes oil from juniper wood commonly found in the area. This ground waste, stored outside in the clay pit, needed no further processing before it was added to the clay. It was, however, mixed with fired bats, ground, screened, and held in four large silos to be withdrawn when required.[37] In yet another similarity to Garrison production, MQP produced only one size of brick—a five-hole king-size unit. In contrast to Garrison, though, multiple color blends could be produced with the basic red clay body, by using englobes, sand, or flashing. Over the next decade, Acme made more improvements at MQP, changing its product line, considerably, and keeping it a valuable up-to-date facility.[38]

By the end of 1978, nearly all the expansions that had been planned in late 1976 had been accomplished. And, while expenditures of $25.9 million were larger than expected, the two-year program increased total annual capacity by about 250 million units, or 37 percent. Concomitantly, with increased brick production Acme sold more brick—both in dollar amount and physical quantity—than any American company had ever sold in a single year.[39] In so doing, it beat the record of 1977, in which some 40 million brick were sold from inventory; inventories were completely

exhausted by that spring. Even with production capacity of more than 750 million brick (up from 650 million in 1976), Acme could not fill the volumes of orders, which continued to grow throughout the year. With industry supplies generally tight all over the country, three price hikes during the year averaging about 8 percent, were inevitable. Acme's inventory sale amounted to about $4 million.[40]

Not all of the almost $26 million expenditure was spent on plant enhancement, but at the same time the program strengthened the company's position. Purchasing the Malvern Brick and Tile Company gave Acme greater capability as well as the raw materials to produce additional white and other light-colored brick. Some $5.5 million was spent on the construction of a new plant in Oklahoma City that was brought on-line in late 1979. Expenditures at Perla again made it the largest brick plant west of the Mississippi, with Denton the second largest. Although bought in 1978 for clay deposits, the Seminole clay pipe plant could be converted to produce brick. Acme spent smaller sums on larger or better quarters for sales yards at Springfield, Missouri, Dallas, Texas, and Monroe, Louisiana. Yet another class of expenditures, those for fuel conservation, were very effective; they were just not as visible.[41]

Over a period of nine years, Acme achieved about a 40 percent decrease in gas consumption per brick produced. Had 1978 operations required the same quantity of fuel per brick as in 1972, Acme's one-year total fuel expense for 1978 would have been $4.3 million more than it actually was. Funds spent in these fuel conservation areas also provided the company with the ability to switch from one type of fuel (natural gas or propane) to oil or solid fuel at about half of Acme's plants. The Sanford Brick affiliate, purchased by Justin in 1974, already ran its three plants on solid fuel, mostly coal. Besides these advantages, recycling heat that ordinarily would be wasted improved efficiency of the drying process and reduced losses. As a spin-off of Acme's research, the concrete division was able to utilize Acme's experience to save nearly 50 percent on its fuel costs.[42]

With more stability at the officer level, other reassignments came in July 1979 that rounded out Stout's leadership team. John Koch was promoted to general production manager in July and moved to Fort Worth. With this appointment, Hubert Capps left his "temporary" job and returned to Denton as the manager of that large facility. Bill Sams became plant manager of the Clinton plant at about this same time, and Jim Miles opened the new Oklahoma City plant, which went into production with a design capacity of 46 million brick. Also in July, Acme hired R. A. "Tony" Neeves, who had a brick production background in his native England,

and in December, Koch appointed him Midwest regional production manager, Koch's former position. To complete the managerial staff, Acme promoted Bob Coleman to plant manager of the Fort Smith plant in November.[43]

Stout's appointment of John Koch to head Acme's production was a most fortuitous development, both for the company and the brick industry. Although he had worked for Acme only fifteen years, Koch had played a key role in the technological advances and modernization of many Acme facilities. Koch brought to his new job valuable experience with the company as well as engineering expertise. Upon completing almost four years with the United States Marine Corps in 1959, Koch attended junior college in Meridian, Mississippi, and went on to obtain a bachelor of science degree in ceramic engineering from Mississippi State University in 1964. He joined Acme Brick Company as a research engineer in Denton when he graduated from the university. While at Denton, Koch was at first responsible for the design and installation of the equipment at the lab as developed under Bob Hockaday. Then, after a one-year term as superintendent at Denton, Koch transferred to Malvern as plant and regional engineer at the Malvern/Perla complex. When the company decentralized and set up various regions, he joined Ed Stout in Little Rock as assistant to the regional general manager. After approximately one year in this position, Koch had gained experience working with several sales projects in both brick and precast concrete, as well as company property utilization. In 1970, Koch returned to the Perla plant as its assistant manager, where he remained for two years.

In 1972, Koch was again back in Texas working as plant manager for the Denton plant. Between 1972 and 1975—the term of his tenure—he was involved with the first application of new burner technology in the Acme system. This new technology allowed production increases of 40 to 60 percent at existing production facilities company-wide. The alterations at the Denton plant, under Koch's tenure, carried the plant from a design capacity of 72 million brick to 120 million brick. After Koch had completed his tour as Denton plant manager, Stout promoted him to the Midwest regional production manager's position. This region included Oklahoma, Kansas, and Arkansas, until Arkansas was incorporated into another region. While manager of the Midwest region he was involved with the design, construction, start-up, and optimization of the company's first European, top-fired kiln system which was installed at the Oklahoma City plant. Koch also worked at the Tulsa plant during efforts to mechanize periodic plant operations. Although the attempts to thoroughly mechanize periodic kilns were

not successful, he and the company benefited later when decisions on plant design and optimization techniques had to be made. Koch remained a regional manager until Stout called him up to be general production manager for Acme Brick in Fort Worth.

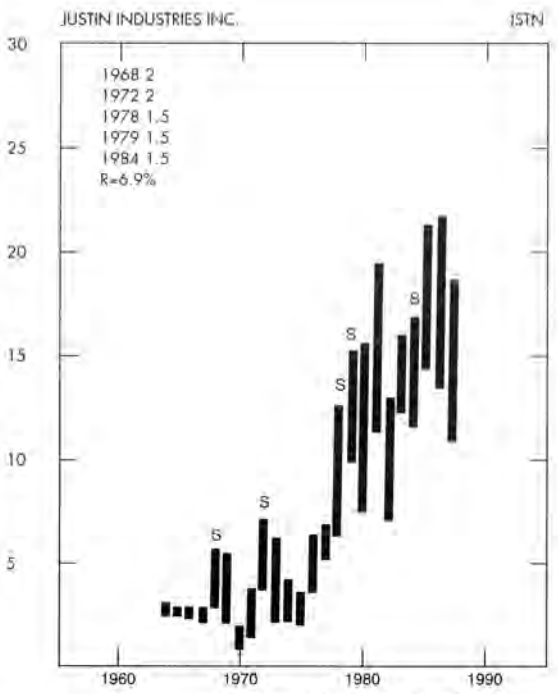
As general production manager, one of Koch's goals was to carry out a program that standardized company procedures in the areas of quality control, mining plans, budgeting techniques, and budget analysis. Another of his goals was to implement a five-year program to upgrade management skills of production management personnel from the superintendent level through the regional manager level. The idea was to ensure that all production supervisors approached planning, organizing, directing, and controlling from the same vantage point. This program was adopted company-wide in 1981 and continued through refresher courses a decade later.[44]

When the books were closed on December 13, 1978, Justin Industries had spent $32.5 million on internal expansion of its manufacturing facilities during 1977 and 1978. The company had provided $27,549,000 from working capital for the two-year period. Net income in 1978 was $10,289,000, an increase of 66 percent over 1977 and 400 percent over 1968. Net sales in 1978 were $170,950,000, compared to $37,594,317 for the first year of the conglomerate—a rise of 450 percent. And, although debt had grown from $6,882,000 to $40,569,000, working capital had almost paralleled that, going from $7,588,284 to $33,675,000. Whereas no dividends had been paid in 1970 or 1971, Justin had started dividend payments again in 1972, paying dividends of $.39. In 1978, these dividends would rise to $.60 per share. Stockholders, who could have bought Justin stock for between $1.50 and $4.875 in 1970, now would have paid from $8.75 to $17.875 per share.[45]

Justin's Building Materials Division, with Acme Brick as its primary company, was the big money-maker for the conglomerate from 1968 to 1978, providing anywhere from 50 percent, in the downturn years, to 90 percent of the net profit in the boom year of 1978. To be more precise presents a dilemma. As the Acme financial analyst said in 1977, "The proportion (of net profit) attributable to each (division) is difficult because of changes in product mix, introduction of new products, and changes in methods of pricing."[46] Furthermore, since the formation of the conglomerate and the shift of control to an unrelated company, the division lines, at times, were completely blurred and entangled.

As an illustration of how complicated the picture is, witness the following facts. Acme was the company from 1968 to 1970. Ultimately CCT was broken away, and Acme became a separate

division (after having been four brick companies), which included its concrete concerns. Next, in 1974, Sanford Brick was purchased and joined the group. Although on the eastern seaboard, much information was shared between these two brickmakers; Sanford, however, was managed separately and sold as a loser in 1984. Meanwhile, in 1976, Kingstip-Featherlite was added but parts of this concrete company were sold off in 1987, as was its subsidiary, Standard Tool, in 1978. At this point, in 1976, Kingstip also brought in a stone company whose units were all under separate management. So several groups within the same category (Building Materials) often sold for or bought from one another, thus sales and profits were intermixed. Moreover, some segments, at times, would deliberately over-produce to stock up the other's inventory—this procedure incidentally was kept at a controlled level by the headquarters office.



Acme's stock history in brief. This excerpt is taken from Common Stock Prices Histories—1910 to 1987, Second Edition, by Dennis E. Prendeville, WIT Publications, 1988.

This situation was in contrast to the boot company, whose expansion and acquisitions were kept under the same management with one major exception—Northland Press (now Northland Publishing)—which, from the time of its purchase in 1972, has been associated with the boot company under various group titles. The publisher of art books and books on the West has made a contribution to Justin Industries but has never been either a profit leader or big loser.

Nonetheless, Acme's profit story can be told in approximations that reflect the company's contribution to the entire organization. By using the total building materials data available, as a Justin unit, to generally determine Acme's position, the story can be related about how Acme performed in relation to its sister units and the corporation as a whole. This approach provides a usable approximation for the purposes of this history, while Justin Industries' general welfare is told by the shareholders' equity return and in commentary where necessary.

At the start of the 1970s, building materials produced $1,621,000 in net profit or 52 percent, the lowest level in percentage and dollars that this division was to earn for the decade. In 1977 and 1978, the building materials group produced 93 percent ($15,087,000) and 100 percent ($25,548,000) net profits, respectively. Building materials profits the next year were $23,464,000, but still a high 82 percent. For the decade of the

1970s, total dollar amount was $99,275,000, averaging $9,927,500 per year and 79.3 percent of the conglomerate's profits. So, Justin Industries Building Materials Division finished the decade netting just under $100 million. The conglomerate's net sales far exceeded this figure in 1977, when total net sales reached $144,396,000. Net income, however, for Justin Industries did not reach $10 million until 1978. Return on shareholders' equity in 1979 was 19.66 percent as compared to 4.22 percent in 1970, and for the decade averaged 14.04 percent.[47]

John Justin and Jerry Brownlee making some management decisions.

If a shareholder had bought 1,000 shares of Justin stock at its average price $1.5625 in 1970 and sold it in 1979 at the average price of $17.875 he or she could have made $16,312.50 on those shares. Not bad for the 740 original First Worth stock-holders who could have done so. By 1979, the number of shareholders had increased to 2,930, and since John S. Justin Jr. owned 19 percent of the stock, he had to be pleased with the company's performance.

Justin's philosophy, strategy, and selection of personnel seemed to be thoroughly vindicated. "Nobody buys expensive boots," he said. "At $75 to $500 a pair, they have to be sold. That's what I did with bricks."[48] With that in mind, Jerry Brownlee, who had been on the board of directors, was made president and chief operating officer in 1973, shortly before Stout became vice president for brick operations for Justin Industries and president of Acme Brick in early 1974. At the same time, M. J. Vincent, who had been Justin's vice president for finance, was reassigned to vice president for concrete and Don Jury to vice president for finance. In 1975, Justin tried to round out his management group by making John Hubenthal, vice president for cooling systems (CCT), Bob Whisenant, vice president for leather goods, and Les McClure, treasurer.[49] Of this group only Brownlee, Jury, Stout and Hubenthal lasted through 1980.

Two new board members were elected in 1975: John B. Connally, who resigned from President Nixon's cabinet before Watergate to go into law practice with Vinson and Elkins, and R. B. Cullum of Cullum Companies (food retailers). Connally resigned from the board in 1979 to re-enter politics and left before the annual meeting in early 1981. Oran F. Needham, president of the Miller Group (insurance) replaced Connally on the board and was still serving on the board in 1990. Kenneth McCalla Jr. replaced

Vincent in charge of the concrete division in 1977 and served about one year. Since 1978, there has been no vice president for concrete products. Howard D. McMahan replaced Bob Whisenant in leather goods. Dee J. Kelly remained during this whole decade as general counsel, adding board secretary to his legal duties in 1976.[50]

As Justin Industries looked forward to the next decade, Justin Boot Company could look back upon a successful century, with Acme Brick viewing its nine decades in a similar manner. Both corporations surveyed with pride their prosperous and significant foundations and creative ventures. The last decade had been one of turmoil, change and growth. What did the 1980s hold? Could they repeat their past performances, maybe even surpass them? Whatever should happen, Acme and Justin Industries viewed 1980 with optimism and felt well prepared. Indeed, they already had made plans for further expansion, but would the economy of the 1980s allow it?

13

Production in the Roller-coaster 1980s

The peaks and valleys of Acme's brick production since 1936 could almost be put to Samba music—down-up-down, down-up-down, as its fortunes went from peak to valley. But the 1980s put Acme on a roller-coaster ride, that consisted of a slow upward climb, with peaks that were more flattened on top and downturns that were deep troughs. The economy hurled Acme off the top in 1980, reaching bottom in 1981 and 1982; it then propelled the company to its greatest economic heights in 1983. Here, for a time, the ride was smooth and almost flat with a very gentle slope downward. Suddenly, in 1984, it dropped the company down a steep continuous incline before making a slight upturn in 1987, only to plunge lower in 1988, then start a slow climb upward again in 1989 and 1990.

Above: Management meeting held at Fort Worth in 1983.

Left: A safety meeting where Acme officials presented awards in 1980.

The region and the economy of the nation was the engine that propelled the corporation through what was one of the strangest, most perplexing decades of the century. None of Justin Industries' divisions escaped its effects, as the company made more money and lost more money than ever before. Linked together, like a string of cars on the roller coaster, economic forces might put one company on a peak while letting others lag behind. Then it would push all them down. With one group still on the bottom, it would push the others up-hill, and so the ride continued.

Everything seemed to be going out of synchronization. By the end of the decade, however, the conglomerate appeared to be doing what it was supposed to—that is, evening out the cycle. But during the first few years of the decade, the economy wreaked havoc on the system, causing more opening and closing of plants than at any other time since the Great Depression. Yet strangely, Acme had its most profitable year during this uneasy and short-lived prosperity. Economic uncertainty seemed to be a speeding engine no one could throttle back.

Comparable, at first, to the 1970s, inflation and interest rates seemed out of control, and as in the 1970s, foreign crises stole the spotlight. But, unlike the 1970s, when middle-America was hardly touched and even prospered,[1] the 1980s were different. Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Kansas, particularly, came back in a boom that lasted from 1975 through 1979, when the Arab embargo lifted. At that time, all the major economic segments of the Southwest profited—industry, labor, building construction—even the state governments generated a surplus, especially from oil.[2] Houston was the fastest-growing large American city, with more than 150 companies moving their headquarters there. Other cities in Acme's territory also prospered. Dallas, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Wichita changed their skylines, spurred by oil industry growth and agriculture. The residents put the early 1970s behind them and built new homes and apartments, remodeled old ones, and spent their money, while the rest of the country was in recession.[3]

At the start of 1979, the dollar had shrunk to a value of $.44 in 1967 terms, and inflation was into double digits; with this, prices and the cost of borrowing climbed spectacularly. It seemed that the government's anti-inflation plan had not worked, and experts had no new answers. During the revolution in Iran, oil prices climbed, at the same time basic industrial ingredients also cost more.[4] By October 1979, the dollar's value had shrunk to one-fifth its World War II value, even home building continued.[5] Nationwide production peaked in January 1980, and then began a precipitous drop that was not to level off until 1981. Construction starts had dropped 10 percent by year's end.

When Ronald Reagan assumed duties at the White House in 1981, he inherited an inflation rate climbing 14 percent per year, and eight million people were unemployed. With a prime interest rate of 20 percent, new home construction and automobile manufacturing were at their lowest since 1961. Reagan's top priorities were to get the economy rolling and to restore worldwide confidence in America. Happily, the future brightened on Inauguration Day, 1981, when Iran released Americans held hostage in that country.[6] As the yellow ribbons, which Americans put up as a reminder of these hostages, came down, little did the country suspect that similar ribbons would be up again by 1990.

President Reagan's supply-side economics (often called Reaganomics, the idea of stabilizing the dollar through monetary policy, tax cuts, and reduced spending) had not worked by early 1982, but the oil shortage had turned into an oil glut—helping to bring prices down. By the summer of 1983, however, interest rates had fallen in response to government lowering of maximum inter-

est rates that could be charged on federally insured mortgage loans. The government dropped the ceiling rate to 11 1/2 percent from the 1981 peak of 16 1/2 percent; other mortgage rates followed suit.[7] In turn, prospects of a new business boom once more seemed imminent, except that federal deficits were not under control, threatening to dry up long-term financing for industrial expansion.[8] A new housing boom, however, was underway and Americans welcomed it. So, naturally, did Acme Brick.

Acme's operations performed better in 1980 than the market as a whole and were poised for very substantial gains should the market improve. By virtue of its plant expansions and planned inventory build-up, Acme was in a position to deliver 50 percent more brick than the whole 1976–1978 period. The company strategy, regarding inventory build-up, was basically designed to prevent the intrusion of lower-quality building materials into Acme's market during shortages. Although it curtailed unit production, the company improved its efficiency through kiln shutdowns at Perla; and the closure of plants at Malvern, Tulsa, and Edmond.[9]

Top: The Malvern plant in 1927.

Bottom: The Malvern plant in 1991.

Typical of Acme during slack times, the company moved its managers as a means of accomplishing more renovations and upgrading the system. For example, Larry Dixon left Fort Smith to become plant manager of the Perla facilities. Although Perla's two plants, Eastgate and Westgate, could produce 80 million brick, they still had some small kilns in operation. Dixon found the time to conduct some experiments with wood burners in one of these kilns. Two of the key people he assigned to this operation later became superintendents: Tom Poston, from Baton Rouge, and Joe Spence, a new management trainee, both became involved with the wood-burning experiment for PWP's Kiln No. 44. In April, Perla Westgate discontinued operating its thin-wall round kilns and the two smaller kilns No. 41 and No. 42.[10]

Across town, a few miles west of Perla, Acme permanently closed production at the old Malvern plant, which had been in sporadic operation since its purchase in 1927. This plant, with its facilities demolished except for the manufacturing building and sheds, became a central equipment storage site for the rest of the company's plants. Shortly after closing this factory, Acme phased out the Malvern Brick and Tile Company unit it had recently purchased and completed the new Ouachita plant a couple of hundred yards away.

Console at the Ouachita plant that controls temperature and monitors functions in the tunnel kilns.

This beautiful, largely automated, Ouachita plant (OEP) was one of Acme's marvels. It featured an 18-brick-wide top-fired tunnel kiln, and a three-hundred-yard-long conveyor from the clay storage bins to the plant. With a 52 million-brick capacity, this facility, originally operated under Ron Gallager, required a work force of only thirty-two. Costing $5.5 million dollars, OEP used the least fuel per brick of any Acme plant and could produce a variety of brick colors that ranged widely from light to dark.[11]

Meanwhile, improvements continued at the McQueeny plant. Here, the plant opened a new pit and started mining a rare white clay at St. Hedwig, Texas. This clay enhanced the plant's product quality and caused the introduction of a new product line. Since this deposit only appears in isolated pockets of geologic strata and would last for only ten to fifteen years, Acme's exploration team located and purchased another deposit some twenty miles from the McQueeny plant to hold in reserve, when, ultimately, the St. Hedwig site would be abandoned.[12]

In 1981, housing starts hit their lowest level since 1946. Yet, Acme, as part of the building materials group, represented more than 50 percent of Justin Industries total sales. It was still the nation's largest brick producer and seller. Acme's dollar volume was slightly higher than in 1980 because it captured a larger share of the available market, however, its profits were down because all plants operated well below capacity and sharp increases in fuel prices reduced margins. A victim of a downtrend economy that remained inflationary, Acme's total cost per unit had climbed in spite of lowering the BTU's and man hours required to make a brick.[13]

Still, Acme continued stockpiling brick. Near year's end, the company had 400 million brick stacked in its yards, so, the new Ouachita plant was closed, as was the Baton Rouge plant. Bridgeport (BPP) and McQueeny were only temporarily shut down to make improvements. At BPP, with Emmett Lawless as regional manager and Bob Reed as plant manager, Acme installed a wood burning furnace for the dryer, safety equipment for four kilns, and modified the machine room. These Bridgeport improvements cost $48,000, but other improvements were not completed until 1983. Farther south at McQueeny, Acme completed the renovation and expansion started at this facility in 1978. The company replaced two "60" machines with a new "75" J. C. Steele brick machine, rehabilitated the machine room's electrical system, completed a state-of-the-art loading facility, parking lot, and inventory yard.[14]

As the down cycle reached bottom in 1981, an opportunity came for Acme to expand in Louisiana. The owners of Jamestown Brick and Dixie Brick Companies offered to sell their plants to Acme. Robert G. Varner and Robert J. Varner sold their plants in Louisiana outright for $1.9 million cash and agreed to close and move the Dixie plant in El Dorado, Arkansas, within two years. John Koch handled the deal for Acme. This purchase included brick the Varners had in inventory, their buildings, equipment, mineral leases, and clay rights. The Varners agreed not to engage in brickmaking for seven years and never to use their El Dorado property for brick production.[15] Before the deal was closed, Mr. Donald Archibald, R. G. Varner's son-in-law, who owned a brick plant at Natchitoches, Louisiana, wrote to Mr. Justin informing him that Dixie Brick had made a practice of buying Natchitoches brick and selling it. Further, Archibald added, "Naturally, we would hope to continue selling to you after you have acquired the Jamestown and Dixie operation."[16] Acme accepted the offer. As in previous friendly purchases, Acme assumed employee accrued vacation time and retained most of the Dixie staff. Acme concluded this important purchase in July 1981 and operated Dixie until March 1982, whereupon it closed the plant for repairs and reopened it in October. Acme's Dixie plant (DXP) produced around 15 million brick per year that were very much in demand, so it seldom held onto a large inventory.[17]

A bad year for Justin Industries, 1982 was the worst year for the conglomerate since its creation. For the first time, Justin Industries lost money. Housing starts were the lowest in forty years, interest rates were still in double digits, unemployment was still high, and consumer spending was greatly reduced. These factors contributed to a $6.3 million loss for Justin. Even so, the building materials group finished 8 percent ahead of 1981. Acme increased its mar-

ket share, although its plants operated only at 45 percent capacity, actually reducing inventory by 19 percent. The big losses were in boots and ceramic cooling towers. Concrete production and sales had their biggest year—gaining 30 percent, however, Sanford Brick sales dropped precipitously. Acme's 423 million brick was its lowest shipping year since 1975; but, even worse, Sanford's three plants produced only 69 million brick. These depressing events, following a three-year downturn, caused much soul searching and several changes in corporate personnel.[18]

Jerry Brownlee left the company and the board of directors in 1981. Later, in 1982, he was replaced by Ernest Blank as president and C.O.O. R. B. Cullum also left the board in 1981. By 1982, J. V. Roach, president and C.E.O. of Tandy Corporation, Dr. William Tucker, chancellor of Texas Christian University, and Marvin Gearhardt were added to the board of directors. During this same period, John Hubenthal, vice president of cooling towers and Howard D. McMahan, vice president-Boots, left Justin. The corporation created and filled new positions as follows: vice president for finance, David Houseman; vice president for brick, Ed Stout; vice president for personnel, Jon Bennett; and controller, R. J. Swartz. Kelly remained general counsel and secretary.[19] In 1983, J. T. Dickinson became vice president of boot operations and president of Justin Boots. Operating divisions began to gain some autonomy as Justin Industries started to decentralize and to redefine its priorities and corporate objectives.[20] All these changes immediately had positive effects. Acme had two banner years before submitting to the long downturn into the doldrums of the late 1980s.

The combined forces of Acme and Sanford had the capacity to produce approximately one billion brick annually, about 10 percent of the nation's annual brick production capacity. Their twenty brick plants had individual production capacities ranging from 16 million to 150 million brick each year. And, although some plants were idled and production was cut back in others, high inventories had developed. Both companies combined had almost four months worth of inventory in stock. Aided by increased housing starts in the Southwest, the companies embarked on an aggressive inventory reduction campaign. By the end of 1983, they had reduced these surpluses to less than four weeks' worth of inventory in most facilities.[21]

Although successful, these actions had mixed results. Acme responded with a 44 percent increase in sales and was Justin's major profit contributor; on the other hand, Sanford's volume increases were not absorbed by the Southeast. So, while Acme

continued its direct marketing and brokerage strategy, Sanford redirected its marketing to concentrate on distributor sales. Despite these attempts, the eastern seaboard markets remained flooded with excess production and, as a consequence, depressed both prices and profits. Upon Ernest Blank's insistence, Sanford Brick was sold, and Justin Industries gave up its brick holdings on the East Coast. Another factor, however, resulted in improved profit margins. Acme's sale of purchased products, primarily flooring and wall materials, gained over 20 percent in 1982 and 1983.[22]

Brick plants that were idle during most of that recent downturn now reopened, yielding a 35 percent increase in production. Accelerated production reduced unit manufacturing costs and contributed to improved profit margins. Once more, company strategy concerning plant improvements had positive results. Acme used both peak and slack times: the former to build new plants or initiate purchases and the latter to improve performance capability.

From 1980 through 1984 Acme engaged in no less than forty major refurbishing projects, including the Dixie purchase and its related improvements, while closing one plant in Louisiana and one in Arkansas. Before the decade was over, Acme had closed two more plants, but it also had built two new facilities. During most of the first half of the 1980s, the company concentrated on its Arkansas plants—Perla and Ouachita—as previously indicated, and to some extent on McQueeny and Bridgeport in Texas. An example of the shutdown and rebuilding activities at this time was the Fort Smith plant.

As Roy Tipton writes concerning the Fort Smith closing and reopening:

> It was never really shut down. We did, however, in mid-February, 1982, stop producing green brick and went through a refurbishment program whereby most facilities and equipment were rebuilt. During this period we maintained about twenty-five employees to work at various projects, one of which was re-burning old inventories of brick and repackaging them.[23]

FSP remained thus until March 1983, when it reopened. Tipton did not mention the fact that FSP's pit was also reshaped and three kilns relined as part of his refurbishment project.

Elsewhere in Arkansas, similar changes occurred at Perla Eastgate (PEP), Perla Westgate (PWP) and Ouachita (OEP). Plant Manager Mitchell Goodger guided the Ouachita plant through its change from a basic buff clay plant to a "red" shale operation in 1983. In this new mode, OEP started producing darker bricks,

which were more suitable to the market. When Larry Dixon was promoted to district production manager, Mr. Goodger went to Perla as its manager and Tom Poston replaced him at Ouachita in 1985. Perla Eastgate, with minor changes, continued from 1972 until May 1985, at its 44 million capacity. In May 1985, the plant was modified and, through applied technology, could then produce 51 million brick per year. The cardinal feature of PEP was that it was Acme's primary source of white and grey brick production, which Acme marketed nationally. Acme had spent considerable sums on PWP in the 1970s so its needs were not so great; however, the company concentrated on improving PWP's fuel efficiency.[24]

In Louisiana, the Dixie plant (DXP) continued to improve its fuel consumption and drying operation. Farther south, the Baton Rouge plant continued to be a problem. Although Acme spent some effort and funds on it in 1983, the results were marginal. Ultimately, the firm closed the Baton Rouge factory in 1984 and removed its equipment in total—storing some equipment and refurbishing some and installing it at other plants. The company retained the plant site and the clay deposit it had recently purchased, in case market conditions ever dictated the need for constructing a new facility in the region.[25]

At mid-decade, the Oklahoma plants, too, went through a number of shutdowns, remodelings, new construction, and personnel shifts. The Oklahoma City facility modified its drying capacity, which increased production from 46,000 to 55,000 million brick. Regional Manager R. A. Neeves, and Plant Manager Jim Miles put the Edmond plant back into full production in December 1983 only to "mothball" it the next December. The Clinton plant, under Walter Karnes's managership, continued to operate until January 1986, and then closed down. In 1980, Acme made plans to build a new facility at Tulsa and was ready to start construction in 1984. Within twenty-two months, the new Tulsa plant (TUP) went into operation on the site of the demolished old TUP.[26]

Under Plant Manager Sam May, Tulsa's new computerized operation went into production in October 1985. Tulsa produced architectural bricks and special shapes at a design capacity of 40,000 million brick annually. TUP also produced sculptured brick, literally hundreds of shapes and sizes, as well as paving brick.[27]

Brick plants have operated around and near its site since Oklahoma was a territory. By 1906, Tulsa Vitrified Brick and Tile Company, operating near the current Acme site, provided many of the bricks for Tulsa's first paved streets.[28] Eighty years later, Acme's new plant could do the same if needed. Farther north, the Kansas

plants now got their turn at refurbishment and upgrading. The Weir plant employed, in 1990, forty-three people and produced 68,000 Heritage brick per day. Although the clay at the site can produce approximately eighty-five different types of red, pink, buff, and mingled colors, Acme produced eleven different blends of red-bodied Heritage brick, which were fired through a tunnel kiln at around 1910 degrees Fahrenheit. The Weir shale is mined from the old coal mining sites from material deposited during the Pennsylvanian Age of about 320 million years ago. Analogous to the Bennett plant in age and brick type, Weir bricks have been popular for a long time and are likely to stay in demand.[29]

Special shape brick made at the Tulsa, Denton and Perla plants.

In 1984, the Weir plant upgraded its kiln burning system and increased production 10 percent. The following year, the company continued its improvements with the addition of a new recirculation system to the dryer, increasing production another 10 percent. Then in 1988, under the guidance of Leonard Hicks, superintendent, and Leo Bircher, a regional engineer, the Weir plant installed a refurbished brick machine and electrical control center in the mill room. Earlier, Weir had been a pilot plant of sorts for alternate energy sources. Because of its proximity to coal, Acme used this plant as an experimental coal-fired system following the energy crisis in the 1970s. The system was actually used for one month in 1978.[30]

Leonard Hicks, who went into the brick industry in 1949 and came to Acme with its United Brick purchase, felt that the solid fuel system was never really successful. Although WRP could make good brick, control was difficult, special grinding was required, and difficulties existed in flashing brick, as well as in scrubbing the pollution from the air and system. Also, coal burning proved to be a very labor-intensive operation.[31]

But Weir remained, in 1990, a labor-intensive plant—thirty-eight of its forty-two employees were classified as labor. With such intense work, one would expect to see a large number of lost-time accidents, but WRP had an outstanding safety record. By 1990, it had gone eight and one-half years without a lost-time injury. Its sister plant to the northwest at Kanopolis had an even better record.[32]

Acme bought the Great Bend property in 1957 and other mining property in a nearby county. Here, the Kanopolis plant (KAP) produced brick from local clays mined from deposits that were formed during the Cretaceous Era of about 130 million years

ago. This Acme plant utilized a tunnel kiln that fires the brick at high temperatures, causing ceramic fusion of its clay particles. Various buff and reddish tones of "distressed" textures—some of Acme's most popular brick—came from this plant and are marketed all over the U.S.[33] Clint Bunch became manager of Kanopolis in 1984.

The Bridgeport office staff in 1990. (Left to right): Superintendent Steve Fincher, Doris Hill, Ann Carothers, and Al Cox.

In 1990, Kanopolis produced about 25 million brick, using thirty-five people, and was more modern than the Weir plant. On December 20, 1989, the company recognized Clint Bunch, his staff, and team of employees with special safety awards for their extraordinary record. KAP surpassed the million-hour mark on October 4, and, on November 8, passed its fifteenth year without a lost-time accident. Other plants envied this record but were content to strive to be second to KAP.[34]

As previously explained, in the first half of the 1980s, most of the company's major expenditures went to improving its Arkansas and Oklahoma facilities. So, as these projects wound down in 1984 and 1985, Acme concentrated on its Texas operations, completing its undertakings at Garrison, Bridgeport, and McQueeny and starting an entirely new facility near Houston. Upon accomplishing these goals, the enterprise launched a major renovation of its Denton plant. Even though the last half of the decade would be in a production downturn, it became an exciting and progressive time for the largest American-owned brickmaker.

Major renovations and capital improvements at Bridgeport (BPP) cost Acme approximately $1 million from 1982 through 1984. Solid fuel feed equipment for improving its drying system cost Acme about $178,000 in 1982. The next year Acme installed a J. C. Steele "90" brick machine and an ash collection system for the new wood-fired dryer. These improvements set the stage for rehabilitation and operation improvements in 1984, which included a new machine room installation, a twelve-track holding room, a new water well, a new burning office and a 613B Caterpillar scraper for the pit.[35]

With the addition of its sixth kiln, Bridgeport's capacity increased from 45 to 55 million flashed dark grey or natural red brick. In 1990, the BPP still used a very old grinding system and elevator that efficiently processed the 320 million-year-old shale from the Palo Pinto formations. BPP raw material consists of blue to black shale, sandstone, limestone, and coal. When this raw material is mixed with sawdust and shale trailings and processed, it pro-

duces a very marketable brick at a cost lower than any but the automated plants.[36]

A more expensive plant to operate, but one that produced brick seen more often years ago, was the Garrison plant located in Nacogdoches County, Texas, twenty miles from the oldest settlement in East Texas. Garrison mined clay and shale from the Eocene Age Wilcox Formation consisting of nonmarine sand, solid clay, and lignite beds, which have been used to make brick there since 1893. Because so many early Texas brick came from this strata and from river bank clay, and were also handmade, the Garrison plant performed a valuable function in reproducing and blending brick to match the earlier products. Consequently, this plant involved more hard labor but was highly significant to its market.

As previously described, the company greatly increased the amount this unique plant could produce in the 1970s and early 1980s through reconstruction of its tunnel dryers. When it became obvious that Acme could not successfully build a plant in the Malakoff area because of rail and political problems,[37] the company spent large sums on Garrison (GAP) to increase its output and to improve its fuel conservation. Continuing the previous upgrade plans, Acme spent $267,000 on expansion of the plant's tunnel dryers, which were put into operation in September 1984. With its capacity now at 45 million brick, the Garrison factory rebuilt, covered, and expanded the brick packaging shed by extending the shed onto a more usable part of the yard at an additional cost of $73,000. When Jewell Godi took over as plant manager the next year, he inherited a new, but old-fashioned brick plant.[38]

Comparable to Bridgeport and Garrison, Acme had also spent considerable sums on the McQueeny plant (MQP) in the 1970s and early 1980s to reenter the San Antonio area markets—even changing the color type of its product twice to be competitive. By June 1987, shortly after Dick Meyer took over its management, after installing a slurry and sand-coat preparation system in the machine room and constructing a new employees' break room, MQP made its final departure from a red-body product line to a "very high quality and attractive new buff body" one. The month before Dick Meyer assumed the leadership of MQP, Gregg Sublett, who guided the plant through many of its changes, moved to Denton as its plant manager to take the facility there through its major changes of the decade.[39]

As mentioned earlier, Hubert Capps had temporarily been general production manager and moved to Denton when John Koch replaced him. Now Capps, because of health problems, relin-

quished the position of plant manager to take the position of assistant to the regional manager. Gregg Sublett took Capps's plant manager position in May 1987, to lead in major kiln and brick setting renovations.[40]

Quickly, work on Kiln A began. Harrop Industries immediately started modifying this kiln as part of their multi-million-dollar contract with Acme. Harrop added a rapid cool section, under-car cooling, redistributed the burners, and modified the air movement system in the dryers. They had this system on line by January 1988. Then, Acme employees went to work on Kiln B.

Bruce Mundorf, Acme's regional engineer for North Texas, managed the total rehabilitation of Kiln B, utilizing company personnel and subcontractors. Steve Fincher supervised the field work on the project before moving to Bridgeport as its plant manager. Acme completed this work in November 1988. As this kiln came back on line, Kiln C was closed indefinitely. Meanwhile, as work progressed on the kiln, Acme contracted with ARTECH, Inc. to replace Denton's old brick-setting machines.[41]

The ARTECH contract was its first with Acme and called for building and installing two fully automatic setting machines. Unique to the Acme system, these computerized machines could be programmed to handle brick size changes for up to twelve kinds of brick, as well as to set brick in a number of edge set and flat set patterns. The devices could also be quickly changed from one setting to another. This part of the project was very successful, as was Denton's new Cutter A, which came on line in June 1988, to be followed by Cutter B in December. At the end of this extensive program, DTP could produce 50 million brick through each kiln.[42]

Mr. Sublett continued his improvement program the next year, completing an elaborate employees' break room. A real point of pride for Denton employees, this room could seat 200 people, had a separate area for vending machines, and featured tables handcrafted by Acme's mining crew. The users could also be proud of the impressive mural done in brick by renowned brick sculptor Paula Collins. Upon its completion in 1989, this room was heavily used by Acme's plant, transportation, sales, research and office employees, as well as for many company functions.[43]

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Acme rebuilt, refurbished, expanded, and bought brick plants. President Stout could rightfully say that "the company built five new plants—Tulsa, Ouachita, Oklahoma City, Perla Eastgate and the San Felipe plant."[44] But, the only one of these that really fit the qualifications of new from start to finish was the San Felipe plant, for the other four were built on

sites where brick plants already existed. Indeed, Acme bought, sold, and redeveloped dozens of plants in its history, but no plant in the system, since the Bennett plant, had been built entirely from scratch. Now, in the 1980s, it was to be done.

Filling a thin clad kiln at Bridgeport with dried brick prepared for burning.

The need for another Acme plant in the Houston area was patently obvious in 1976, and the company was aware of this need before it closed the Houston plant in 1968. As far back as 1963, when it became clear that the Houston facility would have to be closed, the clay exploration department had begun the search for a new site. Although a site was located near Sugarland in 1968, the concern let its option lapse for economic and organizational reasons. Then, in 1982, with the formation of the Clay Exploration Division of Research and Production Services, exploration began in earnest.

Field reconnaissance started in August 1983, near Brookshire, Texas, where the first exploration hole was drilled. For the next nine months, exploration drilling continued covering Fort Bend, Waller, Grimes, Harris, Washington, Lee, and Austin counties. Altogether, 343 holes were drilled and 1,655 samples taken from the 22,509 feet of drilling. On the site of the new plant, called the Chew property, three hundred and forty-eight samples were taken for analysis. While proceeding to test the Chew samples, the exploration division located another site in July 1984 containing an iron-bearing clay sand, which, when mixed with the Chew material, greatly enriched the red colors and size-control properties of this brick. This second property (Able) was six miles from the proposed plant site. A third property, called the Mock property, was one of five others tested that appeared to have qualities that might be suitable for brick processing, so its raw material was also extensively tested throughout the summer of 1984.[45]

In a hurry to bring the project to fruition before their options to buy expired, Acme intensified its attempts to bring its lab results to full-scale production tests. This was accomplished by using the pilot plant at the Denton lab and the McQueeny plant for production runs. Ultimately, twenty-eight tests were run on various mixtures of raw materials from the Chew, Able, and Mock holdings. Four major runs at McQueeny produced about 63,000 king-sized brick; the last two, from Abel and Chew materials, got the desired results. Even before the land was purchased, Acme sent out requests for bids and had engineering work done for the plant buildings' foun-

dations, filed for the proper permits, as well as completed the preliminary work to insure that the plant would have the necessary power, natural gas, water, phones, and access roads.[46]

On July 5, 1984, Acme made its presentation to prospective bidders—all of them well-known contractors of heavy clay manufacturing plants—detailing the specifications for the new plant. Present at this meeting were representatives of Lingl (German), Agemac (Spanish), Pixley-Ceric (American-French), Harrop-Unimorando (American-Italian), and Pullman Swindle (American). Seven months later, Acme awarded Lingl Corporation the bid, mostly because this company had solved many of the problems related to manufacturing brick from such raw material and possessed the knowledge to fully automate the process. One year later, the Germans conducted a full-scale test at the Hagemeister Klinkerwerk, Nottuln, West Germany, utilizing twenty tons of Austin County raw materials and the same equipment they were to install at San Felipe. Then, after positive results, Lingl sent a construction crew to San Felipe to install its machinery. Because severe weather delayed construction, the first brick did not roll off the line until December 27, 1985.[47] Full-scale production did not come until the summer of 1986.

Raw materials, not construction or equipment, caused most of the manufacturing problems at this new plant. The majority of brickmakers, even those in the Gulf Coast area, considered it impossible to mass-produce a quality brick from the alluvial deposits of the Brazos River. Most of these faint-hearted ones had converted their factories to making concrete brick; only one Houston plant made clay brick by 1986, and it was dry-pressed brick from East Harris County.[48] Shrinkage, cracking, and the high moisture content of this clay—problems intrinsic to most of the geologic features of the area—created difficulties for the would-be brickmaker.[49]

According to the company Records and Development Report:

> Both of the raw materials used at San Felipe are of Pleistocene Age. The Pleistocene Age lasted for one million years and ended just 10,000 years ago. This was the time when mammoth, bison, camel, horse, giant sloth, and saber tooth tigers roamed North America. Only the bison survived into modern times. The chief distinction of this period was a number of marked climactic changes. During this time almost a third of the earth's surface was covered by glaciers. The fluctuation between glacial and interglacial periods caused drastic changes in sea levels as the water was tied up as glacial ice. This in turn caused changes in the course and channel depth of all rivers that flowed into the Gulf of Mexico. The two deposits in use at San Felipe were laid

down during these river changes and are terrestrial in origin, rather than marine.[50]

At times, the Sealy area was 200 to 225 miles from the gulf rather than the approximate 75 miles it was in 1990. The area was covered with forests much of the million years this Pleistocene era lasted.[51] Fossilized wood is often excavated from the Chew pits, while a hundred and twenty miles farther west, at McQueeny, prehistoric sharks' teeth are often uncovered, illustrating completely different origins of the raw materials. The main component mined at the plant site is part of the Beaumont Formation and consists of clay, silt, sand, and gravel. The other brick body component (Able) is gravel, sand, silt and the iron oxide clay of the Willis Formation which is about 300,000 years older than the Beaumont (500,000 years old).[52] The surface profile at the plant

Mining and clay preparation operations at the Sealy (San Felipe) plant, Houston, 1990.

Top left: Scraper and grader mining clay at the San Felipe plant.

Top right: Clay stored outside prior to being moved into the plant.

Middle left: Clay stored inside prepared for blending.

Middle right: Shaving and blending clay prior to mixing for mud machines.

Bottom: Automatic cutter and stacker for brick going into dryers.

site is a flat, featureless, virtually treeless, black gumbo plain, while the Able site features low rolling hills with groves of oak trees—much as early Texan colonists found them.

Most clays taken from older geologic formations contain very little moisture. For example, the shale at the Fort Smith plant is so hard and dense mining it posed problems, which were only solved by mising it with other clays and water to make it workable. San Felipe clay, on the other hand, is so soft and pliable it is difficult to work, hence the mixing of the two types and the use of up to 5 percent additive of grog and ash. Even after mixing, the new material contains four to five times the water that "normal" shale contains. With up to 20 percent moisture, only extremely careful and ingenious engineering makes good brick production possible. One of the main reasons Acme used the German company and its engineers was because American companies denied that good brick could be made from this "mud." But Acme employees and the Germans overcame the odds and by July 28, 1986, put the company's first shipment of dark red and brown king-size residential brick into the market, just eighteen months after the Lingl employees had arrived on the scene.[53]

Everything had gone much as planned, except for the final day of construction. Acme employees and the Lingl group were to make a test run through the plant to determine whether the facility would operate as designed and built before Acme finally accepted the project. The usually punctual Germans did not show up at 7:00 a.m. as scheduled. Finally, they arrived at 10:00 a.m. welcomed by friendly jeers and cheers of Acme operators and others inside the plant. It transpired that, realizing that their work was nearly complete, these German fitters, engineers, and technicians had held a farewell party near New Ulm, Texas, the night before. Despite warnings, the celebrating workers had gotten out of hand, and six of them had been made guests of the Austin County Sheriff, until Don Denison, Lingl's United States representative, could arrange for their release from jail. Nonetheless, the test proceeded, albeit with "hung-over" foreign technicians, and was successful.[54]

Within two years San Felipe (SFP) brick were oversold. Almost everything about the SFP was unique to the clay products industry. Human hands did not touch the product until it was handled by the brick mason at the job site. Those bricks that were touched in the plant were rejects bound for regrinding. SFP was the state-of-the-art plant in the United States when it went on-line.

The only functions not computerized were the mining process and the stacking in the yard. From the pit, the clay was fed into two box feeders for blending, then passed to a wet pan for mixing,

then crushed to final size by high-speed rollers. From there, the clay moved along a conveyer belt to a reclaimer system that fed the extrusion area at sixty-five tons per hour and could stock clay for up to forty-two days supply—automatically blending and dispensing the clay as needed. At the rate of 24,000 brick per hour, the mixed material was forced through a die in a continuous column, where it was coated, textured, cut, and separated. From this point, the separated brick required special treatment since soft-mud technology requires brick to be stacked on individual sticks or pallets and then loaded into a (spiral) dryer car two stories tall.

After forty-eight hours in the dryer, where computer-controlled heat and air movement removed precise amounts of moisture from the green brick, automated equipment grouped the brick and set them on individual 14,400 brick kiln cars. Next, the brick were passed through a 290-foot-long tunnel kiln that could hold 21 cars at any given time. Here, the rate of temperature increase or decrease was maintained through a series of automatically controlled air and gas systems that were monitored by Acme technicians. The kiln temperature started out at 200 degrees Fahrenheit and reached a peak of about 2000 degrees Fahrenheit, at which point the Lingl furnace was indexed to fire between hacks from the top onto one-third of a kiln car at a time. Finally, automatic machines dehacked the brick (placed in individual layers for inspection) and palletized, shrink-wrapped, and steel-strapped them through conventional techniques for packaging. When brought to its full design operating capacity, SFP could produce 65,000 million brick per year.[55]

On October 20, 1986, Acme held its grand opening celebration for the San Felipe plant. Not since Sam Houston and Santa Anna marched across the field and into the town had San Felipe seen such excitement. Acme hosted contractors, architects, city officials from Sealy, Houston, San Felipe, and Bellville, as well as area county officials, financial leaders, school officials, citizens, and employees. Activities began early in the day with a company-sponsored golf tournament at the nearby state park, followed by horseshoe pitching, brick tossing, a ribbon cutting, and plant tours conducted by Houston area sales personnel and plant workers. "From 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. barbecue, beer, and soft drinks were served to guests under an immense red and white striped tent, and music by the country band Doppelganger, of Houston, added to the occasion."[56] Since it was also the Texas Sesquicentennial year, Acme dispensed specially stamped SFP bricks to many of its guests. Acme's determination had paid off.

The total cost of the facility, including land, was in excess of $10 million; the Lingl construction contract was for $6.5 million. But

these costs do not reflect the years of research and other resources Acme committed to this project to meet the needs of its customers and to challenge its competition. The original concept for the plant assumed the bulk of its production would be oriented to the residential/apartment market for the South Texas area—with emphasis in Houston. The Houston market, by the early 1980s, was totally dominated by concrete brick. There was no viable burned clay production in the immediate market.[57]

Over the next four years of its existence, the SFP, under Plant Manager Collin C. "Wally" Chrystal, ran to the limits of its capacity producing high-quality low-cost bricks. By the late summer of 1990, plans to increase the plant's capacity were underway. When completed in 1991, the plant could produce, according to John Koch, over 100 million brick, making it the largest "single" kiln producer in the Acme system.[58]

As with a number of Acme's plants, the SFP was located at a spot of great historical significance to the state of Texas and the United States. Less than two miles from the center of the village of San Felipe de Austin and five miles up the Brazos River, as it twists and turns its way, the plant site is on property originally granted to Stephen F. Austin, the "father of Texas," by the Mexican government of Iturbide in 1823. By 1824, Austin had laid out plans here for his provincial capital on the banks of the Brazos at a ferry crossing (Atascasita), connecting a trail from the site to the old San Antonio to Nacogdoches road seventy miles to the north. Almost destroyed by hostile Karawkawa and Tonkawa Indian attacks, Austin nevertheless rallied his colonists and made considerable progress toward building a viable community before the Texas Revolution.[59]

By 1835, eight different roads crossed through San Felipe de Austin and, by 1831, population within the colony was 5,665, about one-fourth the population of Mexican Texas, and was estimated to be 10,000 in 1834.[60] The town was expected to be a great capital and was laid out in a large grid pattern over five square miles. The land upon which Acme built its plant originally was Stephen Austin's and could have been bought from him for $.0264 an acre.[61] But, what the Tonkawas and Karawkawas could not do, general Sam Houston's Texan army had to do in 1836.

As Houston's army retreated across the Brazos in March 1836, Houston ordered the town burned to prevent its capture by general Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. The town never recovered, for as the railroads came they bypassed the old town and junctured at Sealy to its west with other roads and rails.[62] Austin once wrote,

"The prosperity of Texas has been the object of my labors",[63] Acme Brick had done its part at San Felipe.

The planning, engineering, research, marketing, legal, financial and production elements—indeed, all elements of the brick company—pulled together to create the magnificent SFP. The project took many months and was the result of years of evolution and coordinated efforts. Essential to Acme's progress, and illustrated by SFP and during the preceding two decades, was research and development (R&D), a function often overlooked or, only, in the rudimentary stages of development in most brick enterprises.

For many years, even at Acme, R&D was the result of efforts by individuals or plant departments to solve a production problem, to fill a specific customer need, or just simply was an experiment or an accident. Individual Acme plants had their products tested most of the time by outside groups or labs to ensure quality. Many good products and plant improvements came to Acme via these efforts. But, Acme, for many years, did not take an overall systems approach that could utilize untapped resources of the organization or its people.

In the late 1950s, Acme made a decision to form a centralized research/development and clay exploration facility. Board member Dr. Fred Rehfeldt spearheaded the efforts to create such a program, and the company selected Padrick Partridge, a geologist, to head up the operation. Sherman Lee, a regional engineer transferred from the field, became responsible for relocating various pieces of laboratory equipment scattered throughout the organization to a small brick building at the original Denton plant site. When he collected enough material at Denton, the laboratory conducted a series of raw material tests and analyses. Then the lab could not only evaluate raw materials but also conduct complete ASTM testing for themselves.[64]

The enterprise made a commitment in the early 1960s to construct a full-fledged research and development facility, and hired R. B. Hockaday as director of research and clay exploration. He supervised geologists and drilling supervisors Bob Root and Padrick Partridge. He also hired John Koch, a research engineer, and a staff of four technicians, one of whom was Bob Stover. As mentioned in the previous chapter; Koch held an engineering degree from Mississippi State, and, after two and one half years in the lab, moved progressively through various assistant jobs, plant superintendencies, and regional managerships, to become vice president of production. Stover, after six years in the lab, moved into sales and in 1981, was appointed northeast Texas regional sales manager.[65]

One of John Koch's first responsibilities in 1964 was to supervise the construction of a pilot plant designed by R. V. Richardson of the Central Engineering Group. This pilot plant incorporated all the systems required to produce a full-sized brick in a laboratory environment—brick machine, grinders, rotary kiln and dryer, as well as a two car shuttle kiln. This facility became significant during experimentation with alternate fuels in the 1970s and early 1980s.[66]

Experimental houses built with test brick just outside the Denton plant Research Laboratory in 1990.

The research lab's scope included not only testing and evaluating raw materials for new productions but also quality control and maintenance of clay reserves. Additionally, the lab routinely tested materials against ASTM Standards from the time of its origin. By the 1970s, the lab employed a chemist to supervise technicians as well as to be involved in new product development. One of the spin-offs from the chemist's work was the development of a marketable brick cleaner.[67]

In September 1982, Michael Vickers (Clinton plant manager) became geologist and manager of clay exploration, reporting directly to John Koch, who by now was Acme's general production manager. Linked with company efforts to reestablish its position in South Texas, clay exploration took delivery of a new mobile drill rig early in 1983. Soon, the department began the search for raw material near Houston which culminated in the purchases of the Chew and Abel properties and the subsequent construction of the San Felipe plant.[68]

When R. B. Hockaday retired in May 1985, clay exploration was reunited with research and called Research and Production Services. Mike Vickers became its director and brought on board Mr. Brad Nesemeier as geologist and manager of clay exploration.[69]

Since the mid-1980s, committees of sales managers and plant managers have continuously worked on product development at Acme's plants. Each sales and production region establishes a committee to meet periodically at each plant to discuss product lines and to make suggestions for new products. The meetings usually focus on product size, texture, and color. If an idea seems viable, the plants make small test runs. Then, if the results appear desirable, the plants make larger runs for test sales. The team's major emphasis is on developing products that meet classic product criteria, but they also pay attention to making available any product that represents a market need.[70]

Management meeting at Fort Worth in 1985. Pictured (left to right, standing): Jeff Bodley, Tony Neeves, Dennis Knautz, Bob Stover, Ron Bowen, Bill Seidel, Jim Stewart, Harrold Melton, Mike Griffith, Scotty Freebairn, Gerald DeCorte, Joe Allison, John Koch. (Middle row, seated): Jim Duckworth, Larry Dixon, Bob Marks, Fayette Ellis, Emmett Lawless, Bud Adams, David Broom, Jerry Slate, and Bruce Cargill. (Kneeling): Ed Stout, Mike Bowen, Bill Heiss, and Bill Bailey.

When both production and marketing are satisfied with a new product, they issue a "New Product Bulletin" to each sales location, which includes delivery and price information. At this point, so that the success of the new product can be determined, sales offices begin to accumulate records to be studied at periodic meetings.[71]

The overall productivity of R&D depends on management personnel creating the proper climate and setting the pace for conceptual ideas and innovation. To be successful, a small group representing all elements of operation have to be involved as part of a team. Since Acme's business is the manufacture and sale of its products, the company held a quarterly product meeting at the Denton lab to review new products under consideration. This meeting is attended by Acme's president, vice president of production, vice president of sales and marketing, vice president of finance, each regional sales manager, each regional production manager and the director of research who prepared the agenda for the meeting.[72]

Another department related to Acme's last two decades of progress is the Plant Engineering Department. This department handled activities related to new plant construction and new construction within existing plants. R. V. "Bob" Richardson left the company as chief engineer in 1977 due to ill health and was replaced by Joe Lord. Felton Dunn, engineer, and Larry Barger, drafting supervisor, assisted Lord in his duties. Working closely with all levels of production management, this department supervises outside contractors who build plants or install new brick production equipment. Other typical activities of this group include property sur-

veys, clay pit grid maps, new loading docks, plant and sales yard paving, sales property surveys, and utility surveys.[73]

Another ongoing activity related to sales and production is the making of special brick shape drawings that are frequently required by customers. In the mid-1970s, orders for special shapes became so frequent that this turned into a full-time job. Rick Bloodworth and Larry Barger were both doing this by 1990.

Following Acme's reorganization into First Worth Corporation, C. E. Dunaway was employed as manager of personnel and industrial relations (P&IR), and the new parent corporation handled the personnel functions for its subsidiary companies. Then, in 1973, Jon M. Bennett was appointed manager of personnel and industrial relations for Justin Industries, and his department handled all of the P&IR functions and responsibilities for each of the subsidiaries and divisions until early 1983, when these functions were decentralized. Acme Brick Company then appointed Bobby Moon to be manager of personnel and industrial relations.[74]

Bobby Moon, a 1960 TCU graduate with a degree in personnel management, started with Acme in 1970 at the Denton plant as a labor administrator. He had personnel and industrial relations experience at both Featherlite Concrete Company and at Justin Boot Company prior to his appointment as personnel manager with Acme. Beginning in 1986, Glenda Sullivan came in as assistant to Mr. Moon and became an important part of personnel development. She had the responsibility to keep employees advised of current company benefits, administered Workman's Compensation claims, and trained employees in safety standards.[75]

In addition to maintaining employment records and salary administration, Acme's P&IR department is responsible for all labor relations, accident prevention, accident and injury reporting, benefits coordination, plant employee training, and seeing that Acme complies with all federal regulations pertaining to safety, labor relations, wage, and salary administration. Justin Industries handles the maintenance of employee benefits such as medical and hospitalization, pension plan, and the employee stock ownership plan. Since the decentralization in 1983, Acme's accident loss incident rate has steadily decreased from 4.9 percent to 2.4 percent. In 1989, the OSHA standard for the brick manufacturing industry was 6.7 percent, and in that year, seven of Acme Brick Company's plants did not sustain a single lost-time injury.[76]

Acme Brick Company has been fortunate to have many of its production employees continue with the company for a great many years. Among those that retired in 1990, were employees with thirty or more years of service. There were Dennis Wood—FSP (forty-two years); John Sager—DTP (forty-one years); William Mose Jr.—PEP (thirty-nine years); Doyle Watkins—BPP (thirty-six years); David Cozart—GAP (thirty-four years); Donald Whisenat—BEP (thirty-one years); Douglas Merrill—KAP (thirty-one years); Carlos Pitts—BPP (thirty-one years); and Grady Ollison—PEP (thirty years).[77] Acme's oldest retiree, Mr. Henry Wright, reached one hundred years of age in February 1990, and was alive at this writing in 1990.[78]

Map of plant locations in 1990 of Justin Industries.

Another employee, Senon Amador probably served Acme longer than anyone when he retired from the Wichita Falls sales yard in 1989, after fifty-five years of service. Mr. Amador walked five hundred miles from Mexico and went to work for Wichita Falls Brick and Tile before Acme took it over. Because he was too young, Acme sent him home, but he walked back from Mexico a little over a year later and was put back to work.[79]

As Acme production closed out the decade, the company could look back on a time from which it emerged stronger and more efficient. It had survived two of the longest downturns in housing construction in this country's history, raging inflation, two energy crises, serious competitive forces, plant closings, modernizations, and the strenuous activity involved in building five new plants. Production departments lowered their cost per unit produced, invented new types of products, cut energy costs, and lowered their accident rate. In 1989, four plants operated at maximum. The historically low level of construction activity, however, meant that overall production was at 69 percent of capacity. Yet, Acme increased its shipments by 9 percent and continued its eight years of improved market penetration.[80] To paraphrase John Justin, Acme "didn't just go with the flow," it remained profitable each year and headed into its hundredth year with optimistic expectations.

14

Sales and Marketing in the Uncertain 1980s

Left: Denton plant office in 1990.

The previous chapter outlined some of the economic pressures operating over the decade of the 1980s, detailed the reconstruction of Acme's production facilities, and glanced at Justin Industries' structural changes, purchases, and divestitures. That chapter also illustrated how the company pulled its various operating elements together to achieve its greatest profitability, to improve its working conditions, and to survive the most economically depressed decade since the 1930s. Yet that was only part of the story.

Making quality bricks, lowering operating costs, increasing fuel efficiency, building a loyal qualified staff, increasing productivity, and constructing more efficient plants are all very important, but, if the products are not marketed at a profit, all these efforts come to naught. Striking a proper balance between manufacturing and sales in a cyclic market is the greatest challenge for industry, and certainly has been critical in the brick industry. Acme was no exception.

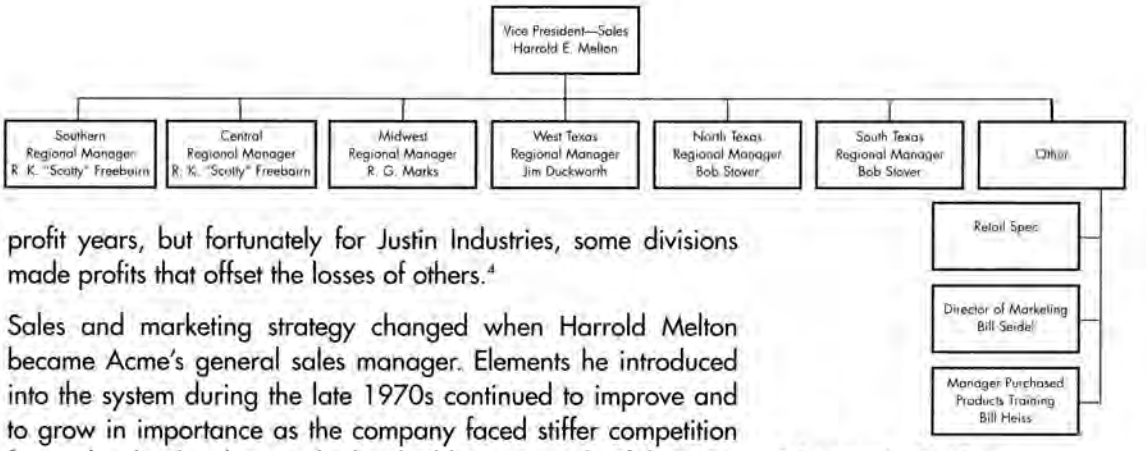
The company's response to this challenge in the 1980s is the subject of this chapter. In this decade, marked by declines in housing starts, shrinking markets, declining profits, and severe competition, Acme Brick Company redefined its goals to become more purpose-driven, to develop new marketing strategies, and to step up its sales efforts. Acme's personnel developed new income resources, improved company support systems, increased their sales efforts, and strengthened their corporate status and position in their service regions. Despite battling odds that were the death of many brick companies, Acme not only survived but remained a profitable organization, while retaining its position as the largest American-owned brick enterprise.

Acme's production and sales strategy had remained much the same since before World War II. Indeed, even as far back as 1916, when Walter Bennett rebuilt the burned Denton plant, and then converted it to a stiff-mud operation, Acme's philosophy was to use economic downturns as an opportunity to rebuild and pro-

duce in anticipation of a building cycle upswing. After ten continuous years of expansion, the longest down cycle in the company's history began in 1930 and bottomed in 1934 with an upswing not apparent until 1936. Even then, Acme used the period to buy other plants in anticipation of a long-awaited upturn. From 1936 to 1985, the cycle in building starts remained much the same in Acme's territory, with lows bottoming out after eighteen to thirty months. Until 1970, Acme usually cut production back to match the market demand after sufficient inventory build-up. President Stout explained the new philosophy: "With available business still at a low ebb in 1970, the decision was made to crank up our production facilities in anticipation of a turnaround in the market—hopefully starting the next year."[1]

This strategic move became a company pattern for the next downturn after producing new profit highs in 1971, 1972, and 1973. Following downturns in 1974 and 1975, record shipments and profits established new all-time records for 1976, 1977, and 1978. Almost as predicted, a 40 percent drop in housing starts in 1979 precipitated drops in shipments and profits in both 1980 and 1981. "But somewhat like a yo-yo—the expected turnaround occurred in 1983 with a dramatic jump in housing starts reaching the highest level since records had been kept and a record level which has not been surpassed for starts in Acme's six-state home territory."[2] As could be expected, Acme again set new sales and profit records in 1983 and 1984. Thus, company leadership had little reason to drastically alter its approach when the market began to slip in 1985. Acme continued with planned construction, scheduled plant rebuilding programs, and predetermined marketing policies. But the market was changing and competition was increasing—a new cycle was developing that would severely test Acme's responses and resources.

As housing starts dropped in 1985, 1986, 1987, and 1988, the brickmaker was left with a market 75 percent smaller than it had had in 1984. Not since the 1930s had Acme experienced such a long decline in "available" business.[3] Although Acme did remain profitable each year of the decade, some long-held myths had to be given up and new strategies developed to deal with emerging market realities. As previously cited, the decade opened under disturbing economic circumstances, yet the company faced its problems with optimism. But then, the devastating year of 1982 sent shock waves throughout Justin Industries. This caused a rethinking of how the conglomerate was run and gave impetus to decentralization, marketing concepts, redefining company goals and recognition of differing divisional needs throughout the corporation. After 1982, each division was to experience its highest and lowest



Sales organization chart.

profit years, but fortunately for Justin Industries, some divisions made profits that offset the losses of others.[4]

Sales and marketing strategy changed when Harrold Melton became Acme's general sales manager. Elements he introduced into the system during the late 1970s continued to improve and to grow in importance as the company faced stiffer competition from other brickmakers and other building materials. If the sales and marketing arm was to keep pace with the innovations and increased efficiency of the production arm, Melton needed an even better organization and more company-wide emphasis placed on sales. Furthermore, his team wanted the marketing concept to be better understood and to become an integral part of each employee's thinking.

There is a certain mystique that makes many people admire and even cherish clay products—especially brick. Perhaps this is due to brick's ancient origin, strength, permanence, beauty, or shape. Or it may be that a product made by man from mere mud lends a certain romance to its existence—taking one back to the ancient hearth. Of course, brick's valuable properties as a building material make it universally desirable, but it also has these same psychological connections for those who manufacture, sell, and work with it. Some people seem to take brick for granted because it has been around for so long, and some are just simply more comfortable with it as a building material. For other people, brick arouses nostalgic feelings, most evident when they come upon an old plant site or admire an old building whose historic construction date is displayed on a high brick gable or low cornerstone. Why else do brick collecting societies exist? For whatever reasons—psychological, social, utilitarian, or otherwise—the mystique is there and affects all those who work with clay products whether sculpture, pottery, tile, or brick.

Such strong psychological connections are very important to the industry. Brickmakers and sellers rightfully feel that they are contributing something permanent and useful to society, so it becomes very easy for brick companies to concentrate their thoughts only on production and the product rather than on the consumer. This type of thinking neglects the fact that the brickmaker's real purpose is to get and keep customers. Indeed, this is one of the least understood elements of most businesses.

People readily understand and accept large expenditures for facilities or equipment, but do not as readily accept the reality that substantial sums must be spent on marketing.[5] Yet, marketing is vital, whether it be an airline or a zoo if companies are to stay in business. Furthermore, history is replete with businesses that no longer exist because they failed to adapt to a changing market or did not clearly define their purpose in terms of customer needs. Other such businesses have been relegated to obscurity as a result of this neglect.[6] So far, Acme Brick has never been one of those, but the stresses of the 1980s forced important company changes in approach and procedures.

By 1980, the sales and marketing group had increased the importance of brokerage, reestablished a qualified technical services group, and started moving towards a formal marketing approach based on promoting the advantages of brick as a building material. The group's selling effort was supported by a technical staff in each Acme sales region, which helped local architects and builders evaluate opportunities for the use of brick in their projects. Prospective homebuyers were reached through a consumer advertising program that made use of newspapers, television, radio, and magazines. Professionals were reached through their trade publications. The message was the same for each audience: brick is the answer to the questions of beauty, maintenance, energy conservation, and overall economy.[7]

The corporate strategy called for continual inventory build up to have brick available in boom times, "because when shortages develop, builders often shift to the use of less desirable substitute materials."[8] Getting a greater share of available business was the key to obtaining satisfactory results in a declining market, and having brick available when housing starts picked up was an essential part of the company strategy. This combination of marketing and manufacturing efforts kept Acme Brick at a profitable level in the downturned market of 1979–1982.

During this market situation, Acme sought to find and attract other users for its products. In 1981, the sales force focused on remodeling contractors and stressed the economy of brick use. For a typical wood frame home, a veneer of Acme brick represented only about 4 percent of the total cost of the home while a decade earlier this cost would have been 10 percent. Salesmen emphasized that initial construction cost of the typical home using brick was only $2,000 more and would save much more than that amount in maintenance to the owner. Also, with brick prices declining, brick in 1981 cost no more than economical materials such as aluminum or vinyl siding.[9]

In 1982, the company stressed the resale value of brick homes. Acme presented survey information that indicated 86 percent of homebuyers preferred brick homes and that these homes sold much faster. Since this survey also showed that 64 percent of the homes built in Acme's area were of brick construction, it indicated a substantial marketing opportunity for the company. But Acme also realized that commercial projects made up 25 percent of its markets and could provide something of a counterbalance to the fluctuating residential construction cycle.[10]

Acme dealt very well with the move toward building skyscrapers and larger commercial buildings. Starting in the 1930s, gaining momentum following World War II, and reaching widespread proportions by the 1970s, more and more companies constructing taller buildings turned to using steel and concrete. Later on, in the 1970s and 1980s the addition of glass paneling and wider windows broke the starkness of some of these monoliths, and these measures cut into the brick market. Over the preceding decades, architectural preferences had shifted to the design of such barren structures because they could be built faster with lower labor costs. Besides, there is a limit on height and weight in the use of brick, and as long as the race to build and own the tallest building continued, the trend would continue. Brick competed on its beauty, economy, and insulating values against glass, aluminum, steel, and concrete. It was easier for brick to compete against wood and stone, and brick proved to be compatible with these materials in some instances.[11]

But, many areas simply had traditions or stylistic preferences for other materials.[12] For example, except for office buildings, wood seemed to be the choice for the West Coast and rural South, while adobe dominated in the far Southwest. The stronger markets for brick were in the Mid-Continent and the East, but brick preference had considerable strength in the South and in Texas. Brick penetrated the other markets to some degree in the 1980s, while also gaining reentry into the large commercial building market, as architects began to turn to richer and more varied brick exteriors that required specially shaped brick and used it for interior walls and flooring.[13]

The competition from other brickmakers also changed in the 1980s. Some companies turned to alternate ways of manufacturing materials to imitate the burned clay product. One manufacturer made brick from sewer sludge, copying to some degree an earlier unsuccessful Japanese attempt to manufacture brick from garbage. The sewage or sludge brick was successful—it did not explode, grow moss, or emit bad odors;[14] however, Acme and oth-

ers did not view this development as a serious threat to clay or shale brickmaking. But another imitation, at least temporarily, met with some success.

The move from Mexican brick to concrete brick, for several years, dominated the Houston and Gulf Coast markets and made headway elsewhere in the country. Earlier versions of this type brick were successful because of a void in available clay brick. But, problems of shrinkage and color fade worked against its manufacturers before they could solve these problems. Properly cured, the concrete brick was a competitive material, especially after the color fading problem was substantially solved. Match jobs, however, remained a major weakness. Given a reasonable choice, customers usually preferred clay brick, as Acme demonstrated in the case of the Houston market, where, within two years of opening its San Felipe plant, the concrete brick market was substantially eliminated.[15]

Of much more serious concern was the foreign takeover of the American brick industry that started in 1978 and was rampant throughout the 1980s. The trend began when Ibstock Ltd. of Great Britain bought the Marion Brick Company in 1978, and then Glen-Gery Brick Company in 1979. First on Ibstock's list of proposed acquisitions was Acme Brick, followed by General Shale (Tennessee), Glen-Gery (Pennsylvania), Boren (North Carolina), Belden (Ohio), and Bickerstaff (Georgia), as well as brick plant subsidiaries in Texas, Virginia, and Iowa.[16] Within three years, Ibstock's purchases had moved it to a number three ranking in the United States.[17] Ibstock at first tried to buy a Canadian firm, but found it to be difficult, as the Canadians were also planning to buy United States firms. When the U.S. Justice Department dropped its antitrust suit against Ibstock in July 1981, the floodgates were opened to foreign buyers to do what had been denied Acme a decade earlier in an aborted merger with Pacific Clay.[18] By 1987, 58 percent of Ibstock's business came from Glen-Gery and its other American subsidiaries.[19]

During the 1980s, Australian and Canadian firms proceeded to buy up the larger brick firms and to gobble up many smaller ones. Acme lost its premier position as the largest brick manufacturer in the United States and, in 1990, was third behind Australian-owned Boren Brick and Canadian-owned General Shale. During the decade, four of the top five United States producers became foreign-owned.[20] There were no large competing United States-owned brick companies left in Acme's direct marketing area.

In 1980, there were thirty-one companies and forty-two plants in Acme's main territory. By 1990 there were only fifteen companies

who operated thirty-seven plants.[21] Ibstock explained the vulnerability of American Midwestern and East Coast brickmakers this way: " . . . marketing was left to distributors . . . profits going to an army of middle-men . . . they had no strategy which placed emphasis on support services, as it did on products themselves, . . . and selling direct."[22] Fortunately, Acme Brick had not made these mistakes, which would have made the company vulnerable to a foreign buyout. Indeed, as a long-time officer of the Brick Institute of America (BIA), Ed Stout had crusaded to form a stronger nationwide marketing campaign for brick and using his term as chairman (1982–1984), promoted the brick marketing council idea. This concept called for the brick industry to have a government-sponsored council similar to that found in the dairy and other industries. But this idea, after being bantered about for several years, did not fly with members.[23] Once it became clear that this concept would not be adopted, Stout put forth a regional promotion scheme that met with a much more positive response. By 1990, with Stout on the BIA Strategic Planning Committee, all BIA-defined regions had brick councils that promoted brick as the preferred building material.[24]

Although Acme had no formal marketing program until the late 1970s and early 1980s, it did actively promote the qualities and versatility of brick. Acme never ceased to sell direct. As the marketing concept promoted by the key Acme team (Melton, Koch, Knautz, and Stout) took hold, all elements of sales and marketing changed. In short, the company changed to meet its new challenges.

Anything but static, Acme's sales organization went through dozens of changes in the 1980s and increased the role, scope, and importance of its various support groups, customer services, and marketing techniques. Between 1979 and 1989, Acme made approximately ninety shifts of personnel assignments and office moves (openings and closings) at the district level or above, with about one-third of these at the regional and general office level. For clarity, only the most significant changes for the company sales group are examined here.

Acme was fortunate to have Bob Marks return from early retirement in 1980, when a vacancy developed in Oklahoma City. Marks, who attended Carnegie Technical School of Architecture, had served Acme as a sales engineer, brokerage manager, and regional and general sales manager, and had returned as regional sales manager for the Midwest region bringing with him a wealth of experience and contacts. When Harris was appointed district manager in Kansas City, Dave Gastgeb returned to Oklahoma City from Kansas City to continue the Technical Services

Engineering Program. And when Mark Merchant resigned in 1982, Bill Lemmond, who had been assisting Stout with financial planning and analysis, in Fort Worth transferred to Tulsa to become its district sales manager.[25]

Another part of the strategy to find new users of Acme brick led to geographic expansion in the Midwest and Central regions. The company sought out and found a new market particularly suitable for its increased production capacity in central Arkansas. With the opening of a brick distribution center in Memphis, Tennessee, Acme entered a new market area in 1982, which, though logistically well-suited, was very competitive. Arch Davenport had been running a district sales office there without adequate facilities since 1980, and as the need became apparent, this move consolidated Acme's position.[26]

Similarly, in Kansas City, Acme had been leasing office space and had no local brick inventory. In 1982 the company had purchased a lumberyard site in Olathe, Kansas, had remodeled the office building into a show room, and had changed the yard into brick storage. Marvin Harris, district sales manager, was in charge of this new office, having replaced Jim Gard, who retired after many years of service with Acme in Kansas.[27] Two years later, Harris left the company and E. H. "Hopp" Vaupel assumed Harris's position as district sales manager in the Kansas City office.

By 1986, the Memphis branch had grown in size to the point where Freebairn recommended that this branch be designated a district and assigned to Rick Dunn to manage it.

In 1986, market studies indicated that Acme sales needed to expand geographically into two areas: St. Louis and Nashville. Bob Marks conducted the market study of the St. Louis area. This study showed St. Louis to be a natural extension of Acme's Missouri sales area, and Marks worked hard at finding a suitable location for a brick inventory and sales yard. It so happened that a site in Maryland Heights was available. Mrs. Marge Schotts, owner of the Cincinnati Reds baseball team, had a brick distribution yard in operation at the old Alton Brick Company plant site. Mrs. Schotts leased the space to Acme, and, in January 1987, with Bobby Ray as manager, the company's St. Louis branch sales office opened.[28]

The other market study, conducted by Scotty Freebairn, showed Nashville, Tennessee, to be a good area for Acme's sales expansion. Mr. Mark Orme became the first Nashville district sales manager in early 1987 and assisted Mr. Freebairn in a careful search for sales yard locations in the area.[29] Within two years,

Acme's market penetration in the area justified the move, validating Freebairn's estimates of its potential.

Because of his expertise in management and sales, Scotty Freebairn had the distinction of simultaneously holding more than one managerial position more often than any other regional manager. His experience belied his age. Mr. Freebairn went to work for Acme in 1955, at the age of seventeen, in the mail room, but he already had sales experience from selling ladies shoes on weekends and summers at Baker's Shoe Store in Fort Worth. He worked for Acme while attending Texas Christian University, where he graduated with a degree in commerce in 1959. Prior to becoming the Central regional manager in 1971, at age thirty-three, he had been a senior sales coordinator, distribution salesman, branch manager, and district sales manager. With such a successful track record, it was no wonder that he was given the troubled Southern region in 1979, and again in 1987, in addition to his own expanding Central region.[30]

In 1981, Melton appointed Bob Stover as North Texas regional manager and Ron Bowen as Southern regional manager, relieving Freebairn of this additional duty. Freebairn next merged the Texarkana territory with the Shreveport district, moved the Little Rock wholesale department there, and placed Grimm Dewell in charge in early 1982. By 1988, the old Shreveport office was abandoned due to highway construction, so Acme built a completely modern Shreveport sales office and distribution yard on King's Highway. Here Dewell was aided by Homer Adams and Harold Hay, salesmen, and Shirley Preston, office manager.[31]

As the building economy deteriorated in Texas and Louisiana after the boom of mid-decade, Scotty Freebairn once more assumed duties as Southern regional manager when Bowen transferred to Fort Worth residential sales in 1987. Acme's sales offices in New Orleans and Baton Rouge had been operated jointly with Louisiana Concrete Company since 1968. Now Acme decided to let the concrete company distribute its own brick and to absorb the remaining Acme sales personnel. But construction activity in Louisiana worsened over the next year, and another approach was tried. Acme resumed selling its own products and those of the concrete company. With this arrangement, the general manager for Louisiana Concrete, Tom Wimp, became district sales manager for Acme in Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Then Acme acquired the Baton Rouge Featherlite Block Plant in 1987 and appointed Greg Foster the district manager in New Orleans under Freebairn.[32]

Following the prosperous years of 1978 and 1979, the company established the West Texas region, with its main office in Lubbock under Dean Chaffin, while Lubbock itself became a district under Andy Anderson. The Amarillo sales office, under Jim Duckworth, was remodeled and its sales yard expanded. In 1980, the oil boom was on, and construction in West Texas grew rapidly. Acme reopened its closed Midland office and sent Andy Green from Lubbock to run this as a branch office. At the same time, sales in Abilene had increased, and Acme appointed Mike Rice to be branch sales manager there. The next year, Chaffin left the company, and Acme named Jim Duckworth the new manager. Duckworth, who was raised in Amarillo, joined the company in 1956, when he left active duty with the U.S. Air Force. He had worked for Acme in West Texas from that time on, moving through the sales organization from trainee to regional manager. Immediately, Acme moved the regional office to Amarillo, where the next year the company purchased additional land and a nearby warehouse. Then, in 1989, Acme constructed additional storage facilities in Wichita Falls and in Midland.[33]

Two key Acme employees in the northeast Texas sales region decided to go into business for themselves in 1981. Fred Clayton, the regional manager, and Jerry Thomas, Dallas district manager, resigned to open a brick distribution company. They were replaced by Bob Stover and Larry Mitchell, respectively. Then Gene Lackey assumed the role of residential sales manager in Dallas, while Joe Creighton returned to the company to assume Mitchell's vacated position.[34]

Brokerage sales had been of growing importance to Acme since 1978. When Mr. Straubmueller left in 1979, Mitchell filled this position until he moved to Dallas as district manager. While Creighton managed this part of the business, Acme continued its expansion of its brokerage products program. A warehouse was leased on Leo Lane in Dallas, not far from the Dallas sales office, and the company moved more strongly into floor and wall tile sales. Shortly after this, in early 1983, Creighton resigned and Bill Heiss was appointed to this position. By 1984 tile sales, as part of the brokerage sales, were strong enough to be designated Acme's Tile Division, and Mr. Gerald DeCorte was employed as its manager. DeCorte had extensive experience in the tile business, and Acme hoped he would help the company move strongly in this direction.[35]

Meanwhile, remodeling and expansion of the Denton sales office was underway. In 1981, the Denton sales office was enlarged to make room for the North Texas distribution yard. Then, in 1984, the company completely remodeled the Denton sales location and

added a large display area. When Tom Syler elected to take early retirement in 1988, Gene Lackey transferred from Dallas sales to become the Denton district sales manager. Syler's retirement was followed by L. H. Simpkin's retirement as the North Texas yard manager, and Simpkin was replaced by Harlon Dixon. Dixon then moved to the Denton plant to supervise truck loading and Danny Cable became the North Texas distribution yard manager. Shortly after Lackey took over Denton sales in early 1989, the Wichita Falls territory came under his supervision, and Bill Gann was reassigned as Acme's territorial representative in Wichita Falls for a second time.[36]

Brick sculpture in front of the Denton plant office is a sample application of brick sculpture.

The Wichita Falls economy had peaked in 1981 when R. C. Dudley retired due to illness and Bill Gann was first assigned as branch sales manager in that city. The area's economy had begun to slow considerably in 1983 when Gann was transferred to Lubbock and Bob Prather replaced him. By June 1986, unemployment stood at 10.3 percent—twice what it was in the area a year before.[37] Reluctantly, Acme closed its sales office there, and the office became a stopping place for company salesmen from Denton who were making calls in the area. The economy and population of Wichita Falls seemed to stabilize by 1989, and Gann was transferred back to this office in anticipation that the area would once again begin to grow.[38]

Portions of the South Texas region experienced circumstances similar to Wichita Falls; Beaumont was a prime example. Buck Upchurch left Fort Worth sales to become Beaumont branch manager in 1980, only to be returned to Fort Worth the next year and replaced by Tony Gillam in Beaumont. By 1984, Gillam was moved to Houston, and Lynn Bond replaced him as the Beaumont manager. The next year, Acme moved the Beaumont sales office from its old location to a new one on the Eastex Freeway. This move did not help much because the construction market was so bad that when Bond resigned, the company did not replace him and Beaumont sales were handled by sales personnel from Houston. A year later, in 1987, since the economy looked better, Acme assigned Dale Scott from Austin to Beaumont as a branch sales manager.[39]

For a time, Houston fared no better that its sister oil economy cities. Houston District Sales Manager R. D. Rankin resigned in late 1984, and Ed Lewis, an experienced brickman and former Acme employee who had returned to the company a few months before, moved to Houston. Acme's Houston territory experienced low sales levels brought on by the 1984–1985 real estate depression which were further amplified by low-priced concrete brick competition. In spite of this, with the San Felipe plant under construction, Acme trained a large residential sales force to sell the anticipated 65 million brick products San Felipe would soon be providing. And, as hoped, even with housing starts still falling in 1986, shipments from the San Felipe plant dramatically increased Acme's volume and market share. The investment in carrying and training an enlarged sales team began to pay off. So much so that two residential sales managers (Sandy Davis and Don Wallace) supervised five large accounts and several salesmen.[40] Upon Ed Lewis's death, Bill Lemmond transferred from Tulsa in June of 1987 to be district sales manager.[41]

For a time after Jim Stewart resigned in 1988, the South Texas region was left without a resident regional manager, so it was directed by Bob Stover from Dallas as a combined region with northeast Texas. Then, as economic conditions improved in 1990, Acme transferred Bill Hurlburt from Dallas to become the new South Texas regional sales manager on September 1. One of Acme's most dedicated and versatile employees, Hurlburt graduated from the Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy, then went to work for United Brick and Tile. He joined Acme in 1966 as a production engineer, and after managing the Edmond, Fort Smith, and Denton plants he became regional production manager of Texas, overseeing many of Acme's plant renovations during the 1970s. Then, in 1979, he went into marketing as an assistant to Harrold Melton for a couple of years. He went on to become a valuable member of the Dallas sales office, working in both architectural and residential sales.[42] An outstanding team member, with a remarkable understanding of all elements of the brick business, Hurlburt's enthusiasm, dedication, and knowledge added strength to Acme's renewed vigor in South Texas.

According to Hurlburt, Acme had a number of beautiful sales offices, particularly those in Shreveport and Round Rock. But, the new Austin sales office (Round Rock) was a long time in coming.[43] Dale Scott had been the district sales manager at the Austin location on Research Road for only three years when the company decided to sell the property. By 1983, this five-acre site, on a rail span bought by Acme for $75,000 in 1955, had become surrounded by office buildings and was a very valuable piece of real

estate. Acme sold the property to the Trammel Crow company, leased "temporary" office space in a nearby business park, and moved its inventory to a spot off Manor Road. Little did anyone realize it would be seven years before the Austin office gained a permanent home.[44]

In 1987, the company called on Scott to transfer to Beaumont in an effort to increase sales there; it also moved Mark Merchant from San Antonio to manage the Austin district. Merchant previously had been the district sales manager at Tulsa until his resignation in 1982. He returned to Acme in 1985 as the San Antonio manager. Merchant's replacement was Dick Goodman, who transferred from Tulsa sales to San Antonio.[45]

After many delays and problems, due to a building moratorium within the city of Austin, Acme purchased property north of Austin in Round Rock. With the land acquired in 1988, drawings and plans moved forward. In December 1989, Acme awarded a construction contract for the building, and the excellent new Austin showroom opened in 1990.[46]

Meanwhile, Dick Goodman's group in San Antonio continued to make progress. Acme's investment in the McQueeny plant over the decade showed fine results for the company in the San Antonio/Austin area. Although construction was down in the area, in 1989 the San Antonio sales office achieved the highest market penetration ever recorded for that office.[47]

In the decade from 1979 to 1989, Acme opened new offices in Springdale (Arkansas), Monroe (Louisiana), Memphis and Nashville (Tennessee), Kansas City (Kansas), Malvern Brokerage (Arkansas), Dallas, Abilene, Longview, Texarkana, and Round Rock (Texas), St. Louis (Missouri), and Shreveport (Louisiana). At the same time, the company remodeled or added to every sales office throughout the system. Moreover, in keeping with the company's policy to upgrade its sales abilities, every sales office received new equipment.

One marketing venture deserving of special consideration evolved out of Melton's desire to increase the company's brokerage business. Late in 1988, Greg House, an expert in merchandising tile, became the new regional tile manager and engaged in preparations to move the Acme tile warehouse in Dallas from Leo

Products of the San Felipe plant. This brick was in such demand that the plant had to be expanded in the early 1990s.

Lane to Plano Road. With Jeff Ehresmann as warehouse manager, House and staff completed the move by April 1989 and held the grand opening for this new prototype store on August 5, 1989. Known to Acme employees as the Plano Road Store (PRS) and to the public in Dallas as the Acme Brick Tile and More Store, this brokerage operation held great promise and was abundantly successful from its start.[48]

Simple in concept, yet exciting in execution and purpose, the innovative Acme Brick Tile and More Store met the company's criteria for satisfying a variety of customer needs. This store consisted of a 20,000-square-foot warehouse and a 5,000-square-foot showroom, located at 10550 Plano Road just north of the LBJ Freeway in Dallas. The colorful, well-designed, spacious showroom sported a refreshing and relaxed atmosphere that invited its customers to feel welcome. In stark contrast to most warehouse-type stores that have materials stacked on unattractive shelves and crowded aisles, Acme's Tile and More showcased more than 300 brick blends, approximately 1,000 ceramic tile designs, floor tile, glass block, imported marble and granite, brick pavers, brickettes, concrete pavers, cast stone, pool coping, skylights, fireplace installations, fireplace accessories, masonry and tile tools, bagged goods, plus the IBP grid system for glass block installations. Yet, the uncluttered and pleasant showroom provided ample space for informational displays for each product.

For example, Acme's most popular brick styles and blends were displayed on exhibit walls and were accompanied by backlit photos showing the brick as it actually appeared on a new home, giving it a very realistic look. Manager Greg House explained some of the advantages this way:

> This gives homebuyers a 'real life' look at how their new home will appear. The store also maintains a list of homes in all areas that have used a particular Acme brick style. The customer can then drive by for a final selection after using the displays to narrow their choices. This process has saved many builders and buyers from making a costly mistake.[49]

For customer convenience the store maintained an inventory level valued at about $1.5 million. The goal was to provide a comprehensive selection in each category that would allow builders and homebuyers to one-stop shop. To this end, the Plano Road Store was an off-site showroom for many builders and was kept open six days a week until well after normal working hours to accommodate the needs of the construction industry.[50] At the time of writing, the city was in the process of widening and paving Plano Road. When this is finished Acme has plans to double the size of the

showroom. Although in a depressed and highly competitive market, one year after its opening, Tile and More was very much a success. A classy operation, Acme had every right to be proud of its Plano Road Store and planned to establish others in strategic market areas.[51]

A special brick paver manufactured at the Bennett plant will be used to make repairs on a Dallas street.

As parts of Acme's new marketing and sales strategy brokerage and Tile and More grew in importance, other fundamentals in the company's move to have a greater impact on its markets also advanced. Often mistaken for marketing, advertising is, nonetheless, only one tool to popularize and promote the goals of a company or to meet a specific objective. This vital part of Acme's marketing program had changed little over the years, but as the influx of cheap, substandard brick from Mexico reached a peak of 500 million brick in 1978, the company had to change its methods in order to convince builders and the public to demand a better product. So, Acme inaugurated a new era of advertising.[52]

Stout, Melton, and Ellis decided to attack the Mexican brick problem in Texas with a sustained radio and newspaper advertising program directed to the homebuyer. In 1978, Acme hired Glenn Baxter to become Acme's manager of advertising, bringing the development and buying of its residential advertising in-house.[53]

Acme's commitment to this program was sizable in dollars and in time and energy. In 1978, the first campaign started. Built around the slogan "Brick Facts for Homebuyers," the campaign was advertised on the radio, on billboards, and in newspapers, in Dallas, Fort Worth, and Houston. The advertisements contrasted Mexican brick and Acme brick, by presenting a series of facts about each one together with pictures of both products and a suggestion that homebuyers take a knife or a key and scratch the surface of the brick to see if it was "suspect." Coupons were put in the paper inviting homebuyers to ask for a copy of a brochure explaining "Brick Facts." This campaign proved very successful, with hundreds of customers requesting the "Brick Facts."[54]

In 1979, the campaign continued through the use of radio and billboards, this time employing the theme "Hard Sell." Now a little humor was introduced by way of the characters Amy Brick (from Acme) and W. C. Wolf (Mexican brick). The advertisements explained why a "Hard Sell" was right for Acme, not "soft" like imported brick. In 1980, the theme "Hard Sell" was again used, but with different advertisements developed along the same lines and introducing homebuyer testimonials.[55]

By 1981, the Mexican brick shipments had declined to about 200 million Mexican brick. While still sizable, this represented a significant change in demand for Mexican brick and also a change in homebuilder attitudes.

An Acme advertisement used in the early 1980s.

From 1978 through 1981, Acme maintained commercial advertising and promotion to architects and builders through their trade periodicals. The message to the designers and builders was for them to take advantage of the structural uses of brick and to use brick as a load-bearing material. Acme provided many details and drawings for users. In 1981, residential advertising took the form of a homebuyer education series discussing sounds through the wall and included homebuyer testimonials. In 1982, Acme switched to TV, asking homebuyers to compare a happy family in a brick home and an unhappy family painting their wood-sided house during vacation time.[56]

Company residential television advertising in 1983 compared Acme brick advantages over Mexican brick and second-hand brick and explained how to identify them. In 1984, Acme repeated the "Hard Sell" campaign and builder testimonials because it fit with the current campaign theme of the Brick Institute of Texas. Likewise, other Texas manufacturers also began to see the benefits of direct advertising to homebuyers. By 1985 Mexican brick usage, though still a factor in the market, was only a fraction of what it had been. Acme, however, continued to build brand identification and brand awareness. In markets where concrete brick was a problem, such as Houston, Austin, and San Antonio, Acme residential advertisements explained the advantages of clay brick over concrete brick.[57]

In 1985, Harrold Melton decided that colored photographs of each of Acme Brick's standard blends of brick would be a desirable aid to customers in selecting brick for their home. A Photographic Services section was added to the marketing department, and photographer Britt Stokes was put in charge. Attractive homes, carefully selected for well-landscaped yards and brick use, were photographed, and the photograph was printed with an inset close-up shot. Thousands of prints were made of each blend of brick, which were then distributed to the sales force to make it easier for customers to make a decision on the color brick they preferred. In addition to keeping these "blend

sheets" up to date, Stokes provided photographs for all company advertising and brochures.

By 1987, Acme had started identifying its brick by imprinting the logo on one end of a percentage of the delivery, and Acme's advertising asked for homebuyers to look for the logo on the brick as a symbol of quality. Following residential market radio spots in 1986, which featured a singing group called the Acme Sisters who sang the Acme message to campy tunes such as "Frankie and Johnny" and "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree," the advertisements in 1987 asked homebuyers to look for the logo on the end of the brick as a symbol of Acme quality. This message was more effective visually, so in 1988 and 1989 the advertisements were adapted to television and showed a builder discussing the advantages of Acme brick and pointing to the logo on the end of the brick at the corners and window sills of his house. While these TV advertisements were used in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex and in Houston, there were similar print messages in the homebuilder publications in every area where Acme sold direct, and where there was a builder organization. Essentially the same radio, television, and print advertisements were run in 1990.[58]

Acme Brick Company's older "Classic Program," which began in 1967 in Acme's Central region remained important to Acme's profit picture. Acme's Classic Program was born under the direction of Ed Stout. The idea required Acme engineers to develop some unique brick products through proprietary clays or processes that could not be duplicated by competitors and to charge a premium price for these products. The challenge and charge to the marketing and production departments was for them to develop distinctive products that could command a premium in the market and yet, at the same time, not cost additional money to produce.[59]

Acme first produced these special classic brick at the Perla plants and offered them at premiums of $2 to $4 per thousand over the base price for other Perla products. But the Classic Program of the Central region was slow to develop company-wide, probably due to the fact that Acme at that point was decentralized, and the general managers in each region set their own priorities. The Classic concept gradually gained acceptance at all plants, and the program had the effect of raising Acme's average selling price. The Classic Program received much greater emphasis in the mid-1970s after Acme had returned to its former centralized management. In 1990, the program still prospered, with a large percentage of Acme's products designated Classic and commanding premiums in price.[60]

Time spent with customers away from an office environment in some form of recreational activity has been an important part of Acme's program since J. E. Fender chartered trains to bring customers to Bennett's Fenderlaken Club House for a week of fishing and relaxation. In 1978, Harrold Melton began a concerted effort to broaden the customer recreational program. When Tillman Niblett came to work for Acme Brick, Melton assigned him to coordinate the program—particularly the hunting and fishing activities. Niblett's background in hunting, fishing, guiding, and outfitting brought the needed experience to the program.[61] The further strengthening of this program came about after Larry Mitchell's appointment as Dallas district manager. Mitchell, too, has taken an active role in coordinating these recreational activities throughout the company.

Fenderlaken.

Since 1978, the Customer Recreation Program's activities have ranged from the lakes and fields of eastern and western Mexico, to the waters of Ontario and the mountains of Vancouver Island. The Customer Recreation Program has taken customers to the brush country of South Texas, the 10 Mile Creek rendezvous at Ferris, the high plains of Texas, the lakes of North and East Texas, the Arbuckle Mountains of Oklahoma, the rivers of eastern Oklahoma, the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, the plains and foothills of Wyoming, and to the mountains of western Montana.[62]

Literally hundreds of people have enjoyed the activities brought about by this program. Many a friendship has been formed around a campfire at night talking about the day's activities, or while sitting in a boat on a secluded lake. Fond memories exist from these trips and customers recount them numerous times.

The Customer Recreation Program represented more than just hunting and fishing activities. An example was a scenic horseback trip to the very top of the Rocky Mountains near Durango, Colorado, where participants marveled at the panoramic beauty of this Rocky Mountain High. Few parts of this country exceed the pristine majesty of this mountain region, and opportunities for photographic gems are many. The individuals who experienced this rugged trip saw vistas that only a lucky few people get the opportunity to see.

During his many years with the Acme Brick Company, Jim Baggett, who may have been the most creative salesman to work for Acme, found a way to build strong personal relationships with customers. In 1960, he invited a dozen customers from Little Rock and Fort

Smith to camp out on Lake Ouachita for three nights and four days. The setting was a remote island reachable only by boat.[63] Strictly a fishing and relaxation event, customers provided their own tents, boats, and personal gear; Acme furnished food and refreshments. A highlight was a "witching" ceremony, during which Mr. Baggett located buried treasure to the amazement of all the guests. This coincided with a demonstration of his famous "string trick."[64]

One of the recreational activities the company provided customers and sometimes employees was the pheasant hunts in Kansas. Such an event is pictured here in 1989. Shown (left to right): Gary Paup, Mark Merchant, Sam May, and Tony Neeves; Leonard Hicks, Superintendent of the Weir plant is standing.

Since 1960, some twenty-seven safaris have been held at Ebone Point on Lake Ouachita, which have grown rapidly in size to include more than two hundred guests. This activity became a legend in Arkansas, and an invitation to the Jim Baggett Fishing Safari continues to be a most sought-after item among Acme's customers.[65]

Another popular idea for customer relations originated with Stout and Melton in the area of the north Central Texas region. They started the Cajun Festival, which has been hosted at the Denton plant, and more recently at the Plano sales location. Similar to cajun festivals held in Louisiana, this has become one of the single most popular functions with customers. Fifteen hundred to two thousand people enjoy crawfish, potatoes, and corn, fixed the way the Cajuns prepare it in south Louisiana. Cooking teams from south Louisiana help prepare and cook the food.[66]

Some traditional sports, such as professional and collegiate football, baseball, and basketball games, were included in Acme's Customer Recreation Program. The slopes of the Rocky Mountains provided skiing opportunities for many customers and employees of Acme. These winter retreats have been a popular pastime for many people and have provided a welcome winter break. Golf outings round out Acme's sports program.[67]

Many of Acme's customers enjoy music and theater. The scope of the Customer Recreation Program includes symphonies, plays, and musicals. Since many Acme Brick friends are prominent in their city cultural programs, Acme Brick feels that this is an important aspect of local culture and encourages participation. Still other customers and employees find ways to enjoy the western heritage of Acme and its sister companies by becoming involved in such events as the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show and the Mesquite Rodeo. The program recognizes the wide variety of recreation and pastime activities available and is designed to provide recreational opportunities for as many people as possible.[68]

During the grand opening ceremony of Acme's Ouachita plant in Malvern in October 1980, Malvern, Arkansas, was recognized as the "Brick Capital of the World." This meant that more brick were produced in the city of Malvern's three brick plants than in any other known city in the world. The Malvern Chamber of Commerce seized this opportunity to publicize the city of Malvern throughout Arkansas and the United States. A festival was created to include parades, horseshoe pitching, marathon running races, brick tosses, best-dressed brick person, hairy leg contests, and a womanless marriage.[69] Other activities include a kick-off ceremony officiated by the secretary of state on the front steps of the state capital in Little Rock on Monday of Brickfest week—an event in which Ed Stout participates annually.[70] Held during the month of June each year, Brickfest is considered a major festival in Arkansas and is largely a tribute to the Acme Brick Company.[71]

Not a part of recreation but nonetheless vital to customer relations and marketing was the previously mentioned Technical Services Department. William G. Bailey was employed in December 1977 as a technical services engineer. Bill Bailey was a registered civil engineer in Texas, and Acme immediately began to search for additional engineers or architects to build a fully manned technical services group. Within about a year and a half, three additional engineers were employed. Dave Gastgeb handled technical services for the Midwest region and maintained an office in Oklahoma City. John Bufford handled the technical services for the Central region and had an office in Little Rock, Arkansas. Mark Owens provided technical services for the northeast Texas region in Dallas, Texas. Bill Bailey coordinated the technical services group activities for the South Texas and West Texas regions from an office in Fort Worth.[72]

Brickfest display at Malvern, Arkansas 1991.

One of the primary functions of this group was to assist architects in designing brick work as a structural unit. Many hours were spent putting together programs at colleges and universities for the architectural and engineering students. Acme had many short programs that addressed all phases of masonry construction such as workmanship, moisture control, differential movement, and reinforced brick work, to name but a few. In 1989, the technical services group provided 423 hours of instruction to 4,671 individuals from 291 architectural/engineering firms and universities. This direct assistance, to architects and engineers currently in practice and to students, built relationships for the future.[73]

In 1979, Melton started a major in-house sales support program that has paid dividends to the company many times over. While Acme periodically exposed its salesmen to sales seminars and to an occasional motivational speaker, Acme had never maintained an ongoing formal sales and product knowledge training program. Harrold Melton recognized the need for a system that would accomplish these training and motivational needs on a continuing basis. In 1979, Jim Head (with prior experience at Xerox) was employed as sales training manager in Fort Worth, with the assignment to establish a formal training plan.[74] The plan was to accomplish the following six objectives:

1. Establish a new-hire interview system to help Acme managers with the interview process so that the best sales candidates would be hired.

2. Establish a new salesman orientation plan so that all new salesmen would be well acquainted with manufacturing processes, product line, sales policies, loading and delivery systems, and so on.

3. Establish formal sales skills training for new salesmen and a review for experienced salesmen.

4. Establish and implement a plan to increase managerial skills of sales managers.

5. Provide for technical training through the use of Acme's technical services engineers.

6. Establish sales motivational plans for the sales group, using some form of award for extra sales effort—be it prizes, gifts, or recognition.[75]

Jim Head got the process started but was not long in the job, leaving in August of 1980. W. E. "Bill" Heiss replaced Head in October and continued until 1983, when he became brokerage products manager. Acme employed Mike Griffith (who had been an instructor at Corsicana Junior College) as training manager in February 1983 where he continued until 1986, at which time he moved to the Fort Worth sales office as office manager. This move was forced by economic considerations, and Bill Heiss was asked to resume handling the sales training in addition to managing the brokerage department. The sales training continued with every sales office and sales manager meeting quarterly. The regional sales managers set the schedule for these training sessions.[76] Pat Mosely, coordinator for the brokerage product department, assisted Heiss in his marketing and sales training activities.

Sales recognition was handled quarterly and annually. Salesmen were selected for special recognition, based on performance against a predetermined sales plan. The recognition usually came in the form of a gift or a plaque. Special annual recognitions, started in 1985, provided for selected salesmen and sales managers to receive a President's Ring of heavy gold (or the addition of a diamond for previous winners). This recognition is made at a special dinner for recipients and their wives, and Acme's president presents the award. The annual Ring of Honor award described above is given to candidates in the marketing department. In 1986, the company initiated a single annual award, which is given to an employee from the company for outstanding career contributions. Career achievements of several candidates are submitted by each of the company's officers. The honoree is selected from this group. The presentation is made at the annual management meeting.[77]

Sales meeting led by Harrold Melton.

Other examples of marketing support systems linked to production were R&D, transportation, and the Brick Reporting and Information Exchange (BRIX) system. Each of these was not only valuable, but important to the efficient functioning of sales and finance. In the quarterly meetings with R&D, production, and administration, many of the marketing plans were presented and refined, but "the sales plan starts with the manager and salesmen in the field. The company does not attempt to forecast brick sales from the plants."[78] "The marketing department at Acme devises sales plans and forecasts, then the plant managers make their plans and the group resolves these into annual and five-year plans that are constantly updated."[79] Transportation and the BRIX are vital elements in translating these plans into reality for the salesman and the customer.

Efficient transportation of brick to the market is vital to the industry. Acme shipped virtually all its products by rail until the 1920s. Even as late as the 1950s, over 90 percent of Acme's shipments were by rail. But, by 1990, the ratio was reversed, and very few shipments went by rail. Starting in the 1960s, Acme began to upgrade its truck fleet by installing mechanical devices to enable one person to load and unload a truck. The company also began

Frequent meetings such as shown here are held at plant sites, sales offices, and the research lab at Denton involving sales people, engineers, plant personnel, and research scientists.

to package the brick—that is, to stack the brick in such a manner that, once banded together with metal straps, the "package" can be moved by fork or hand lifts and loaded onto flat cars or trucks rather than hand stacked into box cars. By hand, it took one person several hours to load 1,000 brick, but with packaging one person can load 25,000 brick in an hour.[80]

For many years, Acme's traffic department helped process each order, because most of the brick were shipped by rail. Customers either unloaded freight cars themselves or paid contract draymen to unload them. Acme's sales were FOB plant with the freight for the customer's account. But the routing of rail cars to their destination was (and still is) a significant part of the freight cost. Keeping up with railroad freight tariffs and routing rail cars for lowest freight rates has been an important function of the Traffic Department, since there are various routes that a rail carrier can use to take a freight car to the same destination from a given plant.[81]

The traffic manager's job began to change gradually a few years after World War II, as the country's road system expanded and trucks with mechanical handling systems were developed. Box cars

were shipped to public team tracks to be unloaded less and less frequently. This double handling of brick with all the risks of damage and the time lost in shipment became less necessary as trucks began to haul longer distances at rates competitive with rail.

In 1973, Joe Allison, who had previous truck transportation experience, came to work as truck manager for Acme. He worked for Bennett Abercrombie, traffic manager. Abercrombie had responsibility for rail shipments and for contract truck haulers. Allison's job was to supervise the company-owned fleet of some sixty trucks and trailers that were equipped with booms to mechanically unload packages of brick.[82]

In 1975, Acme arranged for the formation of a truck company staffed by owner-operators. This truck company was owned by Justin Industries and operated as a contract carrier for Acme Brick Company. Its name was Alpha Cargo Motor Express Company Inc., taken from ACME.[83] After Bennett Abercrombie's death in 1976, Joe Allison became traffic manager. With Allison's retirement in March 1989, Carl Sanders became traffic manager.[84]

In 1990, Acme relied on for-hire common carriers, thirty-eight Alpha Cargo drivers, and its own fleet of some one hundred tractor trailers. Rail shipments were still made, but they became the exception and were usually made to wholesale distributors outside the Southwest. Rail shipment declined from a high of 6,999 freight cars in 1976 to 935 freight cars in 1989.[85]

In 1990, the department operated a central dispatch system to coordinate the long-distance trucking operation. Trucks were routed to take advantage of back-hauls between plants and sales locations, in an attempt to have payloads in either direction, while providing the most efficient service for customers. Harold Hulce handled this part of the traffic department.

Two regional truck maintenance and service facilities, responsible for 100 trucks and 115 trailers equipped with unloaders, operated under the supervision of the traffic department. Charles Sarten managed the truck shop at Denton, Texas, and James Cooper was in charge of the Perla, Arkansas, truck shop. The traffic department developed specifications and secured bids for the purchase of trucks, trailers, and unloading devices.[86]

In addition to the administrative work of auditing freight bills, the traffic department maintained current driver logs for various state and federal audits. These logs determined a driver's pay. Both equipment and driver had to comply with local, state, and federal regulations relating to trucking. Seeing that Acme was in compliance with these regulations and managing Alpha Cargo Motor

Express, Inc. were the responsibilities of the traffic manager. This department maintained tariffs (truck and rail), negotiated rate contracts, and kept up lease agreements for rail spurs and land.[87]

Good financial controls are vital to any successful business. Acme has, throughout its history, paid attention to the accounting and customer credit functions. Acme lost part of its autonomy to handle these functions when it became a part of a diversified conglomerate, but regained most of these functions in 1983 when Justin Industries began to decentralize. In 1982, Mr. Dennis Knautz came to Acme from McDonald Transit Associate, Inc. where he had been the chief financial officer. As Acme's new controller he supervised the credit department, payroll, accounting, data processing operations, management information systems, internal communications, and general office administration.

The BRIX Computer was another important system Acme developed. Started in 1983, to tighten up and speed up communication between various offices, this modern marvel of computer technology took five years to complete and then was upgraded in 1989. The system was installed in a separate building a few hundred feet from the central office building in Fort Worth. The BRIX building was specially designed to meet requirements for computer security and environment. Completely enclosed with no windows, the 4,000-square-foot room houses the system and is environmentally controlled to exact humidity and temperature. It also has backup phone lines, power sources, and its own very extensive fire control system. Essentially BRIX is a very sophisticated network that ties every Acme office, plant, and manager together. Programmed to generate any type of report managers require, in seconds one office can communicate to another, information which in the past could take days. For example, John Koch could find out in a couple of minutes the exact status of brick in any kiln at any plant and tell exactly how many brick would be ready the next day.[88]

Conceived and started by Ed Stout who wanted an electronic system to enter orders and to identify inventories quickly, research and development on such a system began in 1979, with the ultimate aim of replacing the old cumbersome order entry system that had caused some customer difficulty. The system at first was used to improve shipment scheduling and proved its worth in that function. By 1984, BRIX was the most comprehensive, on-line computerized information system in the industry, and was operational in Acme's Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas facilities. In addition, by then, basic customer order, inventory, and billing controls had been made a part of the system. Planned development of BRIX continued

Acme's management team examine the new BRIX computer communication system. (Left to right): Harrold Melton, VP-General Sales Manager; John Koch, General Production Manager; Edward L. Stout Jr., President; and Dennis Knautz, Controller.

over the next year with five new locations brought on-line and 92 percent of plant production and 80 percent of sales office volume tied into it. Completed in 1987, BRIX provided a fully automated delivery ticket/invoice system that reduced customer billing time by up to a week, and helped improve turnover in receivables.[89]

After Knautz was made vice president of finance in October 1988, he supervised the upgrading of this information function, adding a new state-of-the-art mainframe computer. Fully operational by 1989, the improved unit, using a Unisys 220/402 computer, easily handles Acme's increased sales volume and further streamlines customer service and billing operations. Any sales office or plant, with authorization, can communicate with any other part of the system instantaneously from the file.[90]

By 1990, Terry Hampton had joined Acme as controller and Jim Crabtree, who started with the company in the accounting department in 1968, was the assistant controller. Jerry Slate, an Acme veteran of almost three decades, managed the credit department, and Bobby Allen, with twenty years' company experience was computer operations manager. Allen's department provides information about sales, production, transportation, and inventories to Acme management. The BRIX system was supervised by Mike Bowen, the MIS manager, and Kevin Story had responsibility for programs system development. Sharon D. Schultz was administrative assistant to Ed Stout and Dennis Knautz in addition to her duties as publisher of the periodic company newsletter, the *Acme Brick Press*.[91]

By any common measure, the Acme sales and marketing arm succeeded in the 1980s. Aided by strengthened marketing techniques and stronger internal support, Acme's sales and marketing group increased the company's market share during each year. At the end of the decade, in spite of losing its position as the number one brick producer in the United States, Acme retained its position as the number one American-owned brick producer and was positioned to meet the challenges of the 1990s.


HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY

15

Facing a New Century

Left: One of Acme's 100th birthday parties was held in the Plano Acme Brick, Tile and More store in 1991.

To many company officials, the last year of Acme's first century served as a transition from the agonizing 1980s, since the early months of 1990 gave appearances of presenting an economic turnaround and worldwide political change for the better. So these next few pages will review the position of the conglomerate, as well as the brick company. Not only events at Acme in 1990 are the concern here, but also what officials viewed as corporate prospects and problems for the future.

As Acme Brick Company solidified its gains of the last decade and prepared to finish its centennial year, world conditions changed drastically. While the United States government wrestled with continuing economic problems and rapidly changing geopolitics, another crisis in the Middle East drew the nation's attention. At this same time, Justin Industries was threatened for the first time by a hostile takeover attempt. In spite of this distraction, its corporate leadership remained essentially the same, and the conglomerate registered progress in all its divisions. Acme Brick used 1990 to consolidate its advances, to move forward, to once more consider expansion, and to plan for the future.

A study of Justin Industries' activities over the preceding decade reveals some noteworthy facts and trends. A glance at chart 15.1 shows that although 1982 was Justin Industries' lowest profit year, due to significant losses in the footwear industry, that year was not to set a pattern for the decade. Indeed, as the months passed, the footwear segment regrouped and, by 1989, had become the major profit contributor, thereby supplanting the building materials group, whose profits continued to fall due to declines in the construction market.

Although the industrial equipment division lost ground in 1986 and 1987, followed by the building materials group in 1989, these cumulative losses did not equal those of 1982. Even with the downturned market and declining profits of the 1986–1989 period, the building materials group still accounted for just over 60 percent of

the corporate profits of the 1980s. Acme's sales declined during only one of those years, but it still made a slim profit, and continued its market penetration for the ninth straight year. This success for the brickmaker would not have been possible had it not been for Acme's marketing activity and resolute stand against cheap, half-fired imported brick. Indeed, every brickmaker in the region would have been devastated if such imports had continued.

Over the decade, Justin Industries ventured into several business areas in which it lacked knowledge or experience, and, as a result, had to dispose of a number of acquisitions in less than opportune times. Mega Equipment, Standard Machine Works, and some concrete operations were examples of these. On the other hand, the conglomerate's purchases of compatible footwear operations such as Nacona and Chippawah had been profitable. While the purchase of Tony Lama Boot Co., of El Paso, and Tradewinds Technologies appeared to be a good fit for the conglomerate, they had not been operated by Justin Industries long enough at the time of writing to be adequately evaluated.

Finally, in order to control debt levels, Justin Industries held capital expenditures at low levels after 1985 and temporarily put a hold on plans for expanding its brickmaking capacity. Acme, however, developed plans to expand immediately when housing starts picked up or to capitalize on strategic market opportunities when these appeared. So most capital improvements that Acme Brick made in the 1980s, except for new plant construction, were paid out of operating profits of the brick company. The San Felipe and Tulsa plants, however, were financed with industrial revenue bonds. While Justin held the long-term debt of the conglomerate at around $70 million most of the decade, this debt never exceeded working capital. Most of the time, working capital actually exceeded long-term debt by 10 percent but did reach a high of 66 percent and a low of 1.9 percent.[1]

Through the third quarter of 1990, Justin Industries registered gains in all its businesses except the concrete block concerns. The Iraqi attack on Kuwait in August caused Ceramic Cooling Towers (CCT) to suspend operations on its projects in Kuwait and to write these off as losses. Justin's footwear operations expanded with the purchase of Tony Lama Boots on October 15, and Justin Industries sales exceeded the third quarter of 1989 by $535,000. Acme's sales ran ahead for that same period by 12 percent.[2]

The corporate board of directors remained a stable and reliable team throughout the 1980s. In 1990, the Justin Industries board of directors was made up of Justin, Glaze, Friedman, Needham, D. J. Kelly, Gearhardt, Roach, Tucker, and Mussolino. Ernest Blank

had left the company after seven years as a board member and chief operating officer. Mr. Justin was appointed to replace him as president of Justin Industries, and Mr. J. T. Dickinson was given the newly created position of executive vice president.[3] Mr. Marvin Gearhardt, Dr. William Tucker, and Mr. John V. Roach, appointed in the early 1980s, remained on the Justin board. In 1986, when Richard C. Newkirk retired due to health problems, Mr. D. J. Kelly, who had served as corporate counsel for many years, replaced him. At the same time Mr. Joseph R. Mussolino, who in 1986 was president and C.E.O. of Republic Bank Corporation (Dallas), also became a director.[4]

All Justin Industries board members were civic-minded and active in their communities. Six of the nine board members were also affiliated with Texas Christian University. Besides Chancellor Tucker, Justin, Friedman, Kelly, Gearhardt, and Roach served on the TCU Board of Trustees.[5] Mr. Glaze served on the Southern Methodist University board and Mr. Newkirk, who died in 1990, was a TCU graduate and contributor to his Alma Mater. Mr. Bayard Friedman had been chairman of the TCU Board from 1979 to 1990, when he asked not to be elected again. So his colleagues elected Mr. John V. Roach as his replacement.[6]

Rightfully, board members felt that they were conducting Justin Industries' affairs in a competent manner as part of a dedicated team. But late in 1989 and throughout 1990, they came under unexpected pressure to sell all or parts of the corporation. An outside group led by Perry Sutherland of Kansas City, Missouri, and New York investor Barry Rosenstein, a former associate of corporate raider Asher Edelman, began buying Justin Industries stock during the summer of 1989 under the guise of Choctaw Securities and Reatta Partners. By August this group held 5 percent of the company's stock. At a meeting with Justin in October, Sutherland apparently offered to buy all or some of the Justin Industries divisions; and he specifically wanted the Acme Brick Company.[7] Then in November, the Choctaw group filed a report with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) that the partnership owned 6.2 percent of Justin's stock and intended to buy out the business through a "non-negotiated transaction, proxy contract, (or) tender offer."[8] Between November 20 and December 19 the would-be owners boosted their shareholdings to 8.1 percent, paying approximately $23.50 a share for their 365,450 shares.[9]

Shortly after New Year's Day 1990, Justin announced that his corporation would continue to pursue negotiations initiated on a merger or buy-out of the less-profitable Tony Lama Boot Company. Investor perception of this and Sutherland's attempt to

Justin Industries Board of Directors, 1990.

take over, caused Justin Industries' stock price to soar 60 percent in just about one year to $23.50 and split 3-for-2. But as the *Forbes* writer pointed out, Mr. Justin was in for the long haul, and a takeover would not be likely since Justin owned 21 percent of the company and another 21 percent was in the hands of employees, insiders, relatives, and friends.[10]

As the March annual meeting approached, Justin's directors prepared to meet the challenge that Choctaw presented. In February, the directors awarded the 73-year-old Mr. Justin a five-year contract, a clear signal that they had no intentions of surrendering. Within three weeks, the Sutherland-Rosenstein partnership formally offered to buy Justin Industries and raised the specter of selling the company piecemeal.[11] Justin considered the $18.50 a share offer made on March 7 to be too low. On March 8, Justin acknowledged the receipt of Choctaw's letter and responded that the board might consider this proposal at its March shareholders' meeting. Justin also pointed out to the Sutherland group that the board had developed long-term strategies and plans that did not include selling the brick business, much less the entire company, during a down cycle.[12] Then, the next day, Justin sent a letter to all the conglomerate's employees in which he related the content of his reply to Choctaw and offered his opinion that the price was too low. Justin also requested employees to ignore rumors and to continue to provide the best products and services for their customers.[13]

On March 24, Justin's directors considered, then rejected, the bid from the Missouri group since Sutherland did not appear to have

the financing and no one on the board was in favor of the offer. Stockholders expressed agreement with the board. One stockholder was quoted as saying that he felt the potential of the company was unlimited, especially with the set of directors and the president it had.[14] But on March 29, the Choctaw-Reatta partnership filed a statement with the SEC that it would reconsider its offer and could opt to begin a takeover bid that might be "unfriendly."[15] On May 16, the Sutherland group repeated its offer and requested a copy of the Justin strategic plan, minutes of the past two years' board meetings, financial statements for all operating companies, and details on all "golden parachute" contracts for management personnel.[16]

In response to this renewed Choctaw effort, Justin filed a suit contending that Choctaw was not a normal investor group but rather a group of corporate raiders and therefore should not be given the same rights as other investors. Justin's suit also asked the court to rescind Choctaw's stock purchases and to order them to refrain from further purchases of Justin stock.[17] Then, in June, Sutherland filed a counter suit seeking to invalidate the director's election and severance agreements, and to force another election.[18] The outcome of these suits and counter suits was still pending in December 1990, but in the meantime, Justin upped the price Sutherland would have to pay if he took over.

John S. Justin Jr., President of Justin Industries, 1991.

As previously mentioned, Justin agreed to purchase Tony Lama, another boot company that had also been the object of a less-than-favorable takeover attempt that had collapsed in 1989. Considered a "good fit" by most investors,[19] the Choctaw group called the move "astonishing" and sought a stockholder vote on the purchase, since they now owned over one million shares of Justin Industries.[20] Nonetheless, Justin Industries completed the merger in October 1990, adding Lama's and Larry Mahan's brands to its boot line, and boosting Justin's market share by about 20 percent.[21] Tied into this deal, however, was $34 million in Lama debt and a $9 per share price on Lama stock which brought Justin's total purchase to about $52 million.[22]

As the "cat and mouse" game between Justin and Choctaw continued into 1991, Justin's directors and management were confident that they had made the correct decisions. The maneuvers were little

more than a distraction, and the corporation continued to prosper, since Choctaw apparently "didn't know what they were getting into when they started their move."[23] At the very least, it was the fervent hope of Acme Brick Company employees that the company would not be sold off to a group who, in turn, would sell Acme to a foreign-owned corporation. For Acme employees were proud of being part of the largest American-owned brickmaker and looked forward to an early favorable, resolution of the problem. Ultimately their faith in Acme's board and Chairman Justin was justified since the controversy was decided in Acme's favor by early 1991. On February 19, 1991, Richard J. Savitz, Justin's controller, announced that a settlement had been reached by which Justin Industries paid $1.65 million legal fees to avoid further litigation. The Choctaw group pledged to desist its takeover efforts and sold its 12 percent stockholdings to Texas investors. Acme could then get back to its business without this destraction.

Acme's old company store in 1990 was used for storage.

Economic conditions presented a mixed picture for the Acme Brick Company in 1990, with some areas showing improvement. Interest rates remained relatively low and the prime rate stable. Population grew in most of the Acme region, and the area's banking and savings and loan problems appeared to have passed their worst stages. Even the experts could reach no consensus on whether an impending recession was real or not. Likewise a key indicator for the brickmaker was also unclear, since housing starts were up in some of its areas and continued downward in others. And the wildly fluctuating fuel costs brought on by trouble in the Middle East became yet another factor affecting Acme's profitability.

Like the rest of the world, Acme expected so-called peace dividends as communism fell in Europe, only to witness these hopes dashed by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. Most American industries had looked to a positive government response to domestic needs and the coming economic unification of Europe. But the U.S. government, preoccupied with the possibility of a serious conflict with Iraq, devoted little priority to domestic issues, except the upcoming general election.

In spite of 1990 being a soft year for housing starts, Acme Brick Company did quite well. Brick shipments were up from 1989,

reaching 563 MBE, much as John Koch predicted.[24] Expansion of the San Felipe plant got underway in the fall and was scheduled for completion by the first quarter of 1991. This expansion would bring the production of SFP to 100 million brick annually. This planned expansion called for increasing dryer capacity, lengthening the kiln, and adjusting the speed of moving the brick through the kiln. Acme also made minor improvements at several other plants to accommodate the production of some new product lines.[25]

Sales and shipments were up about 12 percent as Acme improved its market share for the eleventh straight year. In some of its home territory, Acme shipped as much as 75 percent of the brick sold, and the company's marketing strategy appeared to be paying off for "Tile and More" and brokerage sales.[26] This progress, along with retirement of some key personnel, caused shifts within the sales and marketing group of Acme Brick.

The changes started in March, when Fayette Ellis retired after forty-one years in sales and marketing work for Acme. Mr. Ellis, a graduate of the University of Houston with a degree in civil engineering, had held jobs as Houston district sales manager, and regional sales manager for both South Texas and the Southern region. He had been director of various marketing activities since 1978. Few people were as knowledgeable about sales in the brick industry, and he definitely would be missed. His tasks were assumed by Mr. Bill Seidel, who held a bachelor's and a master's degree in marketing from the University of Texas and West Texas State. Seidel had worked under Melton and Ellis since 1983 as marketing projects coordinator. He was ably assisted by Hannah Farenkopf, who tabulated marketing statistics, arranged for distribution of literature to sales locations, maintained product descriptions, input all price list changes into data processing, and generally handled various requests for information from the field sales offices. Then, in August, Melton assigned Bill Hurlburt the South Texas region, enabling Bob Stover to concentrate his efforts on the northeast Texas region.[27]

In September, another key man in Acme's sales structure announced his retirement, effective January 1, 1991. This valuable regional manager, Bob Marks, mentioned several times in this book, had been a sales engineer, brokerage manager, general sales manager, and a regional sales manager. He was employed by Acme most of the last forty years. His Midwest region was split, effective with his retirement, into a Mideast region and a Midwest region. The new Mideast sales region was directed by David Martin from Springfield, Missouri and the new Midwest sales region was managed by Jay Cox.[28]

Both new regional managers had held important sales positions with Acme when these promotions were announced. David Martin was born in Springfield, Missouri, but educated at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Prior to his appointment Martin had been an Acme sales trainee, sales representative, architectural salesman, and a district manager. His new region, centered in Missouri, and included Springfield, Joplin, St. Louis, and Kansas City. With this new arrangement, Mr. Jay Cox, who had been a television news anchorman prior to working for Acme, assumed his new duties as regional sales manager for the Midwest region. Before becoming regional sales manager, this native Oklahoman had been a sales representative and a district sales manager. His new region included Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and Wichita while he continued to maintain an office in Oklahoma City.[29]

A 1989 Acme advertisement—"Acme Brick, the best thing to have around your house," seems to have struck a good note with the public and marketing. This slogan has been used for nearly twenty years.

In 1990, marketing continued to focus on popularizing brick, trying to present a time-proven product in such a way as to be perceived by the public as new, exciting, and beneficial. The company continued to promote the Acme brand name through advertising and other marketing commitments as in the recent past, but expanded radio and television efforts. During the year, Acme adopted plans to make 1991 a very creative marketing year with special emphasis on its centennial status. Every Acme plant and sales office scheduled celebrations and ceremonies, and a public relations firm (Ashley and Taylor) was hired to assist in promoting these centennial events. The company's employees looked forward from 1990 to the start of a new year filled with memorable occasions and positive happenings.[30]

As Acme leaders looked to the future, they individually saw a number of distinct challenges but, nonetheless, felt much the same way about them. Harrold Melton put it best when he said, "In the

long range our greatest challenges are not new." From his viewpoint, the brick industry "has not worked hard enough to sell the use of brick" but must do so in the future. Melton also felt that the brick industry would not only have to find new products but also expand the application for existing ones, which might include some form of brick panel manufacturing. Further, he saw the need to develop and train qualified brick masons, a shortage of whom could become critical.[31]

In the short term, John Koch saw the problem of protecting the environment and air quality as major challenges and noted Acme's efforts in this regard. Production plants had already installed scrubbers to clean their emissions and had also done some engineering work exploring the possibility of converting old clay pits into manageable land fills and usable lake sites. For long-range challenges, he saw two major concerns that production had to address using 1990s technology: the expansion of architectural brick options and the production of match work for older buildings. The latter problem was one for which Research and Development had already registered great progress.[32]

The major short-term problem, according to President Stout, was for the company to make the right decisions during the down cycles, so that sales were maintained at high enough levels to keep plants running at an acceptable output. In other words, manage a balancing act between controlling plant costs and building excess inventory in a buyers' market that depressed prices. In the long term, Stout saw, like Melton, that the main challenges were not new, and that the company was well along on its strategic plan to meet them. These challenges were progress and geographic expansion. And Acme's first step in this regard was to secure its position in its home territory—its six-state region. Other steps, as Stout pointed out, required modernizing the company's production facilities, upgrading its sales yards and distribution centers, while being sure to take care of the territory where Acme operated.[33] Once these measures were accomplished, Acme would be in a position to expand.

In a nutshell, all of Acme's leaders saw expansion as their greatest challenge and felt that Acme was ready to meet this headon in the near future.

16

Conclusion

The Acme Brick Company had its origins in the founding of Acme Pressed Brick Company by George Ellis Bennett, near Millsap, Texas, in 1891. From a single kiln built on Rock Creek, it eventually evolved into the giant Acme Brick Company, which changed its name to First Worth Corporation in 1968, and later became a major division of Justin Industries. Acme Pressed Brick was the embryo from which the present colossus of the face brick industry grew. Even in this brief study, several clear areas of evolution and change are apparent.

Above: Rock Creek in 1990 where George Bennett started his first brick plant.

Left: The Acme Brick tower located in the University Center of Tulsa, Oklahoma. (Artist, Mara Smith and Architect, HTB, Inc.) This sculpture has received recognition across the United States.

Bennett founded Acme Pressed Brick shortly after the Texas frontier closed, just as the state was beginning to industrialize. Although, from its earliest days the growth of the company paralleled closely the growth of the region, Acme became a leader in its industry. More than establishing his brick company and the town of Bennett, which grew into a sizable community, George Bennett applied his own nineteenth-century capitalistic principles to create traditions and practices that persisted into the 1990s. His ideas concerning business ethics, marketing, plant expansion, product variation, structural adaptation, sound finance, fair labor practices, facility improvement, aggressive competition, customer relations, and firm leadership originated in the first twenty years of the company's history.

The Acme code of ethics reflected the personality of George Bennett. This code became the unwritten rule of the new Acme Brick Company under his son, Walter R. Bennett. In turn, J. E. Fender, who first translated the code into written form, made it the core of his operational procedure. Finally, these ideas were adopted as a written code in 1964 and placed in every Acme plant and sales office.

Over the last century, Acme has continued to expand its product lines, which at first consisted of only one common and one face brick, both manufactured by the dry-press method. By 1900, Acme was making several types of ornamental and face brick of varying grades or degrees of hardness. Following the Denton merger, the two plants produced at least eighteen types of brick by the stiff-mud and dry-press methods. During the 1920s, Acme's plants made hundreds of types of face brick, as well as tile and paving brick. Then, in the 1930s, the company added a variety of tile and refractories to its product lines. At mid-century, Acme further broadened its product offerings, including at different times soft-mud brick, hollow building tile, acid brick, ceramic cooling tower tile, and concrete products, in addition to face brick. In the last twenty years, Acme has added not only hundreds of brick shapes, styles, and textures but has also developed brick sculpture and brick building technology. In that same time, the corporation has expanded its brokerage operations to include retailing tile and other building materials.

The Rock Creek site where Bennett took his first clay samples in 1890.

In its century of existence, Acme has spread its influence through purchases, mergers, construction, and alliances. The first expansion program began in 1892, when George Bennett bought the Texas Stone Company and the Lakota Merchandising Company. Vertical organization saved Acme when Bennett became a partner in a coal mining company. In 1912, Acme completed its first true merger with the absorption of the Denton Press Brick Company. In its fourth decade, Acme built facilities in Arkansas and Oklahoma and purchased the assets of the Fort Smith Brick Company, Arkansas Brick and Tile, Wichita Falls Brick and Tile, and the American Brick and Tile Company. Later, Acme also bought Bridgeport Brick, Western Brick, Bishop Brick, the Garrison plant (Athens Brick Company), Tri-State Brick, Frizzell Brick, Buffalo Brick, Great Bend Brick, Fraser Brick, United Brick, Malvern Brick and Tile, Seminole Tile, Jamestown, and Dixie Brick Companies. None of these purchases was forced; most of them resulted from offers to sell initiated by the companies themselves. Finally, Acme bought six concrete companies in 1968 in order to diversify its product lines, merged with Justin Boot, and formed into a conglomerate, which its owners renamed Justin Industries in 1972.

Many friendly alliances were formed over the years, the most valuable ones being with the Texas Pacific system, Elgin Standard Brick Company, and Endicott Clay Products. The valuable alliance

with the Elgin Standard Company lasted until it was purchased by the Butler Brick Company in 1965. Subsequently, Elgin's successor, Elgin-Butler Brick, and Acme continued this friendly relationship, which resulted in the 1991 purchase of the Elgin face brick plant. The unwritten agreement between Acme and Endicott Clay Products, struck in 1958 with a handshake, continues to benefit both companies today since Acme markets Endicott products throughout Acme's territory and in the Tile and More stores.

The blending shed at Bennett in 1991.

Acme has continually maintained an effective plant improvement program. The first program began when George Bennett built Acme's second plant in 1894, across the tracks from his first one, and experimented with the use of slack and pea coal for burning brick. In 1912, Acme began a shift to stiff-mud production from the dry-press method, which proved to be a very wise move. Then, in the 1920s, Acme started phasing out uneconomical and out-of-date production methods, installed electrical machinery and began using natural gas for fuel. Alert to newer technologies, Acme officials built the company's first tunnel kiln in 1928 and, in the 1960s, built two highly automated plants (Perla and Denton) that utilized this method. Since tunnel kilns lend themselves to automation, the company later built several other such facilities there and automated the plants at Ouachita, Oklahoma City, Tulsa, and San Felipe. Acme also developed very efficient periodic kilns, which were utilized at about one-third of its plants.

Other manufacturing operations also changed for the better. In 1891, most everything was done by human or animal power, but in the course of time mechanical devices, such as electric transfer cars and forklifts, replaced wheelbarrows and carts inside the factory. Electrical machines, first used in the 1920s, today do most of the work at the plants. At the highly automated San Felipe plant, for example, human hands do not touch the brick until it is handled by a mason at the job site. Plants at Tulsa, Perla, Ouachita, and Oklahoma City are approaching this level of automation.

At other plants, starting in the 1950s, forklifts revolutionized transfer, stacking, burning, and loading. Mining operations continually improved from the days when men shoveled the raw material into mule-drawn carts and hauled it to the grinders. In the 1920s, Acme installed rail transportation from pit to plant and began using shale planers, tractors, and draglines to obtain its clay. Eventually, Acme phased out these in favor of dozers, dump trucks, and huge self-

loading earth movers. This progress in the plants was reflected in 1990 production figures that showed that Acme, with 50 percent more plants and employees, could produce 400 percent more brick than it did in the 1920s at a fraction of the cost in fuel.

Fifty years of Brick transportation evolution:

Acme's shipping, too, became more efficient. Trucking, adopted in the early 1920s to supplement rail transport, gradually supplanted all but the most distant deliveries of brick. Forklift loading and packaging, introduced in the 1950s and 1960s, revolutionized shipping, saving time, money, and breakage. By the 1970s Acme's new automatic devices enabled one man to load and unload a truck faster than a crew of a dozen men could have done formerly with less opportunity for damage to the brick.

Top: A 1949 experiment with a "track" hydraulic system for loading brick.

Bottom: By 1956 the track system had evolved into a more efficient system completely loading the truck trailer (two views).

Marketing expanded to match production in its output. A century ago, Acme marketed its products in only two major cities—Fort Worth and Dallas—both of which were located on one rail line in North Texas. Although George Bennett formed many valuable alliances and managed to sell some large orders, Acme remained a one-man sales force until 1910. Then, Root, W. R. Bennett, Fender, and Fife began selling Acme products throughout the state. Gradually, the company added other salesmen and opened more offices until, by the end of the 1920s, Acme was shipping brick nationwide. Following the Great Depression, it took nearly twenty years before this network was reestablished, but Acme shared in the boom that followed World War II. By the 1960s Acme had developed formal marketing plans that, when implemented, enabled its sales to reach new peaks. By 1990, national and international business were once more important company sales factors.

Acme's market expansion outside Texas started in Shreveport, Louisiana, spread into Oklahoma and Arkansas, and included Kansas and Missouri by the 1920s. By 1971, Acme was selling more bricks in these states than any other company, its market share ranging from 15 percent in some states to 65 percent in others. In its home state of Texas, Acme encountered some of its stiffest competition because of the number of domestic producers and cheap foreign adobe imports from south of the border. At one point, in the 1980s, Acme marketed around 10 percent of the total amount of face brick sold in the nation—more brick than any other company.

By the 1960s, Acme had abandoned relying largely on reputation to sell its products and had begun expending more energy

and money on promotional devices in support of its sales efforts. In 1971, however, the company changed its tactics and returned to advertising primarily in professional magazines and journals. In the late 1970s, Acme officials, recognizing marketing as a most challenging area, made a more consistent effort to continue formal advertising and promotional programs. This commitment has helped Acme increase its market share every year since 1980.

Financially, Acme has weathered many crises. Originally chartered with a capital of only $52,000, the business net worth was $10 million in 1970. At the present time, it has at least several times that amount in plant facilities alone. Cautious internal and external policy, together with aggressive marketing, account for this success. Well established by 1920, the company increased its assets until the Great Depression, when it showed an annual operating loss for the only time in its history. But Acme survived this catastrophe because, in spite of forced cutbacks in personnel and expenditures, it was financially sound, and had not overextended itself. During the twelve-year recovery period that followed, Acme paid dividends each year, in spite of the fact that sales did not reach pre-1929 levels until 1946.

In the 1960s internal improvement programs and mergers increased the company debt by millions of dollars. After struggling with the problems posed by the 1968 diversification program and the formation of the conglomerate, Acme (First Worth Corporation) found for the first time in its financial history that its debt exceeded its surplus, and that its working capital had shrunk to a dangerous low. Alarmed by the prospect of losing his family business, Justin Boot Company, John S. Justin assumed leadership of the First Worth Corporation in 1969. By suspending dividend payments in 1970 and cutting operational expenses, Justin's reorganized company reversed the trend in time to take advantage of the 1971 construction boom. From 1971 to 1991, Acme has been a part of an operating division of Justin Industries, which produced more than 50 percent of Justin's net sales until 1989. This division did not have an operating loss until 1987, but, as a company within Justin Industries, Acme has never lost money in spite of adverse construction cycles.

Top: Acme delivery truck parked outside the company headquarters building in 1963. Note the tandem trailer, brick packaging system, and crane to off load the brick.

Middle: In 1975 Acme used the fixed crane system that basically exists today.

Bottom: Acme truck at Denton in 1992 (from the Garrison plant). This truck has a newer lift system and solid sideboards that store under the trailer bed. These boards are used to stabilize the load.

Acme has been fortunate in that most of its plant purchases proved to be profitable. Many plants, considered losers by their former owners, were turned into money-makers by the Acme team. The really regrettable financial errors were made when the company purchased businesses about which Acme officials were not knowledgeable. A strong auditing and credit control system, introduced in the 1920s, and improved upon ever since has kept internal losses remarkably low.

A view of the Bennett plant in 1991.

Financial success, which has fostered continuous growth, brought the need for more office space and equipment. Acme started with a one-room frame shack at Bennett but built a more suitable office building there a short while later. The next move was to Fort Worth, where Acme rented space on Monroe Street for five years before moving to the old First National Bank Building in 1912. Then, in 1919, the company rented space in the Neil P. Anderson Building where it remained until 1951. In that year Acme built its structure on Seventh Street. The general office force has increased from one staff employee to more than one hundred. The company added modern office equipment over the years and greatly strengthened communications. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Acme began making use of the telegraph and the telephone. At first, a single telephone served the entire organization; a century later, Acme's central office was completely equipped with telephones, personal computers, 1-800 service, facsimile machines, and the very modern, computerized BRIX system.

Growth and economic problems brought several major administrative and structural changes. Originally, a two-man partnership organized as a corporation, Acme's first structure centered around one man: George E. Bennett. Upon the death of his partner, Bennett started training his son, Walter, to run the company, but died himself before accomplishing this goal. So the stockholders selected one of their own number, Ralph Root, as chief executive, to serve until Bennett's son was able to take control. Eventually, Walter Bennett became president and formed the Acme Brick Company as a Texas-owned and chartered business in 1916. The organization that emerged under the guiding hands of the major

shareholders, Bryce and Bennett, was one in which the board and operating officers were almost synonymous. This pattern remained unchanged for more than forty years (1891–1935). With W. R. Bennett's death in 1935, however, structural innovations were adopted. For a time, a professional management team was established and the company was divided into operational divisions. When Fender became president, the top company managers became vice presidents, and then board members. By 1948, the cycle was complete, and the structure returned essentially to what it had been in 1920. At Fender's retirement, the organization was completely overhauled. At the recommendation of experts, the company adopted a line organization and made very few changes until D. O. Tomlin came to Acme in 1961.

Tomlin revamped the sales and production departments, which were placed under a number of managers and their assistants. By 1965, however, he had returned to a system similar to the staff organization of J. E. Fender. But, at the same time, Tomlin took a number of steps designed to decentralize the company. This was carried out in less than two years, just in time to add to the confusion engendered by the moves to transform the company into a conglomerate. Decentralization had been attempted too soon, for the newly created First Worth Corporation required an entirely different type of internal structure if it were to honor commitments to the annexed concerns. Ceramic Cooling Tower, Acme Brick Company, the Justin Companies, and Louisiana Concrete each had its own president, while D. O. Tomlin presided over the entire structure as president of the First Worth Corporation. Board size decreased in 1968, in proportion to the number who had opposed the move to become a conglomerate, that is to say by about 50 percent.

Tomlin's decentralization did not work. Something of a victim of bad timing, First Worth Corporation expected capital for diversification to be generated subsequent to its stock being listed on a major exchange. But this listing was not forthcoming. A depressed construction market and poor earnings squelched these hopes, and along with them the proposed stock offering.

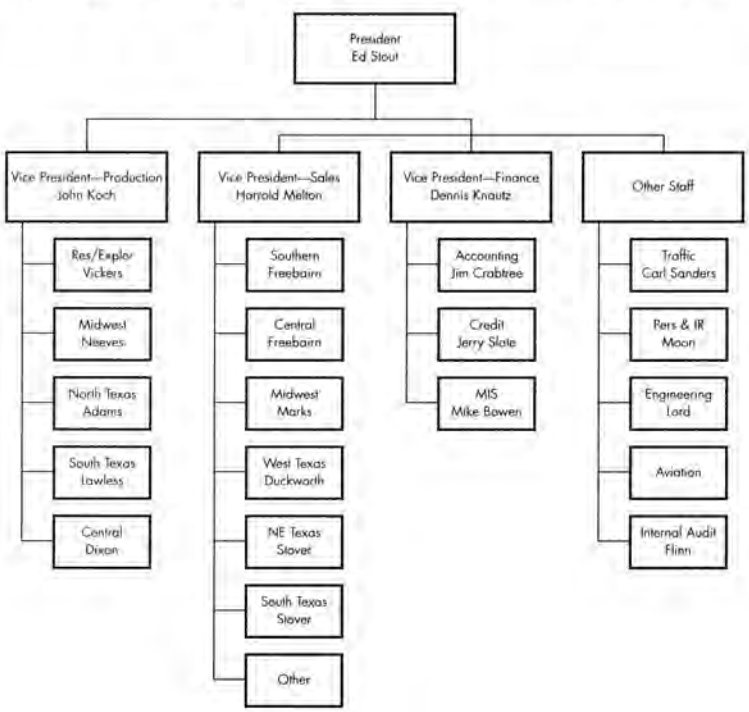
So Tomlin's new structure lasted less than six months. When Justin assumed leadership, he consolidated all but one of these executive positions under his own direct management. He centralized the functions of the building products companies under Acme Brick and Louisiana Concrete Company, making Justin Industries a working service unit for all the subsidiaries. By granting more autonomy to each operating division through decentralization in 1984, the company gained more efficiency and flexibility.

Good leadership has been a tradition with Acme Brick Company. The company has had ten presidents, and their tenure has averaged ten years each. The company has been fortunate in that all its leaders have been honest, sincere men who were civic-minded, as well as being good businessmen. Each man in his own way provided strong leadership and helped shape the destiny of the company. Seven of the ten were native Texans; all had business experience; and six of the ten had experience in the brick business prior to assuming leadership of Acme Brick.

Every one of these executives faced challenging problems and difficulties. George Bennett founded the company, overcoming several market and production handicaps; Ralph Root held the company together during a trying period; Walter R. Bennett led it to greatness; William Bryce and J. E. Fender piloted Acme through the depression—its severest economic test; Fender guided the company to recovery and prosperity; Neill Boldrick started intensive modernization; D. O. Tomlin greatly modernized the company and created a conglomerate; John S. Justin made the conglomerate work; and Edward Stout formed a team that rebuilt and expanded the company in spite of two decades of shrinking markets and consolidations.

Much of the credit for Acme's success was due to the teamwork, diligence, loyalty, and devotion of its employees over the years. Although this history has emphasized the leaders to some extent

Acme Brick Company's Officers/ Executives organization chart.



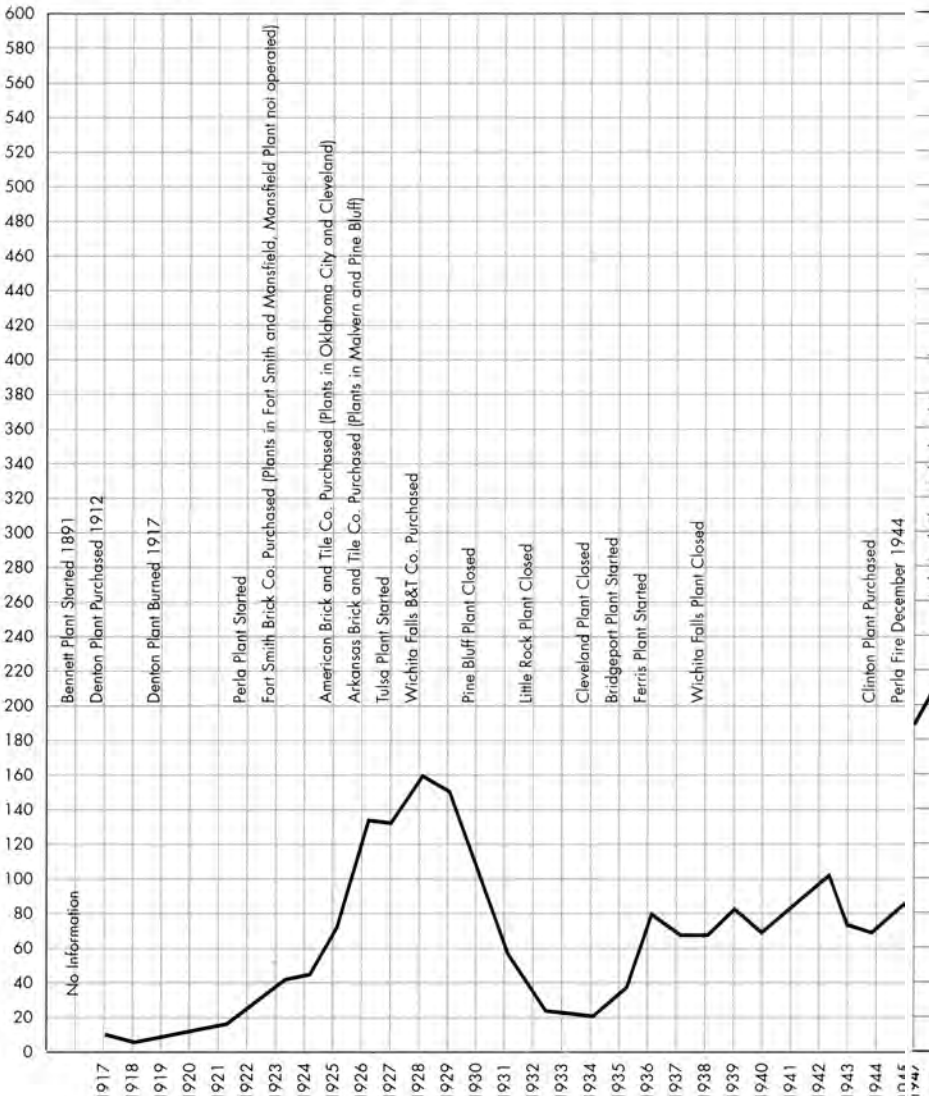
because they have been a major directing force, many employees also have, in their way, made notable contributions to the Acme organization and spirit. Among them were John Young, who swam the Brazos River each day to get to work; John A. Elders, an orphan, who started as a screen beater and eventually became a superintendent and regional director; Dwight Alexander and Bennett Abercrombie, who were first employed as laborers in a brickyard and later held responsibilities in important company positions; A. B. Kelly, who refused some retirement pay because he had not worked full time from 1891 to 1893; Louise Abnot, who retired, but came back and worked double shifts when needed; C. E. Dunaway who fought the unions, but fought fair and earned their respect; Senon Amador who spent sixty years as a laborer and truck driver raising six sons who worked for Acme; John Emberlain, the 92-year-old retired pit worker whose greatest pride was his company pin; and all the dozens of people who have worked for Acme for forty years or more. That three and four generations of the same families have worked for Acme testifies to a spirit of mutual trust and good relations between employer and employee.

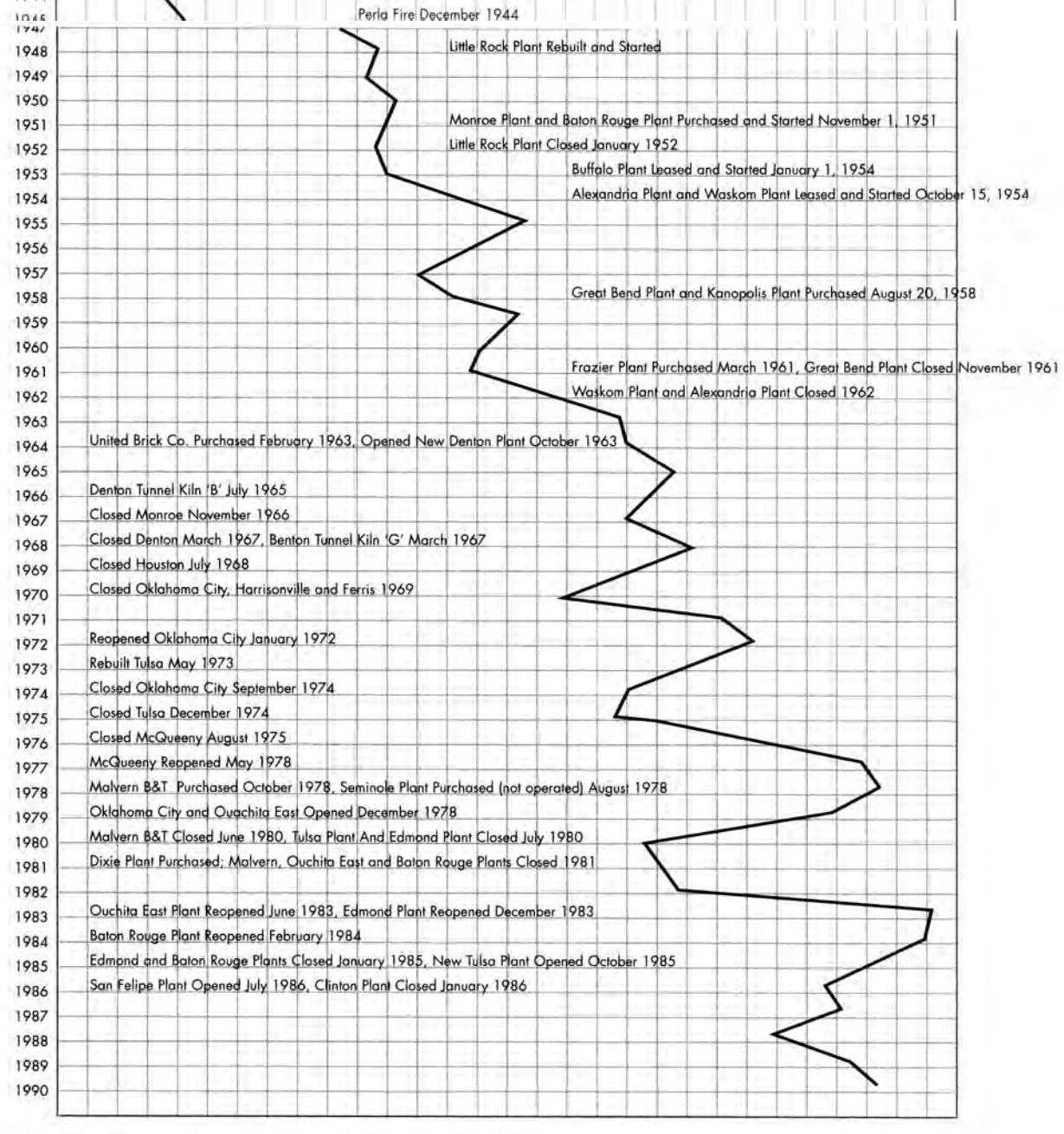
Brick is made to last. This dramatic alcove at the Southern Methodist University campus in Dallas was built in 1940.

Working together Acme's labor and management changed the face of the Southwest in the last one hundred years. In that period Acme produced and sold more than twenty billion bricks. There is not a prominent city or town in the region on which Acme has not left its imprint. Hotels, office buildings, factories, churches, schools, and homes of the nation are more comfortable, more attractive, and more durable because they are constructed of Acme brick. This is a record in which the company can take pride.

The future of America's colossus in clay is as promising as its past has been bright, for Acme has the personnel, talent, organization, and capability that could well make it prosper for another century. Acme's founder could never have envisioned the size and type of corporation, let alone the national status, his brick company enjoyed at the end of its first century. If it were possible for him to reply when asked, "What do you think of Acme today, George?" Bennett's response could be no less than the broad, approving smile he used when courting Octavia.

Appendix A:
Brick Shipped in Millions, 1917–1990




Perla Fire December 1944
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Little Rock Plant Rebuilt and Started
Monroe Plant and Baton Rouge Plant Purchased and Started November 1, 1951
Little Rock Plant Closed January 1952
Buffalo Plant Leased and Started January 1, 1954
Alexandria Plant and Waskom Plant Leased and Started October 15, 1954
Great Bend Plant and Kanopolis Plant Purchased August 20, 1958
Frazier Plant Purchased March 1961, Great Bend Plant Closed November 1961
Waskom Plant and Alexandria Plant Closed 1962
United Brick Co. Purchased February 1963, Opened New Denton Plant October 1963
Denton Tunnel Kiln 'B' July 1965
Closed Monroe November 1966
Closed Denton March 1967, Benton Tunnel Kiln 'G' March 1967
Closed Houston July 1968
Closed Oklahoma City, Harrisonville and Ferris 1969
Reopened Oklahoma City January 1972
Rebuilt Tulsa May 1973
Closed Oklahoma City September 1974
Closed Tulsa December 1974
Closed McQueeny August 1975
McQueeny Reopened May 1978
Malvern B&T Purchased October 1978, Seminole Plant Purchased (not operated) August 1978
Oklahoma City and Ouachita East Opened December 1978
Malvern B&T Closed June 1980, Tulsa Plant And Edmond Plant Closed July 1980
Dixie Plant Purchased; Malvern, Ouchita East and Baton Rouge Plants Closed 1981
Ouchita East Plant Reopened June 1983, Edmond Plant Reopened December 1983
Baton Rouge Plant Reopened February 1984
Edmond and Baton Rouge Plants Closed January 1985, New Tulsa Plant Opened October 1985
San Felipe Plant Opened July 1986, Clinton Plant Closed January 1986

Appendix B: Acme Brick Company Financial Summary, 1918–1933

YEAR	NET WORTH	SURPLUS AND UNDIVIDED PROFITS	STOCK	CURRENT DEBT	ASSETS
1918	N.A.	$100,000	$200,000	N.A.	$768,855
1919	$897,344	250,755	200,000	N.A.	1,109,751
1920	818,838	213,338	605,500	54,978	1,097,864
1921-22	Not Available				
1923	1,325,330	288,393	1,050,000	79,848	1,454,654
1924	1,458,070	411,633	1,050,000	200,000[1]	2.054,932
1925	1,895,734	414,534	1,967,700	145,679	2,650,786
1926	3,020,645[2]	573,245	2,447,400	727,114	3,747,760
1927	3,243,738	691,138[3]	2,552,600	478,242	4,067,132
1928	3,579,889	1,012,625	2,564,600	487,242	4,067,132
1929	3,666,970	1,111,170	2,555,000	586,240[4]	4,253,210
1930	3,405,827	846,027	2,600,000	284,345[5]	3,690,172
1931	2,998,605	472,005	2,526,000	407,151[6]	3,405,756
1932	1,854,285	441,985	1,413,000[7]	185,151	2,040,437
1933	1,792,212	379,911	1,412,300[8]	87,440	1,879,652

Notes: N.A.-Not Available. [1] $200,000 note paid by selling federal bonds at par, January, 1925. [2] Reduced by $66,000 and $128,000 cash dividend as well AI $85,896 stock dividend paid January, 1927. [3] $3,285 cash dividend and $135,156 paid for Wichita Falls Plant. [4] County road bonds sold and $451,746 debt paid in January, 1930. [5] Sold $309,806 federal securities; paid $200,000 note; gave 6% dividend, $135,588 on common, January, 1931. [6] Profits reduced by $133,596 dividend. [7] Common stock cut to $50 a share, rechartered August 20, 1932; number of shares outstanding 22,266 common at $50 and 3,000 preferred at $100. [8] $1,000 preferred repurchased.

Source: Financial Records, Acme Brick Company

Appendix C: Acme Brick Company Financial Summary, 1934–1970

YEAR	NET WORTH	SURPLUS OR UN-DIVIDED PROFITS	STOCK	CURRENT DEBT	ASSETS	NET PROFIT	SALES GROSS	DIVIDENDS	SPECIAL
1934	$ 1,825,292	$ 259,278	$ 1,113,300	$ 172,558	$ 1,997,851	$ (120,632)	$ N. A.	$ 15,697	$ Notes payable 100,000
1935	1,901,755	582,955	1,318,300	281,361	2,183,116	228,908	711,021	19,021	Life insurance 100,000
1936	1,970,115	651,815	1,318,300	424,045	2,394,161	460,930	1,511,194	10,663 Pref. 176,415 Common	19,424 on pref. purchase
1937	1,982,168	655,868	1,326,300	353,788	2,335,957	81,497	1,363,789	77,445	Common 79.46 a share book value
1938	1,855,505	629,205	1,326,300	25,414	1,980,920	38,601	1,325,962	66,315	
1939	1,976,815	649,615	(79.18) 1,326,200	49,824	2,025,640	141,396	1,858,437	121,963	Inc. tax 29,800
1940	1,976,815	649,615	1,326,300	52,969	2,073,937	62,866	1,595,274	77,440	5% Preferred 6% Common Tax 18,785
1941	2,088,365	708,365	1,300,000	79,128	2,087,493	128,462	2,023,657	118,342	Common Book Value $82.20
1942	2,026,002	690,537	1,300,000	377,090	2,403,093	161,263	2,740,715	14,981	
1943	2,035,058	727,765	1,300,000	257,234	2,292,292	85,082	2,374,921	87,000	
1944	2,075,399	700,578	1,366,000	508,217	2,583,616	29,726	2,126,982	76,000	Perla fire loss $14,295 Fed.tax 17,675
1945	2,119,814	699,221	1,413,300	560,001	2,679,815	142,199	3,168,985	144,920	
1946	2,195,799	706,514	1,500,000	1,176,785	3,372,585	103,755	5,011,276	122,600	340,420 Fed tax
1947	2,748,925	748,925	2,000,000	702,042	3,450,968	49,749	5,885,239	500,000	337,696 Fed.tax
1948	3,433,056	1,433,056	2,000,000	805,198	4,238,255	592,278	7,688,607	240,000	507,998 Fed tax
1949	3,776,362	1,776,362	2,000,000	1,055,998	4,832,360	560,283	7,233,543	240,000	
1950	4,239,841	2,239,841	2,000,000	899,681	5,139,523	863,479	9,795,448	400,000	811,000 Fed tax
1951	4,897,909	2,397,909	(40,000 shares) 2,500,000	1,128,633	6,026,543	698,185	10,820,783	120,000 cash 500,000 stock	*Cap. Res. 600,000 set aside
1952	(6,211,022) 5,711,022	3,211,022	(60,000 shares) 3,000,000	491,678	6,802,700	1,026,172	10,372,741	150,000	600,000 reserve
1953	5,738,640	2,779,463	3,000,000	1,038,254	7,576,895	626,313	10,656,299	500,000 stk. 357,870 cash	200,000 Fed tax 204 stk. 1%cashdiv.
1954	6,958,938	3,158,938	2,000,000	1,612,892	8,571,831	1,075,272	13,372,994	360,000	660,000
1955	7,387,853	3,587,875	3,000,000	2,241,122	9,628,977	878,924	16,899,536	449,988	1,357,514
1956	8,536,276	4,736,276	3,000,000	1,760,400	10,296,676	1,240,759	16,771,625	360,000	589,334
1957	9,664,866	5,864,866	3,000,000	716,407	10,381,273	1,578,528	14,759,301	449,938	711,255 tax refund
1958	9,702,875	6,202,875	3,000,000	1,077,059	10,779,934	487,759	15,208,610	449,750	17,327 tax refund
1959	10,447,885	6,947,885	ParVal$10(300,000) 3,000,000	1,140,947	11,588,832	1,104,919	16,692,038	359,909	379,000 taxes 1.20 a share
1960	10,620,400	7,636,677	3,000,000	1,791,003	12,411,403	548,322	15,242,333	359,530	102,171 to pension fund Fed tax -0-
1961	10,088,646	7,152,660	3,000,000	3,187,231	13,275,877	365,573	15,540,346	358,823	
1962	10,243,670	7,319,305	3,000,000	2,092,143	12,355,813	389,615	18,175,059	222,970	
1963	11,198,011	8,174,549	(600,000 shares) 3,000,000	5,355,021	16,553,032	1,077,994	20,154,005	222,750	236,209 (0.75 share)
1964	12,057,484	9,006,972	3,000,000	4,631,975	16,689,459	1,188,823	21,054,330	356,400	924,529 (1.20 sh) Tax
1965	13,137,639	9,417,854	3,000,000	5,324,418	18,462,057	1,301,833	22,355,198	495,000 382,494	Denton Modernization 1,027,408
1966	13,871,381	10,045,784	3,150,000	7,794,259	21,665,640	1,100,435	21,967,630	472,505	
1967	14,655,481	10,721,883	3,150,000	7,419,409	22,074,890	1,148,604	22,540,713	472,505	1.50 a share
1968	18,025,239	13,302,192	(2,500,000 shares) 4,115,370	14,535,680	32,560,919	1,164,172	37,594,317	543,172	First Worth Formed 1,188,157 Fed tax
1969	17,301,638	13,096,268	4,115,370	13,205,071	30,506,709	396,315	42,208,052	602,239	
1970	17,301,638	13,840,546	4,115,370	13,160,252	31,154,383	744,278	39,207,593	-	Tax 1,031,012

Source: Acme Brick Company Financial Records

Appendix D: Justin Industries Financial Summary, 1971–1989

YEAR	NET DIVIDEND	NET SALES	LONGTERM INCOME	WORKING DEBT	REINVEST CAPITAL	DEBT ADDITIONS	REDUCTION (PAY-OUT)
1971	(.0)	46,515,902	2,187,271	4,734,398	10,584,372	1,189,305	655,035
1972	(.15)*	55,502,510	3,617,737	4,088,138	12,079,493	3,411,043	646,260
1973	(.20)	54,929,057	2,721,468	5,540,186	13,552,045	2,448,860	747,952
1974	(.35)	70,606,173	3,006,242	10,510,827	15,761,735	2,543,167	2,121,787
1975	(.40)	69,392,840	3,076,246	11,563,463	20,740,243	602,829	3,517,364
1976	(.55)	99,088,000	4,533,000	24,624,000	31,374,000	1,523,238	5,608,712
1977	(.70)	144,396,000	6,211,000	32,428,000	32,778,000	7,441,774	12,195,796
1978	(.58)**	170,950,000	10,289,000	40,569,000	33,675,000	3,655,699	5,400,742
1979	(.50)**	184,496,000	10,753,000	48,763,000	45,958,000	5,784,584	9,944,010
1980	(.60)	197,862,000	7,879,000	55,655,000	59,225,000	1,625,000	6,835,000
1981	(.60)	232,160,000	5,430,000	71,342,000	77,950,000	1,055,000	18,117,000
1982	(.30)	239,870,000	<6,345,000>	67,104,000	68,405,000	565,000	14,429,000
1983	(.0)	254,801,000	7,685,000	57,054,000	70,841,000	682,000	40,900,000
1984	(.30)**	275,752,000	13,720,000	64,154,000	67,421,000	1,924,000	10,070,000
1985	(.40)	296,990,000	15,050,000	68,089,000	78,873,000	749,000	12,580,000
1986	(.40)	270,325,000	5,033,000	69,321,000	87,407,000	737,000	13,285,000
1987	(.27)	234,277,000	7,746,000	70,509,000	90,206,000	2,297,000	9,603,000
1988	(.27)	249,736,000	7,469,000	69,590,000	105,114,000	528,000	8,496,000
1989	(.30)**	277,930,000	7,198,000	56,238,000	97,983,000	1,807,000	21,087,000

* 2/1STOCK SPLIT FOR 1972
** 3/2 STOCK SPLIT FOR 1978, 1979, 1984, 1989

Appendix E: Building Materials Division— Justin Industries Financial Summary, 1980–1990

YEAR	CAPITAL EXPENDITURES	NET SALES	OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS)	JUSTIN OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS)
1980	6,983,000	94,503,000	13,078,000	23,071,000	
1981	8,480,000	96,918,000	8,913,000	20,704,000	
1982	4,902,000	99,749,000	9,119,000	1,512,000	
1983	3,521,000	133,561,000	14,994,000	18,511,000	
1984	8,865,000	139,750,000	21,047,000	27,528,000	
1985	18,897,000	131,403,000	16,561,000	27,848,000	
1986	3,661,000	115,986,000	6,791,000	7,546,000	
1987	3,453,000	108,729,000	5,156,000	9,863,000	
1988	4,933,000	105,249,000	1,866,000	10,981,000	
1989	4,549,000	109,519,000	(1,984,000)	10,716,000	
1990	**********	**********	**********	**********	
	$68,244,000	$1,135,367,000	$ 95,341,000	$158,280,000	
				60.4%	100%

CONTINUING OPERATONS

NOTE: Per share income amounts have been computed on the average number of common and common equivalent shares outstanding during each year and include preferred stock as common share equivalents. Book value per equivalent share of common stock has been computed on the number of common shares outstanding at December 31. All per share information has been adjusted for the 3-for-2 stock splits in 1979, 1984, 1989. Beginning in 1983, the company allocated interest and other parent company administrative expenses to subsidary companies. Interest expense was charged to subsidiaries based on acutual indebtedness of each subsidiary to the parent company. Administrative costs were allocated based on the use of parent-company services. The years 1979 through 1982 were not restated since precise allocations could not be determined for those years. Total operating profit for 1985 and 1989 includes gains on sales of real estate of $3,537,000 and $327,000 respectively, not spearately included in segment operating profits.

Appendix F: Acme Brick Sales Offices and Distributors, 1990

Acme Brick Company
2723 Old Greenwood Rd.
Ft. Smith, AK 72901
501-782-7974

Acme Brick Company
1004 3rd St.
Hot Springs, AK 72913
501-624-1928

Acme Brick Company
711 Meadowbrook "A"
Jonesboro, AK 72401
501-932-0463

Acme Brick Company
1307 W. 3rd St.
Little Rock, AK 72201
501-374-2263

Acme Brick Company
301 Victory
Little Rock, AK 72201
501-374-2263

Acme Brick Company
3025 N. Midland
Pine Bluff, AK 71603
501-526-2000

Acme Brick Company
2408 E. 19th St.
Russellville, AK 72801
501-968-5900

Acme Brick Company
10 Whippoorwill
Searcy, AK 72143
501-268-4817

Acme Brick Company
1607 N. Thompson
Springdale, AK 72765
501-756-0550

Acme Brick Company
307 W. Santa Fe
Olathe, KS 66061
913-782-9500

Acme Brick Company
801 Kansas Ave.
Topeka, KS 66608
913-234-2992

Acme Brick Company
135 N. Elizabeth
Wichita, KS 67201
316-264-9141

Acme Brick Company
711 Willow Glenn Rd.
Alexandria, LA 71301
318-443-0475

Acme Brick Company
2500 Cameron
Lafayette, LA 70502
318-234-4531

Acme Brick Company
121 Jefferson St.
Lake Charles, LA 70605
318-433-7348

Acme Brick Company
203 S. 8th Street
Monroe, LA 71202
318-325-9652

Acme Brick Company
Grand Encore Rd.
Natchitoches, LA 71457
318-352-5700

Acme Brick Company
1919 Kings Hwy.
Shreveport, LA 71104
318-221-2457

Acme Brick Company
1006 Southwest Blvd.
Jefferson City, MO 65101
314-635-0863

Acme Brick Company
2026 Connecticut
Joplin, MO 64801
417-683-0502

Acme Brick Company
2510 Adie Road
Maryland Heights, MO 63043
314-739-1810

Acme Brick Company
2325 W. Battlefield Rd.
Springfield, MO 65807
417-883-0502

Acme Brick Company
2500 NW 10th St.
Oklahoma City, OK 73107
405-528-8144

Acme Brick Company
4103 Dawson Rd.
Tulsa, OK 74115
918-834-0917

Acme Brick Company
3310 Pearson Rd.
Memphis, TN 38118
901-362-7420

Acme Brick Company
637 Watson Branch
Nashville, TN 37064
615-790-7752

Acme Brick Company
101 N. Mesquite
Abilene, Texas 79601
915-673-7022

Acme Brick Company
400 S. Garfield
Amarillo, TX 79105
806-376-5986

Acme Brick Company
8900 Shoal Creek, Suite 105
Austin, TX 78758
512-458-9132

Acme Brick Company
2910 A. Eastex Frwy.
Beaumont, TX 77703
409-899-4171

Acme Brick Company
1103 Todd Trail
College Station, TX 77840
409-775-6005

Acme Brick Company
11261 Shady Trail
Dallas, TX 75229
214-241-1400

Acme Brick Company
2111 S. Locust
Denton, TX 76201
817-382-7414

Acme Brick Company
2811 W. 7th St.
Ft. Worth, TX 76107
817-332-4101

Acme Brick Company
5020 Acorn
Houston, TX 77092
713-681-4651

Acme Brick Company
2602 Atkins
Killeen, TX 76541
817-526-0979

Acme Brick Company
1301 W. Cotton
Longview, TX 75606
214-753-2679

Acme Brick Company
2301 Avenue A
Lubbock, TX 79404
806-747-3181

Acme Brick Company
3020 W. Front St.
Midland, TX 79701
915-699-5017

Acme Brick Company
931 Basse Road
San Antonio, TX 78212
512-733-6251

Acme Brick Company
N. Frontage Rd. @ I-30/Nash
Texarkana, TX 75505
214-832-8566

Acme Brick Company
300 Rosewood Street
Wichita Falls, TX 76301
817-767-2569

DISTRIBUTORS

Sand Mountain
PO. Box 95
Sylvania, AL 35988
205-593-2120

Del Piso
33 W. Broadway
Mesa, AZ 85202
602-898-8989

Del Webb Development
PO. Box 1708
Sun City AZ 85372
602-876-3332

Del Piso
1635 S. State College Blvd.
Anaheim, CA 92806
714-634-4670

Intermountain Brick Company
2125 15th Street
Denver, CO 80202
303-629-5256

Mack Brick Company
54 Mack Street
Windsor CT 06095
203-688-3735

Ruck Brothers
2902 Warehouse Rd.
Ft. Myers, FL 33901
813-334-8022

Cement Products & Supply
PO. Box 12
Lakeland, FL 33802
813-686-5141

Polk Brick & Stone
PO. Box 3060
Leesburg, FL 32749-3060
904-326-8022

Keeman Brick
PO. Box 543
Pompano Beach, FL 33061
305-972-3141

Keeman Brick
3000 S.E. Wasler St.
Stuart, FL 33495
305-286-8383

Ruck Brothers
2200 12th St.
Sarasota, FL 33577
813-957-3933

Colcroc Materials
5603 Anderson Rd.
Tampa, FL 33634
813-886-7761

Palmer Brick
PO. Box 796
Tucker, GA 30085-0796
424-934-7628

Quad City Brick & Tile
PO. Box 570
Bettendorf, IA 52722
319-335-0276

Sheffield Brick & Tile
2557 Oxford Lane N.W. #2
Cedar Rapids, IA 52405
319-396-4356

Sheffield Brick & Tile Co.
PO. Box 676
Sheffield, IA 50475
515-892-4354

Sheffield Brick & Tile
6208 Twana Drive
Urbandale, IA 50322
515-278-0197

Illinois Brick Company
7601 W. 79th St.
Bridgeview, IL 60455
312-344-1000

Carbondale Brick & Tile
PO. Box 578
Carbondale, IL 62901
618-457-8721

Champaign Builders Supply
30 E. John St.
Champaign, IL 61820
217-384-4288

Johnson Concrete Company
PO. Box 26
Dekalb, IL 60115
815-756-4839

Illini Brick & Supply
1167 W. Washington
East Peoria, IL 61611
309-694-3109

Brady Brick & Supply
1470 Abbot Drive
Elgin, IL 60120
312-741-8343

Accurate Ready-Mix Co.
1220 W. 171st St.
Hazel Crest, IL 60429
312-335-1619

Werden Buck Co.
55 E. Webster St.
Joliet, IL 60434
815-726-4366

Ramm Brick, Inc.
PO. Box 9
La Grange, IL 60525
312-352-5500

Rock Valley Brick & Supply
PO. Box 2126
Loves Park, IL 61130
815-877-5788

Coles County Masonry
PO. Box 249
Matoon, IL 61938
217-235-5486

Holman Brick Co.
409 W. Wise Rd.
Schaumburg, IL 60193
312-529-0850

Sesser Concrete Products
PO. Box 565
Sesser, IL 62884
618-625-2811

Atlas Concrete Products
2500 Peerless Mine Rd.
Springfield, IL 62711
217-528-7368

Acme Brick & Supply Co.
1405 Belvidere
Waukegan, IL 60085
312-662-8245

Woodstock, Brick & Supply Co.
PO. Box 481
Woodstock, IL 60098
815-338-5311

Fidler Inc.
PO. Box 2324
Elkhart, IN 46516
219-262-2681

Old Fort Supply Co.
PO. Box 11303
Ft. Wayne, IN 46857
219-422-2436

Architectural Brick
8091 Center Run Dr.
Indianapolis, IN 46250
317-842-2888

Henry F. Eggars Co., Inc.
2227 New York Ave.
Whiting, IN 46394
219-659-0897

Louisiana Concrete Products
PO. Box 1107
Baton Rouge, LA 70821
504-356-5281

Louisiana Concrete Products
11201 Old Gentilly Hwy.
New Orleans, LA 70129
504-246-3500

L & L Supply Corporation
1404 Front Ave.
Lutherville, MD 21093
305-825-7800

Potomac Valley
5515 Randolph Rd.
Rockville, MD 20852
301-770-3770

The Belden Brick Sales Co.
14305 Livernois Ave.
Detroit, MI 48238
313-834-4792

Standard Brick & Supply
102 S. 21st Ave. West
Duluth, MI 55806
218-722-6641

Beldon Brick & Supply Co.
620 Leonard St., N.W.
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
616-458-8367

Swanson Brothers Co.
301 W. 78th St.
Minneapolis, MI 55420
612-884-2040

Wunder-Klein-Donohue, Inc.
250 Freemont Ave., North
Minneapolis, MI 55405
612-374-5050

Corning-Donohue, Inc.
1407 Marshall Ave.
St. Paul, MI 55140
612-646-8000

Kasten Masonry Sales
PO. Box 486
Jackson, MO 63755
1-800-242-3322

Endicott Clay Products
PO. Box 17
Fairbury, NE 68352
402-729-3315

Nebraska Builders Products
6820 "J" St.
Omaha, NE 68018
402-331-0333

Corriveau-Routhier, Inc.
PO. Box 4127
Manchester, NH 03108
603-627-3805

Church Brick Company
Route 5
Bordentown, NJ 08505
609-298-0090

Advance Brick
2400 S. Highland Ave.
Las Vegas, NV 89102
402-396-0366

Scranton Thruway Builders Supply
3360 Walden Ave.
Depew, NY 14043
716-684-5500

Consolidated Brick & Building
127 W. 24th St.
New York, NY 10011
212-645-6700

Imperia Brothers
57 Canal Rd.
Pelham Manor, NY 10803
212-863-4111

Weckesser Brick and Tile
450 Traboid Road
Rochester, NY 14624
716-247-1100

Thruway Builders Supplies Corp.
5700 Shawnee Rd.
Sanborn, NY 14132
716-731-3216

Perry Brick Co.
211 Arlington Ave.
Staten Island, NY 14132
718-448-5050

Paragon Supply, Inc.
PO. Box 1079
Syracuse, NY 13201
315-475-5115

Laning Brick, Inc.
1414 Stuyvesant
Union, NY 07083
201-964-1750

John Dapper Co.
Montgomery & Columbus Rd.
Loveland, OH 45140
513-683-2194

Consolidated Brick
349 High St.
Cumberland, RI 02864
401-732-2022

Chattanooga Brick & Tile
3130 Dayton
Chattanooga, TN 37415
615-887-4551

Featherlite Building Products
PO. Box 4732
Corpus Christi, TX 78469
512-884-3869

Featherlite Building Products
PO. Box 9977
El Paso, TX 79990
915-859-9171

Metro Building Supply
8361 Old Courthouse Rd.
Vienna, VA 22180
703-827-9555

Fehr Concrete Products
1111 Menomonie St.
Eau Claire, WI 54701
715-834-7701

Hocker Bros. Brick & Tile
1 Brick Rd.
Green Bay, WI 54303
414-499-0587

Janesville Brick & Tile
PO. Box 564
Janesville, WI 53545
608-753-7463

Wisconsin Brick & Block
PO. Box 5009
Madison, WI 53705
608-845-9636

Butler Lime and Cement/Tewa
6200 W. Center
Milwaukee, WI 52310
414-442-8000

ACME BRICK COMPANY GENERAL OFFICE • P.O. BOX 425 • FT. WORTH, TX 76101 • (817) 332-4101

Appendix G:
Acme Brick Employee Directory, 1990

CORPORATE OFFICE
2821 W. 7th Street (76107)
Fort Worth, Texas
(817-332-4101)

(817) 429-2585 Metro Number
800-992-1234 Texas Wats
800-433-5650 Outside Texas Wats
(817) 390-2404 Fax Number

PRESIDENT
Edward L. Stout Jr.
Sharon D. Shultz, Administrative Assistant
Gina Eason, Secretary/Receptionist
BRIX 054

VICE PRESIDENT—MARKETING & GENERAL SALES MANAGER
Harrold E. Melton (290-DAS)
Carrie Berman, Secretary
BRIX 976

VICE PRESIDENT—PRODUCTION & GENERAL PRODUCTION MANAGER
John Kock
Charlotte Braddock, Secretary
BRIX 451

VICE PRESIDENT—FINANCE
Dennis D. Knautz
BRIX 065
Steve Kratzer, Administrative Assistant
BRIX 074
Sharon D. Shultz, Administrative Assistant
BRIX 054

ACCOUNTING
Fax Number (817) 390-2480
Terry Hampton, Controller
BRIX 028
Jim Crabtree, Assistant Controller
BRIX 025
Christine Boehringer, Secretary
BRIX 421
Joe Jehering, Staff Accountant
BRIX 081
Pat Holaday, Staff Accountant
BRIX 035
Ruth Black, Accounting Clerk
BRIX 046
Kathy Clay, Accounting Clerk
BRIX 048
Gay Swinney, Accounting Clerk
BRIX 099
Dolores Salas, Payroll
BRIX 027
Dena Ware, Payroll
BRIX 420
Deena Mosley, Accounts Payable Clerk
BRIX 042
Leah Lingo, Accounts Payable Clerk
BRIX 034
Delayne Huntsberger, Accounts Payable Clerk
BRIX 098

ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES
Purchasing
Cindy Poole, Purchasing Manager
BRIX 423

Mail Center
Marie DeRosch, Supervisor
Terri Clagon, Mail Clerk
Joannie Patton, Mail Clerk

Property Maintenance
Steve Shellberg, Maintenance Supervisor

AVIATION
Sharon Shultz, Schedule Coordinator
Gina Eason, Schedule Coordinator

BROKERAGE PRODUCTS
W. E. "Bill" Heiss, Manager
BRIX 471
Pat Mosley, Coordinator
BRIX 471

CASHIER
Cindy Poole, Cashier
BRIX 423
Hazel Clarke, Assistant Cashier

CREDIT DEPARTMENT
Fax Number (817) 390-2480
Jerry Slate, Manager
BRIX 431
Pam Whisenant, Secretary
BRIX 440
Fred Garrell, Assistant Credit Manager
BRIX 433
Carolyn Thacker, Clerk/Typist
Ruby Blakenship, Chief Credit Clerk
BRIX 435
Annette Clark, Chief Clerk/Accts. Receivable
BRIX 427
Patsy Jennings, Accts. Receivable Clerk
Pam Wilson, Accts. Receivable Clerk
Evelyn Fort, Billing Clerk
Valerie Perez, Credit Clerk

ENGINEERING
Joe Lord, Chief Engineer
Gail Stallings, Secretary
Larry Barger, Drafting Supervisor
Felton Dunn, Project Engineer
Rick Bloodworth, Engineering Designer

INTERNAL AUDIT
Jim Flinn, Internal Audit Manager
BRIX 051
Pam Melendez, Internal Auditor
BRIX 052

MARKETING SERVICES
Bill Seidel, Director
BRIX 067
Hannah Farenkopf, Marketing Coordinator
BRIX 067
Britt Stokes, Photographic Services

TECHNICAL SERVICES
Bill Bailey, Manager

CUSTOMER ENTERTAINMENT
Tillman Niblett
West Route
Davis, Oklahoma 73030
(405) 868-3336

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS
Mike Bowen, Director
BRIX 467
Sandra Bacon, Secretary
BRIX 402
Keith Miller, System Programmer

SYSTEM DESIGN & PROGRAMMING
Kevin Story, Manager
BRIX 414
Bruce Arthurs, Programmer Analyst
BRIX 031
Pat McCoy, Programmer Analyst
BRIX 410
Kevin Payne, PC Support Programmer
BRIX 463
Brad Moore, PC Support Programmer
Ralph Thompson, Systems Analyst
BRIX 416
Dennis Hansen, Systems Analyst

FIELD SUPPORT
Pat Thomas, Field Liaison
BRIX 404
Betty Crayon, Field Support Liaison

OPERATIONS
Bobby Allen, Manager
Carolyn Black, Data Entry Operator
Chuck Jones, Computer Operator
Ricky Patton, Computer Operator
Chris Davis, Third Shift Computer Operator
Denise Kimbrough, Support Liaison

COMMUNICATIONS
Bill King, Manager
Dana Crittendon, Communication Analyst

PERSONNEL & INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
Bobby Moon, Manager
Glenda Sullivan, Personnel Administrator
Carol Mitchell, Data Input Operator
Kim Costley, Personnel Secretary

REAL ESTATE
Edward L. Stout, President

SPECIAL SHAPES
Larry Barger, Drafting Supervisor

TRAFFIC
Carl Sanders, Manager
BRIX 450
Sharon Chisholm, Traffic Coordinator
Harold Hulce, Central Truck Coordinator
BRIX 407
Rogene Johnson, Secretary
Janie King, Traffic Clerk
Laynette Rainey, Traffic Clerk
BRIX 448

SALES

VICE PRESIDENT—
MARKETING & GENERAL SALES MANAGER
Harrold E. Melton (290-DAS)
Carrie Berman, Secretary

11261 Shady Trail (75229-4669)
PO Box 29311 (75229)
Dallas, Texas
(214) 247-6532
(214) 247-0950 Fax

REGIONAL SALES MANAGERS

CENTRAL (239) & SOUTHERN (258) REGION
Scotty Freebairn (231-LRS)
John Bufford, Technical Engineer (Central)
Ann Jorrell, Secretary

301 Victory (72201-1887)
PO Box 286 (72203-0286)
Little Rock, Arkansas
(501) 374-5574

Offices of Responsibility:
MES, DIS, FSS, SDS, LRS, SFS, SPS, TXS, LVS, CPS, HAS, EPS, NVS, BRS, ALS, MOS, LCS, LAS & NOS

MIDWEST REGION (249)
Bob Marks (260-OCS)
David Gastgeb, Regional Engineer
Jan Teel, Secretary

2500 NW 10th Street (73107)
PO Box 24012 (73124)
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
(405) 525-7421

Offices of Responsibility:
KCS, WIS, OCS, SLS & TUS

WEST TEXAS REGION (279)
Jim Duckworth (271-AMS)
Melba Dockery, Secretary

400 S. Garfield Street (79102)
PO Box 507 (79105)
Amarillo, Texas
(806) 376-5986

Offices of Responsibility:
ABS, AMS, LUS & MIS

NORTHEAST TEXAS (297) &
SOUTH TEXAS REGION (289)
Bob Stover (290-DAS)
Mark Owens, Regional Engineer
Regina Whitlow, Secretary (290-DAS)
Patti Stivender, Secretary (282-HOS)

11261 Shady Trail (75229)
PO Box 29311 (75229)
Dallas, Texas
(214) 241-1400

Offices of Responsibility:
DAS, FWS, DES, WFS, PRS, BMS, HOS, SAS & AUS

ABILENE BRANCH (270-ABS)
Barry Hendricks, Branch Manager
Brenda Moore, Office Manager
Tom Isabell, Yard Foreman
Gene Varnell, Truck Driver

101 N. Mesquite (79601)
Abilene, Texas
(915) 673-7022

ALEXANDRIA DISTRICT (250-ALS)
J. W. "Jim" Delaney, District Manager
Barbara Markwalter, Secretary
Glenna Outlaw, Dispt./Credit/Of.
Wayne Curry, Sales Representative
Gerald Henagan, Sales Representative
James LaCour, Forklift Operator
Ronald Nugent, Truck Driver

711 Willow Glenn Road
PO Box 7443 (71306)
Alexandria, Louisiana
(318) 443-0475

AMARILLO BRANCH (271-AMS)
Jim Duckworth, Branch Manager
Melba Dockery, Secretary/Receptionist
Leonard Ruzowski, Office/Credit Manager
Mike Cherry, Sales Representative
Howard Perkins, Yard Foreman

400 S. Garfield (79102)
PO Box 507 (79105)
Amarillo, Texas
(806) 376-5986

AUSTIN DISTRICT (284-AUS)
Mark Merchant, District Manager
Dianne Puckett, Credit Manager
Cole Erwin, Arch. Sales Representative
Bill Davis, Res. Sales Representative
Bob Jackson, Res. Sales Representative
Jack Simpson, Res. Sales Representative
Randy Combs, Terr. Sales Representative
Vince Gallegos, Sales Representative

681 Round Rock West Drive
Round Rock, Texas (78681)
(512) 244-7600
(512) 244-9040 Fax

John Daniels, Territory Sales Representative
1103 Todd Trail (77840)
College Station, Texas
(409) 775-6005

BATON ROUGE DISTRICT (251-BRS)
Tom Wimp, Manager
Mari Ellen Wintz, Receptionist
Karen Leal, Credit Manager
Barbara Hulick, Dispatcher
Ted Strickland, Res. Sales Representative
E. J. "Boots" Barrow, Arch. Sales Representative
Scott Barrow, Yard Supervisor

4747 Choctaw (70805)
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
(504) 356-5281

BEAUMONT DISTRICT (280-BMS)
Dale Scott, Branch Manager
Judy Prevost, Secretary/Dispatcher
Jerry Covington, Truck Driver/Yardman

2910 A. Eastex Frwy. (77703)
Beaumont, Texas
(409) 899-4171

CENTRAL REGION DISTRIBUTION YARD (237-CDY)
Carolyn Poston, Brokerage Manager
Patricia Finley, Secretary/Receptionist

Grigsby Ford Road
PO Box 250 (72104)
(501) 332-2699

DALLAS DISTRICT (290-DAS)
Larry Mitchell, District Manager
Regina Whitlow, Secretary
Tammy Flowers, Receptionist
Donna Poston, Inside Sales
Jerry West, Credit/Office Manager
Susan Taber, Credit Assistant
Bill Hurlburt, Res. Sales Manager
Stan McCarthy, Asst. Res. Sales Manager
Larry Chennault, Res. Sales Representative
Mike Hodges, Res. Sales Representative
Gary Hubbard, Res. Sales Representative
Gary James, Res. Sales Representative
Jerry McGinnis, Res. Sales Representative
Brent Synder, Res. Sales Representative
Fred Clayton, Arch. Sales Manager
Brad Burkes, Arch. Sales Representative
Gene Niblett, Arch. Sales Representative
Susan Houser, Key Accounts Secretary
Wanda Rains, Coordinator/Customer Service
Diana Harris, Customer Service/Sales Secretary
Pat Burchfiel, Sales Trainee
Shawn Hawkins, Yardman
David Menton, Truck Driver

11261 Shady Trail (75229-4669)
PO Box 29311 (75229)
Dallas, Texas
(214) 241-1400
(214) 247-0950 Fax

DENTON DISTRICT (294-DES)
Gene Lackey, District Manager
Deirdre Harris, Secretary
Sherroll Crawford, Inside Sales
Billy Gee, Outside Sales
Greg Hinnrich, Sales Representative
Ron Risdon, Sales Representative

2111 So. Locust (76205)
PO Box 2131 (76202-2131)
Denton, Texas
(817) 382-7414

Bill Gann, Territory Sales Rep.
300 Rosewood (76301)
PO Box 28 (76307)
Wichita Falls, Texas
(817) 767-2560

DISTRIBUTOR SALES (223-DIS)
Floyd Lumley, Distributor Mgr.
Rick Dunn, Sales Representative
Shawn McElroy, Sales Representative
Peggy Reynolds, Sales Coordinator
John B. Douglass, Traffic Coordinator

1307 W. 3rd Street
PO Box 286 (72203)
Little Rock, Arkansas
(501) 374-2263

FORT SMITH DISTRICT (230-FSS)
Carroll West, District Manager
Becky Roberts, Office Manager
Jan Wade, Inside Sales Rep.
Paul Whisenhunt, Terr. Sales Rep.
Bill Ginger, Terr. Sales Rep.

2723 Old Greenwood Rd. (72901)
PO Box 3886 (72913-3886)
Fort Smith, Arkansas
(501)782-7974

Rudy Riley, Terr. Sales Rep.
Debbie Miller, Secretary

1111 S. Arkansas
PO Box 1774 (72801
Russellville, Arkansas
(501) 968-6900 OFFICE
(501) 968-3555 HOME

FORT WORTH DISTRICT (293-FWS)
Arnold Bachschmid, District Manager
Ron Bowen, Residential Sales Mgr.
Jerry Thomas, Residential Sales Mgr.
Susan Thompson, Secretary
Joseph Rohmer, Credit Manager
Sandra Komisarjevsky, Order Entry Clerk
Jamie Perkins, Order Entry Clerk
Larry Clements, Arch. Sales Representative
Steve Burdett, Sales Representative
David Corothers, Sales Representative
John Dolman, Sales Representative
Mark Cooke, Sales Representative
Roy Morris, Sales Representative
Lyle Pattie, Sales Representative
Mark Williams, Sales Representative
Chris Ferrell, Yardman
Sid Mulkey, Dirver

2811 W. 7th St. (76107)
PO Box 425 (76101)
Fort Worth, Texas
(817) 390-2409 or
(817) 332-4101
(817) 390-2404 Fax

HOUSTON DISTRICT (282-HOS)
Bill Lemond, District Manager
Patti Stivender, Secretary
Judy Angell, Service Agent
Vivian Lee, Office Manager
Howard Green, Dispatcher/Operations Mgr.
Dee Petrich, Service Agent
Shari Martin, Inventory Clerk
C. K. Williams, Receptionist
Kristie Venarske, Order Entry Clerk
Liz King, File Clerk
Dean Chaffin, Arch. Sales Representative
Sandy Davis, Key Account Manager
John Wetsel, Res. Sales Manager
Steve Clark, Res. Sales Representative
Jim Deborah, Res. Sales Representative
Pete Dickenson, Res. Sales Representative
Bob Head, Res. Sales Representative
Eddie Perrin, Res. Sales Representative
Ed Sasko, Res. Sales Representative
Don Wallace, Key Account Manager
Ed Seiling, Sales Representative
Tim Heller, Inside Sales Representative
La Rue Smesny, Inside Sales Representative
Rey DeLaGarza, Yard Foreman
Lorenzo Galvan, Warehouseman
David Denham, Maintenance
Ed Coleman, Forklift Operator
Rafael Inestroza, Forklift Operator
Hector Montoya, Yardman
Winford Johnson, Truck Driver
Kenith Thomas, Truck Driver
Danny Ross, Warehouseman/Driver

5020 Acorn (77092)
PO Box 925036 (77292-5036)
Houston, Texas
(713) 681-4651
(713) 681-1907 Fax

Joplin (247-JOS)
Blain Nordstrom, Res. Sales
Gay Lynn Morris, Sec./Rep.

1710 E. 32nd Street N.
PO Box 5056 (64804)
Joplin, Missouri
(417) 781-1931

KANSAS CITY DISTRICT (241-KCS)
E. H. "Hopp" Vaupel, District Manager
Mary McNair, Office Mgr./Dispatcher
Deana Kerr, Office Assistant
Brenda Cogswell, Receptionist
Bob Connell, Arch. Sales Representative
Kirk Allen, Arch. Sales Representative
Harold Bates, Sales Representative
Bob Dalton, Sales Representative
Bob Long, Sales Representative
Alva Edmondson, Yardman Foreman
Jerry Brown, Truck Driver
Herbert Lee Chrisjohn, Truck Driver

307 Santa Fe (66061)
Olathe, Kansas
(913) 782-9500
(913) 782-1839 Fax

LAFAYETTE BRANCH (254-LAS)
Bob LaBorde, Branch Manager
Debbie Burleigh, Credit Mgr./Dispatcher
James Francis, Driver/Forklift Operator

2500 Cameron (70506)
Lafayette, Louisiana
(318) 234-4531

LAKE CHARLES (253-LCS)
Bryan Hackett, Branch Manager
Margaret Flemming, Secretary
Glen Aresment, Sales Coordinator

2111 Common (70601)
Lake Charles, LA
(318) 433-7348

LITTLE ROCK DISTRICT (231-LRS)
Leland Lane, District Manager
Jane Nolan, Secretary
Linda Gerrald, Credit Coordinator
Zae Dinwiddie, Office Mgr./Inside Sales
Dan Cameron, Arch. Sales Representative
Erner Jones, Res. Sales Representative
Scott Faust, Res. Sales Representative

301 Victory (72201)
PO Box 286 (72203)
Little Rock, Arkansas
(501) 374-5574

Randy Reeves, Terr. Sales Rep.
10 Whippoorwill (72143)
Searcy, Arkansas
(501) 268-4817

Calvin Johnson, Terr. Sales Rep.
1004 3rd Street (72913)
Hot Springs, Arkansas
(501) 624-1928

Buddy Powell, Terr. Sales Rep.
3709 Lakeview Ct. (72401)
Jonesboro, Arkansas
(501) 932f-0463

LONGVIEW BRANCH (291-LVS)
Robert Henson, Branch Manager
Linda Nance, Sec./Credit Mgr.
Kenneth Morgan, Yardman/Forklift Oper.
Albert Gonzales, Truck Driver

1301 West Cotton
PO Box 6120 (75608)
Longview, Texas
(214) 753-2679

LUBBOCK BRANCH (274-LUS)
Andy Anderson, Branch Manager
Linda King, Secretary
Roy Dunlap, Dispatcher
Mark Burden, Sales Representative
Santiago Nerios, Forklift Driver
James Fortenbury, Truck Driver
Lupe Gomes, Truck Driver

2301 Avenue A (79404)
PO Box 1302 (79408)
Lubbock, Texas
(806) 747-3181

MEMPHIS DISTRICT (210-MES)
Clyde Blount, District Manager
Pam Eure, Secretary/Rep.
Vikki Fuller, Dispatching Clerk
Woodie Hill, Tile Manager
Eddie Albonetti, Asst. Tile Manager
Wayde Edwards, Res. Sales Representative
Terry Tucker, Res. Sales Representative
Terry Padgett, Res. Sales Manager
Charles Cole, Arch. Sales Representative
Leon Mackey, Yard Superintendent
Robert Mearidy, Truck Driver
Freddie Gillespie, Truck Driver
Tony Glover, Yardman
Gerome Hulom, Yardman
Dwight Ward, Yardman

3310 Pearson Rd. (38118)
Memphis, Tennessee
(901) 362-7420
(901) 362-7420 Fax

MIDLAND BRANCH (275-MIS)
Randy Settle, Branch Manager
Kathy Stewart, Secretary
John G. Alderete, Truck Driver
Brian K. Wilson, Yardman

3020 W. Front Street (79701)
Midland, Texas
(915) 699-5017

MONROE BRANCH (255-MOS)
Rob Jolliff, Branch Manager
Lori Dunn, Office Mgr./Dispatcher
Frankie Miletello, Driver/Yardman

203 S. 8th Street (71202)
Monroe, Louisiana
(318) 325-9652

NASHVILLE BRANCH (211-NVS)
Mark Orme, Branch Manager
Kathy Wall, Office Manager

7016 Church, Suite D
PO Box 3087 (37037)
Brentwood, Tennessee
(615) 371-1915

NATCHITOCHES BRANCH (259-NAY)
Jack T. King, Sales Representative

PO Box 676
Natchitoches, LA (71457)
(318) 352-5700

NEW ORLEANS DISTRICT (256-NOS)
Greg Foster, District Manager
Vickie Polermo, Acct. Rec./Payables
Mike Fos, Sales Representative
Rene Riche, Inside Sales/Dispatcher
Tom Cousin, Sales Representative
Richard Berry, Sales Representative
Henry Robinson, Yardman

11201 Old Gentilly Road
New Orleans, LA (70129)
(504) 246-3500
(504) 246-6769 Fax

NORTH TEXAS DISTRIBUTION YARD (298-NTDY)
Danny Cagel, Manager
Kim Misiko, Dispatcher Coord.
Angie Hokanson, Brokerage Coord.
Jay Jordon, Yard Supervisor
Ben Vecera, Yardman
Usvaldo Commancho, Yardman
Marvin Adams, Driver
Elmer Matthews, Driver
Eddie Smith, Driver

2111 S. Locust (76201)
PO Box 2131 (76202)
Denton, Texas
(817) 387-5804 EXT. 29

OKLAHOMA DISTRICT (260-OCS)
Jay Cox, District Manager
Jan Teel, Secretary
Pat Hufnagel, Office Mgr./Coordinator
Colleen Turner, Receptionist
Carole McCulley, Cust. Serv. Rep.
Debbie Benson, Credit Manager
Rod Morgan, Arch. Sales Representative
Jerry Howell, Sales Representative
Stan Keeley, Sales Representative
Bill White, Sales Representative
Steve Cougill, Sales Representative
Ted Reese, Sales Representative
Angela Hickman, Sales Representative
Joni Land, Inside Sales Representative
Jim Anderson, Yard Foreman
Gary Cummins, Yardman
Earl Lowe, Truck Driver
Gayle Brus, Truck Driver

2500 NW 10th (73107)
PO Box 24012 (73124)
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
(405) 525-7421
(405) 525-7683 Fax

PLANO ROAD SALES (292-PRS)
Greg House, Sales Manager
Mary Emmrich, Secretary
Bill Coker, Inside Sales
Drew Sinquefield, Outside Sales
Kelly Kiefer, Outside Sales
Jeff Ehresmann, Warehouse Manager
Joe Gomez, Warehouseman
Jeff Davis, Warehouseman

10550 Plano Road
PO Box 551357 (75255-1357)
Dallas, Texas
(214) 348-4978
(214) 343-7104 Fax

SAN ANTONIO DISTRICT (283-SAS)
Dick Goodman, District Manager
Tony Pargas, Coordinator/Dispatcher
Anna Campos, Credit Mgr./Secretary
Brad Bochat, Res. Sales Representative
Tony James, Res./Terr. Sales Representative
Joe Arriola, Inside Sales Representative
Glenn Wenzel, Arch. Sales Representative
Greg Payne, Territory Sales Representative
Leo Ramirez, Forklift Operator

931 Basse Road (78212)
San Antonio, Texas
(512) 733-6251
(512) 733-5713 Fax

SHREVEPORT DISTRICT (257-SPS
Grimm Dewell, District Manager
Shirley Preston, Office/Credit Mgr.
Harold Hay, Terr. Sales Representative
Willie Loston, Driver/Forklift Operator
James Johnson, Forklift Operator

1919 Kings Hwy. (71104)
PO Box 38137
(71133-8137)
(318) 221-2449

Jack King, Terr. Sales Representative
Rt. 1, Box 435-C
Campti, LA (71411)
(318) 875-2745

SPRINGDALE BRANCH (232-SDS)
Jerry Jones, Branch Manager
Pat Voise, Secretary
Eddie Faucett, Sales Representative
Judy Thomas, Order Entry Clerk

1607 N. Thompson
PO Box 772 (72765)
Springdale, Arkansas
(501) 756-0550

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Dave Martin, District Manager
LaBetha Jackson, Secretary
Julie Sowards, Credit Manager
John Harp, Sales Representative
Rick Zimmerman, Res. Sales Representative
Chesley "Buzz" Harriman, Dispatcher/Yard Mgr.
David Roberts, Truck Driver
Mark Slaughter, Truck Driver
Bill Brake, Forklift Operator
James Judson, Forklift Operator

2325 W. Battlefield Rd.
Springfield, MO 65807
(417) 883-0502

ST. LOUIS BRANCH (245-SLS)
Bobby Ray, Branch Manager
Shirley Smith, Secretary
Virginia Ray, Dispatcher
Elmer McAdams, Sales Representative
Tim O'Connor, Arch. Sales Representative
Steve Gerke, Sales Representative
Jerry Bowman, Forklift Operator
Jerry Huddleston, Truck Driver
Willie Patton, Truck Driver

2510 Adie Road (63043)
Maryland Heights, MO
(314) 739-1810
(314) 739-2465 Fax

TEXARKANA BRANCH (295-TXS)
Tommy Riggins, Branch Manager
Jesse "Jerry" Dean, Coordinator
Elbert Booker, Driver/Yardman

N. Frontage Road @ I30/Nash
PO Box 5099 (75505)Texarkana Texas

(214) 832-8566

TULSA DISTRICT (241-TUS)
Bruce Cargill, District Manager
Louise Hylla, Office Manager
Kelly Sackett, Secretary
Mel Bowman, Arch. Sales Representative
Bill Meade, Sales Representative
Karen Morgan Samuel, Sales Representative
Curtis Baker, Sales Representative
Sheila Black, Inside Sales Representative
Craig Speer, Sales Representative
Willie Rolph, Forklift Operator

4103 Dawson Rd. (74115)
PO Box 582590 (74158)
Tulsa, Oklahoma
(918) 834-0917

WICHITA BRANCH (244-WIS)
Joe Morris, Branch Manager
Janie Markel, SecretaryMike Walden,
Sales Representative
Grady Denney, Yardman

135 N. Elizabeth (67203)
Wichita, Kansas
(316) 264-9141 or
(316) 264-9144

PRODUCTION

VICE PRESIDENT—PRODUCTION & GENERAL PRODUCTION MANAGER
John Koch
Charlotte Braddock, Secretary
BRIX 451

2821 W. 7th Street (76107)
PO Box 425 (76101)
Fort Worth, Texas
(817) 332-4101
(817) 390-2404 Fax

REGIONAL PRODUCTION MANAGERS

MIDWEST REGION (376-MWR)
R. A. "Tony" Neeves, Regional Manager
Susan Gwin, Secretary
Leo Bircher, Reg. Mechanical & Elec. Engr.

Plants of Responsibility
TUP, OKP, WRP, KAP, & FSP

4103 Dawson Road (74115)
PO Box 582590 (74158)
Tulsa, Oklahoma
(918) 834-4406
BRIX 798

Fred Andreatta, Reg. Ceramic Engineer
500 E. Memorial (73114)
PO Box 14566 (73113)
Oklahoma City, OK
(405) 755-5010 or
(405) 751-2516

NORTH TEXAS REGION (378-NTR)
Bud Adams, Regional Manager
Charlotte Braddock, Secretary
Bruce Mundorf, Regional Engineer

Plants of Responsibility
DTP, BPP, & BEP

2821 W. 7th (76107)
PO Box 425 (76101)
Fort Worth, Texas
(817) 332-4101
BRIX 451

SOUTH TEXAS REGION (377-STR)
Emmett Lawless, Regional Manager
Miriam Walker, Secretary
Dick Ethier, Regional Engineer

Plants of Responsibility
MQP, GAP & SFP

562 Peters-San Felipe
PO Box 397 (77474)
Sealy, Texas
(409)885-4124
BRIX 894

CENTRAL DISTRICT (379-CDP)
Larry Dixon, Dist. Production Manager
Darla Teel, Secretary
Troy Parker, Project Superintendent
Mike Shipley, Regional Engineer
James Green, Burning Foreman
Darl Lehman, Trainee

Plants of Responsibility
OEP, PEP, PWP, & DXP

PO Box 250 (72104)
Malvern, Arkansas
(501) 332-6993
BRIX 825

Central Mining
Al Dunlap, Mining Manager
Niki Ivey, Secretary
BRIX 807

Hwy. 67 North
PO Box 100 (72104)
Malvern, Arkansas
(501) 337-4407

Baton Rouge Block (659-BRB)
Marie Ellen Wintz, Receptionist
Jack T. King, Sales Representative

PO Box 676
Baton Rouge, LA 71457
(318) 352-5700

BENNETT PLANT (671-BEP)
Roger Shelton, Plant Manager
Randall Polk, Sales Coordinator
Brenda Fallin, Timekeeper
J. A. Brogon, Burning Foreman
Mack Huddleston, Packaging Foreman
Darrell Boatman, Mfg. Foreman
Paul Lionberger, Dispatcher

Rt. 1 Box AB1 (76066)
Millsap, Texas
(817) 682-4211

BRIDGEPORT PLANT (672-BPP)
Steve Fincher, Plant Manager
Doris Hill, Plant Accountant
Al Cox, Coordinator
Richard Eder, Burn/Pkg. Foreman
Charlie Golaz, Mfg. Foreman
Benny Davila, Asst. Pkg./Shipping Foreman
Don West, Maintenance Leadman
Jean McComis, Dispatcher

102 Main Street
PO Box 368 (76026)
Bridgeport, Texas
(817) 683-2293

CLINTON PLANT (661-CLP)
Contact OKP-663
Lewis Long, Plant Contact

600 S. 28th Street
PO Box 1014 (73601)
Clinton, Oklahoma
(405) 323-0780 or
(405) 323-0781

DENTON PLANT (673-DTP)

Ext.	
125	Greg Sublett, Plant Manager
120	Rege Hudson, Asst. Plant Manager
-0-	Elaine Zumhofe, Receptionist
128	Kathy McWilliams, Admn. Assistant
161	Johnny Williams, Products Manager
153	Chris James, Purchasing
127	Bonnie Horn, Timekeeper
134	Jodi Jordon, Dispatcher
123	John Bohling, Sales Coordinator
145	Shelia Smith, Asst. Sales Coordinator
122	John Stack, Personnel & Safety Manager
	Jeff Thomas, Reg. Mining Engr.
	George Fisher, Reg. Mining Supervisor
152	Fred Smith, Preparation Supervisor
120	Mike Arellano, Mfg. Supervisor—B Line
151	Gary Smelser, Quality Control & Shapes Supervisor
154	Mike Wheat, Burning Supervisor
147	Mack Wilcox, Packaging Supervisor
149	Simon Rodriquez, Inv. Foreman
147	Arthur Martinez, Packaging Supervisor
144	Harland Dixson, Loading Foreman
147	David Michie, Loading/ Shading Superintendent
143	Harvey Carter, Maintenance Foreman
120/170	Price Birkhead, Mfg. Foreman—A Line
120	John Rutledge, Process Superintendent
220	E. Daniels Street

PO Box 886 (76205-0886)
Denton, Texas
(817) 387-5804
(817) 383-0359 Fax

137/138 Truck Shop (570-DTS)
Charlie Sarten, Manager
Margret Belcher, Secretary/Timekeeper
(817) 387-8612

DIXIE PLANT (650-DXP)
Charles Reuter, Plant Manager
Barbara Awbrey, Dispatcher Coordinator
Victor Swinney, Mfg./Maint.
Jean Clary, Timekeeper
Roy Awbrey, L & S Supervisor
Jim Talley, Burning Supervisor

Hwy. 792
PO Box 5044 (71045)
Jamestown, Louisiana
(318) 894-8241 or
(318) 894-8308

FORT SMITH PLANT (638-FSP)
Roy Tipton, Plant Manager
Retta Wilson, Secretary/Accountant
Jeri Condry, Dispatcher
Susan Glassco, Clerk
Robert Henry, Coordinator
Ed Davis, Manufacturing Supervisor
Mark Ferguson, Loading/Pkg. Supervisor
Johnny Gattis, Burning Supervisor

2723 Old Greenwood Rd. (72902)
PO Box 3886 (72913)
Fort Smith, Arkansas
(501) 785-2404

GARRISON PLANT (677-GAP)
Jewel Godi, Plant Manager
Sheila Cousins, Timekeeper/Asst. Coord.
Anita Winham, Coordinator/Dispatcher
K. M. Churchman, Burning Foreman
Harvey Boleyn, Loading Supervisor
Jim Krueger, Mfg./Maintenance Supervisor
Mark Moore, Packaging Supervisor

Hwy. 95 West
PO Box 428 (75946)
Garrison, Texas
(409) 347-2211

KANOPOLIS PLANT (644-KAP)
Clint Bunch, Plant Manager
Janet Dolezal, Timekeeper/Receptionist
Deborah Castor, Coordinator/Dispatcher
Leonard Lamia, L & S Foreman

East Ohio Street
PO Box 98 (67454)
(913) 472-4411

MCQUEENEY PLANT (676-MQP)
Dick Meyer, Plant Manager
Shirley Zuehl, Dispatcher
Susie Saengerhausen, Secretary/Timekeeper
Jeannie Conors, Walk-in Sales/Accts. Payable
Greg Payne, Territory Sales Representative
Leon Willingham, Mfg./Prg. Supervisor
Stanley Ahrens, Mining Leadman
Jeff Haecker, Burning Supervisor

Carlos Heep, Maintenance Supervisor
Charles Darnell, Drayage Supervisor
Mary Melton, Inventory Control/Loading Supv.
Ernesto Trevino, Packaging Supervisor

FM 725
PO Box 158 (78123)
McQueeney, Texas
(512) 557-6161

OKLAHOMA (663-OKP) & EDMOND (662-EDP)
Jim Miles, Plant Manager
Diana Bannon, Admn. Asst./Acct.
Lynn Heinrich, Payroll Acct.
Bill Sams, Superintendent
Ron McCormick, Safety Mgr./ODM-664 Mining Foreman
Bob Boling, Mfg. Foreman
Dan Sherek, Pkg. Foreman
Jerry Moody, Maintenance Foreman

500 E. Memorial Rd.
PO Box 14566 (73113)
Oklahoma City, OK
(405) 755-5010

Shipping Office:
Randy Derousse, Loading Foreman
Melissa Matter, Sales Coordinator
Debra Stevens, Dispatcher

(405) 751-2516 or
(405) 751-2517

CALL THIS NUMBER FOR ORDERS OR SAMPLE INFORMATION
OUACHITA PLANT (637-OEP)
Joe Spence, Plant Manager
Shirley Cooper, Timekeeper (501-337-4407)
Karen White, Coord. (501-337-7511)
Gracie Williams, Accts. Payable/Sec.
Greg Johnson, Mfg. Foreman
James Green, Burning Foreman
Ernest Fite, Pkg. Foreman
Don Whitley, Loading Foreman
Bill Burdine, Maintenance Foreman

Grigsby Ford Road
PO Box 250 (72104)
Malvern, Arkansas
(501) 332-6991

PERLA PLANT (630-PEP) & (631-PWP)
Tom Poston, Plant Manager
James Hagler, East Gate Superintendent
Jimmy Ogg, West Gate Superintendent
Duncan Crawford, Finished Goods Mgr.
James Nutt, Loading Foreman
Helen Haley, Accts. Payable/Sec.

U.S. Hwy. 67 North
PO Box 100 (72104)
Malvern, Arkansas
(501) 337-4407
(501) 337-7796 Fax

District Personnel for PEP, PWP, OEP, & Mining
Mary Ballard, Personnel/Safety Manager
Shirley Cooper, Timekeeper (PEP & OEP)
Niki Ivey, Production Clerk (PEP & PWP) & Mining Sec.
Juanita Efird, Industrial Nurse/Timekeeper (PWP)

District Shipping (PWP, PEP, & OEP)
(501) 337-7511
David Overturp, Off. Mgr./Dispatcher
Burdean Thompson, Sr. Sales Coordinator
BRIX 806
Karen White, Sales Coordinator
BRIX 804
Susan Riley, Inside Sales
BRIX 801

West Gate (631-PWP)
(501) 337-4407
Jimmy Gatlin, Mfg. Foreman
Bob Maracle, Packaging Foreman
Larry Draper, Maintenance Foreman

East Gate (630-PEP)
(501) 337-4407
Calray Smith, Prep. Foreman
Dean Finley, Mfg. Foreman
Mike Hathcock, Burning Foreman
Raymond Draper, Packaging Foreman
Alan Schodowski, Packaging Foreman
James Hathcock, Maintenance Foreman
Clark Kindrick, Maintenance Foreman
James Spafford, Mfg. Foreman

Drayage (132-PED)
(501) 332-2742
James Cooper, Regional Trucking Mgr.
George Smoke, Maintenance Shop Foreman
Doris Gray, Storeroom Clerk

Endnotes

Chapter 1

1. General Shale Products, "General Shale Museum Visits D. C.," *General Shale News*, Johnson City, Tennessee, June 3, 1966, P. 1. (Hereafter cited as: General Shale, "Museum Visit, D. C."

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Chapter 2

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2. Interview with Mrs. Walter R. Bennett Sr., wife of the third Acme president, and former board member of Acme Brick Company, Fort Worth, Texas on June 7, 1971. (Hereafter cited as: Mrs. Bennett interview.)

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5. Ibid.

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11. Letter, Octavia Bennett to her children, dated June 6, 1952, Fort Worth, Texas, in possession of Walter Bennett Jr. (Hereafter cited as: Octavia Bennett, letter, June 6, 1952.)

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Index

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Dr. Edwin E. Lehr Sr. is a native Texan who has a lifelong interest in history. He was graduated from Robert E. Lee High School at Baytown, Texas, and received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Sam Houston State Teachers College. In 1972, he received his Ph.D. from Texas Christian University. Much of his graduate work was in diplomatic and economic history. His study of Acme Brick Company was partially underwritten by Mr. John Justin in 1971. During his forty-year career in education, Lehr has been a high school teacher, college instructor, college extension director, college executive vice president, and college president. Upon retirement from the presidency of San Jacinto College North in September of 1997, his Board of Regents appointed him historian emeritus. He is now writing an official history of the college district.

Dr. Lehr is an advocate of local community involvement. He has served as a planning commissioner, councilman, Rotary Club president, founder and president of a chamber of commerce and a local emergency medical service. His hobbies are outdoor sports, gardening, and daylily hybridization. He and his wife Dovie split their time now between their homes in Houston and Fredericksburg, Texas. He has three children: Ed Jr. who resides in Virginia; Lynda Cobbler, who lives near Madisonville, Texas; and Holly Cianciotto, who lives near Fairbanks, Alaska.