

Richard S. Neff
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Richard S. Neff, formerly President and Owner of the Neff Construction Company headquartered in the Reynolds Development, Greenville and more recently an employee of the Reynolds Development. I have been asked to tell in narrative form my recollections of the early years of the Reynolds Development and it is as follows.

My first view of Camp Reynolds that former Army Camp was in March of 1946. I had returned from overseas duty and was residing in Miami, Florida when I received a call from the Trimble Company of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at that time the largest general contractors in western Pennsylvania. They engaged me to take over the Camp Reynolds project for them as their General Superintendent. Accordingly, when I arrived at Camp Reynolds approximately March 16, 1946, the camp was fully intact. No buildings had been touched or anything done whatsoever from the time the Camp had been de-activated. The Army Camp was constructed originally as Camp Shenango as an oversea depot for the Army. The name was changed from Camp Shenango to Camp Reynolds at the time the camp was activated.

The buildings were still intact, the roads, utilities, etc. There were still some Army personnel there in the engineering quarters and in the quartermaster corps, a few officers who departed shortly thereafter. Our contract was to tear down the buildings starting in the hospital area, and pre-cut them into panels for re-erection in various towns in Western Pennsylvania and New York. The project under which this was done was entitled the Veteran's Temporary Emergency Housing, and the majority of the buildings, Reynolds Buildings, went to college towns, although some did not.

The buildings were pre-cut into panels both the side walls, roofs and

floors. These in turn were shipped on flat bed trucks to the various towns. At the same time that this work was going on, we were also training crews to go out to these towns for the erection of these buildings, putting in the foundations, putting these buildings together, the steps, etc. We shipped these buildings to Jamestown, New York, two projects in Erie, PA Clarion, Edinboro, Grove City, New Wilmington, three projects in the Pittsburgh area, Connellsville, Waynesboro, Carmichael way down in the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania.

At the same time we opened operations, we made our headquarters in the former hospital headquarters area. The hospital buildings were constructed of a more permanent nature than all of the barracks, latrines and mess halls. The hospital buildings had wood cove siding, hardwood floors with linoleum on them and all of the buildings were heated by steam heat from a steam heating plant located at either end of the hospital area. We sent the bulk of the hospital buildings to Erie to their project and one to Pittsburgh. The rest were barracks, latrines and mess halls. The barracks buildings that we were assigned, we first were assigned the hospital area and then we got a block or two of the barracks buildings at a time. At the same time when we were into the project for a few months, they brought in additional contractors from the East to do the same operation that we were doing, and at one time there were probably a dozen different contractors in the area. Although Trimble Company had the largest portion of the contract, and also we were there first and had the most extensive job to do.

We afterwards moved from the hospital headquarters building down to the former troop assembly building known as Building 1495 on the Army maps. Now this building was a building 64 feet wide by 528 feet long. It was a few years later that it was occupied by Spenser Container Corporation. In there we set up a wood working mill and we had Carl Goodrick in charge of that, and from there

we pre-fabbed doors and door frames, built steps, etc. The operator kept growing and growing and by mid-summer or late summer when we reached the peak of our employment we were employing 685 men. From then on as we passed the peak of the job the employment decreased and in December of 1946 I was transferred to another job at Granite City, Illinois in the St. Louis Area at the Granite City Steel Company on a large construction job there. I left one of my assistants Bob Paine to carry on the completion of the Camp Reynolds project.

I worked in the St. Louis area until early summer of 1947 and then after in the Pittsburgh area and on another job, St. Francis College at Loretto, Pennsylvania. I did not see Camp Reynolds again from the time I left in December of 1946 until July 1948 when I returned to Greenville to establish my own construction business and I headquartered in the Reynolds Area.

* In July 1948 the buildings left standing in the camp, all else had been demolished, were the warehouse buildings between Second Street and the railroad and also the refrigeration building in the same area. There were two recreation buildings at Third and Arlington Drive Streets. Also standing were the theater building at 7th and Brentwood Drive, the Assembly Building #1495 between 14th and 15th west of Arlington Drive Street, the Gymnasium Building at 16th and Arlington Drive and also three fire station buildings; one at Brentwood Drive & 3rd, one at 10th east of Brentwood and one on Edgewood Drive Street.

In the meantime, sometime during 1947 or 1948 the Greenville Business Men's Association had been formed which was a sort of Chamber of Commerce affair for Greenville and had taken over possession of the former Army Camp Reynolds, from the War Assets Corporation of the government. The organization was set up with a Board of Directors comprised mostly of Main Street merchants, insurance men, professional men etc. and also have appointed for purposes of where constant change would not be a feasible operation, a Board of Trustees to administer

Reynolds Development affairs. A permanent board of Trustees comprised of three members. These Trustees in 1948 were Luther J. Kuder of L. J. Kuder Agency, Norman P. Mortensen, President of the First National Bank and James K. Lee, Manager of J. C. Penney Company. Si Moss of Greenville Lumber Company who was one of the original incorporators and helped on the financial transition of acquiring the property from War Assets and setting up Reynolds Development as a non-profit organization, Mr. Moss since he had purchased part of the land for his own business in Reynolds, did not become one of the Trustees but instead acted in an advisory capacity and sat in on all Trustee Meetings.

At this time the warehouse buildings along the railroad had been leased to the Westinghouse Electric Corporation of Sharon and they were occupying these warehouse buildings for warehousing purpose where they warehoused practically all of their material, etc. required for their manufacturing operation in Sharon.

Also in 1948 the Greenville Lumber Company prepared to move from their Greenville location to the Reynolds Development and as a consequence we remodeled the Recreation Buildings at 3rd and Arlington Drive Street for Greenville Lumber Offices and store. They moved their store from Main Street, their offices from Canal Street and also their lumber yard from Franklin Street to their new lumber yard location. Greenville Lumber had acquired the triangle at Arlington Drive & Brentwood Drive Streets and 3rd Street. They had also acquired the block of land between 3rd and Second and 4th & Crestview Streets. In 1949, the following year, Greenville Lumber had moved their entire operation to Reynolds. One of the warehouse buildings down in the warehouse area, along the railroad tracks and at the west end of the warehouse, area was taken over and leased to Hoppenstand and Weigand Company. Hoppenstand started to manufacture aluminum boats and then developed later on a small automobile, cheap

automobile, which they were going to try to manufacture on a national basis. Neither one of these ventures, the boats or automobiles panned out and Hoppenstand soon left the area.

Weigand Company of Pittsburgh the manufacturers of the Chromolox heating elements which are used primarily on the tops of electric cooking ranges had taken over the western section of that building while Hoppenstand was occupying the eastern, and eventually Weigand took over the entire building.

Weigand had been purchasing approximately 12 million feet of small stainless steel tubing from the Kent Tube Company up in Wisconsin yearly for their operation in Pittsburgh, when they decided they would set up their own manufacturing operation in the building which became the Greenville Tubes Company Building #1. They brought in from Trent Tube Company as a manager of Greenville Tube, Richard O. Stratton, Whitey Johnson plant superintendent and a few other key employees and set up their own manufacturing plant with the help of Frank Elge, who had designed and built considerable tubing machinery, and was looked upon as one of the foremost stainless steel experts in the country.

Also, in 1949 the Spenser Container Company came into being in Greenville. John C. Spenser, the present owner of the company, had two manufacturing plants, one in Akron, Ohio called Fedco Container Company and one in Erie, Pennsylvania call McCreery Can & Tube Company. He was going to set this new plant up in Greenville if he had a good available building. When he saw the Assembly Building No. 1495, that was exactly what he wanted for his purposes so he moved his operation from both Akron and Erie to Reynolds. He was undecided for about a year whether to call the company McCreery Can & Tube or Fedco Container and at the speakers suggestion, I said why don't you name it Spenser Container Corporation. Jack said, "well that is an idea; and that was the founding of the Spenser Container corporation name."

They manufactured cylindrical spiral paper tubing used in packaging everything, as Jack used to say, from a small as a Morton Salt box to the big heavy walled tubing in which linoleum was placed and in which also is one of his leading customers with the tire industries in Akron that used it for shipping their tread material, etc.

In 1950 Hoppenstand was removed completely from their section of the building and Greenville Tubes started as expansion program that developed at one time, the largest industry in the Development. At the peak of their employment Greenville Tubes employed 350 men and was working 3 shifts, 7 days a week.

In June 1950 the Neff Construction Company started the first home building in the Reynolds Development. They built 61 small economically priced homes on Arlington & Brentwood Streets between 9th and 12th Streets and also along 10th Street. They built 61 in 1950, and 10 more in 1951 and 1952. All of these operations were going along in real good shape. At the particular time when the housing job was going along in good shape we were completing and occupying five houses per week. But then on Thanksgiving 1950 came the big snow. The biggest snow that Greenville had ever seen, or I had ever seen. And it was really something. The snow started on Thanksgiving night and continued on Friday with intermittent rain and snow just around the freezing point. That soft fluffy stuff kept coming down and compacting, and coming down. By Saturday morning when we looked out, it was good and deep, very deep. In fact I had my pickup truck parked out in front of my house on Lebanon Avenue and by the look of things I wasn't going to get it out of there for a while or anything else.

Around 11 o'clock on Saturday morning as I was just sitting down in an easy chair in the living room and I remarked to my young and beautiful wife that I always wanted to get snowed in with her. Just then the phone rang, who was on the phone, Luther J. Kuder with some very cheerful news. The warehouse

buildings at Westinghouse Electric Corporation occupied in Reynolds, the roofs were collapsing from the weight of the snow. Could I get down there quick and do something about it. Get there and get as many men as you can get hold of and shovel the snow off the roofs. To me a monumental task, not too practical but we went.

The first thing I did was call my good Man Friday, Old Bones Frichman who lived over on Shenango Street and told Bones to get his tail down to my house and help me put chains on the truck. Well, we jacked it up and put chains on and then Bones and I left for Reynolds. We got down there and saw the situation. The warehouse men for Westinghouse Electric Corporation had their office quarters in Building #4 and there were about 6 to 8 warehousemen on that shift that couldn't get home because of the snow. So we checked it over and found that the roof beams were cracking and that the post in all the warehouse buildings had never been supported on concrete footers. They were merely just placed on a block of wood on earth fill. They had dry rotted off below the floor slab and then just simply mushroomed as the weight came down. So we went back into town and bought every snow shovel that the hardware stores had and rounded up every available man that we could find and stood them in the back of the truck, took them down and started shoveling snow off the roofs.

I reported by phone to Luther every now and then and I told him we were getting nowhere as the snow was coming down faster than we could shovel it off, and still coming down. So the only thing to do was I ordered out 6 or 8 of my carpenters and we ran over and dug lumber out of Greenville Lumber's yard across from Building #4, dug it out of the snow, hauled it over and we started shoring the roofs up to keep them from coming down completely. They had settled in toward the middle and instead of sloping outward they were sloping inward.

We worked at that and worked at it, I just left my men there, the

carpenters and three or four laborers. They stayed there and that was on Saturday night and they just kept going. On Saturday night I plowed my way back into Greenville in the pick up with chains on and went home. Sunday morning things didn't look any better, in fact it looked worse if anything. So I had in the meantime sent the men home that had been hired to shovel snow from the roofs because it was an impossible task and after talking to Luther again, I told him that my men down there and the men at Westinghouse Electric Corporation, none had anything to eat.

And there was no way of getting there, so I stopped on Main Street of Greenville, I could still get through there and walking down the street was big old Whitey Johnson from the Greenville Tubes Company. I said, Whitey would you go down with me, sure, glad to. So we stopped in the then Greenville Restaurant and I asked them to make me up two baskets of sandwiches, they asked what kind, any kind at all. So they made up two big chip baskets of sandwiches and I took those and then Whitey and I started out. We got as far as the Shenango Post Office and the truck just got buried and we couldn't go any further. We left it sitting in the middle of the highway. He and I hiked up the hill by Schusters' and down the other side to the Blue Sky Inn and pounded on the door until we got in. There we bought a little bit of "spirits fermenti" to take to the men also. We walked over the little road known as Crestview Drive, over to the Warehouse Building #4 and there we were greeted by the Westinghouse Electric Corporation men, and our men and the sandwiches and other things didn't last long. Then we were there for awhile, as there was no way of getting home again.

I have to digress for a moment in the 1949 and early 1950 operation, was that the Vacuum Melt Corporation headed by Frank Elge had taken over the theater building at 7th and Brentwood Drive Streets. They were setting up this Vacuum Melt Corporation where they were going to melt stainless in electric furnaces.

That building, the old theater building, had a hot water heating boiler and radiators to heat the building. I got a call then from Luther that I had better get up there and see that there is a fire in the boilers so all the piping and the radiators don't freeze. Because right after that snow came down, it started Saturday night and got bitter cold and by Sunday night it was down to 0°. So then Sunday night about 11 o'clock I asked for volunteers among my men to go with me up to the Vacuum Melt building. To go up and see if we could build a fire in that boiler. Three or four of them went with me, for a price, and we went up there, they had coal but no wood to start a boiler fire. So we tore down the railing to the second floor, tramped it up, broke up the railing, threw it in the boiler and set fire to it and got the boiler going. From then on it was like that all night long. Back down in the snow by that time was almost up to the middle of your thighs when you walked, back down to the warehouse building listen to the crack and pop of the beams going and men scurrying here and there to put more wood shores under them. This was then late Sunday night and come early Monday morning. Monday was the same way, there was just no way, nothing. In fact, there was no traffic moved on Route 18 from we'll say from sometime Sunday until Thursday, morning. Thursday morning bright and early around 11 o'clock in the morning, Bill Smith from Westinghouse Electric Corporation arrived with a flat bed truck with heavy coils put on it to weight it down to get through the snow on Route 18 and he came in with a so-called rescue mission with sandwiches, and what have you for their men.

The papers made a big play about Bill Smith's rescue expedition, but the men hadn't exactly starved yet. The snow was measured to 30 inches on the level and at the time Bill Smith, an engineer for WESCO came up he wanted a cubic foot of snow on the roofs at 18 lbs. with 30 inches of snow on the roof that made a total of 45# per square foot. The Army warehouse buildings had been designed

for a live load of only 15#, so it is a small wonder that we had some failure of roof members.

The reason there was no roads opened up for snow plowing or anything else was that the operators of the snowplowing equipment in Mercer and other places were snowed in at their homes they couldn't get with their cars to get where the equipment was to do the plowing. There wasn't any railroad trains through until that following Thursday. Everything was really at a standstill. No mail delivery, no this or that. It was really a period of time to go through.

In the meantime I had received orders from Mr. Kuder and the Trustees to open up what we could to get industries ready to get back into operation. And I had gotten one of Tubby Russell's bulldozers and another small piece of equipment and we plowed out down around the WECO buildings, up around Vacuum Melt, the Greenville Tubes area and the lower end of the camp. My new houses that were under construction from 10th Street on were really just snowed in. I just let that go. We didn't get back to work up there again until the following week because snow removal was such a hard thing to come by and the Borough of Greenville was only able to commandeer a couple of bulldozers to open up the main streets but other than that things were pretty messed up.

The year 1951 showed a lot of progress and development down in the Reynolds Area. In that year WECO decided that in addition to their warehousing operations they were going to start a manufacturing operation in Reynolds with their small transformer Division making small aircraft type transformers, etc. We received the contract to build a large building along the rail road adjacent to the warehouse buildings. The building originally was designed to be another warehouse except it was all concrete block and the building was 50 x 800 feet long containing 40,000 square feet. The building was built of 12" concrete block with wood bow-string truss roof and concrete floors and before the

building was completed as a warehouse it was when the decision was made that they would manufacture there instead.

WECO has been there ever since in that manufacturing phase of the business. Also, that year they constructed their office building adjacent to the new manufacturing building on 4th Street.

By that time the industries now in the Development were Westinghouse, Greenville Tubes, Greenville Lumber, Vacuum Melt, Spenser Container. Vacuum Melt afterwards became the Damascus Tube Corporation when Bill Klee came in as president. Damascus is not only still there but is largely successful in stainless steel tubing and is now a Division of Sharon Steel Corporation.

Also that year sprinkler systems were installed in the warehouse buildings to lower insurance rates and to make the buildings more attractive to present and future tenants. I was designated by the Trustees to prepare the specifications and take bids on it, which was done and the first sprinklers for the buildings were awarded to the Sans Corporation in Jamestown, New York. I also supervised the construction of those in addition to conducting my own business. At that time at all the Trustee meetings, Mr. Moss, of course, always sat in in an advisory capacity at the meetings, as an exofficio member of the Trustees, and I was also in attendance to provide what information that I could regarding current construction activities and things that were of concern to the Trustees.

That year was a year of great fortune for the Development. They were fortunate enough to retain the services of Robert B. Parker, Jr. as Managing Engineer of the Development, also the Water Company, Sewer Company and Telephone Company. From the inception of Mr. Parker's taking over, things really began to look up in the Development. The new industries were attracted and present industries were much happier to have somebody to carry all their grief to.

From there on, of course, Mr. Parker had the job of meeting with the Trustees each meeting and things were thrashed out in detail. Mr. Parker was certainly not only a welcome addition to the Development but an asset that will never be obtained again. He was almost an irreplaceable human being in many, many ways.

I have met Mr. Smith, his successor after Mr. Parker's death, and he to is a very fine gentleman and he has a big pair of shoes to fill.

The ensuing years in 1952, also the large Westinghouse warehouse buildings were built in what was the old coal yard area of the camp and these were two large aluminum buildings between the two of them they contained 120,000 square feet of floor area. Now WECO used the largest building for their warehousing of their raw materials for the Sharon plant and also they put in a steel slitting line where they slit the sheet for manufacturing there. The smaller of the two buildings 16,500 square feet building was their oil storage building in which they stored their volatile materials such as lacquers, varnishes, paints, oil, etc.

Another industry that came in that year was the Deeco Manufacturing Company. We constructed a steel and aluminum building for them at the corner of 7th and Crestview Drive Streets and they were manufacturers - primarily of outdoor lawn furniture. They ran a manufacturing operation there for two or three years when they pulled out and it was taken over by the Development.

Also it should be added that shortly after Mr. Parker's coming into the development he was successful in having some of the street names changes with the approval by mail ballot of the people then living there. It was fortunate and a change for the better. "A" Street became Arlington, "B" Street became Brentwood Drive, "C" Street became Crestview Drive, "D" Street became Delmar Drive and "E" Street became Edgewood Drive. All with the beginning letter and

all the numbered streets retained their same numbers and designations.

In 1953 Valley Freight lines built a building also at 7th and Crestview across from Deeco and in 1954 Universal Refractories built a building off of Fourth Street below 7th and they manufacture a ceramic type product for the steel industry.

In 1955 we received a contract to build Fay Terrace Housing Project along Route 18 on the west side between 7th and 9th Streets, the site of the old civilian army camp employees housing buildings which were demolished and then the new brick buildings built. We built 76 apartments and an office there and this project was to be primarily for low income families.

During the late fall and early spring in 1954 and 1955 Westinghouse went on strike nationwide. It was a long and bitter strike of 5½ months and of course, things in Reynolds were stopped dead the same as they were in Sharon and elsewhere. It was finally settled in the spring and went back to work again.

Now in February of 1956 Si Moss, one of the leading lights in the formation of the Development, was killed in an accident near his winter home in Kings Tree, South Carolina. We all missed his advise and expertise on a lot of matters in many, many ways.

In the ensuing years there was several small industries that came in to the area and some that left. Some that came and stayed were like Frick & Lindsay Company, Salem Stainless, the one that is now Pennsak, I forget the name of the original company in that building - reclaimed welding rods.

There were many large additions built onto the Greenville Tube Plant buildings. They were in a continuous expansion program and although they had another plant in Tennessee and we also worked on their plant in Fremont, Ohio in 1970 and 1971, they also built another plant in Clarksville, Arkansas. Greenville Tubes since then has ceased manufacturing and gone out of business as

far as Reynolds is concerned.

R. D. Werner came into the area with warehousing operations, the Telephone Company, of course, constantly improving their service and equipment and built a new modern central office building out on Edgewood Drive and it is a marvel mechanical facilities for anyone to see.

The Reynolds Water Company plant down along the river at Big Run was also modernized and re-built in 1973, 1974, and 1975. The original buildings, both the original filtration plant building and the pumping station building had been destroyed by fire, one many years ago and the pumping station in 1974. The new buildings were designed and built of masonry and steel for fireproof construction. The plant equipment modernized with new equipment and it today is a pretty smooth running filtration plant system for the Water Company. There have been very favorable reports on the quality of water.

Other than than we are getting up in the current modern era which everybody else is familiar with and I just hope that a few of the earlier events that I have been able to recall have been some help to somebody.

In the last few years many industries have been in and out, mostly in. Valley Freight lines later on Halls Motor Freight came in. Several small manufacturing operations were in Building #4 which is leased to various tenants. But my purpose in making this little recording has been to more or less to try and recall the early days of the Development. The modern phase, of course, is current and not of news to anybody.

I hope in some way I have contributed something to the past record of what went on.

Thank you,

R. S. Neff