

Faultless Rubber: A Lasting Legacy

by Tim Busbey

Shortly after the turn of the 20th Century, an entrepreneurial young businessman from the Akron area arrived in Ashland, Ohio, with a dream in hand. That dream, bursting forth from the mind of Thomas W. Miller, would change the city of Ashland forever, and the fruits of that vision can still be seen today.

The Early Days

The roots of Faultless Rubber stretch as far back as 1896 and as far away as Rochester, N.Y. In 1896, Miller joined with a businessman several years his senior, H.B. Camp, and a group of investors from Rochester to form the Faultless Manufacturing Co. in Akron, with Camp as president and Miller running the day-to-day operations as treasurer and general manager.



Rather than compete with his contemporaries Harvey Firestone (founder of Firestone Tires) and Frank Seiberling (founder of Goodyear Tires), Miller and his partner, H.B. Camp, saw a promising future in other rubber products, including cushions for horse collars, rubber sundries, rubber surgical goods, rubber toilet articles, sponges, toys and balloons.

The Faultless logo, written in a stylized, cursive script.

The new century saw a new beginning for Faultless as Miller and Camp reorganized Faultless Manufacturing Co. into the Faultless Rubber Co. in 1900. Two years later, as the company's small Akron plant was reaching its capacity, Miller began looking beyond the borders of Akron for a new location for his company's manufacturing facility.

Ashland officials, eager to bring the thriving company to their city, made a pitch to Miller, offering to raise \$8,000 to pay for Faultless to move all its manufacturing operations to their community. In the winter of 1902, Ashland officials were pleased when Miller announced that Faultless would be consolidating its operations in their city, but it would be several years before the move would be made.

In 1903, Miller and Camp organized the Camp Rubber Co. and established a plant in Ashland, manufacturing rubber horse collar components. Just one year later, the pair combined all the rubber business under one corporate banner, merging the Camp Rubber Co. into

Faultless. After several years of delays, in the summer of 1907, Faultless closed its Akron plant and began manufacturing its entire line of products in Ashland. That August, at the company's first annual meeting held in Ashland, Camp announced his retirement due to failing health and Miller was named President of Faultless Rubber.

A Time of Innovation – “Craftsmen in Rubber”

From its location on East Fourth Street, Faultless created its unique line of tobacco bags, squeeze bulb syringes, atomizers, water bottles, ice bags, ice caps, nipples and rubber mold work for shipment to customers across America.

Faultless Rubber quickly established itself as an innovative industrial force, making its mark in Ashland, and abroad. The craftsmen at Faultless were the first to produce molded hot water bottles and sponge rubber and were developers of a water cure process that yielded higher quality dipped goods.

By 1915, the company employed 400 workers in its manufacturing plant and had more than a hundred national salesmen. During World War I, the Faultless plant created and manufactured the first medical tubing for intravenous administration of anti-infection solutions used to treat soldiers injured in battle.



Three decades later, the Ashland company again answered the call of duty. As American industrial efforts to help the Allies in World War II ramped up, Faultless was awarded contracts to make rubber boats and other war products. The war years also were a time of change for the Miller family.

In August 1945, at the age of 70, T.W. Miller died of a heart attack that struck him while he was at his home in Ashland. His son, T.W. Miller Jr., was named president of

the company in 1949 after serving in the U.S. Army during World War II. Miller Jr. had started working at Faultless in 1938 to learn more about the company and was on his way to taking over the presidency when World War II interrupted those plans.

1960s – A Time For Change

In July of 1966, a major step in the history of Faultless Rubber was announced. Illinois-based Abbott Laboratories purchased the company in exchange for 110,554 shares of Abbott.



Abbott was interested in the Ashland company to increase its technical base. At the time, Abbott manufactured pharmaceuticals, fine chemicals, prepared baby formula and other specialized food and medical products, and the addition of Faultless was a major addition for the company.

In the short term, business did not change much for Faultless. The business operated as a separate unit of Abbott with most of the Faultless management team still in place. T.W. Miller Jr. remained as president until 1970, when he retired.

For the next four decades, Abbott remained a major presence in Ashland, Ohio. Under the Abbott name, thousands of Ashland-area residents made their living continuing to create the unique rubber products associated with the Faultless tradition of excellence.

During this time, the company specialized in primary product lines requiring compression, injection and transfer of rubber components, precision latex dipping and plastic injection molding and extrusions. The company continued to be known world-wide for pioneering new standards in quality of design and production capabilities.

New Name - A New Beginning?



In 2004, Abbott Laboratories created an independent company called Hospira from its core hospital products business. The local plant continued to produce a wide range of rubber, plastic and latex health products including high-tech pharmaceutical products, intravenous tubing, baby bottle nipples and hot water bottles. The new company became one of the largest hospital-products manufacturers in the U.S.

Local officials and employees were optimistic that the new company would continue the century-long tradition of excellence that had started with T.W. Miller. Company officials said an aging U.S. population boded well for the future of Hospira.



Unfortunately, the lifespan of Hospira in Ashland was to be a short one. Two short years after its creation, on February 1, 2006, the nearly 500 employees of the new company received word that work at the Ashland plant would be transitioned to other company plants by the fall of 2007. Company officials cited economic reasons, saying the plant was not as competitive as other Hospira plants.



In 2008, the former Faultless plant that had stood on East Fourth Street in Ashland for a century was demolished, unofficially ending Faultless' run in our city.

An Enduring Legacy

Today, although the Faultless name is no longer a part of the Ashland landscape, the legacy of the company lives on. The many contributions that the company and the Miller family made to Ashland's history will never be forgotten.

Some of the work performed by Hospira has been taken on by new companies in Ashland, including Novatex. Many former employees have grabbed hold of Miller's entrepreneurial spirit and started their own businesses, including a hauling business, a resale shop and mold maintenance shop.



More than a century after T.W. Miller brought his dream to our city, Ashland continues to have a strong presence in the plastics sector. The resources remain for someone new to grab hold of the same dream Miller brought with him and create a new era of plastic production, breathing new life into Ashland's manufacturing tradition and building on the Faultless legacy.