

The General Mills footprint in Southeast 2010 – “Where wheat gave up its secrets”

General Mills, Inc. was founded in Minneapolis in 1928 by the merger of several milling companies.

In 1930 General Mills paid \$4000 for the initial land they bought at 2008/2010 E. Hennepin Ave. for the site of their research laboratories.

This location was chosen by Dr. Bailey & Dr. Sherwood of General Mills for several reasons. It provided easy access to both the U of M main campus and “Farm Campus” (now known as the St. Paul campus), the General Mills main offices on the 2nd floor of the Chamber of Commerce building downtown at 323 – 4th Ave. S., and the Minneapolis Mill. The site also had suitable zoning & utilities sources.

The initial building was constructed by the August Cederstrand Company and completed in August of 1930. Later that same month, an open house was held to showcase the milling industry’s first research laboratory right here at 2008/2010 E. Hennepin Ave.

Growth of staff at the 2010 Research Laboratories

Year	Size of staff
1930	8
1935	21
1940	57
1943	127
1945	202

** Note the World War II staffing boom.*

Products Control Dept. moves to 2010

In 1946 GM decided to move Products Control from its location in the Chamber of Commerce building downtown to 2010. This move involved constructing another building that held a nutritional laboratory with room for experimental animals, laboratory facilities, experimental & semi-commercial test bakeshops.

Growing, growing, . . . gone

General Mills continued acquiring land, constructing buildings and expanding their laboratories here until deciding in 1951 that they would need 1000+ acres to adequately accommodate their anticipated growth. They first bought land just north of Anoka for this expansion, but decided it was too far out to attract and keep their staff. They then settled on land in the Village of Golden Valley and began construction in 1959. This, of course, remains the world headquarters for General Mills today.,

Footnote – general Mills acquired Minneapolis’ other international food company, Pillsbury, in 2001.

Company Leadership

James Stroud Bell became the president of the Washburn Crosby Company in 1888. James’ son, James Ford Bell, became the president in 1925 and led the formation of GM. In 1952, the third Bell, Charles H. Bell, became president. The Bell Museum of Natural History at the University of Minnesota is named after James Ford Bell.

Research Leadership

Dr. Clyde Harold Bailey, a professor at the U of M Farm Campus and a world-leading cereal chemist, was employed by GM on a part-time basis starting in late 1929. He later became the Director of Research at GM. He remained connected to the U of M as a professor and later a dean between 1911 and 1953. Bailey Hall, the only residence hall on the St. Paul campus, was built & dedicated in his name in 1959.

Famous Products

The Washburn Crosby Company, a forerunner of General Mills, created Betty Crocker in 1921 as a pen name for its consumer response department. The surname Crocker was chosen to honor a recently retired director, William G. Crocker.

Wheaties was introduced by the Washburn Crosby Company in 1924 after being accidentally discovered by a Minneapolis health clinician three years earlier.

General Mills spent a lot of time and energy on Vitamin D research in the 1930’s and 40’s. This work resulted in fortifying such things as milk, evaporated milk, ice cream, bread, soap, lotions, candy and marshmallows.

Kix, the first ready-to-eat puffed cereal, was introduced in 1937 and *Cheerios* was introduced in 1941, changing its name to *Cheerios* in 1945.

The Superfund site left behind

When all was said and done, General Mills conducted food research here from 1930-1947 and chemical research here from 1947-1977. Each year between 1947 and 1962, they disposed of 1000 gallons of solvents, etc. into a pit on-site at 2010. In 1984 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) placed 2010, which they refer to as the General Mills/Henkel site, on its list of hazardous waste sites needing cleanup. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency oversaw the General Mills’ clean-up of the property which involved removing the groundwater contamination. As of April 1999, the soil on the site continued to be evaluated for possible contamination.

~ Notable Anecdotes ~

A Pint of Potato Bugs

~1930, General Mills paid children in Osseo 25 cents for each pint of potato bugs they collected from the plentiful potato crops. A large supply of the bugs were needed to create carotin for their flour bleaching.

Developing a Quality Potato Chip

In 1935-36, an effort was made to create a good-quality, shelf-stable potato chip which had to "equal the quality of chips prepared by President James Ford Bell's colored (sic) chef". They were successful creating the chip, but couldn't come up with a suitable container for shipping.

Price of One Good Cigar

~1939, a Works Project Administration (WPA) project removed the peat under the sidewalks in the area, provided fill and leveling at a cost to General Mills of one good cigar for the job foreman. Manly Berry, a life-long General Mills chemist and former Como resident, recalled East Hennepin Avenue sinking to the point that the manhole covers stood up significantly higher than the street.

Rations for the WWII Quartermaster Corps

In 1941-42 General Mills was making Vitamin D concentrates for evaporated milk and the dairy industry. Special Vitamin D rations for the troops were also developed.

Plant Fire

On January 21, 1946 a fire destroyed the wooden polyamide resin pilot plant at 2010, apparently started by a small explosion. The fire was prevented from spreading to nearby oil tanks and adjoining research buildings.

More recent activities

The Henkel Corporation, one of the world's largest chemical companies, owned the 2010 property from 1980 to 1990, though they ceased operation there in 1985. They make cosmetics, detergents, adhesives, etc. and are based in Dusseldorf, Germany.

After 2010 sat vacant for five years, BBD Holdings, Inc. bought the property at auction in 1990. They continue to operate it as a small business incubator that has been home to hundreds of businesses, some of which currently include:

Guardhouse Coffee – located in General Mills' old guard house (built in 1955); serves area workers and residents coffee, pastries, soups and sandwiches.

B. T. McElrath Chocolatiers – their Epicurean Truffles won awards in 2001 for "Outstanding New Product" and 2002 for "Outstanding Confection" from the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade, Inc.

Panini Catering – makes gourmet sandwiches that are distributed throughout the Twin Cities (you can buy them at Guardhouse Coffee).

Today there are 15 buildings, measuring 290,000 square feet on the 6.5 acre site. Railroad tracks continue to run along the southern edge of the property and are used daily.

Sources:

- Business without Boundary: the story of General Mills, James Gray, 1954
- General Mills' "The Modern Millwheel", February 1946
 - General Mills press release, August 19, 1946
 - General Mills press release, August 7, 1950
 - "General Mills Research", date unknown
- Phone interview with Mr. Manly Berry, former General Mills employee and SE Como resident, June 2003
- U.S. EPA Superfund Redevelopment Initiative, General Mills/Henkel Case Study, April 1999
- www.chemchannels.com, "Analysis of First 50 Companies", 1999

A brief history

of the

2010

East Hennepin Avenue site

in the

Southeast Como Neighborhood

- Former home of General Mills' Research Laboratories
- The birthplace of Cheerios and home to innovative food research which helped create and build the internationally-successful company, General Mills
- Current and recent home to hundreds of small start-up businesses, some of which have already gained success in their own right

Compiled by the Como history group

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