

Hercules Engine News

Including Economy, Arco, Jaeger & Thermoil

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Walter Schnake, now 94, began working at the Hercules Gas Engine Company in 1916 at the age of 15. Employees were supposed to be at least 16, but Walter looked older than he was so they didn't ask his age. He began working in the machine shop where his first job was that of drilling the two holes in the connecting rods for the rod cap bolts. He was paid for piece work. That's the way most machine shop employees were paid.

When he began work at Hercules, they were all excited about the Thermoil engine that they were building. It was said that the Thermoils would even run on buttermilk. William Lauer did most of the Thermoil assembly work.

During the following ten years Mr. Schnake quit and went back to Hercules a half dozen times. In 1920, his second time back, he was in charge of the

engine testing rooms. There were two of them separated by a long partition. Forty engines could be tested at a time in each room. He reported production to be over 100 engines per day. He had to grease, adjust and start every engine to make sure they operated properly before being washed in gasoline and sent to the paint room. During this time, Mr. Schnake reported that the mechanics were making 50 cents an hour.

During 1922 Mr. Schnake worked in the tool room making the various cutters and machining tools needed in the machine shop.

Castings and many other parts were made in the Hercules factory. The magnets, igniters, piston rings, oilers and grease cups were purchased from other manufacturers.

Even after engines were no longer being produced, the replacement parts were still made at Serval Inc. After the great Ohio River flood in 1937, parts were still cast at Serval but were sent across town to the Fawcett and Schnake Machine Shop. They were machined there before being sent to the Hercules Body Works where the parts inventory was kept and where parts shipments were made from until 1955.

Mr. Schnake was a talented person when it came to mechanical things. When he was young, he spent a lot of time building things rather than running around with other kids. He built a one cylinder marine engine when he was only 15. In 1936 he built an electric impact wrench from a sketch made by a man named Potts. The wrench was manufactured and sold by Holtzclaw Brothers at Evansville, Indiana.

Mr. Schnake became involved in the refrigeration business while at Hercules around 1920. He reported that the first refrigerators made in Evansville were called "Ice No More."

Eventually Mr. Schnake began manufacturing businesses of his own. As late as 1988, he was still at it. He along with a couple of others were making and machining aluminum castings that were used to make part of a boat propelling unit. They utilized a two cylinder vertical shaft Briggs and Stratton motor to drive an impellor in the cast aluminum tube. Water was drawn in through one opening and expelled through another. Casting was done in a small building near his home and the rest of the work in a large garage addition to his home. ○