

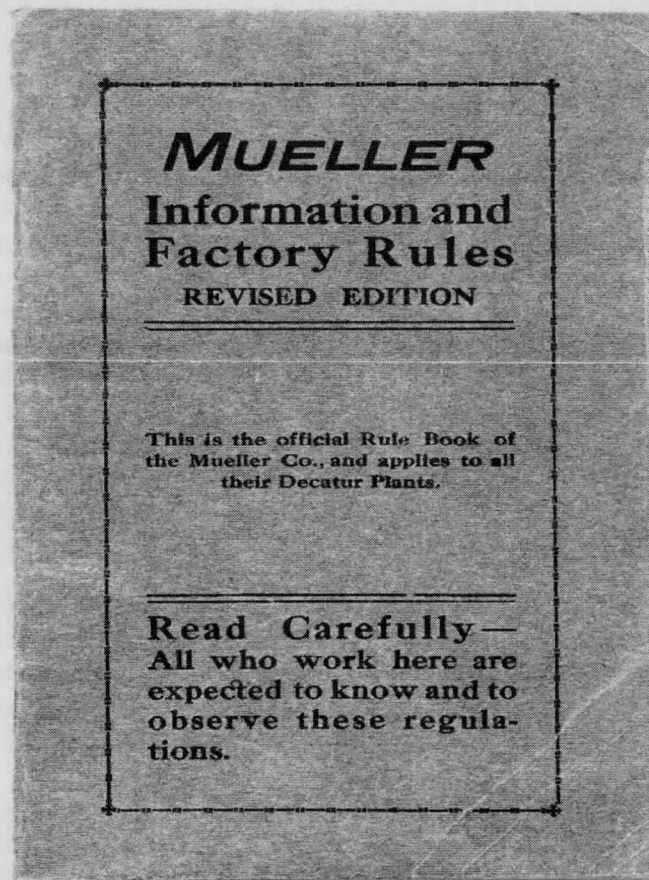


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# THE MUELLER RECORD

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SUMMER 2010 NEWSLETTER



## WORKING AT MUELLER CO. IN 1925

An interesting little bit of history was unearthed in sorting some old company papers – **Mueller Information and Factory Rules**. This small 34 page booklet was published in 1925 for distribution to all employees and tells us a great deal about the relationship of the company and its workers. Here are some excerpts from the booklet to share with you along with some thoughts on their significance.

(continued)

The booklet opens with *"The Mueller Idea ... In this organization quality means something. Quality is safeguarded in the designing of the goods and in all the processes of manufacture, and by inspection. Into the hands of those who work here is committed the trust of maintaining Mueller quality."* This is followed by *"The Mueller Spirit ... employee welfare and that of the company are closely related. It is a policy of the Company to provide regular and steady work for its employees. ... A courteous consideration of employees' rights as men and women is an established Mueller policy. The employee's welfare and ours is the same. Out of this relation grows the spirit of work and co-operation."* Hieronymus Mueller was not educated in the principles of business management but he had simple values which required fair treatment of both his customers and his employees which provided the foundation for a successful enterprise. He instilled these ideals in his sons who found them equally valuable in guiding the business over the years.

On the subject of hiring, it is stated *"This Company hires only American citizens."* Apparently some issues never go away. On the other hand, some very good ideas are now quite old fashioned -- *"It is a well established policy of the Mueller Company to promote men from within the organization ..."*

The boss was still the boss as noted in the section on time cards and punching in for the day. *"If you ring in at 7:01 a.m., your pay does not start until 7:30."* That's a little harsh...

The list of safety rules goes on for several pages with many practical suggestions to avoid injury. Some seem a bit strange -- *"After work, take a shower bath and finish with a dash of cold water"* (does the boss do that?), or perhaps *"When warm and sweating freely, do not step into draft in door or window. You may catch cold."* (Sure, Mom.) Here's some advice you might not think of on your own -- *"When carrying molten metal, be careful not to trip."* And here's some wisdom that might serve you well at home as well as work -- *"Don't drop things on your feet."* Another rule that Mother insists on -- *"Spitting on the floor breeds disease. It is too uncleanly to be tolerated. USE THE CUSPIDOR!"* And just who cleans the cuspidor? In fairness, most of the rules and suggestions are quite practical and one would guess that many are a result lessons learned from unfortunate accidents. There is a sense of real concern for safety in the workplace.

Another section of the rules deals with "deportment", admonishing employees to *"use dignity, respect, and care in addressing fellow employees and officers. Older employees are expected to set an example of COURTESY. We desire that a spirit of cheerfulness shall pervade the offices and factory."*

And then we have the housekeeping rules. *"Don't throw things out the windows. Don't loiter in the halls and washrooms. Don't write on the walls. Don't leave the lights burning when they are not needed."* On this last point, the most senior retirees tell stories of Adolph Mueller (Company president) strolling through the plant during lunch breaks to turn off work lights and leaving notes at work stations advising that he was deducting a dime from pay for the electricity.

Apparently 1925 was the beginning of the paid vacation for most employees. The plan provided that employees with under ten years service would receive a half hour paid vacation for each week of perfect attendance at work. That comes to 26 hours or about 3 days per year assuming that no days were missed. Those with over ten years received one hour credit per week of perfect attendance or a possible 50 hours (maximum) per year. That was a week's paid vacation. While the plan seems less than generous, the idea of paid vacations was just catching on in the 1920's and only the most progressive employers saw the need to provide this benefit.

Other employee benefits described in the booklet included the Employees' Aid Society which workers were encouraged to join. Dues ranged from \$ .35 to \$1.20 per month and provided varying levels of coverage for illness or death. Another payroll deduction option was the Employees' Investment Plan which allowed workers to invest \$1 to \$5 per week with the Company. Interest was paid at 7% (no compounding) but falls to 3% if withdrawn before the end of the year. Mueller Company encouraged

employee innovations and suggestions by offering annual prizes in three categories – Increasing Production, Reducing Overhead, and Preventing Accidents. Six prizes were awarded in each of the categories with the top prize of \$100 (a substantial sum in 1925).

The final few pages were devoted to a description of the recreational activities available to employees and their families. The Company organized these activities through the Mueller Athletic Association which in turn had two parts – the Athletic Division and the Social Division. All of this was administered by an Employees' Activities Commission. Membership was \$1.25 per year for employees. Specific activities included Baseball, Basketball, Boxing, Social Club, Camera Club, Dancing, Fishing, Volleyball, Glee Club, Horseshoes, Outing (organized short trips), and Wrestling. Facilities provided included the Mueller Club House (this was the gymnasium and cafeteria building on the factory grounds), the Mueller Athletic Fields (baseball, track, volleyball, croquet and water sports on Lake Decatur's south shore), the Athletic Club House (a large residential style structure with club rooms for card playing, small parties, and shower rooms), the Amphitheater on Mueller Pond with stage and seating for several hundred, and Mueller Lodge (large gathering dining facilities, shower rooms, overnight lodging, playgrounds, and ball room). Overnight camping was permitted as well as private parties so long as they were properly chaperoned by at least one responsible married lady. A final benefit mentioned was the use of Adolph Mueller's cabin on the Okaw River which provided accommodations for up to 12 for hunting, fishing, and swimming. Although this cabin was the personal property of Adolph, he happily shared it with his workers and it was a very popular destination for many families.

Reading the entire book gives the impression that there was a real commitment to the safety and welfare of the workforce. The list of benefits would have caught the attention of any potential worker in the 1920's – the company was recognized as one of the most forward thinking in providing for its employees. Wages were consistent with national trends – the necessity of controlling costs and remaining competitive probably kept wages low – but the Company seemed determined to provide workers with the best working conditions possible. A pamphlet issued by Mueller's Canadian plant in the early 1920's was seeking to recruit workers to a growing workforce. That pamphlet emphasized the benefits of working for Mueller – clean restrooms, a bright cafeteria, factory floors that were swept daily, recreational facilities, medical staff in the plant, windows in the plant, space to prevent overcrowding of machines. These were all things that Mueller management knew would attract and keep employees. Judging from the remarkable service records of so many long-time employees, that policy was correct and the *Mueller Spirit* mentioned at the beginning of the rule book was right on target – ***"The employee's welfare and ours is the same."***

## **MUELLER CO. RELOCATES HEADQUARTERS TO CHATTANOOGA, TENN.**

After 153 years residence in Decatur, Illinois, the company headquarters of Mueller Co. has been moved to Chattanooga, Tennessee. The new offices are located in a modern office tower in the downtown area and serve as the center for most management and marketing operations. Remaining in Decatur are the training operations and engineering departments as well as the brass foundry and finishing plants. The move was made to place the offices closer to the center of what has become a national operation. Mueller Co. has gradually grown well beyond its Decatur home with major operations in Tennessee, Alabama, and Texas as well as smaller facilities spread throughout the country. Also, the parent company of Mueller Co., Mueller Water Products, Inc., is located in Atlanta, Georgia which is geographically more convenient to Chattanooga. Obviously, those of us who love history and tradition are saddened to see the change, but there is a realization that the future of the company is strengthened by the move and hopefully the Chattanooga offices will begin another 153 year run.