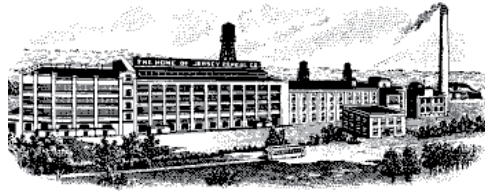


2020 WINTER NEWSLETTER



Did You Know?

Jersey Cereal Company
Former Food Plant in North Huntingdon Put Cereal on Map

BY BOB CUPP

Most North Huntingdon residents are unaware of the township's early 20th century leadership in the manufacture of corn and wheat flakes.

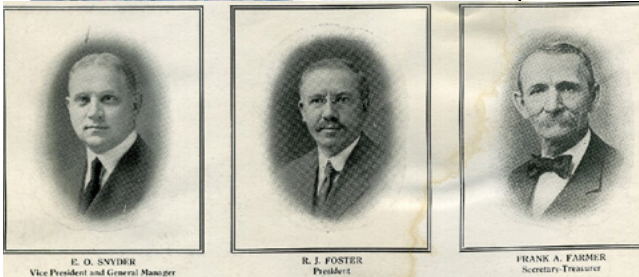
The Jersey Cereal Food Company was organized here in 1903 with \$200,000 capital for the manufacture and distribution of a breakfast cereal called "Jersey Flake." A three-story brick building was erected about a mile south of Irwin near Hahntown at what became known as Cereal, Pa.; production began the following year. Before the cereal plant was built, the area was farmland and was known as Lindencross.



This July 14, 1912 photo of Jersey Food Cereal Co. executives was taken following the expansion of the cereal plant that year.

The new company was described in a 1904 booklet, published in conjunction with Irwin's 50th anniversary celebration: "All the experience of several years in the business is concentrated here, machinery being the best known and the factory in its entirety a model of its kind; automatic in its operation so that human hands do not touch the flakes from the grain to the packing in cartons. A new departure is that the supply of Jersey Flake is constantly crisp and fresh when it reaches the table, something that consumers appreciate and show it by the big demand."

The first company president was John Kerr. He was soon followed by Chester D. Sensenich as president with Frank A. Farmer, treasurer, and R. J. Foster, secretary and manager.



E. O. SNYDER
Vice President and General Manager

R. J. FOSTER
President

FRANK A. FARMER
Secretary-Treasurer

The plant burned down in 1906 and was replaced by a larger one in 1907. It was further expanded in 1908 and 1912 with a power plant added in 1920. Jersey Corn Flakes and Wheat Flakes, along with some related products, were manufactured in the four-story, 400-foot long facility.



First Building 1903



Second Building 1907



Third Building 1910



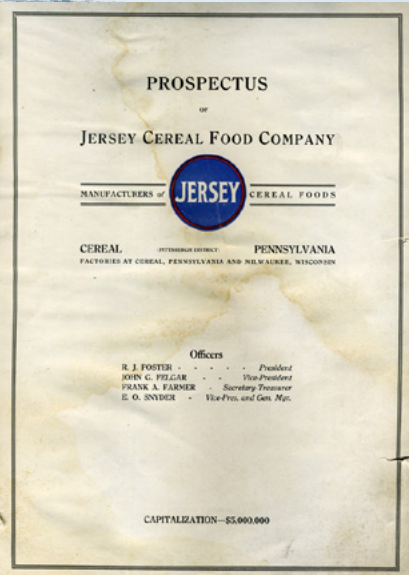
Fourth Building 1920

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This post card, featuring "Jersey Flake," was mailed from the Cereal, Pa. Post Office on September 2, 1910. (Courtesy of the Westmoreland County Philatelic Society)



The Jersey Cereal Food Company looking South, with Pennsylvania Railroad tracks at the right.



Frank Farmer also served as Cereal's postmaster. A post office was located in the Jersey Cereal Food Company's general office building. It operated from November 13, 1907 to August 31, 1920 when it became a rural branch of the Irwin Post Office until it closed on April 30, 1937.

The Jersey Cereal Food Company was a very successful operation. At one time, it was the largest cereal manufacturing company in Pennsylvania. Its products were sold throughout the country. The company, known for being progressive, was one of the first to ban cigarette smoking and the use of alcohol by its employees.

Following World War I, the cereal company expanded into several unrelated businesses. For some time, a candy factory operated on the fourth floor. It produced molded chocolate Christmas candy with crushed cereal in it, and was remembered mainly because the broken candy was sold to local children. The company also tried raising hogs and pedigree dogs, as well as drilling for gas. Gas from one of their gas wells leaked into a local coal mine, and had to be sealed with cement. Problems with the new businesses caused financial difficulties, undermining the company's stability.

In 1919, a change in majority ownership was followed by a disastrous stock selling campaign, resulting in the financial failure of the company and a loss of money by many local residents. In July, 1922, at the request of some creditors and stockholders, Jersey Cereal Food Company was placed in the hands of a receiver after an involuntary petition for bankruptcy.

Plans to cut expenses and return the company to profitability didn't succeed. On February 2, 1923, the land and plant were sold to a new company formed by a stockholders' executive committee. The officers were Dr. R. P. McClelland, president, J. K. Love, vice president, J. A. Jones, secretary and treasurer, and Charles E. Luke, factory manager. The new firm was called the Jersey Cereal Company with the word "Food" dropped from the original name.

At the time, there were only five houses in Cereal with three of them owned by the company. Cale Myers then started selling lots along the Hahntown Road on what was known as "Cale Myers Hill." Many cereal plant employees built homes there. Around 1926, an ash walking path, connecting the houses, was covered with red dog to make a road.

During the 1930's, the company employed about 200 normally, and in peak seasons the number of workers rose to 300. Many of the employees lived close enough to walk to work; others carpooled from Irwin.

The company opened a second production facility at St. Joseph, Missouri in 1935. Two years later, the firm's headquarters were moved to Chicago, Illinois.

By 1939, the company was manufacturing six popular products: Jersey Corn, Wheat, Rice and Bran Flakes, and Jersey Rice and Wheat Puffs. In addition to

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Jersey Cereal Company

MANUFACTURER of the
BREAKFAST FOODS that MAKE YOU HAPPY!

THINK OF ...
JERSEY WHEAT PUFFS

DREAM OF ...
JERSEY RICE PUFFS

BE SATISFIED WITH ...
JERSEY CORN FLAKES
For no better can be found . . . and they are made at home

AND ...
JERSEY BRAN
Just right for you, and tasty too!

ENJOY THE JERSEY DIFFERENCE!

the company's own brands, it also manufactured an extensive line of private brands for other distributors. The Jersey Cereal products were known nationally for their quality, flavor and exceptional value.

The company promoted its superior packaging in a 1939 advertisement: "For your assurance of OVEN CRISPNESS and appetizing flavor these products are packed in the most improved type package known to the industry. This type package for ready to eat cereals is an exclusive JERSEY feature."

Many women were employed to work on the cereal line, while most of the male employees were foremen, maintenance workers and inspectors. The line workers dressed in white smocks and caps. As with many area manufacturing facilities during the 1940's, once a woman got married, she was no longer allowed to work in the factory.



DO YOU "Enjoy the JERSEY Difference"

Jersey Cereals are different in their rich flavor, attractive appearance and wholesome food value. They are tightly and carefully wrapped to insure reaching you in a most fresh and appetizing condition.



For your assurance of OVEN CRISPNESS and appetizing flavor these products are packed in the most improved type package known to the industry. This style package for ready to eat cereals is an exclusive JERSEY feature.

You'll like these extra toasted "oven crisp" flakes—chuck full of goodness and natural wheat flavor—with just enough bran to make them the really balanced Bran health cereal.

A HOME INDUSTRY



JERSEY CEREAL COMPANY
CEREAL, PA.


Visitors were always welcome at the factory to witness the cereal manufacturing process. Manor resident, Harry McCracken, recalled touring the plant with his Norwin High School junior class in 1939. "We walked to the plant from the school in Irwin," he said. "When they 'shot' or 'puffed' the rice or wheat puffs, it sounded like they were shooting off cannons."

Upon graduating from high school in 1942, Buzzardtown resident, Jack Kinsey, got a job at the Jersey Cereal Company. "I worked on the belts for 50 cents an hour," Kinsey recalled. "If the cereal was burnt, you had to scrape it off. You could eat all the cereal you wanted. On pay day, each employee got a free box of cereal. Almost everyone took the rice flakes because they were the best tasting.

This 1939 Jersey Cereal Company advertisement emphasizes the plant's local ownership.

"My father, Russell Kinsey, started working at the plant in 1912 when he was only 12 years old. He worked there for three or four years. The best paying job in the plant was working in the gun room; the 'guns' were used to puff the rice and wheat."

By the late 1940's, production ceased and the last box of cereal was packaged at the plant. In March 1948, Westinghouse Electric purchased the old Jersey Cereal buildings on the 20-acre site for its Transportation and Generation Division's mica processing operations. The mica section



JERSEY CEREAL COMPANY

A Home Institution Owned Largely by
Irwin and Western Pennsylvania People.

☆

Manufacturer of

Jersey Corn Flakes - Jersey Wheat Flakes
Jersey Rice Flakes

•

Jersey Wheat Puffs - Jersey Rice Puffs
Jersey Bran Flakes

EACH PRODUCT ONE OF THE BEST OF ITS KIND . . . AND MADE AT HOME!

This advertisement promotes Jersey Cereal's packaging and freshness, and includes a picture of the company's four-story, four hundred foot-long Cereal, Pa. plant.

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had previously been located at East Pittsburgh. Mica flakes were converted into materials used for insulating electric equipment, used primarily in large electric motors and generators.

Over the next two years, the plant was remodeled in preparation for start-up; production began in February, 1950. Many of the Jersey Cereal workers were hired by Westinghouse. In 1953, a large, two-story brick building was constructed to increase the available manufacturing space, bringing the total to more than 150,000 square feet.

That Westinghouse manufacturing facility has also passed from the scene. The property was sold to James Banda for use as an industrial park. It is now known as the Banco Business Park and is home to many professional offices, small businesses and restaurants.

The U. S. Postal Service now operates its North Huntingdon Carrier Annex nearby, once again providing a post office presence in the tiny village of Cereal along North Huntingdon's Main Street. The "Jersey Flakes" may be long gone, but the "Cereal" name remains as a lasting reminder of that chapter in North Huntingdon's industrial history.



The Banco Business Park now occupies the site where the Jersey Cereal Company was located.





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**2020
WINTER
NEWSLETTER**

*Written by Bob Cupp,
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*Your gift to the
Norwin Historical Society
helps to preserve our history!*