

Former Residents Recount Success in Business World



Visiting Home

Pictured above are the five Zwiebel brothers who visited Burlington recently. The Zwiebel brothers, who were raised here, had not been back in a group in over 50 years. They have done extremely well in the world of business since leaving Burlington, as the accompanying story will attest. They are, left to right: Arthur B., Herbert A., Willard, Albert., and Elmer A. Zwiebel.

"Burlington Has Everything," or so the saying goes, but just recently we had the privilege of meeting and talking with some local-boys who left this city many years ago and made their fortunes in other parts of the country.

The five Bell (Zwiebel) brothers were back in town to revisit some of their many old friends, acquaintances and relatives. During the course of a week, they visited all the Zwiebel and Brehm families in the city and also renewed many old-time friend-

ships which had remained over the years. This was the first time in some 50 years that the brothers had all been here together and so it was a pretty festive week.

We just happened, by appointment, to be at the Louis Brehm residence on Perkins Blvd., Sunday afternoon when all the brothers arrived there and so we cornered them in the backyard near the barbecue pit and asked them how they had made out since leaving Burlington.

Probably the easiest way to tell about one of the most successful families to have ever lived in Burlington is to start at the beginning. This is the story as two of the brothers, Herbert and Albert, told it.

During the period between 1910 and 1915, the five Zwiebel brothers (Herbert, Arthur, Albert, Elmer and Willard) set out individually to "make their way in the world."

Herbert, the oldest of the five, went from Burlington to Milwaukee in 1912. He worked

there for the Mitchell Automobile Co. until 1918, at which time, he, Arthur and Albert formed Zwiebel Brothers Co. They engaged in the manufacture of tire equipment and later, they incorporated with the "Bub" Body Co., which was owned by another brother, Elmer, or "Bub" as he was called.

The company grew and prospered until 1921, when the brothers, were again infected with the travel bug. It seems that their parents had moved to California in 1919, and the boys now decided to follow them. So, in 1921, they made Zwiebel Brothers, Inc., a public corporation by selling it to their stockholders and to the public in general.

Then, with the profits in their hand and their parents', address in their pocket, the brothers set out for California where they separated and entered individual business ventures.

At this point in the story we were joined by two lovely ladies who turned out to be Albert and Arthur's wives and who had also made the trip with the five brothers.

As we sat chatting with them, Mr. Brehm reappeared and began to cook some meat over the fire. The interview seemed to be fast losing prominence to that charcoal-broiled aroma when, almost as suddenly as he had stopped, Herbert resumed the story.

In 1926, as he remembered, Herbert became interested in the electronics business. Using, his father's private two-car garage as a workshop, he started to work in the comparatively new field of radio-electronics. From this humble start was to emerge the Packard-Bell Electronics Corp, a multi-million dollar business, but that is later in the story.

In 1930, Herbert made his brother, Albert, a partner in the

business, but those were the depression years and so the partnership was soon forced in dissolution. Subsequently, a certain Californian named Packard became interested in the company and he became Herbert's partner.

Here we should insert one small bit of personal information. After moving from Milwaukee to California, the five brothers had changed their name from Zwiebel to Bell for business reasons. Thus, the company came to be known as Packard-Bell Electronics Corp.

In 1934, Herbert bought Packard out and again-became sole owner of the business. He recalled Packard's reason for selling as being his lack of faith in the future of the radio business. Herbert remained in charge of the company until the end of World War II.

Meanwhile, the other four brothers had also made their marks in the world of business. They had all founded and owned individual companies engaged in the manufacture of cabinets and component electronic parts. For eight years prior to World War II, these companies were suppliers of this equipment to Packard-Bell.

After the war, the four brothers dissolved their companies and their business affiliations with Herbert and so Packard-Bell began manufacturing its own cabinets and parts.

Later on in the forties, Herbert, after building Packard-Bell Electronics Corp. into a \$50 million a year business, sold it to the public and so it became a public corporation.

He retained his position as president, however, until 1956, when he became chairman of the board, a position from which he retired just this year. Although in retirement, Herbert is still a

member of the board of directors and is senior advisor for the company.

The other four brothers, as we have said, dissolved their individual companies at the end of world war II. They then moved on to different branches of industry.

Arthur founded and still owns the Dimension Mill and Lumber Co. in Los Angeles. His company imports lumber for use and distribution all across the country and he also owns and operates several producing oil wells.

Albert (Slip) now lives with his wife in Honolulu, Hawaii. He is semi-retired but still works as a manufacturer's representative for a subsidiary of Packard-Bell known as the Bellwood Co. This firm produces over one million "Hollow Core" doors per year for use in the electronics industry.

Elmer (Bub) is also semi-retired. He sells-building materials and trailer homes in the Newport area of Los Angeles, one of the most fashionable areas in that city.

The fifth brother, Willard (Sonny) is fondly Referred to as the "Skipper" by his brothers. He operates and continues the boating activities for his brother, Herbert, by serving as ship captain aboard the "Five Bells," a 92-foot personal pleasure boat.

This boat, along with its three auxiliary crafts, is used solely for the boating activities of the family and is docked in the Newport area. It has traveled the pacific to such ports as Panama and the Caribbean Sea area.

And that, as Herbert and Albert told it, is the story from 1912 until now.

As the interview was coming to a close, they outlined their plans for the remainder of the trip. After flying here from California, the five brothers now plan to drive west. They will

They will make a special stop in Rock Valley, Iowa, the birthplace of four of the brothers, and a spot which Herbert has not visited since the family first moved to Burlington around the turn of the century.

Arthur and Albert's wives remained in Burlington for a few days and then flew back to California to meet their husbands.

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