

A CHAINMAKER'S MEMORY

By
Dan Ostrowski

It was a few years ago during the annual "Harvest Festival" on Fleet Avenue when a Mary and Stewart Smith and her father Walter F. Czerpa stopped at the Slavic Village Historical Society booth. They were looking at the display of old neighborhood and historic site photos when Walter asked if we knew of the Round Chain Co. in Garfield Heights. I was just doing a search of the early Round Co., which was originally established in 1874 in the area of Canton and Broadway Avenues. Walter worked for them in the 1930's when the company moved to Garfield Heights in its later years. His recollections follow:

I started work at the Chain Co. in August of 1936 at the age of 17 and left the company the last week of February 1944. The factory was located in the Broadway and Henry Street area. I lived at 3828 E. 54th Street in Cleveland. My first job was assembling the chain. Most of the time the hours were 7 am to 4 pm. Sometimes in the summer they would change the hours to 4 pm to midnight. It was a temporary thing. I got to work by sharing a car ride with my cousin, walking to work, biking and /or taking a streetcar. I was bored with that job and asked to be moved to different work. They moved me to the inspection department that consisted of testing and storage of the chains. I next worked in the chain-welding department that had lines of crudely made machines. Electric lines came from overhead to power the machines. The welding machine had two heavy copper jaws into which the first chain link would be positioned. When you pulled a wooden lever in front of the machine the jaws would close on the link and move it in position where the first link would be welded. The jaws opened and then the chain is moved forward. The second link is welded. You repeat the same steps for about 12 links. Then the links that have been welded are moved by the machine to the shear press that cuts off any excess metal. This continues until every link in the chain is done. The chain polishing department had tumbling equipment and was very noisy. In general the plant was relatively comfortable and not too hot. It had wood block floors and a basement.

The product I first dealt with was chain for automotive tires. Then there were chains for chandelier lamps. There also were very fine chains made from extremely thin wire made on automatic machines. I don't know for what they were used. There were chain links that were made from 7/8-inch diameter steel. They may have been used with anchors or for whatever. There also were chains that were galvanized and others plated with copper, brass, or cadmium. Lockweave was the name of a link chain used with the pulleys. Each link was wrapped around itself and was not welded together. Generally the chains were made from wire. Spools of the wire were mounted alongside a chain-making machine. The wire was fed into the machine. It would form each link and connect them in to a chain, which later had to have each end of each link welded together. They also made rings that were assembled to chain ends of various length and sizes. Punch presses were used to form the rings and remove excess flashing.

The picture on the next page is a Round Chain Company employee group photo taken in the 1930's. Walter P. Czerpa is in the top row second from the right.



A Round Chain Co. employees' picture of the 1930's taken next to the factory located near Henry Street and Broadway Avenue in Garfield Heights.