

Nuts and Bolts: Stories from New Britain Manufacturing
Connecticut Humanities CT at Work Project
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Interview Subject: Stuart Jaeger
Factory subject worked at: Reflexite
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Location: NBIM

Transcript

On February 15, 2014 Patrick and I interviewed Stuart Jaeger at the New Britain Industrial Museum in New Britain. Mr. Jaeger is a middle-aged single white male. He lived and worked in New Britain in the 1970s for a company called Reflexite. Mr. Jaeger worked five and half years for the company as an engineer along with the owners, the Rowland brothers. One of the brothers invented the Reflexite, a reflective plastic used all over the world. Mr. Jaeger is now retired.

Q. How did you get your job in the factory?

A. I gave a ride to a friend who was going to apply for a job at the factory and the receptionist asked me if I wanted an application. I decided to apply for no specific position. I had just graduated college. I would have been twenty-two. I was called within weeks and was hired to work at the New Britain plant.

Q. What kind of work did you do at the factory?

A. I worked in plant engineering. There were two of us. A guy in the name of Andy Anderson. He was mechanically inclined and I was electrically inclined. However, it was more than just design. It was all hands on as well. It was a small development company. When I started, there were six of us. Reflexite was only made in New Britain. It was very exclusive because Bill Rowland had invented it. We were all in one big giant room. It was really a funny working situation. This was the corner of an old factory. To have offices they brought in construction trailers. We had seven construction trailers, six inside the building and one outside. This was my office. They were built right next door. One was set up with the men and women's facilities and one was brought in as a break room.

Q. Did you take pride in your work?

A. I took pride in my work. I always take pride in my work. I liked the Rowland brothers, the owners of the factory. They were nice guys. I enjoyed building, designing, learning and working with the inventor. Bill Rowland was the inventor and he was a genius.

Q. How did you get paid?

A. I worked for Reflexite in the 1970s. We were all hourly employees. There was no distinction between white and blue-collar workers and we all were paid with a paid

check.

Q. Did you socialize with your co-workers outside of work?

A. There was not much socializing. I never socialized, I do not know why. There seemed to be segregation by neighborhoods at that time. They may have socialized.

Q. Was there a union?

A. There was no union. This was a small company. There were about thirty of us, both sexes. There were no laid-offs. To avoid laid-offs the Rowland brothers started hiring temporary employment and it stayed like that. There was nepotism.

Q. Do you have any samples of the plastics made by the Relexite factory?

A. Not any more, I packed them all brought them here to the New Britain Industrial Museum.

Q. Did people get hurt on the job?

A. Yes, people would get hurt with the machines. A man got his finger caught in the machine. He was so affected by the incident what he was never the same again. He rather lost it.

Q. How long did you work for Reflexite in New Britain?

A. I worked for Reflexite in New Britain for one a half year. However, the company was doing badly financially and they could not afford to pay me so I felt. After six months, they called me back and this time I stayed with the company for four years. I left for medical reasons.