

The Randall Family Era (1905 – 1959)

Summary

After receiving his plumbing training in England, Charles E. Randall immigrated to Canada in the late nineteenth century. After stays in Toronto, Detroit and back to Toronto, Mr. Randall decided to pursue opportunities out west in the burgeoning city of Winnipeg. According to the 1903 Henderson Directory for Winnipeg, Charles E. Randall, David Bell and John O'Connell (all plumbers by trade) had a small business established at 364 Portage Avenue.

While this first association appears to be short-lived, they went into business once again as Randall, Bell & O'Connell, plumbers & steamfitters in 1905- the genesis of the Randall Plumbing & Heating Limited of today. By 1907, John O'Connell was no longer a partner in the new firm and the business (Randall & Bell) was expanded to include gas fitting. A solid concentration in the residential market fueled the growth of this young enterprise.

Charles E. Randall and David Bell had laid a solid foundation for a partnership that would last almost twenty years.

Upon the death of David Bell in the early 1920's, Charles E. Randall began to see his younger son Gordon as a possible future manager of the firm which was now called Randall & Company. Gordon Randall became involved with his father's company at a fairly young age and he was trained in the plumbing business under Charles' steady guidance.

As with other firms of the era, the Depression brought difficult times to Randall & Company. Charles went without a pay cheque many times during this period, but he always ensured that his men got paid. The company survived the lean years and by 1937, the economy began improving markedly and Gordon had become an essential member of his father's operation. Eventually, Charles and Gordon Randall became co-managers of Randall & Company.

The firm grew steadily during the war years. No longer was its business based primarily in the residential market as the commercial sector in Winnipeg was in the early stages of rapid expansion. In 1943, the firm was incorporated.

This era saw Charles Randall's role in the business gradually diminish as he aged. As Randall & Company began to grow quickly, Gordon Randall realized that he required someone with a strong financial and managerial background to help him guide the firm through the post-war boom. He looked to his older brother Harold, whom he lured to join Randall & Company Limited in 1945 with the promise of equal ownership. The founder Charles E. Randall then retired. Although no longer active in the business, he maintained a keen interest in the firm through his frequent visits to its Colony Street location. He died shortly thereafter.

The Randall brothers guided the enterprise through a period of tremendous growth during their tenure. Randall & Company Limited evolved almost completely away from its residential roots and into the commercial and industrial sectors. Despite the size and diversity of jobs they managed, Gordon and Harold maintained their father's rigid expectation of quality installations. A move in 1949 to 565 Portage Avenue also brought Randall & Company Limited into the retail appliance market. This location featured a showroom where the new appliances such as televisions and refrigerators (one of which is still in our lunchroom) could be bought. By 1954, the firm had ended its retail operation and relocated to 571 Ferry Road. Between 1954 and 1959, the firm completed many major projects that can still be seen today: the Winnipeg Arena, Assiniboia Downs race track and the head office of Great West Life.