The Occident Mill and WWII

WWII
AMERICAN HERITAGE CITY

American World War II Heritage City

Valley City
North Dakota

Valley City Mill Gets War Contract

As reported in the Ward County Independent, August 12, 1943 -

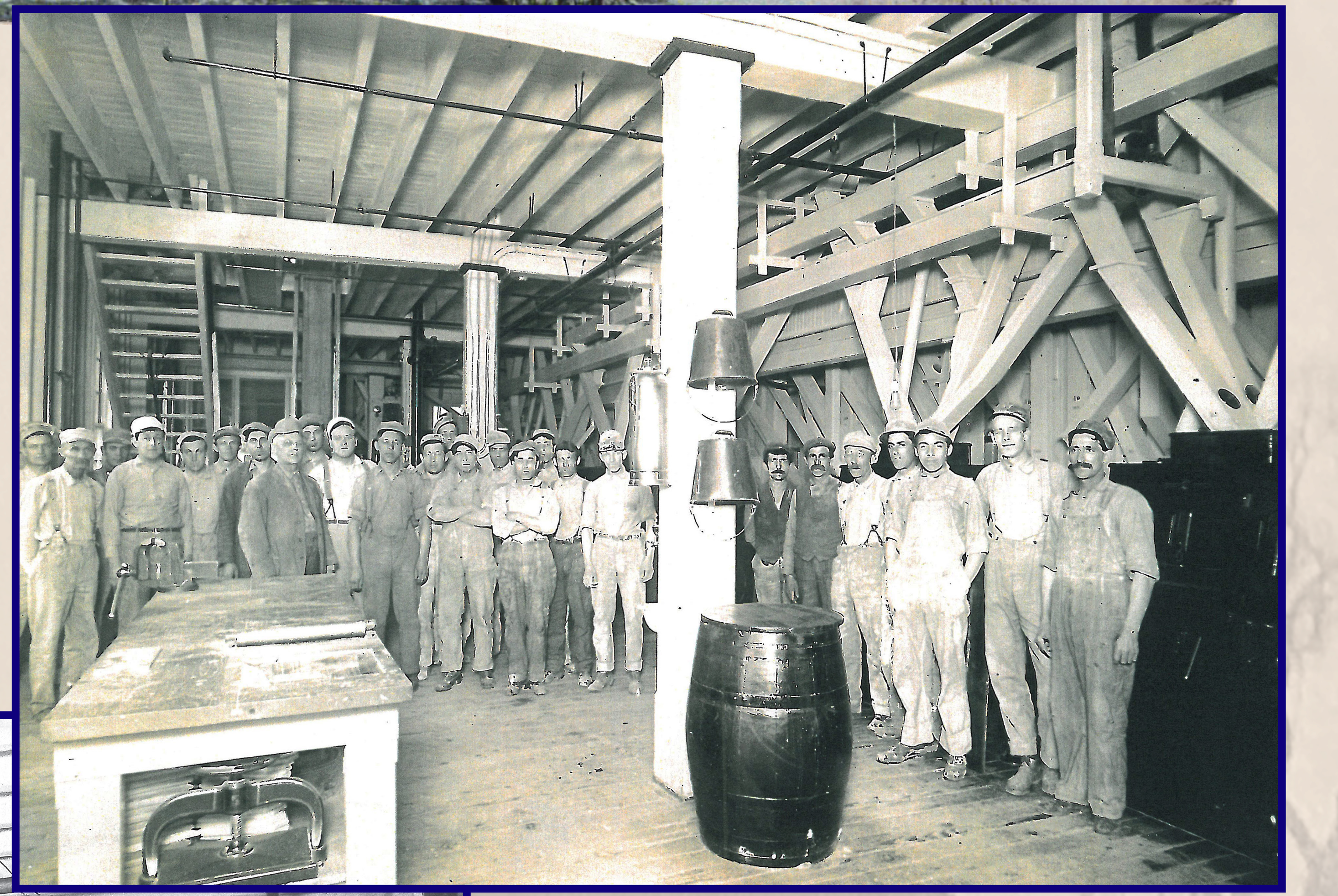
Henry Bjerke, manager of the Russell-Miller company, recently received word that the (Valley City) mill has been awarded a war contract calling for the manufacture of 3,300 tons of granalko grits*. The entire facilities of the mill will be converted to the manufacture of the grits, starting immediately. It is expected the order will be filled in two or three months.

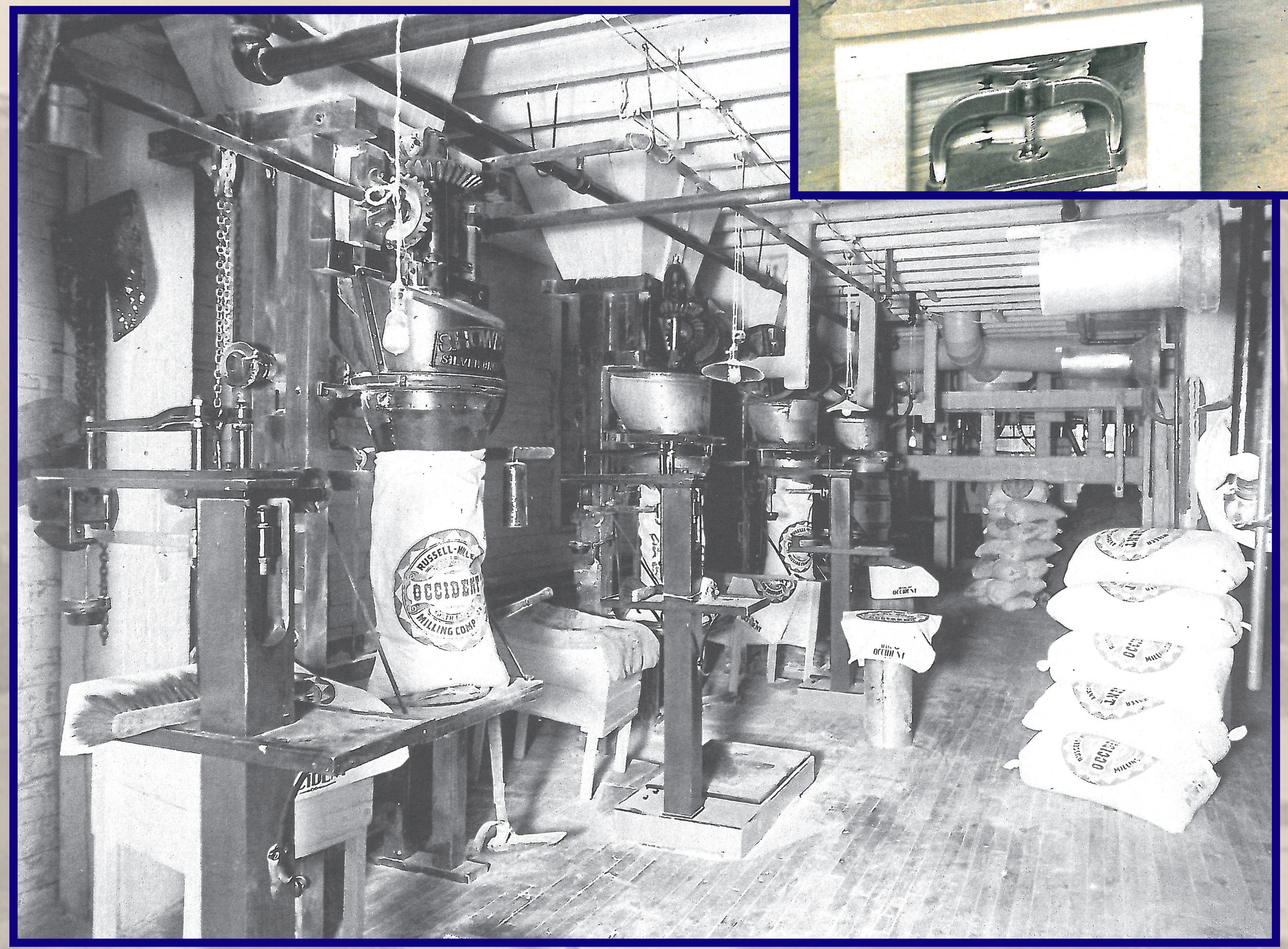
Fulfillment of the contract will require 185,000 bushels of wheat. It is purchased from the Commodity Credit Corporation at rates set by the government. The product turned out by the mill will be shipped to distilleries in the east where it will be converted into alcohol which will be used in the manufacture of synthetic rubber and high explosives.

**Granalko grits would have been grain alcohol grits that were converted from surplus wheat. These grits were a vital wartime resource, both as fuel for torpedoes and as a component in synthetic rubber production, while soy grits played a role in food aid and rationing during World War II.*

(Above) The Russell-Miller Milling Company was a prominent business in Valley City for years, and its impressive buildings were featured on many postcards from the region.

(Right and below) These interior shots of the milling crews and equipment were taken prior to the WWII years, but little changed over the time and these are very indicative of what was found during the production of "granalko grits."





Local Flour Mill Officially Closed

Valley City Times Record, April 2, 1963 -

Milling operations officially closed Thursday in Valley City's Russell Miller-King Midas flour mill.

The switch was thrown at about 3:30 p.m. by Kembel Dahl, veteran milling employee.

As the last bit of flour was ground out, 80 years of milling operations in Valley City came to an official end. The mill itself will be maintained for some time yet by about six men, according to Doug Johnson, North Dakota milling superintendent for the firm. About 10 men were laid off today as a result of the shutdown.

Previously, since the first announcement of the closing was made back in November of 1962, about 26 other employees had been laid off or had left to seek new employment.

The F.H. Peavy Co., owners of the plant, have indicated that the operations handled by the local mill will be moved to other company mills in Minot and Grand Forks.

The local mill was established 80 years ago by Hiram Walker, who later sold it to John Russell. Russell took in as a partner in the operation his son-in-law, Arthur Miller. It was for those two that the mill was named.

The mill started out as a water power unit on the Sheyenne River. It later converted to steam operation and, more recently, to electricity. The original mill in 1902 was rebuilt, but was destroyed by fire a year later. It was rebuilt immediately, and in 1906 a second mill was built here.

In 1953 the Russell-Miller company was purchased by the F.H.Peavy Company.

Picture Review of Role Occident Plays in Life of State

For seventy years, the Russell-Miller Milling Co. and its product, Occident, have been important factors in the growth of North Dakota, as a territory and as a state. Indeed, it would be hard to separate the two.

Occident ranks among the largest taxpayers in North Dakota. In addition to thousands of dollars of income tax paid the state annually, the company pays thousands more in real estate taxes in local communities in which its properties are located. These taxes help pay for projects like this dam at Dickinson.

Wheat—Dakota's biggest crop—is made ready for market every year in harvesting scenes like this one.

A Salute to Dakota Territory And the Promise That Grows

As a territory, Dakota was immense.

From Minnesota, it once rolled westward across the plains, beyond the present borders of North and South Dakota, across Montana and Wyoming to the Rockies, and into Idaho.

The country grew as the railroads moved west. The future held great promise. Eastern immigration societies sent whole colonies of pioneers into the promised land. Towns sprang up where rail lines crossed rivers. Wheat became the bountiful, almost the only, crop as far west as the Missouri river. ...

The Sheyenne Roller Mills eventually became known as the Russell-Miller Milling Co., and the firm grew until its operations spanned the continent. Today the product, Occident, is even better known than the mill. For Occident flour is the finest produced in America, from the finest wheat grown anywhere.

Dakota has lived up to its first promise. Average annual income from crops and livestock on North Dakota's 65,000 farms in 1951 was more than \$11,000. On those farms, North Dakota raised more hard spring wheat, durum, flax and barley than any other state in America.

Many Occident employees are active in their communities. Russell Schultz (left), manager of the company's feed plant and elevator at Minot, is chairman of the grain and seed division of the agricultural committee of the chamber of commerce in his city.

Occident Mills

NORTH DAKOTA

Occident Has 8 Feed, Seed Plants Throughout Area

Years ago feed distributors handling products made in other states found it difficult to deliver fresh feed to customers because of the long haul and slow transportation.

In a move to assure poultry and livestock raisers of maximum freshness in their feeds, Occident was one of the first to establish its own feed-processing plants in North Dakota and Montana. Today the company has such plants at Billings, Sidney and Miles City, Mont., and Bismarck, Valley City and Minot, N.D. The Valley City plant was the first.

Occident also has two seed-processing plants, at Bismarck and Billings, to furnish top-quality seed ideally suited for growing in this area. These processing plants also provide a ready market for the seeds that growers want to sell.

RUSSELL-MILLER
OCCIDENT
MILLING COMPANY

Occident Celebrates 70 Years

(Left) The Occident Company was featured in a special multi-page supplement to the August 26, 1952 edition of the Valley City Times Record for the company's 70th Anniversary. The Valley City site was their first plant.

Want more information?

Visit the Barnes County Museum at 315 Central Ave North in Historic Downtown Valley City or scan the QR Code to connect to the Barnes County Historical Society website.