

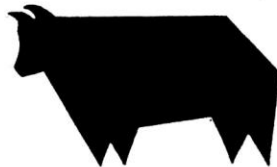
# ***PARTNERS IN PROGRESS***

*A History of Irving Tanning Company*

*and*

*A Story of its People*

*Finest Leathers by Creative Craftsmen*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*This history could not have been told without the efforts of many more people than can be credited here.*

*To Richard Larochelle whose idea and guidance made this possible.*

*To Kate Weeks whose unstinted cooperation and amount of extra work made this project an enjoyable experience.*

*To the History Committee for their genuine interest and dedicated contributions:*

*Otis "Lindy" Bradstreet  
Marilyn Carr.  
Peggy Cully  
Jacob Reifschneider  
Richard Sonier  
Michael Tenedios  
Gordon Woodman*

*To the Town of Hartland and its citizens without whose cooperation, support and encouragement over the years Irving Tanning would not be here.*

*My deepest gratitude and sincere thanks to all.*

*Gabriel Hikel*

## PERSONALIZED HISTORY OF IRVING TANNING

The history of Irving Tanning Company is a story of real people beginning with the founder of our company, a Polish immigrant, who at the age of 13 left his native land and immediately took a job with Beggs & Cobb, the largest tannery of its time located in Peabody, Massachusetts. Because of his experience as a leather worker in Poland, Meyer Kirstein was paid the princely sum of \$3.00 a week -- high wages shortly after the turn of the 20th Century.

At that time, more leather was manufactured in Peabody than all the rest of the United States combined.

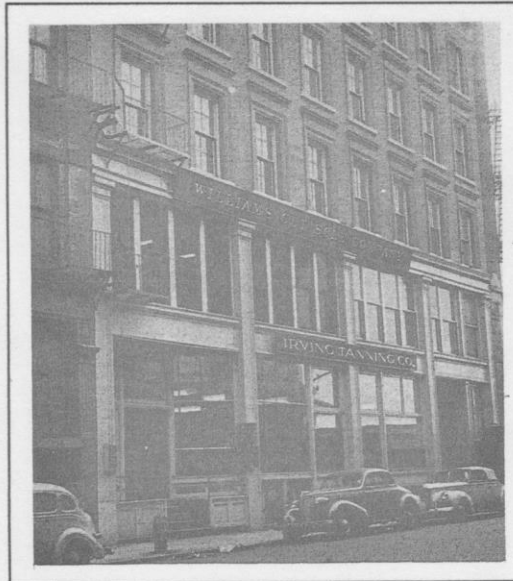
Dissatisfied at working for someone else, Mr. Kirstein began touring all the tanneries collecting their leather scraps in a pushcart. He would take them home and finish the leather pieces then sell them to local manufacturers of novelty leather items.

Hard work and perseverance led to his founding Irving Tanning Company in 1925 -- one more tannery in Salem, MA. The company name, Irving, was taken from the street on which Mr. Kirstein started his business.

His first venture in manufacturing leather was processing sheepskins, then splits presented a better opportunity, and finally side leather. Events almost beyond his control, something we call destiny, led him to Hartland, Maine.

The American Woolen Company was a very large corporation involved in the textile manufacturing business which, until the early 1930's, was a leading industry in New England. American Woolen had factories in Hartland and some of the surrounding towns.

After the Great Depression hit the nation following the stock market crash in 1929, and reaching its depth from 1932 to 1936, the textile industry was hit the hardest, especially in the Northeast. American Woolen was one company that failed to survive. It began closing its factories, one of which was located in Hartland, Maine. They moved out in 1932, sold all the company homes for whatever they could get (some were sold for as "much" as \$600.00) and abandoned an empty building.



Irving Tanning Company Sales Office, Boston, MA, CIRCA 1940

For four years, Hartland was an economic wasteland. In desperation, some of the leading local citizens got together almost haphazardly to see if anything could be done to put the town back on its feet. Without intent, this was the forerunner to our modern economic development committees that are constantly being formed by communities, both large and small, for the purpose of attracting industries that could create jobs for unemployed citizens.

This group of Hartland people, by some magical and spiritual design still unexplained to this day, managed to contact Meyer Kirstein and convince him to start a tannery in an old abandoned four storied textile building. It should be noted these Hartland citizens, farmers and shopkeepers, were not lacking in brain matter. They made an offer that Mr. Kirstein could not refuse. Despite the fact that there was not a single person in the entire county and possibly the state, who knew anything at all about the making of leather, Hartland Tanning became a reality.

This alone almost made Meyer change his mind. But for the persistence and sincerity of the Hartland people, this project would never have come to fruition. No one should ever forget the people who were responsible for bringing this industry to Hartland.

The problem of training people with no skills in leather making would require a monumental effort to produce a saleable product before the catastrophe of bankruptcy would eliminate the entire enterprise. In an effort to relieve some of the economic burden, an agreement was drawn up whereby all employees would return three cents an hour for two years which was the estimated time it would take to properly train people to make a saleable product. To appreciate this concession, bear in mind that initial wages were set at an average of approximately twenty cents per hour. Within three months, Meyer recinded the agreement. He did not think it fair to take money from the workers. So, in 1936, Hartland Tanning came into being. Irving Tanning was now comprised of Hartland Tanning in Maine, Universal Tanning in Peabody, MA, and a Sales Office in Boston.

It was touch and go for several years. Many times Meyer tempted fate by sending a truckload of leather to a customer before the delivery date in hopes that he could convince the customer to pay for the leather in time to meet that week's payroll at Hartland. To know Mr. Kirstein is to understand why he never failed to succeed in whatever he attempted to do.

In 1947, Mr. Kirstein lured a local citizen from the cannery in town (later purchased by Irving Tanning and became the Annex) who played a major part in the success and growth of the company until he retired in 1971. Dan Connelly was the General Manager for the company for approximately 25 years. He was a respected leader at Hartland Tanning as well as in the community itself. Dan steered the company through many crises with skill and intelligent public and employee relations.

By 1955, Hartland Tanning was producing 1500 sides per day and bursting at the seams desperately needing more space to expand production. Again the Town of Hartland and its citizens demonstrated their faith in and cooperation with the company by endorsing a bond issue, guaranteed by Irving that would raise sufficient funds to build a new Beam House (now named the Walter Sauer Building) that would house operations from soaking to shaving and would increase production capacity to 6000 sides per day depending upon the type and weight of sides being processed. The Beam House opened for business in the summer of 1956. Many of the bonds were purchased by Hartland residents and employees. Their confidence in the company proved to be justified.



Blue Sort & Shaving Dept., Irving Tanning Beam House 1956

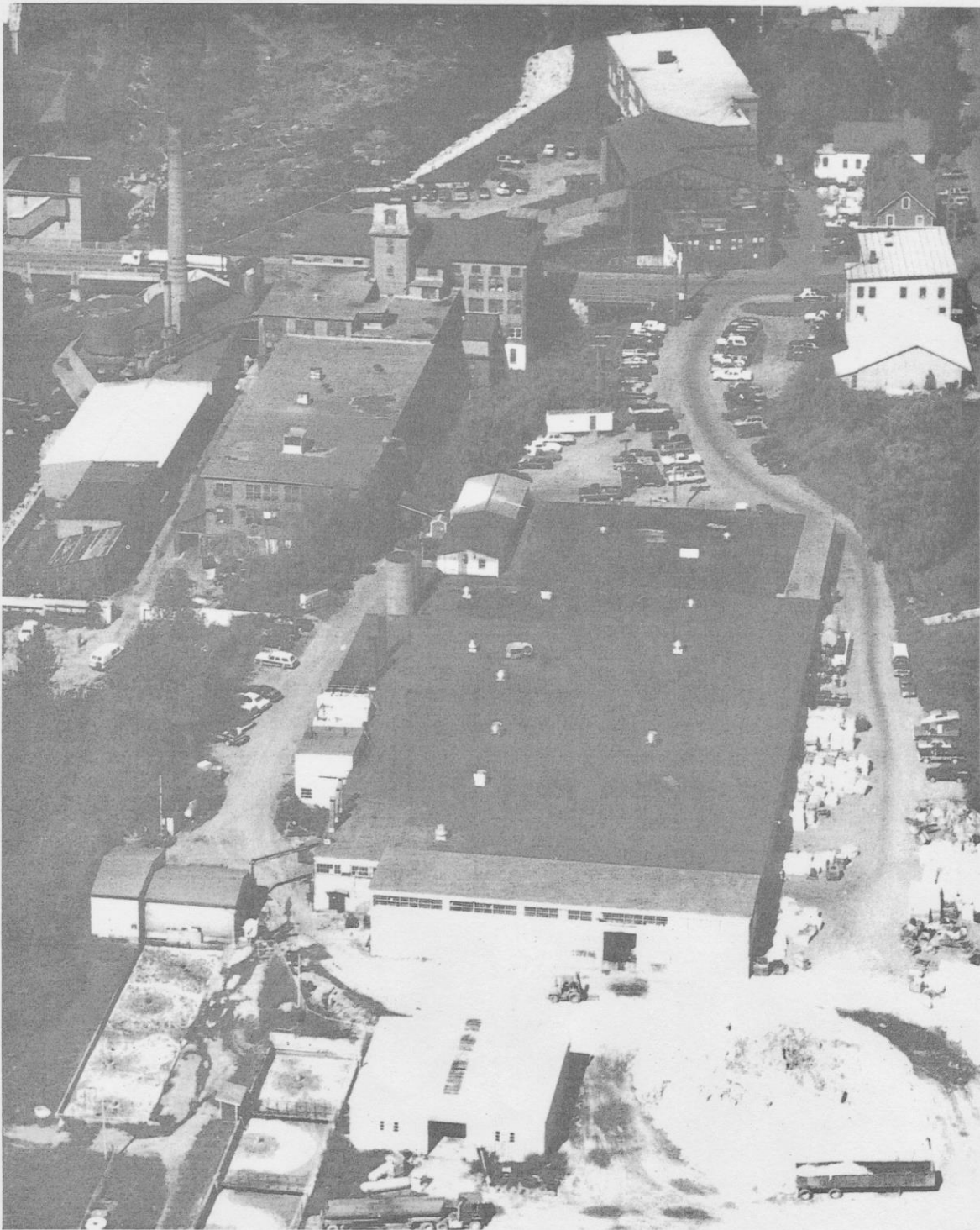
At that time the finish room was under the supervision of a short-fused demon who could get 7000 sides a day through his antique machines. Of course, we were running only black, white and brown. The Beam House had to work six days to keep the finish room running five days. You'll be treated to more of this phenomenon later when Lindy Bradstreet chronicles his contribution to the company.

In 1962 Mr. Kirstein began negotiations for the sale of Irving Tanning and attempted to go public offering shares of stock for sale on the New York financial markets. On the advice of several brokerage houses, the offer was withdrawn. Subsequently, the company was sold to the Seagrave Corporation (the original manufacturer of Seagrave fire engines), whose shares were listed on the New York Stock Exchange. The Seagrave Corporation was a holding company consisting of diversified manufacturing divisions. In addition to leather, Seagrave was made up of chemicals, paints, designer metals for the outside coverings of office and commercial buildings, lighting manufacturing and other operations.

Seagrave eventually sold all operations except the leather division, including the corporate name. Now it became Vista Resources Inc., composed of Irving Tanning, Kroy Tanning (acquired in the late 60's) of Salem, MA, Hancock-Ellsworth of Ellsworth, ME, and Wilton Tanning of East Wilton, ME.

Wilton Tanning was a shearling sheepskin tannery acquired in a merger with Tipel, a Spanish shearling manufacturer. Shortly after, by mutual consent, Vista purchased all Wilton assets of Tipel and converted the tannery to a sheepskin operation.

With Kroy Tanning came an imposing figure and a gentleman by any definition who brought with him a vast knowledge of the sheepskin industry. George Gushen assumed the responsibility of the complete manufacturing and sales of the sheepskin operation. His knowledge and abilities were recognized by his elevation to Vista Board of Directors. George was to give many years of his life to the leather industry.



Irving Tanning Main Plant - Aerial View

Irving Training Annex - Aerial View





FROM GEORGE GUSHEN

*"I started with Kroy Tanning in 1946 when they were still in Salem, MA. We made basically garment suede on New Zealand skins and were considered the leader in the field.*

*"Meyer Kirstein was very anxious to acquire us, and when he sold to the old Seagrave (now Vista) and eventually became Chairman of the Board, he then negotiated our acquisition in 1965. At that time, we also had a tannery in Ellsworth, Maine and when pollution became a problem we closed Salem and Ellsworth and moved to Hartland. Some time after, the tannery in Wilton became available and we have been there ever since.*

*"My fondest memories are of the old days when we spent the week in Maine working, but still had time for a good dinner and sleep at the Old Lancey House before it burned down.*

*"At one time when Kroy was using both Salem and Ellsworth, it was making up to 2000 dozen a day which is a huge production."*

Problems began arising at Universal Tanning and became so complicated as to defy solutions. After struggling vainly to keep operating, the decision to close operations was reluctantly made. Now, a new site was needed to replace the lost production. Again, Mr. Kirstein turned to the State of Maine for a new location and acquired a vacant paper mill in Howland, Maine. Pine Tree Tanning began operations in 1957. Once again, Irving Tanning Company was blessed by having a major talent move from Massachusetts to Howland. Russ Hockridge came from Universal Tanning to become Superintendent and General Manager of Pine Tree. Not only did Russ have the problem of setting up a tannery, but he had to train the people to make leather. Needless to say, Russ succeeded in putting an enterprise into production.

Russell was an influential factor in Mr. Kirstein's decision to establish Pine Tree Tanning in Howland, Maine. He also helped convince Meyer to appoint Walter Sauer to head Hartland's manufacturing operations.

Russell's brief description of his tenure with Irving, which follows, is far too modest considering the scope of his contribution and his importance to our company.

FROM RUSSELL HOCKRIDGE:

*Summer 1948-1949*

*Worked between college semesters at Universal Tanning Division, Irving Tanning Company in Peabody, MA, unloading cars/pulling paddles.*

*June 1950*

*After graduating from Tanning School at Pratt Institute in New York, started full time at Universal putting in a lab/*



*quality control, learning entire tanning operation. Original agreement was "to have a job while looking for a job".*

*Mid 1950's*                      *Took over responsibility for running Universal Tanning since Superintendent suffered heart attack.*

*Late 1950's*                      *Went to Howland, Maine and put a tannery in the then defunct Atlas Plywood factory #10 subsequently named Pine Tree Tanning Company. Operated Pine Tree Tanning Division of Irving Tanning Company until late 1960's then went to Hartland Tanning, Division of Irving Tanning Co., to help Walter Sauer and Mike Tenedios with technical aspects of running tannery.*

*1994*                              *Still helping!!!!*

*Early 1930's*                      *Max (Meyer) Kirstein started small sheepskin plant on Irving Street, Salem, MA., hence the name "Irving" Tanning Company.*

*Approximately 1936*                      *Started tannery in old woolen mill complex on Sebasticook Stream in Hartland, Maine for manufacture of side leather and splits, called Hartland Tanning Company.*

*Approximately 1947*                      *Started tannery in old American Hair Felt Plant in Peabody, MA and called it Universal Tanning Co. Basically a side leather tannery.*

*In mid 1950's*                      *Expanded Hartland Tanning Co. (Sauer Building). Purchased Baxter Canning Co. plant in Hartland (Annex). Bought Hunt Rankin Tanning Co. in Peabody, MA.*

*In late 1950's*                      *Started tannery in Howland, Maine in former Atlas Plywood Plant #10, basically a side leather tannery. Called Pine Tree Division of Irving Tanning Company.*

Production at Pine Tree increased to about 3,000 sides a day, eventually combining with Hartland Tanning Company to ship as much as 55 million square feet of leather a year which was 8% of all leather made in the United States.

At that time, Maine was the fourth largest producer of leather footwear in the country. At its peak, the leather industry in Maine employed 45,000 people when over 600 million pair of shoes were produced in America.

Unfortunately, through the short-sightedness of Congress, the administration and some influential lobbyists, the shoe and leather industry was allowed to be transferred overseas. The decline of the leather industry in the U.S. began in 1963 with the closing of tanneries and shoemakers. Domestic production eventually fell to less than half as foreign imports of leather products became a flood leading to an economic disaster in the domestic leather industry. Attrition became so rapid and severe that tanneries and shoe factories were closing almost weekly throughout the country. Companies which had been in business for 100 years closed their doors. An industry that is labor intensive has ceased to be a viable economic factor in our gross national product. Congress refused to heed the alarm until the auto industry almost suffered a like fate.

At no time does the value of people become most appreciated than during this period of attrition. Survival depends entirely on the quality of the people who are employed in an organization. The buildings, the machinery and all the equipment are available to everyone in the industry. The difference between success and failure of any organization is in the quality of its people.

Recognition of this most important factor was imbued by its founder in Irving Tanning from the start, and the success of our company is a testimony to this truth. From the President's office to the production floor, Irving Tanning has the people who believe in this philosophy. Throughout its history, Irving has had the benefit of superb leadership, foresight, intelligence and an exceptionally high level of skill. This has never been more significant than in



L-R Daniel Connelly, Myer Kirstein, Walter Sauer

the survival of our company during the last thirteen years. So let us turn now to some of the people who have contributed so much to our organization and made us one of the world leaders in the leather industry.

Our present management team is composed of some of the best people in the entire industry. The seed that began the growth into this harvest of giant talents was planted in the Spring of 1960 when Meyer Kirstein elevated a young Canadian of German ancestry to the position of Superintendant which practically assured the continued success of our company. Walter Sauer transformed his passion for making leather into the best products that Irving Tanning ever made and Walter has become a respected industry-wide authority in the manufacturing of leather and leather products even beyond the tannery. His name has become synonymous with Irving Tanning in the eyes of all the people at Hartland.

The first sprout from the seed came when Walter hired Mike Tenedios in the Fall of 1960 to be Assistant Superintendent. Mike attended the Pratt Institute at the same time as Walter. Russ Hockridge had completed his studies there a short time before Walter and Mike began their studies. With Walter, Russ and Mike, it was the finishing touch needed to complete a knowledge and skill of leather making unsurpassed in the leather industry, and they are still contributing today.

After the seed came the harvest in 1982, when a young Franco-American from Lewiston, Maine became President of Irving Tanning Company. With a grin as wide as a sweet slice of melon, Dick Larochelle applied his ability, infectious enthusiasm and vision to lead the company into a new era of doing business on an international scale. He has earned the respect and admiration of everyone at Irving as well as in the industry on both sides of the ocean.

Our company, today, bears the indelible stamp of the hand of Richard Larochelle. He has steered Irving into the era of future technology and common sense management techniques.

His impact on the character of our company and the quality of our products has enhanced the respect Irving has earned in this industry.

#### FROM RICHARD LAROCHELLE

*"A history of Irving Tanning Company is inevitably a story of the many people who for 58 years gave this company its culture, life, unique environment, and rich heritage through their untiring devotion, countless sacrifices, and largely unrecognized and unselfish efforts.*

*"I was offered the opportunity to assume the Presidency of this company twelve years ago. I had devoted all my adult working years to this industry and had always admired Irving Tanning Company and the people who proudly represented it. Irving has survived many tragic years in the industry by being flexible, aggressive and by developing products that are recognized the world over for the quality and innovation. The chance to assume responsibility for this company and work with these highly respected individuals was a once in a lifetime opportunity that no one could turn down, especially a Maine native.*



Richard Larochelle, President & CEO Irving Tanning Company

*"Irving has had a long history of management stability. I am only the third President of this company. Most of its senior management devoted their entire lives to its long struggle. This, in my opinion, is one of the major reasons why this company thrives today while others have failed. Its constancy of purpose, Maine work ethic, and vitality of all the workers have been its mainstay.*

*"I had a substantial amount of experience when I came to Irving, but was relatively young. I was nevertheless welcomed warmly and received vast amounts of cooperation and assistance. It's not easy to accept a new person into a well managed senior management group. This group was dedicated to make Irving not only a survivor but a powerful force in the industry and we quickly shaped a courageous executive team that would mold this leather group into what it has become today and what it can be in the future.*

*"Irving had fallen behind in plant and equipment investment during the late 1970's and 1980's as the industry declined. Vista management was not inclined to make substantial commitments to an industry that appeared to be dying. Despite the dedication and hard work of everyone, Irving's opportunities were being limited by lack of reinvestment. In 1989, controlling interest in Vista was assumed by the Fuqua family in Atlanta. They were very receptive to an initial reorganization and capital investment plan in 1990 known as Phase I, and gave Irving management the encouragement and support needed to begin breathing new life into an otherwise very good but down-trodden company. The success, enthusiasm, and new energy from this project provided the confidence for management to propose a Phase II modernization plan for 1992 which was accepted and executed in 1993 and 1994. These projects have elevated Irving Tanning Company to one of the largest and most technologically advanced tanneries in the world. Irving has become a Global company and its products are used all over the world to manufacture high quality leather products. Irving has once again taken its rightful place in the international tanning community.*

*"I believe that those who have come before us would be very pleased with what we have done with the company. Meyer Kirstein, Saul Stockman, George Gushin, and all retired and current employees should be proud of what has been accomplished and the foundation which was built to provide for future growth and continuing development of the company.*

*"The community of Hartland has been very supportive and helpful through the good times and bad. The vision and support from the Selectman and Town Manager have made possible what could have been very difficult without their encouragement and assistance. A healthy industry will become the basis for a renewed vitality and energy in the Town of Hartland.*

*"This is the beginning of the story, not the end. Everyday is the first day of the rest of our lives. There is a song entitled "We've Only Just Begun". I think this phrase symbolizes how we all feel about the future of Irving Tanning Company.*

*"My sincere thanks to Gabe Hikel as Chairman of the History Committee, and all those who made a contribution to this document so we could preserve a bit of the color and knowledge of our company."*

Probably the most important ingredient of a successful manager is leadership. It is the ability to inspire people to a level of achievement not previously thought possible, and to do it willingly. In Dick and Walter, our company has the best. Through their efforts, our manufacturing and sales division are staffed with quality people that assures the continued success of the company far into the future.

No matter how good the product, it would never leave the factory without a customer. Our management has assembled a Sales Force of superior ability and unequalled imagination.

Their level of skill is best demonstrated by an incident which occurred before the retirement of Norm Revman, who began his career with Irving in his youth (1948) and stayed until he became an "old" salesman.

One of his southern swings took him to Waycross, Georgia, to call on a customer, who he learned from the receptionist was on his deathbed. Genuinely concerned, Norm hurried to the hospital and found the customer (the owner of his own company) in an oxygen tent unable to speak, but still alert. They attempted to converse by using sign and facial expressions. Despite the obstacles, Norm sold him 500,000 feet of leather!!!!

Before finalizing the sale, there was some price haggling. It must have been some sight to see a customer in an oxygen tent unable to speak trying to beat down a price with a salesman who can't stop talking. The price was finally set by using fingers. The customer clenched his fist and raised his first two fingers not realizing that he also partially raised his other two fingers. He repeated the motion a second time.

Norm wrote out the order and slipped it under the tent with a pen for the customer's signature. Happily, the customer recovered and went back to his business.

The billing shortly followed the delivery of the leather. To say there was an explosion on seeing the bill would be an understatement. The customer was billed exactly twice what he thought was the agreed price of 22. Norm read the signals as 44.



Lancy House, Hartland Tanning Foremen Reception, June 1957



Pine Tree/Hartland Tanning Christmas Party, December 1962

The end result was that Norm agreed to take a short course in sign language at the expense of the customer. Norm Reyman now spends his retirement in an insurance company explaining policies to the deaf and mute!!

The genuine concern of management for all our people is reflected by the superior quality of the products that leave the shipping room. It is also reflected by the respect everyone throughout the plant has for Dick and Walter. Meyer would be proud. An event of extreme significance to Irving and all its people occurred in 1989 when controlling interest in the company was purchased by the Fuqua family in Atlanta, GA. Once again, Irving Tanning Company has the extreme good fortune of becoming associated with quality people. As previously stated, without people, there would be no company.

Since that time, the Fuqua family has recognized the tremendous asset of Irving people. Dick Larochelle has been able to successfully present to the Board the vast potential of Irving as a major factor in the world-wide leather industry. In their wisdom, they have provided the resources to convert Irving Tanning from a company treading water to a new vigorous operation that restores the company to a modern tannery that not only will survive, but will be the leader in international leather manufacturing.

In the short period of time since the Fuqua family assumed controlling interest, \$13 million has been invested in new construction, renovation, the purchase of new machinery and equipment, and programs that enhance the welfare of all people who work at Irving. Our company has been transformed into a futuristic dynamo of leather making. Visiting former old time employees are astounded at the changes and a renewed sense of pride in the company emerges.

The impact that Irving has on the economy of Hartland and the surrounding economy was effectively demonstrated several years ago when, on one payday, everyone received their wages in cash in the form of \$2.00 bills.

For the first time shopkeepers, banks and almost all businesses in a twenty mile radius were jolted into the realization of how vital Irving Tanning Company is to their existence.

The international influence of Irving has been enhanced by the award for quality of product and efficiency of operation as determined by a global association, DNV, with its ISO 9000 Certification of Irving Tanning Company in 1993.

The history of Irving Tanning would not be complete without the recognition of the Town of Hartland and its citizens for their contributions, cooperation and support. Over the years, it has been a good relationship overall and obviously beneficial to everyone.

In 1969, Irving Tanning and all its people suffered a tragic event when in June, Meyer Kirstein, the beloved founder and friend to everyone, passed onto higher rewards.

A silver lining emerged from these heavy clouds when Saul Stockman was elevated to the Presidency of the company. Thirty-four years after beginning a distinguished career in the shipping room, he guided Irving through some of its most difficult years until his retirement in 1982.

In view of his accomplishment, his modesty is reflected in his brief history of his 47 years of service which follows:

#### FROM SAUL STOCKMAN

*"Irving Tanning started as a sheepskin tannery in Massachusetts. Negative financial results in sheepskins forced a decision to try another product so it switched to splits in an old woolen mill building in Hartland, Maine in 1936. In 1940, Irving ventured into side leather because that was the "major leagues". At first, domestic wet salted hides were used, but soon Irving used all dried hides from Africa and India.*

*"Immediately after the Pearl Harbor attack, imports of hides ceased and Irving went back to domestic hides and stayed there from then to now.*

*"I started in the shipping room fresh out of high school in 1935. Irving dominated 6/7ths of my life from then until 1982 (during this time I received some job promotions).*

*"Several years after an additional tannery was started -- first in Peabody -- then in Howland, Maine -- we consolidated everything in Hartland, closing the entire main office and sales/distribution headquarters building in Boston.*

*"I shall leave the telling of experiences and anecdotes to better story tellers, but I wish to express my thoughts.*

*"I remember Irving Tanning as a living, surviving thing, giving income and comfort to those who fed it.*

*"I also remember the Honest-to-God efforts of nearly everyone who worked with me -- some with more talents than others, but all caring.*



*"This seems a story with a happy ending. I do thank Dick Larochelle for so much.*

*"This structure in Hartland has finally been rewarded. She's given us things during her hard life and now she's dressed up in brand new implements of modern technology production to make a most glamorous product efficiently and creatively.*

*"I am happy for her and proud to be part of her history."*

What is a history without recognition of the people in the production floor who make the history possible?

One of the all-time favorites of everyone in the dry end of operations from sorting to shipping is Lindy Bradstreet -- officially known as Otis Lindberg Bradstreet. Lindy, for over 44 years, supervised the largest division in the plant. With an unsurpassed sense of humor and quick wit, he put more leather through the shipping room than anyone thought possible, in both good times and in bad. In some of the most stressful situations, Lindy never lost sight of the need for quality and imparted this necessity with remarkable success to all who worked for him.

#### FROM LINDY BRADSTREET

*"In early December of 1949 I passed what was then called Hartland Tanning Company, producer of about 1,500 sides a day of painted leather. I declared, 'I'll never work in that place!!' Forty-three years, one month and one day later the Company gave me and a couple of other colleagues a retirement party. I would be happy to put in another forty-three years if I had the opportunity. Oh well! There is always resurrection!*

*"I was hired by a gentleman named Daniel Connelly, who at that time was the head honcho at the mill and quite capable at what he was doing, which was getting my goat, among other things.*

*"The company was owned and guided by Mr. Meyer Kirstein, and was in existence for about ten years B.O. (before Otis). I always liked Mr. Kirstein and he liked me, I guess. He even named a line of leather after me called 'Landia'. (He had an accent.) My nickname is Lindy!*

*"Mr. Kirstein also owned another tannery in the Peabody area called Universal Tanning Co., which eventually was guided by a young whippersnapper called Russ Hockridge, better known as the 'Bionic Man.'"*

*"Eventually Mr. Kirstein decided to close Universal and open a tannery in Howland, Maine. The year was about 1958. Russ Hockridge was given the task of setting up the shop, shooting the pigeons and extermination of rats!! The mill was known as Pine Tree Tanning and existed for about ten years.*

*"Enter Walter Sauer. Walter joined Hartland Tanning Company in 1955, fresh out of Pratt Institute of Brooklyn, New York, and fresh out of Kitchener, Ontario. He and his lovely wife, Hildegard, arrived with their infant twins, Phil and Paul, and set up residence in Pittsfield.*

*"It was a struggle for Walter as there were people in high places who frowned on 'book*

learning," but Walter knew who his friends were and his Mama and Dad didn't raise an idiot!! He eventually survived them all!!!

"Incidentally, Hartland (Irving) Tanning was twice raided by a competitor, hiring key people away from sales and manufacturing, numbering about eight to ten people.

"One evening Meyer Kirstein was having dinner with a sales person from the "Raiders." Mr. Kirstein said, "Your company has stolen a lot of key people from me but they still don't have the right ones!!! Words that I'll never forget -- as he was genuinely serious.

"Enter Gabriel Hikel in 1956. I remember meeting "Gabe" in the foyer at the top of the elevator shaft on the Main Plant third floor. A rather handsome man fresh from the New York Garment District. Gabe was to replace Dan's duties of Personnel Manager, now known as Director of Human Resources. Gabe also took the job as a temporary "stop-gap" and only kept it for thirty years, finally relieved in 1986 by a Southern gent named James Webster, better known as "The Enigma." But that's getting ahead of myself.

"A couple of humorous spots should be injected at this point. When Mr. Kirstein was in the process of selling the industry to Seagraves, mostly owned by a gentleman named Arnold Saltzman, he introduced me to Arnold as the "Best Finisher in the Country." Seizing the opportunity, I said, "Meyer! How about a raise?" His reply, "You're not that good!!" (He had a "glitter" in his eye.)

"A few years later Walter and myself were discussing the Vacation Syndrome. Walter said, "Vacations are for rest and recreation and should be taken!" I replied (sassily), "Good, I have two weeks from this year, two weeks at shutdown, and two weeks from next year. I think I will take them all at once!" His reply (without batting an eye), "OK. That will give you plenty of time to find another job!!!" (He also had a "glitter" in his eye.) Pretty hard to beat those kinds of logics!! (So I didn't try, as I know when I'm outsmarted!)

"Enter Norm Revman in 1948, Bob Lecraw in 1952, and Bob Shelan in 1959, a Super Sales Force, later to be replaced by Paul Gagne, Mark Joseph and Rick Colford, known as "The Kiddy Corps"! This was 1986.

"These unruly kids-- with no leather experience-- were stabilized by a couple or three leather-wise gents, namely Russ Lashua, Dick King and John Kane (pronounced in Pennsylvania as "Jahn Kyne").

"Eventually Dick King, Fashion Coordinator, retired and turned his duties over to Paul Gagne. In 1991, Marten Loewengart came aboard (another enigma) and "skillfully" molded The Kiddy Corps!

"In 1969 Mr. Kirstein passed away and his brother-in-law, Saul Stockman, took charge. Actually Saul took charge before that, but when M.K. was alive and kicking, nobody took charge really!!

*"In the sixties the Seagrave Group purchased Kroy Tanning, headed by a 1947 employee named George Gushen, who recently became inactive after forty-seven years. Their two sheepskin tanneries in Ellsworth, Maine and Salem, Massachusetts, were closed (in that order) and a sheepskin tannery was purchased in Wilton, Maine, and after a few "moves" still remains active and successful, under the leadership of Geoff Thorne, who came from the "Outbacks" of New Zealand in 1987. In 1960 Walter was given the task of the "Tanner." He employed the help of Mike Tenedios in 1960 (and 1986 and 1993).*

*"Mike almost made it before breaking down on the interstate south of us. (Walter had to rescue him.) We also had a gent from Scotland with us from 1986 to 1993 named Bill Martin, who assassinated the English language---seven was Sevn and Bush was Boosh! He also answered my curiosity--are Scotsmen really close? End of subject.*

*"Enter Dick Larochelle in 1982, a brash thirty-eight year old who took over from Saul Stockman. It's tough for a fifty-five year old to take orders from a kid--but, my Mom also didn't raise an idiot!! Fifty-five is a little old to try a new job! Turned out to be the best decision I ever made.*

*"In 1987 Dick hired a mature gent named Ken Williams, who I knew for three or four months before I met him!! The day he arrived from the Flatlands it was snowing hard--about sixteen inches! He kept saying how beautiful it was!! That really impressed me, as I shoveled for hours! Ken did point out to me that I had a white spot on my forehead when I was angry. Ken eventually became Manager of Operations for the entire factory.*

*"To digress a bit, in 1955 just before Walter, we had a serious spray unit fire which set off fifty-two sprinkler heads. Thanks to the sprinkler system, on-the-ball employees, and a very good Volunteer Fire Department, the damage was kept to a minimum. There was knee deep water on the top floor which our maintenance crew drained by drilling holes through the wall!! Canvas tarps were hung over the burned out windows. Enter Hurricane Carol about a week later. The first gust of wind cleaned the tarps off! Total loss was about fifteen windows, one spray unit, twelve to fifteen sides of leather and fifty-two sprinkler heads!! (We salvaged the tarps!)*

*"Robert Jones arrived on the scene in 1983 as assistant to the Vice President in charge of finance, Clarence J. Ostalkiewicz, and took over when Clarence retired in 1989 after eighteen years. Bob later hired Jack Page in 1989. Boy! Talk about enigmas!!*

*"Richard Holden arrived on the scene as a chemist in 1976. He was nicknamed "Fuzzy" by Keith Osborne after a local stock car driver, because of Dick's flair of breaking down on the road, running out of petrol and having his wheels pass him on the interstate. Dick later very capably took over the environmental duties at Irving, a very trying job!!*

*"A very "glib" gentleman arrived in 1985-- Joel Whitman--and took over the Split Department.*

*"To back up a little, Jake Reifschneider came to work as Expeditor in 1952 and retired in 1982. I learned later that he probably was exiled from Milwaukee!!*

*"After Fuqua Industries became the majority stockholder, things began to happen. That was in 1989. Then a Mr. Sam Norwood became the catalyst between Irving and "Atlanta." What a break for Irving! The decision was made to go from ladies weight leather to mens' weight as the light weights were moving rapidly off shore to Third World Countries.*

*"It was a very wise and necessary decision. Thanks to Dick Larochelle's doggedness and Atlanta's foresight, Irving now has the largest backlog of orders in its history.*

*"The decision to close our Beam house in 1991 and to purchase "wet blues" from the Midwest also solved a lot of environmental problems. Great efforts have been made and are being made to curtail the use of "toxic" materials and minimize the discharge of volatile organic compounds (V.O.C.'s).*

*"Enter Jim Stevens. Jim came in 1991 as the eventual Finisher and my replacement. He is a Maine native from West Paris and very capable for his young years. Dick Larochelle is also a Maine native from Lewiston.*

*"I started to say thanks to Sam Norwood, Atlanta, and Dick's pleading and cajoling that millions of dollars have been and are being spent at Hartland, a decision that will help keep 500 to 600 people employed at Hartland and 70 to 80 in Wilton.*

*"Would I do it again? If the same people were involved, I sure would!!!*

*"This is a rough summary of my years at Irving and I'm sure I have missed a few high points such as when the "new" Beam house was built in 1956 increasing our production from 1500 sides to over 5000 sides a day and when Walter took over after the "Raiders" struck for the second time. At that time baseball managers' and tanners' life expectancy on a job was two years. Walter is in his fortieth!! How's that for doggedness!?*

*"Mike T. is in his third term and Russ H. is three years past retirement age as was Gabe before leaving. Irving will exist for many years to come. Congratulations are to be extended for the many "females" being put into key positions, such as Dianne Brown and Peggy Cully (Pioneers), Penny Picard (Safety Director), Cindy Brooks (First as Supervisor and now Industrial Engineer-selfmade), Penny Russ and Ann Johnston (Color Computer Experts), Linda Holt (Finish Room Supervisor), Gale Carlow (Computer Expert of the Huni System). Plus all the specialists in the office. If I have missed anyone I apologize! OK Lynns (both of them) in the Computer Room!! Not to mention Cindy Munn (Customer Service), Beverly Plugge (Budget) and Kim Tozier (Editor and sometimes writer for the successful Company paper, Hides 'n Sides)!*

*"Having been in supervision for forty-one and a half of my forty-three years I have had many people work with and for me. A lot have left but over ninety percent have come back. A couple of years before I retired, one employee quit and I quote him, "I'll never work at Irving again!" A few months later I ran into him in a different part of the mill happy as a "crow on a paunch"!!*

*"I remarked (for the second time -- the first was my own never) 'Hey Pal! 'Never' isn't very long is it??"*

*"I'm sure there are a few important things that I have missed such as the "O.K. Corral" incident where Gordon Woodman and A. Roy Curtis (Jake's replacement) were wounded and the recent passing of a former supervisor and a good friend and Volunteer Fireman at the serious "Fifty-Two Sprinkler Heads Fire!" His name was Robert Goforth.*

*"This is a recap of a lot of my existence at Irving Tanning Co. I could write more but this will be censored!! Only kidding! I couldn't write much bad about this Company anyhow!!"*

Many of our longtime associates made their contribution to the company as members of our Administrative Office Staff. Two recent retirees exemplify the dedication of the entire department.

#### FROM MARILYN CARR AND DICK SONIER

*Dick came to Irving Tanning in 1947. Sometime in the early 40's, the office was moved from across the street to upstairs to its present location. The office consisted of three people, Ardis Hubbard Stewart-receptionist/secretary, shipping and billing; Allen Jones - payroll supervisor (all payrolls were done by hand); Dick Sonier - stockroom clerk, assisted in payroll and shipping and billing. Even at that time, Dick recalls that employees numbered approximately 200. The office manager was George Loignon for a short time and was replaced by Dan Connelly. After several years the office force was increased because of additional functions. All the billing and shipping bookkeeping was done in the Boston Office. The sales office was based in Boston also. One of Marilyn's memories of the Boston office was of John Alexander who was the office manager/controller. You didn't just go into the supply closet to get what you needed, you made out a requisition, and they said it was the same thing if it was toilet paper! Mr. Alexander was a real Controller!*

*In 1972 the Boston office was closed and operations were moved to Hartland. Three of the office staff traveled to Boston to learn company procedures from Roz Neustadt who worked in the Boston office. The salesman and Saul Stockman, President, came to Hartland during the week staying at Howard Johnson in Waterville. Computers were installed, and it was the beginning of the way things are today.*

*A few highlights from the earlier days - In 1962 a meeting was held in the Town Hall for the employees to vote on the discontinuance of the yearly bonus and replacing it with the pension plan. Each employee attending the meeting was given a \$1 bill.*

*In the middle 60's each employee was given \$25 with a letter from Meyer Kirstein stipulating that it be used to purchase shoes to enhance the leather business.*

*In 1985, Irving Tanning initiated the \$2 Caper which is explained elsewhere in the history.*

*It wouldn't be a complete history of Irving Tanning without mentioning some of the many good deeds done by Mr. Kirstein. Some of the townspeople recalled that he donated an organ to the Hartland Methodist Church, Hartland Baptist Church, the Episcopal Church in Palmyra, and the Catholic Church in Pittsfield. He donated towards the elevator at Scott Webb Hospital, purchased a dryer, and supported furnishing two rooms for the hospital. It was noted that he was very generous and supportive to the needs of the hospital.*

*A Town Swimming Pool Committee was formed in the middle 60's and Mr. Kirstein matched what the Town raised to install the swimming pool, and nearly 30 years later it is still very much in use.*

*In 1952, the West wind blew in Jake Reifschneider from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. A gentleman with long experience in leather making. For 32 years Jake was the expeditor and dry end supervisor, successfully merchandised all the low grade leather and throw outs that came through the tannery. He was often credited with profitably salvaging everybody's mistakes!*

#### *FROM JAKE REIFSCHNEIDER*

*"I started working for Irving Tanning Company in 1952. After giving me a tour of the plant, Mr. Kirstein introduced me to very friendly and hard-working employees. There were 80,000 sides of crust inventory piled down and he told Lindy Bradstreet and myself to sort, condition and finish them ready to sell, along with 1,500 sides of daily production. This was done and production increased.*

*"The big colors in those days were army russet, black and white. The cry became "more and better quality" and "increase production". At one period, the pasting unit ran 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for 13 weeks. The finish room and certain other departments also worked two and three shifts.*

*"At the time, there were more than 30,000 shoe workers in Maine. 25,000 of those jobs have been lost. Some new leathers were being developed -- black onyx, black landia and bag leathers.*

*"There were new buildings -- the Beam House and the Annex; new machinery was everywhere and employees increased from 170 to 500. Along came Vista garment leather, beautiful, soft and silky. We had such a demand for this leather that we had to allocate orders. The demand was worldwide.*

*"Winter storms, snow, ice and freezing rain did not keep workers home. Not a day was missed. They arrived a little late, but were always there. About six weeks before vacation, BV*

would appear on all work tags to be shipped "before vacation". It seems as if more leather was sold and shipped then, than at any other time. There never seemed to be enough horses or room. As building expansion was being done and as fast as the floors were laid, leather horses moved in right behind the carpenters.

"R.S. Brine trucks hauled finished leather to Boston."

#### REWARDS

"Over the years, employees were given health insurance, increased vacation time, additional paid holidays, profit sharing (gone), retirement and pay plans. Summer jobs for employees' children, both boys and girls, were made available. Many of them went onto higher education and many trained for supervisory jobs at the Tannery.

"Rooms were available at the Lancey House for sales and service people. On my first night, did the train come through my room? The railroad ran right by the hotel. Mr. Kirstein had a private room with all the leather chairs and a padded leather door. Our Christmas parties were held there -- a great place to meet and eat -- a favorite watering hole. In order to relax and unwind at lunch time, we brown-bagged it so we could play some bridge. We played bridge for over 20 years. Daily records of our scores were kept.

"Occasionally, we and our visitors went fishing, smelting, and duck hunting. Large groups played golf together. The first month I spent at Irving, Dickie Webber ran to me and said "hey, we're having a party as we shipped over a million feet of leather this month!" The following month we shipped almost double that so there was another party. There were no more parties after that, although we shipped a million feet per week."

One of the most highly respected members of our middle management team, a mild-mannered but imposing gentleman, began his career at Irving Tanning as a part-timer while still in high school and rose to the position of Wet Division Superintendent. During his tenure with the company since 1956, Jim Morgan has proven that nice people don't finish last. His leadership has been a contributing factor over the years in the development and skill of our Wet Division supervisors. He has also given us a son who is the Split Division supervisor.

It is appropriate to note here that Jim's dad, Thirnwood, Sr., worked on the pasting unit until his retirement.

#### FROM GORDON WOODMAN

"In the early days, the leather made at Hartland for out-of-state customers was shipped via R.S. Brine Transportation Company to Boston for sorting daily. For in-state customers, it was sorted at Hartland and shipped common carrier via Grondin's Express. Later, Thuts Express and our trucks shipped the leather to in-state customers such as Viner Bros. in Bangor; Dexter Shoe in



*Dexter; Knapp Shoe in Lewiston; R.P. Hazzard in Augusta; Norrwock Shoe in Skowhegan, just to name a few.*

*"In the 1940's the oils and raw hides were shipped to Hartland by railroad and was trucked up to the tannery by Raymond Gregoire."*

*(Gordon has two sons in our Finish Dept., one of whom is a second shift supervisor).*

#### FROM DOUG ROBINSON

*"The Tannery started in 1936 - John Verzier was the first splitting boss from Massachusetts. We returned \$1.00 of wages to make up some expenses for a few months. Workers made about \$12.00 per week.*

*"There was a woolen mill there first, it closed and the grass was growing on the street. Homer Trembley was the boss on the Seasoning Machine in 1941.*

*"George Loignon was the Personnel Manager in 1941. H. Guss Boss was the Superintendent in the 1950's. Roger Hannon was the Assistant Superintendent when Gus Boss was there, he then took over when Gus left.*

*"The Tannery had a company car under the control of Ardis Hubbard, the office manager. Roger would sweet talk Ardis for weekend use of the car so he and Bob Steeves could go to Canada.*

*"During WWII, they used the tannery car to pick up people to work if they didn't have their own transportation.*

*"Women were used on jobs that had always been men's jobs during WWII. Blanche Cole worked on the setting out machine, a job requiring a great deal of physical strength.*

*"Coal was burned in the boilers for quite a few years. When they burned coal, that was all the fireman did as that kept him busy shoveling coal into the boilers and that had separate watchmen.*

*"When the tannery changed over to oil, Raymond Gregoire bought the balance of the coal that was left at the railroad yard. When he bought the coal, he said he had a coal mine, as over the years the coal had settled into the ground and there was a lot more coal than anyone thought. Ray was clever and knew there was a lot of coal there.*

*"Leather used to be tacked to dry boards years ago. There are still some old tacking boards on the bathroom walls downstairs in the old main plant.*

*"Where the office of Bob Jones is now, is where they had big vats to feed the chemicals into the splits wheels. Men put the chemicals into the vats and when the men downstairs wanted the chemicals in the wheels, they would pound on the pipes with a metal pipe and Dick Nichols would open the valves and feed in the chemicals.*

*"R.S. Brine Trucking Company used to haul the leather and fleshings for the tannery.*

*"In the 1940's there used to be a beer parlor in the Hamilton Block. Some of the men would go there on payday and drink until their paychecks were nearly gone.*

*"In 1949 there was a fatal accident. A man was caught in the chain of the paddle wheel. He was cleaning up around the machine and somehow it was turned on and caught his clothes.*

*"Ernest and Don McDougal fleshed in the line. Instead of the jacks we now have, they had the hand jack with the pump handle. The big old wooden boxes they had to move around were very heavy, even when they were empty, as they were water soaked all of the time. It took 3 to 4 men to move the boxes when they were loaded.*

*"In 1965, the tannery sold bonds to build the Beam House.*

*What is now the Annex used to be H. C. Baxter Canning Company. They used German prisoners for work force during WWII. They were kept at the Bradford Farm in Palmyra at night and were transported to and from work on buses.*

*"Some splits were made in the pickle. In the 1950's they would put them into dry wheels with sawdust added to absorb the excess moisture. The fleshed trimmings were hauled down to the hide house and put on gondola cars at the railroad station.*

*"About 1949, George Janis was maintenance boss, after him, Joe Richards. About 1960, Mike Tenedios came in his old green 1960 Chevy. Jake Reifschneider came ahead of his family and stayed in the Fuller house until his family arrived. Tom Kelso also came before his family and stayed with Don Pelkie until they arrived.*

*"The main tannery offices used to be where Hadley Buker and Gary Rollins are now.*

*"Jesse Holt used to haul up the raw hides from the Hide house to the Beam house. The old truck he used didn't have any door on the driver's side - summer or winter.*

*"There was no heat in the Hide House. During the winter on a good sunny day, the men would open all of the doors even at below zero temperature, to get warm as the sun was warmer than the cold cement floor. One day, a couple of men built a fire in a metal drum to get warm until Arthur Firestone caught them. There wasn't any heat in the bathroom until the early 1960's.*

*"The younger people today would absolutely refuse to work under some of the conditions the people used to work under here."*

#### FROM MIKE TENEDIOS

1952

*I graduated from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, "School of Leather and Tanning Technology." Walter Sauer and I were classmates.*

*Upon graduation, I accepted a position with S. B. Foot Tanning Company in Red Wing, Minnesota, as the supervisor from Hide House through the Coloring Department.*

1956 *I accepted a position with Beggs & Cobb in Winchester, Massachusetts, in the Technical Department to improve and develop new leather.*

1960 *I was hired by Meyer Kirstein and Walter Sauer to assist Walter in the wet and dry end, on production and technical aspects. We also had the responsibility to maintain the quality and production of the split department. In 1968 Russell Hockridge arrived from Howland, Maine, to take over all the technical duties.*

*"Besides the side leather and splits we produced at Irving, we have also produced pig suede, kid skin, sheepskin, and shearling skins.*

*"I am proud to be part of this great organization. From employees to management, I hold all in great esteem."*

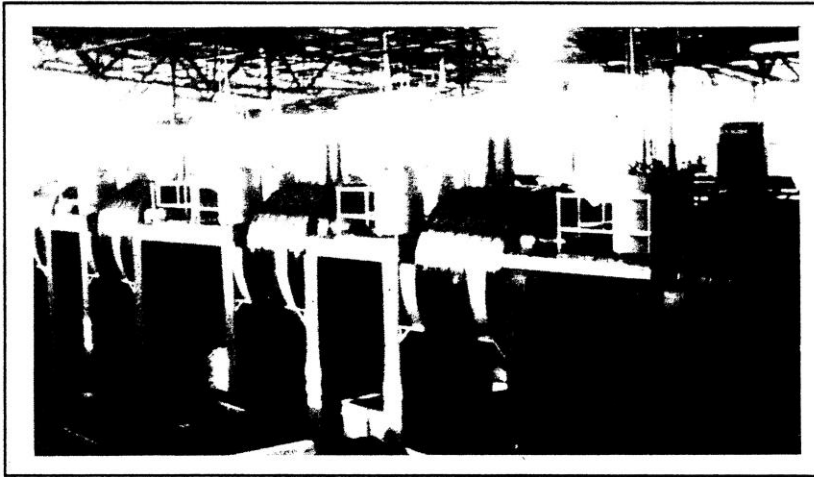
#### FROM EVERETT RINES

*"In September of 1963, I started work at Irving Tanning Company at the age of 19. There, I worked as lamper in the Finish Department, for one month. After a short stay there, I was transferred to the Beam House Lab. Working in the lab was a great opportunity to learn about making leather. We did leather analysis and Research and Development. We developed new lines of leather and improved on some of our regular lines. After working in the lab for nine years, I was transferred to the Side Leather Color Department, there I took over as foreman. I have been foreman of the Side Leather Color Department for 22 years.*

*"In the 22 years as foreman, I have seen many changes. I have witnessed many changes in personnel. A most significant change was the new Fuqua ownership. With the new ownership came commitment, lots of new equipment, training for all supervisors, and a chance for all employees to get involved, resulting in higher quality, increased production, and less cycle time.*

*"We have moved the Side Leather Color Cellar twice. I started on the bottom floor of the Main Plant Building. Eventually we moved to the Sauer Building, there we had more control of color wheels, flow meters, timers, and temperature charts. After being in what was called the new color cellar for a short time, a new building was being constructed for a computerized color cellar. We moved into the new color cellar in March of 1994.*

*"With the new computerized color cellar came control, accuracy, and repeatability. Each move was difficult and a challenging one. Before each move was completed, we had to learn how to make each line of leather all over again. After moving to the new computerized color cellar, I was pleased to see three long time employees from our color cellar receive promotions -- two to leadmen, and one to a colorist position.*



HUNI Color Cellar, Irving Tanning Co. 1993

*"I am also proud that Irving Tanning Company, with the commitment and involvement of all of its employees and management, received the ISO 9000 Certification."*

(Everett's daughter is the present Safety Director.)

An interesting event occurred in 1960, when an attractive young British war bride was hired as a split trimmer and promptly sliced her leg requiring twelve stitches the first day on the job. Peg Cully had just left her position as a nurse in the local hospital. She became the first lady production supervisor and heads the split finish and shipping departments.

#### COMMENTS FROM PEG CULLY:

*"I came to Irving Tanning July 1960. I was only going to stay until the following Spring. But now 34 years later, I'm still here."*

*"Back in the 50's and 60's when Mr. Kirstein was at the tannery, he always went all through the tannery, talked to everyone and knew most people by name. I remember we always had to turn the lights out when we left at noon. If we didn't, we heard about it. He also would look in our trimming barrels to see that there were no large trimmings in there (there hadn't better be) --Ha!"*

*"My daughter reminded me of her delivering papers to individual workers back in the 60's. Then, you had the paper delivered to your work station."*

*"I think if Mr. Kirstein were alive today, he would marvel at how his tannery has grown from a small family operation to a world-wide operation and still not lose its friendliness and caring."*



*Serving Hot Dogs at Company Field Day August, 1984*

*A unique character of Irving Tanning is the relationship between the company and its people. Most of the employees started work with the intention of staying a short time until something better came along. Not only did they work until their retirement, but their children and grandchildren followed them. It has not been uncommon to have three generations of one family working at the same time for our company.*

*It takes a special pride in the standards of quality and individual achievement inspired by the sincere regards for the well-being of each person at Irving, that makes parents encourage their children to seek employment with the tannery. It is a tribute to management, both past and present, which has nurtured this characteristic into a highly valued asset that elevates Irving to a level above the rest.*

*For 69 years Irving Tanning has been a prevalent force in the industry and for 58 years Hartland has been the flagship of the corporation.*

*Let this history be Irving's prelude and corporate excellence be the engine of its future growth.*