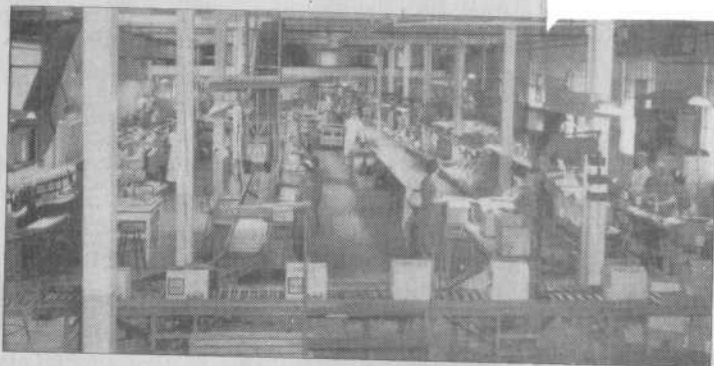


"With the machines, our production went up from 50 bottles a minute to 100 a minute. I tell you we really had to move then because the bottles were coming down the belt close together. We had to have a certain rhythm and we couldn't break that for anything. If some of them fall we had to keep going with the ones still standing. You just had to maintain that rhythm."

White recalls the frustration felt by many of the younger girls who could not keep up with the production speed of 72 a minute.

Years later, her job description changed into serving as a group leader in charge of 30 plus girls in the bottling lines.

She recalls being paid 94 cents an hour



The old bottling plant at Corby Distilleries was replaced with a new one in the 80s.

when she first began working at the plant. By 1991, her wage had increased to \$18 an hour.

Freda Sly, another veteran Corby employee, recalls her own starting wage as \$1.19 an hour when she joined the company in 1961. Over the years, she too became skillful at handling the rhythm to keep the bottling process running smoothly.

"We got 15 minutes break when we needed it but we cannot just up and go in the middle of handling the bottling process. We had to wait till someone else is available to take your position to keep that process going. Until then, you stay where you are and

keep doing what you were doing," says Sly.

The constant motion of the arm affected the nerves on the back of her neck and shoulders that she was forced to quit her job on grounds of long-term disability in 1987.

Sly adds that she was quite relieved to not be there at the time of the plant's closure. "Maybe it was better that way for me. I think it came as a surprise to most workers there. We were like a close-knit family and it has been that way for decades. I guess it hurt everyone very deeply when it shut down."

Sly's decision to quit happened at the time when major changes were taking place at the plant. The company was in the process of stopping its distilling operations in Corbyville and decision was being made to relocate the maturing process to Hiram Walkers. The company then bought McGuinness Distillery in 1988 and began bottling their products in Corbyville. With the new bottling complex in 1989 and the changing of the distillery operation to blending/bottling plant, the company was hopeful of salvaging its operations in the area. This hope was felt by all those employed at the plant only to be dashed two years later.

Corby's roots extend back to 1859. Two years prior to that, Henry Corby Sr., an English immigrant and an owner of a food store and bakery business in Belleville, had established a grist mill at the site. It is said that Corby's distilling business began as a sideline for using up extra grain left by farmers after grinding at the mill. The secondary business soon caught and bypassed the primary milling business. During First and Second World Wars, the plant was converted to manufacturing massive amounts of industrial alcohol for munition uses.

In 1867, Corby was elected the mayor of Belleville and at an age when many think of retirement, the 60-plus Corby became a Member of Provincial Parliament. In 1881, his son Henry Corby Jr. took over the business. The distillery flourished through the decades under the junior Corby until his death in 1918 of appendicitis. Since 1950 the company was known as H. Corby Distillery Ltd. The name was changed to Corby Distilleries Ltd. in 1969.

You can reach Benzie Sangma at bsangma@cogeco.ca with comments on or story ideas for Remember When.