

Lighter factory grabs big market share

By CHRIS SHANAHAN
Staff Reporter

Tokai of Canada Limited has blazed an upward path in Canada's disposable lighter market since opening just two years ago. In 1986, alone, the Uxbridge-area company captured an additional 10 per cent of sales within the field, boosting its total share to somewhere around the 30 per cent level.

Bic had virtually cornered the market in throw-away butane lighters until Tokai arrived on the scene in February of 1985.

"Our presence is much more felt in the Canadian market than when we first opened," according to Gordon Willson, Tokai of Canada's manager of personnel and general administration. "Obviously, we've been felt this past year... Ten per cent is a big increase."

The factory, located on the townline (Durham Region Rd. 30) between Uxbridge Township and Whitchurch-Stouffville, is owned by Japanese-based Tokai Corporation.

Two modular production lines work around-the-clock, six days a week to produce a monthly total of 2.3 million flint-wheel mechanism lighters.

While most of the product finds its way into the Canadian marketplace, some is shipped to the U.S. and Japan. And millions of units of Uxbridge-produced overstock were recently sold to a buyer from Saudi Arabia.

Newly-marketed electronic lighters, different from the standard flint-wheel type, are brought in from Japan and re-packaged at Uxbridge for distribution in Canada.

Machine-intensive

The highly-automated nature of Tokai's manufacturing equipment keeps the plant's employment requirements relatively low.

Its workforce has gradually grown to 50, most of which is drawn from the surrounding communities of Uxbridge, Stouffville and Markham. As well, a sales staff is now in place Canada-wide.

Tokai, which also controls office product-maker Scripto, owns an additional 122 acres of land directly to the east of the existing factory site.

"In some manner, we expect that property will be used for one of the two product lines (either Tokai or Scripto)," Mr. Willson said of possible expansion. He noted that the company sells but doesn't manufacture Scripto merchandise at present.

Future plans include the in-house production of lighters with printed advertising promoting both large corporations and small businesses, an endeavor that may eventually increase staffing by as much as 15 per cent.

Doing its part as a responsible corporate citizen, the company has sponsored an Uxbridge sports team and supports a variety of charitable causes.

Tokai of Japan is a diversified multi-national which has large-scale business interests in countries throughout the world. Its most recent international undertaking is a branch plant development in Mexico.

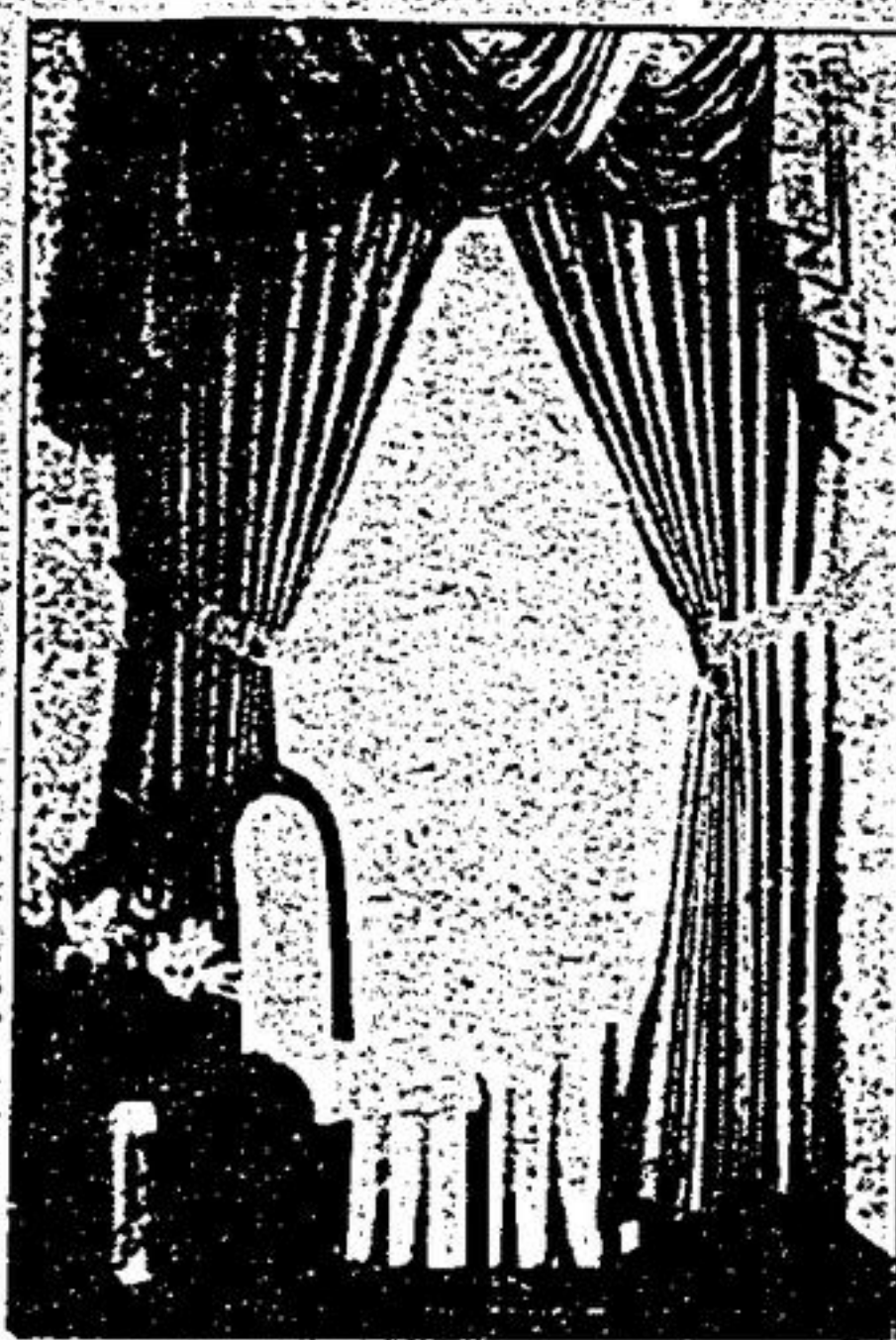
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31"	x45"	\$25 ⁵⁰
33"	x45"	\$22 ⁰⁰
36"	x45"	\$24 ⁰⁰
38"	x45"	\$25 ⁰⁰
40"	x45"	\$26 ⁵⁰
44"	x45"	\$29 ⁰⁰
48"	x45"	\$31 ⁵⁰
54"	x45"	\$35 ⁵⁰
60"	x45"	\$39 ⁵⁰
72"	x45"	\$47 ⁵⁰

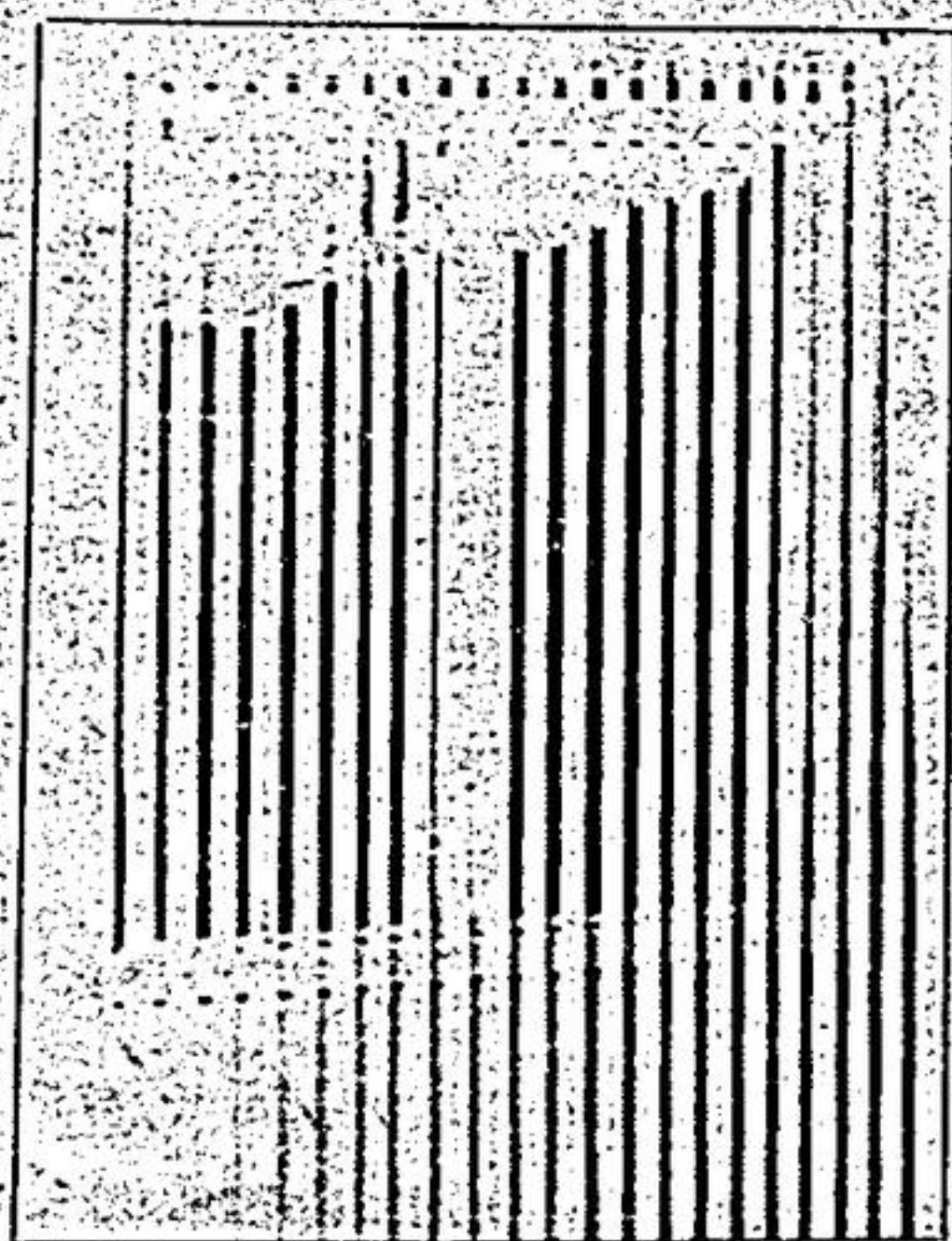
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