Chamber of Commerce 80th Anniversary Celebration

What were things like around Salem when the Chamber was organized in 1943?

WW2 was well underway. I enlisted in the Navy in February of 1943 as my 18th `birthday was in March and I wanted to avoid the draft. People in Salem went about their business as usual with a few inconveniences like Rationing.

Salem City was what people always remember as a typical small town. Sometime later, a prime-time newscaster, David Brinkley, made a study on his room-size computer and found that Salem, New Jersey, was "Average Town USA". He then brought his news team to Salem to interview people to find out just why this was true and then put it on National Television.

In 1943, there were five industries in and around Salem, doing well in their lines of business: Two Glass Houses, Gaynor's and Anchor Hocking, The H J Heinz Company, and Congoleum Nairn and Mannington Mills which were both floor covering businesses. There were 5 trucking companies: Ruhl Transportation Company who was the main hauler for Mannington Mills; Salem Express and Fowser's Fast Freight hauled for Anchor Hocking and others, and John Hall and Ray Stiles who were smaller freight operators.

At the time the founders of the Salem Chamber organized, my dad, Henry Young, had just moved his Insurance and Real Estate Agency from the Salem Lumber Company office on Market & Grant to newly created offices which were in a converted old Friends Meeting House at 107 West Broadway and owned by W Orvyl Schalick, a local Attorney. Salem Lumber Company was a partnership between Henry and Joseph Howland who then took over the lumber business.

At the same time of organization, the merchants in the Salem area, formed a separate unit within the Chamber called the Merchants Division. They would organize special sales events, the times the stores would be open, etc. All stores would close on Wednesday afternoons and be open on Friday and Saturday nights. Paul Chauncey of the J C Penny Co headed up this division. Wednesday afternoons were a good time for merchants to replenish sold merchandise or have a round of golf.

As a matter of interest, I read recently in the quarterly newsletter of the Salem Co. Historical Society, that a former owner of our current office at 90 West Broadway, "Morris Hall, promoted city business life as one of the 64 organizers, and one of the three founding vice presidents of the Salem City Board of Trade" in 1871.

Saturday nights were special, and the streets and sidewalks were really crowded with people. One of the many highlights downtown was at Norm Hurley's soda fountain. Out in front of the store he roasted peanuts. The odor was irresistible. Shells were all over the sidewalks.

I did not join the Henry D Young, Inc agency until just before I was married to Alice Shafer in October of 1947. At that time there was plenty of competition among the more than 10 independent insurance agencies in Salem.

The Young Agency was also in the Real Estate Business. In 1944 they developed Chestnut Terrace with about 75 new houses. This was a major event for our small agency. My dad was always involved in one real estate deal or another.

When I joined the agency, the Chamber Office was in an office on the second floor of the Finlaw Building. The Scott Store was on the first floor. Salem had two five-and-dime stores: Woolworths and the Scott Store, across the street from one another. The Chamber moved its offices at least two other times within the city. One was to storefront on E Broadway in a building next door to Rex Hitchner's Hardware Store, which was formerly occupied by a grocer named Myers. Another move was into the old courthouse.

The Armory on New Market Street was used for several Chamber events. They had dinners served there at annual meetings. Once, they built a ramp along the rear of the building used to drive cars onto the large basketball court for a car show by auto dealers. Another time they had all interested merchants build facilities around the floor where they could show their wares. Before they had their own Gym, Salem High School used the Armory for dances and basketball.

Speaking of auto dealers, I can think of about 13 new car dealerships. There were 7 in the city and 6 in the suburbs. Two dealers were located on Walnut Street next door to one another. E R Kates and J E Harris & Son. I mention these two because no one I've talked with knew anything about them.

The Chamber had many Chairmen over the years. Some were more memorable than others. I'm thinking of one Chairman whom I worked very closely with. His name is Robert Patrick. He was first connected with the Vanneman and Patrick auto dealership on New Market Street. He later opened a new dealership in Mannington called Patrick Chevrolet in buildings formerly owned by Pearson Supply Company.

Well, Bob got wind of a manufacturing concern named Wire Pro which was located in Pureland near Swedesboro and was considering moving to a new location as they needed more space. Bob made immediate contact with the

owners and made his pitch about the vacant Congoleum Nairn complex in Salem. After many meetings with the owners and several weeks of discussions, Bob was able to get them to come to Salem. He was persistent. Bob was named Citizen of the year by the chamber in 1972.

Being a member of the Chamber of Commerce is rewarding, both personally and financially. You get to know other members well enough to call them by their first name.

Over its 80 years of membership in the Chamber, our insurance agency is proud to have had two people chosen as Distinguished Citizens of the Year. My father, Henry Young was chosen as its first Distinguished Citizen in 1968 and my son-in-law, George Reese was chosen in 2017. George was also Chairman of the Board in 2012. My grandson, Jason Reese, our DJ tonight, is the Incoming Vice Chair and will be the Chairman in 2025.

The Henry D Young Inc Insurance Agency is proud to have been a founding member of the Salem County Chamber of Commerce. Soon, in 2028, our agency will celebrate 100 years in business in the Salem area. In two years, 2025, I will be celebrating my first 100 years.