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William Brand's original company still

bears his mark

During the late 1930s, William Brand, a Gramercy Park importer from New York, was earning his living by purchasing insulating products for the electrical industry. He bought varnished tubing from Germany and mica from India.

However, tubing supplies from Europe dried up at the onset of World War II, so Brand set up a company named Insulation Products to manufacture varnished tubing in the United States.

Brand's close friend Phillip Lauter, had recently began manufacturing insulating products in the old Rossie Velvet Mills on South Park Street in Willimantic and Brand rented space from him. These two men laid the foundation of the two industries, Electro-Motive and Brand-Rex, which would boost the Thread City's economy in the postwar years.

When Brand's son Alfred graduated from Wesleyan University in 1940, his father hired him as president and plant manager of the new Willimantic-based Insulation Products Co.

Thanks to increasing orders from the military, Alfred Brand expanded production in 1942 and began manufacturing PVC tubing. Alfred Brand subsequently hired his friend Charles R. Riordan as plant manager, who arrived in Willimantic to take up the post in September 1943.



Tom Beardsley

Riordan realized there was no long-term future in manufacturing tubing alone and on advice from some industry colleagues, he convinced the Brand family to begin the manufacture of insulated wire.

However, the federal government had rationed copper so Riordan began experimenting with glass wire insulated by flamenol, a PVC forerunner.

Shortly after the end of the war, the Willimantic-based tubing manufacturers received a massive contract for insulated wire from a Maryland-based electrical manufacturer and this convinced the Brand Co. to switch completely to the manufacture of wire.

In an unofficial company history Riordan prepared in 1984, he gave much credit to the company's foreman Bunny Lombardo and extrusion expert Stan Luques.

The Insulation Products Co. quickly outgrew its premises on South Park Street and in 1949, Brand purchased an old silk mill on North Street and expanded wire production there.

Shortly after the Brands moved to North Street, the Korean War broke out and the company won a massive order to supply 6,000 miles per month of field telephone wire to the U S Army.

The government furnished the Brand Co. with the extruding equipment to manufacture the wire and when the war ended the government ordered Brand to hand back \$1 million in excess profits.

Nevertheless, he was able to bid on the extruding equipment installed in the North Street factory and managed to acquire it at a bargain price.

The company's rapid expansion led to the construction of a modern new plant in North Windham in 1955 to manufacture wire and cable.

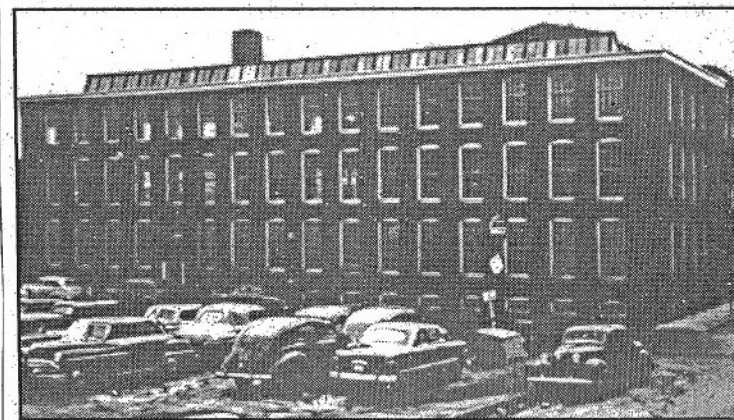
This development coincided with the growth in the Cold War and the Brands received a lucrative order to supply wiring for Titan and Atlas missiles.

In 1959, the Brands sold their company to a Dutch firm, American Enka, that then consolidated it with the Rex Corp. Brand-Rex continued production in Willimantic but sales and management staff moved to Massachusetts.

However, in 1964 the company expanded production once more and purchased the vacant

American Screw factory on West Main Street, built during World War II as an aircraft manufacturing plant.

The company founded by Brand continues to operate in Willimantic as BICC General Cable and produces fiber optic and copper wire and cable products for telecommunications as well as industrial, construction, mining, transit, military, marine, control and instrumentation markets.



The Brand Co.'s North and Valley street plant as it looked in 1942. The view is looking south down North Street. The courthouse is there today.

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