

GATES RUBBER COMPANY

The beginning of what later became Gates Rubber Company started when Charles C. Gates and his wife, Hazel, responded to an ad in the newspaper under "Business Chances". The ad read "a rare manufacturing chance - - can demonstrate that it is more profitable than almost any other legitimate business in the city." They believed in that chance and for a \$3500 investment, they bought the Colorado Leather and Tire Company which was located at 1025 Broadway.

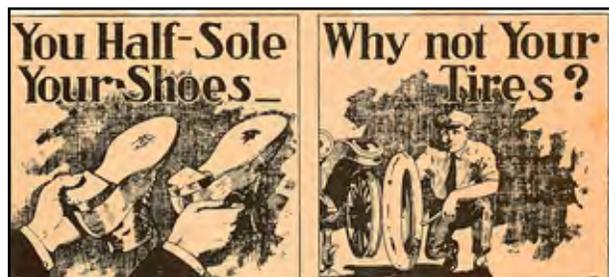


Production at Gates

Soon after the purchase, they started manufacturing the Durable Tread - - a leather tire peppered with metal studs that was guaranteed for "5000 miles without puncture". With the leather scraps left from the tires, he started manufacturing halters. Charles Gates was very aware of the impact of advertising and the public eye, so he gave a halter to Buffalo Bill Cody who tested it, used it and said it would never break. Hence, the halters were called the "Never Break" halters and they carried a green tag with an endorsement by Buffalo Bill himself.

Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

The "Half-Sole" replaced the Durable Tread in 1914. The Half-Sole was a rubber puncture-proof tire cover that was cemented over a worn tire. It increased the mileage on the original tire at half the cost of a new replacement tire. Again with his focus on catchy advertising phrases, Gates started an ad campaign that said "You Half-Sole your shoes - - Why not your tires?" It caught on and the idea swept through the country.



1914 Advertisement - - Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

World War I brought about rubber shortages and rubber supplies were tight. However, the Half-Sole was given priority manufacturing status since it helped the nation conserve rubber by increasing the lifespan and mileage of existing tires.

In 1918, the company was renamed the Gates Rubber Company.⁵ At that time, WWI was over and rubber prices dropped so dramatically, that Gates could make new tires cheaper than the Half-Sole. In 1919, they introduced the Super Tread –“ the tire with wider and thicker tread”.⁶ With the increase in production, Gates “doubled or tripled production floor space”⁷ in Denver and started warehouses in Chicago and San Francisco. By 1922, Gates had 11 distribution points around the country.

Gates continued to diversify over the years. By 1928, it was manufacturing braided garden hose which was quickly followed by the manufacture of industrial hose. After WWI, it introduced rayon-reinforced hose and nylon reinforced hose.⁸



Manufacture of Hose - Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

The Denver Gates complex on S. Broadway eventually grew to include thirty interconnected buildings in a 25-square block area.⁹ Gates was started in 1911 and already, by 1919, the company embarked on a program to envision how the company might grow in 30 years.¹⁰



1919 Vision of Gates “structures of the future” - Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

The offices were housed in the Ford Building at the southeast corner of Broadway and I-25. This building was constructed in 1913 by the Ford Motor Company to manufacture Model T trucks until the plant closed during World War I. Gates bought the building in 1945 and used it

for the print shop, machine shops, warehouses and as the site of the canteen. In 1980, the building was totally renovated and became the corporate headquarters. A new administration building was completed in 1985. Over 1500 workers had their offices at this new administration building and the corporate headquarters.

In the 1950s Gates started expansion out of the country with a vision toward expansion around the world. In the next four decades, Gates expanded its manufacturing operation to include nearly 40 operations throughout the world. Their first out of the country plant was built in 1954 in Brantford, Ontario, Canada, followed by a plant in Toluca, Mexico in 1959. The 1960s brought international expansion to Belgium and Venezuela and by the 1970s Gates expanded into Brazil. The 1980s brought more expansion into Europe including Germany, England, Scotland and Spain. By 1996, the Gates operation in Europe had grown to more than 3,500 employees with sales approaching \$350 million per year. Gates also expanded into Asia with a plant that opened in Japan in 1986, one in South Korea in 1990, and plants in India and China in 1996.¹¹ In 1996, Gates was purchased by Tompkins PLC of London. Fairly recently, they moved their offices to a new building just southwest of Denver Union Station.

Gates Community Connection

In addition to Gates role in worldwide production of hose and belts, it also had a big role in the community of Denver. That role was fostered internally through many social service programs for its employees. The ripple effect from those programs spilled out into the surrounding neighborhoods and into other parts of Denver.

Employee Commissary - One of the benefits for Gates employees was the ability to shop at the Employee Commissary. This store was opened by the Industrial Congress's Commissary Committee in September 1919. The store was stocked with food and staples available to employees at a discounted price. They had 8876 customers waited on in the first 30 days of operation. Gates employees who shopped at the commissary generally cut their grocery bills by 20%.

Recreation Programs - Gates provided an extensive recreation program for its employees. They had a full-time trained recreation director that organized a wide range of recreation teams and activities scheduled throughout the year. The first full-time director was Lloyd Smith, hired in 1948.¹² Sports included archery, baseball, basketball, bowling, golf, softball, table tennis, swimming and tennis. Other programmed activities included chess, bridge, dancing, dart baseball, fishing, hunting, hiking, and horse-back riding. In 1961, Gates' Company publication, the *Progress* magazine, reported that the most popular recreation activity was bowling with over 800 employees taking part in a dozen different leagues. Boxing and wrestling matches drew large crowds. The popularity of these "smokers" as the matches were called, continued to grow so that it became necessary to move them to the City Auditorium with seating for over 7000 spectators. Rodeos were held from 1939 until 1946 with many Gates employees' bronco busting and calf roping.



Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

Roof Garden - The “roof garden” was a popular place “built for the purpose of affording the employees of the International Rubber Company a place of recreation and relaxation - - a place where they can rest, talk and get acquainted during their noon hours and after work. A spot where they can lift the mental strain and sweep the brain cobwebs out with pure, fresh, Colorado air.”¹³ The roof garden was built on top of Unit 4 and had many striking features including vine-covered Italian pergolas, tile terraces, flower beds and hanging plants. A diverse range of activities took place in the roof garden from the usual lunch / meal venues to boxing and wrestling matches, and May Day festivities with the crowning of the May Queen. The roof garden, which had served so many, so specially, for so long was demolished in 1994 to make way for parking.



Gates Roof Garden - Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

Fire Brigade -The fire brigade was organized on May 17, 1917 to provide fire and police protection for the plant.¹⁴ It originally consisted of 25 employees specially selected because they demonstrated honesty and dependability. Since the Gates plant was so far south of Denver, fire protection was difficult and it was the brigade’s job to keep things under control until the fire department from Denver could arrive. From their inception, the brigade had also been a strong social arm of Gates. In 1920, the Fire Brigade organized a “Fortyniner” costume party in honor of Mrs. (Hazel) Gates. Most of the events and parties organized by the fire brigade had creative themes that often turned the roof garden into a big entertainment venue.

The brigade held a Mid-Winter Bathing Carnival as a birthday celebration for Charles C. Gates. The roof garden was decorated to be a seashore complete with sand, water and ocean views - - and bathing costumes were required for admittance.¹⁵



Mid-Winter Bathing Carnival – Birthday Bash for Charles Gates - Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

The brigade sponsored a variety of social events including gambling nights and costume parties. Many of these events raised money for Gates clubs and for the annual Gates picnic. The fire brigade also created fund-raising events to help employees who faced health or personal challenges and were in need of financial assistance. After WWII, the brigade was no longer needed to fight fires. From that time on, the main role of the brigade was in social events. They were the source of the best parties and fun events at Gates.



Party Time, Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

Clubs - Gates sponsored many clubs for its employees. The Gates Progress Club was founded on the principles of service and the betterment of members. Initially, the club was called the Executives Club and had a membership of men in management. In 1919, it became the Gates Club and then in 1926, its name was changed to the Progress Club. Members would listen to guest speakers and meet for discussion and education. Sometime, they would have entertainment.

The first women's club at Gates started in September 1917. It was called the 5-W Club with the 5 W's meaning "We Wish We Were Wed". The members held meetings to study cooking,

sewing and grooming to work toward that goal. The name of the club was later changed to the 999 Service Club with more wide ranging ideals - - friendship, service and loyalty. Other clubs included the Sports Club, the Gateway Club and the Technical Club created by men from the Technical Department.



Gates – Crazy Hat Contest Sponsored by the Women's Service Club
Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

Annual Picnic - - The first annual Gates picnic started in 1914. That year, 150 Gates employees and their families rode a special train up to Eldorado Springs for the picnic. ¹⁶ From 1930 through 1937, the picnic was held at Elitch Gardens. By 1938, the picnic moved to Lakeside Amusement Park as they could handle larger crowds.



Train to Gates 2nd Annual Picnic in Eldorado Springs 1915 - Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

A brochure advertising the June 1947 annual picnic showed that the factory would be closed from 11:00 a.m. on Friday through midnight on Sunday so that employees could fully enjoy the company picnic sponsored by the Gates Fire Brigade. Held at Lakeside Amusement Park, the picnic activities included free rides for all the kids and swimming "in a large, modern pool". Thousands of new pennies were hidden for the children's treasure hunt for all children six years of age and under. The picnic attendees enjoyed free coffee, ice cream and pop. There were races for boys and girls of all ages along with many other sporting events including softball, tug-of-war and horseshoe pitching for valuable prizes. The big event of the picnic was a prize drawing where the lucky winner received a brand new Chevrolet. By 1960, the annual picnic drew 14,000 employees and family members. The picnics were sponsored jointly by the Fire Brigade, Progress Club and the Gates Women's 999 Service Club.



Gates Annual Picnic circa 1960 - Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

Christmas Parties – The Gates Christmas parties were some of the biggest parties in the Rocky Mountain area. The first Christmas party was held in 1917 at the roof garden. Men received a gift of socks and the women received a gift of a handkerchief and some perfume. By 1919, the format of the Christmas party was changed as Hazel Gates wanted the focus of Christmas to be on children. Hazel, called “Mommie G” by most, was Santa. She filled the stockings, wrapped the gifts for the 150 children and played Santa. As the party grew in size, so did the help that Hazel received with the party. A card file was made for every child under the age of 12 so that no children were left out.

After 30 years, the Christmas parties were major events. The following presents the description of the Christmas party in the March 1961 Progress Magazine – Gates 50th Anniversary Edition. “At the Gates Christmas parties, every youngster 12 years of age or under, received a Christmas wrapped present all his own - present selected carefully by Santa for or her boy or girl status and age. There Christmas music, singing and entertainment and best of all, Santa himself.” The Christmas parties were annually starting in 1919. The parties grew in size from 1919, so that by 1959, party had to be moved from the Gates to the Denver Coliseum. By Christmas 1960, there were over 8000 presents needed for the party.



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Hazel Gates with Christmas gifts for the children
Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

Medical Clinic - - From 1915 on, in the early years of production at Gates Rubber, a first-aid station was available to help employees in need. By 1920, a medical clinic had started operation. Gates employees paid dues for membership in the Gates Mutual Benefit Club which then provided needed medical care. By 1937, the clinic had 1400 members. That first year of operation, it treated an average of 350 people per month. By 1963, that early first aid station had grown to an in-house full service medical and dental center with a staff of 76 including 29 doctors and 4 dentists. Although membership was voluntary, 98% of the Gates employees were members.¹⁷ The Gates Pharmacy issued an average of 250 prescriptions per day. By 1987, that center was serving 12,500 people including Gates employees, their dependents and about 4600 Gates retirees.¹⁸



Gates Mutual Benefit Club Hospital staff – 1937 - Photo Courtesy of Gates Corporation

Credit Union - - Formed in 1934 by a group of employees that banded together, the Gates Credit Union provided loans and savings plans. By 1961, the credit union had more than 7100 members and assets over \$ 8 million.¹⁹

Philanthropic Pursuits - The Gates Foundation was established in 1946 by Charles C. Gates Sr. At that time, he gave 10% of the company's stock to the Foundation. The Gates Foundation has given many notable grants to fund major programs and facilities including the Gates Planetarium at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, the South Platte Greenway Foundation, the Breckenridge Outdoor Recreation Center, Outward Bound in Colorado and most recently grants for stem cell research.