

# Charles Renaux- Pipestone Businessman

---

By Susan Hoskins, 2017

The Pipestone County Museum curates several glass “Renaux” (pronounced Renoe) bottles in its collection, as shown in attachment A. The simplest of these is thick clear glass with the raised label “Pipestone Ice Cream Co., Chas. E. Renaux, prop., Pipestone, Minn.”<sup>1</sup> Another has a pressed diamond pattern in the glass with the raised label that simply states “Renaux.”<sup>2</sup> A third glass bottle has a green and white painted label with the words “Pipestone Beverages, Renaux Beverage Company, Pipestone, Minnesota.”<sup>3</sup> These three bottles and their labels indicated three separate business names associated with Charles Renaux. Were the ice cream company and the bottling company interrelated or separate entities? Was Charles Renaux the sole founder of these companies? What happened to these companies after Mr. Renaux.

Although Charles Renaux and his wife moved to Pipestone, Minnesota in the spring of 1918, the very first reference to him in the local newspaper was two years prior in April 1916.<sup>4</sup> Charles Renaux, of Jackson, Minnesota and a Mr. Galsted of Iowa were co-owners of the Pipestone Ice Cream factory which was at that time a new firm located in the basement of the Austin Block at 124 West Olive Street.<sup>5</sup> The \$4,500 installation cost of modern machinery included an ice making machine with a capacity of 7 tons and a freezer with the capacity of 700 gallons of ice cream. Why Renaux of Jackson, Minnesota and Galsted of Iowa chose Pipestone for the site of their joint business was not addressed. Charles Renaux did have a background in butter making with a creamery in Olmsted County, and no information on Mr. Galsted has been located.<sup>6</sup>

In June 1919 the Pipestone Ice Cream Company moved to a new location “to the rear” at 114 West Olive Street.<sup>7</sup> “To the rear” was an interesting way to give directions which merited checking out, as shown in attachment B. The Clymer Block was located at 114 West Olive Street, a two story quartzite structure built in 1890.<sup>8</sup> Charles Renaux owned this building by 1920, it was sometimes referred to as the “Renaux Building,” and added a 40 foot one-story

---

<sup>1</sup> Pipestone County Museum, Glass Bottle 2003.080.0001, *Pipestone Ice Cream Co., Chas. E. Renaux, Prop.*; Pipestone County Historical Society, 113 South Hiawatha Avenue, Pipestone, MN 56164.

<sup>2</sup> Pipestone County Museum, Glass Bottle 1996.056.0001, *Renaux*; Pipestone County Historical Society, 113 South Hiawatha Avenue, Pipestone, MN 56164.

<sup>3</sup> Pipestone County Museum, Glass Bottle 2000.019.0001, *Pipestone Beverages, Renaux Beverage Co.*; Pipestone County Historical Society, 113 South Hiawatha Avenue, Pipestone, MN 56164.

<sup>4</sup> “Funeral of Chas. E. Renaux Thursday,” *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 18 September 1942, p.4 c.5 p.1, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota. “Ice Cream Factory is Ready,” *Pipestone Leader* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 27 April 1916, p.1 c.2 p.1, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>5</sup> “New Establishment to Open,” *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 2 May 1916, p.1 c.3 p.6, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>6</sup> 1910 U.S. Census, Olmsted County, Minnesota, population schedule, Rochester, p. 228 (stamped), dwelling 25, family 26, Charles E. Renaux in the household of William E. Mitchell; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://ancestry.com>) accessed 29 August 2017); citing NARA microfilm publication T624, roll 713.

<sup>7</sup> “Ice Cream Company Moves,” *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 27 June 1919 p.8 c.3 p.7, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>8</sup> *If Walls Could Talk* (Pipestone County Historical Society, Pipestone, Minnesota) p. 32

addition to the rear to house the Pipestone Ice Cream Company.<sup>9</sup>

It was in September 1920, Charles Renaux, the proprietor of the Pipestone Ice Cream Company, got into the bottling business by installing a bottling works in the basement of his ice cream plant.<sup>10</sup> The ice cream mixing was on the main floor and the bottling in the basement. He also added a bottle washing & soaking machine and an automatic crowning machine which filled and capped the bottles. In addition to his manufacture of ice cream and butter, Charles Renaux would also supply pop during the 1920 Pipestone County fair.

In April 1922 the Pipestone Ice Cream Company's growth was said to be "little short of phenomenal."<sup>11</sup> The specific annual output of the business was 66,000 gallons of ice cream, distributed not just in Pipestone, but wholesale over a trade territory. Attempts to identify the extent of the trade territory have fallen short, however with a shipping and freezing station located 60 miles east at Worthington, Minnesota, it covered quite an extensive territory under the name "All Cream" ice cream. The factory had "expensive, modern and up-to-date equipment and machinery," such as glass lined mixers and holding tanks, a churn and three ice cream freezers in which mechanical refrigeration was used. The hardening rooms had a capacity of 3,000 gallons of ice cream at one time.

At the same time the Pipestone Ice Cream Company also produced two kinds of ice cream bars; the Renaux Arctic Nut Bar and the Eskimo Pie.<sup>12</sup> Eskimo Pie, which was a patented brand name, was invented in Onawa, Iowa in 1920, and immediately franchised which allowed ice cream manufacturers such as Renaux to produce them under the brand name.<sup>13</sup>

Besides the booming ice cream business, Charles Renaux was involved in his bottling business, having operating it in the basement "to the rear" of 114 West Olive Street since 1920. In 1922 Renaux moved the bottling operation to a new location which was to be a building near the Pipestone Produce Company Creamery at 216 Second Avenue NW as shown in attachment C.<sup>14</sup> There was a report at that time of Renaux taking a partner and changing the name of his bottling works to "Purity Bottling Works," however nothing else has been found on either the partner or the business name.

In 1925 a second story was added "to the rear" of the Clymer Block, also known as the Renaux building.<sup>15</sup> Renaux did a complete reorganization of his business at that time, and also had plans to open a new branch of the business— the manufacture of cheese.

---

<sup>9</sup> No title, *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 13 January 1920, p.4 c.1 p.6, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>10</sup> "New Bottling Works Another Industry of City," *Pipestone Leader* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 2 September 1920, p.1 c.2 p.1, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>11</sup> "Pipestone Ice Cream Company," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 18 April 1922, p.3 c.2 p.1, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>12</sup> "Pipestone Ice Cream Company," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 18 April 1922, p.3 c.2 p.1, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>13</sup> "Eskimo Pie," *Wikipedia* (<http://www.en.wikipedia.org> : accessed 14:10 24 August 2017.)

<sup>14</sup> "The Purity Bottling Works Under New Firm," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 19 May 1922, p.1 c.4 p.9, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>15</sup> "Enlarge Plant to Meet Business Needs," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 20 Feb 1925, p.1 c.6 p.1, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

Renaux continued to be cutting edge and modern in the manufacture of ice cream with the installation of a new freezer in 1927.<sup>16</sup> This was a new kind of direct expansion freezer that could freeze 120 gallons of ice cream in one hour. It used automatic circulating ammonia rather than brine, for a total investment of \$4,800.

The Pipestone City and County Directory for 1937 showed Charles E. Renaux as the proprietor of Renaux's Ice Cream at 114 West Main Street.<sup>17</sup> (Main Street was formerly known as Olive Street.)<sup>18</sup> A large advertisement stated "Renaux Ice Cream, It's Pure- That's Sure," and listed Pepsi-Cola, 7UP, Silver Sparkle and 4%, for the first time advertising the beverages that were being bottled by the ice cream company. In 1936 Pepsi-Cola released 94 U.S. bottling franchises and it seems likely that Renaux of Pipestone may have gotten a Pepsi franchise at that time.<sup>19</sup> The 7Up Company was created in 1936 from the Howdy Corporation and at that time they changed the name of their best selling beverage to 7Up.<sup>20</sup> Renaux likely secured the franchise to sell 7Up at this time. Nothing has been found on the beverage Silver Sparkle.

An explosion shook the Renaux building in 1938.<sup>21</sup> The oil burner in the furnace went dry and an accumulation of gas ignited. Ten windows were blown out in the building and soot was deposited in the basement, however there were no injuries and remarkably little real damage. The businesses facing Main Street on the first and second floor were not affected, since the furnace only served the addition "to the rear."

After 26 years Charles Renaux split up his company by selling the ice cream portion of the business in February 1942 to the Nelson Ice Cream Company which was headquartered in Fairmont, Minnesota.<sup>22</sup> Renaux retained the bottling works and the firm name was reportedly changed at that time to Pepsi Cola Bottling Works, and was to continue at its location on Second Avenue NW.

Seven months later Charles Renaux experienced a heart attack at his home. He was taken to Pipestone's Ashton Memorial Hospital where he developed bronchial pneumonia and passed away five days later on September 18, 1942 at the age of 57.<sup>23</sup> His funeral was conducted by Walz and Walz Funeral Home and he was buried at New Woodlawn Cemetery at Pipestone, Minnesota on September 17, 1942.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> "Pipestone Ice Cream Company Installs Valuable New Equipment," *Pipestone Leader* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 14 July 1927, p.1 c.2 p.6, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>17</sup> *Wright's Pipestone City & County Directory for 1937*, no page numbers; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>18</sup> Pipestone County Historical Society, editor, *A History of Pipestone County* (Dallas, Texas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1984) "Old Streets" p.128; *In 1934 the names of Pipestone streets, with the exception of Hiawatha Avenue, were changed.*

<sup>19</sup> "The History of Pepsi-Cola" (<http://www.pepsibrattleboro.com>) accessed 10:25 5 September 2017

<sup>20</sup> "7Up," *Wikipedia* (<http://en.wikipedia.org> : accessed 15:40 6 September 2017.)

<sup>21</sup> "Gas Explosion in Renaux Building," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 14 January 1938, p.1 c.6 p.1, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>22</sup> "Nelson Extended Local Interests," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 27 February 1942, p.1 c. p.1, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>23</sup> Pipestone County Minnesota, Death Certificate no. 1942-55, *Charles Edward Renaux, 1942*; County Recorder office, Pipestone, Minnesota. "Funeral of Chas. E. Renaux Thursday," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 18 September 1942, p.4 c.5 p.1, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>24</sup> "Last Rites Held for C.E. Renaux," *Pipestone Leader* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 22 September 1942, p.2 c.5 p.5, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

Charles Renaux's ice cream company was eclipsed by his bottling company in the end. He had sold Renaux's Ice Cream Company to competitor Nelson Ice Cream just months before his death in 1942. The Nelson Ice Cream Company continued to operate in Pipestone until the company merged with Marigold Dairies in 1959. After his death, Renaux's bottling company limped along under a general manger until it was purchased in 1952 by Bill McKeon of Pipestone.<sup>25</sup> In a memoir written by McKeon's wife, she remembers that what they purchased was a rundown bottling works business and that it was a struggle to get it going again.<sup>26</sup> But get it going they did. Pepsi continued to bottle in Pipestone until late 1990, and the company has continued to be a presence in Pipestone with a distribution center, now located in the industrial park.<sup>27</sup> Charles Renaux's business spirit lives on in Pipestone today.

More research could be done to bring the Pepsi story up to the present. The understanding of business franchise practices through this historic time period as well as where it stands today would be useful, as well as continuing the Pepsi story in Pipestone from when it was taken on anew after Charles Renaux's death by entrepreneur Bill McKeon, its shifted focus from a bottling works to a distribution center and its outlook for the future.

---

<sup>25</sup> "Renaux Beverage Plant Sold Aug. 1," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 4 August 1952, p.1 c.2 p.2, microfilm roll; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>26</sup> Helen McKeon, "Some Happenings in My Life" p.8; McKeon Family File, Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.

<sup>27</sup> Tim Haubrich, President and General Manager of Pepsi-Cola Bottling Company in Pipestone, Minnesota. Interview by Susan Hoskins, 29 September 2017. Privately held by interviewer, [address for private use,] Garretson, South Dakota. 2017.



Attachment A: Glass Bottle 2003.080.0001, *Pipestone Ice Cream Co., Chas. E. Renaux, Prop.*; Glass Bottle 1996.056.0001, *Renaux*; Glass Bottle 2000.019.0001, *Pipestone Beverages, Renaux Beverage Co.*; Pipestone County Historical Society, 113 South Hiawatha Avenue, Pipestone, MN 56164.



Attachment B: *“To the rear of 114 West Main Street”* 2017; digital image, privately held by Susan Hoskins, [address for private use] Garretson, South Dakota, 2017.



Attachment C: "Pipestone Produce Company and Renaux Bottling Works," 2011.001.0460, postcard; Photo Archive-Pipestone Buildings/Businesses; Pipestone County Museum, Pipestone, Minnesota.