

Lehi Refractory
by Julian Mercer

Immediately after the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, a federal agency, the Defense Plant Corporation, began constructing a number of strategically located defense plants inland out of harm's way.

One such plant was built on beautiful, fertile farm ground on the east shore of Utah Lake and became known as Geneva Steel after a similar setting in Geneva, Switzerland. During construction, the creation of thousands of new jobs was welcomed by Utah Valley residents.

By April of 1942, Lehi was to be the direct beneficiary of the new steel industry in announcement was made by Mayor Dean Prior that Lehi would be the location for a brick plant necessary to produce refractory, or fire brick capable of withstanding extremely high temperatures, because such brick is used to line the steel making furnaces.

The plant too would be built by D.P.C. on the site of the old Slater Brick Yard in the northwest part of the town.

With war's end, the plant, consisting of six beehive kilns, a production area and other assets was, after open bidding,

purchased by General Refractories (GREFCO) of Philadelphia at the time, the plant employed 45 people with annual payroll around \$110,000.00 and monthly production of 450,000 bricks going primarily to Geneva and other steel production plants.

Over the years, General Refractories has been involved in much more diversification especially in the area of silica brick and for lining coke ovens and furnaces in the glass industry in such remote areas as the Far East and Australia. In fact, according to plant manager, Robert Mattox, General Refractories is the only company in North America that makes silica brick for coke ovens, shipping around 600 pallets per month.

Mattox further emphasizes the Lehi operation is very sound financially having grown from 25-30 percent in the last two years with sales around 12 million expansion is planned for next summer which will add to the 100 current employees and is necessitated by recent modernization at Geneva. Because Geneva is installing two 225 ton vessels that will replace the open hearth furnaces, a new chemically bonded resin brick or larger size will be required for the Q-BOP or bottom blown oxygen systems that were recently dismantled and shipped from Chicago and should greatly improve steel-making production.

Due to the specialized nature of the brick required for the Q-BOP system, containing a variety of raw materials shipped in from various parts of the world, General Refractories may also become involved in a recycling process of crushing the used brick and reclaiming the materials for new production.

With all the activity taking place at General Refractories to fulfill the many specialized needs, great care is taken by the company to make sure all customers get the best service possible, especially Geneva Steel that still remains the biggest purchaser of refractory brick, receiving from 3-5 truckloads per day. The Lehi plant will continue making such exotic brick as magnesium carbon and chromium magnesite, but one thing's sure, it will not be producing brick for homes or buildings.