



Chronicle Photo by John GreenSmith

MACHINE TURNS OUT PAPER LAUNDRY BAGS BY THE MILLIONS
 Tom Eaton, Jr., Left, and Eaton, Sr., Discuss Possible Conversion to Plastics

30,000,000 ANNUALLY

Houston Firm Prints Paper Bags For Laundry, Cleaning Retailers

BY ELMER BERTELSEN
 Industrial Editor

Tom Eaton had just finished snapping aerial photographs of a Cincinnati, Ohio, manufacturing firm and was enjoying the hospitality of the plant president when he spotted a photograph on the wall in the executive's office. "That's an aerial of a paper mill in Louisiana," said Eaton proudly. "I took it myself sometime ago."

Indeed it was, said the executive. It was a picture of the mill from which he bought paper to turn out laundry bags for cleaning establishments.

Earlier, on that same day 35 years ago, Eaton had gone on a tour of the plant. The bags being produced that day were for a Houston concern.

To someone less alert than Tom Eaton, the small talk might have seemed unrelated.

Birth of an Idea

To Eaton, however, it was the birth of an idea that resulted in a Houston company that today prints more than 30,000,000 paper bags annually for more than 1000 laundry and cleaning retailers in eight Southwestern states.

The Eaton Manufacturing Co., Holly at Dart, is the only specialty manufacturing firm of its type in Texas.

It was started by Eaton in a small office in the since-raized Dooley Bldg., Franklin at Milam, with a machine Eaton built from memory after inspecting the Ohio firm's machine.

When his machine did not operate properly, Eaton made another trip to Ohio, told the

executive what he was doing and asked to have another look at the machine.

Instead of indignation, Eaton's request was met with a smile.

"Someone will start it down there sooner or later," Eaton quoted the executive. "It might as well be you. Let's take a look at that machine and I'll show you what you're doing wrong."

Business Grows

Starting with most of Houston's 15 laundry and cleaning firms as customers, Eaton increased his business as the city grew, moving to his present location in 1927.

He branched out over the state, then into the southwestern region. He even sells special bags, like Christmas bags, to firms as far away as Minnesota and Idaho.

Today, he estimates, there

are more than 200 cleaning and laundry firms in Houston alone.

His firm is still growing. An addition to the company's plant, which will add 8800 square feet to the plant's present 12,500 square feet, is nearing completion.

The 60-year-old Eaton has the reputation of being a step ahead of competitors. He developed a machine, built by Houston Foundry and Machine Co., 2005 White, that was the first in the industry to turn out bags with the customer's name printed on both front and back.

That was in 1939.

Today, he said, only a few of his competitors can furnish the same type bag.

A Family Firm

A family firm, Eaton's office force is directed by Mrs.

Eaton and son Harry, 22.

Another son, 26-year-old Tom, Jr., is a jet pilot trainee at Graham Air Force Base, Fla. He'll enter the business when he is through serving Uncle Sam.

The trend toward use of plastic bags by laundries isn't being overlooked by Eaton.

With his machinery graduate G. M. Nagai, Eaton is already at work planning conversion of his plant facilities if he decides that his customers want the now-competitive plastic-type bag.

"We started with an idea and have done all right," said Eaton, who also got his education at Rice. "The plastic bag is not the first new wrinkle we've experienced in this business."