

MASTER ELECTRICIAN FROM GERMANY TAUGHT TRADE TO SONS

Pine City Electric was founded on skills brought to this country by a German immigrant.

Friedrich Holstein came to America from Bramache, Germany in 1923. He landed on Ellis Island with other immigrants and got his first foothold in the new country working in the north woods with his wife's uncles who had arrived earlier.

Friedrich Sr. had been a master electrician in Germany and was anxious to begin working at the trade in America. He began by going into the garage business in Finlayson and within a year he was able to send for his wife Mathilde Luise and his sons Friedrich (Fritz) Jr., aged nine and Wilhelm, four. They arrived in America from Germany in December, 1924.

Eventually Friedrich Sr. got into the electrical business and he was one of the first in Minnesota to acquire a master's electrician license and also one of the first electricians in Minnesota to become an electrical inspector.

Working for himself, he did wiring and machine work for independent companies including Land-o-Lakes. Electric motor rewinding, magneto and electrical repair were his specialities.

Holstein's sons helped him in the business from the time they were youngsters. Friedrich Jr., or Fritz as he is known, began working at the age of nine years, hurrying home from school every day to help his father.

After graduating from high school he studied A.C. and D.C.

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electricity at Dunwoody Institute.

Young Wilhelm, (Bill), as soon as he was old enough also worked side by side with his dad and brother and the trio built a reputation of being some of the best in their field.

After attending the University of Minnesota, Bill enlisted in the army in 1942 where he worked with the maintenance engineers stationed in the Persian Gulf command.

When he was discharged from the service he and his brother Fritz decided to become partners in Pine City Electric.

At first they rented a building from William Challen just south of the Gehl Oil company and in 1946 they decided to build their present shop.

Fritz's father-in-law Jesse Lindburg was a brick mason. He came from Viola Iowa with his son Andrew, a nephew Joe and another man expecting to build the shop in about 10 days.

The job lasted nearly a month. Excessive rain, and a mistake in the survey caused delays that had not been anticipated.

After the footings were in the ground Fritz and Bill discovered the surveyor had made a mistake and they were building on 30 feet of somebody else's property.

They decided if they couldn't purchase the property they would forget the whole thing and move out of town. Fortunately, the owner of the 30 feet was Walt Schwartzwald and he sold to them.

In 1952 their father moved to Pine City to join them and although he was almost ready to retire he stayed with the company for 20 more years.

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Kaiser-Frazer automobiles were one of the most deluxe, luxurious models ever manufactured for the price and the Holstein brothers took on this dealership from 1947 until 1952.

Another sideline included building hand trucks, cream can carts, ice cutters for fishing and 110 volt generators mounted on vehicles to operate 110 volt electric tools.

Since 1966 they have built electric motors for road equipment and fire trucks.

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