

HISTORY OF CALIFORNIA HOBBY DISTRIBUTORS AND THE VEIR FAMILY

September 2010 we had an open house celebrating 100 years in business. Over 150 people attended but the question was asked, how this can be when hobbies haven't been around that long..... So I started doing research:

Henry Christopher Veir was born in Copenhagen area of Denmark July, 1863. He is the older brother of Martin "Peter" Veir Sr. born September 22, 1880 in Denver, Colorado. The Veir family immigrated to the United States in about 1870. Both parents were killed by Indians in 1882. Colorado became a state in 1876 and the Ute Indians were moved off their land and sent to reservations where they were to remain. The new settlers coming in wanted to mine, farm, or ranch and the Indians didn't want their land to be plowed up... There was a lot of tension at that time in Colorado as the Indians didn't like this arrangement.

After their parents were killed, Henry (19) took Martin (2) back to Denmark to be raised by their aunts. Can you imagine a 19 year old boy taking a baby across the United States from Denver to New York, then on a sailing ship across the Atlantic Ocean? Peter would often talk about his time in Copenhagen and the harbor and loving to spend his time there. Henry found his way back to the Denver area where he spent time as a sheep herder and then went into taking flour, etc. into the mines for 3 cents a barrel. Pete's brother Henry modified the original name of Henry Christopher De Veir Rasmussen to Henry Christopher Veir to Americanize his name. Somewhere along the way Henry gets to New York and renounces his allegiance to the King of Denmark and became an American citizen. Henry (32) married Mary Ellen Knoibl (28) in New York City, 1896. As a point of interest Mary was 4'11" and Henry was 6'2"...They went on to have two children, Alice (August 1897) and Henry (September 1898). The son Henry was killed by street car when pushing Alice off the tracks. This happened in the Bronx on Third Avenue after 1900 and before 1910 according to the census records.

Henry, the father had become an electrician and Mary had a small gift and toy store located in the Bronx section of New York City. They owned a three story building. The toy store became more successful and expanded to the basement

with storage on the second floor. The family lived on the third floor. Henry quit the electrician business and worked full time at the toy store.

Alice tells the story that one night the store was closed and there was a loud knock at the front door. She went down and screamed that there was some strange man talking funny. This was my grandfather Peter. He was 21 and Alice was about four. He didn't speak any English and it really scared her. This was about 1902 and his first day in the United States. Peter worked along with his brother and sister-in-law in the toy store that continued to do well. As a point of interest because of the 17 year age difference between Henry and Peter, Peter always called Mary "Mother"...Alice was more like a little sister than his cousin and Peter lived with them until he married Ruth in 1917. The family sold the store and moved to South Pasadena in approximately 1910. Henry and Mary's daughter Alice Veir, and her son Henry Mc Nulty both went to Marengo school. Henry & family lived at 1717 Lyndon, South Pasadena.

It is my father's cousin's understanding that the "Veirs" were of the Dutch Reformed Church in Denmark and settled into the Presbyterian Church in South Pasadena.

The original Veir Brother's toy business was the building on Los Angeles Street between 4th and 5th. Subsequently they moved to the mezzanine floor of the Cooper Building at the N.E. corner of the Los Angeles street and either 8th or 9th street. They also had the doll hospital on Broadway between 8th and 9th where my grandmother Ruth E. Winkler worked until her marriage to Martin Peter Veir at the age of 23. Martin was 37....she won out over another girl who wasn't nearly the cook my grandmother was. He was quite a catch who bought a houseful of new furniture and had a great job.....I guess she must have married her boss. They settled in South Pasadena at 1917 Virginia Place and then moved to a brand new house at 1001 Stratford, across from the Castellano family. My grandmother continued to live there until her death in 1987.

Veir Brothers supplied major department stores with toy departments that they continued to maintain all year long. They covered the Bon Marche in Seattle, Bullocks, Robinsons, Nash's, Hertels, etc., as far South as San Diego. On my

grandfather's road trips up North in his Packard he would always stop by Solvang and enjoy a Danish meal. The New York store and its successes gave my grandfather and his brother a relationship with the Greats of the early 1900's toy business, Beatrice Alexander, creator of Madam Alexander, Steiff, Lionel, Radio Flyer Wagons, etc. The stores only had the finest of toys which they personally could stand behind. That is still our goal at California Hobby Distributors.

California Hobby Distributors was founded in 1935 by Reginald Denny Industries, Inc. in Hollywood, California by the late movie star. Mr. Denny was an avid model builder and Free Flight enthusiast, holding for many years both the endurance and distance world records. Although he opened a large hobby shop on Hollywood Blvd, his main interest was in designing and building model airplanes.

This eventually led into adding a manufacturing facility to produce a line of kits and later develop the Dennymite Engine, which was produced through 1948. His most noted effort was the beautiful Denny Plane, which is still showing up at old-timer meets. Due to the economic conditions in the late 30's and needing some direction as to where the company was heading, they brought in Martin "Pete" Veir, who had recently retired from a very successful 25 years as a large toy wholesaler in Los Angeles. Brother Henry died in 1933.

Through Mr. Veir's guidance, it was decided to eliminate the kit manufacturing end of the business even though it had grown to a point where it had successfully developed the first radio controlled 'Drone' airplane for the U.S. Government. This segment then spun off as Radioplane Corporation and later was absorbed by Northrop Aircraft.

At this point in time, it was decided to pull all efforts into the retail business and since there were very few distributors at the time, the company also picked up a number of manufacturers line direct to distribute to other hobby shops. The actual Hobby business started to evolve in the 1930's and Monogram Models, Athearn Trains, Revell Models, Guillows Balsa Gliders to name a few were added into the toy mix as they became available. This arrangement worked quite well for a number of years. When Pete's sons, Bob and Frank separated from the Air Force in 1946, they took an active part in the business, it was decided to sell off

the retail store and devote full time to the wholesale end, hence the birth of California Hobby Distributors. My grandfather died in 1954.

Although the Veir Family enjoyed the retail part of the business very much and used it as a sounding board for upcoming trends, it also required a lot of time to remain successful. We also realized it was not in the best interest of our ever increasing network of hobby dealers. Whether it is in the 1950's or the 1990's, the dealer certainly doesn't need competition from manufacturers or distributors, only their support.

California Hobby Distributors continued doing business in Hollywood until 1962, at which time they needed to expand because of rapid growth. It was decided to build a new 18,000 foot facility in Alhambra, which is about 10 miles East of Los Angeles. Alhambra was 1-1/2 miles from the Veir family residences and the freeway traffic was getting too heavy in the late 1950's. At the same time they bought out "High Quality" Model Railroad Distributors from Paul Lehman and utilized Paul's vast railroad knowledge along with their general hobby know-how. This worked out extremely well, as today Cal Hobby is well-balanced with approximately 40% in railroad and the balance in plastic models, rockets, wood kits, tools, accessories lines, wood paint, etc.

California Hobby Distributors is the oldest Hobby Distributor in the United States. Communication to the hobby stores was always important and we published the first in our industry, dealer's news in the early 1950's. At that time it was published every week and sent out first class mail. Many of our stores are in remote areas with no physical salesman, but stay in touch via our newsletters, and now our web site. Through the years we published helpful manuals showing how to build ship models and had booths at area hobby shows to show consumers the fun of hobbies. I am presently involved with the Hobby Association on a National level and trying to increase the awareness and fun of hobbies.

From the beginning of California Hobby Distributors our philosophy was to link the industry thru the independent hobby shop. Without them, the hobby industry's future is very bleak. The hobby shop is the only true source to attract

new customers into our industry. New blood does not come from mail order or internet sales, but from the local hobby shop and must be supported by all of us.

All the hobby stores, large and small, are given the best service and treated equally as far as prices and promotions.

At present time we carry about 200 different lines of merchandise which represents about 25,000 items and sell to approximately 1000 retail stores, special effects studios, schools in the United States, Canada, Taiwan, Australia, Japan and Mexico.

Some of our sales people have been with us 40 or more years and service the retail stores often weekly. Our salespeople know their customers, their families and are completely trusted to write an order with or without the owner being in the store. We are always looking for new manufactures with different products and will hopefully be on the ground floor to grow with them.

Along with our knowledgeable sales crew we have evolved through the years in getting our orders from additional sources as technology changed. In 1970 when I started to work while attending college I would stop at the Greyhound Bus depot in Pasadena and pick up the Northern California, Arizona, Washington orders that were sent in. About 1975 Trans box was founded and we would get our orders delivered by a messenger service....problems occurred when there was a bank holiday or weather issues and orders were delayed. Trans box was about \$1,000.00 a month and though convenient, expensive. In the late 1980's fax machines were getting more prevalent and we purchased a very heavy duty Murata fax for our office for approximately \$2,500.00. Within 10 days after seeing the advantage and of the speed in placing our orders we purchased one each small Murata faxes for our salesmen. These machines were carried into the stores and transmitted the orders as soon as they finished with an order, thus taking one to two days off the time a store would get their shipment. They were also able to get the daily receiving and new merchandise coming so preorders could be written every day instead of weekly and they were always up to date. Pre-orders made our ordering new items easier with fewer mistakes. The individual faxes at \$900.00 each paid for themselves within a year. Those

machines were on the road for almost 20 years before replacing. Our salesmen were light years ahead of any other distributor sales crew in the United States. Also in approximately 1975 we had our first WATTS lines or 800 lines to hopefully expand our phone orders. It paid off immediately with dealers placing their orders or add on orders with us instead of the competition because they didn't have to pay for the phone call.

I started in 1970 working along-side my Uncle Bob, Father Frank, Grandmother Ruth, and Uncle Hilton while attending Pasadena City College. It was a part time job while I was working toward becoming a librarian after working along-side Winifred Andrews and Mary Ida Phair. I started to work along with my uncle Bob especially and got more interested in the inner workings of the hobby industry. In 1972 I took the train back to Chicago with Uncle Bob for our big hobby association trade show and then there was no turning back...I soaked up everything I could and did as many different jobs thrown my way to increase my knowledge. I was so lucky to have my Uncle Bob for 12 years before his illness, to guide my way. My grandmother worked at Cal-Hobby until she broke her hip in 1982 at the age of 88.

Hobbies are important to all of us. They help at early ages with career choices whether it is engineering, architecture, space. Building Plastic models helps with hand eye coordination and teaches patience and pride of a job well done. During working years hobbies help reduce stress, feeds the creativity in all of us, and just have fun flying an R/C airplane or speeding in a race of an R/C car while pretending to be doing it in a full size real airplane or race car. There have been many articles written about how important hobbies are in older age while increasing brain function and preventing Alzheimer's.

Thank you,

Marta Veir Renna

President

California Hobby Distributors