

J. Winkler and Sons century-old evolution from horse-drawn deliveries to a fleet of delivery trucks

by Jules Zipp

If you live in Dale, seeing a Winkler truck around town is as common as seeing a deer. It's a rare thing to have a family-owned and operated grocer in the modern age of business consolidation. But, Winkler Inc. in Dale defies modernity in favor of a family tradition spanning over 100 years. Starting out dirt cheap, they built the business upon humble dirt floor beginnings in the small Bays building in Dale, now a veterinarian office, which they rented for \$2 per month. J. Winkler and Son formed in 1911 when John Winkler invested \$225 to help his son Elmer (E.T.) start a grocery service. John and Elmer first sold produce, poultry, and eggs by horse-drawn wagon deliveries.

"Winkler, Inc. is the perfect size company, large enough to buy in truckloads and pursue the best deals, yet small enough to deliver personalized service and customizable programs," the company's website brags.

After a short time, the booming business created a series of moves as they sought out more space to expand. Starting at the former John J. Turnham Store building at Main and Hammond streets, the company moved again in 1919 to a tobacco barn in

downtown Dale. In 1926 a fire burned the building and a bigger warehouse was rebuilt. In the new building, J. Winkler and Sons expanded into sugar, salt, wool and hides. They purchased special semi-trucks built to haul poultry and eggs to markets in Buffalo, New York City, Pittsburgh, Scranton, Baltimore, Cleveland and Philadelphia. It took a two-man team four days to make a run to one of these markets. Probably due to the incredible journey, The Dale Weekly Reporter reported in 1926 that J. Winkler and Sons closed a contract amounting to more than \$80,000 for furnishing a carload of eggs every three days to be shipped to Argentina, South America, via New York.

After another fire in 1928, John Winkler passed on the J. Winkler and Sons dynasty, leaving his son as sole owner. Luckily, E.T. had three sons Jack, Lloyd and Charles William to fit the name.

In 1930 mass-produced cars became so prevalent, Winkler Inc. saw another opportunity to grow and built 50,000 gallon storage tanks. They became a distributor for Phillips Petroleum Company, and by June,

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With a \$225 investment by John Winkler, J. Winkler and Son started delivering produce, poultry and eggs by horse-drawn carriage.



After World War II, Elmer's three sons, Jack, Lloyd and Charles William, took over the budding grocer business.

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