

Olin Brass: A Blast from the Past

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Olin Brass is located in East Alton, Illinois. It produces quality metals not only for its community, but also for its country. Olin Brass is a very large and respectable company which was built on its dedication to its customers. It has experienced many changes and expansions that have been vital to its growth. It is one of the leading companies in the production of specialty metals.

In May 1892, Franklin W. Olin founded Olin Brass, which was then called the Equitable Powder Manufacturing Company. It was a supplier of blasting powder to coal fields in the Midwest. In 1898, it expanded its business into the supply of ammunition for small guns, thus forming the Western Cartridge Company. Olin also purchased a target manufacturing company within that same year. In 1896, Franklin Olin took over presidency of a rival company, the Phoenix Company. Olin resigned from that position in 1903.

During World War I, Western Cartridge Company was awarded a contract to supply ammunition to the French military. This was one of the first of twenty-six military ammunition contracts given to the company. To ensure that the contract would be successfully met, Western built a brass mill to make brass cups for cartridge cases. The first bar of metal was made at the Western Brass Mill in May 1916. On May 27, rolling began and the first rolled metal was finished on June 1.

After the war, Western scrambled to convert the brass making into commercial products. The first commercial order was placed on December 1, 1918. In 1923, the

company built a new cast shop that contained ten electric furnaces because of the rapid growth. Olin purchased Winchester Repeating Arms Company on December 22, 1931. This enabled the company to manufacture firearms and also to expand its brass and ammunition production.

In the late 1930s, the United States government approached the Olin companies and devised a contract for the production of defense systems, if the nation happened to become involved in World War II. The contract was signed on December 14, 1940. It required the United States Cartridge Company, one of the many companies owned by Olin, to build and operate the St. Louis Ordnance Plant, which would manufacture small arms. The first ammunition batch was completed at the United States Cartridge Company on December 8, 1941, the day after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. More than 995 million pounds of metal was shipped from the East Alton brass mill to the United States Cartridge Company, during World War II. The United States carbine and M-1 rifle were also developed within the Olin Companies at this time.

All of the Olin companies were brought under one head, Olin Industries, Inc., on December 31, 1944. At the end of 1944, Franklin W. Olin retired at the age of 84, knowing that his legacy would live on. John M. Olin, Franklin Olin's son, took over as president of Olin Industries, Inc. soon after his father retired. Franklin W. Olin died May 21, 1951, in a St. Louis hospital at the age of 91.

On August 31, 1954, Olin Industries, Inc. merged with Mathieson Chemical Corporation, a company that produced alkali chemicals. Together, they formed the Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation. They purchased the Brown Paper Mill Company, Inc., in 1955 and also acquired the Mississippi Aluminum Corporation. This led to the

production of metal sheets used in refrigerators and other appliances, at the East Alton plant.

On May 22, 1961 the company announced its new name, "Olin Brass." This announcement came a couple of weeks before the Wither program was about to begin. The Wither program was the first modernization and expansion of the brass facilities since World War II. During this expansion, a new Casting Plant was established along with a few other facilities. These were completed in 1964. Another expansion of the East Alton plant came in 1967, with the construction of a shot shell manufacturing facility. This expansion was due to the development of a new process in the production of plastic shot shells.

After realizing that the company's expertise and resources were being stretched to the limit, Olin began a period of consolidation. It sold its aluminum business in 1974 and also exchanged its forest products' subsidiary, Olinkraft, for common stock. In 1981, the company's United States' sporting arms business was sold to the U. S. Repeating Arms Corporation.

In 1985, Olin purchased Rockcor, Inc. which manufactured rocket engines and very sophisticated electronic products for airliners and military aircraft. This brought Olin into the aerospace industry. In 1988, Olin purchased Bridgeport Brass which expanded the capacity of Olin Brass. During the late 1980s, Olin Brass teamed up with Yamaha to form Yamaha-Olin Metals. This was a joint venture in producing copper alloys for use in Asian technology.

Since then, Olin Brass has continued to expand its service to the community while also growing its business. This year Olin has awarded six college scholarships to

children of its employees. The scholarship program was established in 1969 and has since helped 222 students. Olin also recently received a five-year United States military contract to manufacture training ammunition for M16 rifles and M4 carbines. The contract is set to begin in 2006. Olin is currently in the process of relocating the headquarters of its Winchester Division to Clayton, Missouri.

Today, Olin Brass in East Alton, Illinois, is the largest single plant location in the Olin Company. It uses more than sixty copper-based alloys to manufacture its products. The main markets for its sales are automotives, builders' hardware, ammunition, electronic appliances, and musical instruments. It is a leader in the production of specialty metals. Olin Brass has been through many historical events and survived. It is a huge asset to its community and has a unique business in that the legacy and morals of its founder have always been evident throughout its history. [From Nick Lucchesi, Olin gets \$10 million ammunition contract, The Telegraph, Sept. 2005; Olin makes awards of six scholarships, The St. Louis Post Dispatch, May 2005; Olin Brass, "About Olin Brass," <http://www.olinbrass.com/about.html> (Sept. 13, 2005); Olin Brass, "Olin Brass-East Alton," <http://www.olinbrass.com/ealton.html> (Oct. 4, 2005); Olin Corporation, "Organizational Overview"; Olin Corporation Olin Online, "About Olin-History," <http://olin.com/about/history.asp> (Sept. 12, 2005); Olin Corporation, *Olin 100 Years*.]