

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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In this month's issue we are highlighting Refrigeration Research. They are a Lifetime Member of the historical society. The following information was taken from their website.

REFRIGERATION RESEARCH

Like many rock bands, their story started in a garage. However, instead of making music, founders, Ed Bottum and Charlie Powers started repairing refrigerators in a Detroit garage. Refrigeration may not be as glamorous as rock-n-roll, but it's far more important (imagine a world without refrigeration)!

The year was 1944 and due to World War II rationing, it was difficult to get new refrigerators or repair parts. Seeing an opportunity, the two men began a modest refrigerator repair business. As their reputation and business grew, Ed Bottum and Charlie Powers were asked to make replacement parts for refrigerator manufacturers, as well as components for the war effort.

As an early innovator in the refrigeration industry, Refrigeration Research introduced a new line of driers and strainers to solve the inherent moisture problem of early systems. The company also developed and introduced the first suction accumulator, a product that is still manufactured by Refrigeration Research.

In 1949, after several expansions and moves, the company found a home in Brighton, Michigan. As the list of products Refrigeration Research produced continued to grow, the number of manufacturers, distributors and wholesalers who came to rely on our experience, quality and service also multiplied.

Contained in their Brighton location is the Refrigeration Research museum. It has been called "quirky," "fun" and "an interesting tour of history." The museum houses the largest private collection of advances in mechanical refrigeration for U.S. residential and commercial use from the late 19th century up to 1960. Located in their headquarters in Brighton, Michigan, the museum features devices that dramatically improved food storage safety and convenience and set high standards for mechanical reliability.

As you trace the history of refrigeration, you'll recognize names of industry pioneers such as Frigidaire, Philco, Sunbeam and Tecumseh. You may also be familiar with iconic pieces of equipment such as the 1948 Kelvinator, a Crosley "Icy Ball" (still in operating condition), and the popular Sears' Coldspot refrigerator introduced in 1936.

The museum highlights innovations and innovators throughout the years, including: a 1926 compressor unit in which the refrigerant does not come in contact with the motor windings, thereby avoiding the problems most refrigerant systems would have both then and now; refrigerators that were made for farms before rural electrification, using ammonia and water; the "Copelametic" compressor which was first produced for the Coca-Cola company; a 1919 Guardian condensing unit made of heavy cast-iron construction; and a 1918 Kelvinator unit that marked the first generation of household refrigeration. Did you know that the Kelvinator was named in honor of Lord Kelvin (1824-1907), who was knighted Sir William Thomas for his contributions in thermodynamics.

Today, Refrigeration Research is a recognized leader in the refrigeration industry. The company has continued to research, engineer and introduce new products to meet the ever-changing needs of its customers. They are proud to be one of the oldest family-run businesses in Michigan – having celebrated their 75th anniversary in 2019!

