

Niagara's Post-War Prospects

By Paige Groot

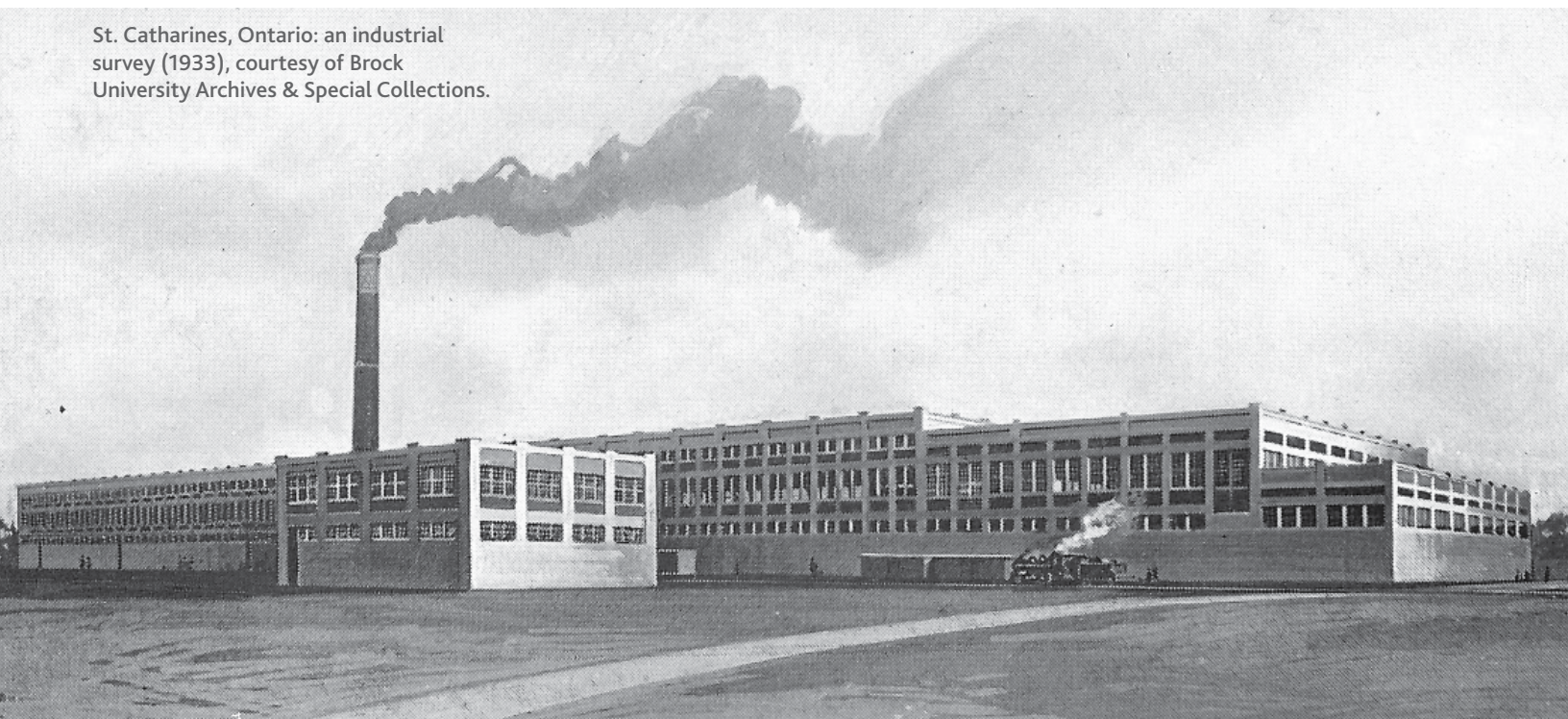
During the Second World War, the Canadian economy was completely transformed to produce goods for the Allied forces under war-time contracts coordinated by the Department of Munitions and Supply. Most of Niagara's manufacturers were engaged in important war-time production. They produced military parachutes, ammunition, parts for military trucks, tanks, and vessels, rubber, and other military implements.

War-time production significantly expanded Canada's economy. War-time production was valued at nearly \$10 billion by the end of the war, and virtually every manufacturing industry increased production. Machine tool production expanded by 500 per cent throughout the war. Aluminum production in Canada alone accounted for 90 per cent of global production in 1943. Niagara manufacturing employers reported all-time employment highs and plants operated 24 hours a day.

Following the war, Canadian manufacturers had to respond to changing economic conditions in the post-war period. The transition to peace-time production meant a decline in manufacturing and concern for job loss. Global reconstruction, especially in Europe, also had a significant impact on Canada's transition to peace-time manufacturing. Canada's reliance on exports and foreign markets meant that Canada's economic future required investments in post-war recovery efforts abroad. Through security and economic aid in organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Marshall Plan, and the North American Treaty Organization (NATO), Canada engaged in significant recovery efforts.

Many of Niagara's manufacturers responded to post-war economic reconstruction and engaged in Canada's domestic and global recovery efforts in innovative ways. In 1946, the *St. Catharines Standard* profiled 17 Niagara businesses over nine months, highlighting their contribution to the peace-time economy in a series it called "Niagara District's Post-war Prospects". These articles provided insight into how Niagara's manufacturing sector responded to post-war reconstruction and demonstrated the Niagara worker's concerns about the peace-time economic climate.

St. Catharines, Ontario: an industrial survey (1933), courtesy of Brock University Archives & Special Collections.





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The Post-war Prospects series covered several Niagara manufacturers engaged in reconstruction projects abroad. The Beaver Wood Fibre Company continued to operate at full capacity producing building materials for housing construction in Great Britain, and Yale and Towne Manufacturing Company operated an “extensive post-war” production of locks and hardware for the domestic home-building program. Under a post-war contract with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Organization, Foster Wheeler Limited produced mobile power plants that were shipped to China to assist in reconstruction efforts. Other Niagara manufacturers, including Grout’s Limited, Nubone Corset Company of Canada, and Guaranty Silk Dyeing and Finishing Company Limited, responded to the peace-time transition by using new techniques and technological advancements developed during war-time production to manufacture new goods for the consumer market. Fire-retardant and fluorescent-coloured fabrics produced by textile manufacturers for parachutes and signal panels were used to make shower curtains, lawn furniture, and awnings.

A consistent trend in *The Standard’s* Post-war Prospects series is the efforts of Niagara manufacturers to curb post-war unemployment. Welland Vale Manufacturing, McKinnon Columbus Chain Ltd., and Yale and Towne reported their commitment to hiring and rehiring veterans returning from war. Welland Vale, English Electric, Engineering, and Tool; and Forgings Ltd., all

commended their staff for sustained economic activity in the post-war period.

Many Niagara manufacturers, like the Ontario Paper Company, promoted their employee benefits such as insurance, pensions, vacation pay, annual bonuses, and war service compensation in the newspaper series.

The *St. Catharines Standard’s* Post-war Prospects series demonstrated the commitment of Niagara manufacturers to the local and national post-war economic reconstruction. The series provided insight into the sector’s response to Niagara resident concerns about job security, and efforts to contribute to Canada’s post-war foreign reconstruction aid.

References

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