

**HISTORICAL DOCUMENTATION REPORT OF
THE ECKO PRODUCTS COMPANY
MANUFACTURING FACILITY,
12352 WHITTIER BOULEVARD, WHITTIER,
LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA 90602**

JUNE 2023



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I. LOCATION: 12352 Whittier Boulevard, Whittier, Los Angeles County, California 90602. The subject property is located on Parcel Map 326-39-43, Portion of Lot 2, in a light-industrial zoned area of Whittier. The parcel is identified as Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 817-002-6011. The property is illustrated on the 2012 USGS *La Habra, California* topographic quadrangle map. The subject property occupies an approximate 12-acre, irregular-shaped, sloping parcel on the west side of Whittier Boulevard between Baldwin Place on the south and Sky Court on the west.

II. PRESENT OWNER: Western Realco, LLC, 500 Newport Center Drive, Suite 630, Newport Beach, CA 92660.

III. PRESENT OCCUPANT: Vacant.

IV. PRESENT USE: None.

V. SIGNIFICANCE: The subject property represents one of the locations in which Ecko Products Company, also known as the EKCO Products Company, operated out of in California after World War II, with the corporate office located in Chicago, Illinois. Besides the Whittier location, EKCO and its subsidiaries, including Ecko Products Company, had plants in 13 other cities in the United States, Canada, and England. Those factories produced more than 2,000 different items (*Whittier News*, September 1, 1952). The Whittier plant was considered a branch facility, and opened in early 1951, having 52,000 square feet of manufacturing and warehousing (*Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1950). The plant reportedly serviced much of the western United States.

Today, the property is characterized by a series of additions, and, in some cases, alterations to the original 1951 plant, which, as noted above, was 52,000 square feet, and expanded to over 300,000 square feet by 1967. As previously described, Ekco owned and operated the facility until 1967, when it was sold to the Worley Division of Standard Pressed Steel, who occupied the property in the 1970s until it was sold to the Leggett & Platt Decorators. EKCO or Ecko products were sold nation-wide and held much of the market share for housewares through the late-1960s. The Whittier plant was one of the larger manufacturing facilities in the city and through the years provided employment for hundreds of individuals in turn providing needed tax revenue.

In summarizing the significance of the Ecko plant in Whittier, the property was found to be of historical significance under National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) Criterion A and California Register of Historic Resources (CRHR) Criterion 1. The subject property, originally established as the Western Regional headquarters for the Ecko Supply or Products Company, represents a significant post-World War II manufacturing and distribution facility whose home products were sold throughout the world. The

company’s products, including those made at the Whittier plant, were illustrated in newspapers and magazines throughout the United States during the 1950s-1960s. Their kitchenware products were some of the most innovative for their time and during the 1950s the company branched into manufacturing hardware, as well as supplying the U.S. Army and Navy with armaments during the Korean War. Based upon historic newspapers, the subject property acted as one of the primary operation centers for Ekco, its parent company, and its Whittier headquarters, became a major employer during its period of significance - namely 1950-1967. In applying the City of Whittier’s Historic Preservation Ordinance, the subject property was found to be a significant resource under Criterion E, in that the plant had a “meaningful contribution to the City of Whittier during its period of operation.

VI. HISTORICAL INFORMATION: The subject property and former home of the Ekco Products Company occupies an approximate 12-acre, irregular-shaped, sloping parcel on the west side of Whittier Boulevard between Baldwin Place on the south and Sky Court on the west (Figure 1).



Figure 1: 1994 aerial photograph of the Ekco Products Company and the Whittier Industrial District (Google Earth).

The parcel was developed as an office and warehouses between the years 1950-1967. While the first office, built in 1950, lies to the north and is connected to a warehouse to the west with domed roof, the second office, which was built in the mid to late-1950s lies to the south and only shares one wall with the warehouses to the north. The original masonry office to the north is rectangular in shape, features a shed-style roof and modest eaves with projecting steel trusses, a painted brick masonry wall on the south elevation followed by an aluminum plate-glass entry door with side-lites, and a bank of aluminum-clad plate glass windows (Historic Resource Associates 2022).

The second office, built in the mid to late-1950s, is also rectangular-shaped, split-level, built of brick and concrete, characterized by a flat roof lacking eaves, smooth painted concrete exterior wall surfaces, a raised concrete foundation, and rows of plate-glass windows set in wood-frames. The office is accented by a painted concrete box that juts out beyond the main wall surface, divided by a decorative rock masonry wall with applied lettering that once read “LG” Leggett & Platt Decorators. The south elevation of the office lacks fenestration, while the north elevation shares a common wall with the older warehouse, which features banks of steel multi-pane windows. The rear of the office features a second-floor bank of replaced windows. Below the windows are three open bays or sheds that look out the large asphalt parking area. Together the complex of buildings, reportedly encompassing 300,000 square feet of interior space, with thirty-nine bay or docking doors, according to Los Angeles County Assessor and Tax Collector Records (Historic Resource Associates 2022). The subject property was revisited on May 11, 2023. During the course of the visit detailed photographs of the main manufacturing plant or building were taken along with the office that fronts Whittier Boulevard.

The Ecko plant was part of a much larger industrial subdivision known as the “Whittier Industrial District” that was created in the late-1940s. The district was the inspiration of John D. Gregg, the owner of the Whittier Industrial District Company who purchased lands occupied by the Fred C. Nelles School along Whittier Boulevard. On July 11, 1947, The Whittier News posted an article that described the Whittier Industrial District Company hosting a meeting of local business leaders with a lunch followed by a tour of the new industrial district (*The Whittier News*, July 11, 1947; November 11, 1947). The district included two tracts, one with over 67 acres another with having 700 feet of frontage along Whittier Boulevard encompassing 18 acres bounded by Pacific Place, Putnam Drive, and Baldwin Street. The 18-acre tract was not opened until 1952 according to newspaper accounts. Gregg reportedly subdivided the land into 16 parcels ranging in size from 10,000 square feet to 5 acres. The “district” was promoted as “ideal factory sites centrally located in Southern California’s greatest area of expansion.” Sale of the parcels was delegated to G.D. Maple, A.D. Holloway, and Dick Smith, all residents of Whittier. Advantages of the industrial district included accessibility to rail lines, major highways, water, electricity, gas, sewer, curbs, gutters, and concrete paved streets. By 1952, according to newspaper accounts, firms that had already established facilities in the district included the Ecko Products Company, being one of the first, and the manufacturer of Flint Hollow Ground Kitchenware; Modine Manufacturing Company, a Ford Motor Company subcontractor; Maple Brothers wood manufacturing; V.B. Anderson welding equipment; the New England Lead Burning Company; and Whittier Transfer and Storage Company (*The Whittier News*, March 26, 1952). Figure 2 illustrates the advertising that went into promoting the Whittier Industrial District, which included numerous amenities along with a rendering of the location of the tract between Pasadena, Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Santa Ana.

Ready Now!

The Newest and Finest
INDUSTRIAL TRACT
in Metropolitan Los Angeles

PASADENA SAN BERNARDINO
LOS ANGELES WHITTIER INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT
LOS ANGELES HARBOR LONG BEACH SANTA ANA

- ★ 67½ acres subdivided into factory sites.
- ★ Adequate transportation facilities.
- ★ Sensible restrictions; M-2 zoning.
- ★ Unlimited reserves of finest water.
- ★ Sewers, cast iron water mains, curbs, gutters and concrete paved streets available.
- ★ Electric, gas and telephone service.
- ★ Full fire and police protection.
- ★ Ideal topography — excellent drainage — good soil conditions for foundation loadings.
- ★ High class labor market.

WRITE OR TELEPHONE FOR FOLDER

WHITTIER INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

GENERAL AGENTS

O. D. MAPLE 318 N. Bright Ave. Whittier, Calif. Telephone 44811	A. D. HOLLOWAY 318 N. Bright Ave. Whittier, Calif. Telephone 44851	DICK SMITH 244 E. Philadelphia Whittier, Calif. Telephone 43408
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Figure 2: *The Whittier News*, March 28, 1947.

In April 1948, Autoweld, who manufactures I.C.C. Butane tanks, announced its intent to build a plant within the Whittier Industrial District (*The Whittier News*, April 8, 1948). In June 1949, the Continental Can Company contracted to build a plant within the industrial district and shortly afterwards the Modine Manufacturing Company of Wisconsin did as well (*The Whittier News*, June 2, 1949). Figure 3 depicts the final stage of development for the industrial district.

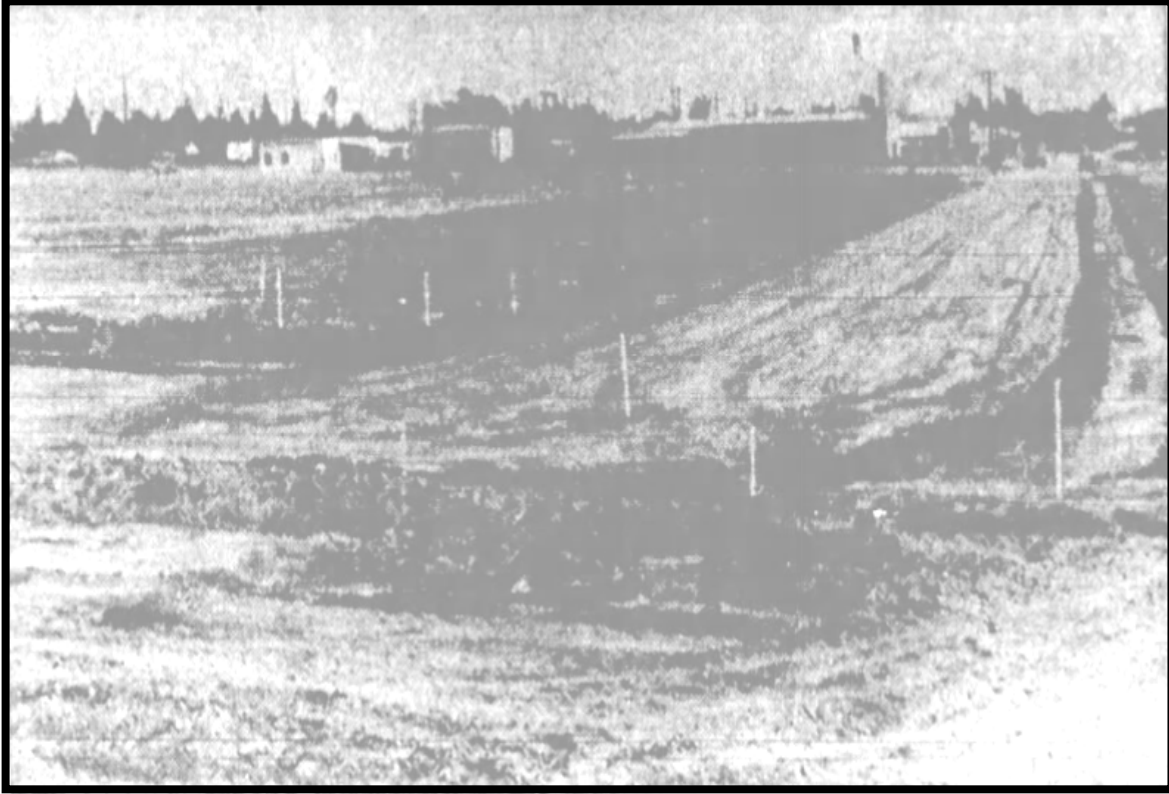
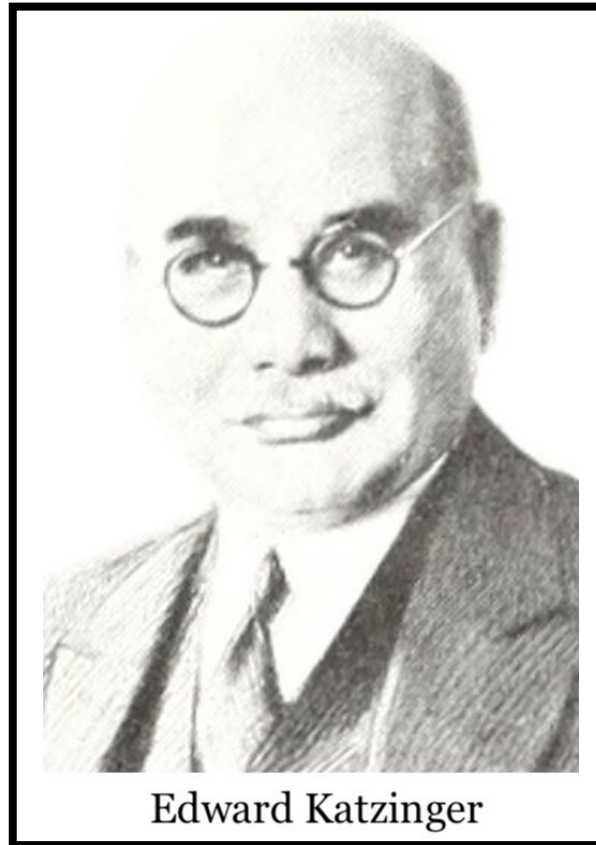


Figure 3: Photograph of the last phase of development on the Whittier Industrial District at Whittier Boulevard and Washington Boulevard, 1952 (*The Whittier News*, June 23, 1952).

History of the Ecko Products Company

The Ecko Products Company was a subsidiary of the EKCO Products Company, which was the brainchild of Arthur Katzinger (Figure 4). His father, Edward Katzinger (b. 1863), did the heavy lifting, moving from his native Austria to the United States as an 18-year-old in 1881, adapting his old-world skills as a “tinner” to factory life in New York City, then relocating out West to start his own business, first in Kansas City, then Chicago, where he specialized in manufacturing baking tins for the commercial baking industry (Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023).



**Figure 4: Photograph of Edward Katzinger
(Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023).**

By the time Arthur was born in 1894, the Katzinger family (including dad, mother Anna, sister Laura and big brother Sidney) were living in a small apartment above Edward's tinsmith shop at 369 S. Halsted Street in Chicago. In the 1890s, poverty was the norm in the neighborhood, but Edward Katzinger, who once took a side gig making cornice work for the "White City" at the 1893 Columbian Exposition, was the classic ambitious outlier. While he only had about a half-dozen workers on the payroll in the late 1890s, that number grew to 22 by the time the business was finally incorporated as the Edward Katzinger Company in 1903. The EKCO" shorthand nickname first came into use about a year later (Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023).

In 1909, after about a decade in a small plant at West Washington Street and Canal Street in Chicago, the Katzinger Company moved down the road to a new five-story building at 120 North Peoria Street; next-door to the headquarters of a baking supply rival, the J.W. Allen Company. Here, Katzinger and his expanded team of 40 employees continued to focus primarily on making equipment for professional bakers, confectioners and ice cream parlors, but a new line of low-cost baking pans for the consumer market laid the groundwork for EKCO's great leap forward. By 1914, the staff had doubled again, and an expanded plant was in the works on the same block as the Peoria Street building, on the corner of Washington and Sangamon Street (Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023).

During this same period, the young Arthur Katzinger who later changed his last name to Keating, was studying mechanical engineering at the Armour Institute (aka the Illinois Institute of Technology), might indeed have looked predestined to a fruitful career with the family business. But his path had far more twists and bends than it appeared. Before beginning college, Arthur had actually been something of a troubled teen; so much so that he was expelled from high school for his consistent misconduct. A frustrated Edward responded by vanquishing his son to a military school, where the youngster supposedly learned the ills of his ways and came back reformed; eventually captaining half the sports teams at his college, despite a stocky 5'4" build. With his older brother Sidney already employed at EKCO, Arthur wasn't technically the heir apparent. But there was still an understanding, or an obligation, as to where his destiny lay. "One day in 1916 I was graduated from Armour institute," he told the *Tribune* in 1961, "and I reported for work [at EKCO] the same day." It was plant operations work; a lot of it on the night shift; a boy amongst men (Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023).

Less than three years later, in January of 1919, Arthur's mother and his brother Sidney both died tragically during the Spanish flu epidemic. Sidney was only 28. Shortly thereafter, Arthur recalled that his father "took me out of the factory and told me to run the company." Being from the generation he was, Arthur Keating never communicated any sense of trauma from these events, instead attributing his struggles with insomnia to a circadian hangover from those old night-shift schedules of his youth. By 1923, he was vice president of the Edward Katzinger Company, and for all intents and purposes, more in charge of the goings on there than his father, who remarried that year and entered a bit of an early retirement. In a 1921 article in the *Northwestern Miller*, the Katzinger factory on West Washington Street was profiled as a shining example of modern baking pan production (Figure 5) (Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023).

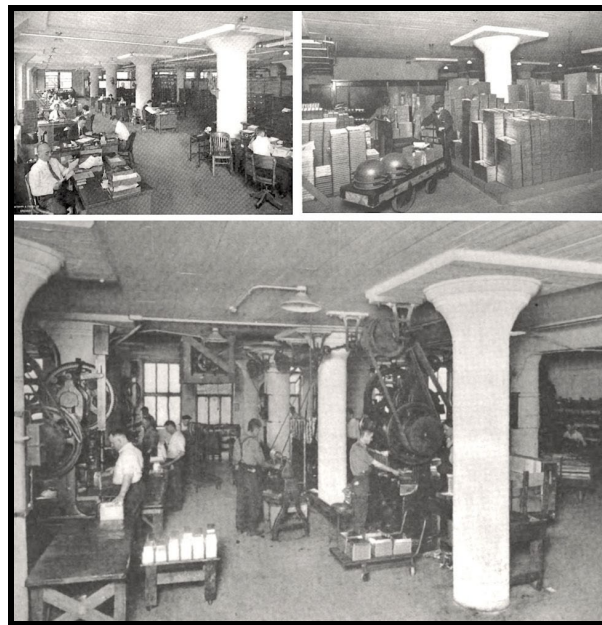


Figure 5: The EKCO offices, warehouse, and factory at Washington Street and Sangamon Street, Chicago, 1921.

With his degree in mechanical engineering, Arthur Keating wasn't just playing an active role in the machining efficiency of his factory, he was designing many of EKCO's modern pans and utensils, as well. Having survived the material shortages of World War I, EKCO's growth was untethered in the 1920s. Another new plant opened in 1923, covering 17 acres at Cicero and Armitage Avenue in Chicago. And in 1927, the company began its conquest of the housewares industry on a national scale, starting with the acquisition of Baltimore's venerable August Maag Company, a maker of commercial baking ware (Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023). Two years later, EKCO began negotiations with the A & J Manufacturing Company, a utensil company in Binghamton, New York. If successful, buying A & J Manufacturing Company would effectively turn EKCO into a new leader in the consumer kitchenware market. There was a stumbling block, however. "All the legal work involved in acquiring A & J Tool company had been straightened out and the purchase was to take effect 10 days after the market crash," according to Arthur Keating, who was leading the tense negotiations without the aid of his father, whose health was declining. ECKO purchased A & J Manufacturing Company for one million dollars, which ensured that ECKO would thrive through much of the Great Depression. Shortly after the A & J buyout, EKCO debuted the Miracle Can Opener (Figure 6), just one of many innovative tools patented by the company's prolific new designer Myron J. Zimmer. With consumers operating on tight budgets, the appeal of these affordable, handy tools was greater than ever; seen more as "wise buys" rather than cheap substitutes for heftier utensils. The same philosophy applied to EKCO's new lines of cutlery, following the purchase of the Geneva Cutlery Co. (of Geneva, NY) in 1934 (Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023).

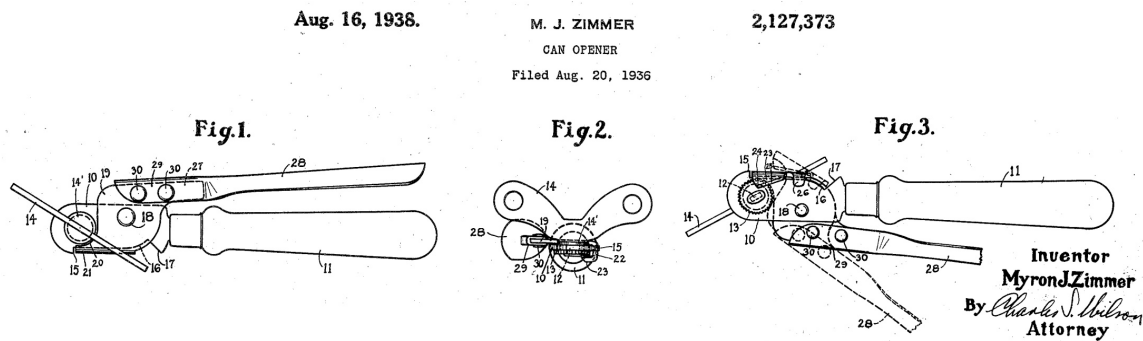


Figure 6: Version of EKCO's Miracle Can Opener, designed by Myron Zimmer and patented in 1938 (Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023).

Perhaps EKCO's biggest financial windfall of the 1930s, however, came with their jump into the pre-war British housewares market. With most UK manufacturers still operating by the stuffy rules of the past, Arthur Keating took some advice from one of his company's top customers, Woolworth, and opened up a subsidiary business in the depressed town of Burnley in Lancashire, giving it the appropriately Britishy name of Platers and Stammers, Ltd. Stocking the Burnley factory with about \$900,000 worth of mostly used machinery and equipment in 1937, Keating watched Platers and Stammers become a \$4 million company by the end of World War II, with the "Sky-Line" and "Ovenex" lines outselling the more esteemed brands made in Sheffield, and the "Prestige" line taking over the pressure cooker market (Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023).

“Doing business in Britain is much easier than in the USA,” Keating later told *Fortune*, “because we design and price our products right, to sell in volume. Britain needs more manufacturers who will do that.” During the war, it was obviously hard for manufacturers in both Britain and the U.S. to focus much on their traditional products. Following Edward Katzinger’s death in 1939, Arthur took the aforementioned bold steps of renaming the company (and himself), creating the Ecko Products Company in 1944. The main factory at Cicero and Armitage in Chicago (Figure 7) was primarily a defense plant during the war years, but Keating was still wheeling and dealing, acquiring the stainless-steel flatware of the Sta-Brite Products Corporation in New Haven, Connecticut in 1943, and the E.L. Tebbets Spool Company in Locke Mills, Maine, and the Massillon Aluminum Company in Massillon, Ohio in 1945. He also established a \$400,000 research laboratory from which many new precision tool-making machines were developed. After World War II, EKCO had domain over most non-electric kitchenware in the U.S., such as cutlery and flatware to baking supplies, pressure cookers, chemicals, plastic accessories, aluminum foil containers, bathroom fixtures, lighting, building supplies, with subsidiaries in Canada, Mexico, Germany, and as far away as Australia. Satellite U.S. factories and offices were operating in Ohio, Maryland, Wisconsin, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, and the Ecko plant in Whittier by the early 1950s (Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023). It was the growing fear of antitrust lawsuits that likely inspired 71-year-old EKCO chairman Arthur Keating to retire from his position and sell the family business to American Home Products for \$145 million in stock in September 1965 (Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023).



Figure 7: EKCO Products Company headquarters in Chicago
(Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023).

It was the growing fear of antitrust lawsuits, in fact, that may have inspired 71-year-old EKCO chairman Arthur Keating to retire from his position and sell the family business to American Home Products for \$145 million in stock in September 1965 (Made in Chicago Museum Website 2023).

History of the Whittier Ecko Products Company

By the early 1950s a number of manufacturing companies had opened plants within the industrial park, including Ecko (Figure 8). The original facility was opened in October of 1951

at a cost of \$500,000, having 981,000 cubic feet of space (*Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1951). Based upon permit records from the City of Whittier Building Department, initial planning for the new or expanded Ecko facility at 12352 E. Whittier Boulevard, appears to have begun in 1953, with construction in 1954. Correspondence with the City of Whittier notes the new manufacturing plant was valued at \$330,000, encompassed over 75,000 square feet, had a fire-retardant roof, corrugated plastic wall sections, along with concrete gypsum reinforcing and structural steel used in framing the industrial building. In February 1955, drawings were provided to the City of Whittier for the new plant, whose purpose was to manufacture metal products and for warehouse purposes. The plant also included the Glaco Plating Department, which was used for silicone and metal plating (Quiton Engineers, LTD. 1955). Lindgren & Swinerton, Inc. builders appears on correspondence with the Whittier Building Department suggesting that they were chosen as the primary contractor for the new plant. Lindgren & Swinerton, Inc. were headquartered at 1631 Beverly Boulevard in Los Angeles. In the correspondence between the city and Lindgren & Swinerton, Inc., the building permit was reportedly issued in early August 1955 (Lindgren & Swinerton, Inc. 1955).

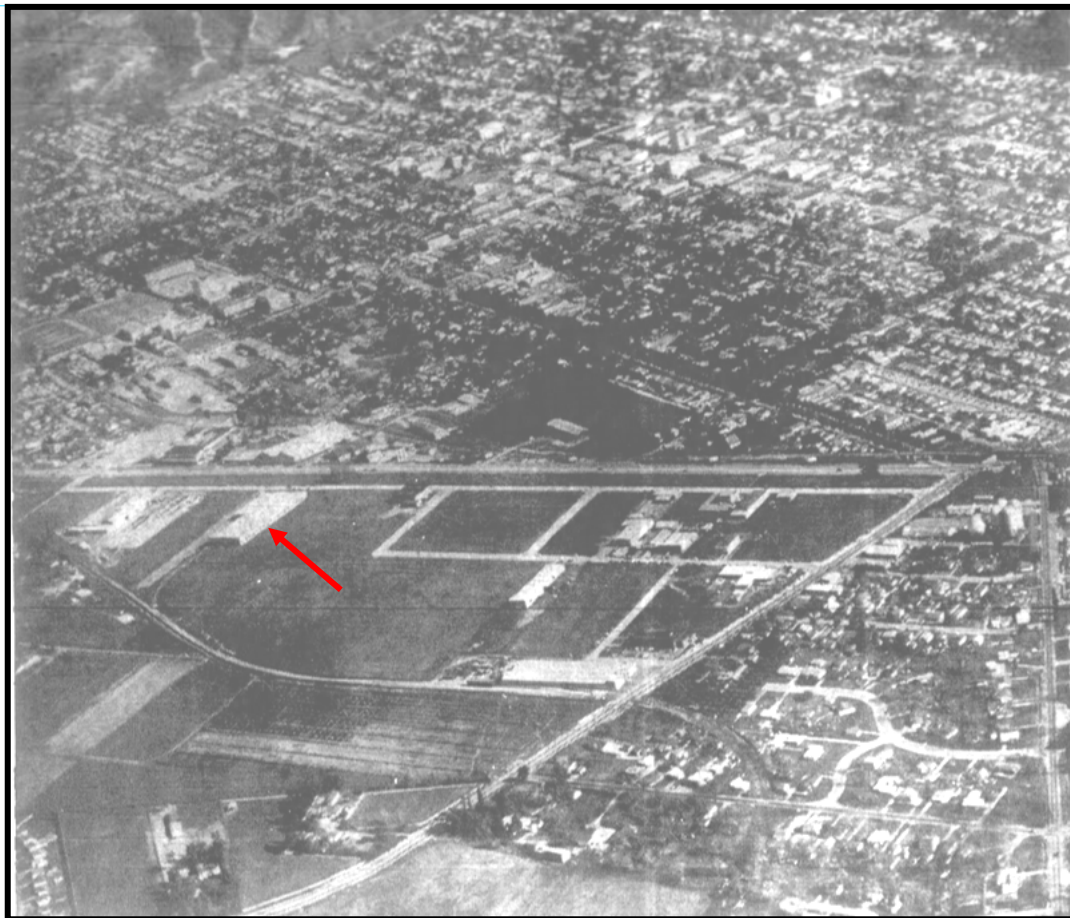


Figure 8: Photograph of the Whittier Industrial District, 1953. The red arrow points to the newly built Ecko Products Company Building located at 12352 E. Whittier Boulevard (*The Whittier News*, February 10, 1953). The aerial photograph does not depict the 1956 expansion or the new office.

Figure 9 depicts the original building completed in the early-1950s and the 1955-1960 additions to the building in later years.



Figure 9: 3D aerial photograph of the original Ecko plant and office built in the early 1950s (red) and the expanded Ecko plant in 1955 with later additions (yellow) (Google Earth 2023).

During the summer of 1955, permits were issued for electrical and plumbing for the new plant with Lindgren & Swinerton, Inc., and Quinton Engineers, LTD acting the principal contractors. In 1956, automatic fire protection sprinklers were installed in the plant for \$34,000. On May 28, 1956, the City of Whittier's Superintendent of Building & Safety issued a formal "certificate of occupancy" for the Ecko Products new manufacturing building. On August 21, 1957, the State of California, Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Industrial Safety issued an "accident prevention report" to the Ecko Products Company outlining safety issues in the plant, particularly electrical. In 1957, a machine-room building was added to the plant. In 1960, a "paint-mixing" concrete block addition was added, and in 1962, a concrete metal-roof structure was built on the to the plant for "light manufacturing" (City of Whittier Building Department 2023).

Ecko, a stock-holder corporation based in Chicago garnered huge market share of the kitchenware products industry following World War II. The company advertised their kitchenware in many newspapers and magazines throughout the United States focusing on housewives and the notion of domesticity. By the late-1950s, the Ecko Products Company posted advertisements for its Whittier plant looking for skilled trades people such as tool and die makers and draftsman, along with advertising their products in popular stores, such as Rexall Drugs (Figures 9-10). During the mid-1960s, Ecko Products Company established new divisions including the Ecko Americas Company, with operations in Canada, Mexico, the

headquarters remaining in Chicago (*Chicago Tribune*, January 28, 1965). With the end of Ecko, the Whittier plant was sold in the late-1960s to the Worley Division of Standard Pressed Steel, who, like Ecko applied for various permits from the City of Whittier to modify and expand the facility.



Ecko 52-pc. stainless steel set^N

"Swedish Castle" by Ecko—stainless flatware, the carefree table service. Set includes 6 knives, 6 forks, 6 dessert spoons, 6 salad forks, 4 tablespoons, 6 soup spoons, 12 teaspoons, 6 ice tea spoons.

Reg. 10.95

850

Houseware—Mezzanine

Figure 10: Advertising for Ecko stainless steel flatware, 1956. (*Stockton Evening and Sunday Record*, August 15, 1956).

48
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 1954—PASADENA (CALIF.) INDEPENDENT

Nash's

PASADENA ALHAMBRA ANGELES

HOME FURNISHINGS EVENT FOR HOMEMAKERS

For Complete Protection From Moths

NO-MOTH . . . kills moths, moth eggs and larvae. Protects your clothes and washers, pungent vapor, no clinging odor. **95¢**
Bottle . . . **85¢**

SIA . . . cedarized spray, kills moths in all stages, protects rugs, upholstery, drapes. **85¢**
SIA Sprayer . . . **39¢**

PARA-PURE . . . naphthalene crystals kills all moth life, protects clothes and other washers . . . 1 1/2 lbs. . . **1.19**

ECKO FOR EASIER HOMEWORK . . .

New Minute COPPER CLEANER 

By ECKO . . . shines as if clean, no hard rubbing, won't spill, scum or stain. **95¢**

ECKO - Double Header MINUTE MOP

Regular 4.95
3.95

AS ADVERTISED IN LIFE

- Twice the Size of Ordinary Sponge Mops
- You Wring Without Bending
- Hands Never Touch Water
- Protective Cushion Bumpers
- Easy-Rinse! Self-Cleaning
- Mophead Reverses, Doubles Wear

New - Odorless RENUZIT

Now . . . clean rugs, clothes and upholstery with this all-purpose dry cleanser! It's easy to vacuum or dust with the new miracle Renuzit Brushes . . . shines perfectly even, streakless cleaning in one operation.

Special Offer! 1-Qt. Renuzit with Upholstery Brush . . . 94¢ Value . . . Both for **79¢**

- Odorless Renuzit . . . gal. **1.79**
- Rug Brushes . . . **1.50**

HOUSEWARES — Pasadena and Anadia Stores Only

See These ECKO Products Demonstrated in Our Housewares Department This April 26th

ECKO Disappearing CLOTHES DRYER

29.95

150 feet of tough, durable clothline, ready when you need it . . . out of the way when you don't! Can be used indoors or out . . . rust-proof, weather-proof aluminum houses five 30 ft. plastic covered wire lines. Rolls in and out like a window shade.

HOUSEWARES — Pasadena and Anadia Stores Only

S & H GREEN STAMPS WITH ALL CASH PURCHASES

Monday and Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 9:15 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.

Figure 11: Advertisement for Ecko products, 1954. (Pasadena Independent, April 21, 1954).

By the 1990s, the former Ecko and American Home Products plant along E. Whittier Boulevard was being operated by Leggett & Platt (L&P), based in Carthage, Missouri. In 1883, J.P. Leggett invented a bedspring that allowed people who worked uncommonly hard, churning butter and doing other things we take for granted today, sleep more comfortably. Leggett needed financing and manufacturing help, and looked to C.B. Platt, who ultimately became his brother-in-law. Leggett & Platt is described as a diversified manufacturer that designs and produces various engineered components and products that can be found in

homes and automobiles. The firm once reported to have 15 business units, 20,000 employee-partners, and 135 manufacturing facilities located in 18 countries (LifeatLeggett Website 2023). In 2009, Leggett & Platt vacated the Whittier plant, and the property was listed for sale in 2019. During the past few years, the property has been unoccupied, and the majority of the equipment housed in the massive warehouse facility removed (refer to Photograph Record).

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