

AFD Ep 471 Links and Notes - KitchenAid Mini-episode [Bill/Rachel] - Recording May 28, 2023

[Note: After more than 160 episodes in our current format from April 2020 through May 2023, plus some precursor episodes in the summer of 2019, we are taking a break this summer to recharge our creative juices and recalibrate what we want to do with the show. In the meantime we will unlock some more of the Patreon episodes from 2021.]

[Bill] This week we're back at it again with another US industrial consumer product with origins in a major defense contract: this time the Hobart/KitchenAid stand mixer.

Hobart Electric Manufacturing Company (1897) just made electric motors generically, but they wanted more sales, so they started motorizing traditionally manual kitchen appliances like coffee mills and meat grinders. In 1913, they reorganized as Hobart Manufacturing Company. The next year a company engineer decided to try to motorize a stand mixer – although initially this innovation was intended for baking bread at the scale of a bakery operation, rather than for home use. The first versions were quite massive and could handle a lot of dough.

[Rachel] According to [a 2019 article in the Smithsonian magazine](#): *That legendary stand mixer got its start in 1908 when Herbert Johnston, a Hobart engineer and one of the company's founders, was watching a baker mixing dough by hand and believed there was a better way to mechanically perform that tiresome task. His creation, which received [U.S. patent number 1,264,128](#) on April 23, 1918, was labeled simply as a "Mixing Machine." He shared credit for the invention with Thomas F. Rataiczak. One of the innovative features of the mixer was its ability to move the bowls up for mixing and down to add ingredients or remove the mixed medium. The patent describes how it adjusts "for the mounting of bowls of different size, and for the hydraulic raising and lowering of the bowl supports," which was quite handy when the bowl was full of dough. Hobart introduced the H model in 1914. Its 80-quart bowl was a hit with commercial bakeries because it had the capacity to mix, fold and beat large quantities of batter and dough.*

[Bill] The US Navy ordered Hobart stand mixers for three of its recent or under construction ships to help with on-board bread production. With the entry of the US into WWI in 1917, the US Navy decided to order enough Hobart stand mixers to make them standard on every active ship in the navy. This was such a huge contract that it jump-started Hobart's production capacity enough to mass-produce a home version of the electric stand-mixer.

[Rachel] In 1919, after the war, Hobart organized the motorized kitchen products line into the now-iconic brand KitchenAid. Reportedly the name came from the glowing review of a company executive's wife when trying out a prototype of the home version of the Hobart stand mixer: "I don't care what you call it, but I know it's the best kitchen aid I've ever had!"

[Bill] As we discussed in [episode 422 on rural electrification, as the 1920s began, small American farms were beginning to invest in wind-powered electrical chargers for home appliances](#), which could make life easier and less manually intensive. Hobart, seeing this trend, initially focused on marketing their new stand mixer to farm kitchens to make life easier. They also sold mixers to commercial kitchens and soda shops for the fountains. But even smaller and lighter home models followed within a few years. By the end of the 1920s, the home models were a quarter the capacity of the 1918 design. Sales were mostly made by women going door-to-door because retailers were uninterested.

[Rachel] Given that the sale price per unit was nearly \$200 in 1922 (or well over \$3000 in 2023 dollars) It is our assumption that these machines were sold on the increasingly popular

consumer product financing system of regular payment plans, which we've discussed in our episodes on the [Singer Sewing Machines](#) and [on consumer finance in the General Motors auto loans era](#). However it might be that this price was the one quoted to businesses for the non-consumer models.

[Bill] As the 1930s began, KitchenAid's competition emerged in the form of the Sunbeam Mixmaster, which had two interlocking detachable mixing blades and various accessory options. Sunbeam had also started back in 1897, as "Chicago Flexible Shaft Company, which made horse trimming and sheep shearing machinery," before transitioning similarly into kitchen appliance development and adopting the Sunbeam branding in 1910.

[Rachel] KitchenAid struggled well into the 1930s to figure out how to compete with Sunbeam's appealing design aesthetic for the home consumer market, because they had never really updated the industrial, functional look dating back to the 1914 design, which was never meant for home users. According to the Smithsonian magazine article, *KitchenAid brought in industrial designer and commercial artist [Egmont Arens](#) to develop a series of low-cost mixers. In 1937, he created the streamlined K model, which has become the standard for the brand. Featuring sleek lines and enameled surfaces, this more modern take on the mixer was instantly popular and helped KitchenAid to eventually take the top spot in sales. Brian Maynard, a KitchenAid marketing director, said it best in 2007: "The first mixer was actually introduced in 1919, but it was Arens' 1937 Model K design that really captivated consumers. And while its core following is among those who love to cook and bake, our research tells us that many less avid cooks simply want one on their countertop, largely because they like its design." The design proved so successful, KitchenAid actually used a silhouette of the mixer's shape as part of its logo. That image was trademarked with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. In 1997, the mixer was named an icon of American design by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.*

[Bill] Perhaps the most famous KitchenAid stand mixer in the world was the one used on the set of Julia Child's show "The French Chef," which premiered in 1963. That kitchen set, including a stand mixer, is now on display at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, since 2001. The mixer is visible on a countertop. However, it is unclear whether or not this is her original mixer that she used for decades. KitchenAid claims to have the original on display at their facilities and that they sent her a replacement in 1999, which is the one at the Smithsonian. This did not match the account given by the Smithsonian.

[Rachel] The KitchenAid brand line has been owned since 1986 by multinational appliance giant Whirlpool, based in Michigan. The stand mixers and other related kitchen products are still manufactured in Greenville Ohio, as they have been since 1946. You can actually sign up for factory tours and cooking classes.

<http://touringohio.com/northwest/darke/greenville/kitchenaid.html>

Hobart, divested of KitchenAid for nearly four decades, still exists separately as a subsidiary of Illinois Tool Works, but focuses more on its preceding area of expertise: behind-the-scenes industrial machinery involved in the food and grocery industry.

[Bill] The [Martha Stewart website](#) explains the enduring functional and aesthetic appeal of the KitchenAid stand mixer as follows:

The unique "planetary" action of the beater, with two orbital directions, provides a fold-over motion, rather than just fast stirring. A variety of attachments have been added over the decades, often following food trends or regional preferences: Those who are vegetarian or

gluten-free may especially appreciate the spiralizer; beefy types might enjoy the meat grinder for homemade sausage; bakers who want precise metric measurements will like the sifter/scale. But any of the 14 attachments that you buy for a brand-new KitchenAid will fit into the same "hub" as your grandmother's model, and the same "locking mechanism" will accommodate the traditional stainless steel or glass bowl, and can even fit one of the new decorative ceramic bowls (they're titanium-reinforced and fired at high temperatures, to withstand staining even if you're using beets). [...] Colors were introduced in 1955, and now there are more than 40, from mid-century Sunny Yellow and Petal Pink to Passion Red for the centennial. The colors are chosen to have a "friendly quality," nothing too high-tech or faddish. The pop of color and pedigree have made the mixer a kitchen status symbol, often accorded valuable counter space even in small apartments, rather than hidden away in a cabinet. And even though it's pretty, it's a workhorse. Throughout its history, the KitchenAid has proven to be a piece of culinary equipment so reliable that it practically comes with a guarantee: Only good things will come out of this mixer.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KitchenAid>

<https://www.kitchenaid.com/100year/history.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hobart_Corporation

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/100-years-kitchenaid-has-been-stand-brand-stand-mixers-180972838/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunbeam_Products

<https://www.marthastewart.com/1537760/stand-mixer-history-kitchenaid>