Humble Beginning, Brilliant Success of Huval Baking Firm Heart-Warming Saga

The saga of Huval Baking Company's rise from a one-room hand-operated bakery, to a booming enterprise that boasts a payroll of $500,000 a year, is the kind of story that warms the collective heart of America—for it presents the perfect example of opportunity's timely knock answered energetically and with assiduous and conscientious labor by a country boy who had his eye fixed on a star.

That star really sparkled in May of 1919, when major expansions resulted in a completely remodeled and highly efficient baking facilities were unveiled and the Huval Baking Company took its place on the pedestal of top-flight businesses in Louisiana.

Evangelina Maid bread, principal product of the gigantic plant located on St. John Street is now a byword in all homes in Southwest Louisiana. That product is an off-spring of the humble loaves baked by Joe Huval in the dark hours of the nights following the Armistice of World War I.

One of a family of eight born to a Coteau, Iberia Parish farming family, Joseph Huval began the seeking of his fortune at the tender age of 12—this primary venture led to a job selling ice at $2.50 per day, plus 5 cents worth of ice to take-home—the winter months were tided over in a pop bottling works, also managed by the ice plant owner.

The baking trade entered Joe Huval's life when, at the age of 14, he hired out to Azar Elias' Bakery in New Iberia as a combination baker's helper and a salesman, house to house, to out of a basket. But the "world" called and Joe migrated to the Mississippi Gulf Coast to work in a bakery owned by Jake Warnson at Biloxi, Miss.

Subsequent moves of the ambitious young man, whose fame as a baker had now gained a solid foothold in the minds of those connected with the trade, included Roder's Bakery; Schoenstein's Bakery at Franklin; P. E. Tabaret Bakery at Lake Charles.

World War I interrupted the uphill climb for Joe Huval, and the next several years saw him employing his baking skill in the ranks of the Quartermaster Corps of the Army.

One of the fondest memories gleaned from the store of his overtures during the war is the one concerning Joe's baking of a birthday cake for General "Black Jack" John J. Pershing. The compliments that the famous man bestowed on Joe and his bakers made the occasion an unforgettable one.

Joe was mustered out of the service at Camp Shelby, Miss. on August 15, 1918, and his footsteps again found him on the road before he left this country.

With the $50 bonus money he received as mustering out pay, Joe Huval opened a small hand-operated bakery in Youngsville, starting the nightly baking of bread at 11 o'clock and setting out early in the morning, basket on shoulder, to sell his wares. He got a "toe-hold" and bought a Model-T truck, established an additional route in Milton. Success loomed and the city, Lafayette, beckoned, so Joe took the growth of the business was at 311 Sampson Street, from which building he began to sell bread house to-house in this city. In 1926, he purchased the Lalande Brothers Bakery at the corner of Simcoe and St. Antoine streets. Within a short time he had expanded the size of this building.

Joe remembers the disastrous flood of 1927, not only for the tragedy it implied, but for the 24-hour schedule of bread baking maintained at his place of business during that time. With 15,000 refugees quartered in the city, the only dry spot in the Atchafalaya Basin, the work of keeping them supplied with bread was a steady and grueling one.

In the early part of 1947, visualizing the rapid growth of Lafayette and Southwest Louisiana, Mr. Huval embarked on another expansion program building a 60 by 110 structure on the site of the present huge plant and equipping it with what was then the most modern and efficient bakery machinery obtainable. At that time he owned four delivery trucks and employed about 18 men in the bakery. Shortly after opening his new plant, several additional trucks were added to the fleet of four which he had, and deliveries extended as far east as Jeanerette and Franklin. Since 1937 the bakery has been enlarged several times by additions and new buildings and was among the first bakeries in this territory to slice and wrap bread.

Vice-president and treasurer of the Huval Baking Company here