

Champion MFG.

Est. 1885

The company, known in 1885 as the Charles Johnson Hardware Company, was incorporated in 1901. Charles Johnson, the company's founder, was a pioneer in the sheet metal industry, and was one of the first in the business to patent sheet metal furnace pipes. As the furnace industry expanded in the early twentieth century, the company's name was changed to the Champion Furnace Pipe Company. During WWII, as with many other manufacturers, Champion converted its factory, and produced one hundred percent of its output for the Defense Department, including instrument panel covers, relay boxes, spare parts boxes, and 50 caliber shell boxes for the B-52 airplane.

After the war, the company was sold to Richard Cott, an Ohio State University engineer, who modernized the manufacturing process at Champion with the latest sheet metal equipment. For the next several decades, the company expanded its holdings and acquired the "Lamneck Division" of Clayton Lambert Manufacturing and the "Milcor Division" of Inland Steel Company.

Champion moved to its current Galena Road location after a fire in May of 1964. Ownership changed hands in 1978 when the Robert J. Lax family purchased the business. Today, Champion's president and CEO, Mike Lax, oversees a 200,000+ square foot building complex and services plumbing, heating and air conditioning wholesalers throughout the Midwest.

Congratulations to Champion Manufacturing on becoming a Peoria Historical Society Centenarian organization.