

*Agnes Tokheim, the daughter of John J. Tokheim, has generously donated the funds to provide this building as a memorial to her father's life and work as an early Iowa inventor.*

*During the design phase of the exhibit, the following history was discovered at the Tokheim factory. The history was written by John J. Tokheim on November 17, 1939.*

## **JOHN J. TOKHEIM HISTORY**

Are the opportunities for young men as good today as fifty years ago? With the advance in education, college and university training, and available to all, the opportunities are much greater today than fifty years ago. But too many young people let the opportunities pass by selecting the easiest way.

The pioneers lived "democracy," and practiced individuality, as granted by the Constitution of this Country to each loyal citizen, and there has always been plenty for those willing to work.

As an example of individuality and self-made opportunity, in spite of the handicaps of the American language and education, I can mention John J. Tokheim, a young man of sixteen who entered this country fifty-two years ago as an immigrant from Norway, paying for his passage by working the first ten months on an Iowa farm. The following two summers he continued farm work, and during winter months, he attended country school and earned his board and room by doing chores on the farm.

He served one year's apprenticeship as a sheet metal worker for \$50.00 for the year, earning board and room by doing extra work consisting of straightening up and sweeping the tin shop, plumbing shop, pump shop and the hardware store after closing hours and sweeping the hardware store as a night watchman usually this work was completed by 9 p.m. and the following two or three hours each evening were spent in studying mechanical drawing from lessons published in a sheet metal worker's magazine.

The next two years' summer seasons he devoted to the tinner's trade and winter months at school. While attending school, he earned board and room by working after school and Saturdays in a tin shop and hardware store.

This was followed by a six months special course in a commercial business college in Des Moines, Iowa and about a year at tinner's work in a Chicago factory. In 1896 he started a tin shop at Thor, Iowa and gradually added a complete stock of hardware and well pumps, and handled kerosene and gasoline for lamps and stoves.

In the spring of 1898 Mr. Tokheim conceived the idea that it would be safer against fire to store the gasoline underground outside the store building, and built a tank for the purpose, buried it underground outside the store building, and piped it into the store where he attached a pump. This led to the invention of the "Visible Measuring Pump" and later this method of storing gasoline underground for safety became universally

adapted. In January 1901 a basic patent was granted to Mr. Tokheim on the Visible Measuring Pump.

At this time he was induced to organize a stock company to promote the manufacturing and marketing of the invention, and a corporation was formed in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in the name of the Tokheim Mfg. Co. Mr. Tokheim, after selling his hardware business, took management of the manufacturing business.

During the ten years he had charge he built it up to a nationally known business. Besides being in charge of the manufacture he invented many additional products, such as: The first known underground naphtha system for dry cleaners and for paint oils for implement manufacturers, and soon the hand pumping outfits led to his inventions of electric operated power pumps, including predetermined automatic stop measuring attachment.

In 1907 he invented and patented a liquid level Tank Gauge, a privately owned invention. Later he sold this patent for use in connection with automobiles. In 1900 he invented and patented a vacuum system for raising and measuring vinegar, cider and acid-containing liquids that could not be handled in metal pumps. Being pumped by vacuum, this liquid came in contact with glass and rubber only. The company manufactured this invention on a royalty basis.