

William Edgar Long



*M*uch of the trust that today exists between consumers and the baking industry, as well as brand recognition and consistent quality, may be traced back to William Edgar Long and the organization he founded in 1900, the W.E. Long Co.

Born in Troy, Ohio, in 1873, Mr. Long was an early advocate of wrap-

ping bread for sanitary and marketing purposes. He inaugurated a clean bread campaign to entice bakers to adopt sanitation procedures in their plants. Additionally, he pioneered the idea of sliced bread and brought about the practice of branding of bread as a means to build repeat sales.

It was a combination of these ideas, revolutionary at the time in the baking industry, that eventually won over the confidence of consumers and laid the path for the industry to prosper and grow.

Mr. Long's introduction in baking could perhaps best be described as a circumstance of chance.

As a youth, he was a sign painter apprentice. He later traveled as a salesman of advertising materials. In 1894, he moved to Chicago, where he started his career as a bakery wagon driver with a route for the sale of bakery products for Hubbard & Dixon.

Mr. Long saw himself as more than just a bakery wagon driver, though. At the time, there was little to distinguish one loaf of bread from any other loaf. With an exceptional eye for advertising, Mr. Long decided to develop a brand that would tie the bakery and the consumer.

He arranged for the adoption of "Buster Brown" as a brand for

bread. To attach this brand to the products of bakeries, he was one of the first to conceive the idea of wrapping bread. Later, “Holsum” and “Besty Ross” brands were spread over the country under his lead.

Mr. Long and the W.E. Long Co. began to build one accomplishment on another. Mr. Long determined that branding alone could not yield maximum returns for bakeries. The problem of inconsistent product

Long, through The W.E. Long Co., joined with 15 leading independent bakers to form a central organization that provided services to its members on a cost basis. Shortly thereafter, the group made two other advances: the establishment of a laboratory for the control of quality; the other the establishment of basic cost factors for allocating the bakers’ cost by the company’s accounting department.

By 1920, the W.E. Long Co. was

The W.E. Long Co. and its members continued to be at the forefront of innovation in baking for the next 20 years. In 1937, W.E. Long employees worked with DuPont to develop cellophane wrapped bread. Four years later, in 1941, W.E. Long became the first to advertise enriched bread.

Mr. Long retired in July 1951 after he sold the business to seven longtime associates in 1948.

In 1951, The W.E. Long Co. approached a group of Holsum bakers to pool their advertising resources and market both a common-denominator brand name and wrapper designs. W.E. Long had launched the Holsum bread brand in 1908.

In 1956, the 54 bakers who then comprised The W.E. Long Co. clients, known as the Holsum Unified Bakers, purchased the entire enterprise. The organization was reorganized as a cooperative and changed its name to The W.E. Long Co. — Independent Bakers’ Cooperative.

Today, the modern-day organization differs little in structure and purpose from that established in 1956. The company consists of regular, associate and specialty baker member companies.

The company purchases secondary ingredients, including corn syrup, raisins, sesame seeds and gluten. Packaging materials are also purchased. The company does not purchase flour, which individual companies are better-suited to do on a localized basis.



Independent bakery executives gather to the 1935 Conference of General Managers, at Edgewater Beach Hotel, Chicago. Mr. Long is visible seated at the desk, far left.

was prevalent for a variety of reasons, ranging from absence of uniformity in output to lack of science being applied toward maintaining or ensuring quality.

Mr. Long surmised that the baker who was able to promise quality, uniformity and cleanliness of manufacturing would be the baker that could put himself in a position to dominate the market.

With that idea in mind, Mr.

offering the service of purchasing ingredients, materials and equipment for its members. In doing so, the company was able to take advantage of volume purchases, resulting in lower overall prices for baker members.

By the end of the 1920s, sliced bread had made its introduction into the American household, thanks to The Colvin Baking Co., Janesville, Wis., a W.E. Long baker.