

Ralph Leroy Nafziger

Much of the innovation and growth that turned Interstate Bakeries Corp. into the nation's largest wholesale baker may be attributed to the efforts of Ralph Leroy Nafziger.

Born Nov. 17, 1887, in Kansas City, Mr. Nafziger wouldn't get his start in the industry until 1904, when he received word that his mother had died and that the family business — a small bakery in Kansas City — was facing bankruptcy for failure to make good on a \$3,500 mortgage.

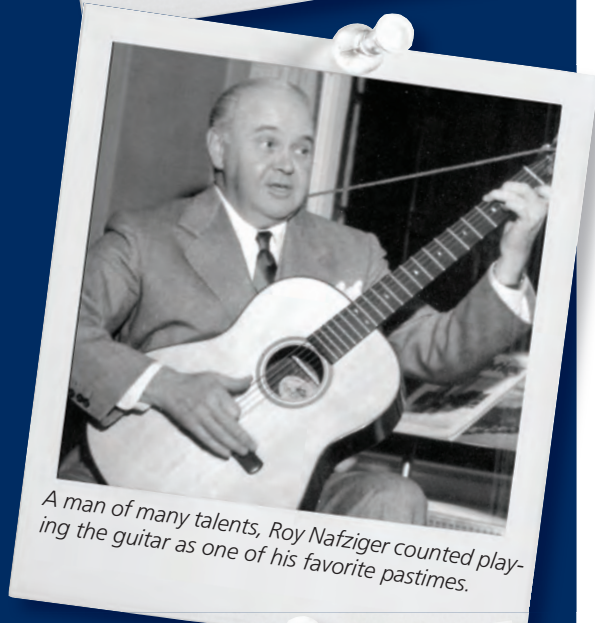
At the time, Mr. Nafziger was attending school in Troy, N.Y., in hopes of becoming an architect. Putting those plans aside, Mr. Nafziger returned home, at

which point his father, Edward Nafziger, who owned the Nafziger's Bakery and delivered bread by horse driven wagon in the greater Kansas City area, asked him to stay and help. The rest, as they say, is history.

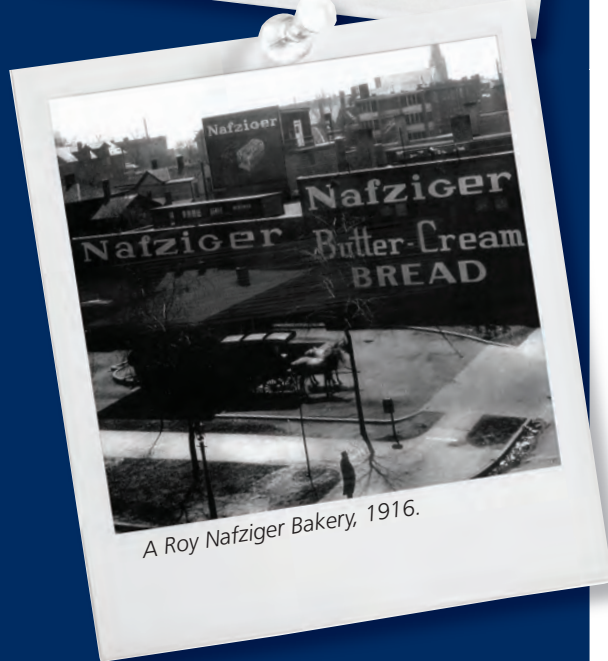
"I gave up the aim and dreams of education and went home, borrowed money, paid the bills, and bailed out our little family bakery," Mr. Nafziger said years later. "Nobody to whom the bakery owed money was hurt, not even a little bit. From that beginning, I have always felt that my business career has been built on the hard rock foundation of integrity. And I have seen it work out, time and time again, that when I deal squarely with others, I enjoy the best of treatment



Roy Nafziger, fifth from the left, with other members of his family in front of a Nafziger bread truck.



A man of many talents, Roy Nafziger counted playing the guitar as one of his favorite pastimes.



A Roy Nafziger Bakery, 1916.

from those who work and live with me.”

Four years after returning home to help his father, Mr. Nafziger not only successfully paid off the bakery’s debt, he had begun expanding it as well. He formed additional Nafziger Bakeries from 1910 to 1925 in St. Louis and Sedalia, Mo.; Burlington, Iowa; Muskogee, Okla.; Decatur and Springfield, Ill.; and Wichita Falls, Texas. He built his own bakery in 1915.

In 1925 he sold Nafziger’s Bakeries to Purity Bakeries, helping to found Purity Bakeries Corp., which later was renamed American Bakeries. Following a short stay at Purity as vice-president, Mr. Nafziger retired at the age of 38, a self-made millionaire.

But Mr. Nafziger’s retirement would be short. After a six-month tour of Europe he returned to the United States and, urged by some New York bankers, he headed up the reorganized Schulze Baking Co. and its nine plants.

In spite of the stock market crash, Mr. Nafziger chose to expand and used every resource he had to build a national baking company and create thousands of jobs. He bought fledgling bakeries from Los Angeles to Chicago to Buffalo, N.Y., revamped them and expanded their market areas. In March 1930, he was responsible for forming Interstate Bakeries Corp., a merger of the Schulze Baking Co. and a group of seven baking companies on the West coast, including Kilpatrick’s Bakeries; Suydam Baking Co.; Four-S Baking Co.; Log Cabin Bread Co.; Cramer Baking Co.; Weber Baking Co.; and Weber Cake Co.

As president of I.B.C. from 1930 to 1957 he was responsible for developing many regional power house branded bread lines, including Weber’s, Butternut, Merita, Millbrook, Sweetheart, Ed-

dy’s and Cotton’s Holsum. Known as an innovator, Mr. Nafziger had a reputation for original advertising methods. He ran the first full page advertisement using newspaper, and was the first to do national advertising of Butternut Bread and Dolly Madison Cakes.

Mr. Nafziger was known as a colorful man always ready to entertain by playing his guitar, performing magic tricks or juggling. He also was a pilot, equestrian, polo player, dog lover, executive and an inventor. He developed the first rotary oven, loading and unloading from the front, and also created the first crème depositor used to deposit crème in an oval shaped cake. The cake was then covered with white or chocolate coating called the French pastry.

He was chairman of the American Bakers Association in 1957-58 and ex-officio member of the A.B.A. board of governors.

In addition to his business dealings, Mr. Nafziger was an avid believer in people. He was responsible for offering training to individuals interested in the baking industry, including offering in-plant training as well as helping set up a six-week live-in executive training program known as the Bakers Dozen.

Mr. Nafziger was the key figure behind the introduction of the Gold Cross Plan for Executives. This preventative medicine plan for I.B.C. executives included a thorough physical each year to help keep them in good health.

I.B.C., which Mr. Nafziger helped build, is now the nation’s largest wholesale baking company. The company employs more than 25,000 people and operates 45 bakeries and 800 distribution centers and approximately 850 bakery outlets throughout the United States. 🍞