

source of supply. He found in California and in the Midwest, particularly in Minnesota, that seed flax was being raised on a large scale. The flax seed was being sold to linseed oil producers but the straw was regarded as waste and was usually burned or destroyed in some other manner.

It was discovered also that there were facilities in and near Minnesota for the production of fibre from seed flax straw. These facilities had been built to produce upholstery tow, a material used quite extensively in the manufacture of furniture during the early 1900's. However, due to the importation of better fibres from abroad, plus several other happenings, the sale of upholstery tow had practically diminished by the 1930's.

The owners of these facilities were glad, and understandably so, to have the opportunity to produce seed flax fibre for Ecusta. A few modifications in their process were necessary, but they were only minor.

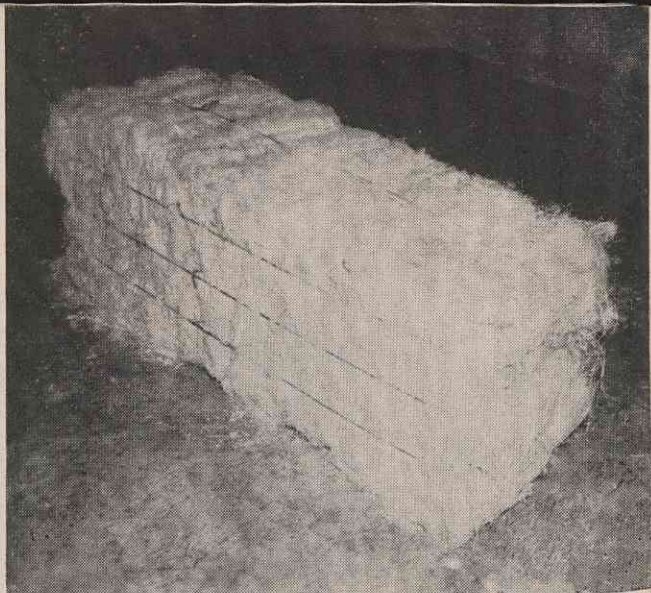
In 1937, for the purpose of diversifying the company's activities, the California Central Fibre Corporation was formed, with Mr Dixon as Vice President and Mr. Ramsey as Vice President and Resident Manager. The Corporation built a flax processing mill in El Centro and began purchasing and processing seed flax fibre for shipment to customers, primarily, of course, to Ecusta.

Although not related to them, flax is very similar to the cereals—wheat, barley, oats, etc.—in its growing habits. In the Imperial Valley, flax is planted in the fall of the year, around November 15, and is harvested during the latter part of May. In harvesting, the usual type of farm equipment is used, enabling the farmer who raises grain crops, in addition to seed flax, to get by without the additional expense of special flax-handling machinery. For example, the straw must be baled before it can be brought to the El Centro storage yard. This baling operation is accomplished through the use of typical pickup balers.

Farming in California is a vast and businesslike operation. Once maturity of a crop has been reached, harvesting proceeds on a strict and speedy time table. Such a program necessitates rapid handling of flax straw, the result being that in some years, as much as 25,000 tons of straw are received by the Company within a 60 day period. This tonnage approximates 5,000 truck loads, 650,000 individual bales, all of which is stored prior to processing.

The storage yard at El Centro covers approximately 100 acres. To keep the danger of fire to a minimum, the bales are arranged in stacks containing about 100 tons each. In addition, the stacks are spaced 100 feet apart.

The processing at the El Centro mill is a year-



round operation. The mill, a decorticating plant, is made up of machinery which roughly separates the fibre from the straw, eliminating a portion of the inner woody part of the flax stalk known as "shive". The machinery consists, basically, of a series of paired, corrugated rollers. The flax straw is fed between upper and lower rollers which crush the stalk and allow the shive to fall beneath the machine where it is removed by a dragline. Following this separation, the resulting fibre is baled in tightly compressed bales, loaded in box-cars and shipped to Ecusta and other customers.

In Minnesota the flax scene is similar to that in California. The notable difference is in the flax growing area. Flax areas extend over practically the whole state of Minnesota, resulting in that state's having a larger flax acreage than California—since flax is grown there in a relatively small area. The straw concentration problem is considerably more difficult than in California, and, too, in the Midwestern area the straw must be dried before processing.

The seed flax straw industry may be looked upon by the individual Imperial Valley farmers as no more than a "sideline business"—a means of picking up a supplementary income from their flax crop. But when the purchases by California Central Fibre from individual farmers are combined, it no longer appears a "sideline business." In 1951 the flax growers received \$345,426.53 for their flax straw—more than 44 times as much as they received 14 years before. By the end of the 1952 season the Corporation had paid to the Valley flax growers approximately \$3,750,000 for flax straw since the first purchases in 1937.

Yes, 1937 is a year that will be long remembered by the flax growers of California—and those of Minnesota as well.