

## Construction of Oldest and Newest Big Buildings in Omaha, Boast of One Firm

**Collins Bros., Omaha Contractors, Point With Pride To Paxton Hotel Building and Huge New Skinner Packing Plant On South Side—Contemporaries Remark On Speed and Thoroughness of Construction of Latest Achievement.**

The distinction of having built the oldest and the newest large buildings in Omaha is part of the record of 40 years of successful service of the contracting firm of Collins Brothers, who constructed the new packing plant of the Skinner Packing company, at Twenty-seventh and Y streets.

In 1882, S. J. Collins of Rock Island, Ill., and his brother, Frank, then members of the firm, began the erection of the Paxton hotel, the oldest of Omaha's large buildings. And in 1918, the day following the signing of the armistice, to be exact, Roy T. Collins, son of S. J., present head of the firm, began the construction work on the new packing plant.

Mr. Collins, as well as Omaha real estate men and other contractors, commented on the coincidence of these two structures representing the efforts of Collins Brothers here. But what Mr. Collins alone mentioned was the additional relation, through the many obstacles that had to be overcome on both buildings.

**First Big Contract.**  
The erection of the Paxton hotel was one of the first big jobs tackled by his father and uncle, Mr. Collins explained, and was undertaken just two years after the organization of the partnership. Bad weather, impassable roads, labor shortage and lack of confidence of Omaha men were just a few of the conditions that had to be contended with. The last mentioned was one of the most serious in the way of the young contractors, Mr. Collins said. At that time Fourteenth and Harney streets was considered too far west for any business to succeed.

The hotel men and the builders were hooted, almost, for working on that site, which then was on unpaved streets, without sidewalks. It was freely predicted, he said, that only failure would reward the faith of those behind the hotel. The dirt roads were more than the time, Mr. Collins' father told him once, which made hauling material a grievous task. Weather interfered continually with the work on the building, and frequently it was slowed down by lack of men. The building was completed in about two years, however, and stands structurally as it did the day it was opened.

**Contractors Remark Speed.**  
Building men in Omaha are remarking on the speed with which the big Skinner plant was completed, and without the use of a double shift at any time. Actual construction work was finished a little more than 12 months after building operations began. What Collins Bros. point to is the fact that it was completed in record time in the face of material shortage, adverse weather conditions, two actual strikes that suspended activities entirely, and a continual labor shortage.

In planning the construction of the building, Mr. Collins explained, consideration was taken of the approaching winter and the effect that would have on concrete work and also on the material supply. As railroads will not ship pumped sand or gravel during the cold months, enough to last until warm weather had to be acquired before the embargo shut down.

On that account, he said, they purchased all the sand, gravel and crushed rock they could. But the tendency of such material to freeze to the consistency of granite, the reason why railroads will not ship it in the winter, also presented a problem to the contractors, as they were forced to store it out of doors.

**Install Heating System.**  
This was solved, he said, by the installation of a heating system that not only kept the material thawed, but actually heated it to a point that made walking through a pile uncomfortable. A central boiler plant was installed and heating pipes from there laid along the ground. The sand and gravel was dumped on these pipes, which supplied sufficient heat to bring the pile to a high temperature, in spite of winter cold and frequent snowfalls.

The heating of the sand also aided in continuing concrete work all winter. The hot sand was added to the rock and cement in the mixer, and the mass additionally heated by hot water. This kept the concrete at a high temperature while it was being conveyed to the forms and after pouring.

By using such expedients they were able to continue work all winter. Further trouble from lack of material were prevented by buying lumber, brick, cement and all items used in the construction of the plant in huge quantities and storing the surplus on the ground.

**Acute Labor Shortage.**  
The real trouble began, Mr. Collins related, after warm weather returned, when labor became scarce and continued so. To add to that, a strike developed on May 1, 1919, and continued for three weeks, necessitating a suspension of construction. The matter was finally settled and work begun again, but early in June another strike tied up all work on the building.

In the last case it was the unskilled laborers that walked out, leaving masons and others without the assistance needed to continue their activities. This strike lasted two weeks, and marked the beginning of a period of acute labor shortage. With the coming of harvest season men quit in all departments to work in the fields, and foremen were forced to fill their places with anyone they could get. This condition continued virtually unrelieved until the building was finished, in December. While actual construction ended then, the work of clearing up the building, finishing the adjacent works, laying pave-

ment, and such issues lasted for several weeks. The installation of machinery begun then, too, but has now been completed, in a space of time as remarkable as that needed to finish the building itself.

**Establishes Unapproached Record.**  
Packing house machinery is all "tailor made" and differs in every plant. Mr. Collins explained. Usually it takes from six months to a year to install this machinery, and at the present time may require a period of much greater length. The placing and testing of the machinery of the Skinner plant in less than three months establishes a record unapproached, he believes.

While the Paxton hotel and the Skinner plant are the only examples of Collins Brothers' enterprise in Omaha, the entire country, and particularly the middle western states, are dotted with structures erected by his firm, according to Mr. Collins. The policy of the firm under his father and since he has become its head has always been to specialize in a few big jobs and do them well, he said.

Among steady clients of Collins Brothers, he enumerated the Rock Island railroad, Moline Plow company, Swift & Co., Morrill Packing company, Ford Motor company, and the John Deere Plow company. For these companies Collins Brothers have erected warehouses, freight terminals, factories and packing houses, as well as innumerable smaller buildings necessary to large construction jobs. Notable among monuments to their credit is the assembling plant of the Ford Motor company at Kansas City, which is the largest owned by that concern, with the exception of their Long Island plant.

**Firm's Keyword, "Service."**  
Although the head office of the company is in Kansas City, Mr. Collins expressed yesterday a desire that he might be able to remain in Omaha and keep his home here. "I wish I could stay in Omaha and go after some of the big jobs here in earnest," he said. "And I may be able to, although right now I am pretty well tied up with work already under way in Kansas City. By all means I am going to keep the Omaha office open."

"Since I have been connected with the firm, and particularly since taking my father's place, I have tried to build up an organization that will give service. To my mind the firm should never become so large as to get out of hand, and introduce the risk of our service to any client falling below that others receive."

"We would rather have a few big contracts and have them completed according to our standards than any number, which might bring us greater returns, but at the expense of the Collins Bros.' reputation for service."

**Maintains Home in Omaha.**  
"In the 40 years the firm has been in the business it has never failed to complete a contract, has never erected a building it could not point to with pride afterward, and, to the best of my knowledge, has never been in law suit over a settlement."

The Omaha office of Collins Brothers, was established several months ago on the fourth floor of the Finance building. Roy I. Brooks is local manager. He has been in the construction business for 15 years, and has been associated with

## They Constructed the New Skinner Packing Plant



Roy T. Collins



Roy I. Brooks

Mr. Collins for the past five years. During the past two years Mr. Collins has made his home in Omaha. With Mrs. Collins, and his family he resides at 5016 Chicago street.

## Tomatoes Should Be Considered First In Back-Yard Gardens

What crops to plant in the home garden will depend upon the size of the garden, the size of the family and the size of the family's appetite. Where the garden space is extremely limited only those crops that will produce a considerable quantity of food on a small area should be included.

As a rule, home gardeners, especially the beginners, devote too much space to lettuce and radishes and too little to beets, carrots, beans, onions, and tomatoes, according to United States Department of Agriculture specialists. Where the family is small it is easy to overplant most of the garden crops. The surplus of certain vegetables can be saved by canning and drying, others like lettuce and radishes are a loss unless some kind neighbor will use them.

Children eat almost as many fresh vegetables as grownups and should be counted as "full hands" in estimating the amount of space to devote to any vegetable. The size of the family appetite is liable to expand considerably when the vegetables are brought fresh from the garden, and it is always safe to have a plenty of the more staple vegetables. Corn and Irish potatoes occupy too much space for planting in the very small garden. Tomatoes should find a place in every garden, as should spinach, chard and other kinds of greens.

## Spading Puts Garden In Better Shape Than Plowing

Plowmen and teams are scarce around cities, and the smaller garden plots can often be spaded to much greater advantage than they can be plowed. Where there are a group of community gardens located on a clear plot of ground they can often be plowed together, and thus considerable labor is saved. But the small garden plots, especially those in back yards, must be spaded. A considerable area can be spaded if the work is done a little at a time, so that it does not become tiresome. A good job of spading will always put the land in better condition than plowing.



Chas. A. Baier

## Plant Gardens On Vacant Lots to Beat the H. C. of L.

Vacant city lots would not be of much value for growing corn or wheat but these valuable pieces of dirt are often just the place for growing a good vegetable garden. Often the soil is rough and covered with stones and all sorts of waste materials, but most people who live in cities and towns do not get enough outdoor exercise anyway, and the labor necessary to clean off the trash and pile the stones to one side will do them good. Some of the best home gardens have been grown on vacant lots that was not much more than a stone pile to begin with. In one case enough old foundation stones were removed to build a wall along the two exposed sides of the lot. The soil was then leveled and a few small loads of manure spaded into it. The garden was planted while neighboring apartment house dwellers looked on from their windows, doubt written on every face, but the garden grew and flourished, and many were the smiles of appreciation of the good things that were handed them by the owner of the garden.

Successful tests have been made in England with the use of benzol for driving automobiles with a view to solving the problem of finding a clean British made fuel for power.

## Few Tools Are Needed For the Home Garden

Thrifty gardeners should be thrifty gardens from start to finish, and the vegetables grown in them should not cost as much as it would cost to buy them on the market. Every item of expense should be kept down. This is especially true in the purchase of tools. Some gardeners have an idea that they must have a large assortment of hoes and rakes, wheel hoes, seed drills, spraying outfits and special equipment before they can begin to garden. But the tools actually required in the cultivation of a thrifty garden are few and simple. A spade or spading fork, a steel rake and a hoe, together with a piece of string and two small wooden stakes, are the chief essentials. There are a number of other tools, such as a trowel, sprinkling can, wheel-hoe, seed drill and wheelbarrow, that may often be used to advantage, but they are not absolutely necessary.

## Good Seeds Essential In Thrift Home Gardens

Bring out the left-over seeds and those saved from last year's garden, spread them on a table, examine them closely, and see how many are worth planting in the garden this year.

As a rule, it does not pay to plant old seeds, and unless those left over from last year are in first-class condition, they had best be discarded, United States Department of Agriculture specialists advise. Even though they look to be all right nothing but a germination test will determine their value. The test may be made in two or three ways, the easiest being by means of a small box of sand in the window or in a warm place in the house. From 50 to 100 seeds of each sample to be tested should be counted out and carefully planted in the moist sand. After the sprouts have appeared, another count can be made to determine the percentage that have germinated. If less than 65 per cent or 70 per cent have grown, the seed by all means should be discarded.

See Want Ads Are Best Business Boosters.

## Well Known Coal Man Is New Board Member Of Big Packing Plant



G. W. Megeath

G. W. Megeath, a new director of The Skinner Company board, is one of Omaha's most successful business men. He was born in Omaha and has lived here a large part of his life.

Among his other business interests is the Sheridan Coal company, of which he is president.

## Omaha Confectioner Dies

Elmer Nelson, 29 years old, 668 South Twenty-sixth street, died early Tuesday morning after a brief illness. He is survived by his widow and 3-year-old son, Elmer, Jr.; mother, sister and two brothers. Mr. Nelson had conducted a confectionery store at Twenty-fifth and Leavenworth streets for five years.

## Nature Has Made the Soil Just Right for Gardeners This Year

Winter snows and hard freezing weather, reported in many parts of the United States this winter, are the best agencies for getting garden soils in condition, according to United States Department of Agriculture specialists. Soil is nothing more nor less than finely divided rock with decayed vegetable matter mixed with it. Every time the water freezes in the crevice of a rock it makes the opening a little wider until finally the rock is split into fragments; more water gets into the openings in these fragments and freezes, and so the work of reduction goes on forever. Every time the ground freezes new soil is formed, but this new soil is in need of manure or decaying vegetable matter before it will hold water in minute quantities and be in condition to produce crops.

Every time the soil is stirred in cultivating, the particles are ground together, and they rub or break off still finer particles. If the soil is too wet when it is worked, the particles will become cemented together

and there will be clods or lumpy soil. The little hairlike roots of plants develop in the spaces between the particles of soil. Here is where they get their water and along with it food materials that are essential to the growth of the plant.

## Cost of Home Gardening Only a Little Bit Higher

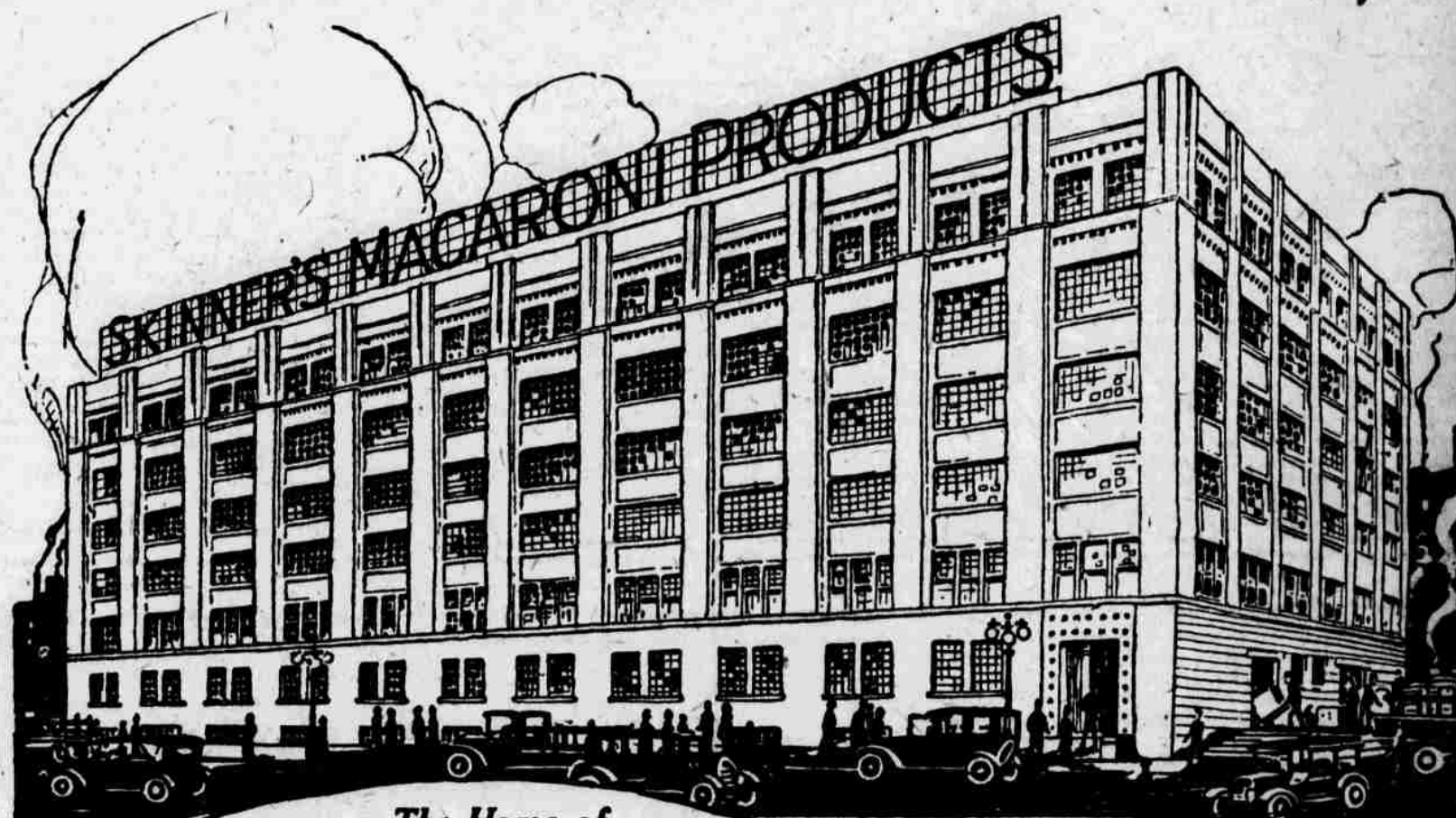
Food prices are high, but food grown in home gardens costs comparatively little more than before prices began to ascend. This additional reason for home gardening in 1920 is put forward by specialists of the United States Department of Agriculture. They quote a letter from a New York business man. He wrote:

"Food costs today are practically double those of 1914, but the cost to plant and care for a home garden has not increased to any considerable extent. The clerk, salesman or professional man who grows his own vegetables and small fruits reduces the family food bill. More important still, he increases the total food supply of the country. He caters the producing class. To a very appreciable extent the home gardener can solve the high cost of living."

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