

# Occasional Local History Series #1

## California Molded Products, Inc. of Santa Paula, California



MELMAC PRODUCTS are readied in this sorting and packing room for world-wide distribution. The machines, at right, check for defects before shipping. —Chronicle Photo.

The Melmac manufacturing operations of the California Molded Products, Inc. factory, as they appeared in 1963. They were capable of turning out over 400,000 pieces of dinnerware a month. (*Santa Paula Chronicle*)

Of interest to both Santa Paula residents and collectors of Melmac plastic dinnerware is the brand-name “Durawear,” manufactured in the city from 1960 until 1964. The trademark, along with the city’s name, is found on the bottoms of these relatively uncommon pieces, the brief period of manufacturing accounting for their scarcity. The owner of this trademark (easily confused with another Melmac dinnerware maker’s “Duraware” trademark) was California Molded Products, Inc. (CMP), based in Glendale, CA.

The melamine plastic raw material used for Melmac, manufactured by the American Cyanamide Corp., was sold and licensed along with the trademark to perhaps hundreds of dinnerware makers during the 1940s and 1950s, the high vogue period for these colorful, inexpensive, and almost indestructible plates, cups, and saucers. Melmac manufacturing arrived in Santa Paula at the tail end of this cycle of popularity, and consequently lasted for only a short time—but for those

who lived in town during these years, a memorable one.

The construction of the new 15,000 square foot CMP plant in the newly-opened industrial area at 118 W. Santa Barbara Street in Santa Paula was announced in late 1959, and was well underway in early 1960. The company was a family affair. Local investors included rancher Fred Stewart, who served as the company’s vice president, spokesperson, and general manager; Eliot Blanchard, the grandson of Santa Paula’s founder, as president; and attorney Blaine Romney as secretary. Theda Call Stewart, wife of Fred, and Eliot’s spouse Elizabeth Munger Blanchard were also named as directors.

The new \$70,000 factory was said at the time to be the first building in Santa Paula to be constructed by the concrete tilt-up method. In keeping with the times, modern dinnerware being manufactured in Santa Paula in an entirely modern building made per-

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fect sense. The equipment used in the new plant was relocated from a Durawear factory in Ontario, CA operated by Capac, Inc., which the investors purchased to start the Santa Paula business.

An open house held on June 11, 1960 drew a crowd of over 2,000 local residents to tour the new factory, and to learn that it was capable of stamping out more than 9,000 45-piece Melmac dinnerware sets a month. The company boasted 48 employees at the opening, with more to come. A future expansion into electronic parts manufacturing was also held out as a possibility. The products were sold locally at Watkins Hardware, and at retailers large and small around the world.

The operation was still going strong three years later, turning out Durawear dishes in the Capri, Sunny, Field Flowers, Honey Comb, and Sierra Maple designs, among others. The Monterey, Dogwood, and Venetian Rose designs were made exclusively for J.C. Penny stores. By then the factory had also branched out into the manufacture of wood and plastic composite bowls and trays under the "Flintwood" brand name.

Yet success appears to have continued only until 1964, when the operation in Santa Paula was combined with the parent company's plant in Scranton, PA, presumably ending the making of dinnerware with Santa Paula stamped on the reverse. At the same time, the Burrite division of CMP was said to be considering locating a plastics injection molding operation in Santa Paula, presumably in the same building, but this seems not to have come about. The factory on Santa Barbara Street appears to have sat vacant until the Chicago-based Solo Cup Company took over the property in 1967, using the CMP building for their paper cup manufacturing operation, and adding several others.

The manufacturing of Melmac dinnerware in Santa Paula has all but faded into memory, except for those who have managed to locate a piece of Durawear dinnerware from Santa Paula for their local memorabilia collections. The headquarters building, now somewhat altered, can still be seen on Santa Barbara Street.

### *Sources*

*Santa Paula Chronicle*: 7-8-1959, 7-23-1959, 8-25-1959, 10-10-1959, 10-13-1959, 12-29-1959, 12-31-1959, 6-10-1960, 6-13-1960, 6-21-1963, 11-20-1964, 1-10-1967.

*Los Angeles Times*: 12-15-1956, 12-6-1959.

The history of Melmac and the American Cyanamid Corporation is well documented in various places on the Web.

Update of 11-29-2013.

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