

Concrete in the Crescent City

A history of the ready mixed concrete industry in New Orleans, LA

BY MARK A. CHEEK

The ready mixed concrete industry in New Orleans dates back to the 1870s. Most concrete companies started as family-owned construction materials supply houses and naturally evolved into ready mixed concrete sales. The majority of the companies grew into multi-plant concrete suppliers and gave up materials sales.

1870s TO 1920

- Jahancke Service began selling construction materials in the 1870s. In 1918, Dixie Building Materials was founded (and later incorporated in 1921). Dixie was a building materials company supplying sand, gravel, cement, and other construction materials by horse and wagon.

1920s

- Materials were manually batched in volumetric boxes and conveyed into horizontal mixers.
- Typical mixer capacity was 1-1/2 yd³ (1.1 m³).

1930s

- Carlo Ditta worked on his father's farm until he started his own business in 1934. In 1934, Ditta began selling stone coal. Soon, he also started selling sand, gravel, bag cement, and other construction materials.
- The 1930s saw the introduction of larger horizontal mixers (3-1/2, 5, and 7 yd³ [2.5, 4, and 5.3 m³]) and beam scales replaced volumetric boxes in the batching process.

1940s

- In the early 1940s, Robert Scogin, Sr., started Standard Materials Co. when he restored a 1916 6-horsepower 1/3-yd³ (1/4-m³) mixer. The mixer was towed to sites where materials were mixed on site (Fig. 1).
- In 1941, Ditta bought his first concrete mixer—a 2-yd³ (1.5-m³) mixer. Prior to the Gretna, LA, plant being built in 1942, Ditta operated out of a yard next to his father's farm.



Fig. 1: Concrete mixing in the early 1940s

- The 1940s brought two major innovations that would change the concrete mixer forever: The addition of power take-off during the World War II years, along with the introduction of helix blade drums. Drum sizes increased to 8, 9, and 10 yd³ (6, 7, and 7.5 m³) and batch plants changed from using beam scales to dial gauges.

1950s

- In 1953, Standard Materials Co. opened its first plant and retired its 1/3-yd³ (1/4-m³) mixer, which was replaced by a surplus army truck with a 4-yd³ (3-m³) Yeager mixer (Fig. 2).
- The Schwartz family owned and operated Schwartz Materials, which provided ready mixed concrete as well as construction materials.
- Reed switches were introduced and used on dial gauges, whereas pneumatic controls were used to open and close bin and silo gates.

1960s

- In the early 1960s, a cubic yard of concrete cost \$13.00.
- In 1960, Schwartz Materials was sold. In 1964, the Schwartz family opened Jimco Ready Mix. Jimco's first plant was located on Airline Highway in Metairie, LA. The plant was both a central mix and dry batch facility (Fig. 3).
- Standard Materials Co. built a second plant.

1970s

- In 1972, Carlo Ditta, Inc., opened its MacArthur Plant capable of producing 200 yd³ (150 m³) per hour (Fig. 4).
- Jahancke Services closed its three plants and retired 125 trucks.
- Electronic batching controls were used to activate pneumatic equipment.

1980s

- Computerized batching revolutionized the batching process (Fig. 5).
- Carlo Ditta, Inc. opened plants in



Fig. 2: In the 1950s, a surplus WWII army truck carried a 4-yd³ (3-m³) mixer



Fig. 3: Jimco Ready Mix opens in 1964



Fig. 4: Carlo Ditta, Inc., opened its MacArthur plant in 1972



Fig. 5: In the 1980s, computerization revolutionized the batching process

New Orleans East and downtown New Orleans.

- In 1989, Lafarge Corp. purchased Jimco Ready Mix, which included six plants and 55 truck mixers.

1990s

- Carlo Ditta, Inc., opened a plant in St. Rose, LA.
- Standard Materials Co. opened another plant located in Mandeville, LA.

NEW ORLEANS CONCRETE IN THE 21st CENTURY

- Carlo Ditta, Inc., has four plants and 45 truck mixers.
- Dixie Building Materials has one central mix plant and 16 trucks.
- Lafarge Corp. has 13 plants, including two mobile plants (one central mix and one dry batch) and 114 truck mixers.
- Standard Materials Co. has two plants and 24 trucks.

Selected for reader interest by the editors.



ACI member **Mark A. Cheek, PE**, is Vice President of Beta Testing & Inspection, LLC, New Orleans, LA. He has more than 15 years of experience in construction materials testing and

inspection. He is a Past President of the ACI Louisiana Chapter, and is a member of the Chapter Activities Committee, the Certification Programs Committee, and ACI Committees C 610, Field Technician Certification; 214, Evaluation of Results of Tests Used to Determine the Strength of Concrete; 228, Nondestructive Testing of Concrete; and the ACI Young Member Award for Professional Achievement Committee. Cheek received his BS in civil engineering from the University of New Orleans, New Orleans, LA.