

# Morton Salt Girl turns 100



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This year the Morton Salt Girl turns 100 and the Morton Salt Company, which has operated an evaporative salt plant in South Hutchinson since 1899, is celebrating.

It's a moment, however, that almost wasn't.

## **New ideas**

In 1911, the then-63-year-old Chicago-based company developed an anti-caking salt, a major product innovation at the time that prevented the table salt from clumping in moist environments.

Then, in 1914, the company developed a new round package with a patented pourable spout. That replaced bulk bags and bins most salt was sold in at the time, said Denise Lauer, director of communications for Morton Salt.

To promote its product advancements, the company hired a major Philadelphia-based advertising agency, N.W. Ayer and Company, to develop a national marketing campaign.

The agency pitched a series of a dozen ads to run in Good Housekeeping magazine.

The ad firm proposed several different plans, but Sterling Morton, the son of founder Joy Morton, noticed one which had been disregarded and was on the cutting room floor that became the campaign.

## **A little girl**

That idea featured an umbrella-toting 8-year-old girl who was accidentally pouring salt from a package under her arm while walking in the rain, along with the slogan, "When it rains, it pours."

While a well-known proverb of the time – meaning when things go wrong, they tend to pile on – it offered a different meaning when coupled with the little girl, telling consumers that Morton Salt would flow freely even in damp weather. The first ad ran in October 1914 and the Morton Salt girl was born.

"We have no sales records from that time, so I can't say if that campaign boosted sales," Lauer said. "But it launched her iconic role recognized around the world today."

## **The test of time**

Throughout the years, the Morton Salt Girl has undergone five redesigns: in 1921, 1933, 1941, 1956 and 1968.

Artists changed dress styles – including adding the dress’ yellow color in 1941 – and hairstyles, going from curly to straight and back to curly in the era of Shirley Temple. But the basic design has remained the same.

“This year we made subtle updates to the 1968 version and debuted a new logo-mark,” Lauer said. “They’re subtle changes to the girl, as well as to the Morton Salt name.”

The new label has “cleaner, more simplified line work to fit better with the new ‘Morton Salt’ word mark, which is in a modern ‘friendlier’ font,” according to the company.

For the anniversary year, the company’s iodized and plain salt packages will feature the new Morton logo with the words “100th Birthday, She’s Still the One” on the package.

## Morton's history in South Hutchinson



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**SOUTH HUTCHINSON** – Morton Salt’s South Hutchinson plant is like an older brother to the Morton Salt Girl.

Company founder Joy Morton, a Chicago investor, first purchased land in South Hutchinson for salt mining in 1898.

Morton built a couple of plants, each a bit larger, before opening the predecessor of today’s South Hutchinson plant in 1906 – eight years before introduction of the company’s longtime logo.

While that plant has expanded several times over the years, the latest \$7.5 million upgrade occurred just about a year ago, securing the plant’s future for many more years.

The plant, which produces highly pure salt using a steam heat “open pan” evaporation process, currently employs about 150 people and produces some 350,000 short tons of salt a year.

The local facility produces the classic 26 ounce Morton Table Salt product, 3 pound Kosher Salt, Morton System Saver II Water Softening Salt, and many other salt products used in food manufacturing and other industrial processes, according to Denise Lauer, Morton director of communications.

## Early history

According to details from a previous story in The News compiled by reporter Ken Stephens, Joy Morton first came to the area about 1892, some five years after Ben Blanchard first discovered salt in South Hutchinson.

Morton's first plant in South Hutchinson had a capacity of 500 barrels of salt a day. Within a year, he had expanded the plant and was producing 1,200 barrels a day.

In September 1906, Morton began construction of what was billed as the largest salt production plant in the western U.S. After fire destroyed the work in progress, the plant, known as the Joy Morton Plant, was restarted and finally completed in September 1907, with a production capacity of 3,300 barrels a day and storage for 200,000 barrels.

## Corporate history

Morton initially set up his operations under Hutchinson-Kansas Salt, a division of International Salt Co., which was owned by a group of investors headed by Morton, who was also president of the company.

In January 1910, Morton formally incorporated Morton Salt Co. Although its headquarters were in Chicago, the sales operation remained in Hutchinson until moving to Kansas City in 1914.

## Corporate changes

The company changed its name to Morton International in 1965. Four years later, Morton International merged with Norwich Pharmaceutical to create Morton-Norwich Products. In 1969, the Morton Salt Co. name re-emerged as a division of Morton-Norwich.

In 1999, Philadelphia-based Rohm and Haas Company Inc. acquired Morton. Then 10 years later, the German chemical group K+S, which has operations all over the world, bought Morton's holdings.

The Hutchinson plant is one of 20 Morton facilities in the United States, which includes five mechanical evaporative plants, two rock salt plants and two solar plants.

# Morton Salt Timeline

1848 – Morton Salt company is founded in Chicago

1892 – Joy Morton arrives in South Hutchinson and purchases land for mining.

1899 – Morton launches his first South Hutchinson Salt operation.

1906-07 – Morton opens food-grade evaporative plant at site of today's South Hutchinson plant.

1914 – The Morton Salt Girl and "When It Rains It Pours" slogan make their first appearance on Morton table salt and in the October issue of Good Housekeeping.

1921 – The Morton Salt Girl changes her curly blonde hair to straight, brown hair.

1924 – Morton launches iodized salt to help prevent goiters and address iodine deficiency.

- 1933 – As Shirley Temple’s career begins to take off, the Morton Salt Girl takes on the child star’s trademark curly hair.
- 1941 – The Morton Salt Girl debuts her iconic yellow dress.
- 1951 – Morton Pellets, a product for recharging of home water softeners, is introduced.
- 1956 – The Morton Salt Girl is updated again and holds a yellow-handled umbrella for the first time.
- 1968 – The sixth version of the Morton Salt Girl debuts, with the yellow dress and a carefree gaze that remains today.
- 1998 – Morton Salt celebrates its 150th anniversary.
- 1999 – Morton Salt is acquired by Philadelphia-based Rohm and Haas Company Inc.
- 2009 – Morton Salt becomes part of a group of companies led by the K+S Group, the world’s leading producer of salt.
- 2011 – Morton Salt is named to Fortune’s list of “100 Great Things about America.”
- 2014 – Morton Salt celebrates the 100th birthday of the Morton Salt Girl.

Source: Morton Salt Co.