

The Marshall boys in 1912: The “boys” were Warren (1881-1953), Albert (1882-1960), Henry (1884-1953), and Clarence (1885-1969). Warren and Clarence were sons of the recently-deceased Israel; Albert and Henry were Elwood’s sons. The current demolition of the main National Vulcanized Fibre plant in Yorklyn brings to mind the time when it was brand new, although even this writer is not old enough to remember that.

Having modernized and expanded the paper mill on Benge Road and started the manufacture of vulcanized fiber there, the Marshall brothers (Israel and Elwood) needed more room, and built what was called the Number One Mill near the railroad in Yorklyn in 1904. With their rapidly expanding business, a much larger facility close by was planned and construction was begun before Israel’s death in 1911. In this complex was a building long enough to house his patented machine to make “endless fiber” instead of sheets, which for many years was the “longest endless fiber machine in the world.” With counsel from Elwood, the “boys” of the next generation were in full charge by 1912. Only Clarence was still unmarried.

Warren was the natural leader. Having been graduated from Wilmington Friends School, along with Albert, in the Class of 1900, he began working full time for his father and uncle and showed so much promise that he was made president of the new National Fibre and Insulation Company in 1904 at the age of 23. Enjoying running the office more than the manufacturing end, he wrapped himself in management and became a “workaholic.” For the next 49 years, Warren was president of National Fibre and Insulation and the succeeding National Vulcanized Fibre Company until his death in 1953. In those days, there was no CEO or Chairman of the Board- “President” was IT.

A few years out of school, Albert became manager of the Wooddale paper mill, about 4 miles downstream from Yorklyn, that Israel, Elwood, and their brother-in-law, Dr. Taylor S. Mitchell, had bought in 1894. Living first in Kennett Square and later at the old Marshall farmstead at Marshall’s Bridge, he commuted to Wooddale until that mill was destroyed by fire on New Year’s Day, 1918. For a few years after that, he worked at the Fibre Specialty Company in Kennett Square or in the main office at Yorklyn. After retiring from NVF in 1926, Albert operated a Guernsey Dairy at Marshallvale Farm, delivering raw milk to many customers in Kennett Square.

Henry was a born salesman. From the time of his marriage about 1909, he lived with his family in Kennett Square, first on South Union Street and then in a large home he built on West Sickles Street. I’m sure he was in charge of sales for the company, although I’m not sure what title he held. Prior to 1926, he was in top management of Fibre Specialty Company or the new Pheno-Lite Company of Kennett Square, a subsidiary of NVF.

Clarence was the mechanical man of his Marshall generation. Being “Mr. Fix-It” for the greater family, it was natural that the milling machinery being purchased and installed in the new mills in 1912 was exactly his “cup of tea.” From the time he was 10 years of age, he was interested in the steam-powered machinery in the paper mills, and lobbied his parents to let him quit school in the 11th grade to pursue a mechanical education with the International Correspondence Schools. After 1912, his job title was “Vice President in charge of Manufacturing.” He was very proud of the new mills and took many photographs of them in their early years (including the new decorative smoke stack with an American flag on top, and the 500-H.P. Hewes-Phillips Corliss engine). He also developed a special bond with his Uncle Elwood, who lived until 1929.

So, in 1912, the four boys were set to make their fortunes, each of whom had more than his share of business acumen. And so they did, with Warren's wise decisions leading the way. In the mid-1920s, however, things started to fall apart within the family. Warren's uncle and cousins, along with his brother Clarence, resigned from the company in 1926. Although family relationships escaped permanent damage, business affiliation was permanently severed. Lizzie Marshall, mother of Warren and Clarence, was really upset. She said Israel never would have wanted that to happen.

So, what really occurred? My father (Clarence) said Warren was too dictatorial and wanted to run everything his way without consulting the others. I have figured it more this way: Warren was a workaholic with few outside pastimes, and expected the others to be the same way, especially where National Fibre was concerned. Although he enjoyed travel, he never had a second home; the other three did: Albert at Buck Hill Falls, Henry at Ocean City (NJ), and Clarence at Rehoboth Beach. Albert liked golf, Clarence was a serious trapshooter, and Henry enjoyed the luxury of famous resort hotels. In short, they didn't want to go to work every day.

In 1912, however, when the big Yorklyn mills were new, a very positive financial future loomed ahead for the Marshall boys, two of whom were not yet 30 years of age.

Work Report: On Tuesday, February 10, fourteen volunteers participated, as follows: Ted Kamen (in charge), Steve Bryce, Jerry Novak, Jerry Lucas, Edwin Paschall, Dave Leon, Brent McDougall, Mark Russell, Tim Nolan, Bob Stransky, Mac Taylor, Jay Williams, Tom Marshall, and a new volunteer John Schubel.

On the Cretors machine, more paint removing and scraping was done on both the frame and the metal top. Rusted nuts under the running board on the '37 Packard were worked on, in order to replace the original rubber covering on the running boards. Caution was exercised not to break off the bolts that go through these boards, as the heads are not accessible. The burner on the Mountain Wagon still backfires, so it needs additional work. (As of Feb. 15, it appears the burner problem has been solved).

More new railroad ties were pre-drilled, and first attempts to screw down a track section on the track bench indicate the gauge is slightly tight for the sharp rear curve- this will be fine-tuned. More towels were cut up for shop rags. In the museum, the Rauch & Lang and the White steamer swapped locations so the steering mechanism on the R & L can be removed and rebuilt.

On Thursday, February 12, with the quarterly Board of Directors meeting taking place simultaneously, five volunteers were on hand: Brent McDougall, Bob Jordan, Tim Nolan, Devon Hall, and Mike Olsen. More cleaning work was done on the frame of the popcorn machine, and time was spent on working out the best way to assemble track sections on the bench. Utilizing rail already on hand, the rail needs to be cut-to-length (on the rear curve, the inside rail is about 1-1/2" shorter per rail length than the outside), old splice bars need to be removed, and the screw holes need re-drilling. Old splice bars will be cleaned up and painted with a special coating, and new screws, washers, and nuts will be ordered. This track work is under the direction of Brent McDougall.

In addition to the work sessions next week, all operating cars in the museum will be reviewed for necessary maintenance with their respective "stewards." This program is under the direction of Steve Bryce.