



A HISTORY AND A DREAM

By Montpel Lewis

(Wherein the Founder of the present house of John Lewis & Co. describes the establishment of the concern one hundred and fifty years ago, and foresees in vision with remarkable accuracy the growth of the Company down to the present.)

SELDOM is it given a man to look back upon a chapter of history which is of intimate moment to himself and then, by the simple device of turning his eyes, behold the continuation of that history, far into the years which shall succeed. Yet such a one am I, as I truly believe, and of the truth thereof I have no wish but that everyone may determine for himself.

On Thursday evening last,* there being a small Editor's Note: This memorable Thursday evening must have been sometime subsequent to 1781 as Montpel Lewis later refers to events of that year having taken place in his lifetime and not at a part of his vision of the future.



Copy of letter from the Bank of North America, talking on that note in the oldest continent.

white-lead at 90 shillings per cwt. In the money of the day; and to which I had become well accustomed in my dream, this figured nearly 22 cents the pound, which those who were aiding my successors in the merry-making in honor of the century and a half of business success considered somewhat high, as white-lead was then selling for slightly more than 12 cents.

Many more things could I describe in similar detail so vividly have I seen what I have seen; but what I have here set forth may perhaps suffice to justify in the minds of those who read this, my own conviction that things which have been unfolded to me in such reasonable sequence and in such minute detail, must be of the substance of reality and may be read in time to come as what has in truth taken place.

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company of friends assembled, of which some were newly come and all were townspeople of spirit and much concerned in the projects of our city. I was prevailed upon to narrate whatever came to my mind of the events of which I had been an observer and sometimes a participant, since my entry into



Samuel N. Lewis
Son of Mordcai Lewis. With
his brother, he began manufac-
turing White Lead in 1830.



The old Lewis factory located in
Thompson & Hastings
don't. Philadelphia. The factory has man-
ufactured from 1839 to date.



John T. Lewis
Son of Samuel N. Lewis and the
member of the firm whose name
the Company adopted in 1856.

the house first known as Neave, Harman and Lewis and later as Mordcai Lewis and Company.

Without undervaluing myself to be unduly urged, which I much dislike, I set forth such of my recollections as seemed to me suitable for the occasion. Being inclined to establish myself in a useful undertaking whereby I might not only honorably maintain myself and family, but also add something to the wealth of the country, which I have ever held to be the bounden duty of every citizen, I connected myself in the year 1772 with the firm of Neave and Harman of this City of Philadelphia, the firm then becoming Neave, Harman and Lewis. The firm had been engaged in importing merchandise from England and the continent of Europe since 1732, although at the outset Samuel Neave, my partner of forty years later, prosecuted the newly founded undertaking entirely alone. My friends were greatly entertained by my narrative of the arduous entry of my partner into Philadelphia. Often have I heard him describe it. The good ship "John" on which he had taken passage for the new country met with severe storms which followed them even into the Delaware River where the ship was run fast aground. Samuel Neave with one or two companions put ashore and finally, after battling the waves for some hours, landed at Levettown where perforce they remained twelve days. Neave and one Nathan Palmer then, having procured horses, set forth for Philadelphia, 150 miles distant. After more than three days in

which the travelers were come upon by divers difficulties, arising by reason of the density of the forest and so late because of the deep snow, they reached this city where they procured assistance for those left behind.

In the winter of 1771 I yielded to a growing longing to

travel and taking ship I sailed for England. I came upon many things of interest in the old and more settled civilization of that country as well as of Ireland and Scotland, though I was ever mindful of the greater opportunity of our own new country, and of the different attitude which methought I could observe in the people of the old and new countries and in most of the concerns of life. I was hospitably received and in Glasgow they did me great honor. On March 13, 1772, with moving ceremony they tendered me the freedom of the city. At this point in my narrative, a wag among my little company of listeners, with a comic glance at a Scottish gentleman present, offered to wager twopenny that the freedom of the city carried with it naught more filling than the burr upon the tongue of the master of the ceremony.

Upon my return to my country I took up actively with my new firm the business of importing white-lead, red-lead and linseed oil with which the partner in want to mix the leaden pigments. We also dealt in sheet lead and other products, all of which found ready sale, not only to the citizens, but also to people in the country round about. In 1781, opportunity came to me to become the controlling factor in our waning business and, as was more befitting to the new conditions, our firm became known as Mordcai Lewis & Company, which has been the style to the present. Our ships were familiar with many waters and our house flag of one red and two white stripes bearing the white L became well known to mariners.

As was most natural, in the interchange of spirited anecdote and the late struggle with King George which was coming to a happy conclusion at the time I took over our business in my name, several of our business related personal experiences characteristic of the time, some of which were indeed more thrilling than my own, but from the difficulties which were experienced by our patriots in bringing to these shores, during the troublous times, the merchandise of which the country stood in sore need, our friends met by any means escape. While with the scene of our ships by the watchful enemy and of our wagons on land by our own troops, our earnest purchases, not safely landed at Baltimore, we were, at times, distressed and put to it to look for means to overcome, however, individuals were of habit that supplies did not have their origin in the land, with which we were at war, they would be passed safely through.

I suppose that, my mind having been thus occupied through the evening with the events which coupled the career of our firm with the history of our new country, and having become more sensible than ordinary of the future possibilities of both, I was rendered very susceptible to the suggestions of imagination. Be that as those of more bookish habits may determine, certain I am that upon the picture of my guests I sat for a while thinking of what might yet be in the years to come, of war or peace, for this country newly set forth upon its independent way, and for the business undertakings which like my own would be part and parcel of our country's prosperity, or of its distress.

All at once methought I became conversant of a wider experience, as if my memory had been refreshed and the events which I had been describing to my companions were only a small part of all I had witnessed in my lifetime. I saw our president, the beloved Washington, succeeded by John Adams, and he by Jefferson; I saw the country's frontiers retreat and green fields take the place of impenetrable forests, first to the great river and even to the western ocean itself. I saw strange sights such as no man living has conceived: great wagons, coupled together and drawn not by horses, but by a monster belching smoke and steam, running on steel rails, carriages propelled by their own power at incredible speed in the streets. I saw tall buildings reaching methought to the sky, take the place of our most thought of structures. I saw another war break out with our mother country, in which our arms were again victorious; I saw our country grown immeasurably great, turn axander, the north against the south; I saw peace again and the peace brought. I saw a world war break out in Europe, such as one could not imagine, and millions of our descendants sailing for the old country to take their places, not only by the side of our late French allies, but beside our late enemies, the English, to meet and defeat a criminal attack upon the world's freedom itself. I saw in this war not only more millions of men engaged than the mind could hitherto have conceived, but instead of engines of war, including men flying and fighting in the air.

To you to whom I relate this marvelous vision, its astounding sweep of creative imagination will seem its most remarkable element. For me, who experienced it, the minuteness of the vision's detail must always awaken the profoundest awe. Not only were the affairs of nations witnessed by me, but the course of my own business was plainly revealed. I was given to direct it for a number of years, and in 1886, I having apparently given place, although the precise event was not clear to me, as I still remain to be living, my sons Mordecai and Samuel Neave Lewis formed a partnership. With energy they continued what I had founded. In 1890 they determined for a manufacturing business and bought the old works of Joseph and John Richards, situated in Pine Street between 15th and 16th Streets. Soon after, they added the manufacture of linseed oil and colors in oil, in order that those who favored them with business in white-lead and red-lead, which were indeed a goodly number, might be served with equally worthy oil and colors to go with them. This policy has continued even up to the close of my vision.

*Editor's Note: Mordecai Lewis here evidently refers to his own death which took place in 1899.

Still as if in the body, witnessed I the further growth of my company until 1849, when the factory was moved to Thompson and Huntington Streets, the site whereupon it still did stand when the dream faded, though much improvement did follow from time to time. When my sons entered upon their co-partnership in 1896 they took offices at 131 South Frost Street (which later, through change in numbering became 231) and there I found them and their successors, in my lifetime dream, in unbroken period, until 1909, when at John T. Lewis & Bros. Company, the company found it necessary, by reason of the growth of and changes in our city, which none can mentally encompass who has not had my privilege, to move to a wonderful building of many stories in height, in the manner of the time. The name of the business had changed in 1856 to John T. Lewis & Bros. after my grandsons, and so it remained except for the addition of the word "Company," when in 1888 the custom of incorporation was followed, as provided by the Congress.

Tho now become a corporation, I saw my family still perpetuated in the business to the close of my vision, for in 1889, Edward F. Beale, my great-grandson by marriage to the daughter of John T. Lewis, and since 1880 a partner in the business, became President of the company and, in 1907, his son, Leonard T. Beale, my great-grandson, became Secretary.

In 1911 our company acquired a factory in Baltimore, Maryland, for the making of lead-burnt metals, solders and other similar metals which had come into much use in the industry.

So that when the great World War took place, of which I have set down some reference in these pages, my successors were ready to supply for their country's need not only such quantities of red-lead, white-lead and linseed oil as we never contemplated in my day, but also rabbit metals for the ships of war, which were propelled by powerful steam engines, not by wind and sail; solder for the fins of food for the armies, and innumerable things which we could not grasp. Indirectly, also our company did enable the Government to move air planes, as the great airships of which I spoke are called; and the motor trucks and cars, for the company's lead oxides were used in uncold quantities for the storage batteries which supplied the vital spark to these marvels of my countrymen's ingenuity. Shrapnel shells, used in the ammunition of the great artillery, were also supplied in unbelievable quantities.

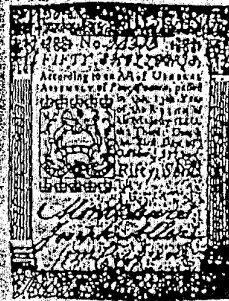
No man, methinks, could by any means come at any idea of the supplies needed in such a war, the like of which no man had seen. The demands by the Government upon my company were great and urgent, requiring the erection of additional buildings, but they were met, and for its part in winning the war, my company received from the Secretary of War an award for distinguished service in the following order:

THE WAR DEPARTMENT
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
RECOGNIZES IN THIS AWARD THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE
THE LOYALTY, ENERGY AND EFFICIENCY IN THE PERFORMANCE
OF THE WAR WORK BY WHICH
JOHN T. LEWIS & BROS. CO.
HAD MATERIALLY IN CREASING VICTORY FOR THE ARMS OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN THE WAR WITH THE IMPERIAL GERMAN
GOVERNMENT AND THE IMPERIAL AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN
GOVERNMENT.

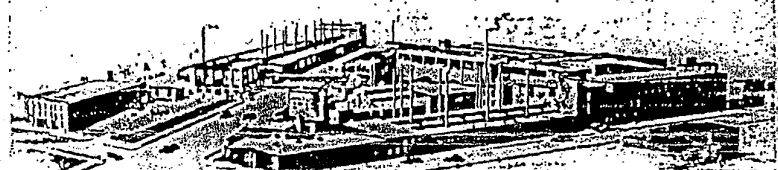
My remarkable glimpse into the future enabled me to see as far as the year of our Lord 1922 when my successors celebrated the 150th anniversary of the founding by myself of the firm of Mordecai Lewis and Company. Not a few of the events of my own life were recalled, together with those which I did not witness but which I saw plainly in my vision.

I saw special honor done to the Bank of North America, in which I opened an account in 1782, and after it had received its charter by act of the Congress, now grown strong and great, and it pleased me well to know that in this year of celebration the account of my firm and its successors had been alive throughout all that time and was known as the oldest continuous bank account in all our broad land.

I saw also one of my old bills, dated May 1, 1787, showing that I had sold to the Pennsylvania Hospital 12 cwt. of ground



Mordecai Lewis, Founder of this Company, was one of a group of about twenty employed by the Crown in the manufacture of paper currency.



The Lewis factory of today, occupying 8 1/2 acres, where White-lead, Lead Oxides, Linseed Oil and Colors are manufactured.