

# Life Stories of Cleveland Firms

## No. 5

### The Sherwin-Williams Co.

By John W. Hill

A SMALL retail store space at 118 Superior Street was the birth-place of the Sherwin-Williams Company, as far as physical beginnings go, though like many great industrial enterprises its birth really was in the brain of the man who had the original idea on which the business was founded. Henry Alden Sherwin believed that there was a market for ready-mixed paint which was properly made and the Sherwin-Williams business of today is proof of the sagacity of his idea.

Mr. Sherwin established his paint store in 1866. Associated with him were Truman Dunham and G. O. Griswold and the business was known as the Truman Dunham Company. Paints and varnishes were sold at retail. The mixing was done in a small room back of the store, where the materials were compounded and put into cans for the trade.

At the time when Mr. Sherwin first established his paint business ready-mixed paints were an innovation, not only in Cleveland but elsewhere. D. R. Ayerill of Newburgh, then a separate community, had obtained a patent on a paint which it was claimed would not settle in the package. Mr. Sherwin saw this paint and on the invitation of the inventor inspected the process of manufacture. His conclusion was that the formula being used under the patent would not produce a good paint.

At the same time he entirely agreed with Ayerill that there was a market for ready-mixed paints, though he insisted that quality manufacture was essential to the success of the business. The Ayerill paint was rather widely sold for a time, but it did not stand up, and ready-mixed paints were under suspicion.

This was the situation which confronted Mr. Sherwin when he went into business. He met it by a rigid adherence to quality standards of manufacture and for a few years the business grew slowly, but was becoming established. Then in 1870 both Mr. Dunham and Mr. Griswold decided to draw out of the business. Edward Porter Williams came in, bringing a small amount of capital which was much needed and a large amount of sales genius and enthusiasm which meant even more to the

young business than capital. This partnership was known as the Sherwin & Williams Company, and there has been little change in the name since.

The two young men, forming a partnership which was to grow into the largest business of its kind in the world,

were admirably suited to each other. Mr. Sherwin knew paints, had a keen insight into the needs of the market which he hoped to serve, and was an excellent executive, while Mr. Williams had the genial disposition and the

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"... great mills in the Sherwin-Williams plant ..."

Photograph by John Gault

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boundless enthusiasm which made him a salesman of more than ordinary ability. Both were convinced that quality must be the outstanding attribute of their merchandise if they were to build for lasting success. In 1870 Mr. S. P. Fenn came into the organization as bookkeeper, later becoming treasurer and vice president.

Under the new partnership separate manufacturing operations were undertaken. A cooper shop which stood between the Cuyahoga River and Canal Road was leased in 1873, and a small steam power plant, a second-hand grinding mill and a putty chaser installed. One workman began the actual manufacturing of paste paints, oil colors and putty. Recognition by the trade of the quality of the product was not long in coming and business began to increase to such an extent that manufacturing facilities had to be made larger.

In 1876 Mr. Sherwin began work on an improved type of mill for grinding paint. This mill was developed by the company for its own use and proved a great success. So capably did it perform that the great mills in the Sherwin-Williams plants today are changed but little in design from the one which Mr. Sherwin perfected.

Under the impetus of better manufacturing methods the business began to spread and more facilities were needed. The Canal Road property which had been under lease was purchased, together with an adjoining strip and factory additions commenced. A Chicago office was opened in 1880 and two years later the retail business in Cleveland was disposed of, the concern becoming purely a manufacturer. In 1883 the business was incorporated as the Sherwin-Williams Company.

### SOLID FOUNDATIONS

WHILE Mr. Sherwin and Mr. Williams were operating as a partnership they did a vast amount of pioneering work which set the business upon a firm foundation. With the incorporation the real era of expansion commenced, and that expansion has gone on during the nearly fifty years of its corporate life. Further extension of manufacturing facilities in Cleveland was accomplished in 1885. A New York office was established in 1887.

In 1888 manufacturing operations spread from Cleveland to Chicago. Controlling interest in the Calumet Paint Company was purchased and the Chicago plant of that company began the manufacture of Sherwin-Williams products. This small plant, first manufacturing unit of the company outside of Cleveland, is still standing and still in

use, surrounded by the great buildings which make up the present Chicago plant, which is the largest single paint and varnish plant in the world.

Acquisition of the Calumet business in Chicago, beyond marking the first expansion of manufacturing facilities beyond Cleveland confines, had another significance to the Sherwin-Williams Company, for it brought into the organization George A. Martin, who is now president of the company and was then a Calumet employee.

Established in Chicago the company spread rapidly in other directions. A Boston office, a retail establishment in Worcester, Mass., a Pacific Coast branch and a Canadian agency, under the management of Walter H. Cottingham, followed in rapid succession. In 1893 the Cleveland Box Company was organized to make the wooden shipping cases then used for shipment. In 1894 the Sherwin-Williams Company of Canada was formed, with Walter H. Cottingham as manager, and Canadian manufacturing operations started.

As sales increased distribution widened, calling for the establishment of many new warehouses and supply depots in many cities. Finally the demand proved too much for the Cleveland and Chicago manufacturing plants and in

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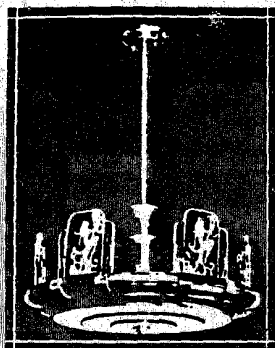
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1901 an eastern plant, at Newark, N. J., was built and put into operation. At the same time a linseed oil plant was built in Cleveland, marking the first step in the company's plans to make or control sources of all raw materials used in its products.

Mr. Williams, who was vice president and general manager of the company, died in 1903, his death ending a thirty-four-year association with Mr. Sherwin. Walter H. Cottingham was called to become vice president and showed at once that he had the organization genius to carry on the upbuilding of the company which Mr. Williams had in hand. Mines were bought in New Mexico and a zinc smelting works established in Missouri. New sales offices followed and in 1905 the purchase of Lewis Berger & Sons, a British house, gave the company not only outlets in the British possessions but the use of formulas for coach varnishes, then much in demand.

### AMERICAN DYES

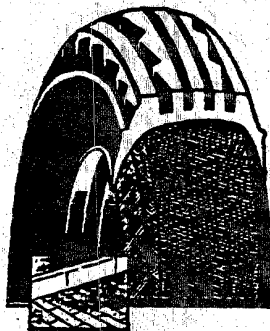
**T**HE coming of the World War in 1914 seriously affected sources of supply for paint dyes, but the Sherwin-Williams Company had been doing a great deal of research on dye manufacture and when the war shut off German supplies it was soon able to offer American dyes, not only to the paint industry but for printing inks, textiles, leather and other commodities.

In 1916 the Sherwin-Williams Company held a jubilee convention to celebrate the golden anniversary of the establishment by Mr. Sherwin of the little retail business on which all the company's far flung activities were based.

The next year the acquisition of the Martin-Senour Company of Chicago and its subsidiaries greatly widened the outlets of the Sherwin-Williams Company for its basic products. Following that purchase came those of Hemingway & Company of New York, the Detroit White Lead Works and the Acme White Lead & Color Works of Detroit.

Mr. Cottingham retired in 1922 and moved to England to make his permanent home, being succeeded by George A. Martin, who is president today. Expansion has continued under his management.

The advent of lacquer into the paint industry found the company ready with its own lacquer products which have greatly increased its business and its



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prestige. In recent years the Lowe Brothers Company of Dayton, Ohio, and John Lucas & Company of Philadelphia, with many branches, have been added to the Sherwin-Williams organization.

Sherwin-Williams manufacturing and sales units command the trade channels of the world and its advertising slogan announces that its products "cover the earth." It is an outstanding example of the manner in which Cleveland manufacturing institutions are carrying the name and the industrial reputation of the city wherever men can read and understand.

A particularly interesting feature of the Sherwin-Williams business is the extraordinarily large percentage of its product which goes over the counters of retail distributors all over the world for sale to the individual consumer. While the company has kept its full share of the rapidly expanding industrial market, it is still true that from 60 to 70 per cent. of its product passes through the hands of retailers in small lots and helps in beautifying and preserving homes and household articles all over the world, which makes the name and home city of Sherwin-Williams familiar everywhere.

The Sherwin-Williams Company has outstanding 164,226 shares of 6 per cent preferred cumulative stock of \$100 par value and 633,583 shares of common stock with par value of \$25, a total stock liability of \$32,312,175. Net profit for the fiscal year ending August 31, 1931, was \$3,222,732.92. Both preferred and common dividends for 1931 were paid and the company has a surplus of \$13,316,141.50, with current assets of \$25,769,808.53 against current liabilities of \$3,183,577.73.

#### OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS

**G**EORGE A. MARTIN is president of the company; H. D. Whittlesey, C. G. Bull, H. J. Hain and A. W. Steudel are vice presidents; L. H. Schroeder is treasurer, and T. G. Murphey is secretary. Directors are Geo. T. Bishop, C. G. Bull, W. S. Cottingham, Harris Creech, Cyrus Eaton, H. J. Hain, C. P. Jarden, D. A. Kohr, George A. Martin, Z. E. Martin, E. M. Richardson, E. T. Trigg, H. D. Whittlesey, E. M. Williams and L. W. Wolcott.

Executive offices of the company were removed a year ago from the old Canal Road building to the Midland Bank building, while the Canal Road property still houses the North Central District offices, shipping, Cleveland factory and printing plant.



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