

hat was that name again?

A tale of two young men who really painted the town



By Ronald Hambleton

IMALS have always been popular in creating corporate images—on trucks, tigers in gas tanks on Corn Flakes boxes, bulls in storage houses, lions on a movie screen or as a radiator cap, dogs in front of a phonograph speaker or on the side of a bus, and cats unrolling bathroom tissue or stamped in a rubber heel.

But when Sherwin-Williams asked a dwarf lion because that's the comparison that struck the ancient Greeks when they put a lion to it. It is ugly, inedible, and has little else but sulk in trees, occasionally flicking out a tongue to catch insects.

But when Sherwin-Williams started image-shopping in the Cleveland zoo over a century ago, they took to the chameleon because it came in a wide range of colorator colors, and color is what they were selling. And to make the customer made the connection, they mounted the chameleon on a painter's palette. That was their first logo.

The message was particularly important back in the 1870s, for Henry Alden Sherwin and Edward Porter Williams were setting out to change the buying habits of the nation.

Before SWP (the chameleon later gave way to initials) it was the custom for stores to sell the ingredients—pigment, white lead, and oil—which the buyer would mix up when he got back to the job. After SWP came the era of the ready-mixed paint.

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That's not to say nobody had ever before sold a can of paint of a certain color, but it fell to Sherwin and Williams to make a habit of it, when they mixed their special talents in this new approach to the merchandising of paint.

It's strange that these two men ever joined forces, for they came from such widely different backgrounds.

Williams, born in 1842, was the son of a Cleveland banker, while Sherwin, a year older, came from a working-class family in the small Vermont town of Baltimore. One source says he moved there with

partnership, but he refused on the moral ground that the grocery store sold liquor, and then quit to go into the paint business with a friend named Truman Dunham.

Later in life, Sherwin listed his capital: Good health, the inheritance from poor but honest parents, ambition, a few years' working experience, and \$2,000 cash in a savings bank.

Though Williams had not yet come into it, that firm, established in 1866 as Truman Dunham & Co., is taken as the beginning of The Sherwin-Williams Company of today.

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his parents when his father was offered a good job with the U.S. Customs. But a history of Cleveland says he went there on the advice of his uncle Nelson, a Cleveland lawyer, who told him "the city was a good place to grow up in." In 1860, the population of Cleveland was about 90,000.

Young Sherwin, then aged 18, had already been earning his own living since he turned 13. As a clerk in a general store in Springfield, Vt., he slept above the store in an attic so leaky that snow would blow in on him as he lay sleeping on his cot.

New in a strange town, he naturally turned to clerking, the work he knew best. In the next six years, he clerked first in a dry-goods store, where he was so good at spotting "wildcat" or bogus money, he was made cashier; then became the bookkeeper in a wholesale grocery. He was offered a

their "little storeroom on Superior Street" sold paint supplies and linseed oil, but Sherwin, more thorough than his partner, went into every aspect of the business. He worked in the shop, packing, carting, stocktaking, and at night pored over books and catalogues.

"Some day," he said, "we're going to manufacture paints."

The partnership ended after three years. Dunham took over linseed oil, while Sherwin looked around for a new partner in paint.

It's a mystery how Sherwin and Williams ever met. Though Williams had been born in Cleveland, he had been away from home for years. He went to University in Hudson, Ohio, and after graduation, enlisted in the infantry for service in the American civil war. Wounded at Vicksburg, Miss., he was invalidated back home, but after the war he went into the glass business in a small town near Akron.

Since both glass and paint are building materials, maybe they met over some supply counter; but somehow they got to know each other well enough to enter into a partnership in February, 1870, under the name Sherwin-Williams & Co.

They started out as retailers, with Sherwin the paint expert, and Williams the born salesman, but the following year they organized a separate manufacturing company, which by 1873 was producing 450,000 pounds of paint, oil colors, putty and 83 different paint formulas.

Their factory was a small cooperative shop beside the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, which they bought from Standard Oil in 1873. They installed a boiler, an engine, a mixer, a second-hand stone mill, and a putty chaser; and hired a veteran Irish paint-maker from New York as foreman.

Six years later, they opened a branch plant in Chicago, the first step in a widening distribution system, and were ready to start production of prepared or ready-mixed paints.

The public didn't trust most paints in those days. They used to say: "Chalk and water, and let the public beware." Sherwin finally came up with a mill to grind the pigments fine enough to remain in suspension with the oil, and the first SWP can—"Shade K"—came out in 1880, carrying a guarantee "not to crack, flake or chalk off," and to "work better, wear better and permanently look better."

The chameleon carried the Sherwin-Williams message for more than 25 years (it was also the name of their house-organ) until it was replaced in 1905 by a can marked SWP spilling its contents over the globe with the slogan "Cover The Earth."

That symbol, promoted by Walter Cottingham, who took over as president from Sherwin in 1909 (Williams died in 1903), was based on a rough sketch by their advertising manager.

Sherwin characteristically thought the symbol was not quite honest, since the company wasn't doing worldwide business at the time. But Cottingham said, in effect: "So what? Put up the sketch and we'll make it come true."

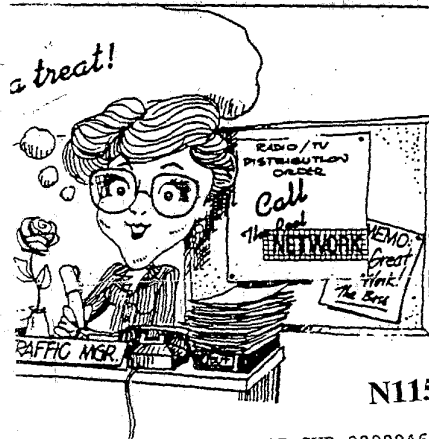
Growth was obviously in the wind, because that same year they acquired a factory to process lead and zinc, the first of a stream of subsidiaries, including white lead works, varnish makers, paint plants, brush makers, aerosol processors, both on this continent and abroad.

Today, they have net sales of over \$1.2 billion from five groups labelled Coatings, Packaging Products, Specialty Products, International Coatings and the 75%-owned Canadian subsidiary.

So what do they do when they finally do "cover the earth"? They dropped it as they dropped the chameleon, and changed the corporate image to the linked names of the two founders.

Which is where it all started anyway.

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Bid to go MOR is denied

ABID by CKDS-FM, Hamilton, Ont., to switch formats from easy-listening to middle-of-the-road (MOR) has been denied by the Canadian Radio-television and

vocal and 42% were instrumental. The maximum level for vocal selections is 50%.

A subsequent study in January 1985, carried out over one week showed that MOR was still a