



West Virginia Historical Society

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ARMSTRONG DISMISSED AT
ARCHIVES AND HISTORY

The Marietta Manufacturing
Company
By
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Fred Armstrong, Secretary of the West Virginia Historical Society was abruptly dismissed from his position as Director of the Department of Archives and History on October 31, 2007. Commissioner of Culture and History, Randall Reid-Smith refused to cite a reason for his dismissal. Fred had been Director of the Department for over 20 years and was known to practically everyone involved in any facet of West Virginia history for his dedication to his job and his keen interest in ensuring that the state's written and cultural heritage was preserved. Speculation is that Fred's termination was due to his opposition to the Manchin administration plan to turn the existing Archives library into a cafeteria to serve anticipated visitors to the state museum when it is finally reopened.

Since he left office, the Charleston newspapers have published numerous letters to the editor, editorials and op ed pieces all of which have lauded Fred for his work and to express appreciation for his service to the state. The West Virginia Historical Society stands firmly behind Fred and has added its voice to the others raised on his behalf.

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What seems to be but a graveyard containing the skeletons of some rather large buildings was at one time one of the country's greatest shipyards. The most intriguing part of it all is that ocean going vessels were made on the Ohio River at an inland site located in the north end of Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Though small in overall size the Marietta Manufacturing Company, originally involved in stove making, took advantage of a land offer from the small river community and transformed itself into a highly successful shipyard that made major contributions to ship building as well as the local economy. MMC was not only the company's initials but also the acronym for its motto "Made Mechanically Correct".¹ This was one of the most highly known mottos that rang throughout the Mississippi Valley and covered a lot of other western rivers.

Point Pleasant had not always been the company's home and it had not always been a shipyard. This small but strong company deviated from conventional business wisdom. Its' story involves stoves, floods, and a literal trip down the river, but through all of this

turmoil a successful business emerged. This company did its part to improve ship building standards, as well as being the site of the first successful side-ways launching of a water craft. It also pioneered in the carbon black process.²

Founded in 1852, at Beverly, Ohio, Marietta Manufacturing got its start as the W.F. Robertson & Sons Company. The company was a partnership engaged in the making of stoves, capstans, and other steam boat related equipment.³ W.F. Robertson & Sons operated at its Beverly facility for eighteen years, when a fire decimated the site. At this point the company chose to move the operation to Marietta, Ohio.⁴

Things went well for W.F. Robertson & Sons after their start up at the Marietta site in 1881. The company was back to business as usual, setting the standard level of product that remained throughout company history. In 1892 the Robertson's decided that it was time to sell their interest in the company. This opportunity was seized by three men, Alla Windsor, J.D. Lashley, and James H. McConnell, who bought the stock and organized the Marietta Manufacturing Company. The founders of Marietta Manufacturing successfully acquired an Ohio charter of business that same year.⁵

The stock-holders chose Alla Windsor as the first president of the Marietta Manufacturing Company. Production continued as it had when it was W.F. Robertson & Sons and the same products - stove, capstans, and steam boat equipment were produced. A. Windsor headed the company from the time it got its charter until his death in 1911. At that time his son Walter Augustus Windsor, who was a law student at Harvard, returned to run the company.⁶ Walter, twenty-seven years of age in 1911, did not fit the typical profile of a manufacturing company president.⁷

However, Walter Windsor proved fit for the job and production continued at an efficient rate through 1912. Everything seemed to go his way until Mother Nature interfered. In 1913 the Ohio Valley experienced one of the most devastating floods in its history. The flood destroyed much of Marietta

Manufacturing's riverside facility and forced Windsor to declare bankruptcy. This seemed the best option at the time, because it would take a tremendous amount of capital to get the company running again.⁸

That same flood also took a heavy toll on the river city of Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Many influential city officials and businessmen were concerned about getting the town's economy back on track. They decided to recruit businesses to come and establish themselves in their town. One citizen especially instrumental in this process was J. Samuel Spencer whose search lead him to find Marietta Manufacturing. He approached Mr. Windsor and made a pretty appealing offer.⁹

The proposition that had been presented to Windsor was hard to refuse. The decision to leave his home town was one that Windsor, despite being bankrupt, was not eager to make. By the time he arrived in Point Pleasant, December 16th 1915, the company had already received a certificate of incorporation from the Secretary of State of West Virginia but physical production did not start at this site until 1916.¹⁰

Marietta Manufacturing had all the resources necessary to establish itself in Point Pleasant. The company did this by attaining its certificate of incorporation, establishing a capital stock of \$100,000 issued at one hundred dollars per share, and by receiving a prime piece of land to develop.¹¹

Before physical production could be conducted at the Point Pleasant site, the bylaws adhering to West Virginia's standards had to be written. These bylaws made it clear that there was to be an annual meeting of the stock holders, set in February, to determine and discuss the business of the previous and proceeding years. For the stock-holders' meetings to be valid there had to be a majority, or owners of fifty-one percent of the stock present. Stock-holders meetings were not the only important meetings laid out by the bylaws. The by laws had a provision called for the establishment of a board of directors. Anyone could have been chosen to be on this board, but the positions were primarily filled by stock-holders.¹² Once the business had been

established, the company proceeded to develop its land for production.

The land attained for the site of the Marietta Manufacturing plant was a well known Ohio River tract called "The Heights". Consisting of forty-two acres, it was named appropriately because it was one of the highest sections of land in that particular stretch of water and consisted of forty-two acres. This site had also been the old Sterret homestead, so the development of this quality land would appear to be relatively easy. The first building that was established at the company's new site was the foundry building and, shortly after, a machine shop.¹³

In the years proceeding the flood of 1913, the company had created an excellent foundry. Most of the machinery that was readily available and economical, for the new plant, was that which was salvaged from the old plant. These machines were floated down the river to the new plant and two more were added to them in the pre-production period in the fall of 1916. Windsor's opinion of his machines was that they would be capable of doing the job in the same amount and at the same standard as he had done business before. This opinion was in error because business had accelerated upon the company's arrival at Point Pleasant. Some business request signaled to it being time for the company to expand its plant and build larger facilities.¹⁴

Walter Windsor's attention shifted from the production of stoves, boiler feeds, and capstans to a much broader base. The first major move made by Windsor as to personnel expansion came by trying to entice Charles Oliver Weissenburger, employed at the time by the Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company to take interest and buy stock in Marietta Manufacturing.¹⁵ Referred to by his friends as C.O., this proved to be a beneficial move and he took over a vacancy that had been left on the Board of Directors, by the departure of John J. Dower. Weissenburger also absorbed the stock which Mr. Dower had held. Windsor was particularly proud of having hired Weissenburger who proved to be one of the most important additions to the company in 1917-1918.¹⁶

Another important personnel addition was the hiring of E.H. Holmes to the position of Chief Engineer. Holmes was a mechanical engineering graduate of Stockholm University. Holmes, previous to his employment by Marietta Manufacturing, had been a design engineer at Nordberg Manufacturing Company and at one point first assistant to Nordberg, the company head. The connection with the latter proved to be the main reason to hire him. The training that E.H. Holmes acquired during his work for Nordberg more than likely came in the way of steam engines, due to that fact that in the early 1900's Mr. Nordberg had been noted as one of the best steam engineers in the world.¹⁷

There were other new employees, especially two superintendents. The first, Mr. S. J. Struben, supervised the plate shop. Struben proved to be well educated and experienced in this field, a key reason for his hiring. The second, George H. Overholt, supervised the machine shop. He, like C.O. Weissenburger, had been a previous employee of Youngstown Sheet and Tube Company. His position there was similar to the one he took in Point Pleasant. In Youngstown, he had five shops under his watch and he made a great impact on the improvement of production at the rapidly expanding Point Pleasant plant.¹⁸

The company's rapid growth did not stop with personnel. There were major purchases made in the way of machinery. Many on the board of directors including Windsor felt the company was not efficient and that replacing the machinery, especially in the machine shop, would be a way to increase capital. The only draw back was that the company's means were limited. Nonetheless, those in charge managed to buy the new machinery. They decided that with the business they were currently conducting, the new machines could pay for themselves during busy times. Another improvement that the new machinery for the machine shop brought was electrification of all equipment. The foundry building also received a brass furnace, electric perforator, and tumblers. All of these steps had laid the foundations for ship building.¹⁹

As far as the building of river craft

was concerned, the first major step toward ship production or anything similar occurred in 1918. While the company had been producing boilers, something that was new to the company after arrival in Point Pleasant, the thought of venturing into the ship building business had never been in the picture. The three years between arriving in Point Pleasant and the securing of a contract to build steel hulls for ships was a relatively short, but was something that Windsor and his excellent staff met. After the contract had been secured the plant facility grew again. The growth came in the way of the addition of a plate shop. This shop would be a substantially large building measuring 100 feet in length and 300 feet in width. It had a lean-to structure that housed a power plant.²⁰

Another building constructed during this incredibly short time was the mold loft. This 40 feet wide and 208 feet long building, that had a finely crafted maple floor, would be where the ship hulls would be drawn. The blue prints were drawn onto the maple floor to full scale to ensure that everything in the drawing would work once production began. The mold loft was connected to the plate shop, and the rest of the plant, by a set of tracks. Tracking the facility gave a certain ease into keeping production somewhat regulated. Track-cranes atop the tracks were for transporting materials from shop to shop as needed based on the stage of production.²¹

The main focus of the company throughout World War I was engine production. Four 150,000 pound, 1400 horsepower triple expansion engines were what the company was most proud of.²² This was because no other engine manufacturing company in any magnitude had secured any business of that type during the war. The only other firms that could come anywhere close to meeting something of that same magnitude would have been much larger and more extensive than the small, but growing plant in Point Pleasant.²³

The whirl wind pace that the plant had been conducting paid dividends in the fall of 1919 when the company successfully attained a contract for the building of four powerful river craft.²⁴ The contract came from the United

States Railroad which planned to use them on the lower Mississippi River.²⁵ Ship building was stymied at this time because of the major focus in facility build up. The government however remained flexible and had full faith in the Point Pleasant plant. Another part of the contract called for the production of twelve triple expansion engines, all of which would be the most powerful that had ever been used on the Mississippi River system.²⁶

That following summer the company achieved another benchmark. A joint contract with a Minnesota shipyard, for the Upper Mississippi River Fleet, made it evident that their engine production had been getting national attention. The particular engines required to meet this contract would drive the most powerful stern wheel river boats of the era. This, a spectacular feat, was coupled with the fact that the contract let for this endeavor made the record books as the second largest one let in its time period for any ship on the Mississippi.²⁷

For a stove making company Marietta Manufacturing seemed to have adapted rather well to ship building. At one point they held every record the Mississippi River System compiled. Some of these records consisted of the highest, and also the previously mentioned second highest, contracts ever let for any self-propelled river craft. The company had also produced the largest and most expansive barge ever for those particular waters. All totaled Marietta Manufacturing held eleven different records that had been complied for the river system of the Mississippi.²⁸

Ship building was not the only business Windsor had taken on, but it was probably his most prolific thing. The other business the Marietta Manufacturing engaged in was the production of carbon black.²⁹ Carbon black was especially important in early days as now in the production of tires and many other industries, plastic in particular. Marietta Manufacturing was a pioneer in the production of carbon black particularly that of the channel method of production. Substantial amounts of the carbon black business were done on an international market, Russia being the most prominent while some went to the Orient. The company saw to it that a

representative went to these countries whenever a new carbon black producing station had been erected to show them how to use the equipment properly. Production of this material continued throughout the expansion into the shipping industry and remained an interest of the company for many of the following years.³⁰

Due to the rapid pace at which personnel had been hired and new contracts were being received, the board of directors appropriately decided in 1920 to increase its capital stock by an additional \$100,000. This unprecedented move had ultimately been brought on by the surprising increase in production. Increasing the stock had other much broader implications as well. Windsor and his staff felt the increase was a necessity not just for plant expansion, but for the securing of some of the larger security bonds the company would need as it moved into the full production of ships and expanded its carbon black business.³¹

Surprisingly, despite the growing amount of revenue generated, the company did its banking with two relatively small banks. These banks were the First National Bank of Marietta and the Merchants National Bank at Point Pleasant. The remarkable thing is that the combined credit of the two banks totaled a mere seventy thousand dollars. However, this did not stop Marietta Manufacturing from having receivable accounts between four and five hundred thousand dollars.³² It proved necessary for the company to have and continue to have accounts with large receivable amounts due to the tremendous size of the contracts they dealt with

It is quite impressive that it was one of the smallest plants conducting that type of business in America. The \$200,000 of capital invested had a turnover of \$1.8 million between the years of 1919 and 1920.³³ These numbers were comparable to any large manufacturing facility, but would never have been foreseeable by anyone in the business world. This company's financing was extraordinary, even though most of the country's economy was facing hard times. In 1921, the company had a monthly pay roll of fifty thousand dollars.³⁴ That totaled a yearly employee payout of

\$600,000. The executive side for the company received \$32,000 of that. The president, vice-president and treasurer of the company were paid twelve thousand and ten thousand dollars a year respectively. The remaining \$568,000 was divided among the laborers. That kind of pay for general laborers made a MMC job highly sought after. Business went well for Marietta Manufacturing even in these early years.³⁵

Even with today's modern technology it is hard to believe that any company of this magnitude could expand like Marietta Manufacturing did. To make the transition from machining stoves and engine parts to the production of ships in a matter of three years is a statistic that seems improbable. The great minds that led Marietta Manufacturing saw this as not that big of a deal. It could solely have come due to their age or from the amount that most of them personally had invested. Most of the top investors would have their earnings reinvested in the business so that it could continue to function at the rate it was. These investors' patience would be rewarded whenever the company had a satisfactory working capital, fewer banking restrictions, and had become a more rounded business.³⁶ It goes to say that much personal sacrifice had been made in order to make the company work.

While it small, for a shipyard, in physical appearance the Marietta Manufacturing Company within a few short years of its incorporation at Point Pleasant, West Virginia had put its name amongst the giants of the ship building industry. The company had a plethora of business ventures going its way as it steamed forward into the roaring 20's. The most important asset for the company had been a firm business foundation, because it seemed highly unlikely that the plant would continue expansion that the pace seen throughout the first four years it had been in West Virginia. And with a growing number of ships bearing the MMC logo on them patrolling the waters of the Mississippi the potential of this company seemed to be endless. Had it not been for those first four years and some luck in opportunity the history of Marietta Manufacturing, which conducted business under that name until the 1970's,

could have been vastly different.

¹ "Boat Building Marietta Manufacturing Company Point Pleasant, West Virginia" in The History of Marietta Manufacturing Co. Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Compiled By Captain Charles H. Stone 125.

² Ibid. 125

³ A capstan is a mechanical device primarily used on board ships or in ship yards to move heavy weights by rope, cable, or chain. It is usually made up of a drum, in which the chain, rope, or cable is wrapped, and is driven either manually or by steam. At the base plate there is a ratchet mechanism that prevents it from unwinding. The amount of grip the capstan has depends on how many times the line is wrapped around the drum. The New Encyclopedia Britannica, volume 2, page 837.

⁴ "Marietta Manufacturing Company, Point Pleasant, West Virginia-1930" in The History of Marietta Manufacturing Co. Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Compiled by Captain Charles H. Stone, 7.

⁵ Ibid. 7

⁶ "Account of the Career and Death of Walter A. Windsor. From the Register of Point Pleasant." from The Waterways Journal, in The History of Marietta Manufacturing Co. Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Compiled by Captain Charles H. Stone. 10

⁷ "Marietta Manufacturing Company, Point Pleasant, West Virginia-1930" 7

⁸ Ibid. 7.

⁹ "Boat Building Marietta Manufacturing Company Point Pleasant, West Virginia", 125.

¹⁰ "Annual Meeting of the Stockholders of Marietta Manufacturing." December 30, 1915. from the Marietta Manufacturing Records, Collection#742 (unprocessed), J. Y. Joyner Library, Special Collections Department, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, USA.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bylaws of the Marietta Manufacturing Company. from the Marietta Manufacturing Records, Collection#742 (unprocessed), J. Y. Joyner Library, Special Collections Department, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, USA.

¹³ "Boat Building Marietta Manufacturing Company Point Pleasant, West Virginia" 125

¹⁴ Windsor, Walter A. "Report to stockholders and directors of Marietta Manufacturing Company upon the activities of the company from the time of its incorporation down to the first day of January, 1921,..." Annual Meeting of the Stockholders of Marietta Manufacturing Company. February 26, 1921. from the Marietta Manufacturing Records, Collection#742 (unprocessed), J. Y. Joyner Library, Special Collections Department, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC, USA. p. 2.

¹⁵ Ibid., 2.

¹⁶ Ibid., 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹ Ibid., 3.

²² A triple expansion engine, sometimes called a multiple expansion engine, is one that consists of three self-acting and differently sized (diameter) cylinders. The engine worked in stages that helped to generate significant power. These stages start at the smallest cylinder in which the steam pushes it down; on the upward movement of the cylinder the steam is pushed into the second cylinder where the action starts over again. This process repeats it's self through all three cylinders. The exhaust, while cutting down on the amount of horse powers is a recycling type that serves to replenish the water system needed to make steam. The development of this type of motor proved to be highly beneficial to the steam ship. Information attained from the encyclopedia part of Dictionary.com. Windsor, Walter A., 4.

²³ Windsor., 4.

²⁴ [No Author], "Boat Building Marietta Manufacturing Company Point Pleasant, West Virginia", p 126.

²⁵ Windsor, Walter A., 4.

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

²⁷ Ibid. 5.

²⁸ Ibid. 5.

²⁹ **carbon black:** *noun:* any of a various colloidal black substances consisting wholly or principally of carbon obtained usually as soot and used especially in tires and as pigments. Merriam-Webster OnLine.

³⁰ New Encyclopedia Britannica, The., 850.,
 “Boat Building Marietta Manufacturing
 Company Point Pleasant, West Virginia”, 126.

³¹ Windsor, Walter A., 3.

³² Ibid., 5.

³³ Ibid.,6., Turn over deals with the number of
 shares sold in a repeat fashion over a specific
 period of time. Dictionary.com.

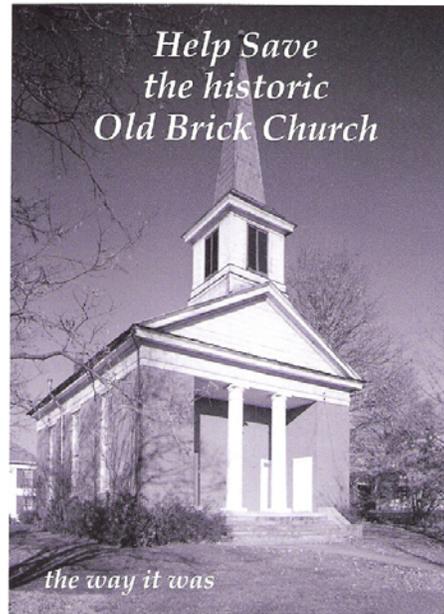
³⁴ Ibid., 6.

³⁵ “Annual Meeting of the Stockholders of
 Marietta Manufacturing. February 28th, 1920.”
 from the Marietta Manufacturing Records,
 Collection#742 (unprocessed), J. Y. Joyner
 Library, Special Collections Department, East
 Carolina University, Greenville, NC, USA.

³⁶ Windsor, Walter A., p. 6.

The Monroe County Historical Society has issued an urgent plea for contributions to help save the Historic Old Brick Church (seen to the right). The church was severely damaged in a storm in 2006. The Society has sought and received funding from the State Historic Preservation Office but those funds are not sufficient to repair all the damage. Contributions may be sent to

**Monroe County
 Historical Society
 P. O. Box 465
 Union, WV 24983**



*a plea for support
 from the
 Monroe County
 Historical Society*