

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, May 21, 2007

**A Minerva Automobile and the Wrights of Newark:** At Winterthur on May 12, I was treated to observe an outstanding Belgian Minerva of about 1932, which brought to mind another Minerva story. A few of these huge and expensive cars made in Antwerp were imported to the U.S. in the period between the two World Wars. Also, I think the Queen of Belgium was killed in one about 1935, when King Leopold ran off a Swiss highway and upset.

Pilling and Ernest Wright ran the Continental Diamond Fibre Company of Newark, which had been started by their grandfather and greatly expanded by their father, Samuel. Samuel Wright and Israel Marshall were keen competitors but the best of friends. They often bailed each other out when mechanical breakdowns at their respective mills might threaten their manufacturing operations. Probably in the early 1920s, Pilling and Ernest built elaborate homes on the east side of Orchard Road in Newark, across a side street from one another. Pilling's former home is now the Blue and Gold Club; Ernest's is the President's House for the University of Delaware.

About 1930, Pilling bought a Minerva seven-passenger sedan or limousine, always driven by a chauffeur. Tiring of this 150-inch wheelbase giant that had cost about \$16,000, he traded it in to Frank Diver in 1934 for a new Packard Twelve seven-passenger limousine (my father bought a similar car a few months later). The new Packard cost Pilling Wright about \$4,500, and I doubt that Mr. Diver allowed him more than \$500 on the Minerva. Thinking that my father might have an interest, it was arranged for him to go to Wright's home in Newark to see the Belgian car, just before he turned it in. I accompanied my dad. I was impressed by the size, but its boxy appearance seemed outdated and unattractive. My father did not want to take it on, either. Eventually, Frank Diver sold the car to a captain from Fort DuPont at Delaware City who paid \$75. I have visited the Blue and Gold several times in recent years, but there has not been a Minerva or a Packard in the driveway.