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Rascob, Robinson, and Duffy: When the DuPont Company was 100 years old in 1902, with gunpowder as its main product, it almost passed out of family control. Sensing what was about to happen, three du Pont cousins, still in their 30s, took the “bull by the horns” and set out to save the company, not only for the family but for competition in the 20th century. The result was the giant chemical company based in Wilmington, which was recognized for excellence around the world.

T. Coleman du Pont (1863-1930) became president. His cousin, Alfred I. du Pont (1865-1935) was active in the triumvirate until he fell out with the other two and dropped out of company management before 1915. The third cousin was Pierre S. du Pont (1870-1954), builder of Longwood Gardens. John J. Rascob (1879-1950), a financier of no equal, was brought to Wilmington and wisely advised Pierre in many areas. The most important was probably DuPont's acquisition of General Motors and second but more spectacular, the building of the Empire State Building in New York in 1930-31. Rascob, a devout Catholic, built his estate along the Delaware River near Claymont, and here he and his wife raised 12 children. His brother, William Rascob, built a fine home on Kennett Pike near the south end of Montchanin Road. This property later became the home office and laboratory of Columbia Gas Company.

“Cap” Robinson owned a historic property, originally an 18th-century inn, on Naamans Road where it intersects with Philadelphia Pike on the north side of Claymont and about one mile from the Rascob estate. No doubt his son, Charles A. Robinson, knew the Rascob family well, and at the proper time, he married Josephine Rascob. However, when Charlie was a teenager, Cap Robinson moved to a large property at Kaolin, on Gap-Newport Pike just north of the Pennsylvania state line. From here, Charlie walked to Southwood Station on the Landenberg Branch of the B & O Railroad and rode the train to attend school in Wilmington. Their former home near Claymont was operated for many years as the Naamans Tea House and served very good meals. In the early 1930s, with his large family grown, John Rascob donated his spacious property to the Catholic Diocese, and it became Archmere Academy, still going strong.

Charlie and Jo Robinson built a new home on the Kaolin property, previously owned by Charlie's father. Here they raised 6 or 7 children of their own and adopted that many more. Charlie pursued a career in banking, and during the years I knew him best, he was senior vice president of the Delaware Trust Company, the “bank where people make the difference.” There was never a finer man than Charlie Robinson. Although he had become a Catholic when he and Jo were married, during Easter week, he could be seen during lunch hour at services of many Protestant churches in Wilmington. When our Holiday Inn near Newark was struggling financially in its initial years, we borrowed a substantial amount from Delaware Trust Company. As we started to prosper and pay off the loan, we would always receive a handwritten note from the senior vice president (Charlie Robinson), telling us how pleased he was that we were doing well. When my father died in 1969, I got another handwritten note telling me how much he appreciated my father's help when he was getting into banking. The Robinson property at Kaolin, famous for its July 4th fireworks during and after the Robinsons' tenure, is now the Hartefeld Country Club.

William Duffy Jr., born about 1920, married possibly the youngest of the Rascob girls. Bill Duffy, a young lawyer, was selected as “Young Man of the Year” by the Wilmington JayCees in 1951, mostly for his philanthropic work. My good friend Lindsay Greenplate was chairman of the luncheon in the Gold Ballroom of the Hotel du Pont to commemorate the occasion, and he asked me to help him with arrangements. Through our well-known Senator John J. Williams (the “watch dog of the Senate”), the Senate's minority leader, William F. Knowland of California, agreed to be our luncheon speaker. I was driving a 1940 Packard 8-passenger sedan (that had been owned by Undertaker William S. Worrall of Kennett Square), and we went to the Pennsylvania Railroad station to pick up our important guests, as they had taken the train from Washington.

In later years, I got to know Bill Duffy, as he and his wife moved to a property they had bought on Mill Creek Road south of Hockessin, and he became a judge on the Superior Court of New Castle County. He heard many of the cases where Wilmington property was condemned to build I-95 through the city. Duffy almost became one of the shareholders in our Holiday Inn at Talleyville but thought better of it. He and his family rode one of the first revived Wilmington & Western trains to Hockessin in 1967. The Duffys eventually gave their Hockessin property to the Catholic Diocese, and it became a retreat.