

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 19, 2018

Israel W. Marshall (1850-1911): I have written about many relatives, but I realize I have not done a biography on my grandfather, who was the patriarch of our branch of the Marshall family for 25 years. He died at the age of 60, 13 years before I was born, and in recent years, I have regretted that I did not ask more questions about him when his children were alive to recall.

From the expansion of the family business from paper manufacturing to vulcanized fiber, and from the many patents he obtained along the way (thanks to Bob Wilhelm), I assume he was quite mechanical, which trait was certainly passed down to my father. He and his younger brother T. Elwood Marshall (1855-1929) recognized the business ability of Israel's eldest son Warren, and when the National Fibre and Insulation Company was founded in 1904, they made Warren, then barely 23, its president. Warren held this position nearly 50 years, until his death in 1953. However, Israel was disappointed in Warren's mechanical ability, and, with the coming of automobiles, he said, "Bertha may learn to drive, but Warren never will." Bertha was Warren's new wife.

Israel Way Marshall was born in the old Marshall homestead at Marshall's Bridge, the eldest child of Thomas S. Marshall (1818-1887) and Mary Way Marshall (1821-1917). In addition to Elwood, he had one sister, Mary (1852-1932), who married Dr. Taylor S. Mitchell, a family doctor in Hockessin. This story was passed down from 1863, when Israel was 12. It seems the rumble and distant "boom" that was heard at Marshall's Bridge was from the cannon-fire at the Battle of Gettysburg, nearly 100 miles away. Perhaps the next year, Israel was enrolled, along with his first cousin Marshall "Marsh" Hannum, at the Eaton Academy on West State Street in Kennett Square. Marsh's mother was a sister of Thomas S. Marshall, and the Hannums lived near Five Points, much closer to the academy than Marshall's Bridge. Israel boarded with the Hannums, walking home on weekends. One winter night in 1865-66, the paper mill at Marshall's Bridge caught fire, and Israel and "Marsh," both 15, ran the two miles to inspect the damage. The mill was destroyed, but Thomas rebuilt it as a state-of-the-art paper mill of 1866.

When Israel was about 18, he fell from the roof of the paper mill and injured one of his kidneys. This damaged kidney, which would sometimes become infected, plagued him for the remainder of his life and caused his early death. He and his brother both liked the paper business, however, and in the 1870s, the company was known as Thomas S. Marshall and Sons. When Israel married Elizabeth C. Mitchell in 1877, a frame addition was attached to the old farmhouse (built in 1767), and shortly after Elwood married Ella Good in 1880, a fine Victorian frame house was built on the hill above the old homestead.

Thomas Marshall died in 1887 after a fall at the mill. His two boys looked to expand their paper business, and in 1889, the old Clark woolen mill at Yorklyn was on the market following the death of William Clark. Clark's son-in-law, S. Franklin Ewart (pronounced "Yoort"), helped the Marshalls buy the property, and he became a temporary partner in Marshall Brothers and Ewart. Five large houses came with the 100-plus-acre mill property, along with the water rights of Red Clay Creek, which included a dam nearly 1/2 mile upstream, and the mill race from there to the mill. In 1890, Israel moved his wife and three children from Marshall's Bridge to the large "farmhouse" on their new property, the oldest section of which dated from 1760. Although the move was just one mile, it entailed moving from Pennsylvania to Delaware. The Yorklyn mill was upgraded, and new steam machinery was installed. John Bengé, who came from New Market, Virginia, to work at Marshall's Bridge, was also moved to Yorklyn and given another large stone house across the creek to raise his growing family. Elwood stayed behind and operated the Homestead Mill at Marshall's Bridge, all under the one paper company.

As the paper business flourished in the 1890s, there were dwelling units for 11 families adjacent to the mill, in addition to the big houses occupied by the Bengé and Marshall families. A large barn near the mill race served all. In 1895, a new brick office building was built in the complex (this building, which served as the Marshall

Brothers superintendent's office until the mill closed in 2008, has been rebuilt and now serves as the office for the Auburn Valley State Park).

In 1896-97, Israel built a large stone mansion on the hill above the paper mill, which was named Auburn Heights. The family moved up the hill into their new home. In 1902, an appropriate stable and carriage house was built behind the mansion. The grey granite for all these buildings was quarried on family property near the Pennsylvania-Delaware state line.

Despite Israel's troublesome kidney, the last 10 years of his life were full of business accomplishments. The mill was selling all its paper to the vulcanized fiber industry in the Wilmington-Newark area. When the Marshalls' best customer built his own paper mill, Israel and Elwood decided to enter the vulcanized fiber business themselves, and the "Insulite" mill, built next to the paper mill in 1900-01, housed the first fiber machine in Yorklyn. This was obviously going to be a very profitable venture, and the location was outgrown almost immediately. A large farm near the railroad in Yorklyn was purchased, and the Number One fiber mill was erected in 1904-5 across the track from the B & O Railroad station. During this time, Israel was obtaining many patents on improved methods for the manufacture of vulcanized fiber, and construction of the "big mill" was begun near the railroad in 1910. He died before the big mill was completed in 1912.

At this time, however, Israel's two sons, Warren and Clarence, and Elwood's two sons, Albert and Henry, were all deeply involved in the business. An earlier Weekly News story was entitled "The Marshall Boys in 1912." Israel was quite ill at times and then would be feeling better and be back in full charge of his company. When his son Warren was married in the front hall of Auburn Heights in 1907, Israel was too ill upstairs to attend the wedding. In the summer of 1910, he spent several weeks at the Mansion House at Poland Spring, Maine, drinking lots of Poland water to help his kidney. Roy Bengel told me he remembered my grandfather as being large around the waist, but that didn't show in any of his posed photographs. The Mancill family told me he had a drinking problem, but I have deduced that he probably took some brandy or hard liquor to alleviate the kidney pain. In any event, all this did not hamper his monumental accomplishments. I wish I had known my grandfather. He would have been disappointed in my mechanical ability, but we would have gotten along well.