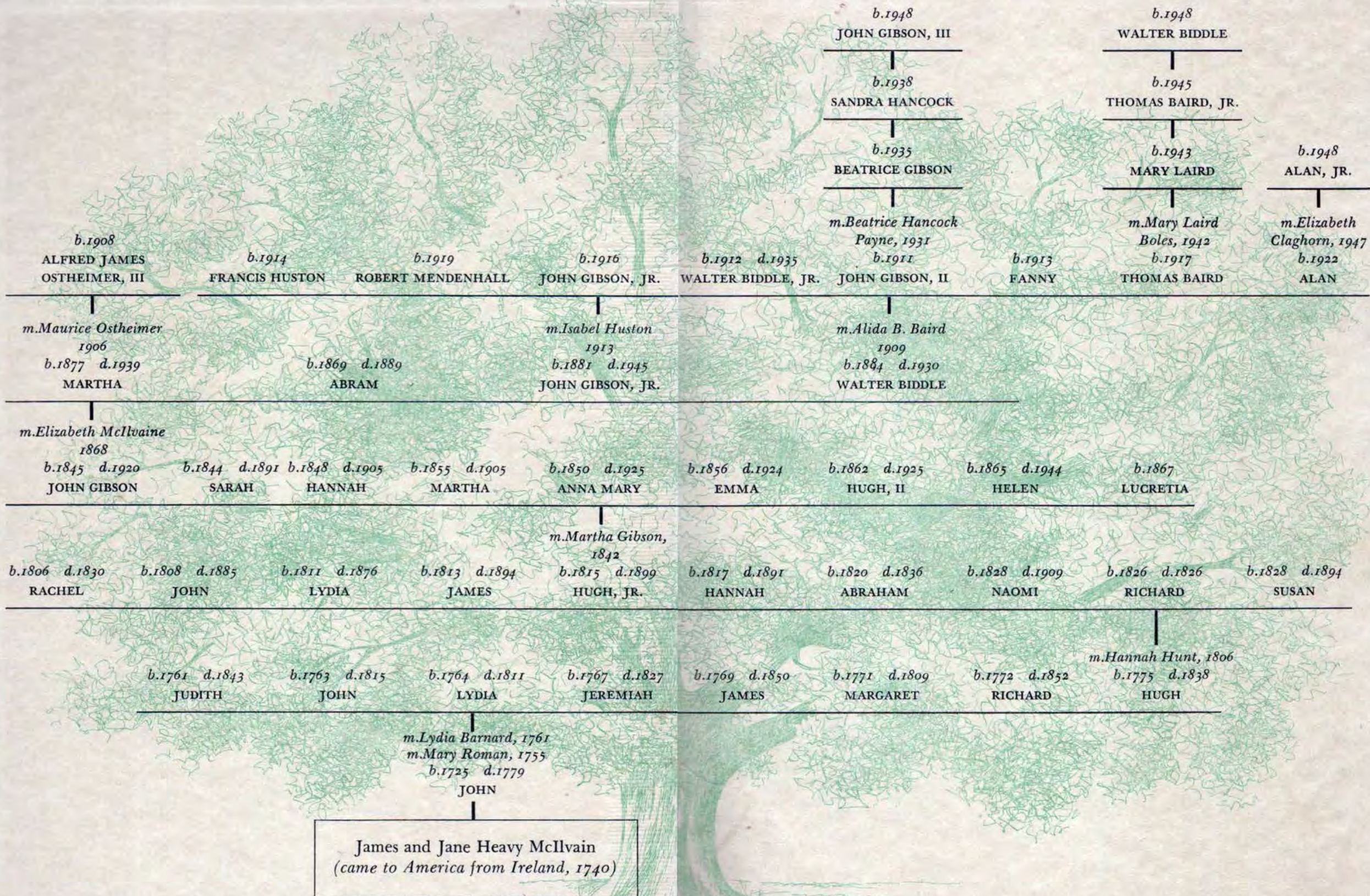


Philadelphia Hardwood

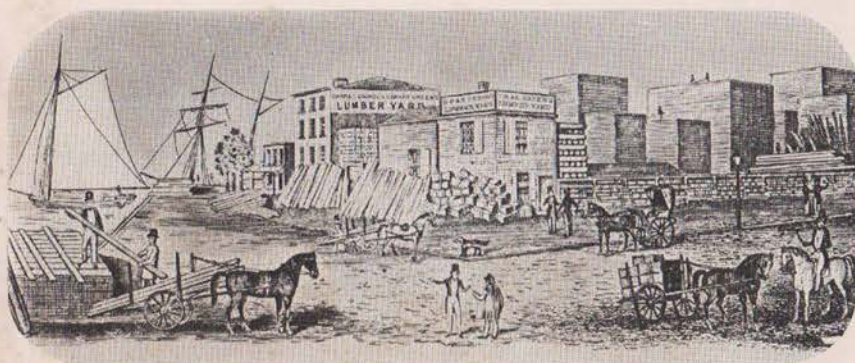


THE STORY OF THE MCILVAINS OF PHILADELPHIA

1798-1948



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Philadelphia Hardwood

1798-1948

THE STORY OF THE McILVAINS OF PHILADELPHIA
AND THE BUSINESS THEY FOUNDED

by

WILLIAM BARTON MARSH



WILLIAM E. RUDGE'S SONS

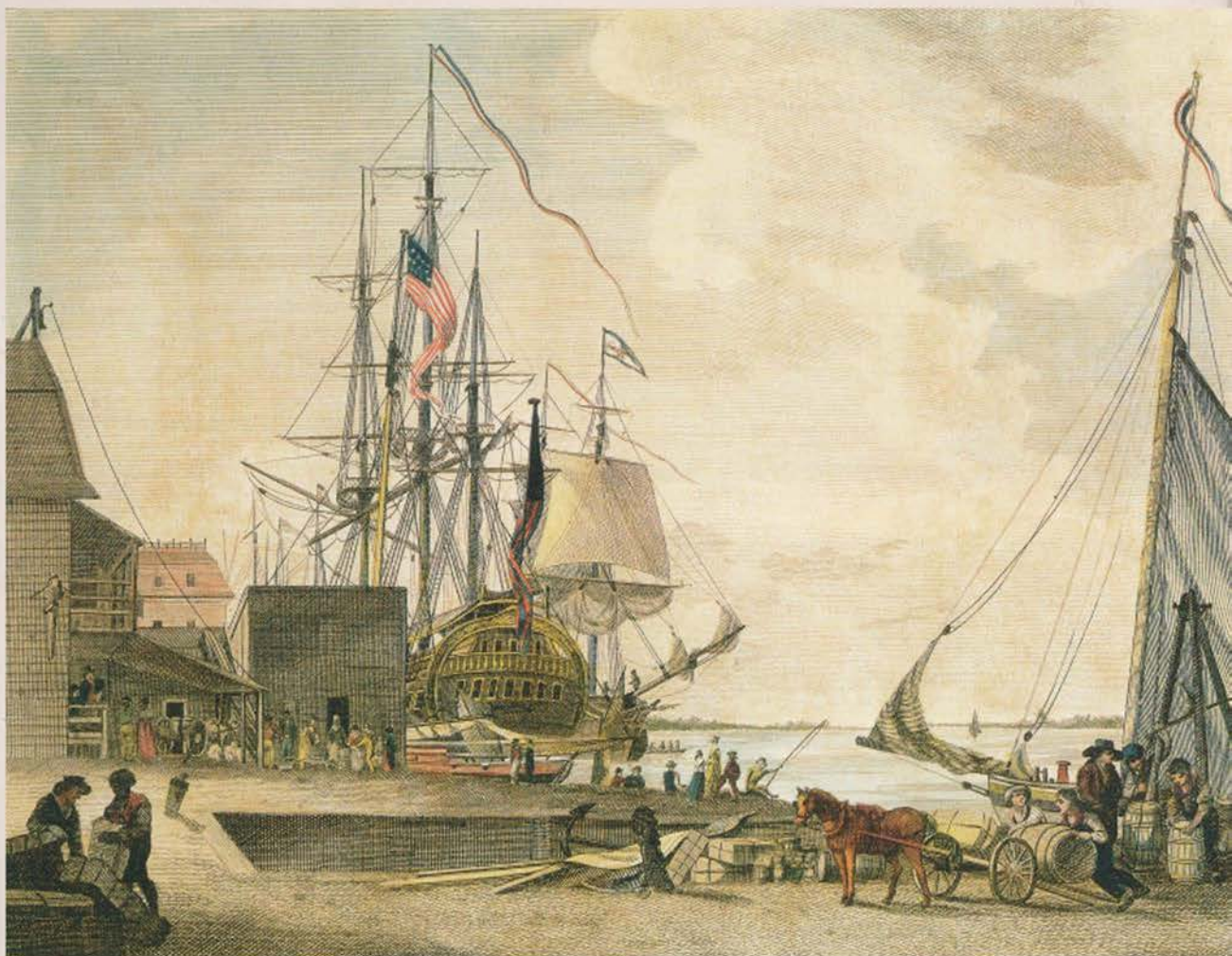
1948

Foreword

The story of the McIlvains of Philadelphia, and of the business which they established one hundred and fifty years ago, is almost unique in the annals of American business enterprise. The firm of J. Gibson McIlvain Company has been in continuous operation for a century and a half under the personal direction of the same family. Five generations of McIlvains, in direct succession from father to son, have contributed to its growth. The firm continues to operate today within a few miles of its original location.

To the student of American business history, therefore, the story of this firm and of this family deserves to be recorded. The life of the McIlvain company spans very closely the life of this republic. If ever a business undertaking epitomized American industrial democracy, it is this one. It typifies the continuity and toughness of our form of free enterprise. It is a story of which our nation may well be proud, for it suggests with abundant clarity both the opportunities and the rewards offered to Americans if they have the imagination and the courage to grasp them.

WILLIAM BARTON MARSH



COURTESY THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA

*The Arch Street Ferry, Philadelphia, and the Delaware River
as they appeared in 1800*



BLACK WALNUT

A Scotch Presbyterian Turns Quaker

IT WAS September of 1777 and the weather was still good. General Washington's military position at Chadd's Ford, where the road from Wilmington to Chester crosses Brandywine Creek, was strong. With a force only slightly inferior in numbers to the British, who were advancing toward Philadelphia under General Howe, Washington had reason to be optimistic. But the gods of battle were against him. After a pretended frontal attack, Howe launched his real blow at one of Washington's flanks which was taken by surprise. Thus, on the evening of September 11, Washington was forced to abandon his position and retire along the Chester Road in the direction of Philadelphia.

It speaks much for Washington's abilities as a general that after this disaster his military organization remained intact and he was able to fight an effective rear-guard action. Late that night, Washington had passed through the town of Chester and found himself on the Chester Turnpike or "King's Road" at Crum Creek, near what was then known as the town of Ridley, but is now Leiperville.

The general was exhausted by the events of the day and at midnight stopped for refreshment and a little rest along the roadside. The house that he selected was that of John McIlvain, late of County Antrim, Ireland, a prosperous farmer and owner of a local gristmill. John McIlvain it may reasonably be assumed, was sympathetic to the revolutionary cause, for his own family had migrated first from Scotland to Ireland in the middle of the 17th century and subsequently from Ireland to America in 1740 in search of greater freedom. As a youth, struggling to establish himself in the new country, he had apprenticed himself to one Jacob Roman, proprietor of a mill on Crum Creek, Ridley Township, whose daughter, Mary, he married about 1755. The death of his father-in-law was followed almost immediately by that of his wife, and John found himself the owner of the family mill and also of a stone quarry nearby which was particularly valuable for the mining of whetstones.

In Colonial America, however, few men could hope to succeed in wringing fortune from the new, undeveloped land without the help of a family. A wife was in every sense a partner whose contribution to the economic well-being of the family was little less important than that of her husband. And every man hoped for a succession of stalwart sons at a period when no independent supply of labor was available to him. It was only natural, therefore, that John McIlvain should remarry, which he did in 1761. His second wife, Lydia Barnard, was of Quaker stock and a woman of great strength of character. Before long John became convinced of the virtues of the Quaker faith and joined the Society of Friends.

Almost immediately, the family which John so much desired began to arrive. The first was a daughter, Judith, born in 1762. In

the following year came John, the eldest son. Lydia was born in 1764 and Jeremiah in 1767. Then came James in 1769, Margaret in 1771, Richard in 1772, and last Hugh McIlvain who was born in 1775, the year of Lexington and Concord.

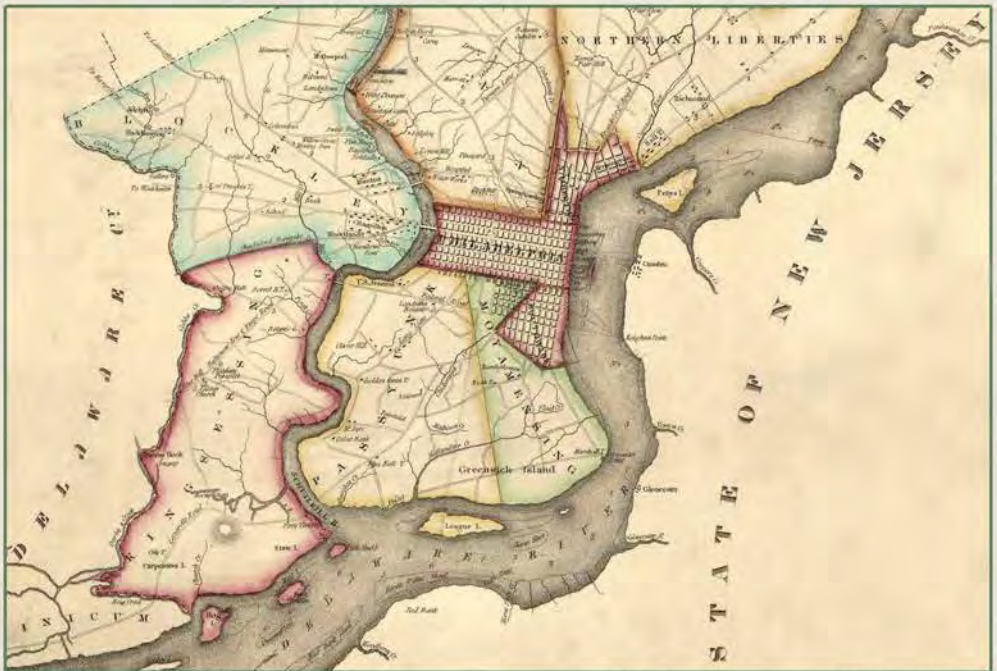
It was into this well-populated household that General Washington found his way after the Battle of the Brandywine. Little Hugh was obviously too young to have remembered the general's visit, but he must have heard from his elder brothers all the details of it and of the subsequent advance of the British on their way to capture Philadelphia.

John McIlvain did not live to see the triumph of the revolutionary cause. He died on April 19, 1779, while the fate of the nation was still uncertain. He left his affairs in competent hands, however, for his wife, Lydia McIlvain, showed all the force of character which was to typify the family for the next five generations. She continued to operate the gristmill and quarry, at times carrying her whetstones to market in her saddle bags, as far as the City of Philadelphia. Her whole family was brought up in strict accordance with the principles of the Society of Friends, and each of her sons, as they became old enough, was established in a business of his own.

John, the eldest son, soon started a lumber business in the town of Ridley and his success enabled him to build his own house, directly across the road from the old homestead. Jeremiah, the second son, had a sawmill and tanyard on part of the homestead property in Ridley and, after the death of his brother John, carried on his elder brother's business, too.

It was left to the younger boys, however, to break away from Ridley and try new territory. In 1798, at the age of twenty-three, Hugh McIlvain, the youngest of the children, decided that he had reached man's estate and that the time had come to go into business for himself. Because of the experience of his elder brothers, he was familiar with the lumber business. It was only natural, therefore, that he should choose lumber as a trade. The nearby City of Philadelphia, with its bustling activity and its great opportunities, no

doubt appealed to him, but he may well have hesitated to enter into direct competition with the old-established "board yards" which lined the wharves along the Delaware. It is certain, at any rate, that he selected the location of his new business with great perspicacity. Perhaps he foresaw the growth of Philadelphia to the west across the River Schuylkill, even though at the time, this section was devoted to farming and great estates. Whatever his reasoning, he opened his new lumber yard within sight of the river on its west bank at what was then known as Middle Ferry. So wise was his choice that the business was to remain and flourish at the original location for more than fifty years and is still today, after a century and a half, in operation within three miles of the spot which its founder chose.



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*This map of Philadelphia County was prepared in 1819
by order of the Pennsylvania Legislature*



A Business Is Born

TRANSPORTATION has always been a key factor in the lumber business. In the days prior to and immediately following the American Revolution plodding ox-carts were the principal means of carrying heavy materials over land and most roads were inadequate even for these vehicles. The lumber industry, therefore, relied almost exclusively upon natural waterways for transporting its products from point of origin to point of use.

This is one of the principal reasons why, for a century or more, the City of Philadelphia was the most active lumber market in America. Situated at the confluence of the Delaware and Schuylkill

Rivers, and with eventual connection by canal to the waters of the Susquehanna, the city had direct access by water to one of the richest natural lumber regions in the country. Furthermore, in those days Philadelphia was America's leading port where deep-sea vessels could readily enter, bringing cargoes of precious mahogany from tropical waters, or depart for the West Indies or for England, our largest lumber export markets.

Even before William Penn arrived in this new world, the first Dutch settlers had begun to establish sawmills on the Delaware. Penn himself, with the foresight which marks the great colonist, provided a basic pattern for the lumber business in Pennsylvania by his regulation made in July, 1681, governing the activities of "adventurers and purchasers" in the territory under his control:

"XVIII — That in clearing the ground, care be taken to leave 1 acre of trees for every 5 acres cleared; especially to preserve oak and mulberries for silk and shipping."

In this early attempt at conservation, William Penn was a forerunner of another Pennsylvania governor of much later date — Gifford Pinchot.

In the year 1798, the bulk of the lumber business in Philadelphia was conducted along the Delaware waterfront. In those days practically all lumber reached the city in crude rafts. It was still being cut along the banks of the Delaware and the Schuylkill not too far from the city itself. Most of it was roughed out by hand in the woods and sawed into planks by local, water-driven sawmills along the riverbanks. Some was brought to Philadelphia in the log and sawed there by hand. Shingles were also hand split.

In spite of the crude lumbering methods then in use, the city was carrying on a thriving lumber trade. Its importance as a lumber export and import market may be gathered from the comments of the Swedish traveler, Kalm, who in 1749 wrote:

"Philadelphia reaps the greatest profits from its trade with the West Indies. For thither the inhabitants ship almost every day a quantity of flour, butter, flesh and other victuals; timber,

plank and the like. In return they receive either sugar, molasses, rum, indigo, mahogany, and other goods, or money. . . . They send both West India goods and their own products to England; the latter are all sorts of woods, especially black walnut, and oak planks for ships; ships ready built, iron, hides and tar."

In 1773 some 4,075,000 feet of boards and scantling were exported from the city, while in 1807 England imported \$1,302,000 of timbers from the United States, much of it Pennsylvania white pine which at that time sold in Liverpool at 60 cents a cubic foot.

There is evidence that as early as 1800 Philadelphia was likewise a center for hardwoods. Mahogany was, of course, the fashionable furniture and cabinet wood, but the native hardwoods, such as cherry, walnut, poplar and oak, were much more extensively used by the local artisans of that day.

Young Hugh McIlvain must have been familiar with Philadelphia, then America's largest city with a population of close to 50,000 people, as his home was only a dozen miles away. It was a town throbbing with life and business activity. Its importance as the seat of the Continental Congress, as well as the social and intellectual center of the nation, had been but slightly dimmed by the prospective transfer of the national capital to its permanent site at Washington City on the Potomac.

With his interest in lumber, Hugh no doubt spent many an hour watching the lumber rafts being dismantled and landed at the south corner of the Vine Street wharf in the rear of John Britton's famous "board yard," or inspecting the stock of lumber carried by Stewar & Knight in their yard at Vine and Water Streets next to Brown's biscuit bakery. He may well have watched Eyre & Massey's ship "Portia" loading lumber for Madeira or some of the other well-known vessels preparing for the long voyage to Liverpool. Further along the waterfront he would have come to the wharf where D. & P. L'Homedieu docked their line of packets and schooners that plied between Philadelphia and Boston, and may have paused at the nearby "Crooked Billet" tavern for a snack of bread and cheese.

He would have accepted, as quite natural, the visiting Indians, some ring-nosed, feathered and painted, others in plain blanket, leggins, and mocassins, who frequently appeared within the city limits trailed listlessly by a squaw or more, each with a papoose in blankets secured to her back. It may have amused him to watch the braves, with their bows and arrows, proudly testing their skill as marksmen upon "fip-penny bits" stuck on edge on a chosen hitching post of which many ranged along the curb.

In his search for a place to establish his own business, Hugh in all probability considered the City of Philadelphia itself, but in his travels between Ridley and Philadelphia, he obviously had become familiar with another section, outside the limits of the city, which intrigued his imagination. The road from Chester, which passed through Ridley, arrived at Philadelphia from the west. Just before it reached the city, it joined with another main highway, the famous Lancaster Turnpike, and with the West Chester Road. Close to the



*Lumber wharves still lined the Delaware at Philadelphia
in 1872 when this drawing was made*

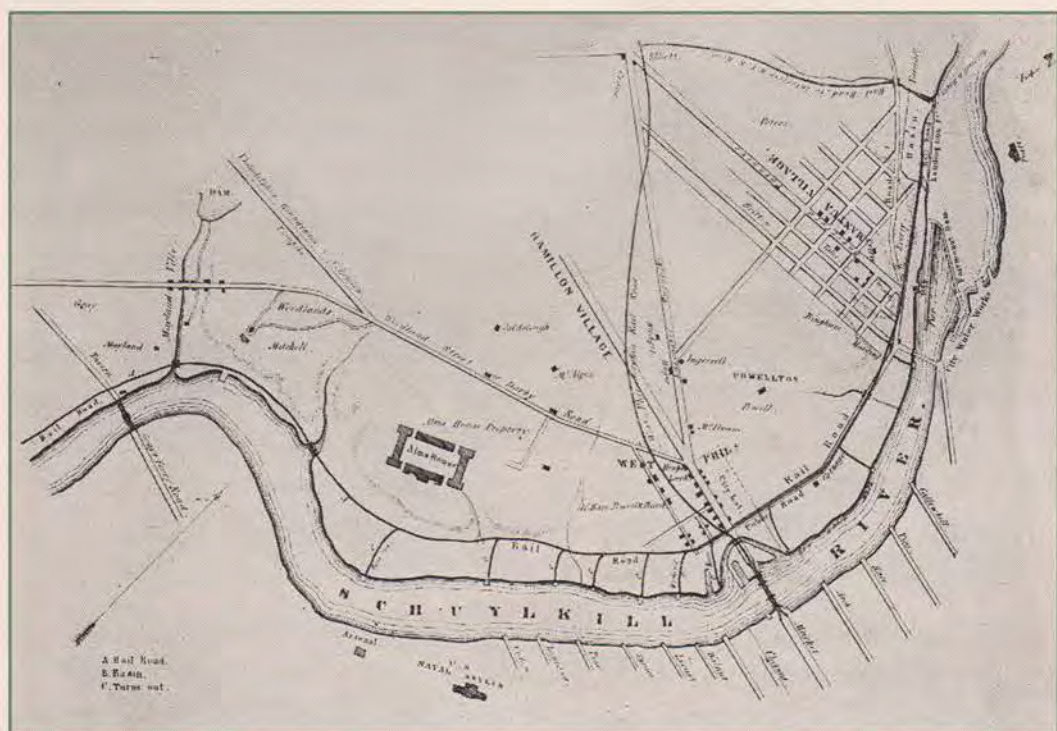
west bank of the Schuylkill these three important thoroughfares merged, and the traffic from them entered Philadelphia over the "Middle Ferry" which had been established in 1722 at the end of High Street (now Market Street) to accommodate travellers headed west for Lancaster, Harrisburg, and Pittsburgh, or south toward Baltimore and Washington.

The "Middle Ferry" was the most important of the three ferries which at that time bridged the Schuylkill. Originally passengers were ferried across by means of a boat pulled by a rope. At a later date, this method had been replaced at each of the three ferries by a floating bridge. An Irish traveller from Philadelphia to Baltimore describes these bridges in his diary.

"The road to Baltimore," he writes, "is over the lowest of three floating bridges which have been thrown across the river Schuylkill, in the neighborhood of Philadelphia. The floating bridges are formed of large trees which are placed in the water transversely, and chained together, beams are then laid lengthwise upon these and the whole boarded over. On each side there is a railing. When very heavy carriages go across these bridges they sink a few inches below the surface of the water."

In 1798, this was the only method of communication between Philadelphia and what is now West Philadelphia. West Philadelphia itself was open farm land chiefly occupied by several large estates. Along the west bank of the river, in what is now West Fairmount Park, was "Landsdowne," the estate originally laid out by John Penn, grandson of William Penn, but at this time owned by Senator William Bingham of Pennsylvania. Nearby was built, in 1797, the house of Samuel Breck which still stands in Fairmount Park. South and west lay "Woodlands," the large estate established by Andrew Hamilton.

This famous Philadelphia lawyer had successfully defended Peter Zenger of New York against charges of treason made against him by the British authorities because of anti-British views expressed in his newspaper and thus helped to establish freedom of the press in



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Early map of West Philadelphia showing the original location of the McIlvain homestead and lumber yard

the new world. In 1798, this estate was owned by William Hamilton, grandson of the original owner. The name of the estate is perpetuated today in Woodland Avenue which runs from West Philadelphia to Darby. South along the river bank was the estate of John Gibson, a prominent Philadelphia merchant, whose family was later to be joined in marriage with the McIlvains. His name, too, is perpetuated in the naming of Gibson Avenue and Gibson Point on the Schuylkill.

Hugh McIlvain was probably less impressed with these great estates than he was by the heavy flow of traffic which passed over the Middle Ferry headed west toward the Alleghenies and the frontier. The Lancaster Turnpike, one of the first artificially-surfaced highways, connected Philadelphia with Lancaster, Pa., then one of the largest inland cities in the country. Opened in 1795, it also accommodated the through traffic destined for Pittsburgh and



BLACK WALNUT

A Scotch Presbyterian Turns Quaker

IT WAS September of 1777 and the weather was still good. General Washington's military position at Chadd's Ford, where the road from Wilmington to Chester crosses Brandywine Creek, was strong. With a force only slightly inferior in numbers to the British, who were advancing toward Philadelphia under General Howe, Washington had reason to be optimistic. But the gods of battle were against him. After a pretended frontal attack, Howe launched his real blow at one of Washington's flanks which was taken by surprise. Thus, on the evening of September 11, Washington was forced to abandon his position and retire along the Chester Road in the direction of Philadelphia.

the region of the Ohio. Legend tells of the days when the Lancaster pike was crowded with great Conestoga wagons, drawn by four, five or six horses, carrying freight bound for Pittsburgh. The round trip of 666 miles required six weeks to make. The Lancaster pike itself was 62 miles long and had nine toll stations along the way. The Darby Road, or King's Highway, leading south along the Delaware to Chester and Wilmington and the West Chester Road were likewise busy thoroughfares.

It was at the junction of those three highways that young Hugh decided to establish his lumber yard. The location had obvious advantages. Not only was it one of the busiest spots outside the limits of the city proper, but it was within easy reach of the river bank where shipments of lumber could be landed. Beyond it lay a region of rich farm land where lumber would be needed for homes and farm buildings. Along the west bank of the river, prominent Philadelphians had already started to build their country estates, many of them actuated, no doubt, by a desire to escape from the City of Philadelphia during the summer months when the dread yellow fever threatened rich and poor alike. In the summer of 1798 alone, more than 3,000 people had been carried off by the plague and the city had been in panic.

There was evidence, too, that the Schuylkill might eventually become the scene of manufacturing activity because of the water power it afforded. As early as 1690, William Rittenhouse had built the first paper mill in the country on the Wissahickon, a tributary which joined the Schuylkill a few miles above the Middle Ferry and in 1710 his brother-in-law, William Dewes, had constructed a similar plant on the Wissahickon where during the Revolution the paper for the Continental money was manufactured. Somewhat farther up the river was Valley Forge, named after the metal-working establishment then located there, which has since been transformed into the Valley Forge State Park.

The deciding factor in young McIlvain's choice may well have been the fact that in 1798 a company with a capital of \$150,000 was

chartered for the purpose of building a permanent bridge across the Schuylkill at the site of the Middle Ferry. This project had been much discussed as early as 1751 when Benjamin Franklin and eight other commissioners were appointed to examine the Schuylkill and select a site for a bridge. Their choice at that time had been in favor of the Middle Ferry site, but owing to the political situation the plan had never been carried to completion. Now at last private initiative was ready to put it through on the basis of prospective toll revenue. Although the cornerstone of the bridge was not actually laid until 1799, there was great public speculation and excitement over the prospect of this important addition to the transportation system, and it must have been clear to a far-sighted young businessman like McIlvain that the erection of the bridge would have a profound influence on the development of the section west of the Schuylkill.



FROM A PAINTING BY W. BIRCH, COURTESY THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA

*The Permanent Bridge over the Schuylkill which first joined
Philadelphia with West Philadelphia*



West of the Schuylkill

THE CONSTRUCTION of the Permanent Bridge over the Schuylkill was not only a vital factor in the eventual development of West Philadelphia, but also brought business to the McIlvain lumber yard. Contemporary accounts tell of the great coffer dams of wood that were constructed at each end of the bridge in order that the stone abutments upon which the bridge was to rest might be built. When these were finished, the bridge itself, also of wood, had to be put together beam by beam and truss by truss. The view of the bridge painted by Birch and here reproduced gives a clear idea of its construction. The yard may also have supplied the wood for the statues

of "Commerce" and "Agriculture," sculptured by the most famous of early American wood carvers, William Rush, which crowned the eastern and western approaches to the structure. Some years later, after the bridge was opened for traffic, it was decided to cover it with a roof to protect the structure which required additional quantities of lumber.

The yard may have participated, likewise, in the construction of the Philadelphia Water Works which was being erected on the eastern bank of the river to bring the waters of the Schuylkill into the city. This project was started in 1799, and a great deal of wood was used both in building the reservoir and in the original wooden piping that carried the water under the city streets.

Hugh McIlvain was, at any rate, sufficiently busy so that in 1801 he was joined in the business by his brother Richard, two years his



This painting by A. J. Kennedy, now in the possession of The Historical Society of Philadelphia, shows the McIlvain homestead at 32nd Street and Lancaster Avenue as it appeared in 1864

elder. Together, under the trade name of Richard & Hugh McIlvain, they formed a partnership which lasted for more than thirty years.

Another token of increased prosperity appears in the fact that in 1803 Hugh started the construction of a family homestead on his property adjoining the lumber yard. The exact site was on the northeast corner of 32nd and Market Streets near where now stands the 30th Street Station of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Shortly thereafter Richard built a similar, but less pretentious house beside that of his brother. A painting dated 1864, now in the Kennedy Collection of The Historical Society of Philadelphia, shows the two dwellings as they appeared in the early 1800's.

Almost immediately West Philadelphia responded to its new accessibility. With the bridge about to be completed, William Hamilton of "Woodlands" decided in 1804 to lay out a part of his large tract in the form of a town site. This was one of the first important real estate developments in the outskirts of Philadelphia. Ten cross streets, running north and south were marked out west of the intersection of the Darby Road and the Lancaster Turnpike, and according to a map of 1809, there was one east and west street paralleling Market Street to the north, and five similar streets to the south. In order to assure the proper facilities for the expected residents, Hamilton set aside one lot for a schoolhouse and two additional lots respectively for an Episcopal and a Presbyterian church. A later map indicates that the Friends also established their own place of worship in the community.

This new development was called Hamilton Village and it was not long before a number of private residences, taverns, and public buildings had been constructed there. The obvious source of building materials was the McIlvain lumber yard.

In 1804, too, the first regular line of stage coaches between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh was established.



Map of Hamilton Village in 1839



COURTESY THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA

Bush Hill. The seat of Wm. Hamilton Esqr. near Philadelphia

The coaches started each Friday morning from Tomlinson's Hotel on Market Street in Philadelphia, crossed the Schuylkill by means of the Permanent Bridge, and proceeded westward along the Lancaster Turnpike, having of course passed the lumber yard en route. This brought Philadelphia and West Philadelphia closer together, and the passing of the weekly coach was one of the highlights of life in the new suburb. The trip to Pittsburgh took a full seven days. The fare was \$20 per passenger, each passenger being allowed 20 pounds of baggage. Extra baggage was charged for at the rate of \$12 per 100 pounds. The cost of meals during the trip, which were taken at "good country inns," came to \$8.21 per passenger.

By 1806, Hugh McIlvain, now a responsible citizen of 31, had developed a thriving business. With the future reasonably well assured, he was in a position to marry. The lady of his choice, of good Quaker stock, was not only personable to a high degree, as appears from her silhouette, but was unusually well educated for a young woman of her day. She was the first girl to matriculate at

the newly established Westtown School for young ladies, and was later described as the prototype of all that distinguished institution of learning stood for. Her name was Hannah Hunt and she was the second of a long list of outstanding women who were to contribute their share to the family history. Hugh and Hannah were married on January 9, 1806, in the new Friends' Meeting House at Darby.

Their honeymoon was enlivened by a near-disaster which even threatened the existence of the lumber yard itself. In January, 1806, a fire broke out at Howland's Tavern on the west side of the Schuylkill "near the Permanent Bridge." (The exact location cannot be more closely defined.) Five thousand people, according to reports, rushed to the scene, even though it was three o'clock in the morning and very cold, because it was feared that the bridge would be destroyed. The bridge was saved by a change of wind, but this only increased the hazard to the lumber yard which lay nearby. Fortunately the fire burned itself out without affecting the yard.

The McIlvain's first child, Rachel, was born toward the close of the year and, in 1808, came John Hunt McIlvain, the oldest son, who was eventually to join his father in the business and distinguish himself as an eminent naturalist and ornithologist. Over a period of more than twenty years, Hugh and Hannah had ten children, the youngest, Susan, being born in 1828 when Hugh was well over fifty. The two other boys who were to participate in the lumber business were James McIlvain, born in 1813, and Hugh McIlvain, Jr., born in 1815.

During this period the lumber



business in general was forced to go through a period of extreme difficulty. The early years of the 19th century were dominated by the struggle that was going on between England on the one hand and France under Napoleon on the other. Because of the maritime superiority of Great Britain, the commercial vessels of France, Holland, and Spain were almost driven from the seas, and these nations became dependent upon a neutral flag for their colonial, as well as other supplies. The vessels of the United States became practically their sole overseas carriers. This resulted in a tremendous wave of prosperity for American shipping and for the suppliers of such important exportable goods as lumber.

In November, 1806, however, Napoleon, having defeated the Prussians and entered Berlin, issued his famous Berlin Decree. It declared the British Isles in a state of blockade and made every American or other neutral vessel going to, or coming from, these isles subject to capture and condemnation. A year later, the British retaliated by their Orders in Council which prohibited all direct trade between America and any part of Europe at war with Great Britain. Immediately Napoleon responded with his Milan Decree which declared that every vessel that should submit to search by a British man-of-war or should touch at a British port was automatically denationalized and subject to seizure.

American shipping was caught between the upper and the nether millstone. Thomas Jefferson was now in his second term as president. He attempted, without success, to negotiate a treaty with Great Britain that would protect American vessels from seizure and American seamen from impressment. Seeking to avoid war, he induced the Congress in December, 1807, to pass the Embargo Act which prohibited all American vessels from sailing for foreign ports and all foreign vessels from taking out cargo from American ports.

The effect of this legislation on American shipping and trade was catastrophic. Domestic prices for exportable products, including lumber, fell to half their accustomed level or even less. Many merchants and shipping houses went into bankruptcy.

Fortunately for the McIlvains, they were not engaged in the export business, and the Embargo Act, operating in reverse, had a stimulating effect upon home building and domestic industry. The Philadelphia "Aurora" of October, 1808, stated that "the embargo has built, or nearly built, 10,000 houses in the city."

Certainly, during this period, further expansion had been going on in West Philadelphia. Beyond the Lancaster Turnpike, along the Schuylkill, two additional real estate developments had been started. One of these, on the property of J. Hare Powell contiguous to the McIlvain lumber yard on the north, became known as the village of Powelton. Still further north, beyond the great Bingham estate, the village of Mantua had sprung up on the property of one Richard Peters and others. By 1810, according to a survey published a few years later, under authority of the Pennsylvania Legislature, the township of Blockley and Kingsessing, which made up West Philadelphia, could boast of a combined population of 2,521 inhabitants, a sizable community for the McIlvains to serve.

As a result of the embargo and the consequent reduction in foreign imports, the United States Government was naturally concerned with the development of domestic manufacturers. In 1810, Secretary of the Treasury Gallatin, at the request of the House of Representatives, prepared a lengthy report on the subject. Under the heading of "Wood, and Manufactures of Wood," he stated:

"All the branches of this manufacture are carried to a high degree of perfection, supplying the whole of the demand of the United States, and consist principally of cabinet ware, and other household furniture, coaches, and carriages, either for pleasure or transportation, and ship building."

Even at this early date the McIlvains were probably in the business of supplying hardwood to cabinet makers and carriage builders, trades which were already well developed in and around Philadelphia. Their participation in the ship-building business, however, was to be delayed until a much later date, for the shipyards of the day were confined to the Delaware, too far removed to be adequately

served from their yard in West Philadelphia.

West Philadelphia's increasing importance as a community was recognized by the Pennsylvania Legislature in 1811, when it appointed commissioners to receive subscriptions "for erecting a permanent bridge over the Schuylkill at or near the floating bridge of Abraham Sheridan, known by the name of Upper Ferry." Capital to the extent of \$40,000 was raised and the bridge was started in 1812. Completed in the following year, the bridge was notable for the fact that its center span of 340 feet was 100 feet longer than any span that had ever been erected up to that time. There were doubts on the part of contemporary engineers as to whether the bridge was entirely safe, but it stood for twenty-five years until destroyed by fire.

With two permanent bridges leading to it, West Philadelphia was now recognized as being definitely a part of the greater city of Philadelphia. It is for that reason, probably, as well as on account of the increasing importance of the firm, that the McIlvain lumber yard appears for the first time in the Philadelphia directory for 1813. The entry reads as follows:

"McIlvain Richard and Hugh, lumber merchants, High west of Permanent Bridge."

High Street had not yet, as will be seen, become Market Street. That change of name came a few years later when the new city markets were built at its lower end.

In this same year the first official census of the United States, an admittedly uncertain and incomplete document, made its appearance. It was dated and signed: "Philadelphia, in the United States of America, May 30th, 1813. Tench Coxe." and purported to present statistics covering the year 1810. From the standpoint of the lumber merchant, some of these are interesting. The census reported, for example, that the 40 counties of Pennsylvania had 2,016 sawmills which produced 74,538,000 feet of sawn lumber valued at \$628,000. There is some question in point of fact, whether the figure given for the number of sawmills represents individual establishments or the number of saws in operation. It is interesting to note that at

today's market prices, a similar cut of lumber would be valued at over \$5,000,000.

The increased importance of Pennsylvania as a lumbering state was in part due to the gradual development of the business along the West Branch of the Susquehanna and such tributaries as the Sinnemahone, Clearfield, Chest and Pine Creeks. Advancing frontiersmen discovered in this section of the state the finest stand of white pine and hemlock ever to be exploited.

This Pennsylvania white pine was distinguished not only for its exceptional strength for spars, but for the ease with which it could be worked. Furthermore, the wood had a natural consistency which gave it great resistance to the rigors of rain, snow, frost, and sun. It would not warp, check or rot under changing weather conditions and was thus an ideal lumber for exterior use. The virgin growth was such that lengths of 90 to 100 feet of admirably straight grain could readily be cut. This timber for many years served as the basis for the spar industry which flourished in Philadelphia and Baltimore.



COURTESY THE BETTMAN ARCHIVE

Making up lumber rafts on the Susquehanna

Records of some of the old Pennsylvania timber tracts attest the density of the timber growth. These indicate that 100,000 board feet of white pine to the acre was not unusual a century ago. In addition to the white pine, stands of as much as 20,000 board feet of hemlock and hardwood grew on the same ground, so that many acres in the white pine belt would have cut, under present methods of operation, up to 120,000 board feet of lumber to the acre. By way of comparison, the average stand of timber in the state today will not cut over 5,000 feet per acre.

One of the first sawmills erected in this district was that of Roland Hall, built in 1792 on Lycoming Creek about four miles above the present city of Williamsport. The real trade in lumber did not start until some years later, however, when the early pioneers began to realize that the crude log rafts built to transport their raw products down river to market were bringing a larger return than the produce which they bore. The first actual lumber raft to go down to Susquehanna is reported to have been that of one David Litz who undertook the experiment in 1805.

During the next fifteen or twenty years, lumbering along the Susquehanna expanded rapidly due to the quality of the timber, and to the diminishing supply near the seaboard. The volume of trade was greatly stimulated in 1827 by the completion of the Union Canal which connected the Susquehanna at Middletown with the Schuylkill Navigation Canal at Reading, providing an inland all-water route from the headwaters of the West Branch to Philadelphia. In its first year of operation, the Union Canal carried over 18,000 tons of freight, lumber being one of the principal items.

Two years later, the lower waters of the Susquehanna were linked with the Delaware by means of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. This was constructed largely to accommodate the increasing movement of lumber and wood to be used as fuel by the new steamboats. The canal was opened in October, 1829, and its importance to the lumber trade is indicated by the steady growth in lumber tolls which rose from \$7,138 in 1840 to \$32,523 in 1860.

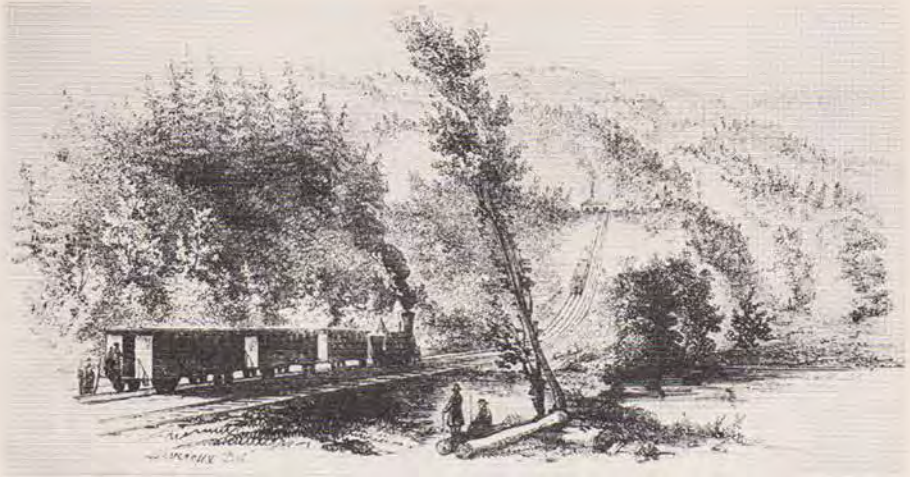
Prices for lumber in the 1820's may well give pause to the modern lumber dealer. Here is a list of some of the prices ruling about that time:

White Oak Sills	\$13 per M.
White Oak Scantling	\$9 per M.
Oak Lath	50¢ per hundred
Oak Posts	11¢ apiece
Curley Maple Scantling	\$13 per M.
Cedar Shingles	\$15.62 $\frac{1}{4}$ per thousand
Cypress Shingles	\$7 per thousand
Yellow Pine Board	\$9 per M.
White Pine Board	\$17 per M.

Not until 1831 was the grading of white pine begun and even then only three grades were recognized — panel, common and cull. The panel grade was approximately equivalent to what is known today as selects. The common was equivalent to Number Two Common through Third Clear. Anything else was merely graded as culls. In the 1830's white pine was sold "log run" in these three grades at \$25, \$19 and \$11 per thousand, respectively.

The comparative cheapness of lumber in those days was partially due, of course, to low labor costs. Lumberjacks were paid 50¢ a day and were expected to board themselves. The services of an ox team and driver could be obtained for \$1.00 a day.

During this early period, there were no wholesalers in Philadelphia, the lumber being sold direct to the retail yards such as that of the McIlvains. Rough sawing was done by water-power sawmills with a capacity of 2,000 to 5,000 feet a day. Flooring was worked by hand, and this was the job of the local carpenters. In June, 1827, several hundred of these journeymen had astonished Philadelphia by striking for a ten hour day, and this they managed to achieve with a base wage rate of \$1.25 for ten hours' work. When the first steam sawmill was erected in Philadelphia in 1835, the mill hands were bitterly opposed to it, designating it as "the thief that stole their bread and butter."



*On the Pennsylvania State Line between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh,
railroad cars were originally hauled across the Alleghanies
by means of stationary engines*

It was at this time that another important public improvement was greatly to affect the development of West Philadelphia and the fate of the McIlvain firm. Stimulated by the example of New York State in building up trade with the west through the construction of the Erie Canal, the State of Pennsylvania entered upon a project similar in nature. This was the famous Pennsylvania State Line of improvement extending, partly by railroad and partly by canal, from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. The first link was the Columbia railroad running from Philadelphia to Columbia, Pa., a distance of 82 miles. The line then continued by canal from Columbia on the Susquehanna to Hollidaysburg at the base of the Alleghany Mountains. These were surmounted by means of the Portage railroad, a series of inclined planes with stretches of level road in between, over which railroad cars and canal boats were hauled by an endless rope activated by stationary steam engines. The final stretch between Johnstown, Pa., and Pittsburgh was traversed by water. The project was started in July, 1826, and was finally completed in March, 1834.

The important aspect of this ambitious enterprise from the standpoint of the McIlvains was that the original Philadelphia terminus

of the line was in West Philadelphia near the Permanent Bridge. Thus the firm once again found itself at the starting point of a new activity and, indeed, of a new and vital industry, for this was the beginning of the railroad era in the United States.

During the period while the Pennsylvania State Line to Pittsburgh was under construction, two other lesser railroads were being built, both of which had their Philadelphia terminals on the west bank of the Schuylkill at, or near, the Permanent Bridge. The first of these was the Philadelphia, Germantown & Norristown Railroad; the second the line between Philadelphia and West Chester.

The significance of these early railroads as far as the McIlvain interests were concerned cannot be overestimated. Not only did they mean a tremendous enhancement in the importance of West Philadelphia, but they afforded the McIlvains an opportunity to establish contact at the outset with an industry which the firm has continued to serve for more than a century. These first rail lines used rails of wood protected on top by a strip of iron. At the beginning, transportation over them was largely dependent upon horsepower. On the Philadelphia-Columbia line there were at first no regular cars or locomotives. Being a State-owned project, anyone was permitted to use the line who could provide the necessary vehicles and horses. As was natural, the old stagecoach companies took early advantage of the line. Eventually railroad coaches and locomotives were constructed, for the most part of wood.

Mathias Baldwin built his first locomotive, called "Old Ironsides," for the Philadelphia, Germantown & Norristown Railroad in 1832. In that same year, the following advertisement appeared over the signature of the railroad:

"The locomotive engine built by Mr. M. W. Baldwin of this city will depart daily when the weather is fair with a train of passenger cars. On rainy days, horses will be attached in the place of the locomotive."

The Philadelphia-Columbia Line was officially opened as far as Lancaster on December 9, 1833. At that time the cars were drawn

by horses and the trip from Philadelphia to Lancaster took eight and one half hours. In 1834, however, the line purchased one of Mr. Baldwin's locomotives, which was christened the "Lancaster," and steam transportation commenced.

The railroad between West Chester and Philadelphia started operation on Christmas Day, 1833, when its first car, romantically called "the mahogany car," was hauled up the inclined plane from its depot on the west side of the Schuylkill and officially launched on its initial trip.

These adventures in railroad development were typical of the rapid business expansion which took place in the United States during the second administration of President Andrew Jackson, who had been re-elected in 1832. Everybody was making money and putting it into lands, banks, roads, canals, railroads, buildings, factories, and cotton. Rates for money advanced until in 1836, as much as 4 per cent a month was being charged on loans. These high interest rates attracted money from abroad, and the country became heavily indebted to Europe.



COURTESY THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA

In the early days of railroading in West Philadelphia

In 1832 Richard McIlvain retired from active participation in the business at the age of sixty, although he was still hale and hearty and was to live for another twenty years. Hugh McIlvain continued the firm under his own name until 1835 when his second son, James was inducted into the partnership. The name of the firm was then changed to Hugh McIlvain & Son.

Hugh's last days in the business were darkened and his life in all probability shortened by the panic of 1837. This economic catastrophe, like the depression that began in 1929, was of international proportions. In the United States, the 1837 crisis was followed by the closing of banks all over the country, the suspension of specie payments, the paralysis of industry, and a collapse of prices. Cotton dropped from 20¢ to 10¢ a pound, and flour went down to the unheard of price of \$12 a barrel. Lumber prices were, of course, similarly affected.

In the midst of the crisis, from which the country did not recover until three or four years later, Hugh McIlvain died. His death occurred in 1838, at the age of sixty-three, after a business career of forty years. Responsibility for the fate of the firm remained in the hands of his two sons, John and James. In the following year, however, they took into partnership with them their younger brother, Hugh McIlvain, Jr., who was then twenty-four, and the firm name was changed to James & Hugh McIlvain.

Hugh, the founder of the business, had been described as a man of quiet and unobtrusive disposition, of good business ability and sterling integrity, who held a high place in the community although taking little part in political or public affairs. He had the satisfaction of seeing his judgment, as a young businessman, completely vindicated and of realizing to a very considerable extent the financial benefits of that judgment. The business which he established was by this time too well grounded to be permanently affected by any temporary financial upheaval. Largely under the guidance of his namesake, the firm was to advance progressively during the period of the next forty years.



Hugh McIlvain, Jr.



A Changing World

PERHAPS no period in American history was so prolific in basic inventions as the thirty-five years between 1830 and 1865. During this period American ingenuity developed the mowing machine and the reaper-binder that revolutionized agricultural production, the telegraph and the rotary printing press that so profoundly affected the collection and dissemination of news, the vulcanization of rubber and the pneumatic tire which eventually brought about a revolution in transportation, the manufacture of steel and the design of the first turret lathe that are both fundamental to modern large-scale manufacture, the sewing machine and the shoe-stitching machine

that completely changed our methods of clothing manufacture, not to mention the Colt revolver, the Otis elevator, the safety pin, the lucifer match, and the paper collar, each of which has in its own way left its mark upon our civilization.

During this period, too, the foundations were laid for our present-day industrial society. In 1820, there were some 2,300,000 people in the United States engaged in industry of whom 83.4 per cent were devoting their time to agricultural production. Although we were to remain for many years primarily an agricultural country, the trend toward industrialism was already definitely in evidence prior to the Civil War.

This change in our economy was stimulated by the rising tide of immigration which took place between 1830 and 1860. In the decade ending with 1829, only about 128,000 immigrants came into the country. In the next ten years, over half a million foreigners arrived here, and in the ten years ending with 1860 the number of immigrants rose to nearly three million. These people supplied much-needed labor for railroad construction and for our budding factories. On the other hand, the need to house and clothe them created a great demand for new homes and for cheap domestic fabrics.

Philadelphia absorbed its fair share, particularly of the German and Irish immigrants. The city was growing rapidly and with it the demand for all kinds of construction materials. Lumber was, of course, still in plentiful supply from comparatively nearby sources and, what with the relatively low level of contemporary wages, the cost of house construction was modest indeed when compared with present-day figures. Between 1830 and 1850, a 6-room house of good taste could be built for as little as \$800, while a 7-room house with some architectural pretensions could be constructed for about \$1,500 and a town mansion or country villa for \$2,500.

West Philadelphia shared fully in this growth and in the related building boom. The Borough of West Philadelphia was incorporated by an act of February 17, 1844, and Richard McIlvain, brother of the original Hugh, who had retired from active participation in

the firm in 1832, showed his continuing interest in the community by becoming one of the first commissioners of the new borough.

Milling and small manufacture had early developed in the environs of West Philadelphia. As early as 1805, John Thoburn was operating a print works at the Falls of Schuylkill in what is now Fairmount Park. This later became the Washington Print Works. In 1812, Hagner's Drug Mills were also started at the Falls and for years carried on with great success a business of powdering drugs and general mill work for the drug trade. A local map of 1812 shows the location of seven or eight small mills that were then making use of the water power afforded by Indian Run, Cobbs Creek, and Mill Creek. In 1828, the Ripka Mills, pioneers in the manufacture of cottonades in America, were established in Manayunk. Opportunities were arising for the McIlvains to furnish lumber to industry as well as to local builders.

This opportunity was further enhanced when, in 1848, one of Philadelphia's first full-fledged carriage factories was established by David M. Lane practically next door to the McIlvain lumber yard. The business was carried on under the name of Lane & Bro. The location, so near to a source of lumber supply, was probably not accidental, for at this period large amounts of hardwood were being used by carriage builders. Carriage bodies were made of ash, cherry and poplar, while wheels were constructed of hickory and running gear of oak. All of the lumber had to be of the first class and seasoned for a period of from two to five years.

It was in 1846 that the Pennsylvania Railroad was incorporated. The company's original operation was restricted to service between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, but in 1857 it gained, through purchase, the line between Philadelphia and Harrisburg. This was significant from the standpoint of the McIlvains for the Pennsylvania soon became and has remained ever since one of the firm's most valued customers.

Since the death of Hugh McIlvain, the founder, major responsibility for the direction of the firm's activities had been in the hands



Martha G. McIlvain

of his son, James. As time went on, however, his younger brother, Hugh McIlvain, Jr., began to take a more active part in the management of the business. He had an excellent understanding of the problems of the builder for, after finishing school, he had apprenticed himself to a builder and, when of age, had engaged in that business himself for a period of three years. Not until after the death of his father did he give up his own business and join his brothers as a partner in the family enterprise.

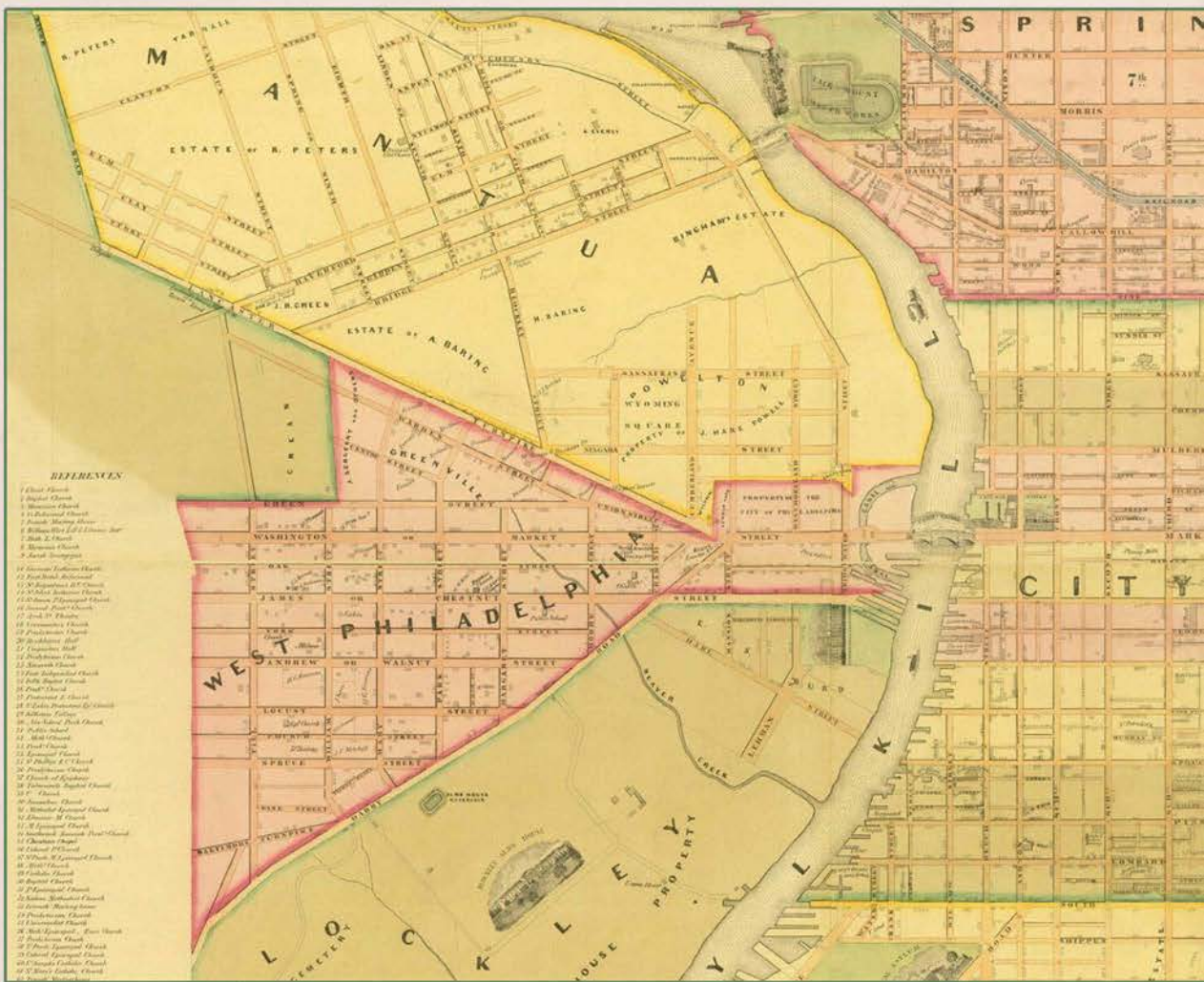
On November 3, 1842, young Hugh married Miss Martha Gibson, daughter of John Gibson, a distinguished Philadelphia merchant. The marriage took place at "Uplands," a beautiful estate of the

bride's father, in Kingessing Township on the west bank of the Schuylkill. In later years, when the firm found it advisable to move to a new location, the site selected was a part of the original Gibson estate.

Hugh and his bride went to live at the McIlvain homestead, built by his father, at what is now 32nd and Market Streets, West Philadelphia. Here all of his nine children, excepting only the youngest, his daughter, Lucretia, were born. His second child and eldest son was born in 1845 and was named John Gibson McIlvain after his maternal grandfather. This was the name which was eventually to be incorporated permanently into the title of the family business. Hugh's second and only other son, Hugh McIlvain 2nd, was not born until almost twenty years later in 1862.

The California Gold Rush of 1848 electrified the nation and stimulated many a hardy adventurer to seek new fortune in the Far West. Others, like the McIlvains, however, had the imagination to perceive the expanding opportunities which were just unfolding in the still undeveloped East. Business was thriving, and there was no good reason for members of this well-established and prosperous enterprise to tear up their roots and venture into the unknown. The requirements for additional space in the lumber yard were growing to such a degree that, in 1852, the firm found it necessary to make its first move. The change in location was negligible, for the new site was only two blocks away at what is now 34th and Market Streets. Apparently the success of the business had been such as to attract competition, for a local map of 1849 indicates that a rival lumber yard had been established directly across Market Street from the McIlvain property. History has not recorded the fate of this competitor, but the name has long since vanished from the records of the community.

During the years between 1840 and 1860 the rafting of lumber on the Susquehanna reached its peak. A great torrent of hand-squared timber rode the spring freshets. The white pine was the fine soft cork pine for which Pennsylvania was famous. The hardwoods,



COURTESY PHILADELPHIA PUBLIC LIBRARY

In this map of West Philadelphia, prepared in 1849, the McIlvain homestead and lumber yard are clearly marked

such as ash, beech, birch, and maple, topped off the white pine and hemlock rafts. Oak, hickory and walnut, although comparatively small in volume, were also of importance in the trade.

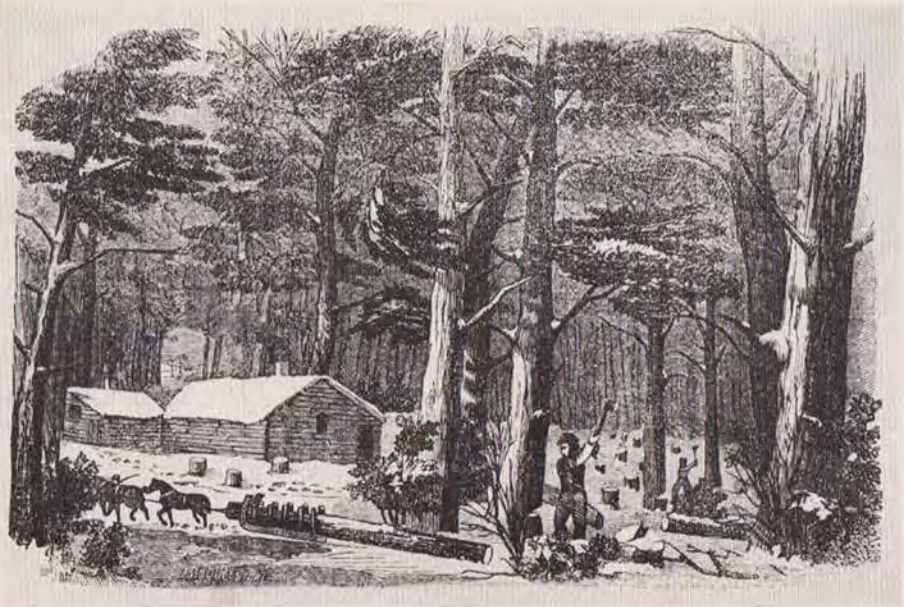
Much of this timber came down river as far as Marietta before being sold. At Marietta, the rafts took on new pilots to guide them through the falls and rapids of the Susquehanna which lay between that city and Chesapeake Bay. In the Bay, the rafts were towed by steam tugs or ships to the entrance of the Delaware and Chesapeake Canal and thence to their ultimate destination at Philadelphia. The rafts were made up of logs from 15 to 24 inches square, and from 30 to 80 feet long. Each log contained from 600 to 1800 board feet, and an average raft contained about 96,000 board feet. Prices at Marietta during this period varied from 6 to 26 cents per cubic foot according to the supply.

About 1850, however, a change came in the character of the Susquehanna lumber trade. In 1847, a great hurricane swept the river country felling millions of feet of timber. In an effort to salvage some of its value, one large lumber company conceived the idea of cutting the fallen logs accessible to the river into comparatively short lengths and floating them unrafted to some place where they could be conveniently milled. A sawmill was built at Lock Haven and a temporary boom constructed to catch the logs. In the Spring of 1852 over 2,000,000 feet of logs were successfully driven to this destination.

Meanwhile, the Susquehanna Boom Company had constructed the giant Williamsport Boom, completed in 1849. Stimulated by the success of the first great log drive, sawmills sprang up like mushrooms along the river bank at Williamsport which by 1860 became the greatest lumber city in the state, taking much of the business away from Marietta and the down-river cities. Rafting continued for many years, but its importance as a method of lumber transportation gradually declined as more and more lumber was sawed at the up-river sawmills and the product was shipped to market by rail. The records of the Pennsylvania Railroad attest to the growing volume of lumber shipped out of the Williamsport district by rail during

the 1860's and 1870's, much of it destined for Philadelphia and Baltimore.

By 1854, James McIlvain, having been active head of the business for fifteen years, was ready to retire, as his elder brother John had already done. He was only 41 years old and in the prime of life, but was anxious to devote his energies to other interests. By so doing, he may well have followed the path of wisdom, for he achieved the ripe old age of 81 and actually outlived his younger brother, Hugh, by some fifteen years. At this juncture, Hugh assumed responsibility for the lumber business which was carried on from 1854 to 1868 under the name of Hugh McIlvain.



COURTESY THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA

*Felling timber in Western Pennsylvania in the middle
of the last century*



Hugh McIlvain the Second

WHEN THE SECOND Hugh McIlvain assumed responsibility for the affairs of the firm in 1854, the war between the States over the matter of slavery was already casting its grim shadow across the nation. Controversy over the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 was at its height. The "Underground Railroad" by which negroes were spirited out of slave territory and on to Canada was in full operation. Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Uncle Tom's Cabin," first published in book form in 1852, was at the peak of its popularity in abolitionist circles.

One of the results of the national ferment was the establishment in February, 1856, of the Republican Party which held its first

national convention in Philadelphia in June of that year. Amid immense enthusiasm, the convention nominated John C. Fremont of California for the presidency. In the following election, however, that intrepid adventurer went down to defeat at the hands of James Buchanan partly because Fremont's French ancestry made him suspect among the Germans of Pennsylvania and partly because his earlier business ethics failed to commend him to the Quakers of the Keystone State. The convention paved the way, none-the-less, for the nomination and election of Abraham Lincoln four years later.

In the summer of 1857 came another of the periodic economic crises that have so insistently plagued American business history. This particular crash is attributed in large measure to the then-current inflation due to the sudden addition of large sums of gold to the world's stock as the result of the discoveries of the precious metal in Australia and in California. Prices had gone up with fantastic rapidity and speculation was on the rampage. This beautiful dream was brought to a sudden end by the failure of one of the most outstanding speculative ventures of the day, the Ohio Life Insurance Trust Company of Cincinnati. Following this debacle, banks first in New York and then in Philadelphia suspended specie payments and refused to cash checks. In Philadelphia there were parades of the unemployed replete with banners bearing inflammatory inscriptions demanding work and despoilment of the rich. In a few months, banks had reopened and factory wheels turned again, but the industries of the country, particularly in Pennsylvania, had received a severe check from which recovery was slow. This naturally affected the lumber trade along with other local industries.

In spite of the uncertainties of the time, the State of Pennsylvania during these years, first took the lead in the matter of lumber production, largely due to the intensive exploitation of the trans-Appalachian timber resources of the state. According to the national census of 1850, Pennsylvania had 2,894 establishments engaged in lumber production, representing an invested capital of \$6,913,000, employing over 7,000 workers, and with an annual production

the market was largely kept alive by the activities of the Federal Government which was a heavy buyer of white pine and other lumber. Many lumber dealers enlisted, and the character of the trade underwent considerable alteration. After the war, many of the wholesalers gave up their lumber yards and established sales offices, shipments being made direct from the mills to the retail distributors like the McIlvain firm.

From the standpoint of building in and around Philadelphia, major interest during the war days was concentrated in the construction of new factories for the production of munitions. During the year 1862, no less than 58 new plants were erected within the city limits. Fifty-seven more were added during 1863, and 65 in 1864.

West Philadelphia enjoyed its share of this industrial expansion, and an opportunity was afforded to the McIlvain firm to participate more and more in this type of business. In 1863, the well-known firm of Sellers Bros., manufacturers of wire goods and ornamental railings, moved to State Street and Powelton Avenue where they erected a large factory. In the following year, Chambers Brother & Co.'s Foundry and Machine Works was moved to a site at 30th and Chestnut Streets. This company was engaged in the manufacture of folding machines for such important publishers as J. B. Lippincott & Company of Philadelphia and Harper & Brothers of New York. The company is still in business today and is still a customer of the McIlvain firm. In 1866, the Flint Glass Works, manufacturers of perfume bottles and other similar items, established themselves at 33rd and Market Streets, practically next door to the McIlvain lumber yard, and there built a plant with a ground-floor expanse of 64 by 140 feet.

During the war between the States, both Hugh and Martha Gibson McIlvain were extremely active in educational and charitable affairs and in the Society of Friends. Hugh assisted materially in the establishment of Swarthmore College which was founded in 1864. He was appointed the first chairman of the institution's building and property committee, a post which he retained for many years. He

and his wife were instrumental in the establishment of the Friends' Meeting at 15th and Race Streets in Philadelphia and both were members of the school committee. For a number of years, Hugh also represented the 27th Ward which comprised most of the old townships of Blockley and Kingsessing in Select Council.

The year 1865 marked the end of the bloody, fratricidal struggle between the Federal Government and the Confederacy, and witnessed also the tragic death of President Lincoln. Peace brought with it a tremendous boom in business activity throughout the northern states. During the five years immediately following the war, scarcely a record in American industry escaped being broken. More cotton spindles were set revolving, more iron furnaces were lighted, more steel was made, more coal and copper were mined, more lumber was hewed and sawed, more houses and shops were constructed, and more manufacturies of different kinds were established than during any similar period in our previous history. The American industrial revolution was really in stride. Needless to say, the McIlvain firm profited in proportion to the general prosperity.

Hugh and his wife began to feel crowded by the growing industrialization of that section of West Philadelphia which bordered on the Schuylkill and, in 1866, decided to abandon the old family homestead next to the lumber yard in favor of a new residence farther away from the heart of the city. A spacious home was built at 59th Street and Elmwood Avenue where Hugh had more room to gratify his affection for, and interest in, country life. Here he spent whatever time was available to him in the development of his orchards, gardens, and lawns, and in building up his herd of thoroughbred Jersey cattle. He had inherited not only the strict business integrity of his father, but also the happy, genial disposition of his mother, and it was due to these qualities, as well as to the charm and intellectual capacity of his wife, that the new McIlvain homestead soon became a bright center of intellectual and social life.

Meanwhile, the elder son of the family, John Gibson McIlvain, had been growing up. He had completed his education at the

Friends' Central School in the Philadelphia suburb of Overbrook and now, in 1868, at the age of twenty-three, he was formally inducted into the family firm. The firm name once again became Hugh McIlvain & Son, following the pattern established by the original Hugh McIlvain in 1835. In the same year, he was married to Miss Elizabeth Mulvaney McIlvaine, daughter of Abraham Robinson McIlvaine, representative in Congress for Chester County. The names of the bride and groom were no mere coincidence, for Elizabeth McIlvaine was a distant cousin of her husband's, being a descendent of the original McIlvaine family of Ayrshire, Scotland, which had itself sent representatives to the New World early in the 18th century.

Two years later, in 1870, the firm experienced good fortune through the establishment at 31st and Chestnut Streets of the J. G. Brill Company, now the ACF-Brill Motors Company located at 62nd Street and Woodland Avenue. The periods immediately preceding and immediately following the Civil War were high points both in American railroad and American urban street car development. Between 1865 and 1872, railroad mileage in the United States practically doubled. Between 1855 and 1860, 30 street railway lines were built, and between 1860 and 1870, 80 new lines were put into service. One of the earlier lines was the West Philadelphia Passenger Railway Company which was chartered in May, 1857. All of this construction created a feverish demand for railroad cars and street cars. Such cars at this period were largely constructed of wood, much of it well-seasoned hardwood such as the McIlvains were accustomed to carry. The J. G. Brill Company almost immediately became clients of the McIlvain firm, a relationship which has continued without interruption for more than seventy-five years.

Another stroke of good fortune occurred in 1872 when the University of Pennsylvania, which since 1802 had occupied quarters at 9th and Chestnut Streets in Philadelphia, acquired a tract of 117 acres in West Philadelphia. The first buildings to be erected on the new site were the College, Logan Hall, the Hare Laboratory, and the main building of the University hospital. Construction was



Early Brill Horse Car

started on the plot between 33rd and 36th Streets bordering on Locust Street. This was within a few short blocks of the McIlvain lumber yard. The University almost immediately became a customer of the McIlvains and has remained so for the past seventy-five years.

The lumber business in the '70s was conducted at what today would be considered a leisurely and ultra-conservative pace. Lumber yards did not have salesmen out soliciting business. Customers came to the yard — the yard owner did not hunt for them. An old-fashioned bond of sympathy commonly existed between the carpenter or builder and his favorite lumberman. Buyers were not so price conscious as they are today, and competitive bidding to supply lumber was practically unknown.

The function of the lumber yard was, however, very much the same in those days as it is today. The lumber dealer had, first, to be familiar with adequate and dependable sources of supply. Knowing his local market, he brought to his yard substantial quantities of the various types of lumber which were likely to be in active current demand. These he held for varying periods, ranging up to two and three years, that it might be properly seasoned. It was his job, too, to separate bulk shipments from the mill according to quality and size

so that his stock was immediately available for specific uses of individual customers, who in most instances came to depend to a large degree upon the judgment and integrity of the yard owner.

Customers of the McIlvains, such as the Philadelphia Car Works, the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the University of Pennsylvania, when once established, continued to deal with the firm on the basis of the quality of lumber and the service which they received. The firm itself had now been in continuous operation at the same location for over seventy years and had built a reputation for unswerving integrity. Its experience in the lumber business and its good name in the community were all that was needed to assure a steady and growing clientele.

Hugh McIlvain's position in the lumber trade of the city was exemplified, in 1873, by his ability to interest other lumber merchants in the organization of the Lumbermen's Insurance Company of which he became a director and the first president. This company was created as a protest against what local lumber dealers considered excessive fire insurance rates. Although the company never grew to large independent stature, it continued to operate successfully until it was eventually purchased by and became a part of the group of companies controlled by the Fire Association of Philadelphia. In 1923, on the occasion of the company's fiftieth anniversary, five out of the twelve members of the company's board of directors were sons or grandsons of the members of the original board. Among them was Walter B. McIlvain, son of J. Gibson McIlvain and grandson of Hugh McIlvain.

To most of the United States, however, the year 1873 was one of disaster and despair, for in the summer of that year the great economic collapse, precipitated by the failure of the Philadelphia banking house of Jay Cooke & Company, burst upon the nation with all the unexpected fury of a summer hurricane. One minute all was sunshine; the next, everything was shrouded in the blackness of economic ruin.

It was the New York office of Jay Cooke & Company that first

closed its doors. When the telegraphic bulletin announcing the failure reached the Philadelphia stock exchange, the entire membership of the exchange rushed pell-mell into the streets and down to Jay Cooke's office to verify the news. A newsboy shouting an extra "all about the failure of Jay Cooke" was arrested by a horrified and incredulous policeman. The belief of the public in the basic soundness of the firm was eventually justified when a liquidation of the firm's assets showed that these exceeded liabilities by a wide margin. Jay Cooke & Company had been the victim of a lack of liquidity brought about by the prevailing economic crisis, but from the standpoint of the general business structure, the damage had been done. Panic ensued.



*Trademark of the
Lumbermen's Insurance
Company of Philadelphia*

The next five years were marked by a depression equalled in severity only by the more recent depression of the 1930's. Railroad building came to a stop and all the industries affiliated with this form of enterprise were correspondingly affected. Unemployment increased by leaps and bounds. Wages dropped to a point where even professional men cut their charges in half. Business failures pyramided.

No firm, such as that of the McIlvains, could go through a period of this sort unscathed. For Hugh McIlvain & Son, however, fate provided a special form of dispensation. In the very midst of the depression, as though in defiance of all the laws of business sanity, the people of the country gave themselves up to an impressive and comprehensive commemoration of the one hundredth anniversary of the nation's birth.

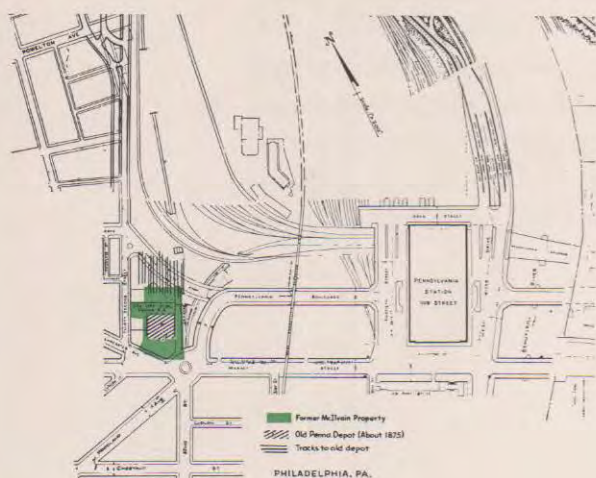
It took the form of the first of the great world's fairs to be held in the United States and, by the greatest of good fortune as far as the McIlvain firm was concerned, the site selected was Fairmount Park on the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia. From the standpoint of the family, the first effect of the Philadelphia Centennial was an

opportunity to sell the old McIlvain homestead at 32nd and Market Streets on very advantageous terms to the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Foreseeing the great volume of passenger traffic that would be generated by the Centennial, the Pennsylvania decided to establish a new railroad station in West Philadelphia conveniently close to the fair grounds. With this in mind, the McIlvain property was purchased in 1875, and the new terminal constructed in time for the opening of the Centennial which took place on May 10, 1876. The original structure was destroyed by fire in 1896, but the present general office building of the Pennsylvania in West Philadelphia is located directly in the center of the property once owned by the original Hugh McIlvain.

The McIlvains were deeply interested in the Centennial both as suppliers of building materials and as eventual exhibitors at the fair. Hugh McIlvain took occasion to enter a number of his prize Jersey cattle in the agricultural exhibit which, incidentally, is reported to have been of astonishing scope and interest. His entries won five prizes out of seventeen in his class. His elder brother, John H. McIlvain, who had retired from the firm to devote his time to ornithology, entered his collection of stuffed birds as an exhibit and likewise received recognition in the form of a first prize. One of these exhibits is still in the possession of the family.

The Centennial itself was open for five months and drew over three million visitors in Philadelphia. While its architecture was admittedly mediocre, it had proved to be a tremendous construction job. It was boasted at the time that the Main Exhibition Building was the largest structure in the world. In addition, four other great



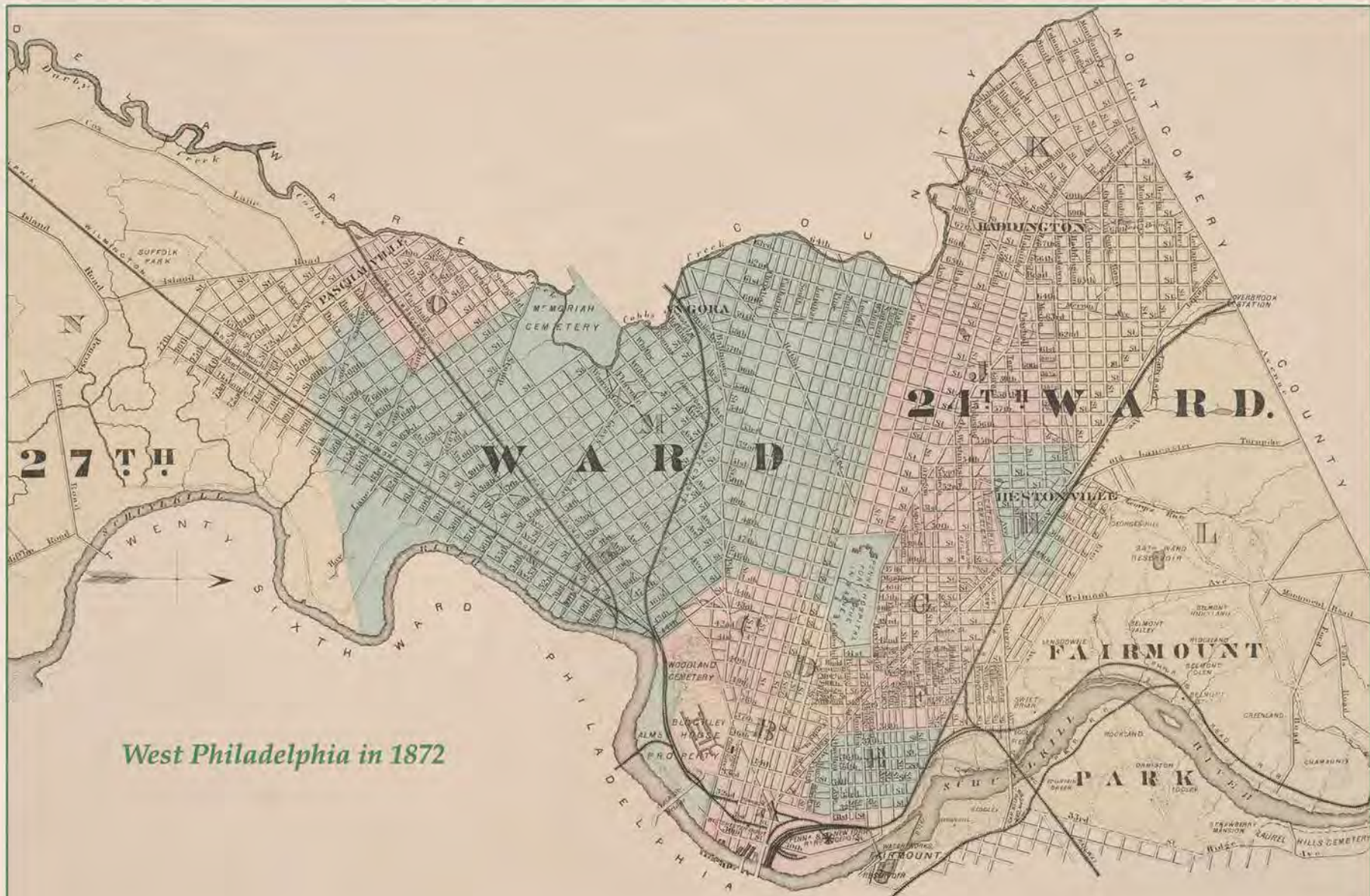
This map, prepared by the Pennsylvania Railroad, shows the former McIlvain property acquired by the railroad, together with the site of the original Pennsylvania depot in West Philadelphia



*The main exhibition hall at the Philadelphia
Centennial Exposition of 1876*

halls and half a hundred smaller buildings were scattered through the fair grounds. No lumber merchant could ask for a better fate than to have such a project constructed at his very front door.

During the latter years of his life, Hugh McIlvain had gradually retired from active management of the family business, leaving the responsibility to an ever increasing extent in the hands of his son, J. Gibson McIlvain. Hugh himself devoted more time as the years went on to matters pertaining to the Society of Friends. His death in February, 1879, had little effect on the affairs of the firm. In the newspaper accounts that followed his death, particular emphasis was laid upon his work as one of the founders of Swarthmore College and as one of those who had been especially active in "pushing improvements in West Philadelphia such as to make that section perhaps the most attractive dwelling place within the city limits." During the twenty-five years that he remained senior partner of the family enterprise, he had been successful in expanding its activities to a very considerable extent, particularly in the field of lumber for industrial construction and use. He left to the family a business that had been tested in war, depression, and prosperity alike.



West Philadelphia in 1872



Trial by Fire

THE LUMBER BUSINESS in Philadelphia in the '70s and '80s of the last century was still conducted very much as it had been one hundred years earlier when the first Hugh McIlvain went into business. As late as 1878 an estimated 200,000,000 feet of logs and lumber were carried annually by the Delaware River to the lower markets. Great log rafts containing from 54,000 to 80,000 feet, board measure, came down each year with the spring floods. Along with them came other rafts of hewn timber and spars.

Up to this time, the Philadelphia lumber market had been able to satisfy its requirements to a very considerable extent from native

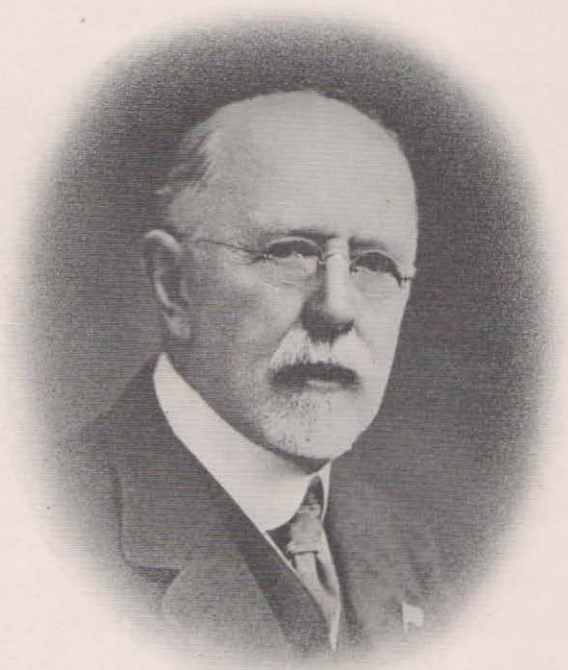
timber felled within the confines of the State of Pennsylvania. The problem of transportation, as always, was the dominating factor in the merchandising of lumber. So long as adequate supplies of local timber remained which could be brought to market along natural waterways, Philadelphia had comparatively little need to seek new sources of supply.

Such tremendous inroads had been made, however, on the virgin timber lands of the state by 1870, that Pennsylvania was crowded from its position of leadership among the lumber-producing states by a young and vigorous Michigan. During the '70s and '80s, large scale lumbering was also being developed in Wisconsin and Minnesota, and a few years later southern yellow pine began coming to market in such volume that, by 1895, it represented between 20 and 40 per cent of the nation's total lumber production. By the turn of the century, the Pacific Coast, headed by Washington and Oregon, came into prominence and before long gained a dominant position.

With the expansion of the country's railroad system, water transportation began to play a less vital role in bringing lumber to market. As early as 1851, the Erie Railroad had established an all-rail route between New York and the Great Lakes. During the hectic period of railroad development immediately following the Civil War, thousands of miles of new trackage was laid. Means were thus established to make the tremendous lumber reserves of the North Central states available to Eastern markets. As Pennsylvania's own resources slowly became exhausted, the Philadelphia market began more and more to draw upon other sections of the country.

In 1892, there were still twelve large sawmills operating around the booms at Williamsport, Pa. Together they had an annual capacity of some 200,000,000 board feet. But they were locked in a death struggle for the diminishing supply of logs that each season floated down the Susquehanna. The timber reserves of the West Branch had been squandered with spendthrift prodigality.

The merchandising of lumber had, of course, become increasingly competitive with the years. The Philadelphia directory for



J. Gibson McIlvain

1877 gave the names of 127 firms and individuals engaged in the lumber trade. Of these, 31 were classified as "commission brokers" and the rest as wholesalers and retailers.

For several years after his father's death, J. Gibson McIlvain continued to operate under the firm style of Hugh McIlvain & Son. In 1883, however, he changed the company to J. Gibson McIlvain. Meanwhile, his younger brother, Hugh McIlvain 2nd, had become affiliated with the family business. He entered the firm's employ in 1880, at the age of eighteen, after graduating from Friend's Central School in Philadelphia. By 1888, at the age of twenty-six, he had become thoroughly familiar with the business and obtained his partnership status. The firm name was thereupon changed to J. Gibson McIlvain & Company.



A photograph of the original McIlvain lumber yard at 58th Street and Woodland Avenue about the turn of the century

With the latter-day expansion of West Philadelphia, the property on which the lumber yard stood at 34th and Market Streets had become increasingly valuable. Furthermore, the expansion of the business itself definitely required more storage space. With this in mind, the partners looked around for a new site. They found it in a plot, comprising about 15 acres, bounded on two sides by 56th and 58th Streets and on the other two sides by Woodland and Gray's Avenues. The property belonged to the estate of one Mark Devine who had originally purchased it from John Gibson, the maternal grandfather for whom J. Gibson McIlvain had been named. The site was particularly advantageous because it was contiguous to both the Pennsylvania and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroads and because it was still within short hauling distance of the Schuylkill River. This is the site upon which the present lumber yard still stands.

Although this property was acquired in 1892, the firm did not immediately move its entire business to the new location. Several years were spent in building sheds and in stocking them with selected hardwoods and lumber for building purposes. Not until six years later, in 1898, on the occasion of the firm's 100th Anniversary, was the company's office actually removed from 3401 Market Street.

The anniversary itself was celebrated with becoming modesty. *The New York Lumber Trade Journal* of June 15, 1898, gives this account of the affair and of the firm:

THEIR HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY

We have recently received from one of our esteemed constituents in the Philadelphia trade an announcement that is undoubtedly unique in the trade. It is nothing less than the announcement of the one hundredth anniversary of J. Gibson McIlvain & Co. in the trade of that city. This house was established by Hugh McIlvain in Philadelphia in 1798. We do not know, but we are led to believe that this is the only instance of the kind in the United States of a lumber concern one hundred years old, at least by succession in direct line.

The celebration was unostentatious and in the nature of a removal from the firm's well-known location at Thirty-fourth and Market Streets, Philadelphia, to Fifty-eight and Woodland Avenue, where, having the increased facilities of 2,500 feet of trackage in their yard from the Pennsylvania and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroads, and being but a short distance from the Schuylkill River, they are thereby enabled to receive and ship by both rail and water. They claim to have now the largest lumber shed in America, with a capacity of storing 16,000,000 feet under cover, and they are certainly in a position to handle lumber of all kinds to the best advantage. As in previous years, it is their intention to continue to carry a large and well assorted stock of the different varieties of Hardwoods, White Pine, Yellow Pine and general building lumber, so as to be prepared to fill any orders promptly, from a well-seasoned stock.

* * *

It is not a matter of frequency that any family can boast of having conducted a certain line of business in any one place in this country for over a century. Such, however, can be said of the McIlvain family, one of the ancestors of which established a lumber yard in West Philadelphia in 1798, within a square of where the descendents have continued it since, and from which the two now in business have removed to what is undoubtedly one of the largest and best equipped lumber yards to be found in the whole country.

What the family does not know about lumber is certainly not worth studying. Some lumbermen come and others go, but the McIlvains go on forever. And I think there are some scions of

the family in training now, to take the places of the present proprietors, when old age has rendered them unfit for service.

While the editor of the *Lumber Trade Journal* seems to have been somewhat addicted to hyperbole, his faith in the McIlvain clan was vindicated by J. Gibson McIlvain, who not only possessed a thorough knowledge of lumber, but also a constructive imagination which he applied to the family business. From the days of the Philadelphia Centennial, and even before, the firm had been acquiring a wider and wider industrial clientele. By 1900, what with its improved storage and shipping facilities, the concern was handling large contracts, often in car-load lots, for many important industrial customers. Moreover, the firm's sales territory had expanded far beyond the confines of West Philadelphia. An old sales ledger or "price book" dated January 1, 1900, still in the firm's possession, sheds considerable light not alone on the character of the business which the firm was then doing, but also on market prices for various types of lumber in that period.

Three of the most important accounts that the firm then carried on its books were the Baldwin Locomotive Works, the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the Pullman Company — all three still active customers of the J. Gibson McIlvain Company. The record indicates, for example, that in September, 1900, the firm contracted to furnish to the Baldwin Locomotive Works 3 to 6 carloads of 5/8 poplar at \$21.80 and an equal amount of 6/4 poplar at \$28.00 per thousand. Rough boxing lumber, of which the firm supplied hundreds of thousands of feet to Baldwin, was selling at that time for about \$14.50 per thousand. The Pennsylvania Railroad, on the other hand, was greatly interested in the hardwoods such as ash and oak, as well as in poplar. Replying to an inquiry from the railroad dated November 11, 1903, the firm quoted the following prices:

58,800 feet 1" Western White Oak	\$41.00
3,600 feet 1 1/4" Western White Oak	44.00
5,775 feet 1 1/2" Western White Oak	45.00
74,250 feet 2" Western White Oak	49.00

3,175 feet 2½" Western White Oak	56.00
9,225 feet 3¼" Western White Oak	62.00
9,225 feet 4" Western White Oak	62.00
11,700 feet 4½" Western White Oak	70.00
22,725 feet 5" Western White Oak	70.00
34,200 feet 5⅛" Quartered White Oak	\$55.00
22,500 feet ¾" Quartered White Oak	62.50
45,450 feet 1" Quartered White Oak	85.00
27,650 feet 1¼" Quartered White Oak	87.00
40,875 feet 1½" Quartered White Oak	88.00
15,000 feet 2" Quartered White Oak	90.00
22,725 feet 2½" Quartered White Oak	95.00
15,900 feet 5⅛" Soft Yellow Poplar	\$39.00
105,300 feet 1" Soft Yellow Poplar	52.50
5,100 feet 1¼" Soft Yellow Poplar	55.00
5,025 feet 1½" Soft Yellow Poplar	57.00
5,400 feet 2½" Soft Yellow Poplar	60.00

The Pullman Company was during this period a heavy buyer of white ash, whitewood, basswood, red birch, hickory, hemlock, and maple, as well as white oak, white and Norway pine. Deliveries were made both to Wilmington, Delaware and to East Buffalo, New York.

A selection of steady-customer names taken from the same ledger will give some idea of the kind of business which the McIlvain firm was then doing. The list includes such firms as the Atlantic Coast Line in Wilmington, N. C., the Keystone Lumber Company in Lancaster, Pa., the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, the Cortland Wagon Company, in Cortland, N.Y., the Union Traction Company of Philadelphia, the Hampden Planing Mill Company in Reading, Pa., the Philadelphia Cabinet Company, the Enterprise Furniture Company of Glen Rock, Pa., the Ogeleby Piano Company of York, Pa., the Reading Iron Company, the Howe Scale Company

This quotation on "western" lumber refers to Appalachian Oak and is significant of the change which had taken place in sources of lumber supply, as well as the continuing demand for superior quality.

of Philadelphia, the Needham Piano & Organ Company of Washington, D. C., Swarthmore College, the Fitzgibbon & Crist Carriage & Wagon Company of Trenton, and the United States Navy.

Among the orders received, the hardwoods predominated, although the firm was likewise doing a large business in white and yellow pine. Orders from builders are less frequent than might be expected, but numerous entries do appear covering such building materials as lath, sheathing, shingles, and barn boards. Some business was done in hardwood veneers such as walnut and ash, and there are occasional orders for mahogany. It is obvious from the record that the business was a substantial one both from the standpoint of volume and from that of the credit rating of its customers.

Typical of the relationship maintained between the firm and its customers is that of the Derham Custom Body Company of Rosemont, Pa. This concern, established in 1887, at first engaged in the manufacture of carriages, which required the best of seasoned hardwood for body and running gear. The McIlvain yard was the logical place to obtain suitable lumber. From the start, the Derham company sent its own mill man down to the yard to make his selection of the finest oak, northern ash, and hickory.

When the automobile was introduced about the turn of the century, Derham was the first company to specialize in making custom bodies for cars. It was an entirely new field and one in which methods had to be developed in the course of the work.

Largely because most early automobiles were manufactured with open, touring car bodies, the business prospered. Wealthy citizens of Philadelphia who wished to drive their cars in winter would come to the Derham company to have a closed body custom-built. Every Spring the closed body would be removed and stored with Derham. In the Fall, the body would be installed in time for the cold weather.

The Derham company has continued to do custom work and to buy its fine hardwoods from the McIlvains. The company fabricated the special body used on the automobile placed at the disposal of the King and Queen of England during their 1940 tour of the United

States. It has built special bodies for many Eastern Potentates. Among the company's current assignments is the construction of a body for the automobile recently purchased in this country for His Holiness, the Pope, which will be equipped with a writing desk, a radio, a radio telephone, and other conveniences.

During the years preceding the turn of the century, J. Gibson McIlvain had purchased a 300-acre farm at Woodbine, Chester County, Pa., two miles from Downingtown. This farm, now known as "Smoky Ridge Farm," became one of his major interests and is still occupied by members of the family.

The senior partner's first child was a son, Abram, born in 1869, who did not live, however, to attain his majority. A daughter, Martha, was born in 1877, and a second son and namesake, John Gibson McIlvain, Jr., in 1881. A third son, Walter Biddle McIlvain, arrived three years later. Both of these boys eventually became partners in the business. J. Gibson McIlvain, Jr. joined the firm in 1903 at the age of twenty-two. After graduating from Princeton University in 1907, Walter McIlvain became a partner in 1909.

Meanwhile, in 1906, the firm was the victim of a disaster which for a time, at least, profoundly affected its entire method of operation. Early on the morning of March 28 of that year, fire broke out in the McIlvain lumber yard. It was discovered by two of the firm's employees, but only after it had gained such momentum that it could not be immediately controlled, and some 12,000,000 board feet of well-seasoned wood was destroyed. The *Philadelphia Inquirer*, in describing the conflagration, stated that "the glare in the sky, which was almost prismatic, ranging from blood orange to pale yellow, was visible at points twenty miles from the scene." Indeed, anxious inquiries were received from points as far distant as the New Jersey shore. "The firemen fought with superhuman effort under terrible odds," the *Inquirer* continues. "A single false step meant a horrible death."

The Mayor of Philadelphia was present during almost the entire period of the fire, giving what assistance he could. Many neighbor-

Philadelphia Inquirer

EVER
210,711
177,264
35,447

PHILADELPHIA, WEDNESDAY MORNING, MARCH 28, 1906

ONE CENT

**DOWNTOWN URGES
EASIER GAS AND
RAPID TRANSIT**

Philadelphia Business-
Demand Considera-
Their Section

REFEITURE OF
ALLEY FRANCHISES

attended meeting of the
Philadelphia Business Men's As-
sociation last evening, announcing
that the Rapid Transit
division had extended service
to the city and the Rapid
Transit division had been
franchisees they have held
to use. The meeting was also
the 100th anniversary of the
city by John Bailey, an indus-
trial man of that section of the
city.

They also discussed the
railway question they put there
in the form of strong recom-
mendations to the Rapid Transit
and Transit officials.

Francis I. Bailey acted as chair-
man. F. L. Lamm and James
L. Lamm as secretaries of the
club was held in Model Hall,
11th and Locust streets.

They called attention to the
fact that the Rapid Transit
company for improving
service of the city nothing
wider for south Philadel-
phia to not only the other
city for what is being pro-
posed. But we do want
to see that the city is not
to be just as low as many
are. They have more ac-
tive service in this section
of the city. The population of
Philadelphia is now 500,000.
The population of Philadel-
phia is now 500,000. The
population of Philadelphia is
now 500,000. The population
of Philadelphia is now 500,000.

MEN IN BLAZING LANES FOUGHT FIRE THAT LIGHTED WHOLE CITY



**\$400,000 Conflagra-
tion Reduced Forests
of Lumber to Ashes
at McIlvain Yard**

**DWELLINGS NEARBY
WERE THREATENED**

**Corpses Dressed for Burial
Lay Within House Ready
for Removal at Flame's
Approach**

In one of the most spectacular fires in
this city, three-fourths of the stock of the
McIlvain Lumber Co., at Fifty-eighth street and
Woodland avenue, was last night reduced
to ashes.

The flames in the sky, which were almost
invisible, ranging from a blood orange
to pale yellow, was visible at points
twenty miles from the scene of the blaze.
Persons lying in bed, with unconscious effort
under terrible odds. A single hole step
meant a horrible death.

Starting from a ground electric wire
the flames were caught up by a stiff
wind and whirling through the mil-
lions of millions of feet of dry lumber
glad to take leaps on every side. The
blaze was in the very heart of the
yard when the screaming whistles called
the first battalion of firemen to the
scene about 9:30 P. M.

They found a fireproof building facing
them. The two minutes of lumber found
on Woodland avenue and ran back
to the stacks of the Baltimore and Ohio
and the P. D. & W. Railroads. Water
was only to be had in small quantities
and had to be used through long lines
of hose.

Towering piles of lumber appeared by
little clouds over rising up every side.
The flames advanced here and there.

SPINAL RHEUMATISM

Sketch of the Fire From Woodland Ave., Drawn
by an Inquirer Artist Shortly Before 11 O'clock

*The Philadelphia Inquirer of March 28, 1906, reports the fire at
the McIlvain lumber yard*

ing buildings, including the 40th Ward Republican Club, had to be evacuated. When the wind changed, however, the members of the club returned and "regaled the firemen with sandwiches and coffee."

Practically the entire McIlvain yard, including offices, sheds and records, was destroyed in this historic blaze. The ultimate loss was assessed at approximately \$350,000 which, fortunately was well covered by insurance. The cause of the fire was determined to have been an electrical short-circuit. Another fortunate circumstance was that the company had in Philadelphia or in transit to the city 138

carloads of lumber which were not in the yard. This reserve stock permitted the firm to continue its business almost without interruption and to take care of the most pressing, immediate needs of its clients. The loss of the company's records was, of course, a serious matter, but owing to the character of its clientele the task of reconstructing accounts outstanding was greatly minimized. The firm survived this experience just as it had already lived through more than a hundred years of economic trials and tribulations.

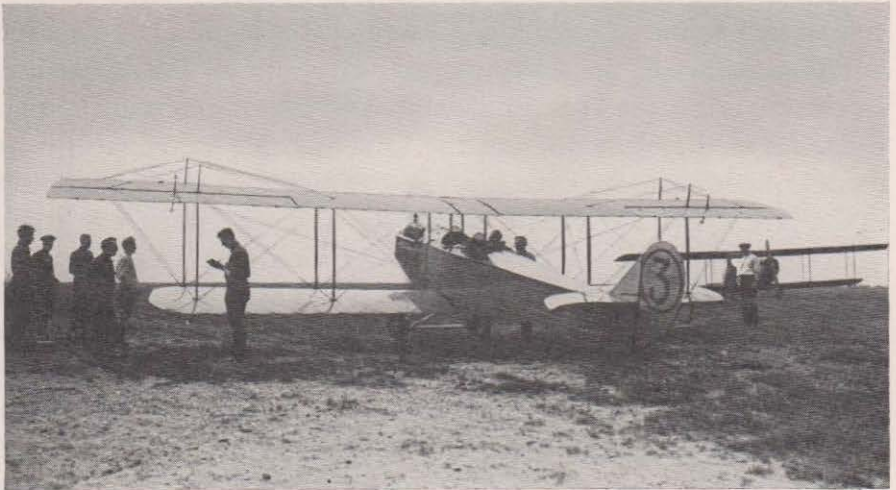
Following the destruction of the lumber yard, the firm started at once to rebuild its storage facilities, meanwhile concentrating on its wholesale operations. The office was maintained in the Crozier building at 1420 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, from which the company continued to develop its growing wholesale hardwood trade, shipments being made direct from stocks which the firm now carried in mills at various points of origin.

In 1909, under the leadership of J. Gibson McIlvain, the firm interested itself in a new type of operation. A controlling interest was purchased in the Croft Lumber Company of Alexander, West Virginia. This company owned several large tracts of timber land as well as its own sawmills. For a period, therefore, the McIlvain enterprise became an integrated business handling lumber from the standing timber to the seasoned product ready for industrial use. By this time, too, the West Philadelphia yard had been rebuilt upon the ashes of the old yard, and the firm was able to reestablish its retail lumber business. Even today, excavation for a new foundation in the yard will uncover charcoal and ashes deposited there in 1906.

In 1915 J. Gibson McIlvain also acquired the Downingtown Paper Box Company of Downingtown, Pa. This company is still in successful operation, although it is now completely disassociated both as to ownership and management from the McIlvain lumber business. The same is true of the Downingtown Paper Company (formerly the Frank P. Miller Paper Company of Downingtown) of which J. Gibson McIlvain became president and subsequently the owner. This company was started by Frank P. Miller, a relative

of the McIlvains by marriage and was taken over by the McIlvain firm upon Mr. Miller's death.

The year 1914 will, of course, always be remembered as the historic milestone that marked the beginning of World War I. After the first shock of the conflict had been absorbed by the American economic system, came a period of feverish business activity during which practically every important industrial organization in the country was engaged in the task of fabricating munitions for the Allies. Later, when the United States entered the war in 1917, these activities were redoubled. As a supplier of vital materials to industry, the services of the McIlvain firm were greatly in demand. The company supplied lumber to the great shipyards that were struggling to turn out tonnage faster than it could be sent to the bottom by German submarines; to U.S. Navy Yards that were working frantically to build up our fleet; and to the new mushrooming aircraft factories that were trying to learn the secret of mass production of aircraft. The framework of the airplane of that day was, of course,



World War I airplane with wooden frame

constructed of wood, which created a substantial demand for seasoned spruce.

Immediately following the war, the United States did an extremely active export business in lumber with both England and France. Hardwoods were in special demand, and the firm found profitable employment for its facilities in this field. Many of the firm's customers were also busily engaged in satisfying pent-up foreign demands for American products, such as trucks, where seasoned hardwood played an important part in fabrication. Added to all this was an active domestic building boom occasioned, like the housing shortage following World War II, by a shortage of manpower and materials during the war years. The firm developed a flourishing trade with building contractors of all kinds.

In the midst of this whirlwind of new activities, J. Gibson McIlvain, who was then a man of seventy-five and had practically retired to his farm at Woodbine, passed away on February 9, 1920. So many were his friends and so wide his interests that a special train was necessary to accommodate all those who wished to attend the services in his honor which were held at the spot he loved best in all the world, his estate at Woodbine. Although a much younger man himself, Gibson's brother, Hugh McIlvain 2nd, retired from the firm shortly thereafter. He was active in many better-government movements, in the Society of Friends, and as a philanthropist. He was a vice president and director of the Logan Trust Company. For the next five years, until his death in 1925, he devoted his time to these private interests.

At this time, the remaining partners decided to incorporate the business. This was done in the latter part of 1920, and the firm name became the J. Gibson McIlvain Company, as it is today. Ownership of the company remained in the hands of the three branches of the family represented by J. Gibson McIlvain's three children, J. Gibson McIlvain, Jr., Walter B. McIlvain, and Martha McIlvain Ostheimer (Mrs. Maurice Ostheimer). The family interests likewise included, as has been indicated, the Croft Lumber Company, the Downing-



The third Hugh McIlvain

town Paper Company, and the Downingtown Paper Box Company.

For the next ten years, management of these interests was carried on jointly by J. Gibson McIlvain, Jr. and his brother, Walter. Gibson became president of the J. Gibson McIlvain Company and the Downingtown Paper Company and vice president of the Croft Lumber Company and the Downingtown Paper Box Company. Walter, on the other hand, was president of the Croft Lumber Company and the Downingtown Paper Box Company and vice president of the J. Gibson McIlvain Company and the Downingtown Paper Company. This arrangement was continued until January, 1930, when it was abruptly terminated by the unexpected and premature death of Walter McIlvain.



POPLAR

A Return to First Principles

THOSE WHO went through the gaudy and exciting days of the 1920's look back at them today with a kind of wonder and even, perhaps, with a secret regret that it was all too good to last. Following the brief, sharp recession immediately after World War I, the whole economy of the nation reached a higher level of activity than the country had ever before experienced. Business roared ahead with open throttle. People began to believe that even the impossible could be accomplished, and it frequently was. Stock market prices doubled and quadrupled. Speculation of all kinds was rife. The theory was expounded and accepted in many quarters that the

United States had created a new type of economy — an economy of plenty — which had no limitations.

The business of the McIlvains more than doubled both in physical and dollar volume. This was due in part to higher prices, but even more to an expanding demand for lumber for export, for domestic industry, and to satisfy the requirements of the current home building boom. Speculative builders were pushing new developments and erecting houses as rapidly as they could be thrown together. Furniture makers, musical instrument manufacturers, and automobile body builders were using unheard-of quantities of the better hardwoods. The railroads were being re-equipped with rolling stock. The mines and other heavy industries of Pennsylvania were flourishing.

The rosy dreams and gratifying profits of the period came to an abrupt end, however, with the stock market crash and general economic collapse which commenced in the fall of 1929. With the depression came not only a drastic curtailment of business volume, but a sharp rise in credit losses which in the past had never been a serious problem with the firm. Now, many of the speculative builders, who had been operating on a shoe-string, were wiped out. In many instances the McIlvains were left holding the proverbial bag. It was a bitter experience which cost the firm, over a period of several years, heavy financial losses. Only a company of real stamina, guided by men of determination and integrity, could have survived losses so severe and so concentrated.

In January of 1930, just as the depression was beginning to make itself felt, Walter McIlvain's death occurred. His family, at the time of his passing, consisted of his wife, his four sons (three of whom are now operating the business) and a daughter, Fanny B. McIlvain. He was only forty-five years old and in the prime of life. His death was, therefore, a profound shock both to his family and to the firm.

Walter's death left the full responsibility for the family interests on the shoulders of J. Gibson McIlvain. Fortunately there was an-



Walter B. McIlvain

other generation of McIlvains now ready to assume its share of the administrative burden. In addition to the four boys in the family of Walter McIlvain, there were three sons in that of his brother, Gibson, and still another family representative was available in the person of Alfred J. Ostheimer, son of Martha McIlvain Ostheimer, daughter of the original J. Gibson McIlvain.

Members of the younger generation had been making their decision as to which branch of the family interests each of the boys wished to pursue, thus fore-shadowing the eventual division of the family properties. In 1930, immediately following his father's death, J. Gibson McIlvain 2nd, eldest son of Walter McIlvain, became associated with the lumber business. The second son, Walter B. McIl-



J. Gibson McIlvain
son of the first J. Gibson McIlvain

vain, Jr., might have done likewise but for his tragic death by accident in 1935 at the age of twenty-three. Their brother, T. Baird McIlvain, joined the company in 1937, as did the youngest son, Alan, some years later. Meanwhile Gibson McIlvain's three sons — F. Huston McIlvain, J. Gibson McIlvain, Jr., and Robert M. McIlvain — decided to associate themselves with the Downingtown Paper Company and the Downingtown Paper Box Company. Alfred Ostheimer, on the other hand, elected to follow the insurance business in which he had already become highly successful.

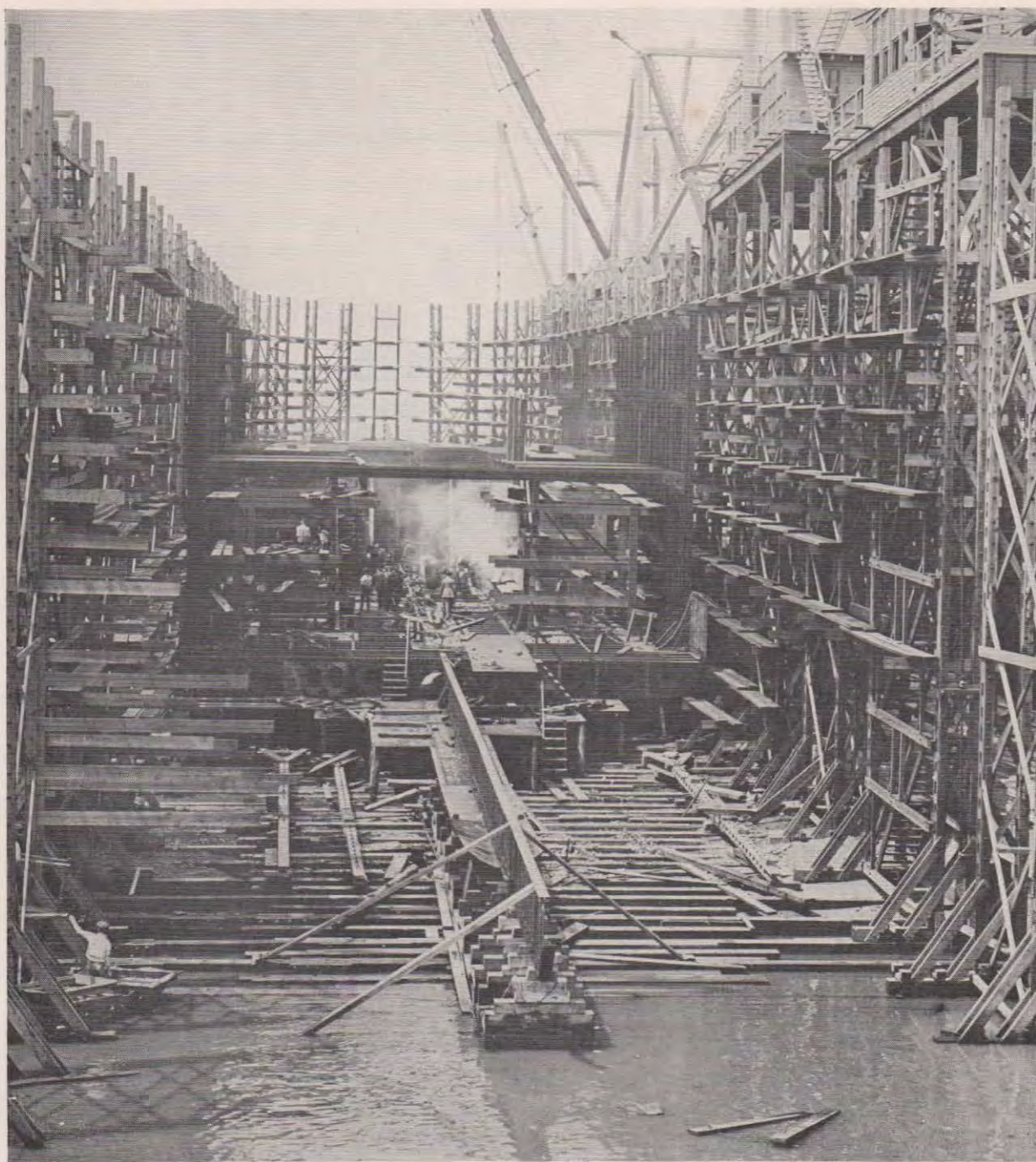
By 1939, the worst of the depression years were over, and J. Gibson McIlvain decided to relinquish some of the burden which he had been carrying. He therefore resigned as president of the lumber

company in favor of his nephew, J. Gibson McIlvain 2nd, although he temporarily retained the post of vice president. A year later, the senior member of the firm retired entirely from the lumber company, being succeeded as vice president by T. Baird McIlvain. Also in 1940, the Croft Lumber Company was liquidated, the last of its timber having been cut some years earlier.

For the next three years, the members of the younger generation assumed more and more responsibility for the operation of the family properties, although J. Gibson McIlvain continued to serve as president of the two Downingtown companies. Each of the three branches of the family had a representative on the board of directors of each of the family companies.

There was a natural desire on the part of the younger men, however, to assume full control of the operations in which they were individually engaged. During 1943, therefore, it was decided to effect a clean-cut division of the family interests. As a result, the J. Gibson McIlvain Company was purchased by the two oldest surviving sons of Walter McIlvain, who were later joined by their younger brother. J. Gibson McIlvain and his family acquired control of the family interests in Downingtown. Alfred Ostheimer disposed of his interest in all of the family businesses to the other two branches of the family.

From the standpoint of the lumber business, this arrangement proved to be highly beneficial. Once again that business, direct inheritance of the original Hugh McIlvain, came under the unified command of one branch of the family whose talents and energies were not distracted by any outside affiliations. This new generation of lumbermen had been born and reared in the lumber trade. They were equipped both by experience and inclination to carry on the family tradition in terms of the principles which their forebears had established.



Shipbuilding in World War I required vast quantities of lumber



War and Peace

THE THREE principals in the McIlvain company today — J. Gibson McIlvain 2nd, T. Baird McIlvain, and Alan McIlvain — are the fifth generation in direct line from the founder to manage the business. It is significant of the basic soundness and tenacity of the McIlvain stock that never in its history has the business been in a more thriving condition.

When J. Gibson McIlvain 2nd and his brother, Baird, assumed control of the company in 1943, they were about as well seasoned by the trials of adversity as any comparatively young men are likely to be. Gibson's entire business career had been one long struggle for recovery from the effects of the country's worst economic depression.

Working side by side with his uncle, he had learned the lumber business during difficult times. Baird, although younger, had also had ample opportunity to study and understand the problems of the lumber business in this adverse period. Finally, just as business conditions seemed to be returning to normal, the world once again found itself plunged into war.

The repercussions of World War II upon the entire business economy of the nation are too recent and too familiar to require extended description. The all-out program of war production touched practically every business in the country. As purveyors of a necessary commodity — lumber — the McIlvains immediately found themselves deeply involved in war contracts either as direct suppliers to the United States Armed Services or as suppliers to industry, such as the automobile manufacturers, the airplane factories, and the shipyards, engaged in producing military and naval equipment. The firm's specialized knowledge of lumber characteristics and sources was repeatedly of value to its customers.

In a modern world of steel and plastics, it may sometimes seem as though the day of wood has passed. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth. Although lumber is less and less in evidence in the end products which the public sees and uses, the utilization of lumber in the process of fabricating and distributing these products is still enormous. Today, for example, it takes more lumber to build an all-steel Liberty ship (approximately 1,000,000 board feet) than was used in constructing a three-masted schooner. A modern battleship has scarcely a piece of wood in its entire construction, yet thousands of square feet of lumber are required for templates which guide the construction of these dreadnaughts. And no one has yet developed a material for the boxing and crating of heavy merchandise which approaches lumber either in efficiency or in simplicity of use.

As far back as 1930, at a conference held at Harrisburg under the auspices of the Governor of Pennsylvania, an official of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation gave an interesting report upon the indus-

trial uses of lumber. His own company, he stated, at that time was using approximately \$2,500,000 of lumber annually to supply the requirements of four steel plants, four shipyards, and the needs of mines, quarries and subsidiary railroad properties. Three steel plants in Pennsylvania alone were using about a million dollars worth of lumber a year. This gives some indication of the extent to which lumber is employed in industries making products far removed from wood.

During the war period the J. Gibson McIlvain Company carried a heavy burden of responsibility. Although customers were clamoring for supplies, manpower shortages in the woods, at the sawmills, and in the lumber yards, put such a curb upon production that the handling of a bulk product of this kind became steadily more difficult. Price regulation kept profit margins at a minimum, and that apparently inevitable companion of price regulation — the “black market” — affected those who believed in playing the game by the rules.

Alan McIlvain, youngest of the three McIlvain brothers, spent the war years in military service. His unit landed in France ten days after D-Day, and from that point on his war experience was strictly first-hand. Attached to Patton’s Third Army, he participated in the lightning thrust of Patton’s armored divisions which drove the German forces back to their own frontiers and beyond. Release from military duty permitted him to join the family firm in 1946 after three years of active service.

With the conclusion of actual hostilities and the eventual abandonment of wartime controls, the McIlvain company was in a position to institute policies which it had been unable to put into effect during the war years. Plans for more efficient operation and better service to customers could now be activated. During the past several years, the soundness of these theories has been thoroughly tested and proven.

The J. Gibson McIlvain Company today looks forward with confidence to the completion of its second full century of service. What

the next half-century may bring in the way of social and economic changes does not particularly perturb them. In their view, it is reasonable to suppose that a firm that has weathered the economic cycles of the past one hundred and fifty years can be expected to accommodate itself successfully to whatever trials and tribulations may lie ahead.

This confidence springs not from the foolhardy optimism of youth, but from a well-seasoned belief in and reliance on the basic philosophy which has guided the company for many years. Fundamental to this philosophy is the concept that a business concern must perform a useful service in order to survive. All evidence indicates that the services of the lumber specialist will continue to be of importance to the community. The second tenet to which the McIlvains adhere is that every successful business must be endowed with a quality of flexibility which permits ready adjustment to economic change, for the one certainty in a changing world is the inevitability of change itself. The third and most important tenet of the McIlvain philosophy is that there is no substitute for integrity, and integrity is the one characteristic which has predominated in whatever the McIlvains have done for the past century and a half. There is no more solid foundation upon which to build an enduring business.

PONDEROSA PINE



Today is What Counts

THE J. Gibson McIlvain Company operates today from the same lumber yard at 58th Street and Woodland Avenue, Philadelphia, to which the company moved on its one hundredth anniversary, just fifty years ago. Changes, inevitable in a changing world, have been made to meet new and different conditions. A program of modernization, initiated in 1943 when the present management took charge, has brought the company thoroughly up to date in its methods of operation and its approach to customer problems. The fundamental characteristics of the service which the company renders to its customers, however, remain unchanged.

For generations the McIlvains have been specialists in hardwoods. In addition, they have for many years been a large supplier of high-grade lumber to builders, manufacturers, and processors. The only marked change which has taken place in the business in recent years has been the discontinuance of the company's retail department which was closed during the war. Its function now is the purchase of lumber from the sawmill and its distribution to retail lumber yards and to industrial users for fabrication and resale or for utilization in manufacturing and shipping.

In an age of business specialization, the lumber specialist has an important place. To meet the needs of many large customers, the McIlvain company must assemble lumber from practically every lumber-producing area in the country. It is not uncommon for a single truck leaving the McIlvain yard to deliver to one customer cypress from Florida, hard maple from New York State, white pine from California, spruce from Washington, and oak from West Virginia. Because promptness in delivery is frequently important, all these woods must be kept in stock at all times.

The lumber dealer must thus be thoroughly familiar with sources of supply. Local lumber is no longer available, as it was a hundred years ago, almost at the McIlvain company's front door. So diversified are its customers' requirements that often the entire continent must be combed to find satisfactory stocks. Today some 35 per cent of the company's lumber business is in the hardwoods — maple, oak, poplar, ash, cherry, walnut, and the like — which grow in the Appalachian hardwood region. Fir, spruce, and white pine from the West Coast represent another 25 per cent of the company's turnover. The balance — cypress, long and short-leaf pine, and gum — comes from such southern states as Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida.

In addition, the firm handles a growing volume of business in plywood of various kinds. Here again, sources of supply are widely scattered. From 80 to 90% of the volume is fir plywood, which comes from Washington and Oregon. Of the hardwood plywoods, Michigan and Wisconsin furnish chiefly birch and maple while



Lumber shed in the McIlvain lumber yard today

North and South Carolina supply poplar, yellow pine and gum. Modern techniques in the manufacture of plywood, as well as the ease with which it can be fabricated, account for its steadily increasing popularity.

The lumber merchant today has another important responsibility — quality control. When lumber was comparatively plentiful and cheap, and wages were relatively low, it was at times economical to use lower grades of lumber. Under present-day conditions, however, every foot of wood and every minute of working time must be conserved. The saving in labor expense when better grades are used exceeds the additional cost of the lumber, because fewer defects have to be eliminated, and cutting and fabrication time is reduced.

By providing the industrial user with top-quality lumber suited to his individual production problems the lumber specialist helps to achieve maximum efficiency. That is one of the basic reasons why every board of lumber which enters or leaves the McIlvain yard is

individually measured, inspected, and sorted into grades to suit customer requirements.

Last, but by no means least, the lumber specialist is often called upon to act as an adviser and purchasing agent for his customers. It is an interesting and illuminating fact that many of the orders received by the McIlvain Company specify neither grade nor price. A large number of the firm's customers rely entirely upon the company to supply lumber in accordance with its long-established, intimate knowledge of their needs. That in so doing the firm is fulfilling a business need and is true to the trust reposed in it, is attested by the extraordinary record of customer loyalty which the company has long enjoyed.

The great lumber shed at the Philadelphia yard, still one of the largest in the East, is the heart of the McIlvain business. It is 306 feet long, 300 feet wide, and 55 feet high, and houses one of the most diversified stocks of lumber in the country. Faster communication and transportation together with kiln drying instead of the longer process of natural seasoning, have resulted in more rapid turnover so that inventories are customarily lower than they were at the turn of the century. Even today the firm carries, on average, some 5,000,000 board feet of stock on hand for seasoning, and to satisfy current customer demands.

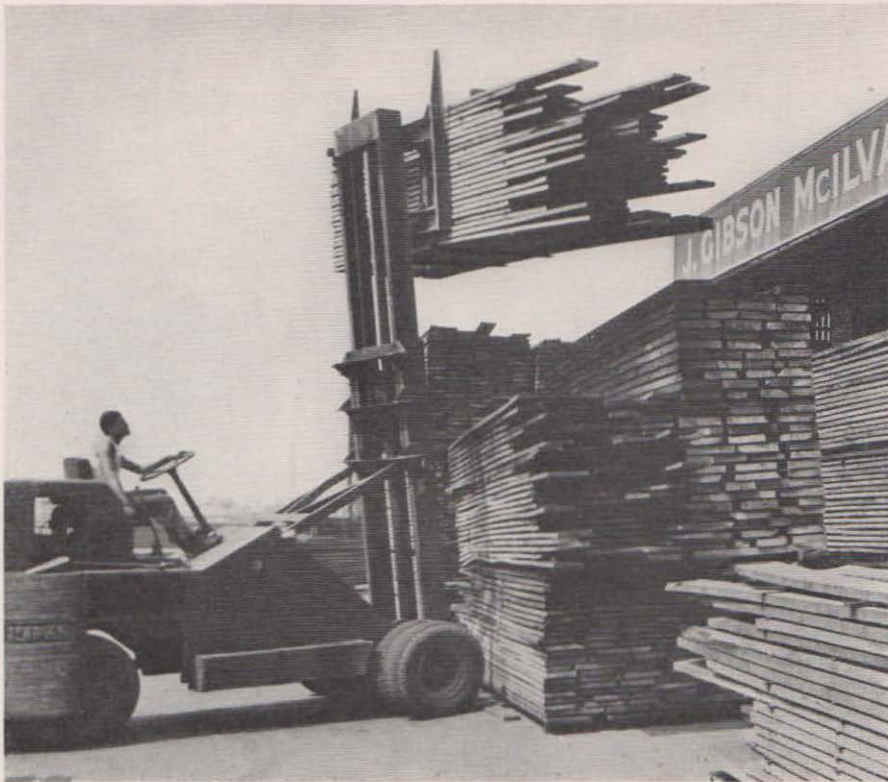
Since 1943, the company's sales volume in terms of board feet has substantially increased. Many technical improvements have been made, both in equipment and in methods of operation. New lift trucks and lumber carriers facilitate the handling of incoming and outgoing shipments. The improvement in yard efficiency has been such that, although the quantity of lumber handled has greatly expanded and although the company now does much processing, its labor force has actually been reduced during the past five years.

An important addition to the yard's facilities was made in May, 1947, with the completion of a modern planing mill. This mill performs two important functions, both of direct benefit to the company's customers. With the planing mill the firm is now in a position

to refine much of its lumber, better adapting the wood to its future use by the processor or manufacturer. This saves time and expense for the purchaser.

As soon as building conditions permit, the company plans to add its own dry kilns, to further reduce the handling of lumber between sawmill and ultimate consumer. The kilns will also concentrate full responsibility for quality and conditioning of lumber in the firm's own hands.

One condition of the lumber trade has changed greatly since the early days. As far as the Eastern seaboard is concerned, water trans-



Up-to-date equipment facilitates handling

portation has largely ceased to play a part in the lumber business. Water transport is still used for long hauls of lumber from the West Coast and the South, but the great lumber rafts have long since disappeared from the Delaware, the Schuylkill, and the Susquehanna. The railroad and the motor truck are less picturesque, but under present-day conditions are more efficient and economical when lumber is to be delivered anywhere except at seaboard.

The fact that the McIlvain yard has access, by direct spur tracks, to two of the nation's railroad systems is, therefore, a matter of consequence. There is more than a half mile of track in the yard itself. Further to expedite deliveries, the company maintains a fleet of delivery trucks.



This modern planing mill is now an important adjunct to the McIlvain yard

A comprehensive picture of the McIlvain clientele and of the many uses of McIlvain lumber would require a volume by itself. To suggest the extent and variety of the company's business, however, may give some idea of the wide knowledge of manufacturing problems which the company needs in order to do its job effectively.

Broadly speaking, from the standpoint of end use, the firm's business may be divided into two major categories. On the one hand, the company must supply lumber for fabrication for such diversified products as pianos, radio cabinets, office and other furniture, toys, bus and truck bodies, gun stocks, sail boats, airplane propellers, railroad rolling stock, and everything of wood which goes into a house from the flooring to the picture frames on the wall. Special uses include the interior of the Freedom Train which recently toured the country and the body for the special limousine constructed by a McIlvain customer for His Holiness, the Pope.

In the second major category falls lumber for manufacturing and for crating and packaging. Comparatively little lumber is used, for example, in the construction of the modern ocean-going vessel, yet a vast amount is required to build the ways in which the vessel must be constructed. Manufacture of all kinds of heavy products requires lumber for props, beams, and machine bases. These are but a few examples of the more obscure but nonetheless essential uses of lumber in industry.

Lumber is also, by all odds, the best material for crating heavy machinery and for boxing goods which must be shipped for long distances by sea or land. Hundreds of millions of board feet of lumber were used by our government during the last war merely to transport munitions. The McIlvain company must have a thorough understanding of what woods to use and of the types and qualities required to meet these many needs. Only intimate acquaintance and experience with the use of lumber in all its manifestations can make possible adequate service to customers.

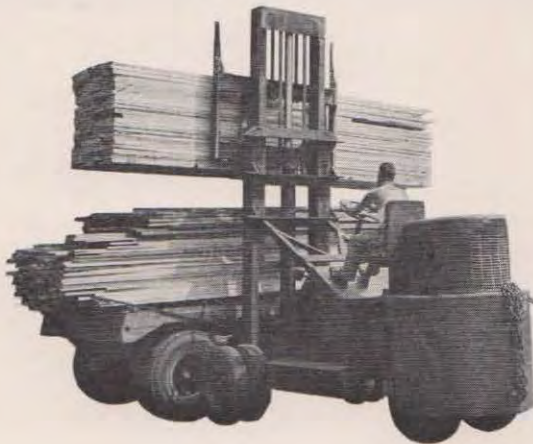
Because of the many technical problems involved in selecting, procuring, seasoning, and handling the right lumber for each of



*The proper seasoning of hardwood lumber is one of the firm's specialties.
This pile of 12/4 hard maple will be well seasoned in three years*

hundreds of different types of construction and fabrication, the McIlvains rightly feel that the accumulated skill and experience of the company's well-trained group of lumber specialists is one of the firm's most valued assets. A good lumberman is the product of years of practical acquaintance with lumber in the raw and in its finished state. The fact that more than 25 per cent of the McIlvain staff has been with the company continuously for twenty years or longer is not only a tribute to the firm's employee relations, but is in itself a form of guarantee which the company offers to its clients that "McIlvain quality" is more than a glib phrase.

To the present generation of McIlvains, the company's employee group is both a link with the past and a bulwark against the future. Indeed, one or two employee families are almost as closely identified with the firm as the McIlvains themselves. It is only fitting, therefore, that this description of the McIlvain organization today should close with a few brief sketches of some of its outstanding members whose loyalty to the company is an important and integral part of the firm's long tradition.



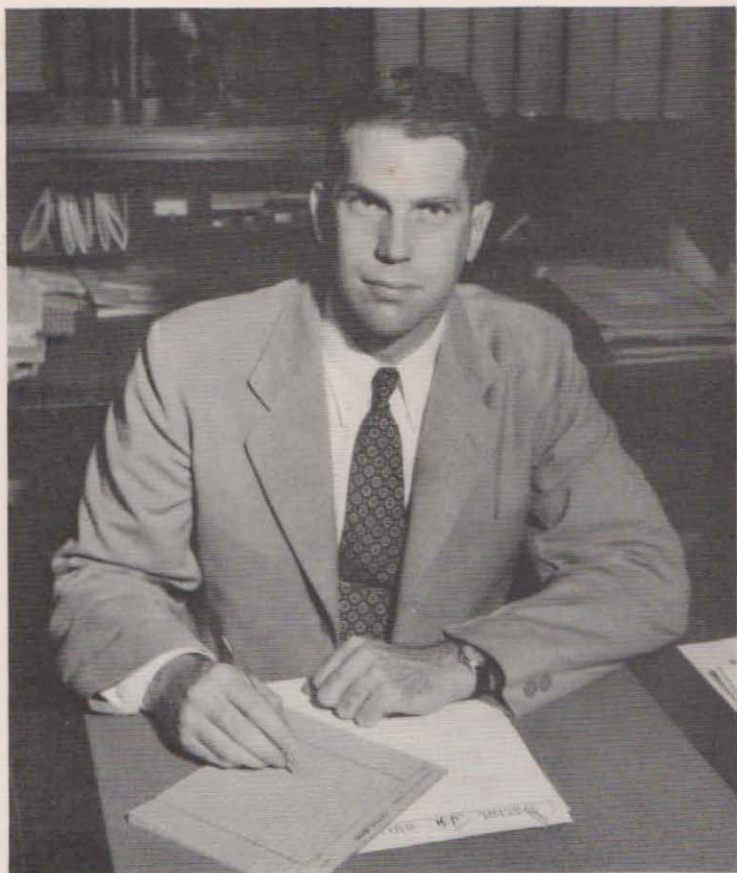


J. GIBSON MCILVAIN 2ND

J. Gibson McIlvain 2nd, now president of the J. Gibson McIlvain Company, is the eldest son of Walter B. McIlvain, a former partner in the business. Like his father and other McIlvains before him, Gibson McIlvain learned the business through long hours in the sawmill and the yard before graduating into sales and executive work.

In addition to his duties as president of the company, Gibson handles the purchasing of hardwoods, a job which requires frequent trips to the hardwood mills and a close acquaintance with the hardwood market. Not content with these activities, he still finds time to cover quite an extensive territory in up-state Pennsylvania as sales representative of the firm. He thus keeps closely in touch with the needs of the company's customers.

Incidentally, when you get to know him, you will discover that he generally has a gun or a fishing rod in the back of his car and can frequently be induced to pause for a day's hunting or fishing if sufficiently urged.



T. BAIRD McILVAIN

T. Baird McIlvain, now vice president of the company, is the third son of Walter B. McIlvain and, like his elder brother, gained his knowledge of the lumber business from the ground up. His responsibilities include the purchase of soft woods and hardwoods from the South, and all West Coast products, which require frequent trips to the sawmills. Much of his sales activity is carried on over the long distance telephone, but he makes a point of visiting his customers at regular intervals. Like his brother, also, Baird is an enthusiast of the open country, although a bag of golf clubs is often included in his traveling equipment.



ALAN MCILVAIN

Alan McIlvain, youngest of the three brothers has recently been elected treasurer of the firm. Although his business career has been somewhat curtailed because of a job he had to do for Uncle Sam in France and Germany, he has been well-schooled in lumber from the woods of West Virginia to the finished product in the establishments of various McIlvain customers. He shares with his brothers the task of keeping in touch with sources of supply by repeated visits to the mills and is thus able to give characteristic McIlvain service to his growing list of customers. He, too, usually finds time to get in some fishing and hunting and judging by the trophies that decorate his home, he is a sure shot with a rifle.



REUEL S. MCKEE

Reuel S. McKee, now secretary of the J. Gibson McIlvain Company began with the firm as a stenographer in June, 1920 after completing service in World War I. He became Secretary to J. Gibson McIlvain, Jr. and Walter B. McIlvain, taking care of their personal affairs and all confidential matters pertaining to J. Gibson McIlvain Company, Croft Lumber Company and many other family interests. "Mac" is now carrying on similar duties with the present generation, in addition to having charge of the company's payroll as well as the billing of all direct shipments and making up orders for the firm's suppliers.

During World War II, he kept all priority and rating records for the company, a thankless task for which he at least had the satisfaction of receiving a "clean bill of health" from the Government.

As can be observed by the type of work entrusted to him, he has the complete confidence and loyalty of his employers and fellow workers.



JOHN A. HASENMAYER

John A. Hasenmayer, bookkeeper and credit manager, came to the McIlvain organization in October, 1943, straight out of service in World War II. Like many of his comrades, he prefers to forget that part of his experience and to look ahead to the future. He knows his end of the business as well as an expert lumberman knows lumber. When you see that "JAH" on an order, you can rest assured that it is OK.

John is a lover of the fine arts and can often be found among those present at the opera and other serious musical presentations.



LLOYD MELLOTT

Lloyd Mellott joined the McIlvain company in July, 1929, after going through a varied experience in the lumber business and railroad traffic work. This background has proved of great value to the company and to Lloyd in his present job of Traffic Manager and Superintendent of Inventory Records.

Lloyd's infallible accuracy when it comes to entering and checking out several million feet of lumber a month in a multitude of small shipments is outstanding. He seems to have the entire McIlvain stock at his fingertips, whether it is a small item that has been mislaid in the yard or a freight car of incoming lumber that has been shopped for repairs somewhere west of Pittsburgh.



GEORGE L. SHUTE

George L. Shute began his career in the lumber business with the McIlvain firm on May 1, 1920. His start, as has been the case with many other valued employees, was in the yard where he took his place with the lumber handlers. His ability was soon apparent and it was not long before he was promoted to inspector. In this capacity, he acquired a broad knowledge of many types of lumber and of grades, as well as the purposes for which each was best suited.

This practical background has served George well in his contact with the firm's customers. He is the office salesman as well as being in charge of several of the company's most valued accounts.



MISS LORRAINE ALBRIGHT AND MRS. RUTH HEWETT

These two able and attractive ladies have important duties to perform, particularly in a firm like the McIlvain company which necessarily does so much of its business by telephone and correspondence. Miss Albright is primarily responsible for the office switchboard, while Mrs. Hewett devotes most of her time to stenography and billing.



ANDREWS K. BORDA

Andrews K. Borda went into the lumber business back in 1906 when he was just out of school. His first job was with an Arkansas sawmill. After an apprenticeship of four years, handling yellow pine and hardwood, and having a hand in all phases of manufacture and shipping of high-grade lumber, he graduated into selling. He is perhaps best acquainted with southern pine, but there are few types of lumber produced in this country with which he is not familiar.

"Tim" became associated with the McIlvain Company in 1943. Since then, he has helped to develop many new accounts for the firm as well as increase the sales volume of many of the old ones. He is a Past President of the Orpheus Club, and is one of the oldest members of that organization.



JAMES A. DEMPSEY

Almost as long identified with the company as the McIlvains themselves are the Dempseys. James A. Dempsey, senior sales representative of the company, was preceded in the firm's employ by his father, three uncles and a first cousin. Jim's son, Martin, has recently decided to follow in his father's footsteps and is learning the business with the firm.

Jim started his career as a lumber handler in the McIlvain yard back in June of 1906. He soon acquired a knack of spotting quality, and when given an opportunity to learn the grading rules, he rapidly became a first-class inspector. But he was not satisfied to hold down that job long. Each night, after ten long hours of hard work in the yard, he put in a few more hours at the University of Pennsylvania Night School until he had completed his course.

Jim's background gained over a period of 42 years, together with his loyalty to the firm, have made him an invaluable member of this organization. His customers depend frequently upon his knowledge and judgment. As a salesman, Jim has done much to keep the McIlvain name out front in the lumber trade.



ALFRED A. GROSS

Alfred A. Gross came to the McIlvain organization as a stenographer in January, 1923, after his graduation from Girard College. His job called for frequent contact with customers over the telephone and this, coupled with his initiative and interest in lumber, soon gave him an opportunity to become a salesman. He is now in charge of the New Jersey territory, and judging by the orders he gets, he has the knack of knowing how to be at the right place at the right time.



ROBERT H. NELSON

Robert H. Nelson, Yard Superintendent in charge of incoming shipments and General Foreman of the McIlvain planing mill, started with the firm in November, 1923. His early training as a lumber handler and his later experience as an inspector (at which he is second to none), have given him outstanding qualifications for his present work. Bob has great adaptability and his mechanical ability, knowledge of carpentry, and good common sense have made him invaluable to the firm.

RUSSELL H. C. SHUTE

Russell H. C. Shute graduated from grammar school on January 31, 1915, and next day found himself at work as office boy with the McIlvain firm. He soon was transferred to the yard where he became a lumber handler and later an inspector. He is a brother of George Shute, another brother is an inspector and at one point two sisters worked with the firm as secretaries.

Through the years, Russell has worked as bookkeeper and as manager of the firm's retail department (now discontinued). Today he is Yard Superintendent in charge of outgoing shipments. As such, he has a heavy responsibility to the firm's customers. He must see that each truckload of lumber is accumulated and counted. He must see to it that each customer is getting just what he ordered. He must give each order equal care, regardless of size. In his present job, Russell is one of the key men in the McIlvain organization.





JAMES QUIGLEY

James Quigley first set foot in America on May 11, 1910, having arrived from Ireland on the *S. S. Haverford* which docked at the Washington Avenue pier. In the Old Country he lived near a saw-mill and the smell of lumber must have entered his blood, for three days later he walked all the way to the McIlvain yard and started a life-long career with the firm.

His first task was to deliver a load of lumber to a customer in Bryn Mawr, 10 miles from the yard, with a four horse team. He started out at 5:00 A.M. and returned at 8:00 P.M. It was moonlight when the horses were cooled off and bedded down for the night.

Since that day, Jim has acquired a knowledge of lumber and its uses that has made him one of the best inspectors in the business. His decisions and selections are accepted as final by the company's customers who know him because of his reputation for fairness and conscientiousness. It is the will and loyalty of men like Jim that have developed an ever-growing understanding between the firm and its customers.

MILTON BECK

One of our outstanding lumber inspectors, who has been with the company for more than a quarter of a century, measuring the width of Tide Water Red Cypress. Some of these pieces are 29 inches wide. This stock, which must be held for approximately two years for drying, is primarily used for making tanks and paper mill machinery.



RICHARD SHUTE

This member of the Shute family has been with the company ever since 1914 and has become one of the firm's experienced and capable inspectors. He is here shown selecting a special piece of fir plywood.



VINCENT J. TULLY

Vince Tully came with the company as a mechanic back in 1921 when heavy motor trucks were first being used in the lumber trade. Vince has kept pace with all the improvements in truck and motor design that have taken place in the past 27 years. It is his responsibility to see that all the company's motorized equipment is constantly in perfect running condition, a job which he handles very ably indeed.



HARRY HAENN (left) WILLIAM IRWIN (right)

William Irwin the mill foreman, assisted by Harry Haenn, double checking the accuracy of their work. These men are responsible for remanufacturing lumber of all kinds to meet customer requirements. Needless to say, where accuracy is required, these men, backed by many years of experience, are prepared to do the job correctly.





THE YARD CREW

This group of fifty-seven men, working together, furnishes the manpower which keeps the lumber moving in a steady stream through the McIlvain lumber yard and planing mill in good weather and in bad. They are men of all ages, races and temperaments, but they have in common a wide knowledge of lumber and a real interest in the success of the company.

MCLIVAIN OLD-TIMERS

Here are some of the McIlvain old-timers. Their length of service ranges from a quarter of a century to 39 years, averaging over 29 years per man. To praise them would add nothing to the esteem in which they are held. Their record speaks for itself.

TOP ROW LEFT TO RIGHT	YEAR EMPLOYED	YEARS WITH THE COMPANY
1. Andrew Dempsey	1909	39
2. Harry Haenn	1922	26
3. Oliver Dallis	1921	27
4. Howard Jackson	1922	26
5. William J. Harrell	1923	25
6. John Kearny	1921	27
LOWER ROW LEFT TO RIGHT		
1. John F. Williams	1922	26
2. Richard S. Shute	1919	29
3. Milton Beck	1923	25
4. James Quigley	1910	38
5. John N. Hatala	1917	31



The Philadelphia Inquirer

VOL 154, NO 87

WEATHER TODAY - Fair, colder

PHILADELPHIA, WEDNESDAY MORNING, MARCH 28, 1906

ONE CENT

MEN IN BLAZING LANES FOUGHT FIRE THAT LIGHTED WHOLE CITY

\$400,000 Conflagration Reduced Forests of Lumber to Ashes at McIlvain Yard

DWELLINGS NEARBY WERE THREATENED

Corpse dressed for Burial Lay Within House Ready for Removal at Flame's Approach

In one of the most spectacular fires in years more than half the area of the fifteen acre lumber yard of J. Gibson McIlvain & Co., at Fifty-eighth street and Woodland avenue, was last night reduced to ruins.

The glare in the sky, which was almost prismatic, ranging from blood orange to pale yellow, was visible at points twenty miles from the scene of the blaze.

Firemen fought with superhuman effort under terrible odds. A single false step meant a horrible death.

Starting from a crossed electrical wire the flames were caught up by a stiff wind and sent whirling through the millions and millions of feet of dry lumber piled to lofty heights on every side. The blaze was in the very heart of the yard when the screeching whistles called the first battalion of firemen to the scene about 8.30 P. M.

They found a difficult problem facing them. The two squares of lumber fronted on Woodland avenue and ran back to the tracks of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Water was only to be had in scant quantities and had to be piped through long lines of hose.

Towering piles of lumber separated by little alleys were blazing on every side. The firemen dragging hose behind them plunged into the network of streets.

As they fought their way in the lumber blazed like funeral pyres above their heads. They themselves looked like pygmies alongside the mountains of glowing lumber. The heat was so intense that the very smoke was consumed.

At its height the fire sent up two pinkish pillars of reflective glow that could be seen miles away. The sight lasted for hours and many thousands of spectators were drawn to the scene. It was like a brilliant autumn sunset.

Even a mile away it was possible to read by the light of the fire.

Third Blaze Within Week

Curiously enough this is the third big fire within a week to occur in that neighborhood.

On Friday the new coal chute of the Pennsylvania Railroad, at the Schuylkill River and Gray's Ferry lane, was destroyed at a loss of \$50,000.

On Saturday night the lumber warehouse at Haney-White Milling Company, at Fifty-eighth and Woodland avenue, went up in smoke.

More than 12,000,000 feet of lumber were consumed in last night's fire at a loss of somewhere between \$300,000 and \$400,000.

Panic reigned in the immediate neighborhood while the fire was fiercest.

Two clusters of dwellings caught within the very zone of the fire, which surged threateningly around them, were early abandoned by their frightened occupants, who fled from the place of danger with all the movable effects they could manage to transport with them. At an early stage these houses caught fire repeatedly. On the roof of every one was stationed a fireman, who stood on post for hours extinguishing the commencements of fires constantly started from the sparks and bits of burning debris which rained down upon the roofs. Even in the houses not directly in the path of the advancing flames the heat and the possibility of danger drove people from their homes.

In one of the houses a corpse lay dressed for burial. Fortunately, the flames were checked before they reached that point.

Forests of Lumber

The lumber yard, which is said to be the largest one in the United States, is the property of J. Gibson McIlvain & Company. The firm is composed of J. Gibson McIlvain, Hugh McIlvain and J. Gibson McIlvain, Jr. The lumber yard extends along Woodland Avenue at a varying distance from the curb from Fifty-eighth street on the west to Fifty-sixth street on the east. Fifty-seventh street is not cut through the yard. Back from Woodland avenue the yard stretches to the tracks of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Over the fifteen acres which its area embraces is distributed an immense quantity of lumber of every description and quality. The yard is divided into five great sheds, beginning at Fifty-eighth street with No. 1, and going on to No. 5 at the eastern end of the yard. The fire began in shed No. 4, the last but one in the row, east of Fifty-seventh street. Defective insulation of an electric light wire is believed to have kindled it. It was discovered by two employees of the firm, Elmer Straup, an engineer, and Samuel Bunting, a clerk, who were at Fifty-sixth street and Woodland avenue.

A railroad whistle sounded the alarm. The fire spread from that shed with a rapidity that seemed incredible, and it was but a few minutes before half the yard was ablaze. The firemen who arrived on the first alarm lost no time in sending in another alarm, and alarm after alarm followed as the seriousness of the situation was realized.



Sketch of the Fire From Woodland Ave., Drawn by an Inquirer Artist Shortly Before 11 O'clock

One of the first places to be vacated before the advance of the flames was the Fortieth Ward Republican Club house, at the south-west corner of Fifty-seventh street and Woodland avenue. Immediately to the west are three houses behind which the lumber yard extends, 5702, 5704 and 5706 Woodland avenue. They are occupied respectively by Mrs. Mary Machin, Mrs. Caroline Haywood and Henry Beaton, Jr., a nephew of the Receiver of Taxes. Four other houses follow to the westward after an interval. They are 5726, occupied by Peter McGrath; 5728, occupied by Thomas Collins; 5730, occupied by Harry Watts, and 5732, occupied by J. E. Sentman.

Houses Were In Danger

Other houses in the immediate danger zone were 1406 South Fifty-seventh street, occupied by James Dougherty, and 1408, the home of Julius Wood. Death had visited the dwelling at 5727 Woodland avenue, directly opposite the lumber yard, and the body of Dr. Edward Milton

Southwick, a well-known practitioner, who died Sunday, still lay in the house. Fortunately, the flames did not spread in that direction, and it was not necessary to transfer the body to another place.

The wind blowing from the northeast swept the fire in a southerly direction, and the flames rolled and surged over the entire western half of the plant. When the fire was at its height nine acres were ablaze. Doggedly and obstinately the firemen fought at close range in the alleys of the yard. In its sweep towards the south a line of telegraph polls along the railroad caught fire and went down, carrying with them their wires.

As an auxiliary to the city's firemen the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad officials ran an engine out on the bridge in the rear of the yard and utilized it to pump water on the flames.

When it was seen that the flames were definitely sweeping away from the Woodland avenue side of the plant to its southwest corner the people who had been

driven from homes came back with their goods. The members of the Fortieth Ward Republican Club came back to the house and began to prepare coffee and sandwiches with which they regaled the firemen.

Mayor Weaver was one of the spectators of the blaze, which had caused such a stir in Overbrook that the Mayor was moved to go and witness the scene himself. He said that he thought the firemen had done admirably and hardly knew how they had managed to keep the fire under control.

He finally went home in the wagon of Fire Marshal Latimer.

Director Potter, Superintendent Taylor and Chief Police Surgeon Angney were also early on the scene. The Superintendent had all the available police reserves on the fire ground and they had all they could do in keeping the crowds back.

Dr. Angney had three ambulances of the Philadelphia Hospital on the ground for use in case of emergency, and a large number of district surgeons were also under his command.

