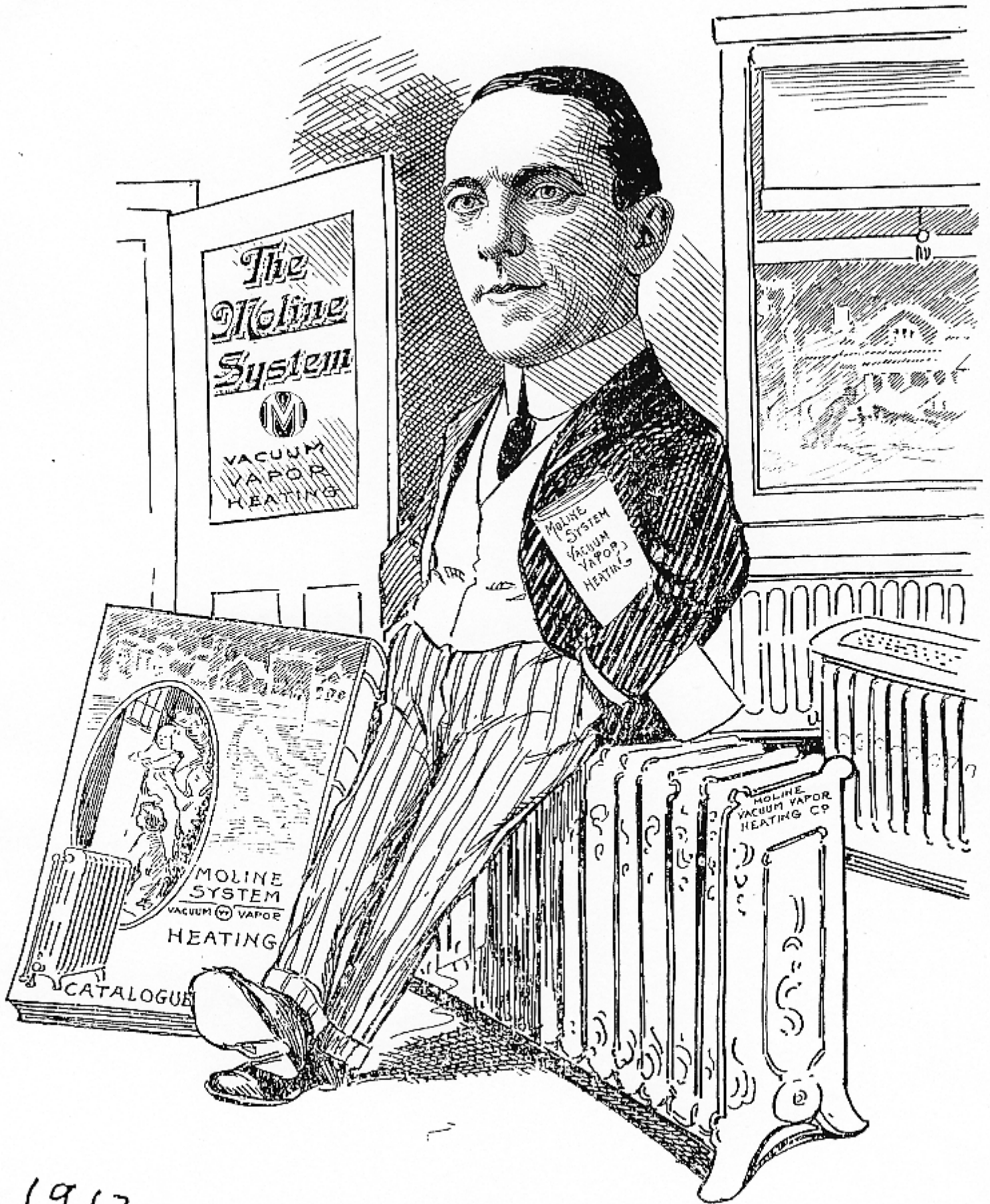




HERMAN W. NELSON

FOUNDER

HERMAN NELSON CORPORATION



1913

HERMAN NELSON



Herman Wallace Nelson

Herman W. Nelson was born to Gustaf and Augusta Lofquist Nelson on January 17, 1876 in Orion, Illinois.

Gustaf Nelson was born in Kalmar Lan, Sweden in December of 1845; left Sweden at about the age of 18 for Germany; emigrated to the United States about 1870; was a carpenter by trade; and married Augusta Lofquist.

Augusta Lofquist was born in Grena, Sweden in December of 1853 and came to the United States about the same time as Gustaf Nelson.

Gustaf and Augusta had three children: Herman, Lillian and Feridolf(1876, 1878 and 1879, respectively). They moved from Orion to Moline, Illinois when Herman was about one year old and remained there all of their lives. Gustaf became a general contractor in Moline building homes and other buildings in the city. Gustaf Nelson died in November, 1907. Could not find date of Augusta's death.

Herman Nelson attended a little three-room wooden grade school(St. Mary's Parochial School?) on the site of what is now Willard School, 1616 16th Street in Moline.

Not much information was found about Herman's grade school years or of his life before marriage. A brief summary of these early days is recorded as notes written by a Mr. Charles Ainsworth during an interview with Herman Nelson covering "Herman W. Nelson, Early Business Life". Mr. Charles Ainsworth was a traveling salesman for Dimock, Gould & Company, one of Herman Nelson's early employers. Dimock, Gould and Company manufactured wooden pails and buckets.

These notes indicated Herman Nelson was out working before he was 14 years old. He started out working for the Swan & Tolles Wood Yard unloading loads of wood, "got 10 cents a load for wet wood; got 11 cents for dry wood; made about 30 cents a day". In 1890, at the age of 14, he worked for the Frank Natts Coal Company at 11th Street and 3rd Avenue in Moline "handling the teamsters".

"Couldn't get help -only bums at 15th Street and 3rd Avenue .... good times." In 1892, "just before Memorial Day", he started as paymaster at Dimock, Gould & Company. His first year at the mill was very busy...."Had day and night force. Paid night crew at midnight; walked around yard handing out pay envelopes." Harry Dimock had a one horse wagon and a driver to go to the First National Bank at the southeast corner of 16th Street and 3rd Avenue to get money. "Harry had a gun."

In 1893, times were hard; no night shift; added job of bill collector to his resume'; "Hated that job". Times did get better later that year; enough that he was able to go to the World's Fair in Chicago in October of that year. Herman indicated that the train cars were so full that men were on top of the cars. Rode all night and slept in the car aisle on the way.

It appears that he worked part of that time with Dimock, Gould & Company but must have lost his job toward the end of 1895. In 1896 he went to Chicago in a box car to look for a job. He met a man who had been a high school principal who said he could get him into the University of Chicago. But apparently his mother was sick; his aunt had just died; and he needed to work. Herman told the man he had a job waiting for him in Moline in April when the sawmill opened up. This ties in with some comments written in a Herman Nelson Corporation publication, "30 Years", which stated, "Had circumstances surrounding his early life been different, Herman Nelson might have become a well-known educator. Studious and analytical, he must know all the reasons why a problem exists before he attempts to solve it". He did get a job in the mill taking boards off the planer and piling them, "got 11 cents an hour; worked 11 hours a day". Worked two weeks but hated the job.

He went to the Swan and Tolles Wood Yard to inquire about a job. Mr. Tolles referred him to Mr. Swan who challenged that he couldn't handle the rough teamsters. But Herman told him he had done so at Natts so they gave him a try. In 1897, Herman asked Mr. Tolles if he could work in the heating and construction business, Moline Heating and Construction Company(owned by Mr. Davis?). He worked taking fittings off of pipes and putting them in bins. "Couldn't tell a cast iron from a malleable fitting." He worked in various jobs at Moline Heating and Construction Company until he started the Herman Nelson Corporation in 1906. Even then, he would start out renting space in the same building as his former employer.

Other articles indicated an interest in biking and also a boyhood ambition to be a cartoonist; "did draw cartoons for local newspapers in his early years". There are some cartoon-style drawings around on the subject of Herman Nelson and his company. Perhaps some were drawn by Herman?

Herman W. Nelson married Agnes F. Stoltenberg on January 17, 1901, his 25th birthday. I wonder if he(or she) planned it that way so he couldn't forget their anniversaries?!? According to a wedding



announcement in the Moline Daily Dispatch, they spent their honeymoon in Chicago and then resided with Mr. and Mrs. P.A. Merriman until they could find a home of their own.

Herman Nelson was determined to go into business for himself and went looking for a product. In 1906, with investments of \$500 each from Messrs. Swan, Tolles, Davis and ? together with \$6000 of his own money, he purchased patents on a heating system from Mr. Wilfred Shurtleff and started the Herman Nelson Corporation. He rented space from his former employer, Moline Heating and Construction Company located at 320 16th Street in Moline. His first employees were Mr. Shurtleff and a secretary. Herman Nelson Corporation was in business to stay.

From 1906 on, Herman Nelson's history was the Herman Nelson Corporation history.

The very first product conceived by Mr. Shurtleff and developed and produced by the Herman Nelson Corporation, was known as Moline Heat, a vacuum-vapor heating system. Within a period of ten years, Moline Heat was nationally known with many thousands of installations throughout the country. It put the Herman Nelson Corporation and Moline, Illinois on the map in heating circles around the country.



In 1918 the company revolutionized the heating and ventilating practices throughout the country and abroad with another new product development, the Univent. This unit ventilator became recognized as a distinct forward step in the art of heating and ventilating schools and public buildings. By this time, the company had grown out of its rental spaces and a new building was constructed at 1834 3rd Avenue in Moline.

In 1924 a radically new type of radiator element was developed by the company's research and development department. This radiator element, built of either copper or aluminum, was called the Herman Nelson Wedge Core Radiator. It materially reduced the size and weight of all heating equipment in which it was used enabling radiators to be concealed in walls displacing the exposed cast iron radiator in homes and apartments. Thus it was incorporated into the production of the Herman Nelson Invisible Radiator which was to become to the heating business what the electric light had become after displacing the old gas light.

In 1927 the Herman Nelson HiJet Unit Heater, incorporating the Wedge Core Radiator, was developed. This displaced the pipe coil and cast iron radiator method of heating in factories. Heat was

distributed from a special radiator by means of an electric fan built right into the assembly.

Demand continued and grew for their products. The company announced expansion plans in 1927 and purchased the entire block on which they were located except for the lot on which the post office building stands. The first units of the factory were erected. In 1928 the office was enlarged and additions to the factory were made. In 1929 the Valley Truck property, a five acre plot located at 25th Street and River Drive, was purchased from the Velie Estate for further expansion. It was initially used for warehouse purposes but later converted to manufacturing. The company employed approximately 120 people in 1929.

In 1929 there were 700 stockholders and 65 branch offices, eight located in foreign countries. In the annual stockholders report for 1929, Mr. Nelson stated that more than 400 of the 700 stockholders resided in the Quad-Cities (Moline & Rock Island, Illinois and Davenport & Bettendorf, Iowa). Net earnings totaled \$464,664 or \$4.02 per share. It was also announced that the company would begin to manufacture sheet metal parts formerly made by others for them.

On July 1, 1941, all of the assets of the Autovent Fan & Blower Co., Chicago, Illinois, were acquired by the Herman Nelson Corporation. The business was continued there as a direct branch of Moline as the Autovent Fan & Blower Division. They manufactured propeller and centrifugal fans.

During the war the company designed and produced thousands of self-powered heaters and ventilators to support the men and equipment from the frigid regions of Antarctica to the hot and humid regions of the Pacific. Some idea of the Herman Nelson Corporation war contributions can be gained from the fact that its employees received four Army-Navy "E" awards before V-J Day. Later in August of 1956, The National Geographic Magazine featured an article by Mr. Ray Saarinen, a free-lance writer, "Herman-And His Wonderful Heat Machine". "It is not known if the Herman Nelson Heater was the first in the field of portable heating, but it certainly became the best known."

In 1948 an addition to the 25th Street and River Drive manufacturing facility was made as production of their regular products increased after the war. Mr. Richard H. Nelson was now president.

Mr. Herman W. Nelson retired in 1949 and purchased a second home in Coronado, California in 1950.

In 1950 the Herman Nelson Corporation was merged with American Air Filter Co., Inc. out of Louisville, Kentucky.

Besides his dedication to his family and company, Herman Nelson did find time to be an active citizen of the community as well. He was one of the founders of the Rotary Club in Moline; was active in local politics(Republican); was a Life Member of ASHRAE; a member of the board of governors for the Rock Island Arsenal Golf Club for many years(he also loved golf!); a member of the Moline Elks, Davenport Outing Club and the First Congregational Church in Moline.

Mr. Herman W. Nelson died in January of 1956 at 79 . He had been ill since May of 1952 when he suffered a stroke in Palm Springs while visiting there enroute to Moline from Coronado, California. His wife, Agnes, died at 80 on January 24, 1963 in Coronado, California.



I enjoyed "digging into" Mr. Nelson's history for at least two reasons: 1. He and his company contributed so many innovations to our(ASHRAE) industries and 2. It turns out he's the grandfather of a good friend of my wife! Mrs. Eugene(Polly Nelson) Hippler was born in Moline, Illinois to Richard H. and Elsie(Haak) Nelson.

History becomes even more interesting when it gets personal. Information contained in this history was obtained from many sources including the following:

The Moline Daily Dispatch, including bylines by Mr. Fred Klann, "Off the Beaten Path" and Ms. Marlene Gantt, "Images of the Past". Also its library.

The Rock Island County Historical Society Library

Herman Nelson Corporation Reports

Dun & Bradstreet, Inc. Report, June 9, 1942

The National Geographic Magazine, August, 1956

Polly Hippler and her mother, Elsie Nelson

By: MARK T. NAGAN  
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