

An Early History of the Lewisburg Chair and Furniture Company

By Walter Watkins

For nearly 120 years, the Lewisburg Chair and Furniture Company operated a successful manufacturing plant in Lewisburg, PA. The early history of the Lewisburg Chair and Furniture Company was overly volatile. Prior to the company's reorganization in 1933 under the guise of Mr. Robert N. Parker, the Lewisburg Chair and Furniture Company experienced several closings and reopenings. However, though there were several interruptions in production, the company had built a strong enough rapport with customers that demand quickly made the company profitable again and again.

In 1887, the Lewisburg Furniture Company was brought into existence. Mr. Horace Cawley, a resident of Millmont and later Lewisburg, gathered the necessary capital to establish the company in Lewisburg Borough. Mr. Cawley had experienced prior industrial success while managing a shipping container plant and sought to venture into the home furniture market. According to accounts, the Lewisburg Furniture Company was an instant success. Production came to a standstill when the plant was ravaged by a fire and this led to a closing of the assembly line.

The early achievement of the plant led several local merchants, who saw a future for the plant, to buy stock in the Lewisburg Furniture Company and reopen the factory in 1891. This new manifestation of the company focused wholly on producing bedroom furniture. With such a constricted market, the company faced an uphill battle and was finally doomed by a failure of management.

Little over a year after its reopening, ownership was transferred to Josiah Partridge for the sum of \$10,000. Mr. Partridge envisioned a company primarily focused on the production of quality cane-bottom chairs. With the return of Mr. Cawley as a manager in 1893, the company expanded its operation to include the goals of both men and the name "Lewisburg Chair and Furniture Company" came to be.

The dual threat production proved to be highly lucrative for the company. Ever increasing product demand helped to push manufacturing output to new heights during the first two decades of the 20th century. At its peak, the company turned out an average of 5600 chairs per week.

Even with high consumer demand, the company was not immune from human error. The factory was consumed by flames from within in 1904 and again in 1911. Poor financial management led to the reorganization of the company following a brief closure in 1921. The company's resilience was put to the ultimate test following the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and subsequent Great Depression. The early history of the Lewisburg Chair and Furniture Company came to a close when it succumbed to market forces and shut its doors on December 11, 1931.

No matter how frequent the stoppage of production, the periods of high profitability led to the company's redemption. By 1933, the modern era of the Lewisburg Chair and Furniture Company came to pass. Under the direction of Mr. Robert Parker and later his son Mr. T. Gregory Parker, the company became a household name with national brand recognition.



“Fire that destroyed the Lewisburg Chair and Furniture Company’s factory in 1911”
From the Union County Historical Collection (92.9.92.68)