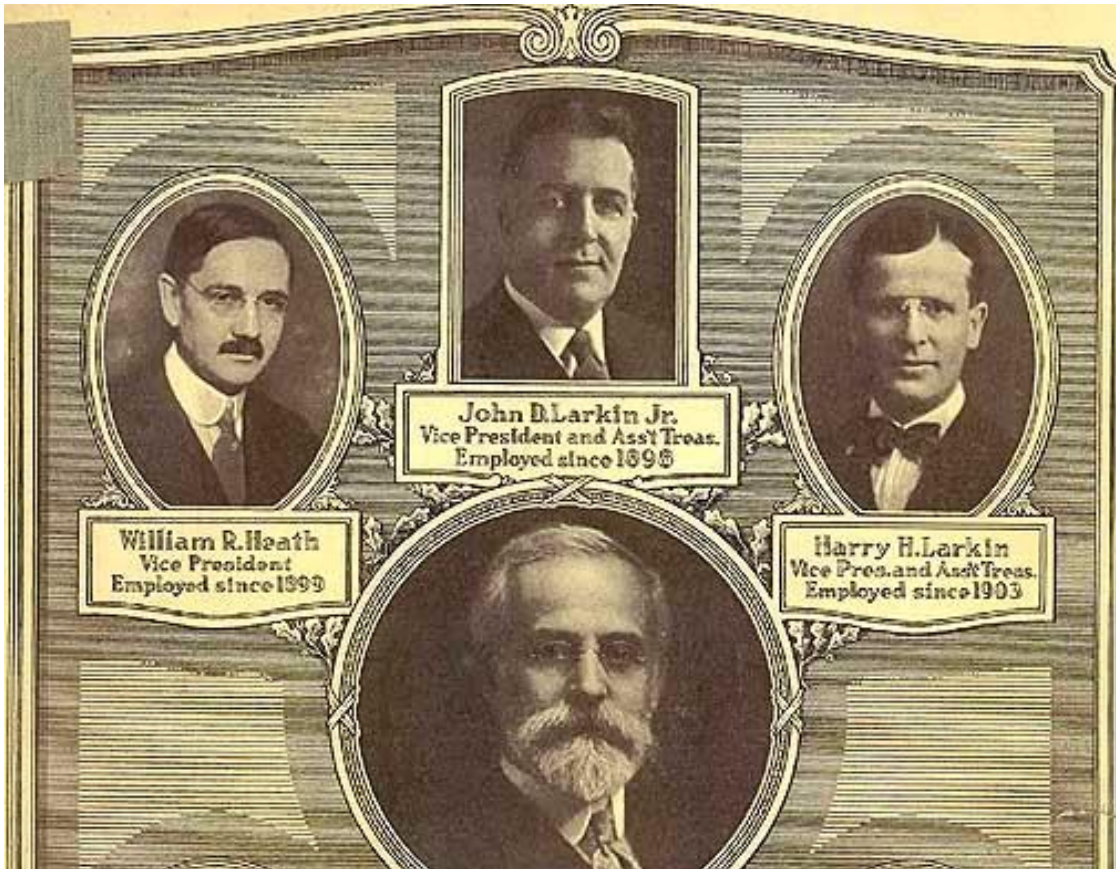


FOUNDING FATHERS: WILLIAM HEATH (Continued #9)

A few months ago, I explored the role of Darwin Martin, who came as a youth to sell soap for the Larkin Soap Company (L.S.C.), who became an office assistant to John D. Larkin and eventually became an officer, director and shareholder of the very successful company. But I have also noted the family relationships among executives. J.D.L. married Frances ("Frank") Hubbard, the sister of Elbert Hubbard. Elbert would later partner with J.D.L. to create the Larkin Soap Company and he would be responsible for developing marketing plans that were key to the success of the company. When Elbert left the company in 1893, Martin became the corporate secretary.



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By 1899 J.D.L.'s daughter, Frances, married Harry Estes, who soon was employed at the L.S.C. J.D.L.'s sons, John, Jr. (Jack) and Charles, also became company employees. It was clear that J.D.L. saw his business as very much so a family enterprise.

It is without debate that Martin held the affections of J.D.L. and his wife, Frank and of Elbert and his wife, Bertha, with both families including him in family functions from the time he was hired at age 13. It is also without debate that Martin was an industrious, intelligent, honest and enthusiastic asset of the corporation. But as he grew in importance, Martin also grew in confidence enough to demand an increase in salary when he was designated Secretary. He had demanded the appointment in 1895, together with a salary suitable for the position. He was given the appointment but the salary increase - to \$10,000, was not bestowed upon him till 1898.

Daniel Larkin, grandson of J.D.L., speculates in his biography of J.D.L. that "it was Martin's aggressiveness, in part, that prompted John to strengthen the position of the family in the management of the burgeoning business." So it was in 1898, having rewarded Martin with position and compensation, that J.D.L. also brought in his brother-in-law, William Heath, who had been an attorney in Chicago, to be in charge of the legal department.

Heath had been born in rural Illinois in 1863. His wife, Mary Hubbard, had also been born in Illinois where her parents had moved from Buffalo, with her and her two siblings, Elbert Hubbard and Frances ("Frank") Larkin. Both Heath and Mary had been teachers. They married in 1888. Heath went on later that year to study at the Union College of Law and became a lawyer with a practice in Chicago.

Upon arriving at the L.S.C. in 1898, Heath was able to participate in, what Patrick Mahoney, a scholar of Frank Lloyd Wright and architect responsible for much work here at the Larkin Center of Commerce, describes as the meteoric rise "not only in the expansion of the L.S.C., but also of his personal fortune." Soon he would commission Frank Lloyd Wright, on referral from an in-law in Chicago. His was to be the first F.L.W. house to be built in Buffalo. But more on this in a future article about the F.L.W. houses in Buffalo.



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Heath received a salary initially of \$5,000 per year which Mahoney notes was about five times the national average at that time. He worked with Martin who was responsible for company personnel and for processing orders for products. Heath also used his legal skills to assist with the complexities of this rapidly growing company with offices and manufacturing plants located in other states. He was a director of L.S.C. subsidiaries like Buffalo Pottery, The Buffalo Leather Company and the Greenburg Glass Company, all

of which manufactured premiums to be given in exchange for certificates that were issued when customers purchased Larkin products.

In a ledger kept by J.D.L.'s secretary of inter-office memos from 1899 to 1902, many memos signed or initialed by Heath are included. They often contained information about how to complete certain forms but could deal with petty issues as suggested in one such memo dated in August, 1901. "Steel erasers will be exchanged only - when your eraser becomes dull exchange it for a sharp one."

On November 30, 1901 Heath posted a memo to "all clerks" to report any problems such as lateness or over-crowding of the Jefferson Street cars and he would deal with the complaints, saying "A strong protest might induce the street-car company to improve its services."

In a memo admonishing employees taking longer vacations than one week, Heath wrote: "If a girl adds a week to her limit we shall probably be so used to getting along without her by the time she returns that we will not need her again."

On September 1, 1902, Heath was on a tear about wasting pencils: "Pencils cost money. Most firms insist that a pencil shall last a clerk a given length of time. The L.S.C. buys good pencils and is not stingy of them. The workers are duty bound not to be wasteful."

In 1902 Heath was appointed vice-president of L.S.C.

It should be noted that, notwithstanding his seeming pettiness about pencils and the like, he was well regarded in the company. Daniel Larkin says, in his biography of J.D.L., "He (J.D.L.) was fortunate in the men he had chosen to be his lieutenants. Darwin D. Martin and William R. Heath were men of principle, concerned, like John, with the integrity of the business, the welfare and comfort of the employees and the general betterment of the human race. They believed in progress, and in the precept that success was the result of hard work, a respect for others and a determination to treat all men fairly. To a large extent they succeeded on the strength of these beliefs."

Heath was considered an expert in employee management, even to the extent of lecturing on publishing articles nationally.

Mary Heath's sister, J.D.L.'s beloved wife, Frank, died in 1922. Her mother, Julianna Hubbard, died at age 95 in 1924. She had been living with the Heaths. It is unclear why, but in June, 1924 Heath sold his stock in the L.S.C. and resigned from his position. This was just one year before the much anticipated 50th anniversary celebration J.D.L. had been planning, which would be named "Fifty Golden Years." It may be that J.D.L., then 75 years old, had been relinquishing more and more of his control of L.S.C. to his son, John Larkin, Jr., and tensions were probably mounting between Heath and the junior Larkin. This was also true for Martin. Though both had been very valued, trusted employees, J.D.L. was increasingly deferring to "Junior."

It appears that if J.D.L. did bring Heath into the company because of concern about outsider Martin somehow impairing the family nature of the business, his distrust was misdirected. In the end, probably because of the tensions between J.D.L., jr. and both

Martin and Heath and their lack of confidence in Junior, both Martin and Heath left L.S.C. to go into business together. Obviously they trusted each other.

After leaving L.S.C., Heath continued in business ventures. He and Martin acquired an interest in an oil company, Elmer E. Harris Co. It owned 22 gas stations. Soon Heath was in discussions with Frank Lloyd Wright, whose designs of Heath's home as well as the Larkin Administration Building had greatly impressed him, about designing a "modern standardized, replicable gas station" that would be built around the country. Heath and Martin dickered with F.L.W. about design changes, and especially regarding the necessity of a bathroom designed for women's privacy and comfort. They had picked a site for the first station to be built, at Michigan and Cherry Streets, but the project never got off the drawing board.

That is - till eighty years later when James Sandoro, with the skilled help of Patrick Mahoney, built a life size version of it inside the Buffalo Transportation Museum down the street on Seneca Street.

Heath also invested in real estate, like the Beecher Office Building on Division Street and the Stuyvesant Apartments and Hotel, the latter being a huge drain on Heath's finances.

After leaving L.S.C., the Heaths moved to the countryside outside of East Aurora. Even as the L.S.C. was suffering from severe decline in Buffalo, Heath became increasingly ill and died on September 27, 1932 at age 69. He was buried at Forest Lawn Cemetery. Mary survived till 1942 before she died and joined her beloved husband at the cemetery.

~From the Desk of Sharon Osgood