

The **50th** *Western*
ANNIVERSARY *Edition*



OUR FIRST FIFTY YEARS

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.. Our First **50** Years..

JULY 4, 1942, is the 50th anniversary of the great institution that is now the Western Cartridge Company.

It was on Independence Day in 1892, just half a century ago, that Franklin W. Olin took possession of the tract of swamp and timber land lying along Wood River, to which he had acquired title only the day before.

With him when he set foot on the property for the first time were Ed James and Fred Walling, whom he had employed as the nucleus of an organization to build and operate a powder mill. With money saved from his profits as a building contractor through the six years following his graduation from Cornell University in 1886, and assisted by friends and relatives who were willing to back his judgment with small investments in his new company, Mr. Olin immediately began construction of the modest project that was to expand into the great Western organization of today.

Now, fifty years later, with the United States engaged in a war for the survival of its ideals and its institutions, that tiny East Alton industry has grown into a gigantic organization with more than 40,000 workers producing the most critical materials in America's struggle for existence—explosives, small arms ammunition, semi-automatic rifles, and scores of related components and parts for these basic products.

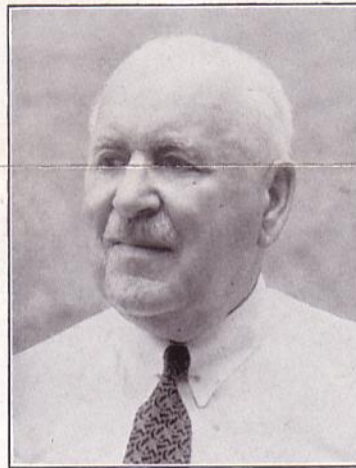
Forty thousand workers! Half a dozen great factories, located at strategic points from New Haven, Conn., in the East, to Tacoma, Wash., in the West! A score of smaller, isolated operations, principally for the manufacture and distribution of explosives! A network of sales and service offices blanketing the continental United States—all devoting their efforts to the winning of the war!

Restrictions of the military censorship prohibit a more detailed description of the many contributions of the Western organization to the tremendous war effort of the American people. Suffice it to say that no other organization in the country has surpassed the individual records of the various Western companies, or the collective weight of the co-ordinated war production program being directed

from East Alton—where Franklin W. Olin founded the Equitable Powder Manufacturing Co. just fifty years ago.

Began as Powder Mill

The Equitable powder mill began operation in February, 1893, and from the very beginning was an out-



F. W. OLIN

standing commercial explosive of that era. The Western Powder Manufacturing Company, located near Peoria, and the Egyptian Powder Company, near Herrin, were other early expansions of the original powder mill property.

Beginning with 1893, about two months in the summer were devoted to sporting powder production by the Equitable mill. Through the next few years, however, it became apparent that to keep pace with the development of firearms, the plant's output of sporting powder would have to be marketed in the new form adapted to loading through the breech—first the old brass shot shells, then the "new fangled" paper shells. Mr. Olin began giving thought, in 1895, to a loading machine to turn out complete rounds of shotgun ammunition, and worked at the task in his spare time through the next three years.

Western earned a citation from General Pershing in the first World War for the patriotic zeal of its 3300 employees. This picture shows the official "flag raising" at which the efforts of the company's workers were dedicated to the nation's cause. The "old" Main Office building was the "new" office building then. Traffic on the Powder Mill Road—mostly horse and buggy—was so light that everything stopped during patriotic meetings.





The original Equitable powder mill, construction on which began in 1892, with operations commencing in 1893. For the first decade of its existence, this plant housed not only powder manufacturing oper-

ations, but the shot-shell loading plant and other early ventures of Western Cartridge Company. In 1902 and 1904, the plant was flooded out by high water from Wood River, shown in the foreground.

A number of the directors of the Equitable Company were in East Alton in May, 1898. At that time, Mr. Olin showed them the loading machine in operation, and immediately it was voted to organize the Western Cartridge Company to load shotgun ammunition. Franklin W. Olin was named president of the new company. Later, the Western Trap and Target Company was formed to manufacture target traps and clay targets, giving Western a complete line of shotgun shooters' supplies with the exception of firearms.

All of these additional operations were part of the original plant in what is now known as the "Powder Mill Area," operated by the East Alton Manufacturing Company. Small sheds and buildings were added from time to time to house the loading machinery. Since these early operations were largely experimental, little space was required. There was also an acute engineering problem to be solved before a permanent plant could be built to house the ammunition manufacturing machinery—the ever-present danger of floods in the Wood River lowlands.

Relief From Flood Menace

In 1902, a disastrous flood overflowed the property, and put the entire plant out of commission for a period of weeks. The great floods of 1903 in the Mississippi and Missouri valleys miraculously spared the Equitable and Western properties, but Wood River went on the rampage again in 1904, and Mr. Olin and his associates decided to do something toward permanent relief from the flood menace. Convinced that the location, direction and height of the various railroad embankments through the East Alton area were responsible for the impounding of flood waters, suit was instituted in 1905 against the railroads, and the litigation was fought to a successful settlement in 1910. Part of the settlement involved an understanding among all parties which led to the organization

of the Wood River Drainage District, which in turn carried through the network of levees and drainage channels that protects the modern plant against recurrence of the disastrous floods of early days.

First Main Plant Building

Through this period when the antagonistic forces of Nature were being brought under control, Western had another battle on its hands—with the manufacturers of components including empty shells, which Western had to purchase in the open market. The sources of supply for shot-shell components were being bought up by the older and wealthier manufacturers. One of the most acute needs in those early days was an unfailing source of supply for primers. Out of this need grew the first physical improvement on what is now the Main Plant area.

Convinced that the only way to insure a satisfactory supply of primers was to manufacture them, Mr. Olin negotiated an agreement with the Austin Cartridge Company of Cleveland, Ohio, whereby Western and Austin would build and operate their own facilities for making primers and blasting caps, also manufacturing .22 caliber ammunition to be marketed under the brand names of the two companies. A corporation called the Union Cap and Chemical Company was organized, and its first home was a building erected in a corn field which covered most of the present Main Plant area. This building still stands. It is the Main Plant Cafeteria, improved and modernized through the years until it is hardly recognizable as the first manufacturing plant to carry a sign reading — "Western Cartridge Company."

This came about in 1907, when Western purchased the business of the Austin company, and took over the entire Union company operation. This was followed in 1908 by the purchase of the National Cartridge Company of Belleville, Ill., and the removal of its manufacturing

facilities to East Alton. Through the period from 1904 to 1910, additional facilities for the manufacture of components were added to the East Alton plant, so that the growing business gradually became self-sufficient in the production of components from raw materials. Mr. Olin even was ready with a complete shot tower when the company's commercial supply of soft and chilled shot was cut off—a "grain elevator" that had been built on the Burlington tracks was disclosed to be a complete plant for the manufacture of shot, designed and built against the day when it might be needed.

The First World War

The period during which Western products were being developed to maximum efficiency led up to the outbreak of the first World War in 1914. Western's first war contract with an Allied power, to supply ammunition to the French government, was signed in October, 1914. In all, Western received 26 war contracts from the United States and its allies, every one of which was successfully accomplished. Western's tremendous contribution to the cause of the Allies was recognized by General John J. Pershing in an official citation.

The unusual demands of the government and its Allies in the first World War created new problems for Western. The most acute was a satisfactory supply of brass required for cartridge cases. It was finally necessary for Western to build its own brass mill and start producing its own cartridge metal from raw materials. When the war ended, Western found itself equipped with a brass mill whose capacity far exceeded peacetime requirements. Instead of letting the mill deteriorate, Mr. Olin and his associates diverted the excess output of the mill to other products than ammunition. Today, Western is one of the largest sources of supply of brass in the Middle West, turning out sheets, rolls, plates and other forms of brass, bronze, phosphor bronze and nickel silver.

Through the early years of operation of the Western plant, the Western management considered it a distinct handicap that ballistic improvements in ammunition could not be carried along with similar improvements in sporting firearms. Several times in the years after World War I, Western was on the verge of buying an arms company. Finally, the big opportunity came in 1931, when the Winchester Repeating Arms Company of New Haven, Conn., was placed on the market. The sale to Western was effective January 1, 1932, giving Western control of the largest plant in the world devoted exclusively to the manufacture of high-grade sporting firearms and sporting ammunition.

Thus, step by step, Franklin W. Olin's first powder mill grew into two great commercial manufacturing plants—each the largest of its kind in the world. Western's East Alton plant became the biggest integrated loading plant, capable of producing all of its requirements within its own factory and mills. Winchester continued to be the acknowledged leader among all firearms manufacturers, adding to the fame of the early Winchester rifles and shotguns many new models, designed or improved after the company was acquired by Western.

Our Present War Effort

Thanks to its many revolutionary improvements in firearms and their ammunition, and the maintenance of the highest standard of quality in all products, the commercial business of Western and its allied organizations was in a prosperous condition when the second World War flamed in Europe in 1939. Step by step, the United States approached closer to the brink of total conflict. So inevitable was our nation's future involvement that early in 1940, the Government called upon the commercial ammunition industry to assume the operation of a series of small arms ammunition plants to help provide the sinews of war for a great modern army. Thus, Western became the operator, through the United States Cartridge Company, a subsidiary, of the largest small arms ammunition plant in the world—the St. Louis Ordnance Plant.

All of the commercial facilities of the principal Western factories have been converted to the production of war material, in addition to the new plants for which the Western management has accepted responsibility. The latter include two large government installations, one in Utah and one in Washington, for the production of aluminum from alunite and other sources of this critical metal which were unavailable up to the time of America's entry into the war. Production through 24 hours of each day, 7 days a week, was inaugurated in Western plants almost before the wreckage in Pearl Harbor had ceased to smolder.

In the first World War, Western contributed the efforts of 3,300 employees to the war effort. Today, in the most titanic struggle of all time, workers under Western management number more than 40,000—more than a modern army corps, more than a mechanized field army. This great industrial legion has cast the weight of its production into the breach on the side of decency and democracy—a tremendous effort befitting an institution which had its beginning in the faith of one American in the future of his country.

The first manufacturing building on the present Main Plant area was built to house the Union Cap and Chemical Company, organized to manufacture primers and .22 caliber ammunition for Western and for the Austin Cartridge Company of Cleveland, Ohio. When Western purchased the Austin company in 1907, the sign reading "Western Cartridge Company" was put up. Thus the future "world champion ammunition" acquired its own home. Note corn shock in right foreground, old fashioned flat-bed wagon under shed. This building is the present Main Plant cafeteria.

