

# Materials for Company History in the National Archives

By HAROLD B. HANCOCK

*Otterbein College*

**R**ESearching in business records in the National Archives for data illuminating the history of a company over 150 years old can be rewarding and exciting. If the researcher combines ingenuity, imagination, and perspiration, he is well on the way to locating interesting material. This paper is a case study of results achieved in less than 4 months, and it is hoped that it will encourage scholars and research organizations concerned with business and industrial history to undertake similar projects. For years military and naval historians have been richly rewarded by using the records in the National Archives, and students of the business history of textiles, leather, shipbuilding, lumbering, mining, and chemicals will also find much treasure.

When E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Co. celebrated its 150th anniversary in 1952, announcement was made of the creation of the Eleutherian Mills-Hagley Foundation to study the industrial history of the Delaware Valley and to create an industrial museum. For some years Pierre S. du Pont had carried on a family tradition of collecting and studying the history of the du Pont family and company, and he had established the Longwood Library in his home on his estate in Pennsylvania. In 1961 the books and manuscripts in this library and the records in the possession of the Hagley Museum were combined in the Eleutherian Mills Historical Library on Brandywine Creek near Greenville, Del.

For 8 years the writer, a specialist in Delaware history, did research and prepared reports for the Hagley Museum. When local sources did not provide sufficient information in 1961 about Civil War contracts of Brandywine-Wilmington business establishments for a museum exhibit, he was commissioned to spend a week in the National Archives, searching out items for copying. The mission was quite successful, and the researcher was stimulated by the variety and amount of economic material available to suggest an exploratory project for 3 weeks in the summer of 1962 to microfilm records. The results were so impressive that examination continued

The author is Chairman of the Department of History and Government at Otterbein College, Westerville, Ohio.

for 2 months in 1963 and 1 month in 1964, part of the time being spent in the Library of Congress and elsewhere.

The person who initiated the project had researched and had written widely in Delaware history, and from experiences as a summer employee he was familiar with the history of the Du Pont Co. and other enterprises in the region and with the economic history of Wilmington. He was given complete freedom in selecting the collections to examine and the items to have microfilmed, but he was in constant touch with officials of the museum and library and submitted both oral and written reports. He was enthusiastic and interested in the project and considered the findings important both to the history of the company and of Delaware.

Abundant clues on what to look for were in the library and museum. The du Pont family included a French philosopher, the founder of a great industrial enterprise, business leaders, inventors, a major general of the Delaware State militia, a Civil War admiral, and several senators; and the list of their correspondents was an important guide. Company correspondence included orders from the Army and Navy, payments from the Treasury, and letters from Congressmen, other politicians, and businessmen. Research was at first confined to the period from 1790 to 1865. In spite of great expectations, the researcher was not prepared for the avalanche of material that awaited him.

#### ARMY RECORDS

Hundreds of letters to and from the Chief of the Bureau of Ordnance, the Secretary of War, and Frankford Arsenal were found to be extant. While many concern routine orders, others are illuminating about experiments, the quality of powder, tests, raw materials, and technical details. Some tell of efforts to secure "the sinews of war" for militia companies of Brandywine workmen during the War of 1812, the shipment of powder for safety to Frankford Arsenal, and the forwarding of kegs to Wilmington Arsenal and to Lewes, Del., which was bombarded briefly by the British. There are comments on the competition provided by William Twaddell, elusive Brandywine manufacturer, and by Peter Bauduy, former Du Pont partner, and his successor, John P. Garesché, at the Eden Park Mills. Twaddell could not fill an order in 1812 because of a spring freshet. Bauduy in 1818 claimed that his powder was "equal if not superior to that of any other establishment in this country or in Europe," but in 1822 his property was sold at sheriff's sale. Garesché received some substantial contracts, including one for

powder for "emigrating Indians" in 1836; but after an explosion in 1853, which sent his workmen into a "panic," he eventually abandoned his enterprise.

In 1862, during the Civil War, the Chief of Army Ordnance referred to the Du Pont Co. as "our principal providers of gunpowder and saltpeter." In 1863 he requested the Assistant Secretary of War to exempt the Du Pont powdermen from the draft, observing that "the value to the government of the services of these powder makers as soldiers in the ranks is not to be compared with that of their services in making powder." Lammot du Pont was sent to England in the fall of 1861 to buy saltpeter secretly for the Union. For a time the success of his mission was jeopardized by the *Trent* affair, but he arranged the purchase on his second trip. For this effort and for the cooperation of the firm in general the Assistant Secretary of War in 1863 expressed appreciation, commending "the zealous efforts which now, as heretofore, you and your house have made to promote the interests of the public service whenever called upon. The supply of gunpowder now exceeds the current consumption." Pleas from the Brandywine for protection reached the ordnance office at the time of Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania in 1863 and again when Early raided in the vicinity of Washington in 1864. During the war and afterwards the Government and the company cooperated in powder experiments and in the development of Mammoth and hexagonal powders.

In the records of the Adjutant General are such items as the morning reports of the Fourth Delaware Regiment of Volunteers, militia stationed at Camps du Pont and Brandywine to protect the powder mills. A crude diary notes the monthly history of Company A, in which many Brandywine workmen had enlisted. Correspondence of Maj. Gen. Henry du Pont, who directed the operations of the company and who headed the State militia, and of his son, young Henry A. du Pont, West Point graduate in 1861 and later his successor in the management of the company, was discovered in this record group. Henry du Pont reported on April 19, 1861, that his workmen were loyal but that they needed arms. He was concerned about the possible disloyalty of Democratic militia within the State.

The records of the Provost Marshal include a petition of Brandywine manufacturers for protection from rebel attacks in 1863; the request of William Bancroft, Quaker textile manufacturer, for exemption from the draft; correspondence relating to the payment of commutation money or the securing of substitutes for manufacturers and their employees, and evidence of disaffection in all parts

of Delaware. Draft lists, arranged by subdistricts, most of which were called hundreds, note the age, occupation, nationality, and residence of males, thus providing important economic and genealogical information. Related material in the Baker-Turner papers provide information about the plot of two rebel spies to damage the mills and the spies' capture in 1862.

The Consolidated Files of the Quartermaster General sometimes overlap with the above material. They might be described as selected materials arranged alphabetically. A letter written by the Secretary of War in 1801, 2 years before the company began to manufacture powder, discussed with du Pont de Nemours the possibility of his son's refining saltpeter for the Government. A company letter in May 1813 reported that the British Commodore in Delaware Bay had expressed a disturbing wish "to pay a visit to a French gentleman on the Brandywine M. du Pont." Since the British were only 8 hours' march from the mills in July 1814, permission was asked to forward powder as rapidly as it was manufactured to Frankford Arsenal. From the Brandywine mills came kegs of powder for the Wilmington Arsenal, the State of Delaware, and Lewes. A handful of encampments such as Camps Brandywine and du Pont looked after the defense of the region. By request equipment was sent down to arm the "Brandywine Rangers," militia companies formed of local workmen. Textile mills in northern Delaware manufactured cloth for shirts, blankets, and uniforms for the Army during the War of 1812, and samples of cloth were enclosed in some letters.

Supplementing this material are over 100 boxes of the correspondence of Callender Irvine, Superintendent of Military Stores, 1804-12, later (until 1842) Commissary General of Purchases. While the box labels indicate a span of time from 1812 to 1842, the contents range from the 1790's to the 1880's. Like the Consolidated Files, the boxes include orders for powder, textiles, and miscellaneous items, as well as information about the defense of the State during the War of 1812. Though the combing of this unarranged material involved tedious and tiresome work, the effort was rewarding and worthwhile.

#### NAVY RECORDS

At the beginning of the 19th century the Secretary of War handled orders for powder. Correspondence with the Du Pont Co. dates from 1805. Riddle and Bird of New Castle first acted as agent in securing orders, claiming in 1807 that the Brandywine product was "of the best quality, superior to any powder imported

*THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST*

from Europe of the same kind" and worthy of a higher price than other domestic brands. Later, from 1818 to 1842, a Board of Navy Commissioners handled purchases. A company letter in 1826 informed the members that 3,000 pounds of powder were manufactured daily and that a production of 60,000 monthly for military purposes, in addition to some for civilian use, could be guaranteed in a time of national emergency. Local competitors corresponded with the Commissioners, answering complaints about powder, informing them of explosions and manufacturing problems, and praising the quality of their products.

At the time of the Oregon crisis in 1846 the company did not haggle about proposed terms of purchase, commenting, "Under such circumstances, we of course waived all considerations of profit and accepted the terms proposed." When the Ordnance Bureau protested a rise in price in 1863, the company justified the increase because of the rising cost of raw materials, labor, taxes, and transportation; and it claimed that it was providing powder at a cheaper rate in time of war than had been true in the history of any country. Correspondence about saltpeter and powder was extracted from the series of regular letters and placed in separate volumes after 1861. During and after the war the company cooperated with the Army and Navy Bureaus of Ordnance in developing Mammoth and hexagonal powder. A naval inspector spent many months at the mills from 1871 to 1873 and wrote lengthy reports about Du Pont manufacturing processes.

Wilmington shipyards, especially Harlan and Hollingsworth and Pusey and Jones, had an enviable production during the Civil War. An inspector in 1862 declared that the *Nahant* and *Patapsco*, constructed by Harlan and Hollingsworth, were "the two finest specimens of iron ship-buildings thus far plated up . . .," and in 1863 another inspector noted that this firm had built more iron vessels than any other for 20 years, adding "that their skill is equal if not superior to any other parties in the same business." At the turn of the century Harlan and Hollingsworth received many contracts for vessels, and assorted papers dealing with each contract are readily available.

The Civil War career of S. F. Du Pont had already been studied, but letters from officers below the rank of commander, commanders' letters, and captains' letters footnoted his advance from the time of his entrance into the service in 1817. Squadron letters described his participation in the capture of California in 1846 and his mission in conveying a minister to China and Japan in 1857 and 1858. Letters to and from the Philadelphia Navy Yard in 1861 told of

his concern for the safety of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, of his assistance in arranging the transportation of troops to Washington, and of the sale of Wilmington vessels to the Navy.

#### DIPLOMATIC, LEGAL, AND FISCAL RECORDS

The Presidential appointment papers of George Washington are in the Library of Congress, but those from John Adams through Monroe in the National Archives were searched, and information was assembled about a number of office seekers from Delaware. One letter of recommendation in 1816 from a New Castle County manufacturer describes the short history of the "Maddison" woolen factory from 1812 to 1815. Dr. James Tilton, active in the American Revolution and War of 1812, recommended for collector in 1817 one John Warner, owner of vessels that frequently transported powder, adding that he was the father of nine children and was expected to increase his family to patriarchal size.

The Miscellaneous and Domestic Letters of the State Department in the early Federal period contain much economic material and have been indexed. Jacob Broom, who later sold land on the Brandywine to E. I. du Pont for his mills, commented in a letter in 1794 upon his reasons for establishing a cotton factory in Wilmington and mentioned the assistance he was receiving from an inventor. Several letters deal with the plight of the French refugees in Wilmington. A miller on White Clay Creek complained that he had not been compensated for flour seized by American soldiers at the time of the Battle of the Brandywine.

"Alien letters" in the papers of the State Department contain two letters written by Thomas and Joshua Gilpin during the War of 1812, trying to have the English manager of their Brandywine papermills exempted from expulsion to Reading, Pa. Besides pointing out that he was needed to help support his 8 children, the writers emphasized that his talents were also required to operate successfully a business, employing 30 people, which made fine paper for banks.

Letters to and from the Collectors of Customs and the Marshals of the Delaware District are illuminating on smuggling, coastal shipping, the importation of rails from England for the New Castle and Frenchtown Railroad in the 1830's, the history of the Wilmington Whaling Co., and the importation of saltpeter. In June 1817 the collector reported the visit of President Monroe to Wilmington and the Brandywine. During the Civil War the collector was concerned about shipments of supplies to the Confederacy. A special

group of records concerning Wilmington commerce in the 1790's was found in papers dealing with French spoliation claims.

Correspondence about payments for powder dates from 1805. Victor and I. E. du Pont were paid \$4,000 each for the allowances and subsistence of the Brandywine Rangers during the War of 1812. Contracts made by Charles I. du Pont indicate the size of his thriving business in woolen cloth with the Army in the 1820's and 1830's.

Large volumes in the records of the Treasury Department show the amount of the manufacturers' tax paid monthly and of income taxes paid by individuals annually from 1862 to 1873. For 11 years the amount of powder produced monthly by the Du Pont Co., the pounds of paper made by Curtis Brothers and by Jessup and Moore, the yards of cloth manufactured by the Bancroft Co., the number of car wheels molded by Bush and Lobdell, and the cans of fruit put up by factories in Kent and Sussex Counties could be determined. The rising incomes of manufacturers during the war and their diminution afterwards could be studied. Henry du Pont in May 1863 reported an income of \$270,691, and his fellow businessmen in shipbuilding, machine shops, and textiles also reported substantial earnings.

In the court records of Eastern Pennsylvania for 1810 was the interesting case of *Munn v. Du Pont and Bauduy*. In a suit brought by a rival powder manufacturer's agent who was attempting to "seduce" some workmen, the Delawareans were accused of attacking the representative with a sword cane, a loaded horsewhip, and clubs at Buck Tavern near the Brandywine. Then they followed him to Philadelphia, and later they brought the malefactor back to Wilmington in irons. Correspondence of the Attorney General with the District Attorney of Delaware concerned cases of smuggling, of collectors who did not settle their accounts properly, and of ships and goods confiscated on the way to the Confederacy.

#### SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RECORDS

Shipping records of several kinds after 1815, the earliest available date, give information on the maritime activities of Delaware ports, the building of ships, and tonnage. Many Brandywine millers owned ships or shares in one or more vessels. The history of the steamboat *E. I. du Pont*, in which a number of local businessmen invested, is documented. Local historians claim that the *Bangor* was the "first iron sea-going propeller steamer constructed in the United States," and changes of ownership from the time of its construction in 1844 by Harlan and Hollingsworth can be traced.



Enrollment records frequently mention the transformation of sailing vessels into steamers. Owing to a fire of 1921, some of these records are in fragile condition, with charred edges.

From Du Pont Co. correspondence it was known that powder had been sold to the Federal government for use by Indians early in the 19th century. Records of the Indian Office before 1830 revealed sales by the company and agents, payment vouchers, and letters specifying Du Pont powder.

Manufacturing was first noted—slightly—in the census records of 1810. Raw returns of individual manufacturers are available for the census of 1820. The 1820 return of E. I. du Pont is in the States of the Union exhibit in the National Archives. The original schedule of the 1840 census of manufactures in which the assistant marshals made returns for each hundred, is more illuminating than the printed census statistics. Archives officials mentioned that the original schedules for 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880 had been deposited in the Delaware Hall of Records. Examination there revealed them to be such rich sources of economic information that subsequently they were microfilmed.

Patent Office records before 1862 contain good material on Delaware agriculture and statistical information on several Brandywine factories. For instance, Joseph Bancroft at Rockford on the Brandywine in 1857 had 2,750 spindles and 80 looms in operation; he employed 30 males at wages of \$5 per week and 50 females at \$2.50 per week.

About 15 letters to and from S. F. Du Pont were found in Coast Survey correspondence of 1861, 1862, and 1863. Work by this Bureau was basic in preparing for attacks by the Union Navy during the Civil War.

#### LEGISLATIVE RECORDS

In the records of the House of Representatives and the Senate before 1830 are petitions advocating higher tariffs by Delaware papermakers, cordwainers, iron manufacturers, cotton and woolen workmen, and gunpowder manufacturers. These, with accompanying papers, provide considerable detail about business operations, such as a letter from Thomas Gilpin in 1818 indicating the number of vats in use in paper mills in Delaware and Pennsylvania. The Society of Domestic Manufacturers of Delaware, of which E. I. du Pont was vice president, advocated higher tariffs after the War of 1812. In 1828 E. I. du Pont, William Young, and John Siddall, all of whom were Brandywine manufacturers, testified before the Committee on Manufacturing about conditions in woolen and cot-



ton mills in New Castle County. Oliver Evans, who mechanized Brandywine flour mills, fought vigorously to renew his patents; millers throughout the country who opposed his high fees protested that as early as 1785 machinery similar to his had been in operation at a flour mill in Stanton, Del. Other items concern the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, road and postoffice petitions, and attempts to make the town of New Castle a port of entry. At some future time the records of the Senate Committee investigating the munitions industry in the 1930's, occupying 200 cubic feet, may be examined.

#### PROCESSING

When the microfilms were received by the Eleutherian Mills Historical Library, they were first checked in by the acquisitions librarian. The reels were then turned over to the reference and research department for checking item by item. As a preliminary guide the researcher's typed notes were used. These had been taken in pencil on lined notebook paper, group and entry numbers being noted, each individual item within a volume or series numbered, and receivers and senders of letters, date, and sometimes contents noted. Items omitted from the film were given to the researcher for checking and reordering. Unfortunately the documents had not always been photocopied in the order that the researcher's notes specified, and hence it was necessary to rearrange and splice portions of some microfilm reels. A summary catalog arranged by record group and subdivided by boxes, volumes, and items in sequence has been organized. The processing and arranging took longer than had been anticipated but was necessary to enable researchers to use the material to maximum advantage.

#### CONCLUSION

Through research of the past 3 summers much important material relating to the economic activities in the Wilmington-Brandywine area and in Delaware has been located and microfilmed. The experiment has turned out successfully and will be continued. Inspection and microfilming of records in the Library of Congress and other libraries has begun. Researchers already have found the material of value and are using it while processing is being completed.

To make an exhaustive search in the National Archives for records relating to any business in operation over an extended period of time would require many months or even years, although finding aids are increasing in number and improving in quality. General advice is to study the history of the business, its correspondents, and

its Government associations of any nature—regulatory, legal, fiscal, advisory—carefully. Look in the index of the general guide published in 1948 and browse through its pages. The more specialized guide to Federal archives during the Civil War should also be examined. Discuss your problem with the archivists in the branch in which you will be doing most of your work and inquire about free mimeographed preliminary inventories or typewritten guides. The archivists are friendly, willing to help, and cooperative, but the researcher must do his own digging. Sample before plunging in. The material is there—it is a challenge for you to find it!



**MAKE PLANS NOW TO ATTEND**

**JOINT**

**SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS**

**AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR STATE AND LOCAL  
HISTORY**

**MEETING**

(30th Annual Meeting, Society of American Archivists)

**October 5–8, 1966**

**Atlanta, Georgia**

**Headquarters: MARRIOTT MOTOR HOTEL**

*THE AMERICAN ARCHIVIST*