

**Personal History Statement**  
**of**  
**Herbert Martinus Nelson**  
**(Husband of Laura Elizabeth Wheeler)**  
**As dictated in the Spring of 1970 to his**  
**daughter, Marian Elizabeth Nelson Stewart.**

I was 14 years old when I quit school, and I am sorry that I didn't finish. I started to work at Mitchell Wagon at 5¢ an hour or 50¢ a day for about a year. Then I worked at the Mitchell Motor Car Company when I was 15 years old and I got \$1.00 a day. I worked for a Mr. Dresen. I worked there until I was 17 and then got a job in the tool room of the J.I. Case Plow Works. I think I worked there about six years. I then transferred to the Gorton Machine Co., and worked there 12 years.

When World War I broke out I received a telegram from the Government sending me to Key West, Florida. I went. When I arrived I received a draft card to fill out, but the Navy Yard kept me there as a civilian employee. I had been there about two months when Thomas A. Edison arrived, and I was directly under him for two years, when the war ended. I was at the Navy Yards from 1916 to 1918. I was 29 years old at the time and Edison was in his late 70's. I was a machinist and received my orders from Thomas A. Edison. The first time I saw him he came down the aisle with soldiers on either side of him and they came over to me and Mr. Wolf, his chief engineer, introduced me to him. I admired Thomas A. Edison and couldn't believe this was really happening to me.

Mr. Edison would make scratch drawings on small pieces of paper and bring them to me to make. I made a gyroscope for him which was placed in the crow's nest on transport ships. This prevented us from sinking our own ships and helped me to site the German ships. I asked his Chief Engineer, Mr. Wolf, if Edison wasn't inspired by the Almighty to do the marvelous things he was doing. Mr. Wolf told me that Edison was an atheist. Wolf had been asked by Edison to measure how far the sun was from the earth at a given angle, and he gave Mr. Edison the answer. Then Mr. Wolf asked Mr. Edison, "Now you believe this, don't you, Mr. Edison?" And Mr. Edison said, "Yes". "Then why don't you believe in God?", said Mr. Wolf, and Mr. Edison was stumped. He had no answer. He only believed the theories that were written up.

Mr. Wolf asked me to come to Orange, New Jersey, to work in the Edison laboratory there, but I decided to return to Racine, Wisconsin.

When I arrived back in Racine in 1918 I knew that I could never work for anyone else, and that I just had to be my own boss, so Cliff Strom and I decided to start a business of our own; asking my two brothers, Frank and Lawrence if they would like to be in on it too. Cliff and I were sitting on a railing down by the tannery when we made this decision. Cliff and I actively ran the business until 1941 when my brother Frank, gave up his job at Horlick's Malted Milk Company to become President of Nelson Bros. & Strom Co. Up until that time he had been a silent partner. (As of this date, January 1971, he is still President, and Herb is Vice President). In the 1960's Herb told me (R. S. Wheeler), that once during World War II he visited the old Navy Yards at Key West. He asked for someone from the old days, whom, he found was still employed there and who came out to greet him - effusively said hello and conducted him deep into the works. Suddenly he found himself surrounded by Security Guards, who asked to see his

pass. Since he didn't have one, he had quite a time explaining what he was doing there, until one of the girls with whom he had worked in 1918 finally convinced the guards that he was harmless. Also, I met Herb and Frank in Washington, D.C., in 1942 when I was only a Captain in the Army Air Corps and they were here to see about some WWII Navy contracts. But to continue his narrative...

Cliff and I decided to make a grinder and grind automobile cylinders; which wd didn't do, but eventually used another method of boring out cylinders. We contracted for the Bethlehem Truck and bought five of them for retail sale; and also the Jordan automobile demonstrator, which we later sold to Mr. Vogt. We sold these cars and trucks and also operated a small machine shop. We rented the Piggins Building on Sixth Street.

Nelson Bros. & Strom was incorporated in September, 1919. In 1969 we celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> year in business. We were incorporated by Vilas Whaley. We rented the Piggins Building for about six years, then built where the Capitol Theater is now located. We were in that building for five or six years.

We then decided we were in the wrong business, that of selling cars— we were machinists, not salesman. We operated a machine shop upstairs. We decided to sell the building and move back into the original Piggins Building, which we bought from Mr. Piggins. We operated there for several years until we moved over to 8<sup>th</sup> Street (where Young Mfg. is today). We were on 8<sup>th</sup> Street until 1941. In 1940 we purchased our present site from the Racine Candy Machine Company; and also purchased the Modine Building, which we operated during WWII with 450 men working 24 hours a day. We received the highest award, the "Navy E" for excellence. We subsequently sold the four story building to Dumore, and moved back into our present facilities. During the war we also built the Speed-Meal Pressure Cooker, which we later sold. After the war, my brother Frank and I bought out Cliff Strom's interest, and Strom retired from the company.

I continue to go to work every day and I am now 80 years of age.

The following is from a newspaper article (Alice Sankey of the Racine Journal Times, for the Unified School System entitled "Industries of Racine" - 1956.

"They developed two lines of stokers, the screw type and the hydraulic ram type. During WWII they reached the peak of their production, producing about 50 different items for the war effort. Subsequently castings of all sizes have been planed, ground, drilled and finished for assembly. Among the larger out-of-town concerns for whom they have made machine castings are: Enterprise Railway Equipment; International Harvester; Diamond T Motor Car; A.O. Smith; Allis-Chalmers; Ingersoll, Gunitite Foundries, Checker Cab, and Ladish."

On a visit in Wisconsin with one of my sons in the 1950's, Herb told me that a Navy "Renegotiation Team" had reviewed their contracts and decided that they were overpaid during WWII years by \$75,000. (Practically all Navy contracts were reviewed - and Army too - by the Government)— and immediate repayment in full was demanded. Frank and he paid, both being Christian gentlemen, but it put a temporary crimp in their finances.