

ARCC Oral History Project

Interviewee: Charles Horn, Jr.

Moderator: Jason Gengler
9078 Hyland Creek Road
Bloomington, MN

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90 South 7th Street
Minneapolis, MN

Subject: Charles Horn, Sr.

JG: The date is January 22nd, 1993 and we're at the Norwest Center. Today we'll be talking about Charles Horn Senior.

My name is Charles L. Horn, Junior. I am the oldest child of Charles L. Horn, the subject of this interview. Myself, I was born on May 12, 1927. I am a retired attorney and I live in Bloomington, Minnesota.

My father, Charles L. Horn, and the L stood for Lilley. I'll spell that for history as Lilley. I may want to comment on that middle name, was born near Mount Vernon, Iowa on March 5th, 1888. He was born, so far as I know, on a farm and there is an unsubstantiated tradition that the farmhouse was in fact a sort of log cabin.

When my father was just a small child, an infant, only a couple of years old, his parents moved to western Iowa. They moved to a small town in western Iowa called Kushig. How my father got to Minnesota is something of a mystery. He never quite explained it other than saying that he had, after graduation, visited his friends in Minnesota and liked the place, and decided he would go to college in Minnesota rather than to the University of Iowa or to what is now called Iowa State. His initial plan was that he was going to study forestry and I believe that probably for a semester or so, he was enrolled in the School of Forestry at the University of Minnesota which was part of the School of Agriculture. However, apparently forestry was not to his liking, and before his first college year was over, he entered the University of Minnesota Law School. My father graduated from law school in 1912. I believe that he was the second ranking student in the class, which was quite a small class.

He became president of a very small company in Minneapolis called the American Ball Company. Now the ball refers to ball bearings. It manufactured steel ball bearings. It was located off East Lake Street. I remember that when I was a small boy the place was pointed out to me. I couldn't say exactly where it was at the present time, but I think it was somewhere near Cedar Avenue or 27th Avenue East.

It was this operation that got him involved with Federal Cartridge. Now, as probably anybody that's going to hear this history knows, Federal Cartridge Corporation as it was known when my father came into the picture, was actually sort of a successor to another company which had been founded six or

seven years before. It was called the Federal Cartridge and Machine Company. It occupied the same grounds and the old main plant building or what's left of it, was in fact the plant of the Federal Cartridge and Machine Company. Some people I think named Sherman, I never knew anything about them except their names which I've read, were behind this. They intended to make shotgun shells and maybe .22s, I don't know, but they never really got it off the ground. About the only thing they did right was sign a two-year contract with a man named John Haller who had worked for other ammunition companies in the east and sort of a mechanical genius. John Haller was the man they were going to have to try to run the plant.

A little side about John Haller, because he was really the first employee at Federal Cartridge Corporation, is that he was supposedly able to mentally see how the various machines, particularly the loaders and the trimmers and everything, would work and on the basis of those pictures that he had in his mind he would be able to draw plans for the manufacture and building of such machines. He was rather a truly remarkable character.

Anyhow, Federal Cartridge and Machine Company so far as I know, sold very, very little ammunition. Soon, after its commencement, ceased operations. They started building the plant in 1916. Apparently, they got the plant completed in 1917, by 1918 or 1919 it was all over.

Now, I don't know exactly the background or details of how my father got into Federal Cartridge Corporation. I do know that he became associated with a man named Todd Lewis. Todd Lewis and my father formed the Federal Cartridge Corporation, an entirely different organization than Federal Cartridge and Machine Company and bought the assets, such as they were. They consisted part of the grounds of the present plant, the old building and I suspect a rather battered clock house, some machinery, a certain amount of raw materials and a certain amount of semi-finished product. They had a lot of very bad primers, my father used to say.

The new Federal Cartridge Corporation, so far as I know, started in the early winter of 1922. There is an article in a 1943 Monarch in which my father gave some recollections of his first day out in Anoka as president of Federal Cartridge Corporation at which time consisted of himself and John Haller and a coal stove in what was the plant to try to keep people warm, namely he and John. From there, the Federal Cartridge Corporation started up.

Now it's rather interesting that although Federal Cartridge was in Anoka, my father never had offices at Federal Cartridge in Anoka. As a matter of fact, I don't think he ever spent the night in Anoka unless he was out there looking in the plant or got snowed in. I guess he wasn't, anymore, a small town boy. As a matter of fact, Anoka was a rather remote place at that time. It was 20 miles from Minneapolis, the roads weren't that good and if you were going to operate the sales division efficiently you almost had to be in the City of Minneapolis. So, he always had his offices in Minneapolis where the sales department remained until 1987 and where the major accounting department remained and where some other facilities remained. It was later situated in the Foshey Tower office. The tower office was where he always had his own personal office.

My father went out to Anoka quite regularly during the week. He would probably go in the early days a couple of times a week. He drove in red Buick Roadster, 1921 Buick Roadster which is still in existence so far as I know out at Federal Hoffman. I can remember as a very small boy riding in it and when I saw

it again later after I had grown it was an amazing machine. The metal that was used in cars in those days was almost the same type you would think as armored cars and tanks. It was enormously high off the ground. The wood in the steering wheel was better than the wood many people have in their furniture in their living room, and by and large, it was an imposing looking creation.

My father was never a very good automobile driver. In fact, a ride with my father in the automobile was not the kind of experience that I particularly enjoyed, although he never had a serious accident. But going to and from Anoka on the dirt and sand roads that they had in those days I guess he got into the ditch quite frequently. His presence at the end of every two weeks in the afternoon was very much looked for because he would bring out the payroll from Minneapolis. If he didn't show up and had been a bad two weeks, you're going to have to wait a while before you get your money.

Now, there's one thing I should tell you about my father before I go further because it explains an awful lot about him. I think some of the people who knew him realized that he had virtually no hearing in one ear. I'll be perfectly honest to tell you that although he lived until I was 51, I was never sure which was his bad ear. This obviously probably had some effect on how he did things while he worked and everything else. It was because of this hearing defect of course that he was never in any military service.

Now, I might just say a little bit. I have not mentioned my father's appearance very much. He was about 5'10" or 5'11". As a young man he was very, very thin. He was a little bit heavier as he grew older. I would say that in his 40's or 50's he weighed probably about 180 pounds or so. He had blue eyes. One thing about him was very interesting. I never saw my father without a mustache. Apparently, he had grown the mustache in 1918 or 1920 and he wore it the rest of his life. So, I never did see him without a mustache. Later on, some of his friends who were also in the other ammunition companies, so one of them as a joke, gave him some mustache wax and he continued to use mustache wax and he had a waxed mustache until the time of his death.

He was a very dapper dresser. For years, he always wore a carnation, a fresh one on every day. I was very curious, that during the 1930's, this was probably because of something else I'll tell you about in a few minutes, that he always wore spats. He was one of the last men I ever knew that wore spats. He was a very good dresser. Later on, he actually had all his clothing and suits made for him by a German tailor named Otto Will.

Now, one thing I'm going to talk about something, I don't know how much, how well people knew about this. I suspect now that it's fairly common knowledge, but for many years it was not. In 1929, my father and Todd Lewis sold Federal Cartridge Corporation to a man named Franklin W. Olin who was also in the ammunition business. I never even knew about this until I was eight years-old in 1935 and then only found out by accident. My father remained as the president of Federal Cartridge Corporation and virtually ran the whole show without any particular interference so far as I know from F. W. Olin.

When I was a boy, there were maybe about 200 or so people, 200 or 300 people who worked for Federal Cartridge. Most of course were out in Anoka. I visited Anoka and the Federal plant quite often. Later on, insurance stuff and everything of that kind made it impossible for me to visit the plant while it was in operation, but many Sunday afternoons we all went out when the plant was closed down. We all went out to Anoka, and I guess sometimes we raided the ice box at the cafeteria commissary which was built in 1930, somewhat to the unhappiness of the people that had to open up on Monday.

When World War II started, things began to change and change very rapidly. Now, I had as a boy, always been conscious of and we talked about, what would happen if there were a war and what would something like Federal Cartridge do. I vaguely knew that there were government plans or orders or instructions that they would make trench mortar primers, anti-aircraft gun primers and things of that kind. That only partially came true.

However, in connection with the defense program which began in 1940 and was going on into 1941, there were plans for the construction of a number of government-owned plants to make small arms ammunition. Now, by small arms I mean ammunition of .30 and .50 caliber size. I suppose also .45's but that wasn't such a big thing. This was the common caliber for army rifles like machine guns. .50 calibers were used largely aircraft machine guns and on some heavy machine guns the army used. Now according to my father, knowing about this, he sort of went to Washington D.C. on his own hook and got an appointment with the people in the ordinance department in the army. He told them he understood that they were thinking about building such a facility in the Twin Cities area and that as a matter of fact, if they were going to do so they ought to look at Federal Cartridge because it was the only company in the whole area that knew anything about making ammunition.

The result was a contract with Federal Cartridge Corporation to build and to operate for the United States Army in the ordinance department a very large, small arms manufacturing facility. It was then called Twin Cities Ordinance Plant (TCOP). That facility of course still exists, though not operating now, and it is called the Twin Cities Arsenal. It was totally built from scratch between late August 1941, and early summer of 1942. All of the people who were hired, all the machines were brought in, the whole thing was put together that quickly and that rapidly. It was a very, very interesting experience even if I only saw it from the outside.

Everybody virtually had to be hired at once. There were some Federal Cartridge people that were transferred from Anoka to Twin Cities Ordinance Plant in some of the key positions. My father and Alfred Smaltz literally went through dozens to hundreds of applications in our own living room, after supper, four or five days a week, selecting out the people who would be the first one-thousand or so employees because they were some of the key people. They would be the machine adjusters, the foremen and a lot of the key people. I don't know if any of those people who are still around realize, who came in the early days, that they were literally hand-picked, absolutely hand-picked. The plant got into operation I think in August, that is producing ammunition in August of 1942. At its peak operation there were 26,000 employees. It was the largest war plant in the State of Minnesota, and I suspect at that time was practically the largest employer in the State of Minnesota.

It was the first plant that went out and hired Negroes. That hadn't been done before. As a matter of fact, one of the first employees of the Twin Cities Ordinance Plant, before there was even a plant even, when there were just the fenced in grounds was a guard who was an African American who would have been hired and there he was out in uniform, I saw him you know, patrolling. He was always patrolling around the perimeter which was several square miles. In that respect, it made quite a record at one time. One-fifth of the Negro population of the state was supposedly working at Twin Cities Ordinance Plant.

One of the highlights was the visit of Franklin D. Roosevelt to the plant in September 1942 when he was making a tour of defense plants, a secret tour of defense plants from Washington. Stray aside a little bit; one of the reasons it was said that he made the tour was that he and Eleanor had a hell of a big row and he decided to get away for a while. But of course, that might or not be true. In matter of fact, I knew about this, found out about this right before President Roosevelt was coming the morning of the day he came there. My father told me I was not to tell anybody else and I did not. We discussed the matter at the Sunday dinner following, it was on a Saturday that Roosevelt was here. We discussed it, the main interesting thing was my father and Alice Robertson who was at dinner with us also agreed that Franklin D. Roosevelt looked just exactly like Franklin D. Roosevelt. Sometimes people don't look like their pictures. Of course, this was not in the newspapers but of course there were a lot of people, all the people who had been on the night shift saw him. Some were quite surprised.

There's a story that as he drove down the aisle, Roosevelt of course was almost totally crippled, he drove down the aisles in this open car that he brought. The aisles of the plant were wide enough, and somebody looked up from their work and said, "God Almighty, it's President Roosevelt!" It was really an astounding for them.

I remember that the disturbance stirred up an underground rumor because people had seen him and were telling friends. One teacher of mine at school came to me and said, "Charles is it true that Franklin D. Roosevelt visited the Twin Cities Ordinance Plant a couple of weeks ago?" I looked him straight in the eye and said, "I don't know anything, never heard anything about that." Its not a nice thing, being able to lie to your teacher for good patriotic motives.

I'm sure that there are an awful lot of people who remember him. I still meet people, older people, who tell me about having worked at the Twin Cities Ordinance Plant during WWII. The interesting thing is that they always seem to feel that they were working personally for my father, not for a company, but personally for my father.

Well, maybe Jason I think I've given you about as much as I can unless you can think of some other questions.

JG: No, I think that about covers everything.

CH: Alright, well it's been interesting to talk to you, and I hope this project works out well.

JG: I hope so too.

CH: Oh, I'm sure it will. You're still running the machine.

JG: I'm turning it off.