

# Minnesota's Grain Family

It is impossible to tell the story of the Cargills and MacMillans without telling the history of the company they built, the Cargill Company. Martha (Muffy) Elizabeth MacMillan is a descendent of this amazing family.

In 2015, 150 years after it was started, if Cargill were a publicly held company, it would rank number nine on the Fortune 100. It is the largest privately held company in the United States, perhaps the world.

On December 15, 1855, William Wallace Cargill (Will) was born in New York on Long Island. Will's father was a sea captain from the Orkney Islands of Scotland. When the Captain came to Long Island he met and married Edna E. Davis. It was said that Edna Davis Cargill hated the sea and wanted to ensure her four sons grew up to do anything except become sailors.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this was the reason the family emigrated west to Wisconsin in the late 1830s. At age 20, Will, along with his brothers, began buying grain in Minnesota. Eventually, they set up a business in Conover, Iowa.



Figure 1. William W. Cargill

During the Civil War, one brother, Thomas Cargill, enlisted but died of typhoid. Will entered the quartermaster's department in Arkansas. After the war, the railroads were changing the way grain went to market. Will capitalized on this by integrating grain storage with transportation.

On October 1, 1868, Will Cargill married Ellen Theresa Stowell setting up housekeeping first in Austin, Minnesota. By 1871, they had moved to Albert Lea, Minnesota where their daughter Edna Clara Cargill was born.

By 1885, Will and his two brothers had more than 100 grain storage structures across the Midwest, all located near railroads or rivers. Now the family was living in

LaCrosse, Wisconsin. Will's neighbor, Duncan MacMillan, also a Scotsman, came to LaCrosse through Canada. MacMillan was director of the local bank and his son was named John Hugh Macmillan. (These MacMillans loved to name their sons John, so one has to use middle initials or terms like junior, to be able to tell one generation of John MacMillan from the next.)

By February 6, 1895, Will Cargill and his brothers had weathered some difficult early business years. When Will's daughter, Edna Clara Cargill, married John Hugh MacMillan, the combined Cargill and MacMillan management would turn the company into the giant grain handling, food processing, and distributing empire it is today.



Figure 2. Edna Clara Cargill MacMillan



Figure 3. John H. MacMillan Sr.

Edna and John Hugh Sr.'s first child, John Hugh MacMillan, Jr., was born in Texas on December 1, 1895. They soon set down roots in the Loring Park neighborhood in Minneapolis. Cargill MacMillan, their second son, was born in 1900.

When Will Cargill died in 1909, and his wife died not long after in 1910, the net worth of the business was \$2 million. However, the estate inherited business debts

large enough to dismantle the entire company.<sup>ii</sup> Without a written will there were some difficult financial times for the company, including a bit of high drama with one son's, Will Samuel Cargill's, investments in Montana land. (Please see Wayne G. Broehl, *Cargill Trading the World's Grain*.) When it all settled out, John H. MacMillan became chairman of the Cargill Co. in 1909 and served until his death in 1944. His brother-in-law, Austen Cargill, bought out his older brother's, Will Samuel's, part in the company. Austen would work with John H. MacMillan and continue to help lead the company for 48 years until his death in 1957.

To handle the financial difficulties, Cargill Securities Company was established. After liquidating all debts in 1916, it became a vehicle to handle assets outside of Cargill for the family. Cargill Securities Company became Waycross Inc.

By 1912 the Cargill elevator company was based in Minneapolis. Then World War I created grain shortages and then surpluses that challenged the company.

Austen Cargill, the younger brother of Will, served in the Navy as a machinist mate second class.

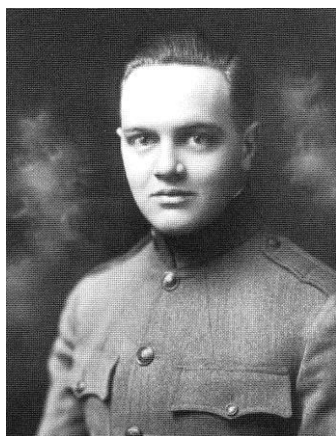


Figure 4. Austen MacMillan

John Hugh MacMillan, Jr. achieved the rank of army major.



Figure 5. John H. MacMillan Jr.

After the war, Cargill MacMillan, who was too young to enlist, married Pauline Whitney, a sister to Wheelock Whitney. If Minneapolis were New York or Boston, the names MacMillan and Whitney would be like Rockefeller and Kennedy. So, when a MacMillan married a Whitney, this was Minnesota's version of a royal wedding. Cargill and Pauline MacMillan had four children, Cargill Jr., Whitney, Alice Whitney, who died young, and Pauline. (Muffy is Cargill Jr's.)



Figure 6. Cargill MacMillan and Pauline Whitney wedding

John H. Jr. married Marion Dickson. They were married by a Catholic priest in the morning in a very private family-only ceremony, followed by a very public Presbyterian wedding. Such were the times. John H. Jr. and Marion had three children, John Hugh III, Whitney Duncan and Marion. John H. Jr. started in the family business in the lumber operation in British Columbia.

After the war, farms were becoming mechanized and farmers needed less livestock for farming. Families were buying automobiles for transportation. This evolution eliminated huge amounts of grain for animal feed. In the early 1920s, when John Hugh, Jr. and his brother Cargill MacMillan joined the company there was a railroad workers' strike (remember Cargill's intimacy with transportation) and prohibition began and ended as the nation sunk into depression.

Cargill and John H. Jr. MacMillan built homes next to each other in Orono.

As prohibition ended the bootleggers turned to crime. There were several kidnappings of famous and wealthy families' children, such as the Lindbergh baby. In 1933, the Barker-Karpis gang kidnapped William Hamm Jr. The children of John H. Jr. and Cargill had to be watched closely at all times. For their safety, the cousins grew up playing only with each other and their closest neighbors.

It would be a threesome that would run the Cargill Company until the 1960s. John H. Jr., who was "the idea man, his brother Cargill, who was the numbers man who helped keep his brother's ideas from getting out of hand, and Austen Cargill, their cousin, who had the common touch, whose intuitive understanding of business politics and public relations greatly helped the development of company plans and policies."<sup>iii</sup> If you were to read the next chapters in *Cargill Trading the World's Grain*, it seemed that whenever the world tossed Cargill lemons, they found a way to make lemonade.

It was in the 1930s that the company purchased the Rand estate in Wayzata to be the company's executive offices. See the article on page one of this newsletter.

During the 1940s, Cargill established Port Cargill on the site of the home of a very famous Minnesotan, Dan Patch. Dan Patch was the most famous harness race horse of his day. Port Cargill on the Minnesota River built ships for the army, 2,000 miles away from any ocean. World War II brought about the use of soybeans, and Cargill capitalized on this new commodity with mill and feed plants

John H. Jr. designed grain elevators, tow boats, barges, temperature controllers for large grain bins, and unloading equipment. Fascinated with ships, he designed and held patents on a below-hull "bubbler" technology, and invented the inflated dome roof.

Austen Cargill passed away in 1957.

John Hugh Jr. died December 23, 1960, in Durham, North Carolina.

Cargill MacMillan, Muffy's grandfather, died in 1968.

With the death of the three family managers of the company, Cargill again made a difficult transition, and again, the company was able to continue to grow and expand into the company that it is today.

Muffy's uncle Whitney would manage the company from 1976 to 1995, keeping the company current with technology evolution. W. Duncan MacMillan, John H. Jr.'s son, managed Waycross Inc. and built the archives responsible for the information drawn in this article from his book *MacMillan the American Grain Family*.



Figure 7. Muffy and her dad, Cargill MacMillan Jr.

## Colonial Dames Roots

Now, let's go back further in time and turn to Colonial roots.

Martha (Muffy) Elizabeth MacMillan could have become a Colonial Dame through her grandmother Pauline Whitney MacMillan, but she chose her mother's lineage. Martha Elizabeth Bacon MacMillan is a descendant of Governor Thomas Welles of Connecticut. Thomas was born in Essex County, England and came to the colonies in 1635. In 1636, he accompanied Reverend Thomas Hooker walking through the wilderness from Cambridge to found Hartford, Connecticut. His name is on the Founders of Hartford Connecticut monument in Hartford's Ancient Burying Ground. Thomas Welles was the only man in Connecticut history to hold all four top offices: governor, deputy governor, treasurer, and secretary. As the colony's secretary he transcribed the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut into the official colony records in 1639. This document was a first constitution for a colony. Connecticut would call itself the "Constitution State."

Thomas Welles great, great grandson and Muffy's ever so great grandfather, Captain Hezekiah Welles, served in the Revolutionary War.

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<sup>i</sup> Broehl, Wayne G. Jr., *Cargill Trading the World's Grain*, University Press of New England, Hanover, 1992 p. 4.

<sup>ii</sup> W. Duncan MacMillan with Patricia Condon Johnston, *MacMillan the American Grain Family*, Afton Historical Society Press, Afton Minnesota. 1998.

<sup>iii</sup> MacMillan and Condon, p 306.



Figure 8. Hartford Connecticut Founders' monument