



*H. C. Davis Sons*

*Manufacturing Company Inc.*

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## **THE FAMILY COMPANY BEHIND THE PRODUCT**

By Ramsey H. Davis

My grandfather, Howard C. Davis, had he lived and worked in this century rather the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the twentieth, would certainly have fit all of the characteristics of a modern day entrepreneur. In his time it was referred to as a “self-made man.”

A family tragedy left him an orphan at the age of 3. By his ninth birthday he was self-supporting and out on his own at thirteen.

In those days there weren't any free government handouts, job training, food stamps, welfare, etc. A person was expected to find a job and work if he wanted to eat.

By today's standards and definitions he was disadvantaged and living in poverty only he didn't know it.

While my grandfather was of Welsh descent he was all 19<sup>th</sup> Century American. He believed most anyone who was willing to work hard could succeed. The harder a person was willing to work the better his chances were of succeeding to an even greater degree, was the way he saw it.

He was also a man with a very positive attitude. “Walk on the sunny side of the street” was his creed. He had it inscribed on many of his personal possessions and often wrote it on the pages of his daily calendar. We have even found it written on the back of envelopes which were part of his stamp collection.

In retrospect it could be said the only way he had to go was up, but to his way of thinking no other prospect was to be considered.

One of his early jobs was as a freight solicitor for the Northern Pacific Railroad. He called on every imaginable type and variety of business in the area served by the railroad soliciting their freight business.

For some reason, unknown to subsequent generations, he developed or acquired an interest in the milling industry.

In time he became a mill builder designing and building flour and feed mills throughout the upper midwest. His travels also led him to meet a young lady, Daisy Dean Roberts, who became his wife and of course, my grandmother.

She was of Scotch descent and possessed a self-reliance similar to his as well as a mind of her own. She wanted a full-time husband, not someone who came home once in a while. My grandfather's days of moving from town to town, stopping only long enough to design and build a feed or flour mill, were over. In 1894 he established a fledgling concern in the spare bedroom of their home, which he called the H. C. Davis Machinery

Company. Through his acquaintances in the milling industry he was able to build a business selling new and used grinding equipment. As his business grew he was able to rent room number 16 in an office building. We

see it printed on his old catalogs, H. C. Davis Machinery Company, Room #16. Today it would be referred to as suite number sixteen. I don't think my grandfather would have cared for that kind of nonsense. To him it was a one room office and the number on the doorway was 16.

The business continued to grow and in time he built an office and machinery warehouse to store his growing inventory of new and used machinery. Just as he began to do rather well, for some unknown and never explained reason, the company he had represented for many years cut the commission they had always paid him in half. In later years my grandfather was to refer to this as an "intolerable act" and he noted with some degree of smugness that a few years after this the company was in bankruptcy. At the time his only concern was survival. He reacted by adding a manufacturing area to his office and warehouse. The name was changed to the H. C. Davis Manufacturing Company.

In a sense the rest is history. The decision he made that day, many years ago, not to acquiesce to an unreasonable edict probably, more than anything else, served to establish and preserve the company's well being.

He believed once a person gave into an unreasonable demand, or agreed to participate in an unethical business practice; they were not only compromising their self-respect but opening the door to further abuses and transgressions. In short, once a person set foot on such a course every step became easier until he finally compromised every principle of honor and decency.

H. C. Davis was truly a man of principle. Business decisions were taken on the basis of what was right rather than expedient. From his early years he knew what it was like to be treated

otherwise. He didn't like it and was certain others didn't either. He retired in 1943 leaving the daily operation of the company to his two sons, Barney and Jack.

They were responsible for greatly increasing the company's product line as well as expanding its sales into the commercial, industrial, agricultural and export markets.

Mixing and grinding equipment was designed and built to process a tremendous variety of products and shipped throughout the world.

In 1970 responsibility for the company's future was assumed by its founder's grandson...whose account of the business' history is herewith concluded.

He will leave it for future generations to judge his accomplishments or lack thereof. However, for posterity the writer would like to register his firm belief and dedication to treating the company's customers and employees as they would like to be treated. If we treat others with respect, kindness and dignity they will generally respond in kind.

The Gold Rule is not passé, old fashion or obsolete. It lives on...at least at the company my grandfather established in eighteen ninety-four.