

Founders Day Celebration of F. W. Woolworth
Company, Commemorating Mr. F. M. Kilby, 1959 September 18th

2.21

IN RE: FOUNDER'S DAY CELEBRATION OF
F. W. WOOLWORTH COMPANY
COMMEMORATING MR. F. M. KIRBY,
SEPTEMBER 18th, 1959, WILKES-BARRE.

This occasion tonight brings an opportunity to reflect upon an important anniversary of a great Company of America, a Company which, throughout its history, has afforded rare services to millions of people and thereby has established itself as indispensable.

It has been a Company of progress, sure in promotion, safe in wisdom.

During the years of its existence colossal strides have occurred. The times have changed, prices have risen and merchandise has changed. The 5 and 10 business has put on diamonds and minks without losing touch with the people, so says the New York Times.

Locally, we recall with gladness that an integral unit of the Woolworth Company was born in Wilkes-Barre and still lives here. We have pride that the present Woolworth Store in Wilkes-Barre on both entrances, one on South Main Street, the other on South Franklin Street, bears the sign in letters of gold "F. M. Kirby & Company."

It was in 1884, through some providential inspiration that Fred Morgan Kirby changed his residence from Watertown to Wilkes-Barre. That was our good fortune.

At that time, the 5 and 10 stores were unknown. It required a man of astute business vision to foresee the possibilities. It was a novel undertaking involving judgment and hope. Mr. Kirby had the essential qualities.

He opened his Store in Wilkes-Barre seventy-five years ago. It was a modest start. The first day the sales were \$26.32. Purchasers had to be shown the way to buy a class of goods not theretofore available. But it was not long until a timely opportunity arrived.

One of our local mining companies had an underground fire in a coal mine. It was necessary to extinguish promptly. The fire was too far from the foot of the shaft to reach by hose, the fire was spreading rapidly, time was urgent. The mining company contracted with a

manufacturer for the purchase of 1,000 buckets for the miners to carry water to the fire. But the buckets were delayed in transit and when they arrived other means had quenched the blaze. The buckets were not needed by the coal company and were for sale.

Mr. Kirby bought them at 25¢ a piece. He then advertised that on a certain day these 1,000 buckets costing 25¢ each would be sold at his Store for 10¢---a loss of 15¢ per bucket.

But he foresaw the result. Housewives in throngs crowded to buy the buckets. It was a bargain. But each purchaser filled the bucket with merchandise. That was a profit. The net result was an upturn in business, and the run to the Store grew thereafter and prosperity smiled upon his business.

In the fullest degree, Mr. Kirby was a self-made man. After he became a man of means, he forthwith assigned to himself superior services in generosity to his community and to the public at large.

His public gifts are matters of record, and they are legion, but no one knows the extent of his private aid bestowed upon others in need. It was bountiful.

He was congenitally a man of religious precepts, devout and fervent in loyalty to his Church and to the Law of God.

His creed was faithful performance of every duty.

Withal, he was companionable, popular, esteemed.

It was my privilege to be a next-door neighbor. There were opportunities of informal visits together.

We were associated on some business boards as fellow-directors and in some other groups of citizens.

It was my happiness to be a guest at his fishing camps in Canada. Such an experience in intimate contact provides the best opportunities to know your host. Fishing was his favorite sport, but he never boasted that he killed the largest salmon (over 60 lbs.) ever known taken on the River.

Mr. Kirby was a man who grew in estimation. The more I saw of him the greater my admiration, and I may truly say my affection. Every

memory of him is sweet and lasting.

A man whose deeds live in the hearts of his friends is with us always, and that is Mr. Kirby.

