**Charles Eugene Warner**

Charley probably went to school in or near Tremont. He was apprenticed to a carpenter as a young man in Illinois. He moved with mother and five siblings to Kansas in mid 1870, probably arriving about June. They settled at Sand Creek, near Waverly.

Charley had a farm near Waverly, but did not like farming. He ran a threshing crew for awhile. Charley married Nancy Stucker in 1876. They farmed west of Waverly. Eugene L. was born at the farm 16 Nov 1877. Charley began to gewt involved in activities that would take him away from farming. In 1878, Charley moved the first business building into Waverly. In the late 1870s, Charley was a cabinet-maker for the Gottschalk Furniture Manufacturing Company in Ottawa.

Charley, with his son E. L., perfected and patented their first machine for manufacturing woven wire fence in 1894. Charley moved to Waverly in 1897, and started the Waverly Fence Company. They sold the fence business to the Steel Trust Company of Joliet, Illinois. Charley immediately began inventing better fence and fence making equipment. He then sold these to the National Steel Company in Dakalb, Indiana.

Charley’s invention of the interlock tie and the machinery that manufactured it was a lesson in persistence. Charley noticed a defect common to all wire fences. They sagged. To correct this, he devised a simple but elegant solution, the interlock tie. It was the forerunner of the chain link fence. After inventing the interlock tie, he immediately patented it. But manufacturing it was more difficult. Charley and his son worked long hours in their barn building the manufacturing equipment. It took many trips on horseback to the nearest foundry, in Ottawa, to make castings. Early trials were not encouraging – the castings broke when the machinery ran. They persevered, making heavier castings. Finally, the machine produced the fence. They were delighted when a farmer placed the first order. But the fencing would not unroll straight. The farmer muttered: “crazy inventors”. The “crazy inventors” persisted until they perfected the machinery.

In 1900, Charley and E. L. bought the machine shops of George W. Davis. By 1902, it was still operating, as the Waverly Machine Shops, Charles E. Warner and Son, Props. By 1903, Charley’s plant in Waverly and Willie’s plant in Melvern were beginning to attract a lot of attention. Larger towns including Emporia, were trying to entice the Warners to relocate their businesses in their towns. In Dec 1903, Charley signed a contract with the Ottawa Business Men’s Group to locate in Ottawa. They gave him $3000. The money was to be repaid if they did not stay for at least five years.

The plants were consolidated in Ottawa in 1904. The initial building was relatively small. But two months after starting the building, they were turning out twenty-two miles of woven wire fence a day. Rapid expansion followed. One problem, though, was that the fence business was cyclical. There was little demand in the winter. So Charley set out to expand the product line. He branched out into the manufacture of small engines and power equipment.

In 1917 fire destroyed the plant. But the Warners rebuilt the plant in only six months, putting their 200 employees back to work.

Writing about Charley today requires us to search through written archives. But there is one notable exception. Ruth Warner, widow of Charley’s nephew, Russell, remembers Charley well. Here are a few of Ruth’s memories:

* “Charley was really nice. He had a mind of his own, and he used it, He talked a lot – like Mark. The rest of the Warners were quiet. His wife, Nancy, was even more outgoing than Charley was, and quite outspoken.”
* “Two of their children – E. L. and Florence – were outgoing like Charley and Nancy. The others Grace, Leonard, and Nellie, were more “Warner-like.”
* “Charley’s family always came to Melvern on Decoration Day. After 1929, when George and Flora moved to Melvern, everyone came to their house. Allie and Mark lived in town, and they always came. The Deweys came up. It was always quite a gathering.

Nancy died in 1933. Charley died in 1935. Both are buried in highland Cemetery in Ottawa.