**WARNER**

**Manufacturing Company**

Charles E. & William H. Warner, brothers, and E. L. Warner, son of Charles, established a fence manufacturing firm in Melvern and Waverly in about 1890. About 1896, E. L. Warner and his father perfected their first machines to manufacture woven wire fence. In a few years they sold these machines and their patents to the Steel Trust, Joliet, Illinois, and then immediately set about inventing newer and better fence-making machines.

These were perfected and patented and a few years later were sold to the National Steel Co., Dekalb, Indiana.

For a short time the Warners went into the merchandising business but not for long. Fence building was apparently in their blood, and they soon set about inventing still more and better fence-making machinery. Associated in the business also was another brother of Charles Warner, Richard E. Warner, who died in 1904.

Late in 1903 the Warner plants in Waverly and Melvern had begun to attract considerable attention, and larger towns, including Ottawa and Emporia were dickering through their commercial clubs and similar associations to have the plants moved from the smaller towns.

Ottawa, through its Business Men’s Association, an earlier version of the Chamber of Commerce, was successful in getting the plant. In December, 1903, the Warners signed a contract which called for the Ottawa Business Men’s group to pay the Warners the sum of $3,000 for bringing the business to Ottawa. C. E. Warner was no stranger to Ottawa, however. In the late 1870’s he had worked in the Gottschalk Furniture Factory located near Hope Cemetery.

Once the contract was signed the Warners lost no time in getting into the work of establishing the plant. Land was leased along the Santa Fe right-of-way between the railroad tracks and King Street in North Ottawa and construction of a plant building was begun.

Only two months later, in February, the wheels of the plant were turning out 22 miles of woven wire fencing a day. Orders were on hand for 30,000 rods of fencing and were continuing to pour in. Even in that early period of the plant’s history the volume of business was surprising.

Shortly after incorporating in 1904, the infant industry branched out in to the manufacture of small engines and power equipment. This included such varied implements as post-hole diggers, powered weed and grass cutters, a one man self-propelled power saw, and windmills before World War I.

Prior to 1913 the Warners sold their gas engines under the name of the Union Foundry & Machine Co. After 1913 this brand name is seldom seen. In 1915 two air cooled models of gas engines were being manufactured, the 1 ½ and 2 horsepower engines. Priced at $24.75, the 1 ½ horsepower size was within the budget of nearly everyone while the large model was priced at only $28.95. By 1917 the Ottawa line had grown to include fifteen sizes ranging from 1 ½ to 22 horsepower. While the air cooled models remained virtually unchanged from earlier years, the larger engines were modified and streamlined, including extensive striping over the red enamel.

In 1917 the plant was destroyed by fire, but such was the energy and determination of Warner that within six months the plant had been rebuilt and the firm’s 200 employees were back on the job. In 1934, a $10,000 fine hindered but didn’t halt operations.

In later years the firm manufactured a wide variety of products, including a full line of service station equipment such as power lifts, pumps, air compressors and lubrication equipment. The plant at one time turned out thousands of brake shoes for several principal railroads of the country. The list of products has also included refrigeration equip0ment, both commercial and domestic. Log saws and feed mills were also turned out in large numbers by the plant. One product manufactured was a garden-size tractor, called the Ottawa Mule Team Tractor.

The death of E. L. Warner in early 1951 brought to a close the family industry known by many names – Warner Fence, Warner Manufacturing, Ottawa Manufacturing, Union Foundry and Ottawa Steel Products.