

Fresh To You From The Calla Greenhouses



Lewis Templin, shown above sporting the patriarchal beard, founded one of America's largest mail-order seed businesses in Ohio.

Nestled among the rolling nursery land of northeastern Ohio, the tiny Mahoning County hamlet of Calla once boasted of *one of the largest mail-order seed houses in the United States*. A unique combination of family enterprise, ingenuity and a regard for quality products gave the Templin nurseries of Calla, Ohio a nationwide reputation, the rival of Burpee and other famous seed companies.

Lewis Templin, son of a Pennsylvania iron molder, turned to horticulture after moving "West" to Ohio in 1822. He started his nursery in 1845 at Canfield. In 1866, his four sons (a fifth had died at the Battle of Stone River) built his first greenhouse at Loveland Station on the Niles and New Lisbon Railroad, ten years before Washington Atlee Burpee opened his first store in Philadelphia.

As a result, almost entirely, of the mail order business of the Templin company, Loveland Station was granted a first class post office in 1869. Lewis Templin became the first postmaster, and the appropriate name of "Calla" was selected to distinguish the town from another Loveland, Ohio.

In the years following the Civil War, when seed fraud and humbuggering in the Midwest was as rampant as quick grass, it was comparatively easy — given a certain amount of industry and perseverance — to establish a successful mail order seed business by the simple expedient of providing quality seed and guaranteeing the product. The religious society of Shakers had found it to be so in New York, though they conducted most of their sales by traveling seedsmen, with little or no advertising, and so the Templin family was to find it in Ohio.

In fact, "Quality" became the trade-

mark of the L. Templin & Sons Seed Company. Their motto: "A pleased customer is the best advertisement." Careful seed testing and the dating of each seed packet increased the reliability of the Templin product. Relying entirely upon the retail trade, the company profited from the small individual orders that the larger wholesale establishments ignored. There also appears to have been an efficient division of labor, son Mark B. Templin specializing in printing "Beautiful Flowers from the Calla Greenhouses" and other catalogues.

Although approximately 300,000 of the Calla catalogues were distributed annually, they are now scarce collector's items. The economies Templin realized in printing, coupled with the advantage of having a post office and railroad station immediately at hand, allowed the company to offer an impressive variety of flower and vegetable seeds and plants, but the company was always reluctant to advertise new varieties until their worth had been proven. (According to their 1896 catalogue, another of their mottos was "'Go Slow' on Novelties.")

Under the conservative and industrious management of the Templin family, the Calla enterprise had an annual business of \$75,000 during its

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peak years. In 1892, however, the company suffered a disastrous January fire. Plants that escaped the flames quickly froze. Insurance companies at that time would not insure greenhouses or their contents, and Lewis Templin estimated a loss of \$20,000, including the destruction of his entire spring crop.

Although the firm quickly rebuilt on an even larger scale, the sons gradually withdrew from the company. At the founder's death in the spring of 1899, only Richard L. and Mark B. Templin continued the operation. In the face of competition and rising costs, prices which had remained constant or even been reduced during the 1890s, doubled during the next 15 years. Richard Templin sold out in 1905, and in 1907 the company failed, went into receivership, then lumbered along for another decade carrying the name Calla Seed Company before Mark Templin finally retired.



A strict "temperance man," like his father and grandfather before him, Mark Templin was elected mayor of Canfield in 1922. According to his obituary, he "worked with many men prominent in the prohibition raids and assessed heavy fines on scores of men." Mark's continued belief in the doctrine of hard work, the value of religion and the institution of the family are reflected in occasional letters to newspapers. To him, FDR was anathema, and the idea of old age pensions ridiculous, since it clearly was the duty of children to care for their aged parents.

Continuing to work until well past 80, Templin supervised landscaping of Columbiana's Firestone Park in 1935. If somewhat out of step with the times at his death in 1945, 88-year-old Mark Templin retained to the end his belief in the fundamental conservative values which had made the Templin nurseries a successful family enterprise of nationwide repute for more than half a century.

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