

Delavan Ag Pumps: The Vision of Nelson Breese Delavan



Behind every successful company, there is a story of a driven entrepreneur, devoted to building a company—often from little or nothing. Nelson B. Delavan was the man behind the company known today as Delavan Ag Pumps located in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Understanding Nelson Delavan helps to paint a portrait of a company that—some 80 years later—is still committed to serving its customers faithfully and delivering innovation and value to the marketplace.

Nelson B. Delavan was born in 1897 in Norwich, New York. He attended Cornell University from 1915 to 1918 and studied engineering. Delavan then served in World War I. He was sent to France with the U.S. Army, serving as First Lieutenant, 310th Infantry, 78th Division. A letter dated May 20, 1918 from Delavan's Commanding Officer, Captain U.S. Navy E. T. Pollock writes "in carrying out his duties he showed judgement and initiative and stuck to the work practically continuously for forty-eight hours in spite of considerable difficulties. This matter is brought to your attention in order that Lieutenant Delavan may be informed that his services were recognized and appreciated." Delavan was a proven and tireless servant—initially in war and eventually in business.

Delavan was married to Elizabeth Hamilton Garnsey in Seneca Falls, New York in 1922. He worked initially for Gould's Pumps in Seneca Falls, New York from 1921 to 1928 and then took a position in 1929 at Penn Electric Switch Company in Des Moines, Iowa becoming Vice-President and Director of Sales in 1934. In 1936, based on news that Penn Electric Switch Company was moving to Goshen, Indiana, Delavan formed Delavan Engineering



Delavan Manufacturing Company, Des Moines, Iowa
(1944) Manufacture of Small Engine Magnetos



Delavan Ag Pumps original Minneapolis location.



Delavan Ag Pumps new Minneapolis location.

Company with some associates. The goal of the company was to be manufacturer's representatives for producers of electrical and mechanical equipment in Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota and the Dakotas. In 1941, founded Delavan Manufacturing company in Des Moines, Iowa to produce high precision nozzles for oil burners, agricultural spraying equipment, special components for aircraft engines and other various applications. Nelson Delavan was very proud of the fact that his Delavan nozzles were part of a rocketship that reached the surface of the Moon on a space flight. Eventually, Delavan focused on agricultural pumps. In 1948, Delavan semi-retired to start a toy company called Humpty-Dumpty Toys. In the early 1960s, Delavan became a founding trustee of Eisenhower College in Seneca Falls, New York.

After Delavan's death in 1971, Delavan Ag Pumps was purchased by several different companies, including Colt Industries at one point, before being finally purchased by William Wanner, President and owner of Wanner Engineering, and his business partner James Binger. The company was then moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota in 2001.

Nelson Delavan died in 1971. In 1984, Delavan's wife Elizabeth established a non-profit trust, The Nelson B. Delavan Foundation, in her late husband's honor. This trust donates money in support of education, historical, cultural and arts-related endeavors and is still operating to this very day.

Edie Delavan Steele, Delavan's granddaughter, shares that Delavan family members recalled their grandfather's "can-do" attitude, remarking that her grandfather's "unquenchable appetite for business and personal success was what drove him." Delavan never quit dreaming and—maybe more importantly—never stopped doing. His life's story proves this and both his family and the company he started back in 1936 are extremely proud of him.

Today, Delavan Ag Pumps is an established and growing agricultural pump company with five distinct product lines (RollerPro, PowerFlo, PowerMax, HD Magnum and Turbo90) that encompasses a national distribution network. Catering principally to farmers, Delavan Ag Pumps sees its future in not only asserting its leadership position in the ag market, but expanding initially into the recreational RV market and then, eventually, into the water filtration market. Most recently, Delavan Ag Pumps achieved the prestigious NSF Certification status.

New Delavan Ag Pumps President and owner, David Beaudry, shares his vision of the future of the company in no uncertain terms. "We have a rich history of entrepreneurship at Delavan Ag Pumps thanks to our founder, Nelson Delavan. Over the last 80 years, we have kept ourselves in business with firm commitments to product innovation coupled with sterling customer service that treats every customer like our last customer. We are not a large company today; however, our future growth strategies will find us aggressively competing in both the RV market as well as the water filtration market in the months and years ahead. We are proud of our rich heritage and are eager to tackle the next frontier."

It might be clever to conclude this story by stating that Delavan Ag Pumps wants to "shoot for the moon." The problem, however, is that Nelson B. Delavan already got there with his nozzles. The Delavan Ag Pumps of the future has its own ambitious dreams and current company President David Beaudry is not in the mood to sit still. It is ironic that Beaudry and Delavan never met, yet both men have the same desire to move forward and seek steady progress. In a world that demands bigger, better and faster, the very best days of Delavan Ag Pumps lay ahead. Nelson Delavan would be proud. His leadership and vision is still the driving force of this company. Delavan Ag pump customers have come to expect nothing less.