

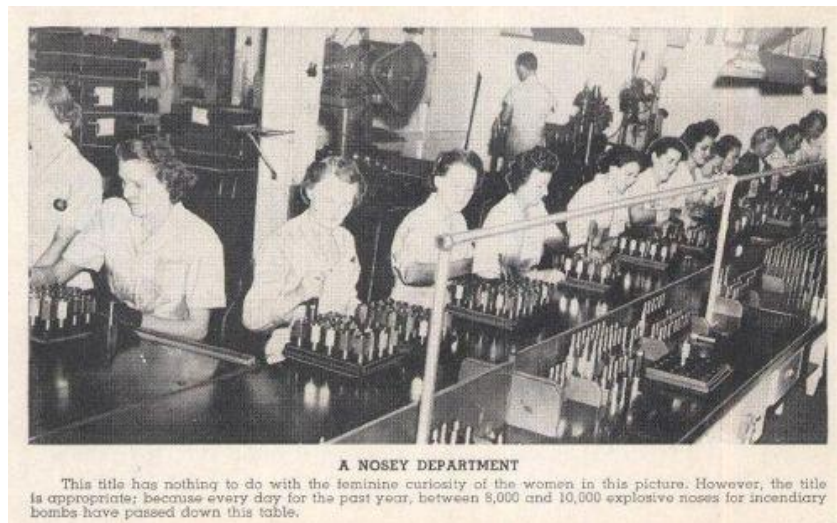
4-28-98

John E. Mitchell Company

The John E. Mitchell Company, where I worked in the 1940's, was a family-owned and -operated plant which manufactured cotton-gin cleaning machines. It supplied cotton gins throughout the cotton-growing south and southwest of the United States. Its president was John E. Mitchell, Jr., its vice president Orville Mitchell, and its secretary-treasurer Donald F. Mitchell, the sons of the late founder John E. Mitchell.

The three officers shared a gigantic office which was divided, sort of, by two partial walls that defined the three offices without separating them. Each was sparsely furnished to the taste of the occupants. The brothers were equal partners in the administration of the concerns of the business and carried on the informal business of their company in quiet conferences from office to office. They were business and philanthropic leaders in the city of Dallas: Mr. John and Mr. Donald were members of the First Presbyterian Church, and Mr. Orville was a prominent member of the East Dallas Christian Church. They were active in a number of civic organizations. They lived in three separate houses in a large private compound near White Rock Lake in far east Dallas; Mr. Donald, the youngest and half-brother to the older two, occupied the home of his late father.

I began working at the Mitchell Company in the summer before my senior year at Southern Methodist University, as a kind of utility secretary for the three brothers, but mostly for Mr. Donald. I filled in for Ida May on the switchboard when she was at lunch. This was at first a tense time for me, for I had difficulty getting the hang of the old-fashioned switchboard, once plugging Mr. Orville into Mr. John's long distance phone call when I was supposed to get him Louis Shindoll in the factory, and once or twice disconnecting Mr. Donald's noon-time conversation with Dorothy, his recent bride. They were wonderfully tolerant of my goofs, having a great time teasing me, when, in my first letter, to an Arkansas gin, I spelled *chute*, part of the cleaning machine, s-h-o-o-t, providing a source of great hilarity among the brothers. Since the offices were completely open, all the rest of the office force never let me forget my first-day boner. But it was really all good fun, and since I was frequently the goat of my large family, I was used to being teased and was not uncomfortable with it.



There was much private gossip among the office staff. Our most lively suppositions had to do with an imagined pre-marital contract between the newly married Mr. Donald and his bride, Dorothy. The common opinion was that the elegant Dorothy had agreed never to let her new husband see her without makeup, while he must have promised never to appear before her unshaven. If true, that may very well have indicated a certain lack of depth in their marriage, for a year later Dorothy ran away with her ice-skating instructor. Mr. Donald thenceforth concentrated on his photography away from work, becoming a prize-winning salon photography exhibitor.

During my senior year when I had only two courses to take to finish my degree, I became Mr. Donald's full-time secretary. I knew that each of the many letters I wrote every day would have to be approved by the other two brothers before it was ready to be mailed. That was not an onerous requirement since the men generally were of one mind about how to conduct their business, and I knew that Mr. Donald's eagle eye would catch any slight glitch in my spelling, syntax, or punctuation. The experience caused me to be a more careful typist than I'd ever been before -- or since.

Mary Frances Hickman (NAME)		
AGE: 21		
HEIGHT: 5'6"		
WEIGHT: 135		
COMPLEXION: Fair		
HAIR: Brown		
EYES: Brown		
SIGNATURE <i>Mary Frances Hickman</i>		
JOHN E. MITCHELL CO. - DALLAS, TEXAS		
BY <i>John E. Mitchell Jr.</i>		PRESIDENT

CERTIFIED COPY OF PUBLIC RECORD DEC. 11, 1941 Shreveport Health Unit Shreveport, La. Page No. 100	
1. PLACE OF BIRTH: (a) Parish: Caddo (b) City or Town: Shreveport (c) State of birth or birthplace: Louisiana (d) Name of hospital or institution: 425 Washington St. (e) Mother's place of birth: 425 Washington St.	
2. USUAL RESIDENCE OF MOTHER: (a) Parish: Caddo (b) City or Town: Shreveport (c) State of birth or birthplace: Louisiana (d) Name of hospital or institution: 425 Washington St.	
3. Full name of child: Mary F. Hickman (a) Sex: Girl (b) Date of birth: Dec. 14, 1920 (c) Time of birth: 10:30 AM (d) Place of birth: 425 Washington St.	
4. FATHER OF CHILD: (a) Full name: Silbert Hickman (b) Color or race: White (c) Age at time of this birth: 35 yrs. (d) Occupation: Supt. Oil Co. (e) Industry or business: Supt. Oil Co.	
5. MOTHER OF CHILD: (a) Full name: Mattie Dunlap (b) Color or race: White (c) Age at time of this birth: 35 yrs. (d) Occupation: Housewife (e) Industry or business: Housewife	
6. I hereby certify that I attended the birth of this child who was born alive at the hour of 10:30 AM on the date above stated and that the information given was furnished to me by: (a) Name of doctor: Dr. J. W. Bodenhimer (b) Name of midwife or other: Dr. J. W. Bodenhimer (c) Address: Shreveport, La.	
7. I hereby certify that I attended the birth of this child who was born alive at the hour of 10:30 AM on the date above stated and that the information given was furnished to me by: (a) Name of doctor: Dr. J. W. Bodenhimer (b) Name of midwife or other: Dr. J. W. Bodenhimer (c) Address: Shreveport, La.	

THE FINAL CHECK-UP

Here we see an automatic belt conveyor handling one of the two types of rockets manufactured by the John E. Mitchell Company. Final inspection and touch-up operations take place on this belt, after which the rocket is packed and made ready for shipment to a loading depot.

Dallas Firm Awarded Fifth Army-Navy E

The John E. Mitchell Company re-
of Dallas Tuesday announced re-
ceipt of its fourth renewal of the
Army-Navy "E". Awarded, the fifth
presentation, counting the original
flag.

John E. Mitchell, Jr., president,
said so far as he knew the firm
was the first in this section of
the country to have received five
awards, each representing six
months of continued production
excellence. The award came
from Adm. C. L. Bloch, chairman
of the navy board of production
awards in Washington.

Employees of the Mitchell com-
pany have a record of 100 per
cent participation in weekly pur-
chase of war bonds, and the
average for all employees is above
12 per cent. Absentees, exclud-
ing authorized absences, run less
than 1 per cent.

CITY HEADS

From The Daily Times Herald
Tuesday, March 20, 1945

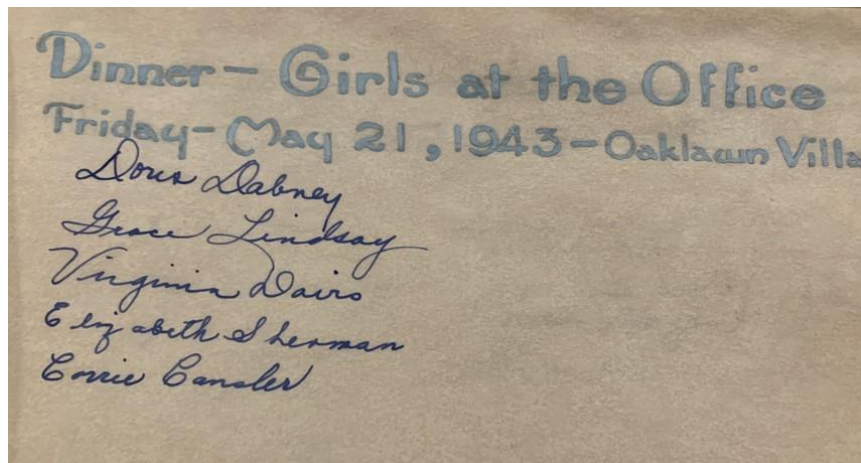
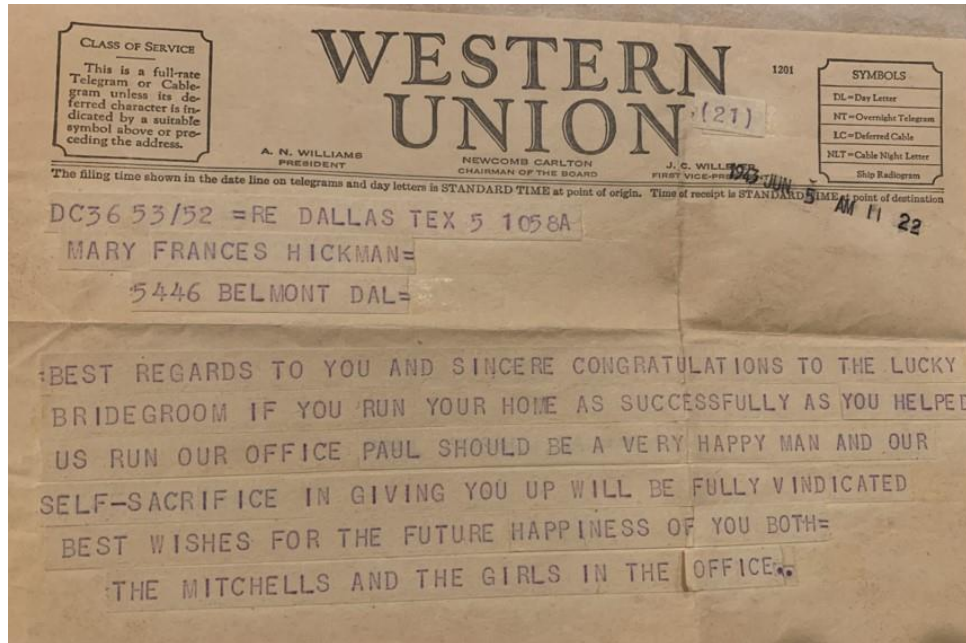
A less serious part of the war effort came when the radio waves were bombarded with the Lucky Strike slogan "Lucky Strike Green Has Gone to War," heralding the substitution of white packages for the hither-to familiar green to save some ingredient in green ink that was vital to the war effort. This was accompanied by the mysterious chanting of the letters "LS MFT." Our office explanation for that slogan was to decide that "LS" referred to Louis Shindoll, the shy, capable supervisor of the men in the plant and the only worker any of us was really familiar with. "MFT" took us a little longer, until a new stenographer came in named Mary Frances Thrasher. Obviously, her initials supplied the rest of the acronym. A more unlikely couple was difficult to imagine, and I was no longer the only one to be teased in the office. We were disappointed when we learned that the letters stood for "Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco."

The biggest mistake I made so far as my fellow staff were concerned was to volunteer to work half a day on Saturday so that the Mitchell war effort could prosper. The other secretaries feared that, when I left, one of them would be expected to work on Saturday, trying to persuade me not to do it, but I did it anyway. I enjoyed the relative calm of being the only stenographer/switchboard operator available. By that time, of course, I had solved most of the mysteries of all those wires and plugs. It also gave me the chance to get better acquainted with some of the part-time factory force.

They were largely Dallas Theological Seminary married students who were fostered by Mr. John in their aspirations to the ministry. The Seminary provided a very conservative training for future Presbyterian clergy. The men were a varied group, mostly deadly serious, very fundamentalist budding theologians who were confident that God would take care of them. In my private opinion, Mr. John was obviously God's agent in providing them with the necessary security for food, lodging, and tuition. I became particularly fond of one of them. Harold Thompson and his wife, Margaret, were later "called" to a church in Portland, Oregon, just before Paul and I were to be married and live there, too. We got together in Portland and had some great adventures, one time taking an over-night car trip to Mount Hood. Ministers had a more liberal gas allowance than most of the population. The car trip of less than a hundred and fifty miles bothered my conscience some but not enough to keep me from enjoying the overwhelming scenery, the vistas of Mount Hood mirrored in beautiful lakes, as well as the two-hundred-foot-high Multnomah Falls and a panoramic overlook of the Columbia River. The trip also gave Paul and me our only experience with cooking breakfast of bacon, eggs, and biscuits on a wood-fired range in the log cabin where we spent the night.



When the time approached for our wedding, the "girls" gave me a lovely luncheon at the elegant Highland Park Tea Room and gave me much advice about how to get along with a man whom I had not seen for two years and who obviously must be a confirmed bachelor at age twenty-four. They sweetly predicted that our marriage had no chance of lasting! The Mitchell brothers were more serious and graciously wished Paul and me success and happiness.



A couple of times after our marriage when I was in Dallas, I went out to see the Mitchell brothers and those of the staff who remained. Then there was a long hiatus when I did not visit them. The last time I was in Dallas, we drove by the once handsome Mitchell plant which had become a deserted, rusted hulk of a building with broken windows, the formerly safe and thriving neighborhood now obviously one of the less savory parts of town. I had no heart to follow up on what had happened to the Company and the brothers. I preferred remembering the exciting war years when I worked there and felt very close to the owners and the staff, and even a few of the factory men.

12-28-95

The John E. Mitchell Company

The last time I was in Dallas I discovered that the John E. Mitchell Company plant where I once worked as a secretary is an empty shell of a building in what used to be a thriving industrial area of Dallas, near the State Fair Grounds. I found it sad that the family concern which had thrived for three generations had succumbed to the changing demands of the south's cotton business. The Company had manufactured and serviced cotton cleaning machines that went on the front end of cotton gins, machines which had been the invention of John E. Mitchell, Sr., in the early years of the twentieth century. When I worked during my last two years of college, the business was run by the three sons of Mr. Mitchell, Sr., and was thriving, supplying cleaning machines for gins throughout cotton country in the south and southwest.



The office of the three brothers was an over-sized room with sketchily defined personal spaces. Not only did the brothers work harmoniously together in the daytime, but the families lived together in an enclave occupying some seventy-five acres in what is today the near east-side of Dallas, just beyond White Rock Lake. They led independent lives but still enjoyed family recreation on the extensive estate. The families constituted a significant force in the business, civic, and religious life of the city. All three were leaders in their respective churches and together served as benefactors of a local theological seminary, supporting many of the students by employing them as workers in the factory.

The brothers were seldom ill, but soon after I started work there, Donald was away from work for a period because of some brotherly cooperation on the family property. Donald was exceptionally allergic to poison ivy which thrived on the estate. The three brothers, helped by some of their children, had raked all the poison ivy plants they could find into a clearing and had set fire to the plants. Donald had lingered to tend the fire. The wind switched direction, causing him to inhale some of the smoke from the fire. The resulting rash in his throat and bronchial tubes had been severe; the family consensus was that he wouldn't assist in future poison ivy roundups and that they would no longer burn the plants.

John, Jr., was president and organizational head of the company; Orville, the vice president, was the mechanical genius, devoting most of his efforts to the running of the plant and frequently adding his own inventions to the efficiency and range of the cotton-cleaning machinery on which the business was based; and Donald, the red-headed much younger brother was the titular treasurer who coordinated activities of the sales and service personnel in the field. The office force consisted of a switchboard operator/receptionist named Willie Mae, a bookkeeper, and four secretaries, two of us named Mary Frances. We secretaries knew all the hundred or so other employees; we frequently typed their names and often dealt with the men who went with the names, although we seldom ventured forth onto the floors of the four-story plant. They frequently had reason to come into the front office about payroll matters or to consult with Mr. Orville, and we sometimes joined them on the dock during their lunch hour.



I was primarily Donald's secretary. At the end of my first day, I was summoned into the presence of the three as they reviewed the day's correspondence, an end-of-the-day ritual. I entered to the sound of their dying laughter, caused, it developed, by my confusion about cotton gin machinery terminology. I had spelled *chute* s-h-o-o-t; I did know the difference between the words. Thereafter I became a much more careful transcriber of my shorthand notes, keeping a wary eye out for homonyms. Actually, it was the first of many lessons that I had to learn before I finally realized that I was not meant to be a secretary.

Occasionally, for example, any of the secretaries would have a short stint on the multi-wired switchboard while Willie Mae had lunch or a rest period. I was duly instructed in the mysteries of placing the proper cord into the proper hole to connect, say, Mr. Orville to Louis Shindoll in the plant, or to place Mr. Junior's long-distance call to a cotton gin in Dothan, Alabama, or to a parts supplier in Akron, Ohio. Sometimes when I was operating the switchboard, Louis Shindoll might

be surprised to find himself talking to a gin manager in Georgia or Donald might find himself with a dead line, interrupting his conversation with Dorothy, his recent bride. (He probably made business calls, but I seemed only to interrupt his calls to Dorothy.) The men were remarkably good natured about my foul-ups. Eventually, I learned how to get the right wire in the right outlet, but I never felt really secure when I was at the front desk.

I incurred the temporary ill will of my fellow secretaries when, in answer to a need from the Mitchells as we entered war production, I volunteered to work all day on Saturdays. They knew that I would soon leave them with an established need for someone to work on Saturday afternoons. But I cherished those quiet Saturday afternoons when there weren't enough people around to cause me to panic on the phone calls and when I could catch up my least favorite task of filing. I guess my filing wasn't entirely exemplary, for soon before I quit to get married, the other secretaries teased me that they could usually find anything I'd misfiled by looking under "P" for Paul.

One of the aspects of quiet Saturday afternoons that I soon started dreading was the occasional theological seminary worker who undertook to perfect his missionary skills by trying to "save" me. Sometimes, I could derail their missionary zeal by inquiring about their wives or children and finding out a bit about them. I was surprised when one such Saturday afternoon acquaintance, Edward Thomas, revealed that he had been engaged as the new minister in a church in Portland, Oregon, just as I was leaving to marry Paul and live with him in Portland. Paul and I saw Ed and his wife Margaret occasionally during the two years we lived in Portland. We had one great weekend trip with them to Mount Hood using a couple of gallons of the gas provided by the extra gasoline coupons allotted to ministers.

Once I had the task of transferring out-dated files to the second-floor dead file room. The pickle I got myself in had nothing to do with my secretarial skills but a lot to do with my not considering the practical consequences of my actions. I had filled one four-drawer dead file and needed to open the next tier of drawers. I yanked out the top drawer and filled it with a couple of feet of file folders. With nothing to serve as ballast at the bottom of the file, the whole contraption fell over, pinning me helplessly to the floor until one of the other secretaries came up to find out why I was gone so long. My friend Louis Shindoll was nearby on the second floor of the plant; he lifted the filing cabinet and freed me.

Louis Shindoll unwittingly played a part in a secretarial jest. It was early 1941 and the country was beginning to experience changes due to our war efforts. Lucky Strike cigarettes began a campaign of chanting "LS/MFT, LS/MFT" in the radio commercials. We also saw the mysterious code in newspaper and magazine ads. The gimmick must have had the desired effect of piquing the public curiosity; it certainly appealed to us. One of the secretaries decided it meant "Louis Shindoll/ Mary Frances Thrasher" (the other Mary Frances secretary). Both were happily married to other people, but we had great fun teasing them about their romance, especially since they were an obvious mismatch. Louis was a shy, very small man; Mar Frances was a tall, large-boned jolly woman. When he heard the office interpretation of the acronym, he was terribly concerned to assure us that there was no basis for the gossip. He was saved from further harassment when we learned that the letters really meant "Lucky Strike Means Fine Tobacco." This campaign was soon followed by the slogan "Lucky Strike Green Has Gone to War" to capitalize on the tobacco company's sacrificing their well-known green package to a white wrapper in order to save ink for the war effort.

until one of our parents could be there. I saw her through the surgery, turned my job over to Daddy when he arrived, and returned to Dallas. Only after I returned the truck to the plant the next day did it hit me that I'd never driven a truck before.

The office personnel gave me a luncheon and shower and the Mitchell brothers gave us a handsome silver tray before our wedding. I went to see all of them several times when I was back in Dallas for a visit, but eventually didn't renew the connection. Then, last year Martha and I drove around looking for old landmarks. I guess I'd just as soon not have seen that forlorn building with its scaling paint and broken windows. But the warm memories survive intact.

Added from the internet:

In the late 1950's, a man named Omar Knedlik owned a Dairy Queen in Coffeerville, Kansas. On warm days, Mr. Knedlik would store bottles of coke in his freezer and serve these super-cooled, semi-frozen drinks to his customers. He advertised this unique and refreshing drink as "The Coldest Drink in Town."

As the popularity of this new drink grew, Mr. Knedlik felt the need and saw the opportunity to develop a machine that was capable of dispensing the same type of frozen carbonated beverage. Mr. Knedlik felt strongly that any new machine should produce a product that was equal to or better in quality than the product his consumers were currently enjoying.

With a clear and unwavering idea of what he wanted, Mr. Knedlik began tinkering with an old ice cream machine and soon had the first primitive working model of the modern ICEE machine. The new machine was an instant hit!!!

After a short time, Mr. Knedlik decided to contract manufacture and sell the new ICEE machines. He took his converted ice cream machine to the John E. Mitchell Company in Dallas, TX. Soon after manufacturing and selling approximately 300 machines, the John E. Mitchell Co. was facing an avalanche of sales orders and an overwhelming volume of field service and customer service requests. In the early 1960's the John E. Mitchell company decided to sell territory distributorships as a way to grow the new venture.