

# A Century in the Bicycle Business

## Beginnings

Edwin F. Merry opened his business in 1906 at 507 Golden Gate Avenue in San Francisco. It was an opportune time to start as the City was rebuilding from the Great Earthquake and Fire. The wholesale business, known then simply as *Edwin F. Merry*, first handled only bicycles, which were still popular from the boom in the 1890s, and common on the streets of San Francisco. Later, Mr. Merry sold automobile and motorcycle parts and accessories, which were, of course, thriving new industries. As a result, the new business grew rapidly.

In 1911 Mr. Merry established a branch in the then smaller city of Los Angeles and advertised for a bicycle messenger to make deliveries to dealers located in the downtown area of the city. Paul Porter, who had just arrived from Illinois and a new high school graduate, applied for the job. Mr. Merry selected him out of a group of about twenty-five applicants. For the next five years, Paul worked in the shipping department of The Merry Co. in Los Angeles.

In 1916 Mr. Merry asked Paul to move to San Francisco and work in the office. The company continued to do well for the next fifteen years adding an automobile battery factory, which made batteries under the Gold Seal brand. During this time the company moved to various locations in San Francisco. In 1918 Paul had to take a brief leave of absence as he joined the US Navy during World War I. After the War, Paul became manager of the company, and a participant in Mr. Merry's policy of permitting certain employees to purchase shares of the company.

The Great Depression of the thirties caused business to slow down, so The Merry Co. and The Bean Son Co., another long established San Francisco bicycle wholesaler, merged to form The Merry-Bean Company in order to better survive the poor business conditions.

Mr. Merry died in 1936 as a result of injuries sustained in an automobile accident. His family decided not to continue in business, and ultimately the employees of the San Francisco and Los Angeles branches were able to purchase the business from the Merry family, and each branch became a separate and distinct entity.



*Company founder Edwin Merry is the one on the extreme right. Paul Porter is the one in the center crouching.*

It is interesting to note that prior to World War II The Merry Co. was one of the distributors who imported from Japan, and, as early as the 1920's, Mr. Merry traveled the world and visited many Japanese suppliers and dealers. Photos of Mr. Merry visiting Japanese bike shops are still on view in our office. In the thirties, Paul Porter became friendly with Mr. Shoji Yamashita of T. Kuge & Co of Osaka. When war started in 1941, of course all communication ceased, but later, as noted below, another connection with the Yamashita family was made.

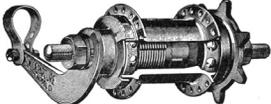


*Edwin Merry and his family visiting a bike shop in Japan. (1924)*

The onset of World War II cause further difficulties for the bicycle business as bicycle production was curtailed drastically, and many items became either rationed or completely unavailable. Finally in 1942 the remaining shareholders of the Merry-Bean Company in San Francisco decided to dissolve the corporation. The Bean Son Co. had already returned to its former status. The Gold Seal Battery division became a separate company, and Paul Porter became sole owner of the bicycle division. The automobile and motorcycle accessories had been discontinued many years before.

Paul Porter called his new company, *The Merry Sales Co.* In 1943 he moved to 378 Seventh St. in San Francisco with barely enough merchandise to fill one-third of the warehouse space. It was a new start for the company that had been founded in 1906.

**NEW DEPARTURE COASTER BRAKES**  
THE BRAKE THAT MAKES CYCLING A DELIGHT  
**NEW DEPARTURE MODEL D BRAKE**



E OF RIDERS                      THE CHOICE

d—in the lead in manufacture. The multiple disc principle allows for a wide range of the desire of the rider and is noted for its rolling ease. Meets the requirements

## A New Start

During World War II, Paul's only child, John, worked at Merry Sales after school and on weekends. He still remembers this time of great shortage. This was the era of the coaster brake and one of the items most treasured were replacement brake discs for New Departure Brakes. They were made of rationed material, and when a few sets of brake discs were received into stock, it was like receiving their weight in gold. The Merry Sales Co. was fortunate to have been a Columbia Bicycle distributor as the Columbia factory was allowed to continue to build a few bicycles while other bicycle factories were forced to convert to manufacturing war materials. John remembers that shipments would arrive by rail car, and he would help unload them on to a dock at a railroad siding. He would put shipping labels on the bikes and then help load them into waiting trucks for shipment to the lucky dealers. The bikes were never warehoused. In the latter part of the war, John, like his father, joined the Navy.

After the end of the World War II, merchandise again became plentiful and The Merry Sales Co. was able to prosper and continue to serve its customers. Merry Sales represented such now famous names as Raleigh, Shimano and Campagnolo.

In 1959 John, (after returning from the Navy, graduating from U.C. Berkeley, and spending a few years in an accounting firm as a CPA) re-entered his father's business and eventually became president of the company. Paul continued to work on a daily basis until he retired in 1977 at the age of 83.

John experienced the bike boom of the 1970's and the company flourished. When Merry Sales became a distributor of Japanese Sekai Bicycles, it was ironic that the Japanese Trading Company exporting the Sekai Bicycles was headed by Katsu and Yoshi Yamashita, the sons of Shoji Yamashita who was the man, previously mentioned above, who The Merry Co. was working with during the 1930s. Katsu Yamashita became a good friend of John, and later John's son, Jim.

Among his many duties, John was also a sales rep for the company, his service area being Marin County, California. He became well known in the Marin County bike shop scene where occasionally he would literally "pedal" the company's products on his bicycle. This area was an important component of The Merry Sales Company during this time, and John was careful to call on these shops personally. He came in contact with such people as Gary Fisher, Joe Breeze, Eric, Don and Dave Koski, Tony Tom, to name a few. As the Mountain Bike scene grew, Merry Sales played an important part bringing the "Breezer" name back to the cycling industry in 1991.

John's eldest son, Jeff, spent several years with the company. He also was a Merry Sales representative in Marin while in college. After graduation from college, like his father, Jeff became a CPA, and is presently Controller for Lucasfilm.

In 1985, the company moved one more time to its present location in South San Francisco. In 1994, James Porter, John's youngest son, succeeded John as company leader. John's daughter, Mary (Porter) Sales, was became Vice President and Office Manager. They became the third generation of Porters to run The Merry Sales Co. Another key person attributable to the success of Merry Sales is Daniel McDonagh. Dan has been with the company for many years and his current position is Director of Operations. John continues working as CFO.

## A New Direction

At the turn of the millenium, The Merry Sales Co. embarked on a new course. Jim realized that distribution was becoming increasingly difficult in the extremely expensive San Francisco area. Furthermore, he also believed that innovation in the bicycle industry had slowed incredibly after the end of the mountain bike boom. So using the rich pool of innovative, technical, and artistic talent centered in Northern California, Merry Sales began designing daring and exciting products under Soma Fabrications and other brands. In addition, Merry Sales regularly lends its expertise to some of their main suppliers in new product development. It was another new start for the company that had been founded in 1906.

Merry Sales now supplies the independent dealer in the fifty United States and also in fifteen other countries. As we approach our 100th Year we invite you look to us for what is new, hot and exciting.  
More to follow - guaranteed!!!