

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 13, 2011

**The L. D. Caulk Company of Milford:** Milford, Delaware, historians will know when the L. D. Caulk Company, a well-known pharmaceutical manufacturer in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, was founded. Its best-known product was Mercitan, a red, pleasant-tasting mouthwash used by many dentists of the time. Going to the dentist has never been pleasant, but my annual visit suffered a setback when Mercitan was no longer in a small cup with which to rinse alongside the reclining dentist's chair. Today, the nearest thing in taste is Cepacol, but it is yellow in color instead of red.

The Grier family of Milford seemed to own the L. D. Caulk Company. The "Grier cottage" in Rehoboth was designed by the prominent New York architect Stanford White and was built about 1905 just north of the Henlopen Hotel. (White's career ended abruptly in 1906 when he was shot and killed by Harry K. Thaw, the husband of actress Evelyn Nesbitt. The story is told in the theatrical production and late 1970s movie *Ragtime*.) The Grier cottage washed into the sea in the big storm of March 1962. One of the Griers owned a 1932 Packard Twin Six seven-passenger sedan with Delaware license number 98. An outstanding car, it was spotted up and down the state from Rehoboth to Madison Street in Wilmington. In the 1960s, a member of the family represented a district including part of Milford in Delaware's General Assembly.

The Caulk Company also manufactured Mer toothpaste. Although pleasant-tasting and seemingly competitive, it proved no match for Pepsodent, Ipana, Colgate, and others. There was also a woman's skin ointment called Mercirex. On the jar was a picture of a woman's head with her appropriate 1930s hairdo and a list of some of the salve's ingredients, including mercury. For an obscure reason, a jar was saved from 75 years ago, it was opened, and the contents seemed in new condition with the texture and aroma just as I had remembered it. I used some last week.

Doctor Nelson seemed to be the head physician at the Caulk Company. He must have had a summer place in Rehoboth, as my mother called him when I had trench mouth there about 1934. He came to our house on Queen Street, prescribed something, and I was better very soon. As I got older, our paths crossed a few times, and there was a fondness on both sides.