

Our History

The Raymond John Wean Foundation

From its humble beginnings to the modern, professionally-staffed foundation that it is, The Raymond John Wean Foundation continues the legacy of its founder by employing the principles he established years ago into the current work of the Foundation.



With nearly \$120 million in grants benefitting a broad variety of nonprofit organizations in the Mahoning Valley, the Foundation's vision is one of empowered residents creating a healthy, vibrant, equitable and economically stable Mahoning Valley.

In 1949, enterprising industrialist Raymond John "Jack" Wean established the Foundation in Warren, Ohio, to serve the communities that contributed to his success in the flat-rolled steel industry. Since then, three generations of the Wean family have worked toward that cause, with Gordon B. Wean serving as its current Chair of the Board of Directors.

Since its inception, the Foundation has consistently innovated new initiatives to refine its strategic grantmaking process.

In 2006, the Foundation enlisted PolicyLink, a national research and action institute, to help develop a long-term strategy. Its report, "A Community Building Philanthropic Initiative to Strengthen the Mahoning Valley," gave the Foundation a fresh perspective and outlined a new strategy to remain a catalyst for positive change as a place-based grantmaker with a focus on Ohio's Mahoning and Trumbull counties. The strategy focused the Foundation's efforts to benefit residents living in the underresourced communities of the Mahoning Valley. It also transformed the Foundation from a traditional family-managed board to being a community asset where the majority of the board members are nonfamily.



Today, the Foundation has assets in excess of \$84 million and distributes some \$2.3 million in grants every year to organizations in Mahoning and Trumbull counties, and continues to enhance the community's well-being and vitality through grant-making, convening and advocating efforts. It strives to provide community leadership with a focus on underresourced people and neighborhoods.

Our Founder – Raymond John Wean

An Early Work Ethic...

Raymond John "Jack" Wean was born in Barto, Pennsylvania in 1895. His father was a flour miller who moved his family to Pottstown, Pa., and worked as a supervisor with the Warwick Iron and Steel Co., which later became part of the Eastern

Steel Co.

Jack Wean started working in grade school when he delivered newspapers for \$2.50 a week before taking a job in an industrial boiler shop earning 10 cents an hour. The engineers there encouraged him to pursue industrial work, which drove him to become an apprentice metal patternmaker, then a journeyman patternmaker earning 50 cents an hour at just 18 years old. Although his high school education was deferred for work, his respect for self-improvement and advancement through training led him to seek out mentors and attend night school.

“Get your education, whatever else happens...”

When an opportunity opened for Wean to become a plant superintendent, his father encouraged him to think long-term and pursue a college education.

“Son, there will always be jobs for a good man,” his father said. “College training will equip you for much better work. Get your education, whatever else happens.”

That advice stayed with him, and in 1914, he enrolled at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, now Carnegie Mellon University. While he had saved enough money for one year of school, he didn't have his high school diploma. After meeting with Clifford B. Connelly, a dean at the Institute and patternmaker by trade, Wean convinced Connelly that he belonged at Carnegie Tech and was admitted. Overcoming an early difficulty with math, he excelled academically and earned a scholarship to continue his education. To earn extra money during the summer, he took on subcontractor work and pitched for a semi-professional baseball team, earning as much as \$100 a game...but only if he won.

His tenure at Carnegie Tech affirmed his love and respect for education and set the course for his future career, even when he turned down a tempting offer at a small steel plant in

Warren, Ohio, to finish school.

Back to Ohio...

With years of experience as both a foreman and efficiency expert at various foundries, Wean had developed a reputation as a foundry management expert. Just before Easter in his senior year at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, an acquaintance asked him to come to Warren, Ohio, to evaluate a small steel plant. Wean impressed the new owners, who offered him a job as soon as they acquired the plant. To their chagrin, he declined saying, "I'm sorry, but I want to finish school."

Determined to hire Wean, the plant owners contacted Carnegie Tech's president, A.A. Hamerschlag, asking him if Jack could graduate early. In fewer than 10 days, he was finished with final exams, prepared for graduation and ready to start his new job as General Superintendent of Aetna Foundry and Machine Co. in Warren. For the next 12 years, Wean held various management positions at Aetna and later at Union Switch & Signal Co. in Swissvale, Pa.

The Wean Engineering Company...

In June 1929, Wean rented a one-room office in the Second National Bank Building in downtown Warren, hired a secretary and began developing his own ideas for new approaches to steel processing. Bucking the difficulties of the Great Depression, he enjoyed immediate success with his new venture, and filled his first order of pack heating furnaces for the Empire Steel Corp. in Mansfield, Ohio. By the end of its first year, Wean Engineering employed seven and expanded into several rooms in the bank building.

As the company grew, Wean Engineering became Wean Manufacturing, then Wean Equipment Corp. The headquarters

remained in Warren, but the corporation would later expand its operations to France, England and Canada.

In addition to his entrepreneurial success, he developed his innovative "combination system" for rolling steel, driving an industry trend that helped reduce the hand labor needed to make sheet steel. In 1971, board chairman for U.S. Steel, Edwin Gott, dubbed Wean "the man who has contributed more than any other single person to modern day production of flat-rolled steel products – the backbone of today's steel industry."