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Forman H. Craton - 1941 - Diary

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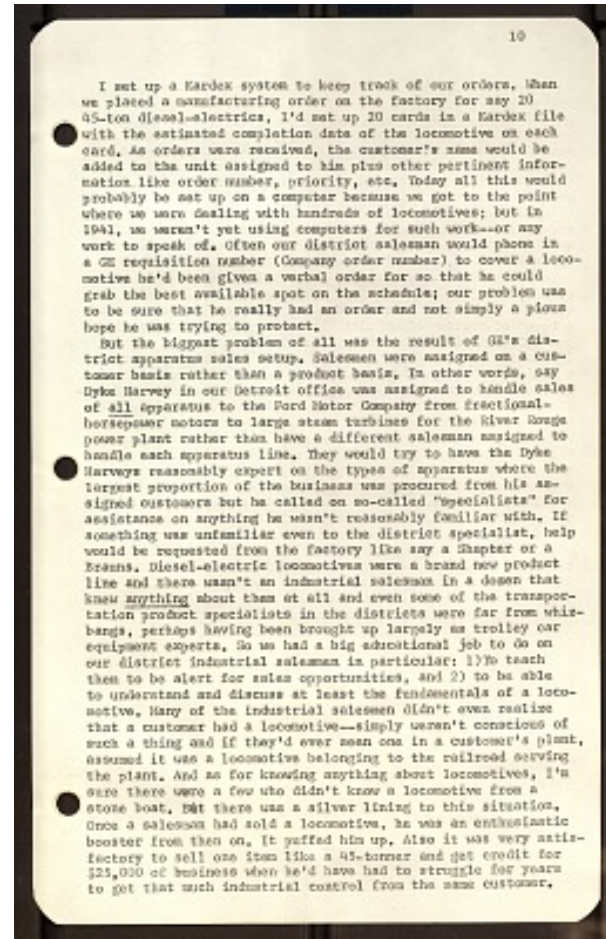
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I set up a Kardex system to keep track of our orders. When we placed a manufacturing order on the factory for say 20 45-ton diesel-electrics, I'd set up 20 cards in a Kardex file with the estimated completion date of the locomotive on each card. As orders were received, the customer's name would be added to the unit assigned to him plus other pertinent information like order number, priority, etc. Today all this would probably be set up on a computer because we got to the point where we were dealing with hundreds of locomotives; but in 1941, we weren't yet using computers for such work—or any work to speak of. Often our district salesman would phone in a GE requisition number (Company order number) to cover a locomotive he'd been given a verbal order for so that he could grab the best available spot on the schedule; our problem was to be sure that he really had an order and not simply a pious hope he was trying to protect.

But the biggest problem of all was the result of GE's district apparatus sales setup. Salesmen were assigned on a customer basis rather than a product basis. In other words, say Dyke Harvey in our Detroit office was assigned to handle sales of all apparatus to the Ford Motor Company from fractional-horsepower motors to large steam turbines for the River Rouge power plant rather than have a different salesman assigned to handle each apparatus line. They would try to have the Dyke Harveys [[sic]] reasonably expert on the types of apparatus where the largest proportion of the business was procured from his assigned customers but he called on so-called "specialists" for assistance on anything he wasn't reasonably familiar with. If something was unfamiliar even to the district specialist, help would be requested from the factory like say a Shapter or a Brauns. Diesel-electric locomotives were a brand new product line and there wasn't an industrial salesman in a dozen that knew anything about them at all and even some of the transportation product specialists in the districts were far from whiz-bangs, perhaps having been brought up largely as trolley car equipment experts. So we had a big educational job to do on our district industrial salesmen in particular: 1) To teach them to be alert for sales opportunities, and 2) to be able to understand and discuss at least the fundamentals of a locomotive. Many of the industrial salesmen didn't even realize that a customer had a locomotive—simply weren't conscious of such a thing and if they'd ever seen one in a customer's plant, assumed it was a locomotive belonging to the railroad serving the plant. And as for knowing anything about locomotives, I'm sure there were a few who didn't know a locomotive from a stone boat. But there was a silver lining to this situation. Once a salesman had sold a locomotive, he was an enthusiastic booster from then on. It puffed him up. Also it was very satisfactory to sell one item like a 45-tonner and get credit for \$25,000 of business when he'd have to struggle for years to get that much industrial control from the same customer.



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