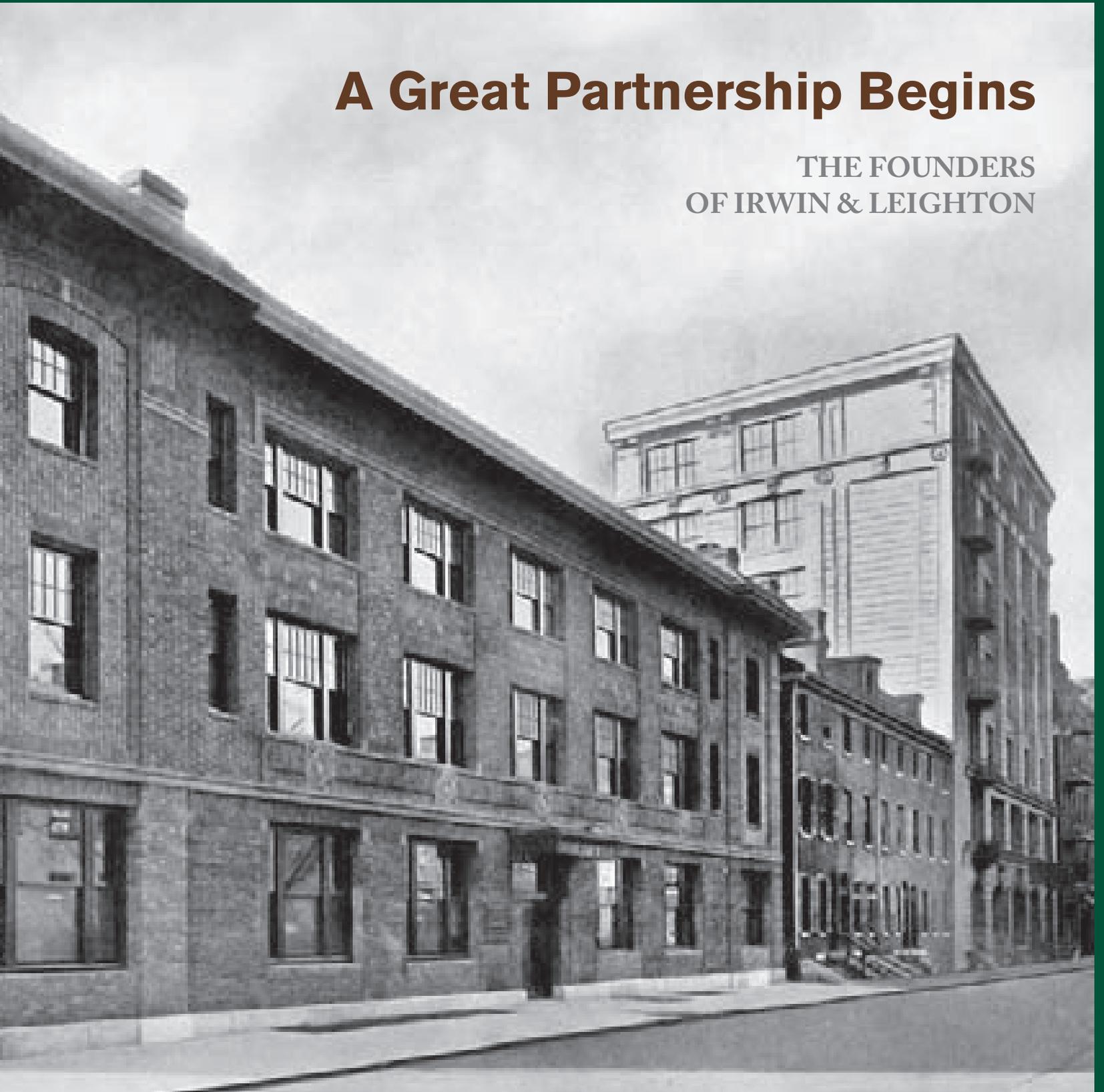


In 1909, two Philadelphia men formally began a business partnership that would continue for the remainder of their lives and into the new millennium. Drawing on personal experience and connections, the infant business would make quick and fortuitous partnerships. Long after its founders parted, their namesake continues to enhance a reputation that shines beyond the memory of their personal achievements. The founders of this company were, indeed, two truly inspired men who, despite disparate beginnings, very effectively paired their strengths to forge an organization that would stand the tests of time.



A Great Partnership Begins

THE FOUNDERS
OF IRWIN & LEIGHTON



c1912 **IRWIN & LEIGHTON'S FIRST HEADQUARTERS**

12th and Cherry Streets • Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Alexander Dickson Irwin, Jr. (A.D.) was born in 1881 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Irwin, Jr. was the first of three children born to Alexander D. Irwin, Sr. and his second wife, Rose Elizabeth Truitt.



1881-1964

Alexander Dickson Irwin, Jr.

The Irwins were a comfortable and successful family of Philadelphia's industrial age. Alexander D. Irwin, Sr. was the son of James Irwin and the brother of Robert S. Irwin, whose R.S. Irwin & Company owned Columbia Mill in the Kensington section of the city. The Irwins were descendants of the prominent Dickson family and closely related to the Irvine and Irving families of Philadelphia, all early Scottish and Irish immigrants to the Americas who had ascended to the merchant class by the mid 19th century.

In an age when the city was a hub for the railroads, oil, steel, and textile industries, giving it the name "the workshop of the world," early Philadelphia industrialists like R.S. Irwin were gaining in wealth and social capital. These men formed social and business organizations, such as the Manufacturers' Club of Philadelphia, that were instrumental in many workings of the city, from legislature and zoning to the completion of the Centennial Exhibition in 1876.

Alexander D. Irwin, Sr. founded A.D. Irwin & Brothers, a manufacturer of woolen goods, in the 1870s on the premises of Columbia Mill. A successful businessman and philanthropist, Alexander D. Irwin, Sr. was one of the early men on the Board of Visitors of the Maryland School for the Deaf and Dumb, known today as Maryland School for the Deaf.

The early life of Archibald Ogilvie Leighton (A.O.) was very different from that of his future business partner. A.O. was born in 1880 in a small town named Ballycarry, located near Belfast in Northern Ireland. He was the youngest son of John Leighton, an attorney, who had been born in Scotland but came to Ireland at the time of his marriage to Caroline Wilson.

As a young man, Archibald was apprenticed in the building trade with Mr. Stuart, who received a contract to build a post office in Sligo on the West Coast of Ireland; this area is known as "Yeats' Country" because so many of Yeats' well-known poems describe the area. The young Archibald was sent to supervise this post office project, and it was there that he met and became engaged to Gertrude Ann Hamilton.

At about this time, the San Francisco earthquake of April, 1906 occurred. A.O. reasoned that San Francisco would need builders, so he decided to come to the United States with the goal of crossing the country and

establishing himself on the West Coast; he would then send for Gertrude to come and be his bride. However, he was asked to stop in Philadelphia to provide a first-hand assessment of a project being financed by a family friend. A.O. was much engaged by what he saw in Philadelphia and decided to stay. It was not until some 50 years later that A.O. saw the West Coast.



1880-1964

Archibald Olgilvie Leighton

One of A.O.'s first jobs in Philadelphia was with Roydhouse and Arey, a company noted for the construction of the Northeast Philadelphia Station/Germantown Junction Station designed by architect Theophilus Parsons Chandler, Jr.. This massive Renaissance Revival structure was the hub of

transportation north of Center City for many years, with an estimated 4,000 daily boardings and departures on 40 different trains by 1930. The somewhat disheveled station still stands and is the oldest surviving depot on Amtrak's line. It is likely that A.O. met his future partner, A.D. Irwin, Jr. through their mutual connections with Roydhouse and Arey and the railroad.

Perhaps facing fewer obstacles but approaching life with a similar vigor, the young A.D. Irwin, Jr. graduated in 1903 from Pennsylvania Military College at Chester (now Widener University). He remained a consistent speaker, board member, and financial supporter of that institution for many years. According to the commencement announcement, the "widely known contracting engineer of Philadelphia" received an honorary Master of Applied Science degree from the school on June 21, 1922.

In 1909, A.D. Irwin, Jr. and A.O. Leighton founded Irwin & Leighton, reportedly drawing straws as to whose name should come first. It is speculated that the business, as that of Irwin's father, was initially backed by his uncle, Robert S. Irwin of R.S. Irwin & Co. Through the combination of many Irwin family connections in the local business community and the tireless efforts of A.O. Leighton as business manager, the building contractors soon became an independently dominant force within their industry, both in Philadelphia and across the eastern United States.

In 1906, A.O. married his fiancé, Gertrude, in Philadelphia. The young couple's first home was a rented house in Abington, north of Philadelphia. There, in 1908, a first child was born: a son named Alexander Hamilton Leighton. The family moved to Narberth in 1909. Shortly after the beginning of the First World War in 1914, a second child was born: a daughter named Gertrude Catherine, known as "Gessie" to distin-

gush her from her mother. Shortly thereafter, the family moved to Haverford and began to spend summer vacations at Belmar on the New Jersey coast.

In 1916, the Jersey coast and estuaries were invaded by killer sharks and there was an outbreak of what was then called “infantile paralysis” (polio melitis). A.O., very concerned for his wife and young children, asked the family doctor if he knew of a place free of the disease. The doctor told A.O. that, to his knowledge, there were no cases in Nova Scotia; so, A.O. took his family there for the summer. From that time onwards, the family returned often, and ultimately both A.O. and his son “Alec” established second homes there.

As Irwin and Leighton grew and became more prosperous, the Leighton family moved throughout the Main Line. They purchased a house in Villanova and hired the renowned architect, Richardson Brognard Okie, for renovations. In the design, Okie used many familiar elements of a typical Pennsylvania farmhouse, while at the same time keeping in mind the prototypical Irish homestead. When it was finished in 1929, the Leightons called it “Stonecrop,” which is the name of an Irish plant that grows on old stone walls. Because of the economic uncertainties associated with the Great Depression, the Leightons only lived at Stonecrop for a few years and then moved to Radnor, where Gertrude passed away in 1958. A few years later, A.O. married Rose Witkoska.

In 1931, A.D. Irwin married Aimee Lawson, a widow with a young daughter. In 1933, the couple purchased the historic John Moore House, a Revolutionary War-era farmhouse in Upper Merion Township once occupied by George Washington and Peter Muhlenberg. Having been impressed with Richardson Brognard Okie’s work on “Stonecrop” for the Leightons, A.D. hired him to design a country haven. The architect adapted the original farmhouse and an 1846 addition and added a large wing. Calling it Irwin Farm, they completed this first project in 1933. In 1944, Okie designed another wing, further expanding the capacity to entertain at the estate. Interestingly, Irwin is said to have added salvaged elements from his own job sites to add to the house.

A.D. and his wife and step-daughter split their time between the farm and a stylish home at 2014 Delancey Place in Philadelphia, where the very socially apt Mrs. Irwin entertained intimates such as Mrs. John Dorrance and other society ladies of her time. Mrs. Irwin was also active in philanthropic and social activities in and around Philadelphia, and daughter Miss Jeanne Lawson was a 1936 debutante at the Philadelphia Charity Ball and listed as a “success” in the New York Times.

Irwin sold his estate and its extensive property in 1957 to the developers of the King of Prussia Business Park. At the time, he retained a parcel on North Gulph Road where, in the 1970s, his company would develop The Irwin and The Leighton Buildings, as well as build a major hotel. Today, his house is known as Moore-Irwin House and is owned by Upper Merion Township. For a time, the house served various

purposes under the township: a community center and the Township Parks Service Offices among them. Although eligible, the Moore-Irwin House is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and today lies in a five-acre bubble of wooded area surrounded by corporate development. It is now unoccupied and has an uncertain future.

A.D. died in 1964 at age 83. He had spent the last years of his life as an advisor to Irwin & Leighton and director of various other local and national corporations, including the Pennroad Corporation: the holding company created when the Pennsylvania Railroad was dissolved. He is buried along with the rest of the Irwin family at Laurel Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia.

A.O. remained with the firm throughout the rest of his life, never retiring from it. At the time of his death at age 84 in 1964, he was serving as Chairman of the Board of Irwin and Leighton. His ashes and those of other family members are buried in a small cemetery located on the property in Nova Scotia, which belongs to the son's family.

According to his son, A.O. came to Philadelphia with a strong work ethic, eager to put what he had learned about building to use. To a large extent, he was a self-educated man. Throughout his life, he was an avid reader of books on many topics. Despite the success of the company and his personal fortunes, he remained a pragmatist – a very practical man at heart – who always displayed an engaging humility. He was an excellent teller of stories, often in Irish brogue, and among other talents, he could play the piano “by ear.”

A.O. passed on to his children and grandchildren a strong sense of the importance of education. His son, Alec, graduated from Princeton University and was trained in medicine and psychiatry at Johns Hopkins Medical School. He was a Professor at Cornell, Harvard, and Dalhousie University, and he devoted his life to research. A.O.'s daughter, Gessie, was trained in law at Yale and later headed the Department of Political Science at Bryn Mawr College.

Ultimately, A.D. Irwin and A.O. Leighton were a fine pairing. Because of their early ability to blend their talents and capitalize on them, the firm today can rest on a foundation of innovation and achievement.

The Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building

When Irwin & Leighton built the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Building on Broad Street in Philadelphia, the grand and ornate building was to feature many distinctive architectural details. Among these details, there were arched reliefs depicting allegorical, patriotic, and privately meaningful images. The contractors must have won the favor of their clients, for they are immortalized in the architecture along with others.

Mr. Leighton maintained a lifelong passion in the violin. In his later years, Leighton is said to have played every morning for over an hour before coming to the office. If one were to call the Leighton's home before noon, Mrs. Leighton would answer and politely inform the caller that Mr. Leighton was not to be disturbed during his practice.

In the relief below, Mr. Leighton is personified by a child playing the fiddle.



1927 ▼ **ARCHED RELIEF, THE FIDELITY-PHILADELPHIA TRUST COMPANY BUILDING**

See page 35 for complete description of this building.

Mr. Irwin was an avid botanist, and greatly enjoyed reading about the latest developments in the study of plants. One can imagine he and his wife, in a bygone era, strolling through the extensive grounds of their Irwin Farm estate, enjoying the sights of the flora near the brook that bounded across the front of the property.

Irwin traveled extensively on business for Irwin & Leighton, and for many years commuted in his own private railroad car to Detroit in order to manage an office that dealt with customers such as Crowley Milner & Co. and the Ford Motor Company. He insisted, however, that on his train commute to and from Detroit, he would not do work; rather, he would catch up on his botanical studies.

In the relief below, Mr. Irwin is personified by a botanist cherub and is facing his business partner.

