



West Lorne Council

Pictured here are the newly-elected West Lorne Council; (Back row left to right) Councillors Tammy Swain, Fred Rees and Helen Okolisan. (Front row left to

right) Deputy-Reeve Dianne Buchanan, Reeve Joe Fisher and Clerk-Treasurer Donna MacDougall.



Saying good-bye

Aldborough Township Reeve Harry Mezenberg presents Past Deputy-Reeve Curtis Hay with book ends on behalf of the county Dec. 5.

Mr. Liepmann took over Milner-Rigsby with 7 workers; now 125

The tremendous growth of the Milner-Rigsby Company under Mr. Wolfgang Liepmann was explained recently to Rodney Kiwanians by his son-in-law, Ray Jobson, who is the company's production manager.

From only seven employees when Mr. Liepmann bought the industry from Andrew C. Rigsby in 1962, it has been expanded from more than a frame office building with Mrs. Harold Schneckenger as secretary, an old sawmill and lathe building, to newer manufacturing buildings. The company has continued to expand until today, when it includes the former Canadian Cannery brick building on Argyle St., several large new buildings and the former West Lorne Industries, employing 125.

After immigrating Mr. Liepmann worked at Erie Flooring. Recognizing his abilities in the lumber business, Mr. Rigsby asked Mr. Liepmann to join his firm. In poor health, Mr. Rigsby sold the industry, which was still making whiffle trees, tent post and pegs for the Army, etc., to Mr. Liepmann.

Recognizing increasing interest in picnicking, Mr. Liepmann started making cedar picnic tables, many of which were sold to the provincial parks.

FLOORING

Flooring for trucks became a staple.

Recognizing the demand for truck flooring, Mr. Liepmann bought the Canadian Cannery's buildings and started laminating truck flooring 38 and 40 feet long, which was just what transport truck trailer manufacturers were looking for to reduce labor costs and improve trailer floors.

Originally each piece of oak had glued applied with a paint brush and clamped together to dry over night. Later a gluing machine was installed, increasing and improving production. The procedure was unique in North America.

When microwave glue drying was developed, the first new Milner-Rigsby plant was built on the south side of Elm St., and there was no stopping the company from then on, Mr. Jobson explained.

Kilns had to be added to keep pace with requirements for dry wood.

The former Conklin Lumber property was purchased after it went bankrupt in December '81, for further expansion. On it a large new warehouse was built. Now a new office building is complete where the Conklin office-store combination was.

Then there was the addition of West Lorne Industries, which is now a stair step and flooring plant. That plant was expanded and a new lumber stacker building was built there recently.



MR. WOLFGANG LIEPMANN IN HIS new white oak walled and hardwood floored office, which is a great improvement in quality and size over the cubby-hole he had in the former little office

Mr. Jobson explained that his father-in-law accompanied an Ontario government-sponsored trade mission to Europe in 1965, where some contracts were made which resulted in Milner-Rigsby selling laminated table tops, etc. That business has continued to expand, until now, when an average of two containers a month are shipped to Germany and Holland.

Because Germans view stairs as furniture, Kiwanian Jobson said the country is a major market for laminated stair steps. Toronto is another, because older, narrow houses are being refurbished and spiral staircases are required to save space.

While steps are laminated, he assured the ladies grading the oak are so exacting that it is difficult to determine that a step is anything but one oak board.

Milner-Rigsby also makes parquet flooring, but not in competition with Erie Flooring.

As far as Milner-Rigsby is concerned, parquet flooring is a means of eliminating as much waste as possible, thus keeping the company's products competitive, competitive even with American products, the manufacturers of which are at the source of the supply of wood.

GOOD FOR WEST LORNE

In addition to employing 125, Mr. Jobson explained that Milner Rigsby is good for West Lorne because of the amount of taxes it pays, it is the second greatest hydro consumer, being only exceeded by Form Rite which has electric furnaces.

As for the 125 employees, he said 65 percent are Portuguese immigrants. So happy are they with their work, pay and benefits, fathers, mothers and children work there.

And this is the case despite the company not having a union. However, Mr. Jobson reported employees have superior benefits, including hospitalization, dental plan and an excellent pension.

While he said it all costs money,

building at the north corner of Elm and Argyle Sts., which building he, son Winn, son-in-law Ray, and secretary vacated recently.

See picture on page 10.

management feels it owes its dedicated employees the best possible benefits. One of these is the dental plan, because before hiring on at Milner-Rigsby some employees had never been to a dentist.

Getting their dental problems overcome cost a lot of money, but once accomplished absenteeism reduced considerably, he explained.

Proof that good working conditions, good pay, and fringe benefits have paid off, is the fact there is little staff turn-over, the company not losing 10 employees a year, and it having a long list of people who want to work there.

FREE TRADE

As for threatened free trade, Mr. Jobson said it will not mean much to Milner-Rigsby, because it buys 500,000 board feet of oak a month from Pennsylvania, which is greater than the entire Canadian production for the year.

With most of the American competition in southern states, he figures there won't be any tariff against Milner-Rigsby's production, because it costs southern flooring manufacturers too much to transport their products up here.

One problem in the States for Milner-Rigsby was that so many sawmills, with which the company was dealing, went out of business in the '82-'83 depression, the company couldn't get enough lumber when business picked up here.

Because of that, the company had to resort to using walnut for stair steps, which some thought too expensive, but really was on a par with American oak, which buyers found very difficult to believe, Mr. Jobson assured.

Concluding his address, he invited Kiwanians to tour the plant some evening in the fall when it is running overtime to see how big it is, how two laminated oak planks 120-feet long are glued and cured in one and a half minutes in a micro wave "cooker", as well as stair steps and parquet flooring, plants, etc.

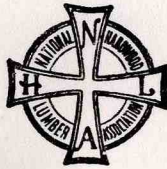
The invitation was accepted.

THE MILNER-RIGSBY CO. LTD.

TELEPHONE 519-768-1250

MANUFACTURERS OF HARDWOOD PRODUCTS SINCE 1906

WEST LORNE, ONTARIO



History of The Milner-Rigsby Co. Limited

On company letterhead we read "In business since 1906". This is slightly presumptuous. It refers to a plumbing & heating business, a joint venture of the Milner and McKillop families.

Next we see the handle factory in existence "MILNER TURNED GOODS", owned and operated by John Milner sr. and later by John Milner jr. On the main street of West Lorne, the family operated a small saw mill. Here white ash logs were sawn into billets which were worked into handles: Hammer, Axe, Pike Pole, Canthook etc, but also they were catering to the agricultural community of horsedrawn vintage by supplying neck-yokes, single trees, double-trees etc.

With the advent of farm tractors the latter became more or less obsolete. John Milner jr. decided that a shot in the arm was needed.

In October 1950 "Milner Turned Goods" was converted to "The Milner-Rigsby Co. Limited". Andrew Rigsby, a Dresden, Ontario citizen and businessman joined John Milner jr. and brought new ideas with him. They started catering to the industry making road transportation equipment.

Unfortunately, John Milner jr. passed away before the young company had a chance to get off the ground. To fill the void Mr. Rigsby accepted help in the person of Vince McHale. After one year, however, the marriage was over. Mr. Rigsby later said "Vince wanted to build a niche for himself, but the opportunity was not there".

On October 1, 1956 Wolfgang J. H. Liepmann joined the company as a junior shareholder. A legal contract was set up to regulate the continuity of the company. An addition to existing business was a "bush operation", i.e. purchase of standing timber and its harvesting, combined with export of veneer logs overseas. For a few years, log picnic tables were supplied to many Ontario Provincial parks, Springbank Park in London and the City of Toronto.

1960 saw one event of importance: The last remnants of the sawmill were removed and a manufacturing building was erected on the site.

Early in 1961 Winfrid W. Liepmann joined the company as Lumber Inspector. He is a graduate from the Memphis, Tenn., School of the Hardwood Lumber Association.

Suddenly, on 16 July, 1962 Mr. Rigsby took sick and an hour later, in the ambulance, he passed away.

Now it was up to W.J.H. Liepmann to set the course for the company. The direction was very simple. Fruehauf Inc. of Toronto, one of our main customers, had expected us to start manufacturing laminated trailer flooring. Mr. Rigsby had always declined to do so. Now it was "Full speed ahead". The implementation, however, was not quite as simple as giving the order. Facilities and capital were needed.

Mr. Gabriel Gat had previously shown an interest in Milner-Rigsby, and he purchased Milner-Rigsby shares from time to time.

Late in 1962 property of Canadian Cannery on Argyle and Elm streets, long considered a white elephant, was acquired and slowly transformed into a factory producing laminated trailer flooring. It is added here, that this was the first time, edgeglued flooring was being produced in Canada. It was a long uphill battle, to convince the trucking industry, that this was the way to go.

The first battery of two drykilns was erected in 1965 with one each to follow in 1970 and 1972.

In 1974, the company received new blood in the person of Ray Jobson, who was holding the rank of Major in the Royal Canadian Regiment. After 20 years with the armed forces he resigned and joined the family of his wife Dagmar.

Father and brothers-in-law together started a seemingly never ending process of adding facilities and machinery to the company's assets.

1975 plant III, the big blue building, together with a boiler-room and a boiler together with kilns 5,6 and 7. Three more kilns were added in 1977, ## 8, 9 and 10. Nos. 11 and 12 followed in 1979. In 1979 the share holding of the Gat family were purchased by us.

West Lorne Industries, a pallet-producing company, was for sale in 1980. It was purchased and converted, as our plant #4, into a mill room producing OAK stairtreads and turning squares.

1984 was a double header. As a first in Canada, four new kiln chambers (##13, 14, 15 and 16) and a warm water boiler, all computer-operated, were added to supply the kilndried material which was required in ever growing quantities to feed the production lines.

Also, in the same year, Conklin Lumber Co. had gone bankrupt. Their West Lorne premises were acquired, lock, stock and barrel. Their truss operation was taken over intact and utilized for two years. Then it was discontinued as other plans had been made for the property.

In 1985, the third generation of our family in the person of Roger Jobson has joined the company. After obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree at The University of Waterloo he attended the Memphis School of the National Hardwood Lumber Association and is now looking forward to a long career in lumber.

Finally, in 1986, a lumber stacking device in a separate building was added and the company's head office, long overdue, was erected on property formerly owned by Conklin Lumber. It is a showcase displaying several of Milner-Rigsby's products.

The company has many dedicated employees at all levels and, thanks to them all, a flourishing business.

In the 1950's the company was operating with six to ten employees, the present payroll shows 125.

Now, as everything is more or less the way he dreamed about, there is only one chore left to be done by the man who started this in 1962:

To think of retirement and hand the reins over to the next generation.

Old Canning Factory



Plant #2



Original Office

Plant No. 2



Old Stacker

View of Lumber yard

