

David R. Webb Company

Founded: 1894

Location: 206 South Holland Street, Edinburgh (1894– )

Indiana's rich supply of high-quality, virgin hardwood timber made the state a center of the hardwood lumber industry in the 1870s and 1880s. Johnson County became a center of the wood veneer industry in the 1890s with the development of firms such as the Muloda Veneer Company, which was founded in Edinburgh by Roscoe Mutz, A. J. Loughery, and Cassius W. Davis in 1894. By the 1920s Indiana was the premier producer of high-grade furniture hardwood veneer products. The Muloda Veneer Company was tied into a larger lumber "empire" controlled by a group of families in Shelby and Johnson Counties. At the head of this local lumber empire was Henry Maley, the son of German-immigrant parents who had brought him to the United States as an infant, and his nephew Daniel Wertz. Maley erected his first sawmill in Edinburgh in 1878. Loughery married into the Cutsinger family, which was in turn related to the Maleys, and Davis was a bookkeeper for Maley's sawmill.

In 1905 David R. Webb purchased the Muloda Veneer Company. Webb grew up in Edinburgh and as a young man clerked in a store during the day and worked at Winterberg's ice-cream parlor in the evening. Webb purchased a hardware store, which he later sold, and in 1900 purchased a half interest in a grain elevator with Martin Cutsinger. The Muloda Veneer Company marketed quartered white oak veneer through the Walter Clark Veneer Company of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Webb took advantage of the company's contacts and built the firm into a prominent regional hardwood veneer

manufacturer. Webb was related to the Maley lumber empire through the marriage of his daughter Eva to Henry Maley's son Claude. In 1909 Webb purchased an abandoned grain mill in order to expand the company's physical plant with the financial aid of his son-in-law. By 1913 his firm had fifteen employees.

After Webb's death in 1914, his daughter Ruth and her husband, Percy Broadbeck, became sole owners of the company. Under their management the company gained a national and international reputation for the quality of their products. The company, which by 1927 had become the David R. Webb Company, benefited from the growing popularity of walnut furniture and paneling. In the 1940s the Rutland Corporation of Vermont purchased the veneer company and installed Michael Joelson as its chief executive officer. In 1969 the David R. Webb Company became a division of Walter Meade Company, with John Grunwald in charge. The David R. Webb Company was incorporated in 1972. In 1989 the David R. Webb Company opened a second sawmill in Bradford, Pennsylvania, near the Allegheny National Forest, with a capacity of sixteen million board feet per year. The Edinburgh sawmill produced six million board feet per year. By the 1990s the David R. Webb Company was the largest veneer company in the United States and one of the leading manufacturers, importers, and exporters of high-quality veneer and lumber in the world. It employed approximately six hundred workers at its two plants and had sales offices in Edinburgh; Tenafly, New Jersey; High Point, North Carolina; and Cerritos, California.