

Kramer Brothers Lumber Company, Incorporated

Founded: 1872

Location: 608 West Washington Street, Frankfort (1872– )

The Kramer Brothers Lumber Company began as the J. A. & J. A. Kramer & Company. The company manufactured doors, blinds, sashes, moldings, fences, and frames, as well as custom-made items. J. A. Kramer established a planing mill in Frankfort and was joined by his cousin John A. Kramer, a native of Maryland, in opening the lumber business. In 1874 J. A. sold his interest in the firm to another set of cousins, James T. and Franklin B. Kramer.

William B. Kramer, Sr., a brother of John A., James, and Franklin, acquired an interest in the company in 1873. Six years later the business changed names to the Kramer Brothers Company. By 1886 William and another brother, Lewis N., controlled the family business. Before the turn of the century the brothers were joined by William's sons, William Jr. and Ledru.

In 1883 the Kramer building housed Frankfort's first electric-light plant. Electric lights extended east from the plant to the square and from the square to a railroad station. Lumber was brought to the plant in the rough where it was planed and then sent out to construction sites. At the sites cabinetmakers and other specialists would use the planed wood to make the various items needed in the construction of the building. The company was incorporated in 1898. William Jr. served as the incorporated company's first president.

William Jr's tenure as president was short-lived. He served until 1903, disposing of his stock in the company at that time. Ledru became president, serving into the 1940s.

Ledru's son-in-law, Tim V. Ransom, entered the business in 1922. Ransom was followed into the company by his son, Rawlings V., in 1941.

The company survived the ravages of the Great Depression and prospered in the good times of the 1950s. In 1952 the organization became the Kramer Brothers Lumber Company, Incorporated. Custom planing was dropped in favor of the retail hardware business.

In 1998 Kramer Lumber was affiliated with the Hardware Wholesalers, Incorporated, a cooperative venture of thousands of independent dealers who save money by buying products in bulk. Tom Ransom served as chairman of the board of directors, and Jack Ransom served as president of the company. The company still sold doors, lumber, hardware, tools, roofing materials, and millwork, but it also expanded into insulation, windows, siding, and computerized kitchen planning. The company has a second store in Lebanon and has a Web page on the Internet.