

Maley & Wertz, Incorporated

Founded: 1885

Location: Mt. Auburn, Indiana (1885–90); Flat Rock, Indiana (1890–99); Grammer, Indiana (1899–1901); 906 East Columbia Street (later Avenue) (1901–)

Daniel P. Wertz established a lumber concern in Mt. Auburn, Indiana, in 1885. Wertz was a native Hoosier who had worked as a sawmill employee after he completed his education. When he first started his lumber operation, he cut and hauled his own logs in addition to processing the wood into usable lumber, which he sold to his uncle, Henry Maley. In 1890 he teamed with Bedna Young, and the partners purchased a sawmill at Flat Rock, Indiana. Two years later they built a mill at Grammer, Indiana. In 1896 the partnership dissolved, and Wertz took over the mill at Grammer.

In 1901 Wertz partnered with Henry Maley, and they bought the Thompson-Bonnell Lumber plant in Evansville, transferring some equipment and personnel from the older mill to the newly purchased one. The new company was designated the Maley & Wertz Lumber Company. For Wertz, an entrepreneur, the lumber company remained one of many concerns. He sat on the boards of at least eleven companies, including banks and hotels. Maley remained in his hometown of Edinburgh, operating a sawmill and lumberyard. Henry Maley's son, Claude, bought his father's half interest in the Evansville plant and a half interest in Wertz's mill in Grammer in 1902. Until his death in 1917 Henry remained a partner in the lumber business.

Expansion seemed to be the byword of the company in the early twentieth century. The firm began operating a sawmill in Vincennes and a lumberyard in Memphis, Tennessee. In 1908, upon the death of Henry Maley, the company's proprietors assumed ownership of the Henry Maley Mill in Edinburgh. In 1917 Wertz's son, J. Claude, began working for his father and cousin's firm. In 1920 the company was again ready to grow. It built a large sawmill at

Keirn, Mississippi, which it ran for four years, and became a corporation. Officers of the new corporation included Daniel Wertz, his wife, Susan Rand Wertz, and their son, J. Claude.

The firm employed about 150 men in the early 1950s and specialized in fine hardwoods and quartersawed oak. The wood was used primarily for flooring and interior work. The company's product was shipped around the world after the 1920s. By the late 1930s wood was shipped from the Evansville plant to furniture makers in Norway, Sweden, Italy, Great Britain, New Zealand, and South Africa. In 1946 a fire destroyed the sawmill at the Evansville facility, causing close to \$50,000 in damages.

J. Claude Wertz became the operator of the company in 1944 after his father's death, and he handed it to his son, J. Claude Jr., in 1972. J. Claude Sr. was born in 1896 and graduated from Evansville High School. He was active in other businesses, philanthropic agencies, and the Democratic party. J. Claude Jr. attended the College of William and Mary before coming back to the family business. In 1968 the name of the company changed to Maley & Mertz, Incorporated. J. Claude Jr. made several improvements to the facility in the 1980s and early 1990s, including expanding kiln capacity by 30 percent in 1990.

J. Claude Jr. sold the company to Richard W. Klipsch who handed the firm to his son, Art, in 1994. Since then the business has continued to expand and adapt to the changing market. In 1998 the company purchased a \$400,000 wood gasification system, in part with the help of a \$161,848 loan from the state. The system converts wood waste, such as sawdust, chips, and discarded wood, into a gas that can be burned as cleanly as natural gas. The process was projected to save the concern more than \$120,000 in energy costs every year.