

BRIGGS LUMBER COMPANY Inc.

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The story of its past, which is the basis for its future.

Free enterprise under the American plan.

H I S T O R Y

It is interesting to note how lumber yards are started.

We believe about as follows:

First, 40% begin with a small portable sawmill.

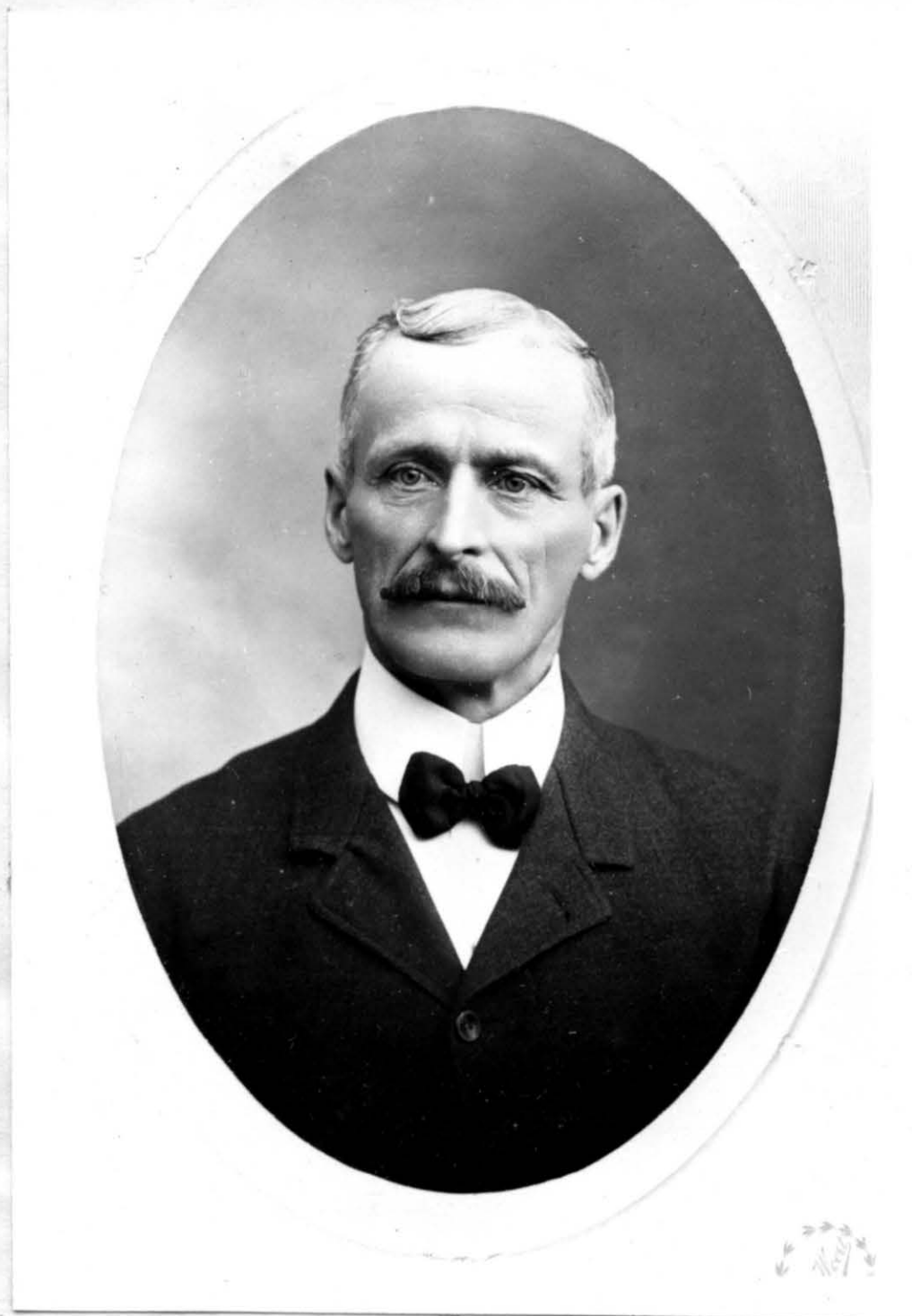
Second, 40% begin as contractors.

Third, 10% work into business from a feed store or coal yard.

Fourth, 5% work into business from a masons' supply house.

Fifth, 5% just started.

Our own case falls under numbers one and two.

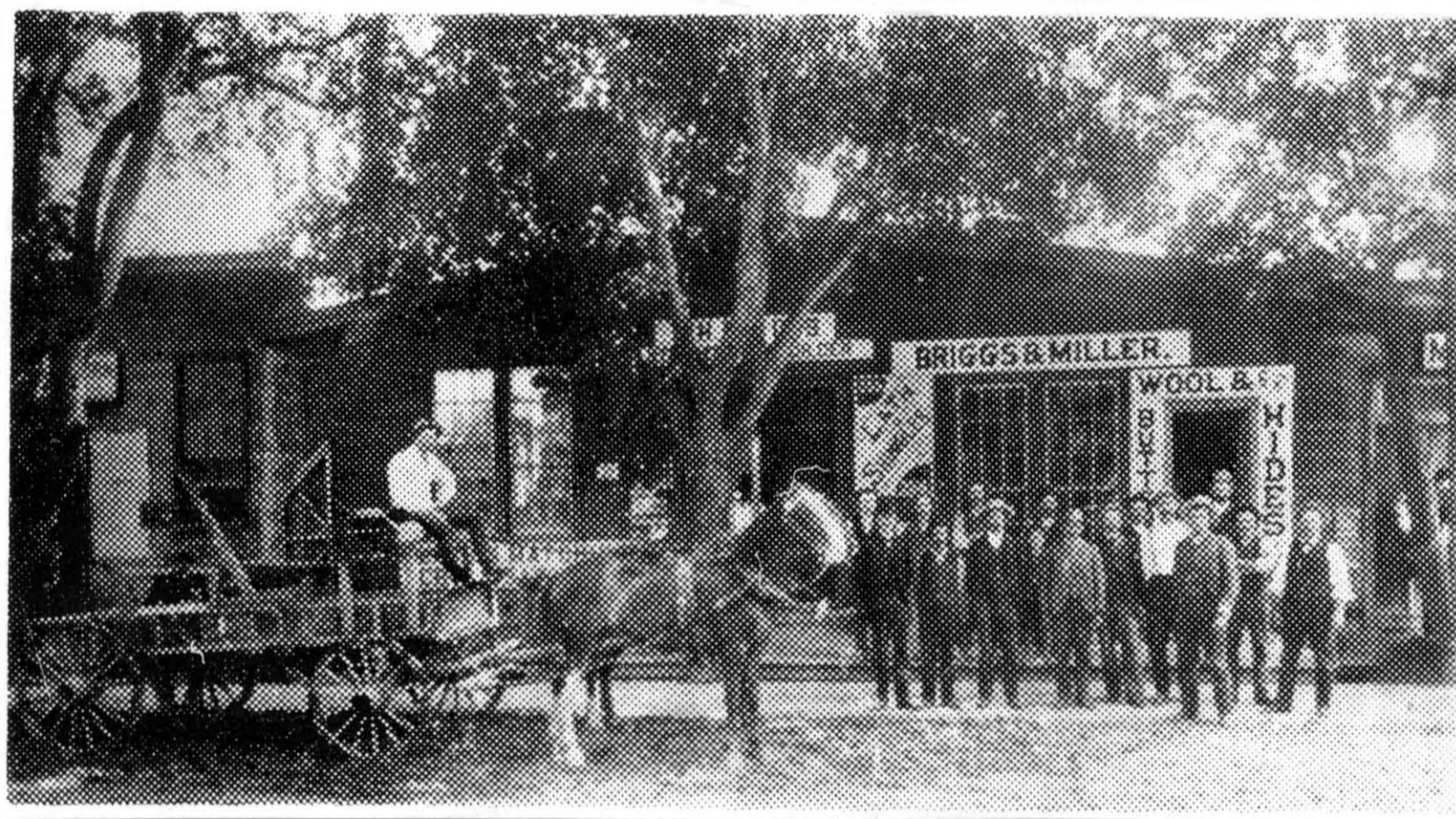


Nathan H. Briggs

NATHAN H. BRIGGS, the founder of our company, was a carpenter-mechanic who moved to Oneonta, New York, March 4, 1883. He immediately began small house construction, his first contract covering the erection of a home on the farm at Cliffside, then owned by George I. Wilber. Mr. Wilber was the most prominent banker in this territory and Mr. Briggs' association with him was of great benefit, especially in the early years.

Mr. Briggs had trouble securing lumber needed so purchased a small portable sawmill and began sawing stock for his own use.

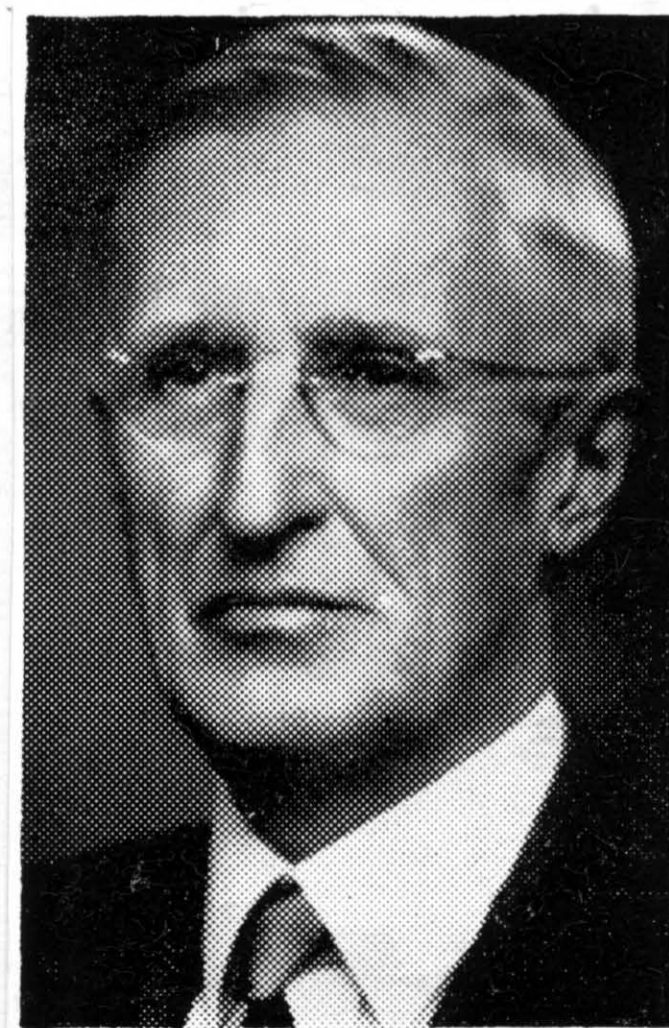
In 1885 Mr. Briggs joined another carpenter, William Scott, and formed a partnership under the name of Scott & Briggs. Their pay checks were \$9.00, or \$1.50 per day for ten hours. They felt the need of a shop so rented a small section of the mill located on Main Street and operated by a Mr. Wilber. After two years the partnership was amicably dissolved and Mr. Briggs



carried on alone. R. Wesley Miller conducted a commission business handling butter, wool, hides, etc., and he and Mr. Briggs formed the partnership of Briggs & Miller.

They rented the Wilber mill, which was located on Main Street, the present site of the Post Office. This wonderful partnership lasted until 1902, when it was dissolved and Mr. Miller continued his original business alone, occupying a portion of the Briggs & Miller mill.

Mr. Briggs took his son, Roscoe C. Briggs, into partnership under the name of N. H. Briggs & Son. The mill



Roscoe C. Briggs



was inadequate so a lot on Hickory Street, extending to Otsego Street, was purchased.

(Below is a picture of our old shop, showing conditions which could not exist today.)

A two-story brick office and mill was erected. This building was 60 x 100 with boiler room adjoining. A dry kiln was included. The lower floor was used for ripping, planing, matching, and the manufacture of



mouldings. The second floor was used as a carpenter shop with suitable machines installed for the manufacture of sash and doors.



First floor

The plant was powered by a steam engine and our blower delivered the surplus shavings to a bin from which they were manually fed into the boiler or directly to the fire box. The very crude

dry kiln was heated by exhaust steam.

Sheds for our growing retail business were erected and a barn for four horses built on the lot. The balance of the property was used for storage of dimension stock and the drying of new lumber.

During previous years we had experienced trouble securing timbers for bases of lumber piles. In order to correct this we bought some #3 railroad rails; made a form for concrete blocks with a slot that would hold the 3 inch rail. Using old nail kegs as forms concrete bases were built and leveled with the concrete blocks and rails. These were most satisfactory and, to our knowledge, our retail yard was the first to entirely eliminate wood foundations for piling lumber. Now, in 1952, more than forty years, later



Second floor 1910

we are using the same type foundation.



The business proved profitable and, in order to have a railroad siding we purchased the property of Mrs. Mary Stapleton and Mrs. Emma Smith located on Lewis Street and extending along Railroad Avenue to the D. & H. Tracks.

We erected a warehouse on the track for our masons' supplies.

In the meantime a milk plant was built next to our property so we opened a small one-man feed store in our masons' supply building.



This proved to be only a fair business. We were not too well informed and the sales we hoped to make to milk plant customers were disappointing. On account of ill health the manager was forced to retire and we decided to close the feed store.

This part of the building was immediately available for our growing masons' supply business.

When we began handling masons' supplies lime came in barrels, cement in cloth bags. It was dirty work. Soon prepared plaster took the place of lime for plaster. This also came in cloth bags. Both the cement and plaster bags had to be baled and returned for credit. Next non-returnable paper bags as used today.

The first cement we sold was known as Rosendale. It was a natural cement manufactured at Rosedale, New York. This was shipped in a rather closely woven burlap bag. Its color was similar to a yellowish loam and it was very dirty to handle. Rosendale cement is slow setting and its initial set was 27 days. They report this setting continues for a year. Their advertising stressed the fact that this cement was used in the building of the Brooklyn Bridge. For certain types of construction Rosendale is specified and very successfully used.

When Portland cement began to be manufactured in the United States it immediately became popular. The quick setting appealed to the contractors.

About the turn of the century Portland Cement was sold by the manufacturers to a list of jobbers who had exclusive territories. These jobbers sold the retailers at a guaranteed price on a definite number of barrels for the year, orders being placed in January with a specified delivery date for each car. That went wonderfully well for three years on an advancing market but, the fourth year, the market dropped forty cents per barrel and we sold our cement at cost for that season. That was the end of that type of contract. This cost one jobber as much as \$12,000. to get his contracts cancelled with cement mills.

Wood lath was the accepted plaster base for many years after "patent plaster" was introduced. Next appeared plaster board for plaster base. It first was made in sheets 32" x 48" with selvage edge and was known as "Sackett's plaster board". This board eventually developed into the 16 x 48 plaster board with folded edges that we have today.

Sheetrock came and dry wall construction gradually became as popular and satisfactory as it is today. The manufacturers have done a fine job on improvements. The brittleness that caused so much trouble with broken corners has been corrected and the weight of the product reduced until there is no mechanic resistance to its use.

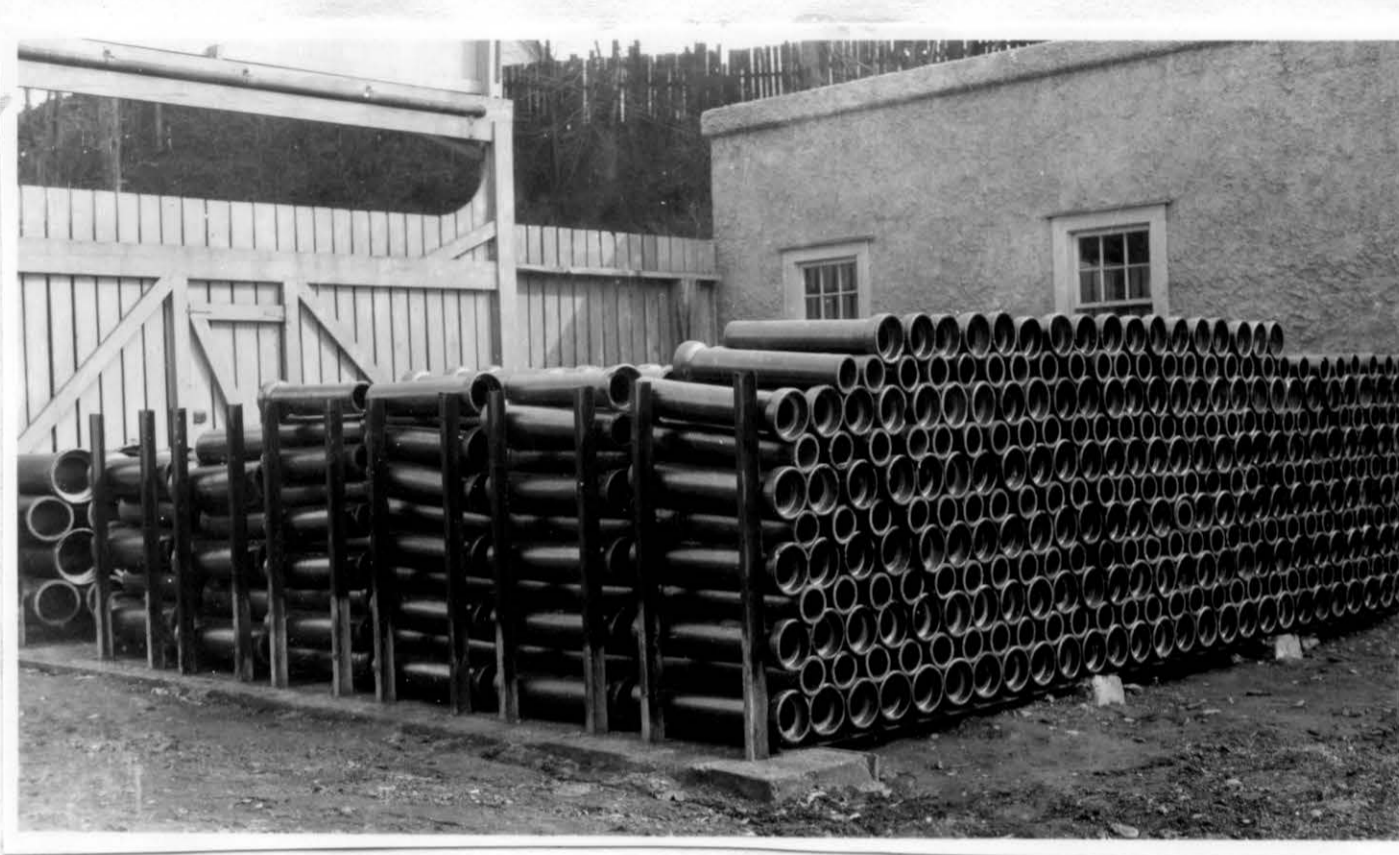
The first board had square edges and gave great difficulty in filling a smooth joint. Many improvements have been made but the present recessed edge, with the excellent tape and filler now used, makes a fine completed job.

One of the difficulties of Sheetrock's use was the application of ceiling sheets. This has been overcome by the use of an inexpensive tri-jack. We have one or more of these tri-jacks in each yard and loan them with many Sheetrock orders.

SEWAR PIPE: We always cater to farm trade and many inquiries were received for sewar pipe and drain tile. We put in a stock of 4", 6" & 8" glazed pipe. We soon found breakage was excessive and began to use the same 3" iron rails that we used for our lumber piles. We placed upright rails in concrete at the ends of the piles.

Breakage with storage was completely eliminated and the

appearance was so improved that the pipe sold without argument.



DRAIN TILE has been in good demand. We only stock 4" octagon. This shape lays more easily in the drainage ditches.

FLUE LINERS: We carry 8 x 8, 8 x 12 and 12 x 12 flue liners piling them in the same manner as our sewer pipe. These are most efficient for chimneys and while the sales were slow when first introduced today they are a must. Every building and fire code specifies their use. It is necessary to purchase these in carlots as any other method of delivery makes prices and breakage excessive.

BRICK: There are only two types of brick that are handled in real quantities in this territory.

Best known and oldest is a clay moulded brick for years made in kilns along the Hudson River. Good clay banks available and water deliveries to large centers made the industry. We handled these clay brick exclusively for years. A very high handling cost makes them uninteresting for a dealer but a necessary evil.

Shale brick, made from crushed shale rock mixed with small amount of clay, now are in favor. They weigh 25% more than clay

but are harder and better looking. Face brick are sold by the job and few rural dealers can afford to stock them.

CINDER BLOCK & CHIMNEY BLOCKS: Chimney blocks are a recent development. They are very popular with these who lay up their own chimneys. They are only carried or manufactured in 8" x 8", and 8" x 12" sizes. Their sale has greatly increased sale of flue liners.

CONCRETE & CINDER BLOCKS: We only sell these in truck loads delivered directly from manufacturing plant to the job. They are very popular. Concrete is used next to or in the ground. On account of costs we cannot stock them in our yard and make small deliveries with our trucks.

ROOFING: About 1910 Asphalt roof became a factor in the roofing market. We visited a plant in York, Pa. and were fascinated by the prospect of colored roofs.

The demand for roll and slate surface roofing and slate surfaced shingle increased rapidly. We have always advocated the best quality of Slate shingles regardless of price.

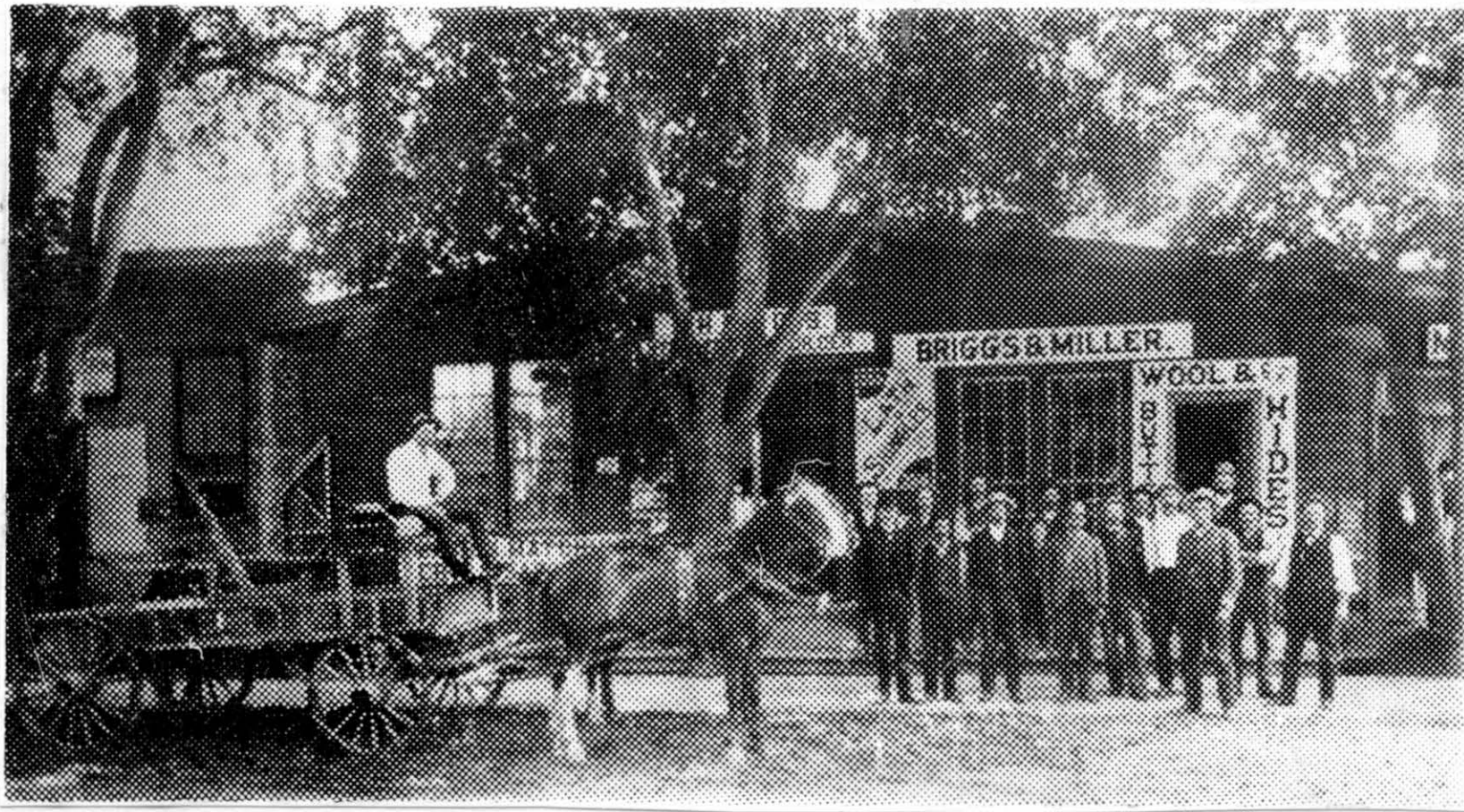
This has paid off. We handle a shingle manufactured by the largest roofing manufacturer in the United States. These are furnished with a special label used by a group of friendly dealers.

We were often asked about guarantees on our shingles. Our manufacturers say "no adjustment". If the roof is wrong give a new one without cost.

In the last ten years we have sold over 500 carloads of asphalt roofing without a replacement. Quality certainly brings return customers.

Delivery of lumber has always been one of a retailers real problems.

We began with about eight horses which were used in our saw-mill operations and used what was needed in town deliveries. We were proud of our first lettered delivery wagon.



Don't imagine horses, barn men and drivers aren't producers of trouble.

With eight or ten horses one was sick (I don't mean ill) most of the time. It always happened at night.

When sawmills were closed two pair and a single horse made up our delivery equipment.

The writer became disgusted with sick horses and in about 1910 tried mules. They were most satisfactory and were seldom if ever sick.

We purchased a roll off wagon and endeavored to roll off our loads. The wagon was a success (we still use it in emergency unloading of cars) but it was impossible with a team to get the wagon where it should be dumped.

Our horses and even mules were show stock and won many county fair prizes. This was fine publicity as is any well kept equipment.

During summer activity we used to purchase an extra single horse from a professional horse dealer using it until fall and then selling it at the horse auction. I think \$35.00 was the most we lost on any deal and one year made a profit.

In 1915 we had our first truck a one ton Reo. We built a narrow cab and left space each side for long stock.



This was very satisfactory and we used Reo's exclusively in our yards for some years.

Trucks improved and we gradually increased size to two ton.



We do not stock timbers so two ton trucks serve our every purpose.

All makes of trucks are used as each yard buys to best advantage in his home town.



We have now installed three trucks with R. B. Bodies, (two in Oneonta and one in Afton). These are manufactured by the R. B. Company, Kansas City, Missouri. They are of great advantage as loads can be rolled off in minutes. Our contractor customers prefer their use as no helpers are needed for unloading.

We expect to install these bodies on all new trucks we purchase.



During the past years the advisability of incorporating our business has been seriously considered. In case of the owners death the business to all practical purposes would be closed until estate inventories were completed and approved by Surrogate Court.

With the above information I decided to incorporate. The certificate of incorporation was filed November 15, 1913. The capital stock was \$40,000.00 divided into 400 shares as follows:

395 shares	Roscoe C. Briggs
4 shares	Katherine S. Briggs
1 share	Alice A. Shaffer

The directors elected were Roscoe C. Briggs, Katherine S. Briggs and Alice A. Shaffer. The following officers were elected:

Roscoe C. Briggs	-	President
Katherine S. Briggs	-	Vice President
Alice A. Shaffer	-	Secretary & Treasurer

It was interesting that the assets were \$38,500.00 and we included good will of \$1500.00 to make up the \$40,000.00 which was charged off the first year.

In July 1927 Robert Briggs purchased the share of stock of Alice A. Shaffer and was elected to the Board of Directors and made Secretary and Treasurer.

On November 15, 1931 Robert Briggs was killed while flying his own plane. His stock came to Duncan who was elected to the Board of Directors and made Secretary & Treasurer and these officers remained the same to date on 1963 except that Barbara Briggs Letson and Judith Briggs Watson were elected directors in 1960.

In order that the yard managers might have authority in legal authority each of our managers were made Vice Presidents.



Robert Briggs

In June 1926, Mr. Robert Briggs graduated from the merchandising course of Wharton School of the University of Penn. and on July 1st, came with us in our Oneonta yard.

For two months he worked on the construction of a home with one of our contractors.

In September Ward Moxley left Oneonta to open our Norwich yard and Robert came in the office at Oneonta.

Robert was a perfectionist in business, advertising and selling. His development was rapid and his assistance in selling and advertising was marked.

When 3/8" Cromar finished oak flooring came on the market Robert gave us a fine demonstration of opportune selling. Many local insurance firms cared for rental properties for their customers, collecting rents, making repairs, and renting when vacancies occurred. Robert called on the more progressive agencies and sold them on the use of finished oak flooring for their repair jobs. He was successful.

Today, 1953, we are successfully promoting use of 3/4" finished flooring in new as well as repair work.

During the next four years he was gradually versed in buying and office management.



Duncan Briggs

Duncan Briggs came to us in July 1930 after his graduation from University of Penn. He followed the same course of instruction as Robert, and when on July 1, 1931 we took over the Afton lumber yard at Afton, N.Y. Robert went there as Manager (See Line Yards Afton)

Duncan immediately took over Roberts work and has been invaluable in the development of our whole organization.

Our original plan was that Robert was to stay four years at Afton then he was to come to Oneonta and Duncan to take over the Afton yard. Robert's accident changed our whole setup and Duncan really had to take over much responsibility that was planned for both boys.

Duncan has taken over much of the management and he was in charge of the purchase and inventory of stock at our new yards at Roxbury and Oxford.

The Lumber Merchandising Corporation was organized and we were invited to join. We accepted and have taken an active part in its management. Duncan Briggs is now chairman of the Board of L. M. C..

L. M. C. is a non-profit organization buying as wholesalers and selling only to members at cost plus service charge. This has been a wonderful source of supply for us. Roofing, insulation, boards, shingles and etc. are packed under the Elmco label.



We have always cooperated with the Farm Bureau. Mr. Briggs is one of their charter members.

In 1915 we sold our mill to a silk company and began to build our new yard on the property we owned and located on the Railroad. We formerly used this property for our mason supply and feed business.

We first built over the Stapleton residence into an office and added to it a one story mill 40' x 40'. We moved the machinery needed from our old mill and added a new and modern cut off saw. We sold the old machinery from the old mill to a New York firm of second hand dealers. It was interesting that the old leather belting brought over \$150.00.

We first erected a 3 car garage on the corner of the lot and buried a gasoline tank first back of the garage. At that time there were few private tank installations. A one gallon pump was installed. This was a regular installation in those years.

We then erected a two story lumber shed that was 116' wide on the tracks and 184' on Delaware Avenue.

This shed had two driveways each 20 feet wide extending the entire width. On the side of the shed nearest the mill doors were placed so material would be easily available.

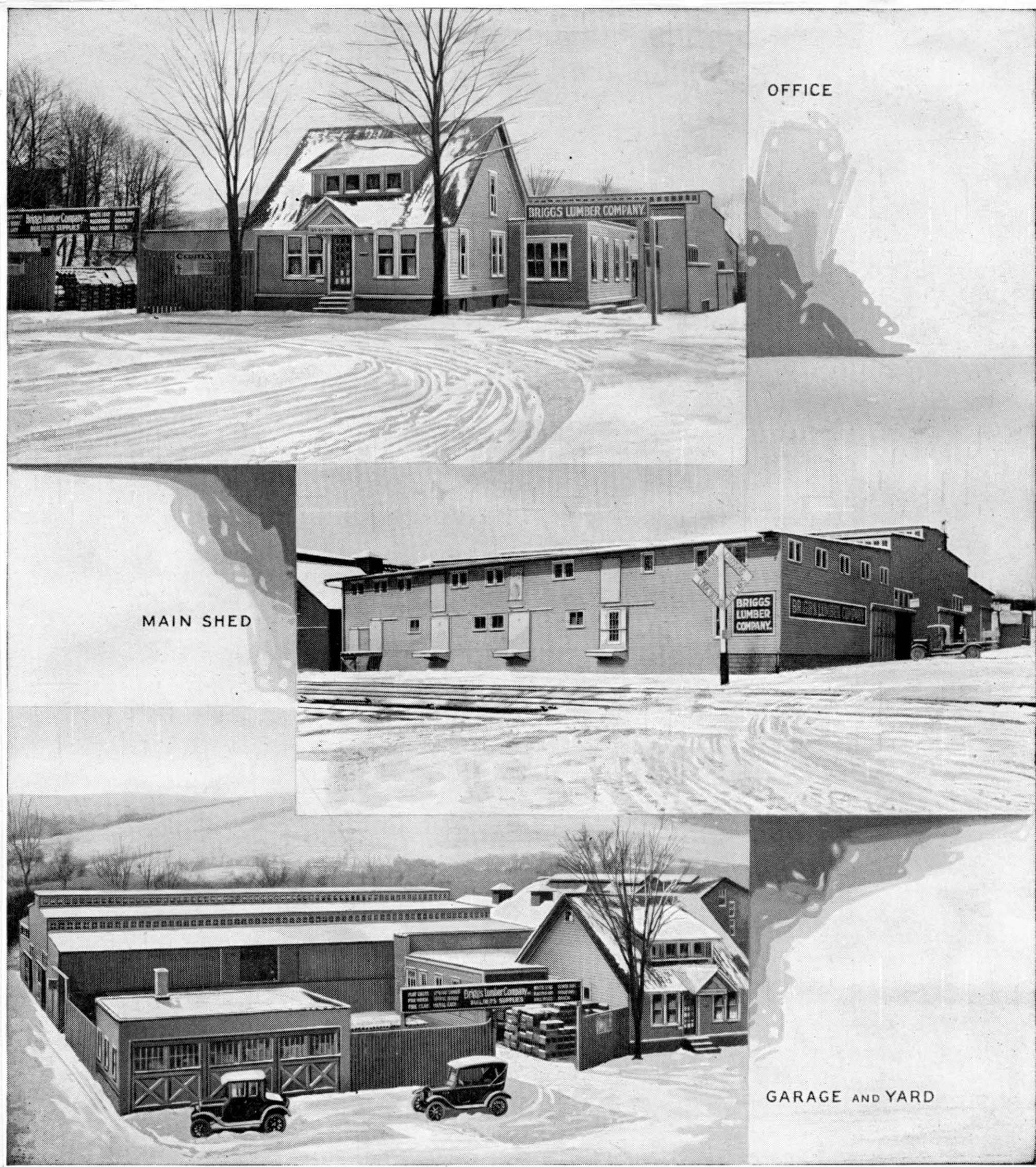
With increase in sales and the extra personal it became necessary to add space to our office. This was done by adding a room 15' x 24' with second story. The display room was furnished in knotty pine, and the ceiling of whole office renewed with 16" x 32" ivory celotex ceiling. The floors 9" x 9" asphalt tile in two shades. The private office was covered with birch plywood using 4" cove and partition mouldings. The second floor

is finished with celotex planking and finished oak flooring. The interior doors are samples of our regular stock. The rooms are used for contractors and their meetings. It also gives us space that is entirely private.

The display of knotty pine, birch, plywood, asphalt flooring has led to many sales.



We moved to the new plant on July 1st, 1920 and had pictures taken and arranged for advertizing purposes.



Note the type of cars and trucks shown.

Our first change was an addition to the office extending west to a line with the mill. This gave much needed space.

Following our custom a monthly meeting of the managers is held in Oneonta with luncheon at noon followed by a business meeting at the office for the balance of the day.

This print was made in the summer of 1954.



Left to right: Duncan Briggs, Oneonta; Fred Walpole, Roxbury; Don Smith, Norwich; John Tobey, Afton; Hube Williams, Oxford; Joe Buckley, Cobleskill; George Snyder, Sharon Springs, and Roscoe C. Briggs, Oneonta.

During the summer of 1954 a new oil burner was installed for our steam heating system.

We traded in our business car, a 1951 Oldsmobile coupe, on a 1954 Ford Ranch Wagon. This will be used as a salesman's car.