

## **Bruce County Furniture Factories – A Brief History**

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### **Solomon Knechtel Wood Turning and Furniture Company – Southampton Furniture Company – Bell Furniture – Fitton-Parker Furniture Company Southampton**

In 1906, Solomon Knechtel Wood Turning and Furniture Company was purchased by Southampton Furniture Company. Thomas Bell bought the company in 1907.

In 1910, an electric motor was installed at the factory and in 1911 a four story addition was built and a new heating and sprinkler system installed. Bell Furniture specialized in quality bedroom and living room furniture and eventually dining room suites. Bell Furniture closed in 1937.

Fitton-Parker Furniture Company purchased the factory in 1937. They produced bedroom suites, liquor cabinets, cedar chests, television cabinets and dining room suites.

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### **Southampton Manufacturing Company – Knechtel Furniture Company - Sklar-Peppler Limited Southampton**

Southampton Manufacturing Company purchased land in Southampton in 1894. Daniel Knechtel was President of the Company and S.M. Knechtel was Secretary-Treasurer. In 1901, the property was sold to Knechtel Furniture Company Limited of Hanover. The Knechtel Furniture Company made surface oak furniture. A great deal of the furniture was sent west by rail.

A newspaper article in August of 1903, reports 900 people attended a Knechtel Furniture picnic in Southampton. The employees of Knechtel Furniture formed a fire brigade in 1905.

The Corporation of the Town of Southampton took over the property in 1937. At this time, Hepworth Furniture Company made an agreement to purchase all of the land, buildings and machinery.

In 1969 Sklar-Peppler Ltd. Took over the factory.

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### **Vanstone and Morans Furniture Factory – S.M. Knechtel Chair Company – Sellers Kitchen Cabinets – Bell Furniture Southampton**

Vanstone and Morans Furniture Factory, Southampton had ceased to operate by 1890.

Samuel Miller Knechtel operated S.M. Knechtel Chair Company from this building. His father was Peter Knechtel who ran a sawmill at the mouth of the Saugeen River. The company manufactured chairs of all kinds including high chairs.

Oak kitchen cabinets in three sizes were manufactured by Sellers Kitchen Cabinets, an American company in the building for a short time.

Bell Furniture also used this building as a chair factory after 1907.

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### **Krug Brothers Co. Ltd.**

Chesley

Peter Krug was born in Alsfelt, Germany in 1836 and came to Canada in 1852. He apprenticed as a cabinet maker in Kitchener, Ontario. After getting married Peter and his family of one daughter and five sons moved to Listowel where the boys talked and planned on some day having their own furniture business.

Brothers Conrad, Christian, John, William and George Krug with Brother in Law Henry Ankeman formed a furniture manufacturing company at Chesley in 1886. Members of the Krug family have served the Chesley community in many capacities since that time.

In 1899 the brothers acquired Thomas Moore's sawmill. In 1910 Krug Brothers moved their business to the Chesley Rake and Novelty Factory at the corner of King and Main Streets to take advantage of the rail connection.

They continued to manufacture fine quality "Colonial and Traditional" furniture in Hardrock Maple, Cherry and Elm until 1987.

Krug Brothers took a keen interest in Reforestation for many years and maintained large tree plantations in Bruce County.

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### **Wolfe Chair Company Ltd. – Chesley Chair Company Ltd. – Heirloom of Canada Ltd.**

Chesley

Heirloom of Canada had its beginnings in October 1909 in the form of the Wolfe Chair Company Limited. The Provisional Directors were: Levi Wolfe, Conrad Krug, Henry Ankenman, John Krug, William Krug, Christian Krug and George Krug.

The Factory building was completed in the Fall of 1909 and furniture manufacturing operations commenced.

By March of 1910 it was apparent that the young company was experiencing some financial difficulty and a re-organization became necessary. Additional new stock was

sold and the name changed in May 1910 to the Chesley Chair Company Limited. M.E. Boos and Louis Asmus became shareholders at this time and played a prominent part in the early development of the company.

New bank accommodation was obtained and the company continued its struggle until 1912 when it again became apparent that further financial assistance would be required.

In March 1912 considerable financing was provided by Krug Brothers Company Limited to keep the struggling company in operation and an arrangement was made to supply Krug Brothers with dining room chairs.

Difficulties continued to plague the company during the next year and in August 1913 Mr. Asmus sold his interest to Mr. Conrad Krug who succeeded as President. Mr. C.R. Ankenman was appointed Secretary-Treasurer on August 15, 1913.

W.G. Krug and C.R. Ankenman purchased the interests of Conrad Krug in February 1914 and W.G. Krug became a Director of the company. The new addition to the plant comprising the east half of the main building was completed in March. In August, a lighting generator was purchased and put into service with a steam engine supplying the motive power. During the war years the plant was kept busy on government orders and large quantities of munitions cases were manufactured.

The steam engine which drove the line shaft and supplied all of the power for machinery was replaced in February 1919 with a 60 H.P. electric motor.

In March 1921 Mr. M.E. Boos sold his interest in the company to Henry Ankenman and Conrad Krug.

The company prospered during the next few years and in March 1926 it was decided to proceed with a new 70' x 40' addition to the plant. Shortly after the sprinkler system was installed since insurance rates were becoming intolerable. This improvement had been under regular consideration since 1921. The first Motor Truck was purchased in 1925 for \$300.00.

Numerous changes and improvements were undertaken during the next three years but the market crash in 1929 set the stage for almost ten years of difficult business conditions, not only for the company itself but for the industry as a whole. During these most difficult years many furniture companies were forced out of business because of the fierce competition in a greatly reduced market. This company operated for many years with reduced staff through the worst of the depression but emerged with new competitive strength and experience for the years ahead.

The office addition was built during 1940-41 but further improvements had to be held in abeyance until the post-war years. During the war period, the company again played its part in assisting the cause. The most significant work, probably, was the manufacture of

wooden parts for the famed Mosquito Bomber. For the first time, female help was enlisted on a large scale to keep production at a high level.

With the end of hostilities in 1945, employees who had seen service with the armed forces returned and favourable business conditions kept the plant at full capacity and employment for several years. R.D. Ankenman, the son of C.R. Ankenman and the grandson of Henry Ankenman, one of the founders of the company, joined the firm in February 1946.

Major improvements to both the plant and machinery were undertaken in the post-war period as materials and machinery again became available. A new boiler was installed in 1948 and the complete heating system rebuilt. In 1949 the ling shaft was replaced by motorized machines and in 1951-52 the lumber yard was completely renovated with new trackage and layout. A new dry kiln was built and the old drying units converted to dry storage buildings. A program of equipment improvement and renewal on a regular basis was in effect since this period.

In June 1963 a company reorganization took place and the assets of the Chesley Chair Company Limited were acquired by the new company, Heirloom of Canada Limited. There was no change in management.

In August 1965 the property and plant formerly known as the Chesley Manufacturing Company Limited was acquired. Extensive renovations were undertaken in this 35,000 sq. ft. building to provide the company with a very efficient warehousing facility. With this new acquisition, the total factory area increased to 85,000 sq. ft. When inventories of stock were moved to the new location, considerable space became available in the main plant for expanded production facilities and output began to increase steadily.

In 1976 plant #2 was further improved with the addition of fully equipped upholstering and veneering departments eliminating the need to purchase these requirements from other sources.

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### **Chesley Manufacturing Company**

Chesley

The Chesley Manufacturing Company was built in 1907. At that time it was called Chesley Furniture Co., with tables as their chief output. In 1948 they were manufacturing fine furniture.

In August 1965 the property and plant of the Chesley Manufacturing Company Limited was acquired by the Chesley Chair Company/Heirloom of Canada.

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### **Chesley Rake and Novelty**

Chesley

In 1906 Mathew Halliday sold part of Park lot U in the town of Chesley to Chesley Rake and Novelty for \$2,000.00. Additional pieces of Park lot U were purchased from the Corporation of the Town of Chesley for \$250.00 and John Krug for \$450.00 in 1907.

The company was deeded to Krug Brothers by Chesley Rake, John Krug, Christina Krug, Conrad Krug, William Krug, Henry Ankenman and George Krug for \$1.00 in 1910.

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### **Grandfather Hauser Cabinet Maker at Elmwood**

Elmwood

This Mr. Hauser was father of Mrs. Krug, grandfather to Bruce and Howard. He was in the sawmill business with a partner. When the business slowed down, he did cabinetmaking. Krug brothers have a table made by him. This is an extension table patented by Mr. Hauser. They have the patent papers. A lovely bonnet chest is also in their possession. Bruce would like to believe this was also made by his grandfather. It was made by someone in Elmwood.

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### **Chesley Church Furniture**

Chesley

Early in 1900, Mr. Smith constructed a two-story brick plant just east of the Chesley Manufacturing Company, and engaged in the manufacture of church benches.

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### **Hay Furniture – Canadian Furniture Manufacturers – Anderson Furniture**

Walkerton – Wiarton

The furniture business that was purchased by Canadian Furniture Manufacturers first appeared in 1844 when James Hay started a business called Hay Furniture. He operated this business for a number of years, selling out to Oliver G. Anderson of Walkerton in 1895. Hay re-established a Hay and company firm in 1897, which was sold in 1945 to U.S. Plywoods (Weldwood Division). It closed in 1970. Meanwhile, Anderson Furniture expanded, and at one time covered 25 acres in Woodstock, using a dozen buildings. There are a few illustrations in our file here from a company catalogue, rattan furniture seemed to be a very popular item. This business was in turn sold to Canadian Furniture Manufacturers Limited, the name of a corporation owning and operating 21 furniture factories in western Ontario. The amalgamation of these factories took place in 1901. The head office was in Toronto, but Woodstock had the largest furniture factory in Canada at that time. Around 1911 the plant in Woodstock scaled back significantly; it seems that most of the work was redirected to the plant in Walkerton. The company ceased operations here in the late 1920s.

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**Watson and Coombe Furniture – F.E. Coombe Furniture – Coombe Furniture  
Factory Company Limited**  
Kincardine

James B. Watson and Frank E. Coombe joined forces in 1903 to form Watson and Coombe Furniture. The company name was changed to F.E. Coombe Company when J.B. Watson sold his interest and Howard Magwood and George Davidson joined the company. After the death of Frank I. Coombe in 1929, Howard Magwood became President and H.E. Magwood became the new Secretary-Treasurer. The name changed yet again to Coombe Furniture Factory Company Limited in 1963.

During peak times there were 75 to 80 employees at the company.

The F.E. Coombe Company made high quality wooden period furniture and upholstered furniture. Most of the wood was imported from the United States, Africa and the West Indies. Marble for table tops was at one time imported from Spain. This Spanish marble was very attractive but often arrived broken so Portuguese Marble was imported. Canadian elm and birch were used for the frames of upholstered furniture.

The furniture made at the Coombe factory was known worldwide. It was used to furnish the Canadian Government House in England, the MPP's chairs in Parliament and the Queen's suite when she visited Charlottetown.

In 1972 Coombe Furniture closed. Today there is a park situated where the company once stood on Huron Terrace Street across from the Kincardine Harbour.

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**Watson and Malcolm Furniture – Andrew Malcolm Furniture**  
Kincardine

In the 1850's, John Watson a young Scotsman opened a furniture shop at Kincardine, where he produced household furniture. About the same time, Andrew Malcolm emigrated to the British West Indies. The climate was too hot and he sailed north to Canada where he was employed by the Canada Land Company in the Queen's Bush.

Watson and Malcolm formed a partnership and under the company name of Watson and Malcolm began producing furniture at Kincardine. John Watson died in 1897. Andrew Malcolm's two sons Andrew and James joined the business and it became Andrew Malcolm Furniture Company. James Malcolm managed the Kincardine company and Andrew Malcolm, Jr. managed the Listowel Factory. High quality period furniture was produced by both companies.

Lumber for the Kincardine plant arrived by boat from Manitoulin Island. The finished furniture was shipped by railway from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast and exported as well

Malcolm furniture was used in many Canadian Hotels and one Jamaican Hotel.

Mosquito Bomber parts kept the company very busy during World War II. Over 300 people were employed in this work. Following the war the company returned to making furniture.

Difficulty in securing workers forced the company to close in 1973.

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### **Bogdon and Gross Furniture**

Walkerton

The Bogdon and Gross partnership began in Kitchener in 1927 producing wooden frames for upholstered furniture. The three partners were Carl Gross, George Bogdon and George's father.

In 1938, Bogdon and Gross came to Walkerton renovating the factory vacated by Knechtel Furniture. The town of Walkerton offered inducements for the company to come and provide jobs for the citizens of Walkerton.

By the 1980's Bogdon and Gross was the only furniture maker in Bruce County handling every aspect of production from harvesting of the trees, to the saw mill operation and kiln drying the lumber and producing the furniture. During this time they employed up to 250 people.

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### **Hepworth Manufacturing Company**

Hepworth/Southampton

The Hepworth Manufacturing Company was organized in 1898 by a group of local businessmen to link together a number of small saw mills on the site of the Charles Withun sawmill. Charles Withun had been employed at Knechtel Furniture of Hanover. Bedroom suites, sideboards, tables and game boards were produced.

Hepworth Furniture employed a large number of people in the village, until they moved to Southampton in 1937. The company specialized in a line of inexpensive bedroom and dinette furniture but closed in 1974.

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### **Lucknow Furniture Company – Teeswater Furniture Company – Maple Leaf Aircraft**

Lucknow

Lucknow Furniture Company was started as a small wood-working shop operated by John Ackert and Tom Hoey. The factory was enlarged in 1896 but was soon closed.

In 1898, John Button and H.J. Trevett, known as Teeswater Furniture Company, moved their machinery to Lucknow. They specialized in tables. A modern, fire-proof, concrete building was completed in 1907.

During World War II, the firm made war products under the name of Maple Leaf Aircraft. Following the war, William Renaud operated the furniture factory for a short time.

The factory was idle for ten years and then purchased by Beatty Brothers of Fergus in the winter of 1958. Extensive alterations and improvements were made to the building and production of wooden ladders began. By 1963, other changes came and the company became Lucknow Woodproducts Limited.

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**Anderson Company – Walkerton Chair Factory –Knechtel Furniture Company –  
Bogdon and Gross Furniture**  
Walkerton

O.G. Anderson began the manufacturing of furniture at Walkerton in a former stave mill in 1887. The Anderson Company moved to Woodstock Ontario in 1895 and the town of Walkerton offered incentives to start Walkerton Chair Factory.

Knechtel Furniture Company of Hanover purchased the business and operated it as a branch plant until 1935.

In 1938 the factory building was purchased by Bogdon and Gross Furniture.

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**Allenford Furniture Factory**  
Allenford

In 1866 Tom McLean was operating a furniture factory in Allenford on lot 11, Concession A. he manufactured furniture and self-rocking cradles, and was a dealer in sewing machines, sashes, doors and blinds, and also an undertaker. The building was later converted to a house.

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**E. Miller Furniture**  
Kincardine

E. Miller's steam furniture factory at Kincardine employed six to ten hands in 1880.

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**Pinkerton Furniture Factory**  
Pinkerton

Thomas and William Geary operated a cabinet and furniture business at Pinkerton. William Geary also operated an undertaking business.

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**Canada Furniture Manufacturers – American Rattan Company Ltd. – Hill Chair Company Limited – Siemon Brothers Manufacturing Company**  
Walkerton – Wiarton – Woodstock

Canada Furniture Manufacturers Limited of Woodstock purchased several factories around 1900. In Bruce County the purchases were American Rattan Company (1900), Hill Chair Company Limited (1901), Siemon Brothers Manufacturing Company (1902).

When Canada Furniture purchased these companies, management appears to have been left with the previous local owners.

In time all of these companies were closed.

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**Warton Furniture Company – The Hill Chair Company – Canada Furniture Manufacturing Company – Siemon Brothers – Canada Casket Company – Warton Furniture Company**  
Warton

In 1888 Christian Hill, an employee of Knechtel Furniture of Hanover and Jacob C. Siemon, his Brother in Law, formed a partnership in the furniture business in the town of Warton. Mr. Siemon purchased Mr. Hill's interest in the business in 1895.

Christian Hill, Martin Hill, George Allenson, William Becker and August Holland formed a new furniture business, known as Hill Chair Company in 1896. The Hill Chair Company was purchased by Canada Furniture Manufacturing Company in 1901. John L. Seimon and Andrew Siemon purchased the company in 1905 and it became known as Siemon Brothers.

In 1914, the company was sold to the Canada Casket Company and Warton Furniture Company purchased the property in 1928.

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**American Rattan Company Limited – Canada Furniture Manufacturers**  
Walkerton

In 1897 Dr. Lauchlin Sinclair and his wife Julia Ann Sinclair sold to American Rattan Company of Toronto part of lots 14 and 15, south of the Durham Road and west of Victoria Street in the town of Walkerton for \$800.00.

The American Rattan Company Limited produced items such as chairs and baby buggies which were shipped to all parts of Canada and the United States

American Rattan Company Limited became Canada Furniture Manufacturers Limited in 1900 and took over all land holdings of this company.

In 1919 an additional part of lot 15 was purchased from the Corina Sinclair estate.

Runnymede Iron and Steele Company purchased the property from Canada Furniture Manufacturers Limited in 1932.

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### **Larsen and Shaw**

Walkerton

No information available.

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### **Canada Spool and Bobbin Company**

Walkerton

The Canada Spool and Bobbin company was started in 1885. It was acquired by W.M. Shaw in 1903.

Some idea of the variety and extent of the products of the Canada Spool and Bobbin Company may be gathered from the fact that they turned out 1,500 varieties of bobbins for wollen, knitting, silk and cotton mills, etc., while handles are made for screw drivers, electric irons and nearly all small tools.

Such diversity brought stability to the company. In the late 1920,s it's experienced a period of expansion, taking over the old defunct Binder Twine Factory for its new operations. In the depression years it forged ahead and increased considerably the number on its payroll. In 1935, there were 2,400 square feet of floor space added to the plant.

Diversification of production and excellent management were not the only key factors which permitted the company to prosper when the rest of Canada was in the depth of depression. The cost of labour and their major raw material, wood, had declined, dramatically decreasing the production costs.

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### **Truax Sash and Door**

Walkerton

This woodworking industry extended back to November 7, 1878 when it was purchased by Reuben E. Truax from David W. Moore. The plant covered several acres on the corner of Mill and Durham Streets. It utilized the water power from the Saugeen River for its machines and lights. At the outbreak of the depression in 1929, the river flooded its banks causing \$4,000.00 in damages to the plant, but this was not as serious as the

\$12,000 lost by the Canada Spool and Bobbin Company. Such a natural disaster, combined with the stockmarket crash in that year, could have ended the existence of either one of the companies. Difficulties were overcome by the excellent management of the industries.

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### **Falk, Morlock and Wegenert**

Warton

In 1879 Messrs. Falk, Morlock and Wegenert started Warton's first furniture Factory.

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### **Thomas Fairbairn Furniture**

In the very early days of settlement, Thomas Fairbairn who was a joiner, made such items of furniture as the settlers needed at the time.

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### **Moore and Fletcher Chair Company – Button Brothers**

In 1867 Moore and Fletcher had a chair factory on the site of Frazer's Mill.

In 1877 Button Brothers bought Frazer's sawmill and built a furniture factory next to it. The factory was afterward moved across the street. William and John Button were associated with William Fesant. Button Bros. And Co. manufactured chairs, cabinets, doors, sashes, blinds, mouldings and all kinds of builders' materials.

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### **Peter Bartleman**

Maple Hill

Peter Bartleman was an old country cabinet maker and he made furniture for his own family, and others too. He was the man that built the clock on the first barn on the Bartleman farm.

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### **Knechtel Furniture Company**

Hanover

Daniel Knechtel was born in Roseville, Waterloo County. He learned the carpenter's trade as a boy on the farm of his father, Daniel Sr., a former cooper. In 1864, at 21 years old Daniel walked to Hanover in two days with his tools on his back. Hanover was at this period a thriving village whose mills and foundry utilized the waterpower of the Saugeen River. During his first years there, with the skills of a carpenter and the resolve to become a cabinet-maker, Daniel worked at carpentry and rail-splitting to accumulate capital.

By 1866 Daniel and Peter, his brother, were selling their furniture and in 1868 the two brothers bought a sawmill. By 1871 Daniel was promoting himself as a cabinet-maker and another brother, Jacob, managed the sawmill. He and his brother Peter began making simple furniture by hand for the newly arrived settlers to the area. By about 1871, "D. & P. Knechtel" bought a small steam factory where they employed a dozen men. In 1874 they erected a frame factory and a brick structure with storefront on the site of the present manufactory. The store was called "The Great Eastern Emporium" and it was much more than a furniture shop. The Knechtels offered dry goods, groceries, and hardware for sale, as well as manufacturing all kinds of household furniture (including upholstered pieces), producing sash, doors, shingles, staves and other wood products, and providing undertaking services. Unfortunately, no furniture is known from this early period of production. With this expansion the number of employees more than doubled to 30 men. In 1882 the partnership between Daniel and his brother Peter was dissolved. Daniel bought Peter out and continued manufacturing furniture. Peter moved on into the saw milling business.

Knechtel expanded the operations again in 1884, building a brick factory in Hanover. Over the next three decades, Daniel's business acumen and initiative made the firm one of the largest furniture factories in the Dominion. In the late 1890's, nominally separate factories and sawmills were established in Southamptton and Walkerton and a western warehouse was established in Winnipeg. In 1899, Daniel supervised the acquisition of extensive timberlands at Stokes Bay on the Bruce Peninsula.

On December 20, 1900, the main plant at Hanover burned with a loss of \$100,000 and 250 jobs. With the aid of a \$10,000 grant from the village, the present four-story factory was opened on the old site on December 20, 1901. By 1905 Knechtel furniture – from tables to hall racks – was being distributed from Cape Breton to Vancouver.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Daniel Knechtel again expanded his business to include the operation of a Portland cement factory in Hanover.

During the Great Depression, in 1934 and 1936 respectively, the Walkerton and Southamptton factories were closed, as was the warehouse in Winnipeg. The Walkerton plant was purchased by Bogdon and Gross and the Southamptton plant by Hepworth Manufacturing Company. Business was confined to the two Hanover plants. Since the reorganization of the 1930's the firm has been known as Knechtels Ltd.

After Daniel Knechtel passed away at the ripe old age of 92 in 1936, his son J.S. succeeded him as president. He had only held the position for two years when he also died in 1938. His son Karl took over the company at that time until his sudden death in 1972.

Knechtel Furniture Company was the third oldest furniture company in Canada.

Knechtel Furniture Company was a stepping-stone for many in the furniture industry in Bruce County. Many employees from Knechtels moved elsewhere and started their own furniture manufacturing companies.