

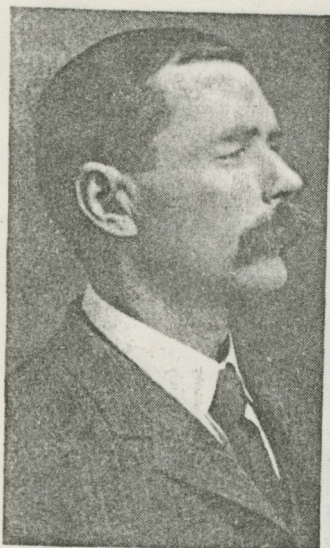
Furniture Factory Once Coffin Shop

By Lexa Cummings Groce
Special to The Tribune

The multi-million-dollar Vaughan-Bassett Elkin Furniture Co. plant sprawling over two blocks on E. Main Street at Brookwood Drive, Elkin, evolved from J.F. Cooke's casket and coffin shop on Main Street, Jonesville 77 years ago.

It was early in 1895 that Mr. Cooke, a pioneer settler at Jonesville, began operations in a bedroom furniture plant. Bedroom furnishings remain Elkin Furniture's principal commodity---shipped to all parts of the nation.

The three-story furniture plant was erected along Market Street in Elkin at the present site of Yadkin Valley Bank & Trust Company's home office.



JOHN FRANK COOKE
...Elkin Furniture founder...

Mr. Cooke, born in 1855 at Winston-Salem to John Martin and Nancy Amos Cooke, was reared at Mount Airy and came to Jonesville as a young man. In his adult life he became a charter member of both the Elkin and the Jonesville First Baptist churches. He served as a Jonesville town commissioner before being elected mayor for 1891 and 1892.

It was Mr. Cooke, a prominent civic and religious leader, who persuaded the governments of Elkin and Jonesville to purchase the privately-owned, wood covered Old Bridge---eventually succeeded by the E. Gwyn McNeil Bridge---in order to halt the five-cent toll fee. At the time, it was the only suitable crossing point in the area over the Yadkin River.

Mr. Cooke, who died here in 1936, was married two times,

to the former Miss Emma Lineberry and to the former Miss Ellen McBride. His children are Mrs. Ruth Bell, Miss Emma Cooke, Dr. Ralph M. Cooke and John F. Cooke Jr.

ON JAN. 3, 1905, MR. COOKE and three associates incorporated Elkin Furniture Co.---W.J. Boyles, S.M. Arnold and J.W. Arnold. Because Mr. Cooke was the largest stockholder he easily won election as president. Mr. Boyles, at one time mayor of Elkin, was chosen secretary-general manager.

Two years later the Market Street plant, located across from The Tribune office, was abandoned in favor of a larger facility on the present site east of Chatham Manufacturing Company.

At this time the plant was manufacturing nothing but sideboards and buffets. In that year, M.R. Bailey came with the company as superintendent from a furniture plant in Talladega, Ala. Mr. Bailey remained superintendent of the plant until 1954 when he retired. His son, Glenn W. Bailey, succeeded him as superintendent.

In the second decade of this century W.S. Guth became president of the company, J.H. Greenwood, vice president and R.L. Hubbard became secretary and general manager. The company then was manufacturing quartered oak bedroom suites, chiffoniers, sideboards, wood beds, wash stands, dressers and catalog and filing cabinets.

THE FLOOD OF 1916 did considerable damage to the machine room. However, it did not damage the building to any extent. Then all the machinery was run with belts and pulleys. The pulleys were made of wood, and all of these had to be replaced. The following year, in 1917, the plant was completely wiped out by fire.

THE TRIBUNE, Elkin-Jonesville, N.C., April 7, 1972

It was rebuilt on higher ground adjoining the old site. Almost the entire construction was done by the employees. The outer walls of the first story of the west section of the plant are the walls that were built at that time.

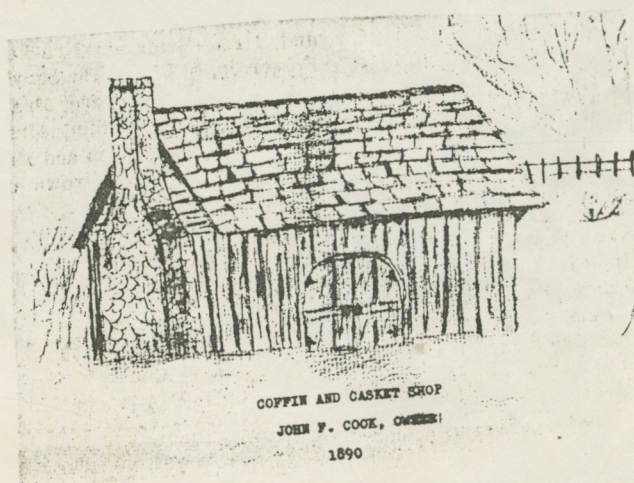
In the teens A.G. Click, R.L. Hubbard, H.F. Gray and W.E. Cooper secured control of the stock. Mr. Click was elected president of the company and remained in that office until his death in 1931. Mr. Hubbard remained secretary and general manager of the company until his death in 1930.

The Click family gained control of the stock in the twenties and some of the grandchildren are still with the company. At the death of A.G. Click, his son Dr. E.G. Click succeeded him as president and remained president until 1947, at which time Alex G. Biggs succeeded him as president. M.A. Biggs remained general manager of the company until his death in 1942. He was succeeded by his son Alex G. Biggs, who is still with the company as a member of the board of directors and chief of operations here.

FROM ITS BEGINNING in the last century, Elkin Furniture Co. has consistently relied upon local lumber sources for its basic raw materials. This correspondent's father, R.W. Cummings was a sawmill operator who furnished much lumber for the company.

Elkin Furniture was merged with Vaughan-Bassett of Galax, Va., in 1942. Carlyle "Buck" Higgins Jr. of Galax is president. Production and employment has been increased during the interim with about 350 persons involved in the local operation under O.C. Clark as superintendent.

It was a second disastrous fire---this on Friday afternoon, May 30, 1969---which hastened the modernization of Elkin Furniture and promoted erection of the present facility, said to be among the most modern in the United States.



COFFIN AND CASKET SHOP
JOHN F. COOK, OWNER
1890

ELKIN
HISTORY

1962