

# THE CELLAR LUMBER COMPANY

Any company that operates successfully for over a century is bound to be doing a great many things right. Certainly, that is the case with The Cellar Lumber Company, which has furnished lumber and building materials in Westerville, Ohio, a suburb of Columbus, since October of 1908. At that time Wilson F. Cellar and eleven investors pooled \$5,400 to open the company. The property at College Avenue and Summit Street was purchased due to its border with the railroad, providing convenient access to inbound material. Cellar opened the doors less than thirty days after his marriage to Carrie Saunders.

Frank Bookman was named as president, with Jos. J. Knox as vice president and Wilson Cellar as secretary-treasurer and general manager. Knox had formerly lived in Westerville. He owned and operated a large lumberyard on Columbus' Cleveland Avenue, across from Fort Hayes. Cellar, who had left Otterbein College Department of Business in 1902 to take an office position with the Hocking Valley Railroad, left there about a year later, when he became associated with D. H. Bard in the sawmill and lumber business at a site east of the Lincoln Street Cemetery in Westerville. After Bard's death, Cellar formed a new company in 1908 at its current location.

J. C. McLeod was Cellar Lumber's first customer, with others among the earliest including the Westerville Creamery Co., Otterbein College, the Methodist and Presbyterian churches, the Village of Westerville,

H. L. Bennett & Co., F. C. Arn, and the Culver Art & Frame Co. Westerville was just getting out of the mud. College Avenue had been paved only a short time. Dr. W. M. Gantz, a jovial dentist, was mayor.

Mrs. Cellar, a bride of only thirty days when she became a director of the new company, recalled that her first dinner guest in her new home was a business associate her husband brought in without warning. She remembered that he was particularly fond of hot spiced cling peaches and attempted to get them off the seed by putting the whole peach in his mouth.

Receipted bills in the company's early records show that it sponsored space for advertising at the rate of 10 cents per inch. Other bills show the purchases of a curry comb for 10 cents and a bucket of axle grease from Bale and Walker Hardware Store for 25 cents. A blacksmith charged 20 cents to refit old shoes and \$1.20 for four new ones. Corn and hay for the horse were other early items of expense.

The first stocks of lumber were pine from Arkansas and hemlock from West Virginia and Michigan. Then, as now, red cedar shingles came from the Northwest. Redwood was just being introduced locally as a building material. Good carpenters earned 30 to 35 cents per hour, and good laborers from \$9 to \$12 per week.

Stephen Rizer, one of the finest characters Westerville has ever known, was the first yard man and "pilot" for the horse and wagon. A devout Methodist and a faithful employee, he never talked politics on the job but was



*Rachel Jones Miller painted this forty-foot mural depicting the history of Cellar Lumber Company in 1978. The mural is located on three walls of the conference room of the company's offices in Westerville.*



always ready to discuss religion and a better way of living.

A fire in January of 1912 destroyed the office and largest shed and their contents. It was a very cold winter, and Westerville's volunteer fire department responded promptly, only to find the hydrant adjacent to the lumberyard frozen solid. They did what they could, forming a bucket line from a nearby cistern. Cellar admitted to being a bit excited when he fell while jumping through an office window in trying to save books and records. This fire was a major disaster. Had it not been for the prompt adjustment by the insurance company, Cellar Lumber would have been unable to rebuild.

Wilson's brother, George B. Cellar, became associated with the company in 1914, and served for many years as manager. Early directors of the company included Mr. and Mrs. Wilson Cellar, George B. Cellar, Don P. Miller, H.O. Reece, manager of the Sunbury branch; J.B. Miller and Frank C. Arn.

In 1919, Wilson began an expansion program, moving with his family to Circleville shortly after the purchase of stores in Chillicothe and Circleville, followed by the purchase of a store in Sunbury in 1923 and stores in Johnstown and Groveport in 1926.

Later, yards were purchased in Frankfort and Canal Winchester, and one was started in Marengo. The Circleville yard was sold in 1927. With the exception of a few hard years, growth and expansion have continued, accomplished largely by plowing profits back into the business.



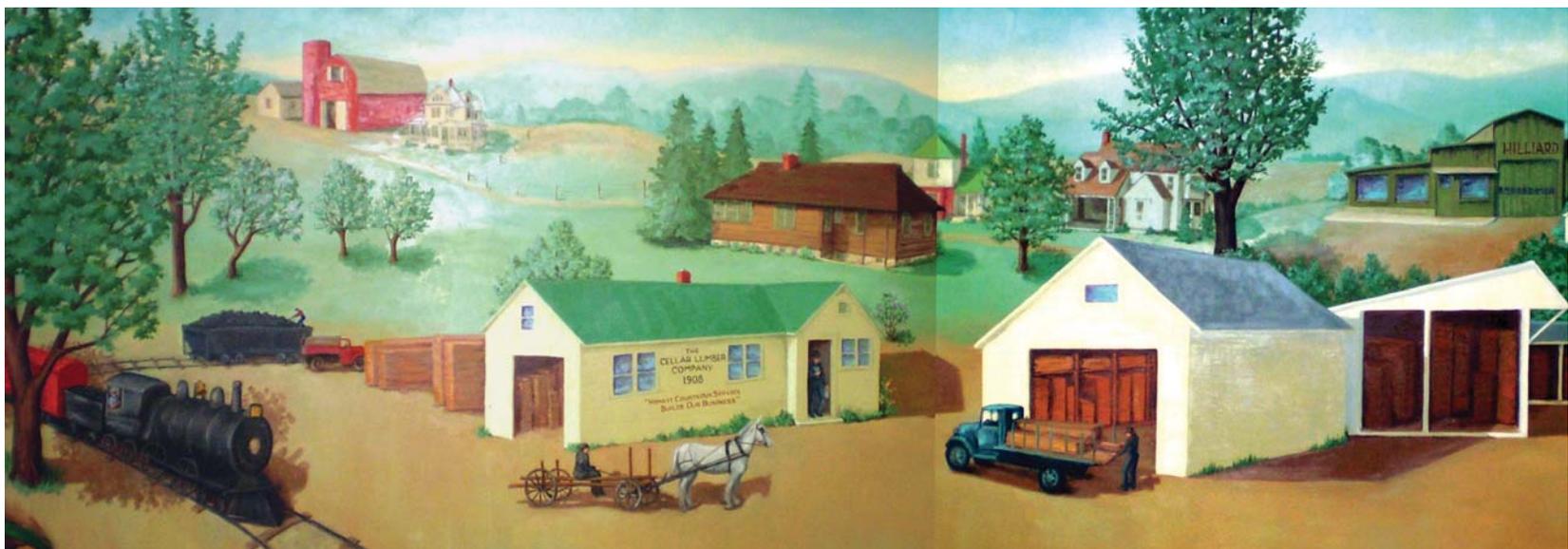
In 1932, Cellar hired his nephew, Don Miller, a part-time student at Otterbein College. Miller soon began going to school for six months and working at the Chillicothe store for six months. In 1936 he returned to the Westerville store and was named its manager in 1938. He became secretary-treasurer of the entire company in 1938, and general manager five years later. Cellar began spending winters in Florida as he phased in his retirement. When the Cellars made Florida their permanent home, they donated their house to Otterbein College.

Miller served as general manager through the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s and was named president in 1970. During that period the stores were modernized with the introduction of forklift trucks and the addition of hydraulic dump beds on the delivery trucks. This modernization was accomplished with the immense help of Dick Longhenry.

Miller and his wife Rachel had three sons, Bill, John, and Tom, and a daughter, Jean. All three of their sons have been involved with the company in various capacities over the years.



*Above: Setting the corner stone at the Women's Christian Temperance Movement, c. 1908. This photograph features Cellar Lumber's first delivery vehicle and its "pilot," Stephen Rizer.*





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Above: Wilson Cellar, Ernest McElwee, and Isaac Williams at the company's Westerville office in 1915.

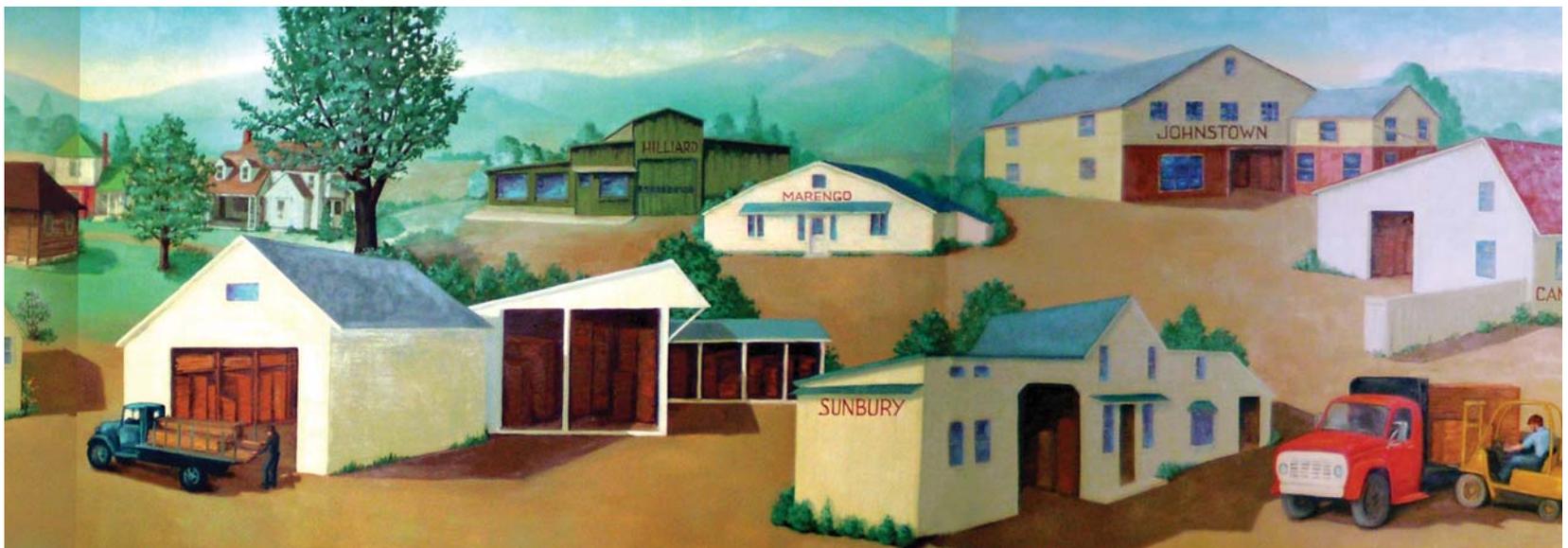
John Miller came on the scene at Cellar Lumber in the 1950s, playing in the boxcars and hanging out in the sheds. His first paying job with the company was painting its numerous white picket fences. In 1961 he worked as a driver's helper, assistant driver, and loaded and unloaded rock lath. After completing high school in 1962 he served in the U.S. Army, returning to work at Cellar during the summers until he graduated from Miami University in April of 1967. He then worked for five years at Armco Steel in Middletown, Ohio, during which time he met and married Melinda (Mindy) Scott.

In 1972, John was again hired at Cellar and returned to Westerville, where Don Miller planned to spend five years training him in management and knowledge of the business. Unfortunately, Don died during the first year of John's apprenticeship. With the help of the employees and Scott Neely, an important supplier from Lima, Ohio, the company

continued. John was named general manager in 1972, president in 1976, and CEO and chairman in June 2008.

In 1948, as Cellar was writing the company history for the Public Opinion, he attributed Cellar Lumber's success to its loyal and faithful employees. More than sixty years later, that has not changed. Two of those on hand representing Cellar Lumber at the Westerville Chamber of Commerce in honor of the company's hundredth anniversary in 2008 had also been on the payroll when Cellar made the statement in 1948. Dick Longhenry worked forty-eight years as yard foreman and manager of inventory control and safety and was a company director. Of most significance was his influence convincing John Miller to return to Westerville in 1972 to work for the company. Doyle Spangler worked in Westerville from 1948 to 1963, and was instrumental in opening a new store in Circleville in 1963. He managed it until 1991, making it the top store in the company for many of those years. Upon retirement from management, he went into outside sales from 1991 until 2005. He still serves on Cellar's board of directors.

Key employees today include Tom Kramp, who joined the company in 1987. He was store manager in Westerville (1988-91 and 1999-2010), and Circleville (1991-99); was named operations manager (2001), general manager (2003) and company president (2008).



John and Mindy's two sons are the third-generation Millers and fourth-generation family members actively involved in the business. Both received their initial training with the company reporting to Pat Farington, who has been with Cellar since 1986 and is currently office and credit manager. Drew Miller began working part time with the company in 1992 and full time after graduation from Muskingum College. He managed the Sunbury store (2003-2006) and returned to Westerville to assist in the switchover from custom homes to consumer remodeling as the Sunbury store was retrofitted for roofing contractors. He has spent over half of his life working for Cellar Lumber Company and has been a director since 2006. Brian Miller began working part-time with the company in 1995. After attending Miami University he worked for McCabe Lumber in Cincinnati from 2005-2010, when he was hired back by Cellar and returned to Westerville. Currently manager of the Westerville store, Brian has been a director since 2006 and was named company vice president in 2010.

Bryan Moehring came on board in 2011 as operations manager and to use his thirty-plus years of experience in the building materials supply industry to help expand current operations in the areas of commercial and installed sales, and help further expand into the remodeling supply arena.

The ability to adapt to continuing changes in the industry has been instrumental in the



longevity and continued success of the company. In addition to modernizing equipment in the yards and office procedures, the company has consolidated several stores and added new product lines over the years, reinventing itself to better serve a changing customer base. For many years Cellar Lumber catered primarily to home owners, farmers, and “mom and pop” contractors. By the 1970s to 1980s the main focus had gradually shifted towards custom homebuilders. With the rapid decline in demand for new homes following the recent housing bubble, the focus of Cellar Lumber has been adjusted yet again to better serve professional home remodelers, with plans to become more involved with commercial, industrial and installed sales.

Looking back, the motto Carrie Cellar coined over one hundred years ago still holds true today: “Honest, Courteous Service Builds our Business.” A second motto has since been added: “Doing What’s Right Since 1908.” We believe that staying true to our core values of customer service and having a willingness to adapt to the continuously changing needs of the building industry will keep the company going strong the next hundred years.



Above: *The Cellar Lumberyard, 1948.*

