

## **The French & Heald Furniture Company Milford, NH**

The original French & Heald Furniture plant was started by David Heald in 1856. The building was known at one time as the "Steam Mill", as it was the first building in Milford in which steam power was used to any extent.



French & Heald on average employed about 100 to 150 people. In 1905, French & Heald was one of the largest furniture manufacturing plants in New England. In 1908, the company was incorporated with David Heald as President, L.A. French as Vice-President, and E.N. Brown as Treasurer. The founder, David Heald, passed away in 1909 and his son, Edward, took over.

In January of 1912, with the temperature reading twenty below zero, a fire almost completely destroyed the manufacturing facility. Because this fire put 150 Milford men out of work and caused much hardship for the town, the people of Milford pitched in to raise a \$50,000 bond issue to help the company build another plant. The company purchased the land where Edgewood shopping center is now and in a short time a large and well-planned furniture plant was completed.

To increase business, an office was opened in New York and sales were made all over the United States. Until 1920 the bedroom furniture in which the company specialized was made of oak, but after that date a line of birch was introduced which became very popular. Over forty thousand pieces of furniture were being made a year. In 1926 trucks were purchased to expedite the delivery of furniture in New England, but railroad freight service was still used to ship large lots to distant locations.

During the depression years, the business decreased and by 1933, the company was looking for new products to augment the business. After a \$30,000 investment in a new material for airplanes called “duply” failed to rejuvenate the business, in 1935 the plant was obliged to close. The company went into receivership and was reorganized. The business survived the war years by making furnishing of solid oak for merchant marine ships.

In 1949, Daniel Titcomb and Clarence Weymouth bought out the business. On January 1, 1954, the Sprague & Carleton Co. of Keene, NH bought the French & Heald plant and business. Business continued for several years with an average of 90 workers busy on at least a 40-hour week. In April of 1967, an agreement was made by Sprague & Carleton with their parent company, Triumph Industries of Houston, Texas to close the Milford plant and move much of the machinery to plants controlled by them in Texas. By June of 1967, all production of furniture was completed and the factory was shut down. This brought to a close a business operation that had started more than a century ago.

All Information from Ramsdell's *History of Milford, NH 1738-1901* and Winifred A. Wright's *The Granite Town, Milford, NH 1901/1978*.

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