

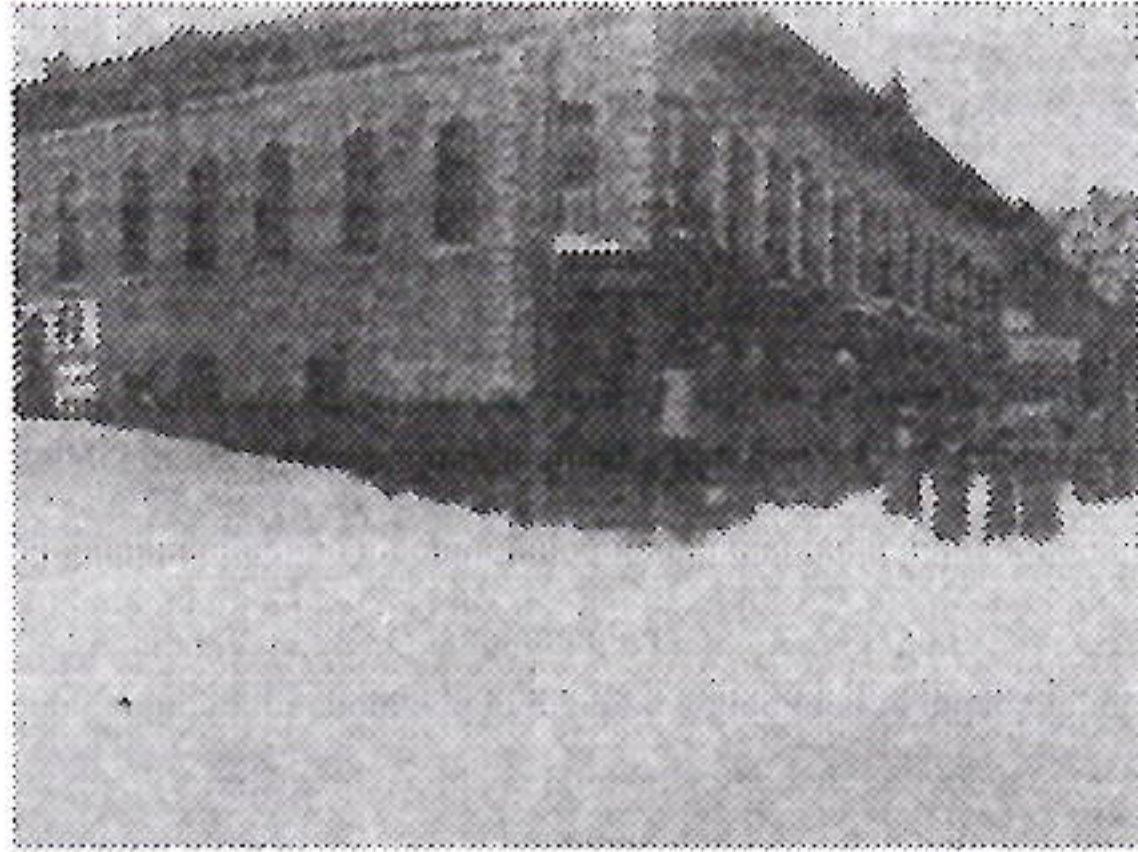
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Looking Back: Brown & Saenger born in downtown Sioux Falls more than 128 years ago

Eric Renshaw, For the Argus Leader

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(Photo: GreetingsFromSiouxFalls.com)

Brown & Saenger trucks are seen so frequently around town that they are easy to overlook. They've always been here, hustling office supplies thither and yon. It's hard to believe that the company was born here in 1889, before Dakota Territory was split into North and South Dakota.

Thomas Henderson Brown was born in Durham, England on Aug. 17, 1837, and moved to the U.S. in 1848 with his parents, settling in Wisconsin. In 1861, heeding President Lincoln's call to arms, he served in the Civil War with Company I, Third Wisconsin Infantry. Brown performed admirably in many battles, and went on to achieve the rank of Colonel. He was honorably discharged in 1865, and for a short time, went to work in the mining industry in Montana. He then returned to Wisconsin and worked in the hardware business, marrying Mary Morse in 1867.

In 1872, the Browns moved to Sioux Falls, which was then a small hamlet on the frontier. They resided in the first frame-constructed building in town at the southwest corner of 12th Street and Phillips Avenue.

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In Sioux Falls, Brown partnered with B.F. Rodrick in the lumber business, but that continued for only a year and a half. He then purchased half interest in Nye Phillips' business, which was a unique combination of hardware, leather and drugs. Brown worked there for five years, then around 1879, went on to work for the Northwestern Railroad Company, securing right-of-way, purchasing property and locating potential town sites for that concern.

In 1888, a literary publication called The Dakota Bell ran out of money, and its publisher, Sam T. Clover, sold the outfit to Brown. The business incorporated a printing and a book-binding plant. Brown also purchased an additional printing business from the Insurance Company of the Dakotas. Brown sought a partner in this venture, knowing little of printing and book binding himself. He found Eugene Saenger in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Saenger was born in Freeport, Ill., on Feb. 13, 1860, the child of German immigrants. He took a job at the *Freeport Journal*, a daily and weekly newspaper, where he learned bookbinding. From there, Saenger moved to Cedar Rapids, where he worked for eight years at the Republican Printing Co. On May 2, 1889, Saenger checked into the Cataract Hotel at Ninth Street and Phillips Avenue in Sioux Falls. A day later it was announced that Brown and Saenger were partnering in the printing business. They'd call their company Brown & Saenger, but I guess you saw that coming. To begin with, they leased the top two floors of the Metropolitan Block at the northwest corner of Ninth Street and Main Avenue. At the time, the Metropolitan Block was only three years old, and it had an elevator necessary for the business.

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The partners' intention was to produce office forms and bound blank books. At this they became incredibly successful. Within the first year, Brown & Saenger had been awarded the contract to publish the compiled laws of Sioux Falls. In 1893, they produced two gigantic, bound registration books for the South Dakota display at the World's Fair in Chicago.

In 1908, Brown retired, leaving the young company. Saenger took the reigns and put his every effort into making the venture a successful one. Brown & Saenger expanded into office furniture, among other things and furnished the state capitol in Pierre in 1910. Saenger retired in 1929, having given his company the momentum it needed to carry on.

Today, Brown & Saenger has 10 locations in North Dakota and South Dakota and has adapted to remain prominent in the industry for more than 128 years. This longevity is a rarity in any industry, especially a local one.

Eric Renshaw of Sioux Falls has written the book "Forgotten Sioux Falls" and gives a historical perspective on his website GreetingsFromSiouxFalls.com.

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