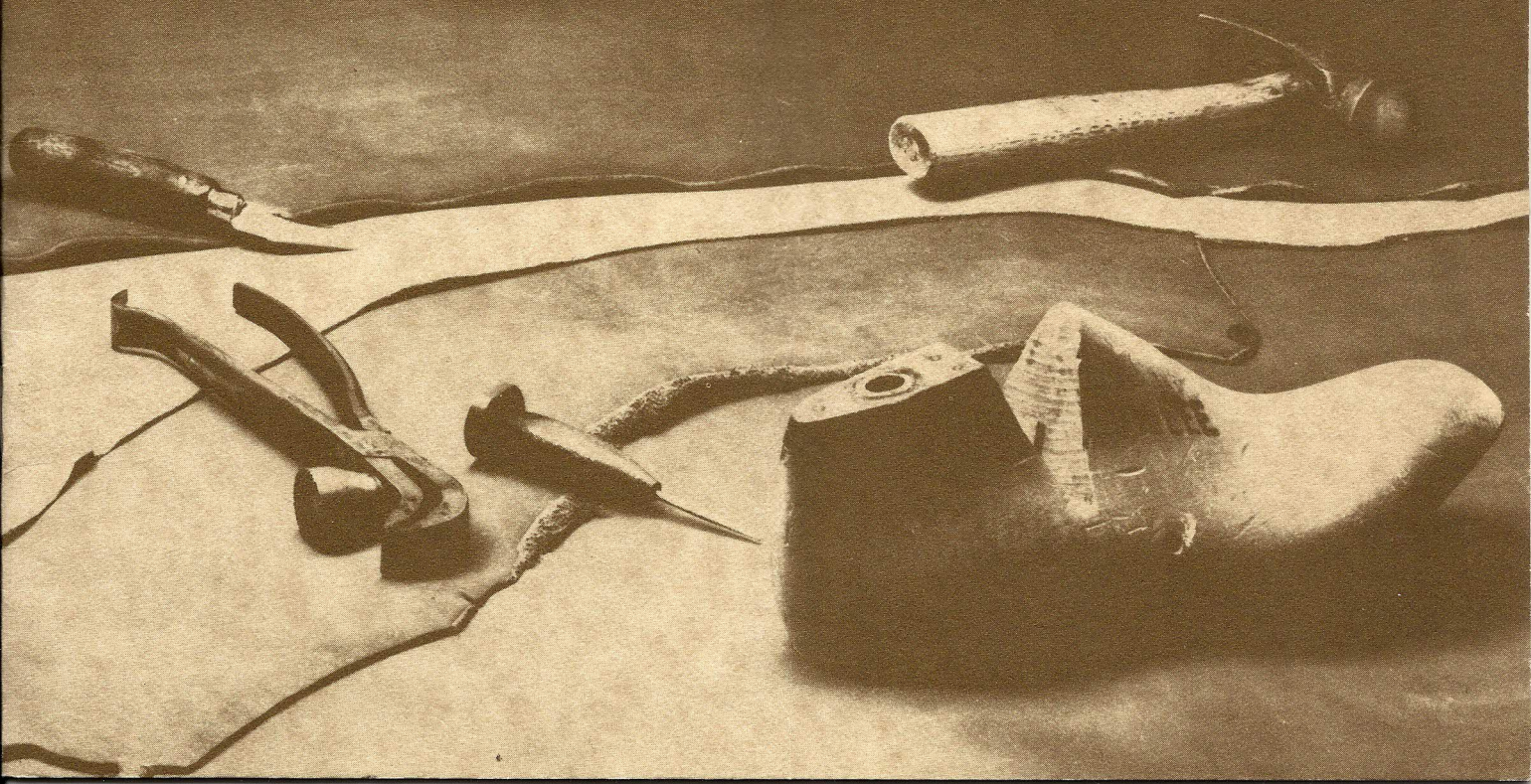


The History of WEINBRENNER Shoe Company



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Weinbrenner Shoe Company

MERRILL HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Our Tradition is Quality
Our Reputation is Value



About The Author

The many hours of research and writing needed to complete the history of Weinbrenner Shoe Company was accomplished by Lester H. Schoenke, 74, the single individual with the longest known record of 47 years of service to the company.

Mr. Schoenke's career with Weinbrenner commenced on June 22, 1927 when he was 17 years old, a youth, just graduated from a Milwaukee high school. During his many years with the company, his versatility and expertise were used in manufacturing, costing, and accounting. He was also instrumental in the movement of Weinbrenner production operations to north central Wisconsin, beginning with the opening of the Marshfield factory in 1935.

History of Weinbrenner



Weinbrenner & Pepper, 1892



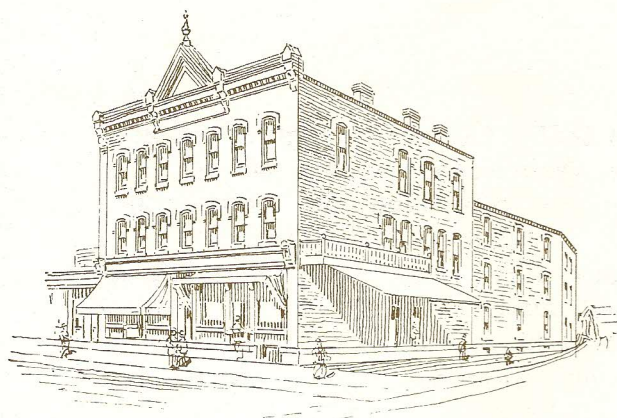
1902 Mens Shoe

In 1855 a German immigrant cobbler, Peter Weinbrenner, renounced his allegiance to the Duke Alphonsus, ruler of the province of Weisbaden, to become a United States citizen at age 28 in Milwaukee.

There he worked diligently in his cobbler's shop to support his small family. Seventeen years after his landing, a son was born who would follow the trade and then take it many steps further by becoming a leader in the field of shoe manufacturing.

At age 13, Albert H. Weinbrenner started his apprenticeship in his father's shop by learning to attach outsoles with wooden pegs. Fourteen years later in 1892 he formed a partnership, "Weinbrenner & Pepper," with Joseph Pfeffer through which they sold shoes and boots to the jobbing trade from a small store at 140 West Water Street in Milwaukee.

Their business continued for 8 years before the partners decided to enter manufacturing. On January 1, 1900 the corporation of Albert H. Weinbrenner Company was formed and each partner subscribed 50 shares of stock at \$100 each. Two additional stockholders, Ferdinand Knoll and John Batstone, joined the firm with 30 shares each. The four men met at the Weinbrenner and Pfeffer office and elected Knoll, President; Pfeffer, Vice President; and Weinbrenner, Secretary and Treasurer. The next day the group voted to buy the assets of Knoll Shoe Company for \$1,500. The Knoll Shoe Company building was rented by the new corporation and records show that the new president was named manager and given a salary of \$720 per year. Mr. Batstone was hired as a cutter at the same salary.

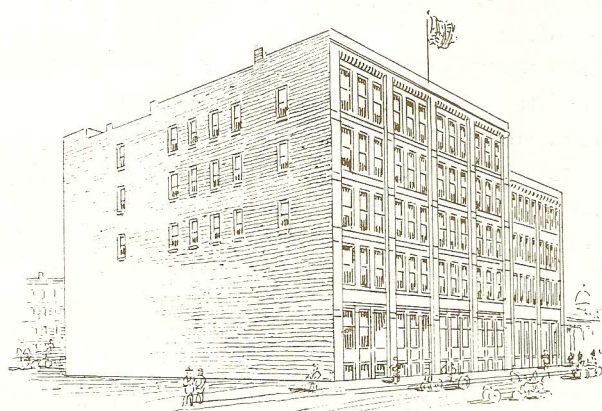


1902
Rented Production Building

On December 31, 1902 the secretary reported that the net profit in the last two years was \$8,226.67 with production reaching 60 pairs per day.

In 1905 the company moved to a larger factory in a rented building where production grew to 2,500 pairs per day. Shipments for that year amounted to \$333,000. The following year Joseph Peffer retired and sold his stock to his partner.

The company purchased land in 1908 at the intersection of Juneau Avenue and Market Streets in Milwaukee for a future factory location. By 1909 the building was completed, consisting of four stories. A basement provided 45,000 square feet with the other four floors providing nearly 157,356 square feet. The building was designed to withstand the addition of another five floors, if expansion was necessary. An innovative approach to the building was the construction of a huge power plant in the basement of the facility in order to provide all the power for machinery and lights at a substantially lower cost than the electricity provided by the utilities.



1905
Albert H. Weinbrenner Co. moved to larger rented facilities.

In 1916 the company employed about 1,200 people to make men's and boys' shoes in goodyear welt, nailed, standard screw, and McKay processes. Styles ranged from 6 to 18 inch men's and boys' work shoes. Dress shoes were made only in 6 inch heights. Several ladies styles with buttons and kid and kangaroo uppers were also included in the line. Weinbrenner's production had now reached 20,000 pairs daily which ranked it among the top manufacturers of the country. Much of the upper cutting in the industry was done by hand, but Weinbrenner had 82 clicker cutting machines--the largest number of any factory in the United States. The company also employed the use of 40 sole cutting machines for leather soles which were used exclusively at that



1917 - 1919 Boot & Shoe



time.

1917 marked the year that the job-fitted concept was introduced. Catalogs stressed styles particularly designed for various occupations, such as hobnailed shoes for miners and quarry workers, manure proof uppers for farmers, along with various styles made for railroad workers, foundry workers, and an 8 inch boot for oil well drillers.

On May 28, 1918 the Thorogood trademark was registered and became widely known. By now, military shoes became very popular for civilian wear and one style alone in a semi-dress pattern was being made by the company at a rate of 1,000 pairs per day.

The company opened its first branch warehouse in New York City in 1919 as a separate corporation. It had its own sales force and shoes were shipped from Milwaukee to the warehouse in car load lots. During the next several years, branches were opened on the same basis in Pittsburgh, Chicago, Kansas City, Atlanta, San Francisco, and Nashville. The New York City branch was later moved to Newark, New Jersey. In 1939 only three branches remained operational. The last branch in San Francisco was closed in the early 1950's.

In August of 1919 the company entered into a joint venture with 13 other companies which organized a cooperative box and crate manufacturer incorporated under the name of Manufacturer's Box Company. A.H. Weinbrenner Company was the second largest subscriber of stock in the venture. A.H. Weinbrenner was elected to the board of directors and was later joined on that board by Weinbrenner Vice President, W.G. Hanson. The Company continues as a stockholder of Manufacturer's Box and is still represented on the board of directors, although the box firm is now in the process of liquidation, having achieved its purpose over the years.

During 1924 management decided to



1925 - 1927 Boot & Shoe



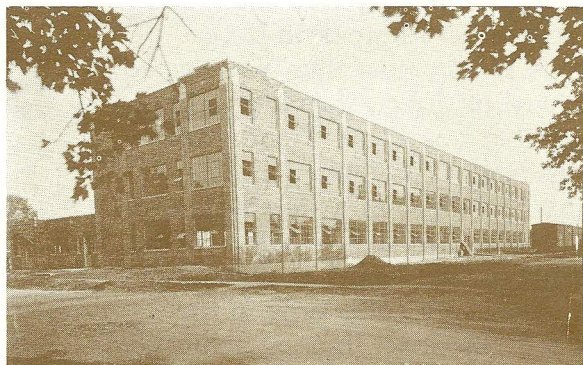
build a factory for children's footwear. The fourth floor of the Ogden Shoe Company was leased to start production before a new factory was available. The new building was completed the next year and consisted of three stories at 33rd and Hadley Streets in Milwaukee. Initially 34 styles in misses, childrens and infants were made. During the next few years production increased to 3,000 pairs daily, but the great depression in the early thirties required changes.

A two-sole stitchdown was developed and patented as the Hadley Process. Using the midsole as an insole required changes in last and midsole design. The lower cost in this construction enabled the company to produce a line of unlined barefoot sandals and unlined oxfords to sell to dealers at 95¢ and \$1.05 respectively and helped the factory to continue production at full capacity during those hard times.

In 1935 a delegation of the Marshfield Industrial Foundation approached the Weinbrenner Company about relocating in that city. They proposed building a factory and leasing it for a nominal amount. Marshfield, like other cities in that area, needed industry to replace the businesses that had disappeared during the depression.

Plans were made accordingly and the factory for work shoes was opened in January of 1936 to alleviate overcrowding of the Milwaukee facilities and to lower the costs of production.

For several months before the opening, a training facility was established in the Purdy School in Marshfield with upper cutting machines and sewing machines furnished by Weinbrenner. Uppers had been partially completed by the time the factory was ready to begin production. The first shoes were of nailed construction with black split uppers. The United Shoe Machinery Corporation maintained a staff of instructors to teach the



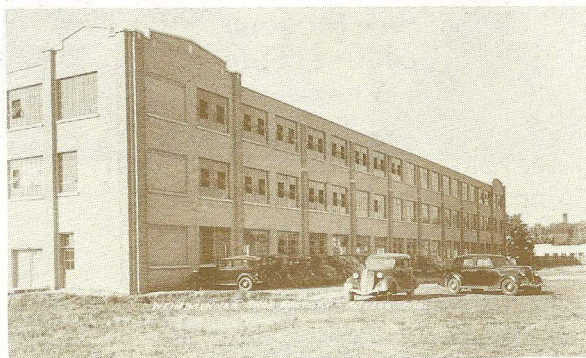
Marshfield factory nearly completed, 1935.



Merrill factory, 1936 prior to the opening.



1936 Boot



1938, Antigo factory after completion

operation of lasting and bottoming machines. Weinbrenner instructors were used for training on the other operations. Before the trainees were placed on the payroll, however, they had to obtain a certain level of proficiency within three weeks.

Goodyear welt production began several months later. In the meantime, work shoe production continued at Milwaukee, but was phased out as quickly as Marshfield could absorb it.

In March of 1936, a group of Merrill businessmen invited Weinbrenner officials to visit that city to discuss building a shoe factory similar to the one leased in Marshfield. The company was interested and the Merrill Industrial Foundation was quickly formed. By December 5 of that year, the building was dedicated with a two day celebration by enthusiastic residents. The city-wide party, arranged by the Junior Chamber of Commerce, had a carnival atmosphere.

Production in Merrill began in January of 1937 with Alvin Jung as General Manager. The next year the city of Antigo built a similar factory for children's stitchdown production which was opened in early 1938. Employee hiring and training in Antigo and Merrill proceeded similarly to the program followed in Marshfield. Executive offices, shipping, and sole cutting remained in Milwaukee after production was completely absorbed by the northern factories.

In 1938 the company took its first step into safety footwear which would prove to be a cornerstone of its business in later years. The shoe was a vamp-lined 6 inch boot with a bulky tip that concealed a steel box toe. It was sold to dealers for \$3.10 per pair.

In August of 1940, Albert H. Weinbrenner again assumed the duties of General Manager following the sudden death of W.G. Hanson who had been an executive with the company



Mass shipment of shoes to Iron Age.



1942
Safety Toe Shoe



1949 Christmas promotion for Proud-Fit children's footwear.

since 1917. Mr. Weinbrenner had been inactive in the business even though he still spent time at his office as President. Shortly after Mr. Hanson's death, Walter Kieckhefer, son-in-law of Mr. Weinbrenner, became a director.

The next year, James Childs, Jr. and Martin Mitchell, officials of the H. Childs Company of Pittsburgh, called on the Weinbrenner Company to discuss the safety footwear business. The safety shoe business was a separate division of the Childs Company, and was named the Iron Age Shoe Company. Weinbrenner became a major supplier to Iron Age as a result of the meeting between Weinbrenner and Childs Company executives.

With World War II now in progress, the United States Government required shoe manufacturers to convert to military shoe production in 1942. Civilian shoes were allotted to territories and travel restricted because of gas rationing. Antigo was partially converted to welt production and made combat boots along with the Marshfield plant. Merrill made shoes for the Navy. The Air Force had adopted a plain toe, buckle oxford and the Navy a plain toe, lace oxford as official uniform wear. These patterns became extremely popular in civilian shoes and a good portion of Merrill's production was devoted to these styles.

In 1945 Weinbrenner sold its production facilities in Milwaukee to the Cutler-Hammer Company. It had been used up until that time for home offices and a shipping warehouse. The children's factory had been sold earlier to the Milwaukee Saddlery Company which later sold the building to the Ideal Shoe Company. The Juneau Avenue building having been sold, new office quarters were rented on North Summit Avenue in Milwaukee. New shipping warehouse space was added onto the existing factory in Merrill in 1947.

By now the company needed more



Proud-fit
Children's Shoes



Albert H. Weinbrenner

work shoe production than Marshfield could provide. The city of Rib Lake had a suitable building available and an ample labor supply. Production quickly began and grew to about 600 pairs per day. By the end of 1950, however, arrangements had been made to enlarge the Marshfield factory and the Rib Lake production was absorbed. A shoe manufacturer in St. Paul, Minnesota, indicated an interest in continuing the Rib Lake facilities under the name of Jem Products, which still produces footwear in that community.

In 1948 Walter Keickhefer was elected President of the corporation, but Mr. Weinbrenner remained Chairman of the Board. It was at this time that a separate division was formed to promote children's stitchdown and compo shoes. It was called the Proudfit division and carried a special sales staff. A circus theme was used in cartoon design and national advertising featured Felix Adler, the famous clown of Ringling Brothers Circus, as spokesperson for the line.

On July 4, 1949 a colorful career came to an end with the death of Albert H. Weinbrenner. His company grew into one of the leading shoe manufacturers in the country. He was remembered as a tall and slender, mild mannered individual without bluster. His devotion to his family members was evident by the manner in which he included them in the affairs of his company. Even though he could afford any luxury, he preferred to be unpretentious and somewhat frugal.

By 1950 the work shoe line had been developed further toward special shoes for each industry. In that year the name "Job-Fitted" was copyrighted and applied to individual styles. Names such as the Bruiser, Pole-hiker, special service shoes, the Trophy, and Choreboy were used in promotions. About 40 basic industries were supplied with their special needs in work shoes.

The company entered into another

Strike



cooperative venture in October of 1951. Eleven shoe manufacturers from Wisconsin joined together in forming the Manufacturer's Chemical Company which was designed to supply footwear, tanning and other leather industries with chemicals, adhesives, finishes, and other related materials. Weinbrenner Shoe Company was a major subscriber of stock in the corporation and was represented on the board of directors. Weinbrenner continues to hold stock in the corporation and is represented on the board of directors today.

During the next several years, significant developments occurred. Children's shoes were phased out and replaced with men's casual cemented footwear in Antigo; and Process 82, which directly vulcanized a rubber sole to a welted leather upper, was introduced in Merrill.

The first production of vulcanized footwear began in Merrill in 1961 in the part of the factory that had housed the sole cutting department. This process has become an important part of work shoe sales.

One of the most popular styles in the Process 82 line was a comfortable shoe, with an oiled soft leather upper, called the Strike designed especially for fishermen. These shoes were packed in a plastic box which could be used for fishing tackle.

Another important product of Process 82 was the Mulligan Line of golf oxfords. These shoes were developed to compete with more expensive welt golf oxfords. Insulated, waterproof hunting boots were among the types made possible through the use of the vulcanized process or Vulco Process as it had become known.

By 1965 genuine hand-sewn moccasin oxfords had become very popular in men's footwear. That year, production on this type of construction began in the small community of Kimball, Wisconsin, about 100 miles north of Merrill.

Mulligan





Thomas J. Bata - Chairman, Bata Shoe Organization.



Bata International Center, Toronto, Canada,

Training in the high skill of hand-sewing moccasin vamps began in a leased building and eventually production of the completed shoes reached about 400 pairs per day. Three years later, however, management decided to transfer production to the Antigo factory.

Weinbrenner Shoe Company became a member of the Toronto-based, world-wide Bata Shoe Organization on July 1, 1966. Weinbrenner headquarters remained in Milwaukee until 1969, when it transferred operations to the Merrill location.

In 1970 Weinbrenner Shoe Company became a Division of Bata Shoe Company, Belcamp, Maryland, and Weinbrenner Corporation was dissolved, although the Company still sells its products under the well established Weinbrenner name.

The Bata Shoe Organization is a decentralized manufacturing and marketing operation of 90 footwear factories, 5 engineering works, and 5,000 retail stores, employing 86,000 people world-wide. The key word to understanding what makes Bata substantially different from other international business organizations is "decentralization."

Quite simply it means that each Bata Company is independent and responsible for running its own affairs, with its first concern the community in which it does business. It is headed by a local board of directors and a company manager.

The strong local commitment combined with membership in a large international marketing operation has given the Bata Shoe Organization the stability and strength that has marked its growth since the early part of the century.

In areas such as organization, planning and budgeting, administration, financing, marketing and market analysis, the relationship of the companies with the international organization has proven to be vital to

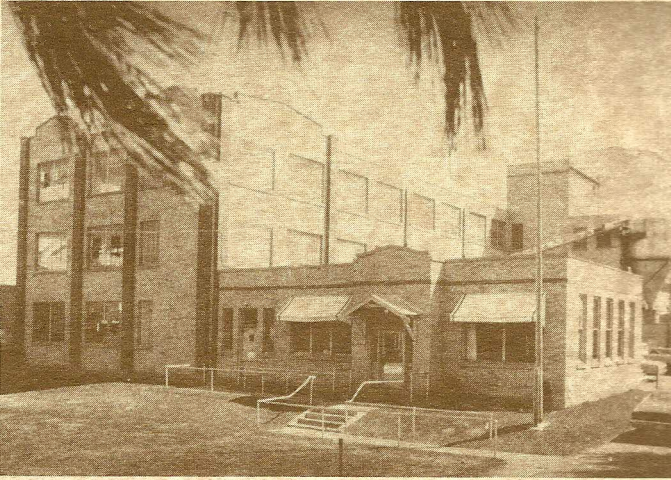
their prosperity and to the prosperity of the economies in which they function. This is particularly true of the footwear industry with its rapidly changing technologies and its market whose fashions and tastes must be watched constantly if the product is to answer a

consumer need.

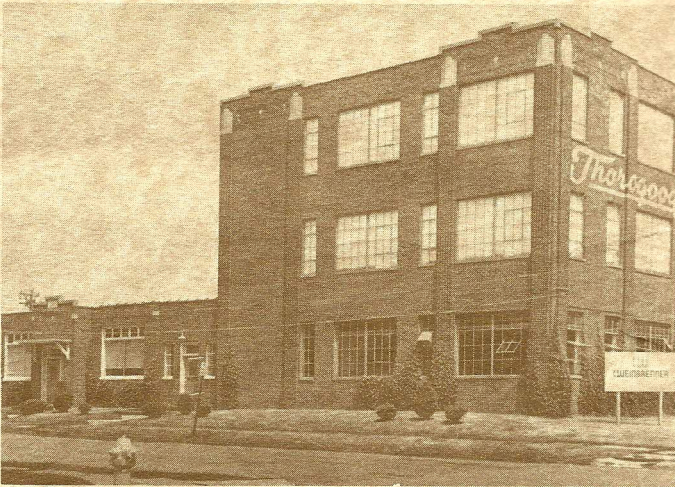
In the merging of these two businesses, both founded by clear-sighted and community conscious men, the philosophy the "Customer is our Master" is still the prime concern of the Weinbrenner Shoe Company.



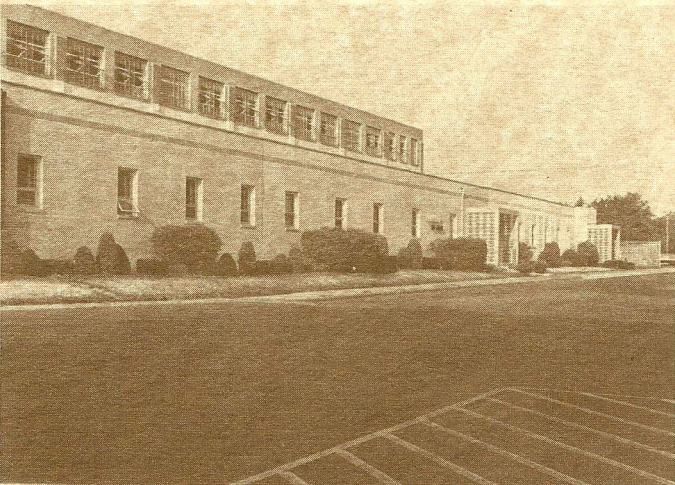
Weinbrenner Today



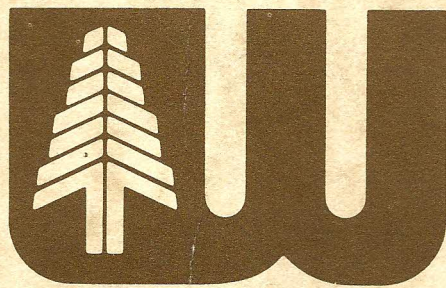
Antigo



Marshfield



Merrill



 **WEINBRENNER**
Craftsmen Of The Northwoods