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Daniel Knechtel 1843-1936

On July 1, 2003, the Ontario Heritage Foundation will unveil a plaque commemorating Daniel Knechtel at Daniel Knechtel Park on the site of the former Knechtel furniture factory in Hanover. The bilingual plaque reads:

DANIEL KNECHTEL 1843-1936

Born in Waterloo County, Daniel Knechtel came to Hanover in 1864. Two years later, he began producing handcrafted furniture and in 1874 opened a factory on this site. By using local timber resources and applying the latest techniques in furniture manufacturing, Knechtel built a successful business. Under his direction, subsidiaries were established in Southampton and Walkerton and markets expanded into the Canadian West. A fire destroyed Knechtel's factory in 1900 but another was built the following year and operated until 1983. Active in the community, Knechtel made substantial donations for a hospital, library and Baptist church, and served as first reeve and mayor of Hanover (1909-1911).

DANIEL KNECHTEL (1843-1936)

Daniel Knechtel naît dans le comté de Waterloo. Il arrive à Hanover en 1864 et, deux ans plus tard, commence à fabriquer des meubles. En 1874, il ouvre ici une usine. Une utilisation judicieuse des ressources locales en bois et des dernières techniques de fabrication de meubles lui permettent de monter une affaire prospère. Sous sa direction, des filiales s'établissent à Southampton et à Walkerton, et sa clientèle s'étend jusque dans l'Ouest canadien. En 1900, un incendie détruit l'usine, mais dès l'année suivante, une autre est reconstruite. Elle reste ouverte jusqu'en 1983. Socialement engagé, Knechtel a fait des dons importants pour un hôpital, une bibliothèque et une église baptiste. Il a été le premier président du conseil municipal puis maire de Hanover (1909-1911).

Historical background

Daniel Knechtel, founder of the Knechtel Furniture Company, was born on December 20, 1843 at Roseville, Waterloo County. Daniel was descended from German immigrants and in his childhood learned woodworking from his father, Daniel Sr. Attracted by its German Baptist

population, Daniel came to Hanover in 1864 to set up a cabinet-making business. Hanover was a thriving village situated beside the Saugeen River. His married sister also lived on a farm nearby and his brother Peter seems to have moved into the village around this time as well.

During his first years in Hanover, Daniel worked as a carpenter and rail-splitter to save enough money to open a cabinet-making shop. By 1866, Daniel and Peter had begun to make and sell cabinetry and, two years later, bought a sawmill, which by 1871 was being managed by their brother Jacob. Around 1873, "D. and P. Knechtel" expanded their business by purchasing a small steam factory and, the following year, building a frame factory and a brick building with stone front at the present-day site of Eleventh Street and Eleventh Avenue. By that time the company employed 30 workers.

Using timber harvested from Bruce and Grey Counties and contemporary American techniques for manufacturing furniture, the Knechtel factory prospered. Encouraged by protective tariffs, the completion in 1881 of the Hanover leg of the Stratford and Lake Huron Railway, and increasing market demands for furniture, Knechtel's business continued to grow. He opened a brick factory in Hanover in 1884 and then a retail store. By 1887, his brother Solomon and Henry Pepler, who had been employed by Knechtel since 1873, had also joined the management of the Knechtel Furniture Company under Daniel's direction.

In 1891, the company became a joint stock company and the capital generated by the sale of stock was used to expand the business. By the late 1890s, Knechtel had opened factories and sawmills in Southampton and Walkerton and in 1899 he acquired extensive wood lots at nearby Stokes Bay anticipating the general need in the furniture industry to acquire and conserve timber resources.

On December 20, 1900, the Hanover factory was destroyed by fire with the loss of \$100,000 and 250 jobs. With the assistance of \$10,000 donated by the village, the factory was rebuilt on the original site, opening December 20, 1901. By 1905, the business had recovered significantly and Knechtel furniture was being distributed across the country. In the early 20th century, Daniel Knechtel again expanded his business to include the operation of a Portland cement factory in Hanover. Under the guidance of Daniel and J.S. Knechtel (1868-1938), a son who joined the firm about 1895, the broadly-based Knechtel Furniture Company continued to prosper through the Great Depression.

When Daniel died on January 18, 1936, the Knechtel Furniture Company was one of Canada's largest furniture companies. The company was widely respected for Daniel's business skills and personal initiative, the craftsmanship of its employees and its successful furniture-manufacturing techniques. Daniel was also remembered for his service to the community. He was the first reeve of Hanover, its mayor between 1909 and 1911, and a philanthropist who helped to fund the Hanover hospital, library and Baptist church.

In 1983, the Knechtel Furniture Company closed and the factory was demolished. Twenty years later, the site of the factory was redeveloped into a municipal park dedicated to Daniel Knechtel.

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