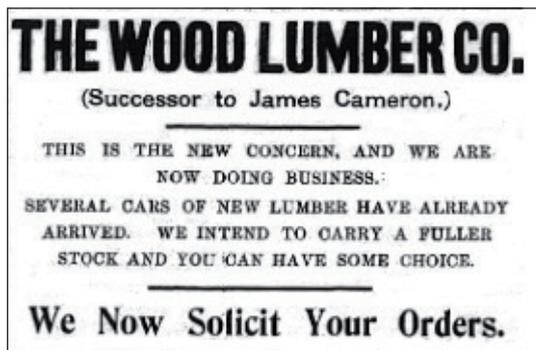


The Wood Lumber Company

by Deborah Griffin Scanlon

This story starts with Edmund Wood, who owned the Greene and Wood Lumber Yard, a chain of lumber warehouses based in New Bedford that dated back to 1835. In 1912 Mr. Wood saw potential for growth in Falmouth and decided to open a branch here. He bought James Cameron's small lumber yard on Locust Street and named it The Wood Lumber Company.



The first Wood Lumber Co. ad in *The Enterprise*, March 12, 1912

Joseph B. Miskell, the 22-year-old son of James Miskell, the general manager of Greene and Wood, was sent to manage the new branch.

The town in 1912 had a total of 3,100 residents and 1,400 dwellings, and according to the town report, there were still kerosene street lamps tended by a lamplighter. Although power had that year been extended to West and North Falmouth, Falmouth Heights, Megansett and Quissett were "looking ahead to electric lights." Eight constables policed the town, and a night watchman patrolled Main Street.

One hundred and three years later, Falmouth has about 32,000 year-round residents, too many dwellings to count, LED streetlights and a 60-person police department. The Miskells - Joseph's grandson, Dana Miskell, and his wife Eileen - still own, manage, and welcome new and old customers to The Wood Lumber Company.

The lumber business that Edmund Wood bought on Locust Street from Mr. Cameron was originally on King Street. Owned since at least 1875 by B. B. King, for whom the street was named, the business was purchased in 1895 by Mr. Cameron.

A native of Scotland, Mr. Cameron came to Falmouth by way of Naushon Island, where he was superintendent of the Forbes's farm. He operated the lumber business on King Street until 1909, when he moved it to Locust Street. The first building he put up was a large cypress shed which was in use for many years. In 1912, Mr. Cameron sold his business to Mr. Wood and then lived in Falmouth in retirement for another 25 years.

The purchase of the Falmouth lumber yard was a good opportunity for young Joseph Miskell, whose father, James, had wanted him to get started in business. Joseph moved to Falmouth and settled in. An early ad in *The Enterprise* promised "new facilities for Falmouth."

Later, in 1926, the corporation known as The Wood Lumber Company was formed by Edmund Wood, George R. Wood and John T. Hanna Jr. On

the board of directors were James and Joseph B. Miskell, John Hanna, Edmund and George Wood. Joseph Miskell's wife, Mary, carefully maintained a book of minutes of the corporation.

That year The Wood Lumber Company had "3,000 shares of common stock, \$304,484.18 in assets (lumber; brick and flue lining; hardware and paints; notes receivable; real estate; dwelling house; garage; accounts receivable; mortgage notes receivable; Lawrence Property; unexpired insurance; auto trucks; cash, and \$31,370.84 in liabilities (notes payable, accounts payable, depreciation)," according to the corporation meeting minutes. Its purpose was to "carry on a general business in hardware and building materials, cement, lime and paint."

By 1931 Wood Lumber was well established in the town. The depression had hit, but Joe Miskell had a plan. *The Enterprise* headline read "Jobs And Cash for Local Men" and the article explained that Mr. Miskell "envisions a fund of \$25,000 made available by the Wood Lumber Company to finance home remodeling, repairing or small construction by Falmouth property owners. The money is to be loaned on notes, with the provision that for every \$100 of materials, \$200 shall be expended directly in wages to local workmen."

In 1935 Joe Miskell was president of the company and by 1942 only the Miskells were listed in the company records as shareholders.

The company also became involved in the building of Camp Edwards. A 1936 headline in *The Enterprise* read "Big Concrete Block Order Comes Here," and the story that followed told of a "contract in the mail for delivery of 145,000 concrete blocks for camp building construction." This was the beginning of Camp Edwards in Bourne, later part of the Massachusetts Military Reservation,

which included Otis Air National Guard Base and Coast Guard Air Station Cape Cod.

The Enterprise article noted that The Wood Lumber Company "bid on blocks as manufactured by the Concrete Products Company of Falmouth and will fill the order entirely from the Falmouth-made blocks. Each day's shipment will weigh about 75 tons. The trucking will be done by Eldredge and Bourne. Award of the contract to Falmouth will add considerably to employment here all through the fall."

In 1940 the US Army leased Camp Edwards to use as a training facility, and began construction to house 30,000 soldiers of the Army's 26th Yankee Division.

With this major construction underway came "Joseph B. Miskell's spectacular moment in business," *The Enterprise* reported, "when Thomas J. Walsh arrived to start building Camp Edwards. Purchase Order No. One, was issued by the Walsh company for a few pounds of sweeping compound, a few pencils and erasers. Within 72 hours, Mr. Miskell delivered the first 200,000 feet of lumber at camp. With great resource and enterprise Mr. Miskell saw to it that the Falmouth supplier won substantial share of the material orders for the camp."

Mr. Miskell had also helped Falmouth face another challenge during this time as the Hurricane of 1938 tore through New England. Building materials were scarce, but Joseph Miskell announced in a newspaper ad that the company had "adequate stocks," and that "the Wood Lumber Company is in a position to furnish money for materials and labor required to repair hurricane and flood damage and restore homes."

The Wood Lumber Company continued to grow through the war and postwar years. Joseph Miskell died in 1957. His obituary read, "he built it into

TO THE PUBLIC

"I regret the great damage that has been done. I am extremely thankful to be able to say to those who have been injured that my Wood Lumber Company is in extremely good stock position and offers its facilities and its known ability to obtain additional materials, to anyone who has suffered building losses."

Joseph B. Miskell,
The Wood Lumber Co.

Ad in *The Enterprise*, September 23, 1938. The Hurricane of 1938 struck on September 21.

one of Falmouth's greatest business successes. As he did so, he took a lively interest in Falmouth affairs. No man worked harder for the town and the Cape. Mr. Miskell was, too, a thoughtful and kindly friend who unobtrusively did much for neighbors around him."

Mr. Miskell had married Mary L. Glennon in 1915, daughter of a New Bedford textile merchant. They lived in Falmouth Heights in a house facing the ballpark, and had two children, Joseph B. Jr. and Laura.

Joseph Jr., or "Bud," was bright, energetic and athletic. In his senior year at Lawrence High School in 1939, *The Enterprise* sports page reported, "After playing 108 games of tennis in 12 sets from 9 AM to 5 PM, Joseph B. Miskell Jr. fell in the finals of the Southeastern Massachusetts schoolboy tourna-

ANNOUNCEMENT

To Owners Whose Property Has Been Damaged By The Hurricane

The Wood Lumber Company is in a position to furnish the money for materials and labor required to repair hurricane and flood damage and to restore your homes to first class condition.

We will pay for all building materials, carpenter labor, plumbing and heating, electrical wiring, mason work and grading. You arrange all your financing with us.

LOANS UP TO \$2,000 *For Periods of 36 Months*

We can arrange loans up to \$2,000 for as long a period as three years with small monthly payments. There will be no red tape; no delay. You will appreciate the convenient terms and the promptness with which men can be put to work to protect your houses before winter storms do more damage.

The demand for building materials is heavy through New England. Building materials are very scarce.

We are happy to assure you that we have adequate stocks of all kinds to take care of the damage done in Falmouth and vicinity.

The demand for building materials is heavy through New England. Building materials are very scarce.

We are happy to assure you that we have adequate stocks of all kinds to take care of the damage done in Falmouth and vicinity.

It is easy to repair your home through us. From this one source you can get everything. We arrange all details. We suggest that you call or telephone for further details.



The Wood Lumber Co.

"Everything To Build Anything"

LOCUST STREET

TELEPHONE 154

FALMOUTH

Ad in *The Enterprise*, September 30, 1938. Wood Lumber made similar offers after the hurricanes of 1944 and 1954.

ment in Brockton," and, "When he finished the grueling day of tennis, Bud had dropped 8 pounds from his slender frame."

He attended Dartmouth College. In 1942, with World War II underway, he and a group of Dartmouth students enlisted together in the Air Corps. He still managed to graduate from Dartmouth in 1943.

As a “Navigator in a Liberator bomber,” he wrote to his father, “we did take part in the invasion” in 1944. In 1945, he was awarded the “third oak leaf cluster to the Air Medal... for his coolness, courage and skill on bombing attacks over Germany.”

Taking over the company in 1957, Bud began to plan for the company’s growth. In 1960 the Falmouth planning board approved applications for expansion by Wood Lumber Company on land on the north side of Locust Street for additional facilities. It was during this time that the front entrance was moved from Locust Street to the parking lot.

On the evening of February 7, 1968, a fire swept through The Wood Lumber Company. The general alarm fire, Falmouth’s first of that nature since 1953, was battled by 120 Falmouth firefighters and call men, with help from seven other fire departments. The fire spread quickly, fueled by stacks of lumber and a brisk wind. In the end, Bud Miskell estimated damages at \$100,000 to \$150,000.

Wood Lumber’s parent company, Greene and Wood, had also faced a devastating fire in the late 1880s. But, as noted in the 1889 book, “*New Bedford, MA: Its history, industries, institutions and attractions*,” “This mill was burned a few months ago and almost wholly destroyed, but a greater has arisen from its ashes...”

In similar fashion, the Miskells did not let the fire stop Wood Lumber Company. Later that year, a 120 x 80 foot open structure with steel girders supporting an aluminum roof had been completed to take the place of several smaller buildings that had been destroyed in the fire. *The Enterprise re-*

ported that “Translucent doors and roof panels give considerable illumination even when the overhead lights are off...Doors are 18’ wide and 14’ high. ‘Any size trailer can go in for loading or unloading,” said Mr. Miskell.

In the years that followed, another generation of the Miskell family began to get involved in the family business. Bud and his wife, Betty (Sample) Miskell, had three children. Sons David and Dana began working at the lumber yard during their high school and college vacations. Daughter Deborah worked for “exactly one week,” she recalled, before she moved on to the National Marine Fisheries Service. She recalls driving around town with her father as a child, when he would point out houses and tell her what kind of lumber the firm had supplied for their construction.

By 1986 Dana and his wife Eileen were ready to return to Falmouth from Boston, where both had worked since college, Eileen in the business department of New England Deaconess Hospital and Dana in the computer industry.

“My father let us take over right away,” said Dana. “It doesn’t usually work that way. He trusted us.”

Bud continued to work full time, then part time until he was 80. Bud Miskell died in 2009 at the age of 88. He had bicycled 20 miles the day he died.

Since taking over, Dana and Eileen have made several changes in the physical plant, the most noteworthy being the showroom that was built in 2002. But the major change for the new generation was in the technology. “When we took over in 1986, it took weeks and weeks to conduct inventory,” Eileen said. Within the next year, they were well into the electronic age. Bud would look up customer accounts on the computer. “He knew one sequence of key strokes,” said Dana.



1934 photo courtesy of Falmouth Historical Society.

As for the lumber business, the Miskells said at the time of the 100th anniversary, “In the past 25 years there have been way more changes than in the first 75 years of Wood Lumber. There is increased competition in the business with the advent of the chain stores, and the last 10 years especially have brought major product changes.”

Something that has not changed for Wood Lumber is the loyalty and longevity of its staff. “Most of our employees have been here 10 years or more,” Greg Souza, the company’s hardware manager, said. “Lots of Wood Lumber’s success is due to the length of time employees have been here. We don’t have a high turnover rate, and it provides a good atmosphere for both the employees and customers.”

The lumber yard that young Joe Miskell came to Falmouth to manage in 1912 has made its mark on Falmouth. As *The Enterprise* noted at the time of his death, “Through the years that followed 1912, Falmouth depended on Mr. Miskell for the materials which changed the face of the township and built a bigger and bigger town.” The Miskell family has consistently benefited Falmouth both as business owners and benefactors. Joe Miskell began the tradition and, while modernizing the business, the Miskell family of today has continued the tradition of thoughtful and unobtrusive generosity.

About the Author

Deborah Griffin Scanlon is a graduate of Syracuse University’s Newhouse College of Public Communications and is currently a copy editor and writer for the *Falmouth Enterprise*.