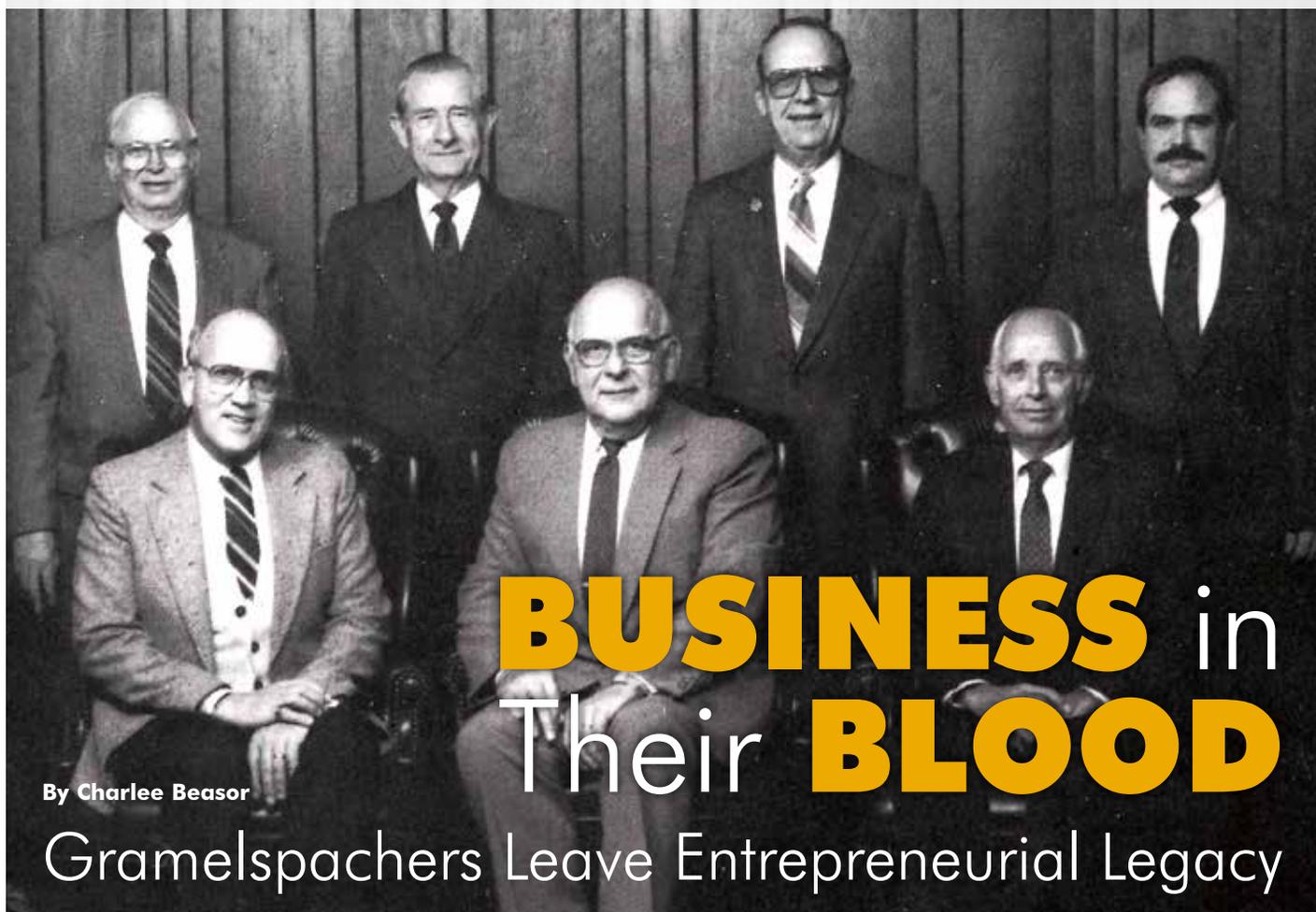


The Gramelspacher family's heritage of woodworking and entrepreneurship goes back to when Joseph Gramelspacher first settled in Jasper in 1837. Pictured is the 1989 board of directors of one of the family businesses, Jasper Wood Products Co., Inc.



By Charlee Beasor

BUSINESS in Their BLOOD

Gramelspachers Leave Entrepreneurial Legacy

One of the reasons German immigrants settled in Jasper in the early 1800s was because the forests there resembled those of Germany. Woodworking and furniture-making were in their blood and Jasper was reminiscent of home.

Joseph Gramelspacher – one of those German immigrants – came to Jasper in 1837, before some of the surrounding towns were even settled.

He and his progeny started businesses, served in the military, were active in politics and their religion, and supported their community financially and through volunteerism. These were some of the early entrepreneurs of Jasper and southern Indiana. They're not the only ones, of course, but certainly among the largest concentrations in one family.

Dubois County Historian Arthur C. Nordhoff Jr. points to the Gramelspacher family as one of the most notable in the area's business history. Through six generations, Gramelspachers have been involved with the woodworking, furniture-making and agricultural industries, as well as numerous political and civic organizations.

There are at least 11 companies in Jasper (some going back to the mid-1800s) that have been managed or directed by one – or several – Gramelspachers. They were entrepreneurs, and even inventors, in some cases.

“My great-great grandfather John (Joseph’s son) was quite the entrepreneur, and he had four patents on different types of furniture. Clarence Gramelspacher was really into that kind of stuff; he had patents on the tubeless tire and mobile homes as we know them today,” offers Phil Gramelspacher. “We’ve been blessed. It’s a fun family history and they always were looking outside the box, trying to make things better and come up with better things.”

Phil previously worked for Jasper Wood Products Company (which was started by his grandfather, Virgil, and Virgil’s three siblings – Claude, Clarence and Elsie), as well as Jasper Desk Co. He runs his own company today, Gramwood, Inc., which focuses on lumber management and invasive species work.

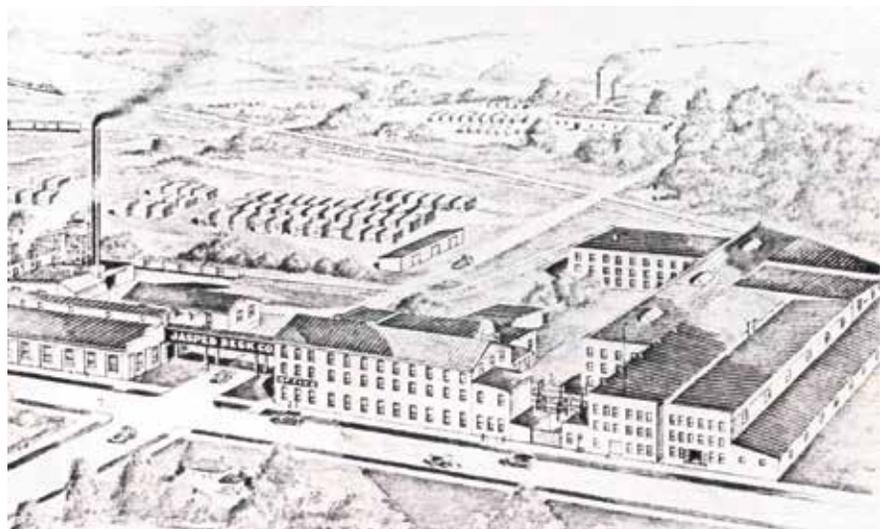
Glenn H. Gramelspacher, great-great grandson of Joseph, also worked at the various woodworking companies, including Jasper Wood Products Company, Inc. and Jasper Novelty Furniture Company. At 91, he has been retired since 1974 and continues to reside in Jasper.

“Dubois County has the lowest unemployment in the state of

EDITOR’S NOTE: Through publications, online accounts and interviews with several family members, BizVoice® has strived to accurately reflect all individuals, companies, dates, titles and relationships. Some conflicting data was presented, with none of it altering the family’s significant business impact.

Jasper Businesses With Gramelspacher Ties

- Jasper Group is the parent company that many of the Jasper-based furniture and wood manufacturing companies were rolled into over the years
- Jasper Desk Company (started in 1876 by the Alles brothers; John Gramelspacher was an early owner and general manager); a number of Gramelspacher family members have worked at the business through the years (part of Jasper Group)
- Jasper Wood Products Co., Inc. was started in 1924 by Virgil, Claude, Clarence and Elsie Gramelspacher, among others; later it was operated by Claude's son, Robert, and others (this company is no longer in business)
- Jasper Seating Inc. opened in 1929 and was the original company of Jasper Group (still part of Jasper Group today)
- Jasper Veneer Mills, Inc. was started in 1890 and purchased by George Gramelspacher in 1900. In 1995, his great-grandson, George W. Gramelspacher, purchased the business
- Jasper Office Furniture Company (JOFCO) was founded by Claude and Clarence Gramelspacher; it was rolled into Jasper Group
- Gramelspacher Farms was operated primarily by Claude and his son Robert
- Eckstein Lumber Co. was operated primarily by Claude and his son Robert
- Jasper Novelty Furniture Company was operated by Claude, and then his son, Glenn H. Gramelspacher, managed the company
- Newton Box & Basket Company
- Jasper Glove Company



Agricultural endeavors included turkey farms and forestry. Jasper Desk Company (sketched here in 1926) started in 1876 and operates today on the original site.

Indiana (3.4% annual unemployment in 2015),” Glenn observes. “We have some really successful companies. . . . Even though we had a lot of the companies that had maybe 75 or 95 employees, now they’ve got these companies with 2,000 employees in there.”

Another member of the younger Gramelspacher generation, Mark (grandson of Claude) has continued on with the entrepreneurial roots of his family, just on a different path.

“I grew up in a family where balance sheets and financial statements and human resource challenges and the trials and tribulations of the responsibility of running an enterprise were discussed at the dinner table,” he recalls.

Mark has created several businesses throughout his career, including EverGreen Global Advisors, LLC. He is currently an Entrepreneur-In-Residence for Elevate Ventures, Inc. (an entrepreneurial

development partner and venture capital fund that serves the state of Indiana). He is also a member of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce board of directors as was his father, Robert, for 50 years.

“Personally, I’ve come to realize more clearly and through involvements with organizations like the state Chamber, the awesome difficulty and awesome respect due to organizations that can survive three, four, five generations. It is really a testament to the will of the constituents of the enterprises, that they can carry on through many trials and tribulations to keep the business thriving through very awesome phenomena,” he asserts.

One of the challenges with a mature industry, such as woodworking, is that over time various business threats (cheap overseas imports or the desire of younger generations to diverge from the family enterprise are two examples) often lead to consolidation.

“That’s a problem with the woodworking industry. It’s just a mature industry; there is not a lot of growth. Imports are really hurting us. It’s a shame, but years and years ago when the ancestors were working the wood industry, it had a lot of potential growth. It just matures,” Phil laments. “Wood is in our blood, and now I’m not sure about the next generation.”

Today, many of the family’s original businesses are either lost to history or have been bought by other companies. Glenn also notes that the chance of success is lessened in each succeeding generation.

“The chance of a first generation in a small corporation has 90% chance of success. The second generation has 50% chance of success and the third generation has 10% chance of success. There’s a lot of three and four generations of businesses that are no longer in existence,” he explains.

RESOURCES: Glenn, Phil and Mark Gramelspacher

Gramelspacher Family Historical Ancestors

A 'Who's Who' of Gramelspachers in Business From the 1800s to 2016



Sophia Gramelspacher

The first Gramelspacher to locate in Jasper, Indiana was **Joseph Gramelspacher**. He was born in Bollschweil, Germany in 1812 and emigrated to the United States in 1837. In 1838, he married Sophia Freidman in the first Catholic marriage ceremony in Jasper; they had eight children.

Joseph and Sophia Gramelspacher built the first two-story brick home in Jasper in 1849, known today as the Gramelspacher-Gutzweiler House. It is on the National Register of Historic Places and was moved in 1980 from its original location to a new location in Jasper for preservation.



The Gramelspacher-Gutzweiler House.

One of Joseph's sons was **John Gramelspacher**, born in 1845 in Jasper.

At age 15, he was conscripted to the Confederate Army through the employment roll as he worked a construction job in Kentucky. After attempting to flee north several times, he and another soldier escaped and deserted the Confederate Army. He swam the James River and joined the Union Army in Virginia, under an alias. A few years following the end of the Civil War, John Gramelspacher was given a proper and honorable discharge from the United States under his real name.



John married Franziska Dupps and they had five children. John owned and operated a wood planning mill (possibly called the Jasper Manufacturing Company, according to the history on the Jasper Veneer Mills web site). He was also the first general manager of the Jasper Desk Company, the oldest wood office furniture manufacturer in the country, which still operates today at its original 1876 location. Additionally, John was successful in the ice cream and soda-water business, and was elected Dubois County auditor in 1886 and 1890.



The next generation of Gramelspachers included **George W. Gramelspacher**, who was the son of John and Franziska Gramelspacher, born in 1867 in Jasper. He married Mary Haller and they had five children.

George purchased and operated Jasper Veneer Mills in 1900. He rebuilt the business after it had burned to the ground in a fire (that was the second fire that had burned the mill down since 1895).

These generations were the origins of the Gramelspacher family in Jasper, and in the wood and wood manufacturing businesses that became prevalent in future generations.

The great-grandchildren of Joseph Gramelspacher, the first Gramelspacher to emigrate to Jasper were:

Elsie (Gramelspacher) Christian, born in 1904. She held shares in Jasper Wood Products Company, Inc.



Clarence Gramelspacher, born in 1896. He was general manager of Jasper Wood Products Company, Inc., among others. Clarence was also an inventor. He held the patent on one of the first electric food mixers, the “tube-less” tire (which he sold to Firestone), as well as a patent for plywood that was used on airplanes in World War II.



Claude Gramelspacher, born in 1894. He held various positions at companies that included: Jasper Wood Products Company, Inc., Jasper Veneer Mills, Gramelspacher Farms, Jasper Office Furniture Company, Eckstein Lumber Company and Jasper Novelty Furniture Co.



Virgil Gramelspacher, born in 1891. He was involved in various positions at companies that included: Jasper Wood Products Company, Inc. (where he was president), Jasper Veneer Mills and Jasper Glove Company.

The great-great grandchildren of Joseph Gramelspacher include (among others):

Eugene J. Gramelspacher was born 1930 to Clarence and Marie Gramelspacher and was involved with Jasper Wood Products. He was a U.S. Air Force veteran of the Korean War.



Robert Gramelspacher, born in 1924 to Claude and Marie Gramelspacher. Robert joined Jasper Veneer Mills in 1948 and was president from 1967 to 1985. He served as president and general manager of Gramelspacher Farms, Inc., and Eckstein Lumber Company. He retired from Jasper Wood Products Company in 2000.

Glenn H. Gramelspacher, age 91, was born in 1925 to Claude and Marie Gramelspacher. He was the Jasper Wood Products Company head of engineering for 16 years and was manager at the Jasper Novelty Furniture Company.

John W. Gramelspacher was born to Virgil and Catherine Gramelspacher and was a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He was president and general manager of Jasper Wood Products Company, Inc. and on the board of directors of Jasper Desk Company.

The great-great-great grandchildren of Joseph Gramelspacher include:



Mark Gramelspacher, son of Robert and Marilyn Gramelspacher (grandson of Claude), presided over the leveraged buyout of Jasper Wood Products Company, Inc. He is managing director of EverGreen Global Advisors, LLC and Entrepreneur-in-Residence at Elevate Ventures, Inc.

Glenn H. Gramelspacher II, son of Glenn H. Gramelspacher (grandson of Claude), recently retired from an executive position at the Jasper Group.

Phil Gramelspacher, son of John W. and Ruby Gramelspacher (grandson of Virgil), he recently retired from Jasper Desk Co. and previously worked for Jasper Wood Products Company, Inc.; owns his own business, Gramwood, Inc.

George W. Gramelspacher, son of John W. and Ruby Gramelspacher (grandson of Virgil); purchased Jasper Veneer Mills in 1995; previously worked for Jasper Wood Products.