

Grand Rapids History & Special Collections

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Finding Aid for the

Birdseye Veneer Company / Birds Eye Veneer Company  
35th Anniversary Photo Album, 1912-01947

Collection # 072

September 2007 version

Abstract

The Birds Eye Veneer Company 35th Anniversary Photo Album, 1912-1947 documents one “publication”, which appears to have been issued by the company as a commemorative. The cover is essentially labeled “Birds Eye Veneer Co., Escanaba, Mich.”, with additional descriptive works RE their products. The publication as found here includes 2 wooden covers using Birdseye veneer, 3 sheets of written introductory material which gives the dates 1912-1947 as well as basic information, and the 43 8x10 b/w photographs with a linen type backing. All of these were spiral bound, which has now been removed and lost. Included in the preliminary pages is reprinted information from the Escanaba Morning Press, May 3, 1913, which discusses the opening of a new plant there, beginning construction in 1912. However, this does not necessarily mean that this was the beginning of the operation of the firm itself, which is contradicted by information found elsewhere. A Web source <http://www.bonifasarts.org/teacherResource/Logging.html> places a “Birds Eye Veneer Company” in the pine forests of Delta County, Michigan during late 19th Century, as well. Insufficient information is currently available to correctly document the history here or to connect the Birds Eye Veneer Company with the Rice Veneer Company. Both of these companies were previously listed in this finding aid as having been established in 1912, and both exist today, the former in Butternut, Wisconsin and the later in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The Feb. 27, 1906 Michigan Tradesman states that Rice & Company changed its name to Rice Veneer & Lumber Co. that year, which would place it’s founding in 1906, rather than 1912. The images found here detail the processing of trees into sheets and rolls of veneer by the company, probably ca. 1947. The images document the mechanical, animal and human power used in the process. In Grand Rapids it is likely that this product was used to support the furniture industry, though various other uses for Birds Eye Veneer are known.

Collection #: 072

Accession #: 00.000

Donor: Library purchase

Span dates: 1943

Original archival processing date, May 1988. Description heavily revised by R. Mayne, Feb. 2005.

Size: 0.2 cu. ft. ; x linear ft.

Box Summary

Box No.	Description of Contents	Box Description
1	untitled	Slim [box change, 1/2002]

## History

Little information is known about the Birdseye or Birds Eye Veneer Company, though a company by that title exists today in Butternut, Wisconsin, tracing its roots to 1912. [http://www.bessegroup.com/public/companies/birds\\_eye\\_veneer\\_company.php](http://www.bessegroup.com/public/companies/birds_eye_veneer_company.php) That company was acquired by the Besse Forest Products Group in 1990. <http://www.bessegroup.com/public/index.php>. It appears that the company was a large manufacturer of pine veneers, and when that stock was depleted, transitioned with other companies in the 1890s to hardwoods. Grand Rapids, as one of the largest furniture manufacturers in the country, would have been primarily interested in the veneer for that use. Other information shows Birdseye spruce veneers being used for Kay Musical Instruments.

This finding aid previously listed the Rice Veneer Company, rather than the Birdseye Company in this history section. Further research may show the early relationship between these two companies. This finding aid previously also had the Rice Veneer Company tracing being organized in 1912 to process trees into veneer at Escanaba, Michigan. It is know that Rice Veneer and Lumber Company purchased the last holdings Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company in Grand Rapids in 1923. The name of the Rice Veneer and Lumbering Company is still listed in directories today (2005) at 20 Leonard St., Grand Rapids.

See also the notes in the Abstract above, RE the conflicting historical information currently available about these two veneer companies.

## Scope and Content

Forty-three 8x10 photos in an album, plus some written materials, removed from the album to create this collection. The photos detail the processing of trees into sheets and rolls of veneer by the company. The images document the mechanical, animal and human power used in the process as well as the firm's physical plant. The images provide views of techniques, machinery, and transport of logs, veneer and waste. The album contains a brief narrative introduction. Since the album covers are clad with examples of the firm's veneer, they are retained.

The photos are labeled "by Ernie", and have identification in "white" lettering on the front of the photos.

Pencilled numbers, in a latter hand, indicate the order of the photographs from the original album.

Contents

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	1	Introduction to the album (3 sheets)
	2	pages 1-11 (11 photos) Includes views of the plant (1 aerial), and felling of trees
	3	pages 12-22 (11 photos) Includes Log Handling
	4	pages 23-33 (11 photos) Includes interior factory views of log cutting and veneers [Order of photos does not seem correct]
	5	pages 34-43 (10 photos) Includes factory & 1 office interior
	6	album covers. (2 items, front & back wood covers)

Item Level photo Descriptions (2/28/2005)

1	2	.1 Aerial View of Escanaba Plant of Birdseye Veneer Co. .2 Cutting Veneer logs. .3 Notching .4 Falling of a Forest Giant .5 Timber!! .6 Sawing to specified lengths .7 Checking annual ring growth .8 Skidding veneer logs .9 Loading logs in the woods .10 Heavy pulling .11 The Log Yard and Equipment for handling
1	3	.12 Log Handling Equipment. Shows crane in the center with a bull dozer left and a tractor right, logs piled behind. .13 The Log Yard and Equipment for Handling. Shows crane on a railroad track running into the horizon, with logs on either side. .14 The Log Yard and Equipment for Handling. Shows box cars being loaded with a mechanical lifting devise. "Great Northern" on boxcar. .15 The Log Yard and Equipment for Handling. Shows men left with a crane, lifting a log. .16 The Log Yard and Equipment for Handling. .17 The Log Yard and Equipment for Handling. Shows cut logs piled in front of a railroad track, with logs strewn in a field in the background. .18 The Log Yard and Equipment for Handling.

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- 1      3      .19 The Log Yard and Equipment for Handling. Shows a man in a shirt, tie and hat, looking at the camera, with his right hand rest on a log.  
                 .20 The Log Yard and Equipment for handling.  
                 .21 Conveyor to drag saw  
                 .22 Logs being drag sawn to lengths required on special orders.
- 1      4      .23 Hoisting Blocks from Boiling Vats.  
                 .24 Log Peeling Deck in Tank Room.  
                 .25 New 110" Coe Lathe in Operation with Flow of Veneers Going to Double Deck Clipper  
                 .26 72" Lathe cutting Maple pin plank stock  
                 .27 Dimension Clippers Sizing Sheet Stock  
                 .28 Latest type drier  
                 .29 Drying Veneer  
                 .30 Merritt Dryad Drying Pin Plank Stock  
                 .31 Double Cut-off saw sizing pink plank  
                 .32 Flitching Mill preparing logs for Slicer and Veneer Saws  
                 .33 Making Quartered Elm Flitches
- 1      5      .34 Curly Birch Flitches  
                 .35 Hauling Slabs from Flitching Mill  
                 .36 Sawdust Tanks Steaming Flitches for Slicer  
                 .37 Slicing Machines in Operation  
                 .38 Sizing Clipper Squaring up Flitches  
                 .39 Veneer Saw in Operation  
                 .40 Bolter Saw Cutting Cores into Grating Lumber and Wood  
                 .41 Crating Veneers for Shipment  
                 .42 Storage Warehouse for Veneers Ready for Shipment  
                 .43 Sales Office Birds Eye, Maple Suite in foreground.