

Charlotte Chair Company/James Brandt Company

Charlotte Chair Company was started by E.J. Elles and Frank Spaulding in 1912. Soon after that and before 1920, E.J. Elles became the sole owner. Their plant was located on North Cochran where the James Brandt Company is now. (?) The plant was enlarged to its current size, about 34,000 sq. feet, in 1921. They had 30 employees. The company's only product then was dining room chairs. They had a special patented locking method for securing the seat and arms to the back. This made for an exceptionally strong chair. It was merchandised with tables and other dining room furniture from other manufacturers.

In 1930 the chair company acquired the old Dolson/duplex Truck Factory on Pearl Street. The wood being used then was oak.

Edward (Bun) Elles joined the company in 1935 and in the years to come became the general manager and sole owner. The employee force topped at 115 people.

Production during the war years of 1941 to 1945 was difficult because production machine parts and repair was impossible to get. The company secured a couple of war contracts which helped. They built all-wooden (runners and all) dog sleds in preparation for an invasion the military never had to make. They also built sub-assemblies for aircraft towed gliders used in the invasion of Europe.

After the war the Chair Company went to occasional chairs and about this time began to secure contracts for commercial chairs for restaurants and office use. The design for the interior of the Chicago Civic Center specified that their chairs be made of English brown oak – expensive, but Bun discovered this too late.

In 1956 the company built reproduction chairs for the restoration of the old State House in Springfield, Ill. This contract called for horse hair cloth upholstery! They found a company in England to provide it. This exposure lead to the manufacture of many styles of antique reproductions for such retailers as Macy's Department Store.

In 1969, the Charlotte Chair Company was sold to a conglomerate, The Illinois Iron and Bolt Company. The Pearl Street plant was sold to Frank Palmer, the owner of Charlotte Wood Products in 1970. The North Cochran plant was acquired by James Brandt in February, 1988. The James Brandt Co. made college dormitory furniture including beds, end tables, night stands, desks and chairs. The company employs 44 people.

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I hope this helps. At least we can surmise the company was still in business in 1988.

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