

THE OHIO BRIDGE CORPORATION

Since its debut in 1952 U.S. Bridge—also known as The Ohio Bridge Corporation—has built thousands of bridges that span rivers, roadways and railroads across America. The manufacturer's award-winning, custom-designed truss, beam and pedestrian bridges can be seen in cities and towns from Massachusetts to Florida to California. The firm's colorful history not only spans more than seven decades, it also bridges three generations of the Rogovin family, which founded the bridge manufacturing company.

Brothers Herman and Theodore "Ted" Rogovin didn't set out to launch a bridge company. The Ohio natives originally started a business making steel culverts, the corrugated steel tubes that go under roadways. In 1936, in the midst of the Depression, and unable to find employment, the pair took out a \$5,000 loan from the Quaker City National Bank to purchase riveting machines to fabricate the steel culverts. With that loan, the brothers founded American Culvert & Fabricating Co., which still exists today. They set up shop in Cambridge in a 500-square-foot office and a 5,000-square-foot manufacturing

Somerset County, New Jersey.



Ted and Herman.

plant. With about five employees, the Rogovin brothers quickly got production underway.

Even though their business was new, Herman and Ted were not newcomers to the notion of entrepreneurship. Their father Sam, who had immigrated from Russia in the 1890s, had instilled it in them at an early age. After Sam arrived in the U.S., he opened a scrapyard in Cambridge, which he ran until he passed away when he was approximately ninety years old. Herman and Ted both helped

out at the scrapyard while growing up, learning what it takes to run a business. As a boy of nine, cutting apart a gasoline tank on a Model T with a torch, Herman's arm was broken when the tank exploded and wasn't properly set because the family was too poor to pay a doctor. It remained crooked through his life. Ted and the family supported Herman during tough economic times in the Depression when he became the first member of the family to ever attend college. Herman graduated in 1936 from Case Institute of Technology to become a registered professional engineer, a license of which he was justifiably proud his entire life.

With their new venture underway, Herman traveled the state handling sales while Ted ran the shop. The business was growing at a steady clip until the U.S. entered World War II at the end of 1941. With no steel available, the brothers reluctantly shuttered the business for the duration of the war. Herman headed off to Cleveland to work for Fisher Body building wing nacelles of B-29 bombers. When the war ended in 1945 Herman moved his family to Zanesville, about twenty-five miles away from Cambridge. He and Ted revived their dormant business and again began supplying steel culverts. The business thrived and within

a few years, it had grown to about ten employees.

The year 1952 proved to be a pivotal one for the American Culvert & Fabricating Co. That's the year the firm built its first bridge. Commissioned by a local county in Ohio, the bridge marked the debut of a shift in focus for the manufacturing concern. Steel culverts couldn't span rivers and Herman and Ted both saw greater potential in bridge-building. Because of this, they decided to concentrate their efforts in this direction and created a new business entity that same year to reflect the new emphasis. They called the new venture The Ohio Bridge Corporation and began manufacturing the first all-welded steel truss bridges in the country.

The brothers began selling, manufacturing, and erecting bridges throughout the state of Ohio. The firm's target list of customers included local governments, townships, counties, and small towns. The company designed and manufactured the bridges in its own plant, which had moved next door and over the years expanded several times to meet the growing needs of the company. Once they were built, the bridges were loaded onto trucks in sections and hauled to their final destinations. Ohio Bridge also handled the construction efforts, sending three or four multi-talented crew members to erect the bridges on-site.

Ohio Bridge quickly earned a reputation for providing high quality custom bridges. To this day, each bridge is custom built. That's because each bridge project has so many variables, including different lengths, different widths and different highway loadings. Highway loadings are determined by what's traveling on the bridge—pedestrians, cars, gravel trucks, etc.

In 1987 the firm branched out once again. This time, however, the expansion was of a geographic nature. The company sold its first bridge outside of Ohio in upstate New York. Following that sale, Herman and Ted made the decision to target customers outside of Ohio. The pair felt that their company name, Ohio Bridge, might be a hindrance for a national operation so they registered a new trademark: U.S. Bridge.



Under that brand name, the firm began actively selling throughout the nation, now to counties, state governments, private developers and federal agencies.

By that time the second generation of Rogovins had begun contributing to the family firm. Herman's son Arthur "Art" Rogovin started working full-time for the company in 1972. Herman's other son Richard "Dick" Rogovin, a lawyer, returned to Ohio from Pennsylvania and went into private practice, being retained by the company as the firm's attorney. Art and Dick also joined their father and Uncle Ted as the company's

Stark County, Ohio.

board of directors and met every Saturday at the family farm near Zanesville to discuss business strategy.

Even though a second generation had become involved with the family firm, the founders Herman and Ted were reluctant to relinquish control. Likewise, they were hesitant to make changes or to modernize. For example, Art and Dick had to work hard to convince them that computers, fax machines and galvanized finishes were essential for future growth; that it was critical to obtain the quality certification of the American Institute of Steel Construction, and that bridges

Richland County, Arizona.



could be sold on the Internet. Sometimes the discussions became heated, but the four of them always operated by discussion and consensus, no matter how long it took.

Art and Dick were patient, recognizing that although their father and uncle were nearing the age of retirement, they would never stop working. The word “retirement” simply doesn’t seem to exist in the Rogovin family vocabulary. After all, Sam had labored in his scrapyard until his death at about age 90. Both Herman and Ted inherited that work ethic and continued working in the family business until they passed away in their 90s—Ted in 1998 and Herman in 2004. Richard, now 68, joined a new law firm, Frost Brown Todd, three years ago where he remains a hard-working partner with no plans to ever retire.

Despite their advanced ages, Herman and Ted remained active in the day-to-day operations and in the strategic planning at U.S. Bridge. In fact, Herman remained so intellectually sharp that he was still solving complex engineering problems in his late 80s. For instance, one bridge in West Virginia was posing a particular problem that had stumped the engineering staff: how to remove and reinstall the trusses while maintaining the entire floor system without bracing. To no one’s surprise, it was Herman who came up with the solution.

Erie, Pennsylvania.



Prior to his death, Herman shared an office for about five years with Dick’s son Dan Rogovin, the third generation to join the family business. Dan came on board in 1999 and gained tremendous insight into running the business while sharing an office with his grandfather. Following the deaths of Herman and Ted, Art assumed the role of president and Dan stepped into the position of vice president. The firm’s board of directors now includes Art, Dick, Dan and Ted’s daughter, Carole Schwartz.

The new leadership has made significant changes at the family business. For instance, the firm has added new styles of bridges to its portfolio. Today, U.S. Bridge offers a wide variety of bridges, including truss bridges, beam bridges and pedestrian bridges—all manufactured from steel and in several different mod-

Cochise County, Arizona.

els as can be seen on the company’s website, www.usbridge.com.

The truss bridges provide an economical design solution that accommodates roadway widths from one to three lanes, local utilities, sidewalks and skewed alignments. Beam bridges are available in short-span models and long-span models. Short-span beam bridges, up to sixty feet in length, allow for easy installation and don’t require any specialized equipment. For more complex long-span beam bridges, U.S. Bridge possesses the necessary equipment, materials and expertise to design, manufacture, and even install them.

Each type of bridge at U.S. Bridge is available with a number of treatment options, including galvanized, self-weathering and painted. The galvanizing process ensures an attractive, maintenance-free surface. In fact, U.S. Bridge is so confident in the galvanizing process, it became the first bridge manufacturer to negotiate and offer a thirty-five year rust-free warranty from its exclusive galvanizer, V&S Columbus Galvanizing. U.S. Bridge built the first all-galvanized steel truss bridge in the county of Delaware, Ohio and won an award from the American Galvaniz-



ers Association. Careful measurements of remaining zinc through the years, supports the company's belief that galvanized coatings can survive for more than ninety years in most rural locations.

The self-weathering steel option develops an attractive protective coating that eliminates the need for painting, also making it a maintenance-free option. Examples of self-weathering bridge projects include a 130-foot-long pedestrian bridge in Lorain County, Ohio and a 106-foot-long steel truss bridge in Essex County, New York. The final treatment option, painting, is available in a variety of coatings and a wide range of colors to fit with the surrounding environment. In some cases, customers ask for painting over galvanizing which, while more expensive, ensures the longer life of the painted surface.

In addition to manufacturing new bridges, the family business has also made a name for itself in bridge rehabilitation and historic bridge restoration. For historic restoration projects, all attempts are made to save the original bridge components, but when that isn't possible, U.S. Bridge creates new components that meet current structural codes. Preservation and rehabilitation projects include a Lawrence County riveted truss bridge, the Oxford Road Bowstring Arch Truss in Hamilton County (which received a County Engineers Association of Ohio Historic Preservation Award) and an historic overhead truss in Newark, Ohio which was disassembled, restored, galvanized and re-erected.

Today all of the bridges and bridge components are produced at the firm's expanded office and manufacturing plant. The office currently measures about 10,000 square feet and the plant has grown to approximately 155,000 square feet. The plant houses some sophisticated equipment, but the firm still relies heavily on highly skilled manpower, and its bridges are still considered to be custom "hand-built" products.

Approximately 150 people are currently employed at U.S. Bridge, which still uses the Ohio Bridge name within Ohio. Many of them are longtime workers with more than twenty or twenty-five years with the company. In order to



better utilize those human assets, the leaders at U.S. Bridge recently hired a consultant to review and revamp their plant and business practices. That resulted in leadership delegating more authority to department heads than ever before while increasing plant capacity by more than 50 percent.

In part, it's thanks to the firm's dedicated workers that it has survived for so many decades in an industry that has been changing dramatically. In the late 1800s there were hundreds of bridge manufacturers. Since that time, many of them have gone out of business or have been snapped up by larger firms. To remain a major player in the bridge-making industry, U.S. Bridge has concentrated on expansion and growth.

One of the key elements that has helped fuel growth at U.S. Bridge is Internet marketing. The firm was the first bridge manufacturer in the country to advertise on the Internet and to create a website for marketing purposes. This move proved to be tremendously successful, increasing sales and inquiries both within Ohio and from around the nation. This forward-thinking advertising and marketing strategy helped cement the company's position as the leading manufacturer of rural steel highway bridges with span lengths from 50 to 200 feet.

With many more inquiries coming in

Burlington-Colchester, Vermont.

and bids going out, U.S. Bridge has continued its expansion efforts by strengthening its reach across the country. The firm has begun opening satellite offices to accommodate increasing demand. It currently has offices in several locations—including New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Tennessee—so it can better meet the needs of customers outside Ohio. It is also setting its sights beyond the U.S. The firm has created an international division and new subsidiaries in Europe and South America. This new division is poised to take off and should help keep U.S. Bridge in a growth mode for decades to come.

In the words of Dan Rogovin, "I'm very proud to be part of the company that my grandfather and great-uncle founded, that is still in the family and is rapidly growing across the country and internationally. Our success is due to their dedication and the example they set for the rest of us. They rose from poverty through their own efforts and established our business culture, which is to deal honestly and fairly with our employees and customers, to work hard and to always try to do a better job. We are living proof of the American dream."