

A SHORT HISTORY OF HUGHES BROTHERS, INC. 1921-2011

In 1893 John Morse Hughes, father of the Hughes Brothers of Seward, came to Seward to build a mansion for a local banker. Mr. Hughes had a reputation for strict adherence to minute detail where he was employed as an architectural millwork specialist for a Lincoln firm. While building the home for the banker, John also built four other Seward homes, one of which was intended for his own family.

By the time of his death in 1918, John M. Hughes had not only established a reputation as a master builder, but had taught his sons the basics of industrial production due to the fact that his business was for the complete home, including all millwork and architectural finery required by the turn of the century designs.

The Hughes Brothers: John R. Hughes, H. Burr Hughes, Ben H. Hughes and Ted R. Hughes inherited Seward Planing Mills in 1918 following their father's death. The young men attempted to carry on the home building business, but the deep recession that followed World War I restricted building in Seward to such an extent that it placed a serious problem on the survival of this business. The opportunity that started Hughes Brothers in the crossarm business came in 1921 in the form of a severe ice and sleet storm. Electric power restoration after the 1921 ice storm required a large quantity of crossarm replacements and at the urging of Burdette Boyes, a director for the Blue River Power Company, Hughes Brothers accepted the challenge of making the necessary production from their windmill timber inventory. At the time of this first endeavor, the City of Seward was dependent on both the Blue River Power Company and the City's small coal fired steam generating plant. This same Blue River Power Company later was merged into the Iowa-Nebraska Light & Power Company, and subsequently into Consumers Public Power District and finally into Nebraska Public Power District.

The successful completion of the order for the first crossarms furnished by Hughes Brothers encouraged the founding of the company dedicated to production of the very finest crossarms available anywhere, at competitive prices, and delivered to meet the customer's requirements. This firm belief in top quality production has never been compromised in favor of a more profitable inferior product. For the first few years this business was limited to what is now considered distribution material, starting with only wood items, then moving on into the steel business on a very limited scale in 1927. Hughes Brothers introduced the underarm crossarm brace at about this same time, and then followed very closely with the "X" Brace for "H" Frames in about 1929.



Limited production and assets during the next few years slowed the growth considerably until about 1934 when Hughes Brothers was in the position to participate in the first 115 kV Transmission line across the eastern two-thirds of Nebraska. Engineering studies began in 1934, for the line running from North Platte to Columbus, Nebraska – a distance of 225 miles. Hughes Brothers was involved in this project from the start, developing and testing suitable structures. This project was perhaps the earliest fully engineered and designed wood transmission project in the country. The basic concepts and principles used in this original transmission line served as the model for the Hughes type factory assembled crossarms and complete structure units. It was also during the design of this line that double-arming bolts were introduced to the industry with cast washer nuts, permitting the change over of damaged or broken side arms without costly delay and excessive outage required to replace the whole structure.

In the early years the founding brothers developed a program of careful engineering, testing and quality control. Hughes Brothers began to develop a reputation for superior quality. The company saw rapid growth during the World War II years. A variety of products such as ammunition boxes, land mine casings, and ship davits for the war effort were manufactured along with transmission and distribution materials for the electric utility industry.



In recent years the company has added a variety of new products to our product mix. In 1984, Hughes Brothers built a fiberglass plant adjacent to the wood and steel manufacturing facilities. This new product line further enhances Hughes Brothers ability to meet the needs of the customer and is again proof of the company's commitment to the electric utility industry. A process of careful engineering and testing has placed Hughes Brothers in a position of leadership in the industry. As customer needs evolve and change, Hughes Brothers continues to develop products to meet those needs.

Although Hughes Brothers is justifiably proud of the engineering accomplishments contributed by this company to the industry, the real motivating force toward keeping the business successful is still the quality and service that our customers have grown to recognize and expect. Our 290 dedicated employees working in a facility occupying over 300,000 square feet of manufacturing space work hard to maintain the Hughes Brothers reputation for quality established by the Brothers in 1921.

Hughes Brothers, Inc. continues to be a family-owned and operated business. One hundred percent of the capital stock is presently owned by the third generation of the original Hughes Brothers. As a leader in manufacturing materials for the electric utility industry for 90 years, Hughes Brothers, Inc. has been a vital source of employment and economic strength for the Seward Community. Building upon the strengths of the past, the company looks forward to many years of continued economic success and growth for generations to come.