

Churning Out Custom Moldings for 125 Years

at Coyle Lumber & Millwork

by Farron D. Brougner

FOR MANY OF TODAY'S HOMEOWNERS, lumber for projects often comes from the same place that faucets, gas grills and peat moss can be purchased. But don't walk into one of these mega-lumberyards with a piece of molding from an 18th-century farmhouse and hope to have about 80 feet duplicated. For a job like that, head to Coyle Lumber and Millwork in Carlisle, Cumberland County, where the workers enjoy making things that their customers can't buy or find anywhere else.

Mill Began with Water Power

Coyle Lumber began in 1879 as a water-powered mill on the banks of the Yellow Breeches Creek. Owned and operated by four generations of Coyle lumbermen for more than 100 years, the business first traded under the family name during the reign of William Graham Coyle, the second generation of Coyles to operate the mill.

In 1905, William Coyle bought a planing mill, house and property containing one acre and 15 perches (a unit

of measurement similar to a rod) in a sheriff's sale for \$400, or about \$7,600 in today's dollars. To raise capital for the lumberyard, during the Great Depression, William's son



William Johnson Coyle, shown around 1945, was the fourth and final generation of Coyles to own the Coyle Lumber Co. He joined the business after World War II and worked in the mill every day until his death in 1992.

Photograph courtesy of Johnson G. Coyle, MD



Coyle Lumber Co. in the 1890s, shortly after the mill opened along the Yellow Breeches Creek outside of Carlisle. This photo shows the mill where moldings were planed on a water-powered machine.

Photograph courtesy of Johnson G. Coyle, MD

RoundUp

people, places & events

“What would you sell me to replace it?” Heiser asked. The salesman had to concede that no new machinery could really replace the antique because, after all, “no one makes sashes the way you do.”

Mervyn had to take on two partners, but the Coyle family still retained control of the business.

During World War II, Coyle won defense contracts to make practice artillery shells from western red cedar. From the profits, Coyle was able to expand, and in 1939 the mill's operation became powered by

electric motor rather than water.

The last family owner, William Johnson Coyle, joined the business after serving in World War II, and he worked in the mill every day until his sudden death in 1992. When William's son, Johnson, decided to become an emergency medicine physician

rather than follow his father into the business, Coyle Lumber and Millwork was sold to Ken Heiser.

Specializing in Moldings

Custom moldings were and still are a mainstay at Coyle. In the late 1800s, carpenters used hand planes to make moldings, but that

was beginning to change just about the time the first-generation owner harnessed the Yellow Breeches to run his machinery. It soon became more convenient and cost-effective to run all the molding at once through a machine, an operation that continues at Coyle to this day.

All but a small portion of Coyle's business today is custom millwork, with 60 percent of that residential and 40 percent commercial, says Tim McCurdy, manager of Coyle's Carlisle shop. While window sash and a variety of other millwork are made in the Carlisle shop across Old York Road from the original location, moldings are produced near Mt. Holly Springs at the more spacious Yellow Breeches Box Company workshop, which is also owned by Heiser.

At the Mt. Holly Springs shop, a worker sets up a complex machine with five separate cutter heads that can be adjusted in increments of one-thousandths of an inch. An order for 80 linear feet of molding can zip through the machine in two and a half minutes.

In Carlisle, the massive post-and-beam structure that originally housed Coyle Lumber is long gone, but some of the machines from that mill, now converted to electric power, continue to turn out window sash and doorframes in the shop across the street from the original mill. A sash sticker built by the Hermance Machine Company of Williamsport in about 1900 shapes pieces that guide a



This hundred-year-old sash sticker machine was first powered by water and then converted to electricity in the 1930s. Coyle Lumber and Millwork continues to use this machine today to make custom window sashes.

Photograph by Farron D. Brougher

double-hung window on its tracks.

Owner Ken Heiser says that when he bought the business a machine salesman toured the shop to evaluate the machinery for insurance and financing. When he came to the sash sticker, he told Heiser, "You might get \$100 at auction for this."

"What would you sell me to replace it?" Heiser asked. The salesman mentioned some state-of-the-art mass production machines, but then had to concede that they couldn't really replace the antique because, after all, "no one makes sashes the way you do."

As a result of milling lumber in Cumberland County for 125 years, a number of familiar buildings around Carlisle were built or renovated with Coyle lumber. The builders of the Embers Restaurant, now called The Clarion, and the Church of God Home on North Hanover Street, specified Coyle materials. The 2001 renovation of Dickinson College's 1885 Tome Scientific Building, now the Stem Center for Global Education, used 11 doors built by Coyle. A massive red front door on a church on High Street is another visible Coyle product. The company's website is www.coylelumber.com ▼

Farron D. Brouger is a writer living in Anaheim, Calif. He grew up in northern York County, where his parents operate Repliques, a reproduction antique woodworking business for which Coyle has supplied lumber.

Washington County

Light Down Below—

A Coal Miner's Son Tells His Story

by Geno Lawrenzi

Photographs courtesy of Arthur Ciervo

IN THE SUMMER OF 2002, while the nation was celebrating the rescue of nine western Pennsylvania coal miners who had been trapped in a flooded mine for three days, Arthur Ciervo was uttering a silent prayer of thanks that the accident hadn't occurred 35 years ago.

"If it had," says Ciervo, "all those men would have probably died."

Ciervo should know. The 74-year-old West Chester man grew up in the small coal mining town of Richeyville, Washington County, southwest of Pittsburgh. His father, Carmine "Tony" Ciervo, was an Italian immigrant who held one job in his life—a pick-and-shovel man who mined coal for the Vesta No. 4 mine.

In 1996, Ciervo published a 228-page book, *Always in a Hole*, now in its third printing, which graphically depicted life in a Pennsylvania coal town during the years of the Great Depression and World War II. A former reporter and public relations consultant, he interviewed 60 miners and their families to tell the story.

"Today, everybody

talks about safety, but it wasn't always that way," says Ciervo. "Thirty-five years ago, the technology that saved the Quecreek miners wouldn't have been there and those men would be dead. The owners and the bosses just didn't care back then."

He credits John L. Lewis, president of the United Mine Workers of America from 1920 to 1960, and the United Mine Workers Union with forcing the mine owners to provide the technology and safety standards that would eventually save the lives of the Quecreek miners in 2002.

A Dirty, Dangerous Living

On December 17, 1907, one of the nation's worst mining accidents occurred at the Jacobs Creek Mine along the Youghiogheny River. At 11:45 a.m., flames from the miners' carbide lamps caused a tremendous methane gas explosion that killed all 284 miners working in the mine at the time.

A pumper on his way out of the mine was blown outside by the force of the blast and died instantly. A week later, men searching for the victims cleared their way into a small room, where their lamps lit up the motionless bodies of 10 dead men by the sidewalls.

"The men were seated like they had been talking and enjoying each other's com-



The Vesta No. 4 mine after a snowfall in 1940. Arthur Ciervo's father held only one job during his life—working as a pick-and-shovel man for the Washington County mine.