A MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP

Mississippi’s Crane Brothers, Jimmie and Johnnie, Complement Each Other Perfectly.

By William T. Miles

During the depths of the Great Depression, the government backed WPA program created jobs for out-of-work people and many of these jobs centered around the construction of public facilities such as school buildings, courthouses and service offices.

One of the people who worked on the WPA projects in Northeast Mississippi was F.L. Crane. Not only did he learn a trade and cultivate his sense of personal satisfaction in doing a good job, he developed a reputation in the plastering trade that made him a sought-after craftsman when building accelerated after World War II.

It was on this background that today’s company, F.L. Crane & Sons, Inc., is built. The Fulton, Miss. based operation is a dominant force in the interior and exterior finishing business in the Mid-South with a selected market area in Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas, where the firm’s second office was opened in 1984.

Headed by Jimmie U. Crane as president and Johnny Crane as executive vice president (F.L. Crane died in 1974), F.L. Crane & Sons, Inc. has more than 175 specialists and staff and maintains a warehouse inventory sufficient to help meet the most stringent deadlines.

The company literally was a one-man operation when F.L. Crane started. He contracted labor for plastering as it was used in construction in the 40s and 50s. His reputation spread and Fulton became known for construction craftsmen because of the influence of F.L. Crane, J.E. Staub
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(Jesco, Inc., now a division of Amca International) as a general contractor, and CM. Young, for concrete finishing.

Today Itawamba County of which Fulton is the county-seat still has one of the largest concentrations of skilled craftsmen in the construction trades of any area in the South.

“As building picked up and techniques in construction changed, we provided contract labor and materials,” explains Jimmie Crane. “I started working on the job in the summer between school as soon as I was big enough to be allowed on the site.”

Other key members of the F.L. Crane operation were relatives and friends who had grown up working on small farms and who supplemented their income on public jobs.

The Second Generation . . .

In the mid-1950s Jimmie bid adieu to a college education to pursue other interests but soon found himself back in construction with a firm located in Jackson, Miss. This experience convinced Jimmie that his father’s reputation for good work coupled with his ambition to serve all of the plastering needs in the market (at that time Northeast Mississippi) that F.L. Crane & Sons, Inc. could succeed.

“I admit that some of our competitors in those years didn’t succeed,” Jimmie says.

F.L. stayed in the field working along with his crew. Jimmie hunted work. As Jimmie found more work the market grew. Brother Johnny joined the company evolving from the summer work force as had Jimmie. Johnny took on responsibilities for getting the work produced as he still does. Jimmie has remained in charge of obtaining the work.

“Johnny and I make a unique management partnership by complementing one another’s capabilities,” adds Jimmie.

Recently the company promoted
The office staff of F.L. Crane & Sons, Inc. includes (standing, left to right) Evangala Roberts, Rhonda Mayhall, Travis Holiman, Tammy Palmer and Donna Spigner. Seated is Helen Logan.

Jimmie and Hilda Crane have made a unique business team since she started keeping company records in the basement of the F.L. Crane home where she and Jimmie lived during the early growth days of the company.

President Jimmie Crane (left) looks over blueprints with estimators James Bowen and Joey Hargett and Chip Crane (seated).
When Jimmie U. Crane assumes the presidency of the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries-International on July 1, 1986, he will bring a long and successful record of professional and public involvement with him.

Jimmie has served on numerous committees for AWCI including positions on the executive committee for four years, AWCI board of directors for three years, the Technical Committee and the Continuing Study Council. He has served as chairman of the Southeast Region.

He has held every elected office in the Mississippi Chapter of the Associated Building Contractors of which he is a charter member. He is a member and has served on many committees of the American Sub-Contractors’ Association.

He has been elected to five four-year term on the city council of Fulton, Miss., his hometown. He has served two terms of president of the volunteer development group, the Itawamba County Development Council, and has been active in service, community and church activities. He was a founder and chairman of the board of Tombigbee Bank & Trust Company and serves as a member of the board of directors of Merchants & Farmers Bank headquartered in Columbus, Miss.

By appointment of two governors of Mississippi, Mr. Crane served five years as chairman of the Mississippi Medicaid Commission.

He was also appointed by two governors as a member of the Executive Committee of the Mississippi Agricultural and Industrialization Board.

He is married to the former Hilda Lindsey, who has been a vital part of the F.L. Crane operation, and they have two children, Donnie of Austin, Texas and Mrs. Karen Schmidt of Jackson, Miss.

In regard to objectives he hopes to accomplish as AWCI president, Jimmie says simply: “I want to keep on course with plans and projects already in place by previous officers and boards. We have some excellent educational programs and member participation efforts. I want to continue to emphasize membership. I support seminars for supervisory personnel on people management.

“I want to continue the effective legislative thrust we have with the qualified personnel we have on staff. I hope we can continue to develop technical education programs for the members and most of all, I need the continued support of all of the members.”

Ruford Holley, a cousin and longtime company employee, to first vice president and Robert Burleson, manager of the Austin, Texas office, to second vice president.

At first the company operated from the basement in the F.L. Crane home where Jimmie and Hilda lived. Hilda did the bookkeeping while holding a job in a local factory. In the mid-1960s the company’s operations moved into its present headquarters which has ample warehouse facilities to house supplies.

**Customer Satisfaction . . .**

“We found that in order to meet the deadlines our clients wanted we need-

Jobs in all sizes and descriptions attract F.L. Crane & Sons, Inc. An older building added its unique niche to the Booneville, Miss. downtown through the touch of Crane specialists in exterior finishing.

ed a ready supply of materials,” Jimmie said. “Located where we are made shipping inconvenient so we convinced manufacturers to sell direct to us and we warehoused the materials.”

“Our customers have counted on us for years for our expertise,” he added. “We enjoy great customer loyalty.”

Loyalty is something the second generation inherited from the company’s founder. Many of the company
personnel are longtime employees and have never had another job.

“Just like we did in the 1950s and 60s when construction changed, we’re continuing to adjust as new materials are used and drywall finishing takes on dimensions,” Jimmie stated.

“I don’t foresee another boom as we enjoyed in the trade in the 1970s but I don’t see a bust either,” he added. “I think the next two years will be much of the same as the past two years.”

Third generations are already involved in the business. Jimmie’s son, Donnie, is in the Austin, Texas office and Johnny’s son, Chip, is part of the Fulton team.

The IBM Corporation building in Austin, Texas was a 100,000 square foot project and the customer had to be in it in within eight weeks. F.L. Crane and Sons, Inc. airlifted skilled craftsmen and supplies from its headquarters to supplement local labor and materials. The mission was accomplished in record time. The general contractor, developer and client were pleased. For Crane it was just part of the standard operation on which four decades of service have been built.