

# Knapheide History

The Knapheide Manufacturing Company was started in 1848 by H. Heinrich Knapheide. The adventurous Knapheide left his native Lengerich, Germany in 1845 and sailed to New Orleans where he worked as a wagon maker for two years before moving up the Mississippi River to St. Louis where he was married. The following year, he moved on to Quincy and started the Henry Knapheide Wagon Company.

From the beginning, Knapheide's principal line of wagons was for farmers. Early products also served the lumber, coal and general hauling industries. The little wagon company grew continually during the late 1800's and Heinrich's son, Henry E. Knapheide assumed control of the company upon his father's death in 1890.

Henry E. Knapheide built a three story wagon factory in 1892 and the company began building cabs and bodies for Model T trucks when internal combustion vehicles started to replace horse-drawn wagons. The wagon business declined steadily during the 1920's and the once prosperous company was devastated by the '29 crash and the Great Depression that followed. Revenues plummeted and the company survived on only \$14,083.65 total sales in 1932.

Harold W. Knapheide, the third generation now in control, survived by operating a repair shop during the Great Depression when it seemed that Knapheide would never sell another truck body. Harold even sold such items as washing machines to keep his company afloat.

H.W. (Bud) Knapheide, Jr. joined his father for \$20/week in 1938. A 1936 graduate of Grinnell College, young Knapheide had worked two years with International Harvester Company selling trucks in Davenport, Iowa. Bud began to plan changes, which included sales over a much larger territory and using mass production to meet the demand that had been building throughout the Great Depression. After years of a tough economy, the company had no money and was lucky to have survived, but Bud Knapheide has a creative mind and boundless energy. A commerce and economics major in college, he learned the necessary engineering on his own from books he purchased on strength of materials, structural steel design and metal fabrication. When the economy boomed following the Second World War, Knapheide was ready and pioneered the manufacture of all steel truck bodies. During the 50's, 60's and into the 70's, Knapheide expanded its manufacturing facilities, diversified the product line and grew rapidly into national and international markets.

In 1973, Knapheide suffered a setback when the West Quincy, Missouri assembly plant (80% of total manufacturing space) was inundated by 14 feet of the flooding Mississippi River. Although not able to return to their facility for over three months, Knapheide rented numerous small buildings in Quincy and quickly got employees back to work and supplied customers.

The company had no flood insurance and sustained flood losses in excess of over one million dollars, but with plenty of ingenuity and determination made a small profit for the flood year of 1973.

Knapheide grew rapidly during the farm boom of the 70's – additional growth came from the energy fields as heavy speculation accelerated oil, natural gas and coal exploration and production.

This tremendous expansion hit the wall in '80 – '81 as 20% interest rates, declining farm income, and bankruptcies in the energy sector crunched Knapheide's key markets. Total sales dropped in half in 18 months and an unprecedented boom turned to red ink.

With the fifth generation, H.W. (Knap) Knapheide, III now leading the Company, Knapheide was forced to downsize drastically and pursue new markets. Agriculture provided over half of Knapheide revenue in 1980, but it would never again approach the volume of the 70's. Moving quickly, Knapheide targeted utilities, telecommunication companies and railroads. Geographically, they moved into rapidly growing sun-belt markets and export markets in the Middle East.

By the mid 80's, Knapheide was growing quickly again and became the largest U.S. producer of service and utility truck bodies.

Adversity struck again in July of 1993 when the raging Mississippi River rushed through a damaged levee (the person responsible for sabotaging the levee received a life sentence for causing a disaster) and filled the West Quincy, Missouri plant with 19 feet of water.

Although emotionally and physically exhausted after a month of defending 17 miles of levee in 90 degree July heat, Knapheide and its dedicated people fought back. They rented an abandoned plant on Quincy's north side and within two weeks Knapheide started production and within six months exceeded pre-flood output. A decision was made to build a new facility and even though the temporary assembly space was crowded and by all measures inadequate, Knapheide met customer demand from 1994 - 1996 and grew total revenue by over 40%.

Construction was begun on the new Westphalia facility in the fall of 1995 and the 400,000 square foot facility was completed by the end of 1996. The first assembly lines moved into the new facility in January, 1997, and the move was completed by October, 1997.

We're proud of our home at 1848 Westphalia Strasse. The building is designed to help carry us well into the 21st Century, even as its address reminds us of our roots in the 19th Century. Our sixth generation, H.W. (Bo) Knapheide, IV is now on board as we continue to innovate and grow.