

CABINET WORKS IS 50 YEARS OLD

Two of Sons Associated
with Riecke in Firm

From a meager beginning with less than \$1000 investment and a small shop into one of the best equipped and largest specialized cabinet shops in the South is the story of Riecke Cabinet Works, Inc. which is celebrating its 50th anniversary at 4322 Tulane.

The present plant, a two-story building complete with workshops and warehouses, is the fourth in which the firm has been located since it was started by Henry S. Riecke Sr., in a small building at Magazine and Girod in 1904.

Associated with Riecke in the business are two of his five sons while a third is vice-president and general manager of the Tulane Hardwood Lumber Co., which operates separately and of which Riecke is the principal stockholder with the rest of the stock divided among members of his family.

Henry S. Jr. and Earl have been partners in the cabinet works for more than 25 years, getting an early start in the business by learning intricate details of fine cabinet craftsmanship in their father's shop back in their early teens.

"Do It Right" Watchword
Henry Jr., handles the sales end while Earl is in charge of production. Riecke Sr., partially retired from the business about 10 years ago, but still spends a few hours a day in the plant supervising and giving advice and cautioning employees "to do it right."

"If it isn't worth doing right, it isn't worth doing at all," the 73-year-old Riecke said.
The plant specializes in fine cabinet work with fine domestic and imported woods of all kinds. It operates as both a wholesale and retail plant, but it does not cater to conventional items such as kitchen cabinets, window sashes, doorways and the like.

Riecke said a number of stock designs are carried on hand, but most of the work is done to individual and architects specifications on a specialized basis with most of the designs drafted in the plant in accordance with the customer's desires.

At present, which is a slack season, the plants have about 53 employees, all highly skilled mechanics and many of whom have been with the firm for 30 to 40 years. At the peak season of production the plant employs about 129 persons.

Fixtures for 1200 Churches
Primarily, the company specializes in office, bank, store and church fixtures.

Church fixtures were added to the company's line about 40 years ago and since that time the firm has supplied fixtures to order for about 1200 churches all over the country and even in Hong Kong and Shanghai.

The first church equipped in New Orleans was the Grace Evangelical Lutheran church on Canal at 7th. The church later moved to 5800 Canal Blvd., and the pews and other fixtures were in such good shape that they were continued in use.

One of the prize accomplishments of the company is the archbishop's throne in St. Louis Cathedral which the firm designed and constructed about 10 years ago. The throne is of mahogany and is hand carved.

Riecke Sr., is a native New Orleansian. He attended the old McDonogh grade school at S. Rampart and Girod, quitting while in the fourth grade.

Went to Work at 14
After doing many odd jobs, he went to work in a woodworking plant at 14, and 18, he went to work for a cabinet maker and decided he wanted that as a career.

Working in the daytime and attending night school, Riecke's reputation for proficiency in his work spread. At 21 he went to Hattiesburg to manage a plant there at the salary of \$5 a week, leaving his wife in New Orleans.

A year and a half later, he had saved \$1000. He came back to New Orleans and set up his own small shop at Magazine and Girod.

"I didn't solicit any orders," Riecke said. "I just did my work right and people kept coming in with orders."

The shop outgrew itself and Riecke moved to larger quarters at Tchoupitoulas and Girod. After a few years, this plant proved too

Founder Reviews Plans with Sons, Office Manager



—Photo by The Times-Picayune.
HENRY S. RIECKE SR. (second from right), founder of the Riecke Cabinet Works, Inc., reviews plans for the firm with two of his sons and their office manager. From left are sons Earl and Henry S. Jr., Riecke, and office manager O. F. Serpas, who has been with the company 31 years.

small and he moved to a building at Assumption and Girod, staying there until 1924 when he signed and built the present main building of the plant. Since that time it has been expanded to include warehouses, storage space and modern treatment rooms.

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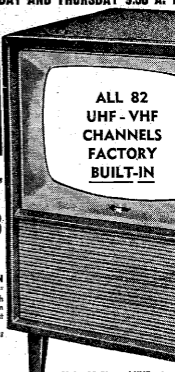
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