

Turkstra Lumber

Founding and Early Days

Jack Turkstra once spoke of his brother Peter to his nephew Carl, “Your father is a snake. If he can’t get his way in one direction, he goes another way.” Peter Sr. was no quitter. He was a risk taker, and he worked very hard. He was a very good judge of character and was quite a popular man. He had an uncanny ability to influence other people.

In the late 1930s, Peter Sr. left the family business, Turkstra Eggs, which his father and brother Harold had started, to reinvent himself as a carpenter. He travelled to Timmins, Ontario and got a job with a building contractor collecting money, which he excelled in because of his well-developed communication skills.

He returned to Hamilton in 1940 with a bit of capital and started a company called Turkstra Construction. He purchased a few lots on Osborne Avenue in the McQuesten East neighbourhood in east Hamilton with the intention of building some houses. Peter Sr. went to Guy Long of Consumers Lumber and said, “If you finance the lumber and materials, I’ll finance the land and labour, and we’ll split the profits.” Long agreed.

Peter Sr. built a couple houses and in 1941 when he was nearly finished, the lumber owner called his \$10,000 loan (\$150,000 when adjusted for inflation) early. It was a





devastating blow for the startup. Peter was very upset and went to the bank to borrow money. Although he had the land and assets, the bank refused his request for a loan.

In 1940s Canada, banks were often reluctant to loan money to immigrant businessmen. Hamilton was a very British city and non-British immigrants such as the Turkstras were considered foreigners. For example, Turkstra's Eggs was established with help from relatives in Michigan. Peter's business, Turkstra Construction, was financed by material suppliers, private lenders and sympathetic customers.

At the time when the lumber owner called his loan, Peter Sr. was also working on a job for a Dr. Woodhall on Barton Street. He went to Dr. Woodhall and told him the whole story.

"Don't worry, I'll loan you the money, Peter," Dr. Woodhall reassured.

"Thank you, but you know, you may not even have to loan me the money," Peter suggested.

Peter went down to the bank and told them, "I don't need your bloody money. Dr. Woodhall is going to give me the money." With the possibility of this new guarantor, the bank decided to approve the loan.

Carl comments, "I guess the fact that an upstanding citizen of the community was willing to provide a private loan convinced them Peter was a safe bet. Bank managers in those days had the authority to discriminate in this way. By the end of the Second World War, he had a very strong relationship with the Royal Bank and introduced many new immigrant

“ Suddenly, we had a lumber company. ”



businessmen and farmers to them, and successful businesses were developed.”

Peter Sr. continued building houses and other construction projects in the community, but he dreamt of starting his own lumber company. He had a contract for a large warehouse and needed to buy a lot of wood. Instead of buying the wood from someone else, he decided to get it directly from the mill.

The catch? He had to have a place to receive it.

In 1951, Peter and his wife Tina boarded a train to Vancouver to buy the lumber. The couple happened to be sitting in the dining car alongside the president of Weldwood, the largest plywood manufacturing company in Canada.

In 1991, Peter Sr. recalled, “He had a good look at us and liked what he saw. The next morning, he sent a taxi to our hotel that drove us to the factory. Before I left, he established me with \$200,000 credit and a \$100,000 loan at five per cent. That’s how I got started.” (*Fort Erie Times-Review*, 19 Jan 1991)

The loan enabled Peter Sr. to open his first lumber yard and outlet in May 1953 in Hamilton on Wentworth Street beneath the escarpment between the railway tracks.

Carl remembers when the first load of lumber Peter had bought showed up on the railroad cars. “Suddenly, we had a lumber company.”

They had one truck and two part-time employees. The yard first catered to people wanting to build their own homes. But Peter Sr. had much bigger plans. He continued with his

construction business for the next five years. By the early 1960s, Hamilton had seven lumberyards run by older men whose sons had no interest in taking over. Peter Sr. had to make a choice, because he couldn't keep doing both construction and lumber.

Peter Sr. thought the lumber business had more of a future, so he devoted all his attention to it. He spotted a golden opportunity and drew up plans for a network of ten lumberyards. He went down to the Royal Bank at Main and Locke Streets in downtown Hamilton and enthusiastically pitched these plans to the bank manager.

"Here are seven old people running seven lumber companies that are going to be for sale because their sons have no interest in them," Peter exclaimed.

After some negotiation, Peter Sr. left the bank with a handshake and a line of credit for one million dollars (approximately eight million dollars when adjusted for inflation). This credit enabled him to immediately open a second yard in Waterdown in 1963 under the Turkstra Lumber banner.

This achievement was indicative of

Peter's inborn charm and character.

Carl observes, "My father had very little education, but he had enormous determination, character, ambition and drive. He was indomitable, really. People had confidence in him. A lot of his success came down to his personal charisma." (*Flamborough Review*, 28 Feb 2003)

Peter Sr. also attracted hardworking employees. Early on, Turkstra Lumber employed a wonderful salesman named Ted Steenhoff. Ted was wonderfully charismatic and an extremely hard worker. He was known for making himself available at all hours. The story goes that a few Italian contractors were celebrating Christmas Eve together and they were talking about Ted.

One of them said, "I bet you, if I call Ted and told him to come over, he'd come."

"Ah, he'd never come!" replied another.

"Let's see."

They called Ted and twenty minutes later he knocked on the door. That's just the kind of salesman he was. When Ted left, Carl's cousin Ron Turkstra took over in sales.

Facing page: Early receipt from the Turkstra Lumber Co.

PHONE JA. 8-6315

TURKSTRA
LUMBER CO. LTD.

SOLD TO

HAMILTON, ONT.

APR. 15

195 C

ADDRESS

DELIVERED TO

[Terms]

QUANTITY	DESCRIPTION	PRICE	AMOUNT
80'	L 2"x2" #2 GRADE	3 1/2¢	2.80
5'	"L 2"x8"	10¢	.50
			3.30
			6
		<i>Paid</i>	
		<i>Mason's</i>	
		TOTAL	3.30
		Cash Sale	
		C.O.D.	
		Charge	
		Rec'd on Account	

Said

~~W. Brown~~

TOTAL

324

Rep. of the Association

CHALK

12.00

Cash Sale

Clerk

PLEASE CHECK YOUR LOG

Cash Sale	
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144

TURKSTRA

LUMBER COMPANY LTD.

HAMILTON

R.R. 4 - PHONE JA 8-6315

OUR NEW YARD



AND OFFICE



HIGHWAY # 6

MOHAWK

ROAD

EFFECTIVE
FEBRUARY 1st 1955

PRICES ARE SUBJECT TO
CHANGE WITHOUT NOTICE

WHITE PINE (Continued)

1 1/4" x 10"	100 L. ft.
2" x 2"	\$ 28.00
2" x 4"	7.50
2" x 6"	14.50
2" x 8"	22.50
2" x 10"	30.00

SIDING

Common Cedar bevel	100 L. ft.
3/4" x 8"	\$ 8.75
3/4" x 10"	11.25
Clear Cedar bevel	
3/4" x 8"	19.00
3/4" x 10"	23.75
Vertical siding (knotty pine paneling)	
1" x 9"	16.00
V-matching 1" x 6" No. 1&2 Common Pine	12.35
Cedar Squares 4" x 4"	20.00

HARDWOOD FLOORING

Oak No. 1	30 ¢ per sq. ft.
Oak No. 2	27 ¢ - - -

PICKETS (Spruce or Jack pine)

1" x 3" (pointed) 3 ft.	11 ¢ Each
1" x 3" " 4 "	14 ¢ "
1" x 4" " 3 "	14 ¢ "
1" x 4" " 4 "	18 ¢ "

WOOD LATH \$ 1.50 per bundle

LUMBER

SPRUCE

	1000' B.M.	Lin. ft.
2" x 2" to 16 ft.		4 1/2 ¢
2" x 3" - - -	\$ 120.00	6 ¢
2" x 4" - - -	115.00	7 3/4 ¢
2" x 6" - - -	120.00	12 ¢
2" x 8" - - -	125.00	16 3/4 ¢
2" x 10" - - -	130.00	21 3/4 ¢
2" x 12" - - -	130.00	26 ¢

For lengths over 16 ft. add. \$ 5.00 per 1000' B.M.

	100 L. ft.
1" x 2"	\$ 2.25
1" x 3"	3.00
1" x 4"	3.95
1" x 5"	4.85
1" x 6"	5.50
1" x 8"	8.00
1" x 10"	10.80
1" x 12"	13.50

1" x 4" T&G flooring	1000 sq. ft.
(for laid measure add appr. 20%)	\$ 110.00
1" x 5" T&G flooring	
(for laid measure add appr. 17%)	115.00
Roofsheating 1" x 6" & up	\$ 115.00

WHITE PINE No. 1 & 2 Common

	100 L. ft.
1" x 2"	\$ 4.50
1" x 3"	6.00
1" x 4"	7.50
1" x 5"	9.00
1" x 6"	10.75
1" x 8"	14.50
1" x 10"	21.00
1" x 12"	28.50
1 1/4" x 4"	10.00
1 1/4" x 6"	15.00
1 1/4" x 8"	20.00

TRIM & MOULDINGS:

	100 L. ft.
Crown Mould No. 501 3/4" x 2 5/8"	\$ 8.50
Bed Mould No. 511 3/4" x 1 1/4"	4.25
No. 513 1 1/4" x 2 1/2"	14.25
No. 518 1 1/8" x 1 5/8"	9.50
Quarterround 1/2" x 1/2" No. 520) 2.75
3/4" x 3/4" No. 523)
Halfround 3/8" x 3/4" No. 530	- 2.50
Cove Mould 3/4" x 3/4" No. 541	- 2.75
Doorstop 3/8" x 1 5/8" No. 603, 606	4.75
Casing 3/4" x 2 1/2" No. 561, 2039	8.50
Hardwood dowelling 1 1/8" diam. No. 2134	- 8.25
Windowstop 3/8" x 1 1/4" Fir No. 602, 605	3.50
Windowstool No. 638 1 1/8" x 3 1/2"	- 15.75
No. 639 1 1/8" x 4 1/2"	19.75
Baseboard 3/4" x 4 1/4" No. 662 A, 668 A	14.00
3/4" x 5 1/4" No. 662, 668	- 16.75
Door Jambs Clear Fir	per set 3.00
Stair treads 1 1/8" x 10 1/4" x 3 ft.	
Fir	each - 2.00
Oak	- 3.45
Nosings 1 1/8" x 3 1/2" x 3 ft.	
Fir	each - 1.00
Oak	- 1.60
Fillerstrip F 17 (3 beads)	3.65
Joint mould F 13 (4 beads)	2.50
Wooden Shingles No. 3	bundle 2.35

PLYWOOD

FIR		Good one side		Good two sides	
		sq. f.	sheet	sq. f.	sheet
1/4"	48 × 72	16 ¢	\$ 3.84	20 ¢	\$ 4.80
	48 × 96	16 ¢	- 5.12	20 ¢	- 6.40
3/8"	48 × 96	22 ¢	- 7.04	25 ¢	- 8.00
1/2"	48 × 96	29 ¢	- 9.28	31 ¢	- 9.92
5/8"	48 × 96	33 ¢	- 10.56	36 ¢	- 11.52
3/4"	48 × 72	39 ¢	- 9.36	42 ¢	- 10.08
	48 × 96	39 ¢	- 12.48	42 ¢	- 13.44

		sq. f.	sheet
Sylvacraft	48 × 72	18 ¢	\$ 4.32
	48 × 96	18 ¢	- 5.76
Sylvacord	48 × 72	20 ¢	- 4.80
	48 × 96	20 ¢	- 6.40

BIRCH		Good one side			
		from		to	
		sq. f.	sheet	sq. f.	sheet
1/4"	48 × 72	20 ¢	\$ 4.80	27 ¢	\$ 6.48
	48 × 96	24 ¢	- 7.68	31 ¢	- 9.92
1/2"	48 × 72	38 ¢	- 9.12	46 ¢	- 11.04
	48 × 96	42 ¢	- 13.44	50 ¢	- 16.00
3/4"	48 × 72	50 ¢	- 12.00	58 ¢	- 13.92
	48 × 96	54 ¢	- 17.28	62 ¢	- 19.84

BIRCH		Good two sides			
		from		to	
		sq. f.	sheet	sq. f.	sheet
1/4"	48 × 72	27 ¢	\$ 6.48	33 ¢	\$ 7.92
	48 × 96	32 ¢	- 10.24	37 ¢	- 11.84
1/2"	48 × 72	47 ¢	- 11.28	52 ¢	- 12.48
	48 × 96	51 ¢	- 16.32	56 ¢	- 17.92
3/4"	48 × 72	59 ¢	- 14.16	64 ¢	- 15.36
	48 × 96	63 ¢	- 20.16	69 ¢	- 22.08

WALLBOARD

MASONITE

		sq. f.	sheet
Standard	1/8"	48 × 48	9 ¢ \$ 1.44
	1/8"	48 × 96	10 ¢ \$ 3.20
	1/4"	48 × 96	13 ¢ \$ 4.16
Tempered	1/8"	48 × 48	12 ¢ \$ 1.92
	1/8"	48 × 96	14 ¢ \$ 4.48
	1/4"	48 × 48	17 ¢ \$ 2.72
	1/4"	48 × 96	17 ¢ \$ 5.44
Economy grade (quarterboard)	1/4"	48 × 48	10 ¢ \$ 1.60
	1/4"	48 × 96	12 ¢ 3.84

Masonite square tile
16" × 16" on 1/4" Preswood

		sq. f.	sheet
Natural tone	48 × 48	13 ¢	\$ 2.08
Grey prime coated	48 × 48	15 ¢	2.40

Tempered Perforated Hardboard 1" centres

		sq. f.	sheet
1/8"	24 × 48	16 ¢	\$ 1.28
	36 × 48	16 ¢	1.92
	48 × 48	16 ¢	2.56
	48 × 72	16 ¢	- 3.84
	48 × 96	19 ¢	6.08
1/4"	48 × 96	35 ¢	- 11.20

Prices of Fixtures for use with Perforated hardboard on request.

BARCLAY PRIMTILE

1/8" 48 × 96 (4" × 4" squares)

	sq. f.	sheet
All colours	45 ¢	\$ 14.40

PANELYTE

for counter- and table tops different colours
from to

	sq. f.	sheet	sq. f.	sheet
1/10" × 48 × 96	55 ¢	\$ 17.60	58 ¢	\$ 18.56

PLYWOOD (Continued)

RIFT WHITE OAK

		Good one side		Good two sides	
		sq. f.	sheet	sq. f.	sheet
1/4"	48 × 72	56 ¢	\$ 13.44		
	48 × 96	59 ¢	- 18.88		
3/4"	48 × 96	92 ¢	- 29.44	\$ 1.20	\$ 38.40

POPLAR UNDERLAY

		sq. f.	sheet
1/4"	48 × 48	10 ¢	\$ 1.60

FIR SHEATHING

		sq. f.	sheet
5/16"		12 ¢	\$ 3.84
3/8"		14 ¢	- 4.48
1/2"		20 ¢	- 6.40
5/8"		25 ¢	- 8.00
3/4"		30 ¢	- 9.60

CEILING TILES

TEN/TEST

		per 100 sq. feet	
		t. & gr.	shiplap
12" × 12" × 1/2"		\$ 9.60	\$ 9.60
16" × 16" × 1/2"		- 9.60	- 9.60
12" × 12" × 5/8"		- 11.45	
16" × 16" × 5/8"		- 11.45	

		White colour primed t. & gr.	Ivory pre-finished t. & gr.
12" × 12" × 1/2"		\$ 10.20	\$ 11.60
16" × 16" × 1/2"		- 10.20	- 11.60
12" × 12" × 5/8"		- 12.10	- 13.50
16" × 16" × 5/8"		12.10	- 13.50

SILVERTONE ACCOUSTICAL TILE

(White - bevels painted)

		p. 100 sq. ft.
12" × 12" × 1/2"		\$ 21.45
12" × 12" × 5/8"		- 25.10
16" × 16" × 5/8"		26.65

STANDARD KNOCKDOWN FRAMES

PRIMED	Frame with sill	Brick V., Masonry, Cement Block, no sill
2' 8" × 6' 8"	11.90	11.35
2'10" × 6' 8"	12.10	11.55
3' 0" × 6' 8"	12.30	11.70
2'10" × 6'10"	12.30	11.70
3' 0" × 6'10"	12.50	11.90
3' 0" × 7' 0"	12.70	12.10

SLAB DOORS

Birch and Fir	paint grade	No. 1 grade
2' 0" × 6' 0" × 1 3/8"	\$ 8.20	\$ 10.50
1' 6" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	8.55	10.85
1' 8" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	8.55	10.85
1'10" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	8.55	10.85
2' 0" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	8.55	10.85
2' 2" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	9.00	11.25
2' 4" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	9.00	11.25
2' 6" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	9.25	11.65
2' 8" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	9.55	11.90
1' 6" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	8.55	10.85
1' 8" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	8.55	10.85
1'10" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	8.55	10.85
2' 0" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	8.55	10.85
2' 2" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	9.25	11.60
2' 4" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	9.25	11.60
2' 6" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	9.40	11.70
2' 8" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	9.65	12.00
2'10" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	10.40	13.00
2'10" × 6'10" × 1 3/8"	10.40	13.00
2' 8" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	14.05	17.10
2'10" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	14.95	18.10
2'10" × 6'10" × 1 3/8"	14.95	18.10
3' 0" × 7' 0" × 1 3/8"	15.40	18.55

HARDWARE

NAILS

	per lb.
Common	\$ 0.12
Finishing	0.14
Roofing	0.14
Galvanized	0.20
Flooring	0.16
Plywood (ringed)	0.40
Blued Lath	0.15

Metal corners for bevel siding 3/4" × 10"	\$ 0.13
Joist hangers for 2" × 8" joists	0.39
2" × 10"	0.43
Staples - box of 5000	3.20
Sash lifts (hook type)	ea. 0.06
Sashfasteners	0.30
Handrail brackets brass finish	0.45
Screen door hinges	pr. 0.50
latch	1.90
Butts 3" × 3"	pr. 0.80
3 1/2" × 3 1/2"	0.90
4" × 4"	1.20

LOCKS Schlage

Key in Knob	\$ 8.00
Privacy Locks	6.00
Latch-sets	5.70

LOCKS National

Latch-sets	\$ 4.00
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FIR PANEL DOORS Clear grade

DESIGN 130 (one third light)	
2' 8" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	\$ 12.25
2'10" × 6'10" × 1 3/8"	13.45
2' 8" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	15.40
2'10" × 6'10" × 1 3/8"	18.40
3' 0" × 7' 0" × 1 3/8"	19.40

DESIGN 132 (one third light cross bar)

2' 8" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	\$ 13.55
2' 6" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	16.80
2' 8" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	16.70
2'10" × 6'10" × 1 3/8"	19.70
3' 0" × 7' 0" × 1 3/8"	20.70

FIR FRENCH DOORS - Clear Grade

DESIGN 205 (5 × 3 lts.)	
2' 0" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	\$ 17.30
2' 4" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	17.65
2' 6" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	17.75
2' 0" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	17.45
2' 4" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	17.75
2' 6" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	17.90
2' 8" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	18.10
2'10" × 6'10" × 1 3/8"	19.25

DESIGN 232 (4 × 3 lts., panel in bottom)

2' 4" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	\$ 18.50
2' 6" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"	18.60
2' 4" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	18.60
2' 6" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	18.75
2' 8" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"	18.95
2'10" × 6'10" × 1 3/8"	20.05

COMBINATION DOORS

Clear Fir and/or Sitka Spruce

	Open	Glazed
2' 6" × 6' 6" × 1 3/8"		
2' 8" × 6' 8" × 1 3/8"		
2'10" × 6'10" × 1 3/8"	\$ 16.45	\$ 18.40
3' 0" × 7' 0" × 1 3/8"		

CABINET HARDWARE

Amerock Hinges E 7558	pr.	\$ 0.35
(semi-concealed 3/8" inset)		
Doorpulls E 323		0.35
E 326		0.35
Door knobs E 595		0.35
Friction catches E 9700		0.20
Onward Hinges 510 C		0.50
(semi-concealed 3/8" inset)		
Hollymade Friction catches		0.10

Turkstra's First Truck Driver

Carl recalls his job as the first truck driver.

“Well, it was a stake truck. And do you know how we used to get the lumber off? We'd put a pipe across the truck and the lumber on the pipe. We'd place chains to secure the pipe and when we got to the right place, we'd back up fast and slam on the brakes, so the wood would fly off the back of the truck.”

Of course, this was not a failsafe system. It didn't always work. Carl remembers sitting on the rear wheels when the lumber didn't come off and straining to unload it.

“We had no forklifts in those days, so we unloaded all the railroad ties by hand.”

There was a plot of land behind the yard which backed onto the railway tracks. When a railway car came in Peter Sr. would sometimes send somebody to help Carl, but normally he was the only one there. The cars would come in and they'd have to be unloaded all by hand, stacked on the truck, and unloaded and restacked in the yard. It was hard, hot work.



PROTECTION FROM ROOF TO BASEMENT
SHINGLES SIDINGS INSULATION
BP BUILDING PRODUCTS LIMITED FLOORING

TURKSTRA LUMBER Co. LTD.
865 UPPER JAMES ST.
HAMILTON - FU-5-5317



Carl continued as the truck driver in the summers when he was in university. "I really enjoyed driving the lumber trucks! As the business expanded and we started buying lumber in northern Ontario, suddenly much of my summers were spent driving the daylong journey to Timmins, Ontario."

The old Turkstra Lumber truck that currently tours around southern Ontario was acquired from Bob Slack at Slack Lumber. Carl did an exchange of several loads of lumber. He spent around \$10,000 to fix it up with a new motor and transmission. "It's been great fun to put it in different fairs and community events."

Peter Sr. the Dealmaker

When Peter Sr. retired, lumber dealers and others came and had lunch with him. People from all walks of life would come to see him. They talked about anything—raising children, politics, business. Peter Sr. was a very intelligent and intellectual man. His willingness to talk to people about issues that genuinely mattered to them was a big part of his popularity. People really looked to him for advice and guidance.

Peter Sr. would usually dress professionally, with a suit and tie, but not at all pretentious or flashy. He was very personable and would talk to people on a personal level. He made friends easily and was very generous. He would often give money to friends and employees who were suffering tough times, like the Dykstras, the Kooimans, and others.

Obviously, he was successful as a businessman. He was very good at making deals. He had five or six property development companies that would develop land and sell the houses. But he was also determined to do things his way. He would often influence people to follow his lead and when he couldn't get anyone behind him, he'd do it anyway.

He was always a determined risk-taker. And many of his risks turned out successfully. You do that enough times and people really start to have faith in you. He made some mistakes here and there, of course. He was human. But overall, he was extraordinarily successful, and people followed him because they believed in him.





Bill Voortman – Co-Founder, Voortman Cookies Ltd.

I immigrated to Canada in 1948 from Hellendoorn, the Netherlands. I was too young to serve in the Second World War, but I certainly experienced many of the hardships that has made me part of who I am today. I came to Canada with my dad and three brothers. My mother passed away at an early age, so I didn't know her. We first arrived in Picton, Ontario where we worked for around nine months at a farm. After that, one by one, we all ended up in Hamilton.

The Turkstra family had already settled in Canada when our family arrived. Peter Sr. and a few other families really took us under their wings. We belonged to the same Christian Reformed Church on Dundurn and Main Street, which later moved to Charlton and Hess Streets.

I first met Peter when he had decided to open a new business called Turkstra Bakery with my oldest brother at

Painting depicting evolution of Voortman Cookies picturing Harry (left) and Bill (right) Voortman at top and bakers at work below..

Herkimer and Charlton Streets. Apparently, they didn't make the best team and I was pulled in to try to help. However, I was just a kid really. Eventually, Peter Sr. declared, "Peter Turkstra is not a baker!" and closed shop. It's too bad because I think had I been a bit older I could have made it work. But it didn't happen. All the same, we stayed connected.

Since I was four years old, I knew I was going to be a baker. I thought I was going to bake the best loaf of bread in our little village. When we arrived in Canada, I worked on the farm, then picked tobacco in Delhi, Ontario, and even worked at a few bakeries. In 1951, my brother Harry and I decided we would start a bakery. We had no money and no buildings. We saw an ad in *The Spectator* for a space with an oven and a Benson mixer. It was basically just two rooms and the previous tenants had given up. We rented the space and began to make some products. Those were very hard, difficult years. I was nineteen years old and Harry was around seventeen. But we were used to demanding work back in the old country. Our business, Voortman Cookies Ltd., eventually grew to become a major cookie producer in Canada.

When demand for our business began

to grow around 1956, we decided we needed a new building. Harry and I turned to Peter for advice. We had purchased land in Aldershot but didn't know where to go from there. Peter told us, "Well, put the walls up and roof on. Once you'd paid for that, you can go to the bank and they'll mortgage it." When it came to get a mortgage, it didn't work out. Peter said, "Just keep working. You'll find somebody who will give you money."

Peter was daring and a bit of a risk-taker, but very business-smart too. Eventually, we did find a lender and with our suppliers seeing how hard we were working, things really began to turn around. We always appreciated Peter for his wisdom, having clever ideas, and speaking his mind.

We had a strong relationship with Wilfred, father of Ron Turkstra. Wilfred ran Turkstra Eggs with his brother Jack (J.R.). We were making a kind of cookie that required a lot of eggs, so we needed a reliable supplier. Wilfred and Jack would get a lot of cracked eggs that couldn't be sold in stores. Instead of discarding them, Turkstra Eggs would keep the yolks frozen in steel pails and sell them to us. We continued that relationship for many years.

I remember working with Peter Sr. on church council in the 1970s. I learned firsthand his wisdom for saying the right thing at the right time. Back then, everybody smoked. I remember my dad



had a sign that read, “If you don’t smoke, you’re not a man.” At council meetings, we had to have two fans running in our meeting room to keep all the smoke moving. Peter Sr. didn’t smoke, and he was able to influence everyone to restrict smoking during meetings. The fact he was able to change people’s behaviour like that indicates the kind of respect and influence he had.

Peter Sr. got involved in all sorts of community organizations. We worked with him on fundraising activities for Redeemer University College. When we were both retired in the 1990s, I would go down to Niagara Region with him and visit all the flower and fruit farmers. We built some good relationships working together. Both our names were familiar which helped in our fundraising efforts. Peter had a lot of respect in the Dutch community because the Turkstras had helped so many immigrants in Canada. Many people would come to him if they needed help, which is exactly what we did when we were growing our bakery.

We maintained a good relationship with the Turkstras over the years, whether it was in business, church or fundraising activities. Not only are we part of a tight-knit Dutch community, but the Turkstra family really demonstrated to me the kind of good, honest, hardworking qualities that I think a lot of Dutch people are known for.



Herman Turkstra – Son and Lawyer

In 1951, Peter Sr.'s eldest son Herman was studying at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. His father sent a note stating, "I need you home. I'm starting a new business."

It was a fortunate coincidence because soon afterward, Herman received a draft notice from the U.S. government to fight in the Korean War. He was already packing his bags to return to Canada and fled the same day the draft notice arrived.

Later, when Herman became a lawyer, his father sent him to deal with a lien action in the county courthouse on

Main Street in Hamilton. Peter Sr. came along and sat watching a whole raft of around fifteen lawyers and the judge. There were some other contractors there who had not had their bills paid.

Peter Sr. leaned over to his son and said, "This is the last time. Fifteen lawyers have just eaten up all the equity in that project. We're never going to do that again."

In future lien actions, Peter Sr. decided he would call a meeting with the creditors and instead of hiring lawyers, he would take over the project. If creditors didn't agree to take it over, he would buy them out at what he thought the project could succeed at,



whether it was fifteen or fifty cents on the dollar. It was a successful approach. Some would stay with him, and some would say, “Just give me the check, I’m out of here.” But that way, he could avoid expensive litigation proceedings.

Local lawyers were furious with this approach. One day, Herman was confronted by a lawyer in Hamilton.

“Your father is stealing these projects from the trades people.”

Herman quipped, “Oh, really? Okay. Would your client like to give the money back that he just took? I’m sure my father would cut him back in for the percentage that he offered everybody else”.

Herman adapted that approach of calling all the creditors together in his law practice for other clients. He’d tell clients, “Let’s forget about the bankruptcy courts and all the rest of that stuff. Let’s just sit around the table and see what we can do without everyone’s lawyers.”

He used that technique with several major companies that got into financial troubles. He’d put a creditors committee in place and they would appoint an overseer instead of accounting companies or the banks. On a couple occasions, he got the banks to stand down while the creditors committee went through this process. It’s a very practical legal solution replicated elsewhere of dealing with multiple claimants against one project that originated with Turkstra Lumber.



Clifford Turkstra - Son and Pastor

Clifford remembers the early days of Turkstra Construction, and later Turkstra Lumber.

“My dad, Peter Sr., built many houses, commercial buildings and churches. I remember driving with him to one church he built in Trenton. He’d have a crew of Dutch immigrants he hired in Hamilton. They would leave early Monday morning and stay at the site during the week in a trailer outfitted with bunk beds. My brother Carl was the cook in the summers. I was only twelve years old or so at the time, so I did some odd jobs to help, but I wasn’t really involved in the construction side of things.”

When Clifford turned fourteen, he started working at the original location on Wentworth Street. He did some work in the office and in the yard. At the time, Turkstra Lumber didn’t have much hardware stock, so Clifford would often have to drive to another store to pick up locks or hinges and other supplies.

Clifford helped when they moved from the Wentworth Street location to Upper James in the late 1950s.

“We had an old Leyland diesel truck that ran up and down the mountain, moving all the lumber and supplies we had. For example, we had 1200 bundles of shingles that had to be moved up to



the mountain. Of course, we had no forklifts or anything, so everything had to be loaded and unloaded by hand.”

A big part of the lumber business involved hauling lumber from place to place, which really relies on truck drivers. It’s not an easy job and you have to be very safety conscious. In the early 1960s, there was a driver named Stuart Dykstra. He was a very safety conscious individual. He hauled lumber for Turkstra from up north in a tractor trailer. He had a load of two-by-tens he was hauling for Lawson Lumber. According to reports, Stuart was on top of a load of lumber when it collapsed, and he died.

Stuart’s death had a significant impact on Peter Sr. He felt personally responsible and did all he could for the man’s family. He was already very people-oriented, but after the accident, Peter Sr. became very concerned about safety and caring for his employees. He was also a mentor to a great many contractors. He worked with Valery Construction and helped them reorganize the way they worked and invoiced customers. Clemente Valeri, the founder, was struggling and Peter Sr. took the time to set them on a firm footing.

Clifford continued working for Turkstra Lumber during the summers until around 1965 when he left for seminary school in the Netherlands. He returned to Canada in 1968 and served as a pastor in London, Ontario until 1983. After that, he came back to work in the family business.

“I never had a defined title. Basically, my function was to be my dad’s gopher. He’d give me various assignments and I would get it done. For example,

Dad wanted me to investigate computerizing parts of the business. I had never touched a computer before, so I took some courses and got in touch with a few software developers. We worked with one developer who installed a program and taught the employees how to use it. It was amazing. Our sales jumped with the same number of employees and made the workflow so much more efficient.”

Later, Clifford worked for one of Peter Sr.’s land development companies. At one time, Hamilton and other cities would subdivide land and contractors could buy a few lots at a time to build houses. In the mid-1970s, land development regulations changed, and developers were now required to bid on subdivisions with 150 to 300 lots at a time. That was way too much for many of these small contractors. That happened to be around the time Peter Sr. started getting into land development. He would buy the land, develop the property and sell off lots to individual contractors. There was no official requirement for contractors to buy their lumber from Turkstra, but there was certainly a sense of indebtedness since they couldn’t have acquired the lots on their own.

Clifford remembers when they introduced fax machines in the business.

I kept telling Dad, “We need fax machines.”

“No, no. They’re just toys,” he’d say. Finally, after about the fourth or fifth time, he said “I’ll tell you what. You can put one of your toys in the Stoney Creek office.”

“That’s a good start,” I told him.

“You watch. After six months, it’ll just be sitting there doing nothing,” he said.

The very next day, Dad was talking to a purchaser in



British Columbia who asked him for his fax number.

“What’s a fax machine? Oh, I think my son put one of those things in here yesterday.”

He had his secretary give the purchaser the fax number. A couple minutes later, he received the quote which really shocked him. He couldn’t understand how it came through the telephone line.

Suddenly, Dad said “Put fax machines in every yard.”

The fax even protected the business from work errors. “We had an order for over a hundred trusses for a townhouse development in the Oakville area that came through the fax. When the order arrived, they called us up and said we made a big mistake. The walls are forty-one feet and the trusses are only forty feet. Fortunately, we had the original fax where they had requested forty-foot trusses. There were several cases after that which helped with recordkeeping and identifying problems.”

Clifford recalls his dad’s business acumen.

“I remember one time he bought seventeen truckloads of number one pine he intended to be milled for the yard. When it arrived rough, they

discovered it was number three pine. Dad pointed out the mistake to the forestry company and they said they could take it back or give him a discounted price on it. Dad took the discount, milled the pine and shipped it to the yards. The stuff went like hot cakes. Apparently, cabinetmakers loved number three pine because they could take clear pieces out of the middle of the boards and cut out all the knots, which was much cheaper than using all number one pine. He did a similar thing with plywood. He would source cores from a plywood manufacturer and fashion them into skids and sell the skids. After four or five years, the plywood folks realized what he was doing and decided to start making skids themselves, which eventually cut off his supply.”

Peter Sr. built Turkstra Lumber on a foundation of integrity and strong principles. That integrity certainly passed onto Carl and Peter who have carried the company through to today. Peter has many characteristics that remind me of my dad. He is fair and has a clear sense of direction and vision. These are important qualities in a leader.

Peter Sr. had a real knack for seeing opportunities that other people overlooked. I think Peter has that same ability to see these kinds of opportunities, which is why I have every confidence the company will continue to grow and prosper into the future.



Marlene Verduyn (née Turkstra) – Daughter and Former Secretary

Peter Sr.'s daughter Marlene worked at Turkstra Lumber for a few summers when she was around sixteen years old in the original office on Wentworth Street. That was interesting. She vividly remembers the office being extremely hot in the summers. When the office moved to Upper James Street, there was a Dairy Queen across the street and employees would go down at lunch and buy a milkshake or something because it was so unbearably hot. Eventually, they installed an air conditioner and all the staff would come up and eat their lunch in the office, so they could cool off.

The original Wentworth office location was located there thanks to Lawson Lumber. The Lawson's owned a spur line from the main track, so they could unload their own lumber. At the

time, Peter Sr. was running Turkstra Construction and building churches and schools.

Peter Sr. went to Mr. Lawson and asked, "Could we unload our lumber using your spur line?"

Mr. Lawson agreed but added, "As long as you get out of here before I get to work in the morning."

Peter Sr. would call in his sons and kids from the church—even Marlene's future husband, Jack Verduyn whom she didn't yet know—and they would unload the lumber very early in the morning and get it to the construction site. That's around the time Peter Sr. started thinking he should get into the lumber business because it earned more money than construction.

After a few summers working at Turkstra Lumber Marlene went to college and Peter Sr. found her a job in Winnipeg with International Harvester. Later, she was involved in some of her father's land development ventures where she served on the board.

"I was the token female!," she exclaims.

Marlene would attend board meetings where she learned about the complex matters of land division and development. Peter Sr. would buy 200 acres or so and would have to figure out how to engineer the subdivisions with roads and utilities and such.

Marlene remembers her dad as quite a brilliant businessman.

"In Waterdown, for example, before he opened the lumberyard there, he bought all the surrounding land behind the yard and had it subdivided. He'd sell lots to various small builders who would then come and get their lumber from him. He built a lot of loyalty this way because Dad gave them places to work and they couldn't really drive by the guy who's just made it possible to keep your business going. He did the same thing in Brantford and elsewhere. You can't really do things like this with all the new government regulations, but at the time it was a brilliant strategy to build the business."

One of Marlene's lasting memories of her dad is a mental picture of him sitting at the dining table.

"One half of the table is scattered papers



Marlene and Peter at the beach



Marlene at Upper James location

from the land divisions, rulers and pencils and reports. On the other half is a Jewish book, Catholic book, Protestant concordance and his Bible. He would spend an hour with one side of the table and the next hour on the other. It showed me how important God was to him. He wasn't perfect, but he tried to be a good person."

Another thing she'll always remember about her dad is his ability to get things done.

"I have all these letters from people saying how if Dad wasn't involved their organizations would not exist. Dad had an uncanny ability to get a

project off the ground and get people working together. Sometimes he would take over a project just to get it started and then hand it back over when it was up and running."

Peter Sr. knew how to handle people and get them to cooperate to get things done.

Hard Times, Happy Days

The head office of Turkstra Lumber was originally on Wentworth Street below the escarpment in downtown Hamilton. In the late 1950s, head office moved to a building on Upper James, south of Mohawk Road. Busy traffic on that street eventually inspired a move to the less-busy Upper Wellington Street in Hamilton. It ended up being the first real lumberyard with a proper store and office space to support everything, and that is where head office is currently located.

It was around this time that the company rapidly expanded, starting with branches in Stoney Creek (1967), Smithville (1968), and Brantford (1969). When Peter Sr. had gone to the bank with an ambitious plan for ten yards, he intended to follow

through!

“Make no mistake, he was the one driving all the growth,” says Carl.

But it was not all smooth sailing. Carl remembers his father walking the floor at three in the morning, desperate with bad debts and other concerns. It was very difficult collecting money at times.

Peter Sr. once commented on the financial success of his business.

“I don’t see it. It just seems to keep going back in one way or another. We share our profits with our employees and our contractors. That always falls on good earth.”



Gerry Evers,
Dunnville

Early on, Peter Sr. decided that he wanted to keep the profile of the company small. He wasn't a flashy person by nature and his business would be made in his own image. His personality really reflected the way the business was structured. He wanted people to think of each branch as the-store-down-the-street rather than a larger company. Customers didn't need to know the company had ten locations when the focus was on local service.

When Turkstra Lumber opened, most lumber companies were closing. When "big box" corporations came along, they put a lot of medium and small lumber companies out of business. Peter Sr. realized that they were in a different kind of business.

Carl explains, "The big box stores are a cash-and-carry business. Turkstra Lumber is not. We are a contractor's lumber yard that also helps people wanting to build their own houses. Most of our business is on credit. That is a defining feature. If you went to one of these big companies and asked for a lift of two-by-fours, they'd say, 'Okay, we'll get it to you in two days.' Whereas if you came to Turkstra, we'd say, 'I'll be there in an hour or so.'"





Culture of Turkstra Lumber

Early on, Peter Sr. always made sure there was a pot of coffee brewing and either a couch or picnic table near the entrance. Contractors would come in for a coffee in the morning, and Peter would sit and chat with them about the different jobs they were doing. People now mainly head to Tim Horton's coffee shop, but for a long time, it worked to get people in the door. He'd learn who was a good contractor and who to watch out for. It was an effective way to build relationships with contractors while sharing information across the construction sector.

Turkstra Lumber is known for having knowledgeable staff who build relationships with customers who want to come in and talk to someone who knows how to build a house. Salesmen can advise contractors on what to do and that's very important. There has always been an ethos at Turkstra that when you support your employees, the

business benefits. It's all about building meaningful relationships.

Peter Sr. cared deeply about his employees. George Kooiman, now a truss specialist at Turkstra Lumber, recalls when his dad, Jack, came to work at the Stoney Creek yard in the early 1960s. In 1971, Jack suffered a fainting spell and was admitted to hospital where he was diagnosed with a brain tumour. Peter Sr. visited him before his surgery which greatly lifted his spirits. Unfortunately, he did not survive the delicate surgery, leaving a wife and five children. George recalls his dad's final words, "If I don't survive, hold on to Psalm 23," which concludes, *surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever*. That Christmas, and many Christmases afterwards, Peter Sr. visited the Kooiman family and would

bring a sizeable cheque to help support Mrs. Kooiman and her five dependent children. George adds, “I’m glad I had the opportunity to thank Peter Sr. for those annual gifts when he was at his final home at Shalom Manor in Grimsby.”

A caring approach exemplified by Peter Sr. permeated the organization. Carl observes, “Everybody works. It’s a reasonably relaxed company. People have freedom, and with that, responsibility. If everybody does their share, everybody makes profits. People like to work for this company.” The culture at Turkstra Lumber has always been friendly and down-to-earth. There is always someone at the counter to come in and talk to. Nowadays, if you call in, there are no answering machines. Only live human beings on the other end of the telephone. That friendliness, openness, and mutual support is the essence of Turkstra’s success.

An interesting development sometimes happens over the generations between Turkstra Lumber and family contracting businesses. The first generation will develop a relationship with Turkstra, but the next generation comes along and tries to do things differently. They start shopping around at different lumberyards even though they are getting good wood at a fair price. Searching might find a penny here and a penny there, but this second generation has also wasted a lot of time in the process. They’ve missed the point about developing a relationship with a lumberyard that helps them solve problems. It’s a process that often drives first-generation entrepreneurs crazy because they realize focusing on building and selling a good house is a lot better use of time than nickel and diming the lumber company. It’s a constant battle, but Turkstra is committed to continuing to build strong relationships with second and third-generation businesses.





Brantford yard

Product development

As Turkstra Lumber grew over the years, the number of products expanded. Trim, pine, hardwood, drywall and new hardware were introduced.

Carl explains how it all comes down to the logic of horizontal integration.

“We sell door locks bought on wholesale. When the trade gets big enough, it makes sense to buy those locks direct from the manufacturer. Cut out the middleman when you have a big enough trade. Next you have the door hanging, which is an entirely different business. In the past, we used to sell the doors and customers would subcontract a trim carpenter to put the door up for them. But some trim carpenters started getting smart and trying to sell the doors themselves.

Suddenly, we’re in a position where we’re losing business on door selling, so we opened a business for trimming and hanging doors. That’s how it grows. An evolutionary thread happens.”

There’s no secret. It’s always a risk to develop new areas because it could work or not. Peter Sr. once set up a dedicated window business in Stoney Creek because Turkstra Lumber was selling a lot of windows. The business did well for some years, but eventually transitioned out to focus on other retail and sales opportunities.

The idea really is to keep your head up and your eyes and ears open to all the opportunities around you. It’s important to look around and see what other companies are doing.

Economy, technology, government and society

Every ten years or so there is an economic downturn or recession that affects the construction industry. It's at these times that lumber companies like Turkstra Lumber take a big hit. The lumber business is heavily tied to the home building and renovation industry. When home building rates goes down, lumber sales go down. There's really nothing you can do about it; besides maybe consider going into a different kind of business!


Technology has certainly changed the way business is done at Turkstra. The company is fully computerized and sophisticated. It's a wonderful system that completely transformed the way the office works. Obviously, cell phones have changed the way salesmen operate. The most important technology that was introduced in Carl's lifetime was the forklift truck. It transformed the way Turkstra did business, particularly regarding loading and unloading trucks but also unloading railroad cars.

The way lumber arrives and moves around hasn't really changed all that much over the years. It arrives by railway, Turkstra unloads it onto waiting trucks, it gets stored at the yard, and goes out to customers by truck. There is more international lumber coming in from South America, but the bulk of the lumber comes from Canada. China has certainly had an impact on our business in terms of certain hardware products that can be produced for a fraction of the price.

But what is one of the things China can't produce for us at a competitive price? Lumber.

The Green Belt Act—provincial legislation introduced in 1999 which established protections for 1.8 million acres of environmentally sensitive and agricultural land—is a threat to the lumber market because it's a threat to housing. But there's nothing to be done about it. Contractors complain, we complain, but that's about it.





“ *But what is one of the things China can’t produce for us at a competitive price? Lumber.* ”

Changes in the planning act certainly had a major effect on the housing business. If you want to get an irate comment from someone, talk to a contractor about the local planning department. It takes years to get certain permits and the necessary approvals. All this red tape slows down the lumber business as well.

Carl remembers a property in Stoney Creek, Ontario he was involved in developing, but he was never able to secure a draft plan approval. “Over time, delays cost a fortune and must be factored into the actual cost of building a house. If you sit on a property for five years at ten percent interest, that’s a lot of money!”

There has also been an enormous trend toward housing intensification. But people do still want to live in a single-family home. Housing prices have increased dramatically. Many people can’t afford single-family homes. That’s something we can’t control, but it certainly comes back at us and impacts the lumber industry. These are all changes to watch out for and the only thing to do is continually adapt, which is something Turkstra Lumber has done successfully over time.