



—Democrat Staff photos

AT THEIR PLANT ON RT. 28—DAVID SMITH, right, and SON RODNEY

Smith Cattleguard Expands Into New Plant on Rt. 28

About 10 years ago David S. Smith, then 54, of Midland, built a concrete cattle guard for his father-in-law Edgar Messick.

Ground-level guards for entrance gates, and for separating one field from another, at the time were usually made of wood or iron pipe. Farmers often made them in their farm shops in slack season.

But the concrete type looked as if it would be so superior that Mr. Smith and his son Rodney I. Smith, then 21, began making more. Finding there was a demand for a simply built, durable guard, and using wooden molds in the Smiths' own farm shop, they began producing concrete guards for sale.

The Smith Cattleguard Co. was formed. In 1964, there were to fulltime employees. Nov. 10 years later, and with about 20 fulltime workers, they're ready to move into a new 8600 square foot prefabricated steel factory on Rt. 28 at Midland.

Complete Concrete Line

And son Rodney expects that when they're in full production of their line of farm and utility products they'll be employing from 35 to 40 workmen here.

And elsewhere, to make it "economically easier for customers to buy our products," they announced last month the opening of two new franchise plants, one in Lexington, Ky., the other in Gainesville, Ga. Eventually they hope to have licensed as many as 12 plants, coast-to-coast.

They are now producing not only concrete guards, stock waterers, panel fence and outdoor incinerators. They have become the only company in the nearby mid-Atlantic area turning out concrete bases and underground manholes for utility companies. The manholes usually are eight feet square and

weigh 15 tons and are in demand by telephone and electric companies.

In addition to utility vaults, they're also turning out on order underground cable troughs and distribution boxes. Some byproducts of regular production are parking curb stones, splash blocks, patio blocks—and millstones.

The Smith factory on the farm on Rt. 649 was getting a little crowded. Ready-mix concrete trucks, delivery vehicles and the cars of employees were getting in each others' way. "It was getting hard to get in," Mr. Smith, senior, said.

Decision: Keep Up

And with the orders increasing, it was "either drag along, keep up or get out."

David and Rodney Smith, manager Herb Holmes and bookkeeper Charlotte Mautner decided to keep up. The decision, although it involved more responsibility and substantial investment, wasn't too unlike the decision of a decade ago when David Smith, a farmer who likes farming, decided to try to supplement general farm income with cattle guard production.

His skill as a carpenter helped. As did son Rodney's three years prior experience selling farm machinery.

By pooling their skills, by 1964 they were selling Smith Cattleguard products in seven states—as far west as Michigan and as far south as North Carolina.

In that year, also, they built 44 of their new electrically heated and completely automatic cattle waterers for one customer—a feeder operation at New Market. And a half mile of the Smith-made concrete fencing was bought by an estate owner in Winston-Salem, N. C.

They experimented and halved the production time needed to produce concrete guards by substituting metal molds for wooden molds.

One of the most expensive items of equipment in their new building will be an electrically driven bridge crane which will provide lift power in all parts of the large building.

And while until now they have been depending on ready-mix concrete deliveries, in the new building they'll be batching their own concrete.

When the new plant is in full production it will have an annual capacity of about \$750,000 worth of products, compared with the maximum annual production capability in the present plant of \$300,000 worth. The increase, says Rodney Smith, is possible largely because of the efficient, reliable personnel working with the company.

No Time For Farming

It's been a long time since the Smiths' father and son, have been able to regard the making of cattleguards and concrete waterers and fencing as a mere supplement to farming. Looking around at the welders and electricians trying to put their new prefab steel factory and office building into readiness for production—by December 15—Rodney said, "It turned into a little bit bigger project than I thought."

Confident of the future, David Smith says, "That first cattleguard I put in for my father-in-law 10 years ago is still sound today."

Planners Won't Meet This Month

There will be no regular, monthly meeting of the Fauquier County Planning Commission in December.