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For Annual Peek

A Special Comment of The News & Leader
By MAXINE MIRACLE WASSON

EVERYBODY talks about the weather in the Ozarks, but Mr. Groundhog does something about it. He emerges dutifully from his burrow and takes a look around. If he sees his shadow, winter will last at least six more weeks; if he doesn't, spring is just around the corner so says the groundhog legend.

And it's according to where you live in the Ozarks as to what birds light you can count on a date you observe as Groundhog Day. In Missouri, it's generally Feb. 2—this Thursday—but some Arkansas residents say it's Feb. 14.

"I'd just as leave go by the actions of birds, snakes, groundhogs, and other wooded critters in predicting weather conditions," an Arkansas Ozark farmer said, "as to know it on TV. 'Course it takes a little more time watchin' the animals, and I agree it's a mile more troublesome than turnin' on your TV set."

"Now you take last year on Groundhog day. Remember how bright the sun was? That little fellow couldn't help but see his shadow in all that sunshine. And what did we have? Snow and more snow."

"They a heap more ways to predict weather conditions than with the groundhog of course. I reckon you know how to tell when it's goin' to snow a right smart. If you'll just listen, the fire in the fireplace will tell you, if the fire goes and quiet, like a man trampin' in the snow, then that's a sign it will snow."

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Illustrates somewhat the amount of fitting and the varied patterns of molding—all done on the same machine—is this baby cabinet as demonstrated by brother Earl Bennett. Of course, this is far from complete—the covering, fitting and general handiwork is yet to be done.

Seven Brothers Operate Purdy's Lone Industry

Casket Making Family Affair

By TOM ELLIS
On The News and Leader Staff

FROM TIME immemorial—almost from the time the first man crawled out of his cave to ponder the potentialities of numbers—there has been something mystically lucky in the number seven.

There were the "Seven Stars" (the Pleiades), the "Seven Churches of Asia," the "Seven Years of Plenty" and the "Seven Years of Famine" of Egypt, the "Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost," the "Seven Sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church," the "Seven Wise Men." On into contemporary history that mystic seven has continued. "The Seven Years War," the "Seven Days Battle," etc., through thousands of ages.

Even Pythagoras, the mathematical master of Golden Greece, endowed the number seven with mystic powers, treated it with respect, and compounded seventy times seven headaches for the millions of youngsters who have had to study the Pythagorean theory.

So who is Purdy to quarrel with the ancient theory of the lucky seven? After all, it was seven brothers who brought this quiet little Barry County town its only

industry—an industry, incidentally, now in its seventh year. If or know it exists. But the seven that's highly advertised, Earl, Frank, Gordon and George Bennett listed downward in the

rank of their ages—couldn't care less. Their type of business doesn't need advertising to prosper, except in a certain limited field, and there the Bennetts are becoming well known.

For their business is that of making caskets.

"A casket is the last thing in the world the man on the street wants to come in and buy," admits Earl Bennett, who, fourth out the seventh son of the family, is more or less the firm's business manager.

Incidentally, Earl adds with a bit of wry humor, the Bennetts brothers are quite equipped to handle the last mortal affairs of anyone from first to final stages. Brother Alvin is a minister; two of the brothers are licensed morticians, including Gordon, who has his own mortuary in Miami; and then the firm, of course, makes the caskets.

All seven brothers are partners in the business, but it is Earl, Frank and Alvin who are perhaps the most active. George Bennett is a U. S. postal employee; but his days off, he "travels the territory" and serves as sales manager.

All the brothers live at Purdy or near by Miami, except Carl, who is an electrical engineer in Hutchinson, Kan.

When the business was first established, in 1954, Earl was an accountant at the big U. S. air base in Morocco, Africa. He came home on a vacation, planning to return, but instead he, too, joined the firm and has never regretted it since.

The sales, of course, are in mortuaries throughout the country. The little factory sells its product in seven states, and has grown almost too fast and too

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The manufacture of wooden caskets calls for skills not far removed from those of the cabinet making—different molding cuts on woods, careful fittings. This work is done on one machine whose versatility is only limited by one's imagination in thinking up jobs for it to do, Frank Bennett explains. And his brothers explain that by "one's imagination" he really means his own imagination, since it is

Frank who shapes and makes the blades for this machine.



Brother Alvin demonstrates the plane-molder's versatility, explains that it replaced a machine that cost four times as much and had only a limited scope of operation. Alvin, a patient, self-taught man, is also a molder.