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## America's oldest family businesses

*Pride, ingenuity and endurance: More lessons from survivors.*

By Leah Kristie

What motivates a family in modern-day America—the land of easy mobility and limitless opportunity—to continue an enterprise founded by a long-dead ancestor? Here are the views of Randall Holmes of Holmes' Brothers Farm of Wayne County, Mo., founded in 1847. "My brothers and I carry on a tradition started by our great-great grandmother, who told her granddaughter, who told our father, 'Don't sell the farm,'" Holmes says. "Before my father died, he gave his permission to sell. We have chosen not to. We don't feel obligated to keep the farm as some kind of commitment to legacy. Rather, it has become something of a novelty and tradition we continue just to see how long the business can stay in one family."

Holmes and other proprietors of the companies that rank among America's oldest family businesses are justifiably proud. In fact, since the last version of our list was published in 2003, we've received numerous communications alerting us to 34 venerable companies we had inadvertently omitted (plus many impressive businesses too "young" to make the list). Asterisks on our list identify "new" additions.

Longtime *Family Business* readers will notice a change in our numbering system with this edition of the list. Two or more companies founded in the same year are now ranked as a "tie," with the businesses listed in alphabetical order. For example, the Howell Farm in Cedarville, N.J., and Lyman Orchards in Middlefield, Conn., both founded in 1741, are tied for No. 12. The next business on the list (John Whitley Farm of Williamston, N.C., founded in 1742) is thus ranked at No. 14.

What has enabled these companies to stay in business for so many generations? In 2003, we pondered this question and suggested four strategies for family business longevity, based on the characteristics of the enterprises on our list:

1. Stay small.
2. Don't go public.
3. Avoid big cities.
4. Keep it in the family.

Since 2003, only two businesses have changed ownership. The *Delaware Gazette* of Delaware, Ohio, was

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sold to Brown Publishing Company of Cincinnati in 2004. And after the death of the sixth-generation owner of Sawyer Bentwood Co. in Whitingham, Vt., George Campo purchased the company. Five other companies on our 2003 list either have closed their doors or could not be reached to confirm their existence.

Thanks to feedback from owners of the country's oldest businesses, plus a bit of research on our part, we have identified three more keys to long-term sustainability of a family company:

5. Choose a business that won't go out of style. To put it bluntly, people will always eat, and people will always die. Many of the companies on our list are working farms or ranches, makers or sellers of food products, and funeral home operators.

6. Be creative. Farms and funeral homes may dominate the list, but America's oldest family business is Zildjian Cymbal Co., established in 1623. Other instrument makers are guitar company C.F. Martin & Co. (#47) and drum manufacturer Noble & Cooley (tied for #93).

7. Persist. "To each generation come challenges," says Paul Hayward, the seventh-generation owner of The Homestead, a Sugar Hill, N.H., inn established in 1802 (tied for #26). "The inn has survived for over 200 years through the Civil War, Great Depression, World War I and World War II," Hayward says. "I am confident my family will see the Inn through present difficulties."

**Leah Kristie** served as a student intern at Family Business in summer 2007. We extend special thanks to Professor William T. O'Hara, founder and executive director of Bryant College's Institute for Family Enterprise in Smithfield, R.I., and his associate Peter Mandel, who conducted the original research for our list, first published in 1999.

## The oldest family businesses in America \* denotes new listing

Rank	Year Founded	Company	Family	Industry	Location
1.	1623	Avedis Zildjian Co.	Zildjian family	Cymbals	Norwell, MA
2.	1635-38?	Tuttle Farm	Tuttle family	Agriculture	Dover, NH
3.	1638	Shirley Plantation	Hill/Carter family	Historical site	Charles City, VA
4.	1642	Barker Farm	Barker family	Dairy, apples	North Andover, MA
* 5.	1667	The Seaside Inn and Cottages	Mason family	Hospitality	Kennebunkport, ME
* 6.	1680	Saunderskill Farms	Schoonmaker family	Agriculture	Accord, NY
7.	1700?	Allandale Farm	Lawrence family	Agriculture	Brookline, MA
* 8.	1712	The Orchards of Concklin	Concklin family	Agriculture	Pomona, NY
* 9.	1720?	Smiling Hill Farm/Hillside Lumber	Knight family	Dairy, lumber	Westbrook, ME

10.	1722	Nourse Family Farm	Nourse family	Agriculture	Westborough, MA
* 11.	1728	Clark Farm	Hobart-Clark family	Agriculture	Danvers, MA
* (tie) 12.	1741	The Howell Farm	Howell family	Agriculture, cattle	Cedarville, NJ
(tie) 12.	1741	Lyman Orchards	Lyman family	Agriculture	Middlefield, CT
14.	1742	John Whitley Farm	Whitley family	Agriculture	Williamston, NC
15.	1750	Parlange Plantation	Parlange family	Agriculture	New Roads, LA
16.	1769	Bachman Funeral Home	Bachman family	Funeral services	Strasburg, PA
17.	1774	Stuart Land Co. of Virginia	Stuart family	Cattle	Rosedale, VA
18.	1778	St. John Milling Co.	St. John/Dawson family	Milling, farm products	Watauga, TN
19.	1780	Laird & Co.	Laird family	Brandy distiller	Scobeyville, NJ
20.	1783	Juanita M. Joiner Farm/ Southern Woodland Co.	Joiner family	Agriculture	Millen, GA
21.	1785	Bixler's	Bixler family	Retail jeweler	Easton, PA
22.	1787	Hayes' Coffees	Hayes family	Coffee roasters	Oak Park, IL
23.	1789	George R. Ruhl & Son Inc.	Ruhl family	Baking supplies	Hanover, MD
24.	1798	Alan McIlvain Co.	McIlvain family	Lumber	Marcus Hook, PA
25.	1801	Crane & Co.	Crane family	Paper manufacturing	Dalton, MA
(tie) 26.	1802	The Homestead	Hayward family	Hospitality	Sugar Hill, NH
(tie) 26.	1802	Rogers Funeral Home	Rogers family	Funeral services	Frankfort, KY
* 28.	1805	Samuel T. Freeman & Co.	Freeman family	Auction house	Philadelphia, PA
29.	1812	Bear Funeral Home	Bear family	Funeral services	Churchville, VA
30.	1813	ContiGroup Companies Inc.	Fribourg family	Grain, feed, food processing	New York, NY
31.	1815	Loane Bros. Inc.	Loane family	Awnings, tents	Baltimore, MD
32.	1816	Taylor Chair Co.	Taylor/Meals family	Furniture	Bedford, OH
(tie) 33.	1818	Eaton Funeral Homes	Eaton family	Funeral services	Needham, MA
* (tie) 33.	1818	Marshall Elevator	Marshall family	Elevators	Pittsburgh, PA
35.	1822	Stuard Funeral Home	Stuard family	Funeral services	Ardmore, PA
36.	1824	Ashaway Line and Twine Mfg. Co.	Crandall family	Manufacturing	Ashaway, RI
* (tie) 37.	1825	Milward Funeral Directors Inc.	Milward family	Funeral services	Lexington, KY
(tie) 37.	1825	M.A. Patout & Son Ltd.	Patout family	Sugar, syrup, etc.	Jeanerette, LA
39.	1826	Henry W.T. Mali & Company	Mali family	Billiards	New York, NY
(tie) 40.	1828	Cornell Iron Works	Cornell family	Industrial door manufacturing	Mountaintop, PA
(tie) 40.	1828	George Jerome & Co.	Jerome family	Engineering	Roseville, MI
42.	1829	D.G. Yuengling & Son Inc.	Yuengling family	Brewery	Pottsville, PA
43. (tie)	1830	E.A. Clore Sons Inc.	Clore family	Furniture	Madison, VA
* 43.					

(tie)	1830	Woolrich Inc.	Brayton family	Apparel	Woolrich, PA
*	45.	1831	Faries Funeral Home	Faries family	Funeral services Smyrna, DE
	46.	1832	Bevin Brothers Manufacturing Co.	Bevin family	Bells East Hampton, CT
	47.	1833	C.F. Martin & Co.	Martin family	Guitars Nazareth, PA
*	48.	1834	Bahney's Furniture	Bahney family	Furniture Myerstown, PA
(tie)	49.	1835	Hussey Seating Company	Hussey family	Seat manufacturing North Berwick, ME
(tie)	49.	1835	McLanahan Corp.	McLanahan family	Mining equipment Hollidaysburg, PA
(tie)	51.	1836	Bromberg & Co. Inc.	Bromberg family	Retail jeweler Birmingham, AL
(tie)	51.	1836	Thompson Drug Company	Thompson family	Pharmacy Spring Valley, IL
(tie)	53.	1837	Garretson Farm	Garretson family	Agriculture Salem, IA
*	(tie) 53.	1837	Harland Family Farm	Harland family	Cattle farming Lafayette, IL
(tie)	53.	1837	Shaff Family Farm	Shaff family	Agriculture Camanche, IA
*	(tie) 56.	1839	Schaeffer Manufacturing Company	Schaeffer family	Lubricants St. Louis, MO
(tie)	56.	1839	Southworth Co.	Southworth family	Paper Agawam, MA
(tie)	56.	1839	Suter's Handcrafted Furniture	Suter family	Furniture Harrisonburg, VA
	59.	1840	Antoine's Restaurant	Alciatore/Guste family	Restaurant New Orleans, LA
	60.	1842	The Verdin Co.	Verdin family	Bells, chimes, carillons Cincinnati, OH
(tie)	61.	1843	Baumann Safe Co.	Baumann/Billings family	Safe manufacturing St. Louis, MO
*	(tie) 61.	1843	Teas Nursery Company	Teas family	Horticulture Bellaire, TX
*	(tie) 63.	1844	S.W. Collins Co.	Collins family	Lumber, building materials Caribou, ME
*	(tie) 63.	1844	Gold Star Farms	Richmond family	Dairy Kent County, MI
*	(tie) 63.	1844	Harden Furniture Company	Harden family	Furniture McConnellsville, NY
*	66.	1845	Wise Funeral Service	Wise family	Funeral services Bucyrus, OH
*	(tie) 67.	1847	Faller's Better Furniture/ Faller Funeral Home/ Fryburg Old Treasures Depot	Faller family	Furniture, funeral services, antiques Fryburg, PA
(tie)	67.	1847	Flood Co.	Flood family	Painting contractor Cleveland, OH
*	(tie) 67.	1847	Hare Auto Group	Hare/Cox families	Automobiles Noblesville, IN
*	(tie) 67.	1847	Holmes' Brothers Farm of Wayne County	Holmes family	Cattle Wayne County, MO
*	(tie) 71.	1848	The Bentley Company	Bentley family	Construction Milwaukee, WI
(tie)	71.	1848	Hancock Land Co./ Hancock Lumber Co.	Hancock family	Forestry, lumber Casco, ME Building products,

(tie) 71.	1848	Richardson Industries	Richardson family	yacht interiors, retail furniture	Sheboygan, WI	
(tie) 74.	1849	Schneidereith & Sons	Schneidereith family	Printing	Baltimore, MD	
(tie) 74.	1849	Teeters Furniture and Funeral Chapel	Teeter family	Furniture, funeral services	Hawley, PA	
(tie) 76.	1850	G. Krug & Son	Krug family	Metalworking	Baltimore, MD	
* (tie) 76.	1850	Rod McLellan Company	McLellan family	Horticulture	San Mateo, CA	
* (tie) 76.	1850	Menasha Corporation	Smith family	Manufacturing	Neenah, WI	
(tie) 76.	1850	A.E. Schmidt Company	Schmidt family	Billiards	St. Louis, MO	
(tie) 76.	1850	Wilbert Funeral Home	Wilbert family	Funeral services	Plaquemine, LA	
(tie) 81.	1851	Corning	Houghton family	Materials	Corning, NY	
(tie) 81.	1851	C.H. Guenther & Son Inc. (Pioneer Flour Mills)	Guenther family	Food products	San Antonio, TX	
(tie) 81.	1851	Mager & Gougelman Inc.	Gougelman family	Ocularists	New York, NY	
* (tie) 81.	1851	B.F. Shaw Printing Company	Shaw family	Multimedia	Dixon, IL	
	85.	1852	Breitbach's Country Dining	Breitbach family	Restaurant	Balltown, IA
(tie) 86.	1853	Hicks Nurseries	Hicks family	Horticulture	Westbury, NY	
(tie) 86.	1853	King Ranch	Kleberg family	Diversified	Kingsville, TX	
(tie) 86.	1853	Levi Strauss & Co.	Haas family	Apparel	San Francisco, CA	
(tie) 86.	1853	Lonsdale Farm	Lonsdale family	Cattle, agriculture	Stuart, IA	
(tie) 86.	1853	Luyties Pharmacal Co.	Luyties family	Homeopathic remedies	St. Louis, MO	
* (tie) 86.	1853	Marcus Paint Co.	Marcus family	Coating manufacturer	Louisville, KY	
(tie) 86.	1853	Wagner Printing Co.	Wagner family	Printing	Chicago, IL	
* (tie) 93.	1854	N.H. Bragg & Sons	Bragg family	Industrial supplies	Bangor, ME	
(tie) 93.	1854	Holman's Funeral Service	Holmes family	Funeral services	Portland, OR	
(tie) 93.	1854	Noble & Cooley	Cooley/Jones family	Drum manufacturer	Granville, MA	
* (tie) 93.	1854	Pumphrey Funeral Home	Pumphrey family	Funeral services	Rockville, MD	
(tie) 93.	1854	Quinn Funeral Home	Quinn family	Funeral services	Warwick, RI	
* (tie) 93.	1854	Times-Union Newspaper	Williams family	Newspaper	Warsaw, IN	
* (tie) 93.	1854	Wagner Quality Shoes	Wagner family	Shoes	Pittsburgh, PA	
(tie) 100.	1855	Davis Funeral Chapel Inc.	Moulden family	Funeral services	Leavenworth, KS	
(tie) 100.	1855	N.P. Dodge Co.	Dodge family	Real estate	Omaha, NE	
* (tie) 100.	1855	Laird Norton Co. LLC	Norton and Laird families	Financial services, real estate, investing	Seattle, WA	
* (tie)	1855	Lane Funeral Homes	Lane family	Funeral services	Mineral Ridge,	

100.					OH
(tie)	1855	Penner Angus Ranch	Penner family	Ranching	Mill Creek, OK
100.	1855	Schoedinger Funeral Home	Schoedinger family	Funeral services	Columbus, OH
(tie)	1855	Sears Seating	Sears family	Specialized seating	Davenport, IA
100.	1855	H.C. Wood Inc.	Wood family	Cemetery memorials	Lansdowne, PA

## America's oldest family businesses — by State

	Date	Rank
<b>Alabama</b>		
Bromberg & Co.	1836	51 (tie)
<b>California</b>		
Rod McLellan Co.	1850	76 (tie)
Levi Strauss & Co.	1853	86 (tie)
<b>Connecticut</b>		
Bevin Bros. Manufacturing	1832	46
Lyman Orchards	1741	12 (tie)
<b>Delaware</b>		
Faries Funeral Home	1831	45
<b>Georgia</b>		
Juanita M. Joiner Farm	1783	20
<b>Illinois</b>		
Harland Family Farm	1837	53 (tie)
Hayes' Coffees	1787	22
B.F. Shaw Printing Co.	1851	81 (tie)
Thompson Drug Co.	1836	51 (tie)
Wagner Printing Co.	1853	86 (tie)
<b>Indiana</b>		
Hare Auto Group	1847	67 (tie)
Times-Union Newspaper	1854	93 (tie)

## Removed since 2003:

Business	State	Founded	Notes
Miller Farm	Delaware	1684	Company's existence could not be confirmed.
Cooke Farm	Connecticut	1720	Company's existence could not be confirmed.
Sawyer Bentwood Co.	Vermont	1801	Sixth-generation owner passed away; company bought by George Campo.
Ratcliffe Farms	Mississippi	1821	Company's existence could not be confirmed.
Delaware Gazette	Ohio	1834	Acquired by Brown Publishing Company of Cincinnati.
Fletcher Family Farm	Illinois	1843	Company's existence could not be confirmed.
R.C. Perine & Son	Kansas	1856	Not continuously owned by one family; closed in 2005.

## Superseded by newly discovered companies:

Business	State	Founded
Monarch Hydraulics Inc.	Michigan	1856
Laufersweiler Funeral Home	Iowa	1856
Iwan Ries & Co.	Illinois	1857

**Iowa**

Breitbach's Country Dining	1852	85
Garretson Farm	1837	53 (tie)
Lonsdale Farm	1853	86 (tie)
Shaff Family Farm	1837	53 (tie)
Sears Seating	1855	100 (tie)

**Kansas**

Davis Funeral Chapel Inc.	1855	100 (tie)
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**Kentucky**

Marcus Paint Co.	1853	86 (tie)
Milward Funeral Directors Inc.	1825	37 (tie)
Rogers Funeral Home	1802	26 (tie)

**Louisiana**

Antoine's Restaurant	1840	59
Parlange Plantation	1750	15
M.A. Patout & Son	1825	37 (tie)
Wilbert Funeral Home	1850	76 (tie)

**Maine**

N.H. Bragg & Sons	1854	93 (tie)
S.W. Collins Co.	1844	63 (tie)
Hancock Land/Lumber Co.	1848	71 (tie)
Hussey Seating Co.	1835	49 (tie)
The Seaside Inn and Cottages	1667	5
Smiling Hill Farm/Hillside Lumber	1720?	9

**Maryland**

G. Krug & Son	1850	76 (tie)
Loane Brothers Inc.	1815	31
Pumphrey Funeral Home	1854	93 (tie)
George R. Ruhl & Son Inc.	1789	23
Schneidereith & Sons	1849	74 (tie)

Klein Tools	Illinois	1857
Gundlach-Bundschu Winery	California	1858
Baird & Warner	Illinois	1860
W.A. Bean & Son	Maine	1860
Anheuser-Busch Cos.	Missouri	1860
John Boyle & Co.	North Carolina	1860
J.H. Home & Sons Inc.	Massachusetts	1860
Haworth Farm	Idaho	1861
Bacardi	Puerto Rico	1862
Daynes Music	Utah	1862
R.R. Donnelley & Sons	Illinois	1864
Cargill Inc.	Minnesota	1865
Milliken & Co.	South Carolina	1865
Wawa	Pennsylvania	1865
Russ Casson & Sons Meats	Iowa	1865
Destilería Serrallés	Puerto Rico	1865
Langlois Pianos	Washington	1865
J. Henry Stuhr Inc.	South Carolina	1865
Newman Galleries	Pennsylvania	1865

**Massachusetts**

Allendale Farm	1700?	7
Barker Farm	1642	4
Clark Farm	1728	11
Crane & Co.	1801	25
Eaton Funeral Homes	1818	33 (tie)
Noble & Cooley	1854	93 (tie)
Nourse Family Farm	1722	10
Southworth Co.	1839	56 (tie)
Zildjian Cymbal Co.	1623	1

**Michigan**

Gold Star Farms.	1844	63 (tie)
George Jerome & Co.	1828	40 (tie)

**Missouri**

Baumann Safe Co.	1843	61 (tie)
Holmes' Bros. Farm of Wayne County	1847	67 (tie)
Luyties Pharmacal Co.	1853	86 (tie)
Schaeffer Mfg. Co.	1839	56 (tie)
A.E. Schmidt Co.	1850	76 (tie)

**Nebraska**

Gold Star Farms	1844	63 (tie)
N.P. Dodge Co.	1855	100 (tie)

**New Hampshire**

The Homestead	1802	26 (tie)
Tuttle Farm	1635- 38?	2

**New Jersey**

Laird & Co.	1780	19
The Howell Farm	1741	12 (tie)

**New York**

ContiGroup Cos. Inc.	1813	30
Corning	1851	81 (tie)
Harden Furniture Inc.	1844	63 (tie)
Hicks Nurseries	1853	86

		(tie)
The Orchards of Concklin	1712	8
Mager & Gougelman Inc.	1851	81 (tie)
Henry W.T. Mali & Co.	1826	39
Saunderskill Farms	1680	6
<b>North Carolina</b>		
John Whitley Farm	1742	14
<b>Ohio</b>		
Flood Co.	1847	67 (tie)
Lane Funeral Homes	1855	100 (tie)
Schoedinger Funeral Home	1855	100 (tie)
Taylor Chair Co.	1816	32
The Verdin Co.	1842	60
Wise Funeral Service	1845	66
<b>Oklahoma</b>		
Penner Angus Ranch	1855	100 (tie)
<b>Oregon</b>		
Holman's Funeral Service	1854	93 (tie)
<b>Pennsylvania</b>		
Bachman Funeral Home	1769	16
Bahney's Furniture	1834	48
Bixler's	1785	21
Cornell Iron Works	1828	40 (tie)
Faller's Better Furniture	1847	67 (tie)
C.F. Martin & Co.	1833	47
Alan McIlvain Co.	1798	24
Marshall Elevator	1818	33 (tie)
McLanahan Corp.	1835	49 (tie)
Samuel T. Freeman & Co.	1805	28
Stuard Funeral Home	1822	35
Teeters Furniture & Funeral Home	1849	74 (tie)
Wagner Quality Shoes	1854	93 (tie)
H.C. Wood Inc.	1855	100 (tie)
Woolrich Inc.	1830s	43

		(tie)
D.G. Yuengling & Son	1829	42
<b>Rhode Island</b>		
Ashaway Line and Twine Mfg. Co.	1824	36
Quinn Funeral Home	1854	93 (tie)
<b>Tennessee</b>		
St. John Milling Co.	1778	18
<b>Texas</b>		
C.H. Guenther & Son Inc. (Pioneer Flour Mills)	1851	81 (tie)
King Ranch	1853	86 (tie)
Teas Nursery Co.	1843	61 (tie)
<b>Virginia</b>		
Bear Funeral Home	1812	29
E.A. Clore Sons Inc.	1830	43 (tie)
Shirley Plantation	1638	3
Stuart Land Co. of Virginia Inc.	1774	17
Suter's Handcrafted Furniture	1839	56 (tie)
<b>Washington</b>		
Laird Norton Company LLC	1855	100 (tie)
<b>Wisconsin</b>		
The Bentley Company	1848	71 (tie)
Menasha Corp.	1850	76 (tie)
Richardson Industries	1848	71 (tie)

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