

Proud of Hard-Earned Skill

Holden Builder, 84, Still Active

By MICHAEL J. DALEY
Telegram Staff Reporter

"Listen to the ladies."

That's part of the success formula offered by an 84-year-old builder of more than 1,000 homes who still puts in a full day's work after 68 years in the business.

He's Bernard A. Sundin of 524 Grove St., president of B.A. Sundin Inc. of Holden. His is not a desk job either.

Earns Award

He spends his work day "in the field" supervising construction at Armington Acres in Holden, the housing development that earned for his firm one of the Saturday Evening Post's Blue Ribbon Home Awards.

Sundin said he attributes much of his success to his own informal technique of market analysis. "The successful builder," he said, "stays ahead of the market, learns what the customer wants and builds his houses accordingly."

That's where the women can help. Sundin said he always has had much respect for the opinion of women in such matters.

Suggest Improvement

He gives women credit for many of the innovations which he has introduced into homes in this area. One was the placement of electrical outlets several inches up the wall, instead of near the floor.

He also claims to be the first local contractor to raise the sinks to 36 inches above the kitchen floor to permit a six-inch indented foot space below the sink cabinet.

This made dishwashing less a

chore and saved wear and tear on the bottom of the cabinet, he said. His wife, who took an active interest in the firm, suggested this last improvement.

Coming from a family with five generations of carpenters in Sweden and America, Sundin fell naturally into the building trade. He started 68 years ago as a "wood butcher" for the Leonard Hall Builders on a job near Columbus Park.

Pay wasn't very high in those days, Sundin recalled. "A good carpenter made \$12 a week." As an apprentice, he labored gratis — an employer thought he was doing a young man a favor by letting him learn from experienced workers.

He spent four years in Worcester and then decided to heed Horace Greeley's exhortation to go West. He worked as journeyman carpenter and foreman on the West Coast for the Diamond Match Co. and stayed there long enough to see San Francisco after the ravages of the great earthquake of 1906.

Worked in Guatemala

After giving the Californians a hand in rebuilding their city, Sundin heeded the call of adventure and traveled to San Jose, Guatemala.

He was hired by the Redmond Lumber Co. and the U.S. government to supervise local carpenters in the reconstruction of the town which had been burned down when an over-exuberant Italian sea captain fired his salutes too close to the port.

He worked a year in the Central American republic as a T.R. Roosevelt administration equivalent of the modern peace corpsman before returning home to Worcester in 1907.

Extended 'Brief Visit'

His intention was to pay a "brief visit" to friends and relatives in the Union Hill neighborhood where he had spent his

boyhood. Here he met and married the former Edith A. Ackerson. They will celebrate their 58th wedding anniversary in November. Sundin wanted to return to what he described as "God's country," the verdant hills and fertile valleys of northern California. His new bride wanted to remain in Worcester. The couple stayed.

In 1920, Sundin went into business for himself, and built the first of his estimated 1,000 homes. He began building custom-made dwellings and then tried his hand at housing developments on North Parkway, Melrose Street and Bancroft Hill.

Wiped out in the Depression, Sundin redoubled his efforts and saw his business flourish again.

In 1928, the firm added "& Son" to its letterheads when his only child, Clark B. Sundin Sr., entered the business. He is now the treasurer. A grandson, Clark B. Sundin Jr., joined the company in 1960 and is now assistant treasurer. "You know," Sundin said jocularly, "it's the assistant who does all the work."

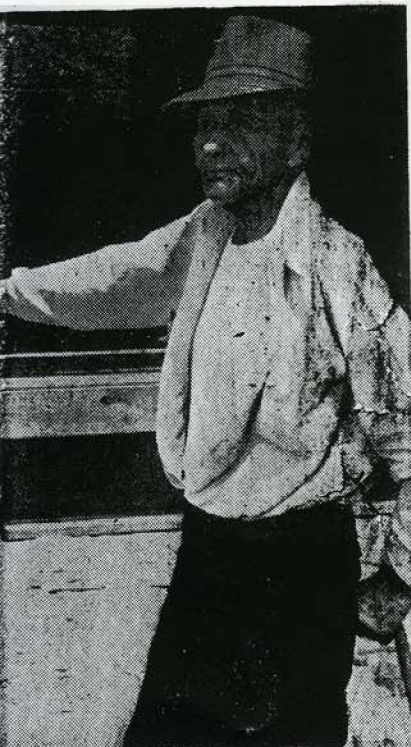
Lacks Skilled Workers

He was most optimistic about the firm's current prospects. "Business, is so good I can't keep up with orders." He said one of his troubles was a dearth of skilled workers. "The youngster don't want to work like their fathers."

When asked if he had any plans for retirement, Sundin said: "I'll stop working when they dig a six-foot hole for me."

Sundin said he has no special secret that would account for his astounding vigor at such an advanced age. He does believe, however, that hard work has enabled him to remain healthy and energetic.

Sundin summed it all up in a few sentences. "I've been a lucky man. I made a few mistakes, but I learned from them. I'd like to do it all over again."



BERNARD A. SUNDIN SUPERVISES PROJECT IN HOLDEN
He has 68 years of construction experience