

FROM THE PAGES OF  
**HISTORY**

# Francis Doors, Russia, Ohio



Courtesy of Mary Francis

Leo joined the Marines on Dec. 8, 1941, the day after the Pearl Harbor attack.



Courtesy of Jim York, Clopay

Leo Francis, 1960.

Francis Garage Doors brochure, ca. 1960.

The original Francis Products building in Russia, ca. 1960.



Courtesy of Jim York, Clopay

**About Leo Francis**

Jim York: "Leo was a good person to know and work for. He was honest, generous, and a shrewd businessman."

Mary Francis: "He was a fun, loving, crazy, smart man."

**Why did Leo sell the company?**

Tom Cordonnier: "The business was getting too big, and the money looked good."

Mary Francis: "It was just too much worry and stress. He said, 'I don't have to do all this.'"

**Sources:**

- Tom Cordonnier of Russia, Ohio. Francis Products and Clopay, 1953–1997. Former Plant Manager at Russia and Clopay Vice President of Industry Relations.
- Mary Francis of Russia. Widow of Leo Francis.
- Jim York of Russia. Francis Products and Clopay, 1963–present. Former Plant Manager at Russia and now Clopay Director of Operations Projects.

**Milestones**

- 1949** ▶ High school dropout Leo Francis and his brother, Tom, jointly own a fledgling company known as Francis Mfg. in Russia, Ohio (pronounced ROO-shee). To determine the sole owner, they flip a coin. Leo loses.
- 1953** ▶ Laid off from Francis Mfg., 33-year-old Leo Francis starts Francis Products in the basement and garage of his home in Russia.  
  
(1953) Leo hires 21-year-old Tom Cordonnier, also laid off from Francis Mfg., to handle sales for Francis Products. Cordonnier works the first year without pay, in exchange for owning a portion of the company. The first products they try to sell are feather bird pictures from Mexico.  
  
(1953) The company becomes a wholesale distributor of residential garage door operators, viewing them as a product with a future. The operators are made by Verdier Brothers of nearby Sidney, Ohio.  
  
(1953-1954) The company begins selling garage doors and eventually moves into a former filling station. Over the next 10 years, Francis Products sells wood garage doors from Kinneer, Ridge Doors, and General Doors, steel doors from Berry and Taylor, and fiberglass doors from Frantz.
- 1964** ▶ Francis Products buys a Lincoln Door clamp (from Glen Berry of Berry Door) and begins to manufacture the first Francis Door, a wood garage door. The company has 13 employees, but begins to grow more rapidly.  
  
(1964) Clopay Corporation of Cincinnati enters the garage door business with the purchase of Baker-Aldor-Jones of Hialeah, Florida.
- 1969** ▶ Clopay purchases Francis Products, Inc., of Russia, which now has 40 employees and many dealers spread throughout the East and Midwest. Leo Francis is also the mayor of Russia.
- 1972** ▶ The name of the Francis Door changes to the Clopay brand name. The Russia plant has 70 employees.
- 1973** ▶ After serving as Clopay's Plant Manager at Russia, Leo Francis retires at age 53.
- 1995** ▶ Leo Francis dies of lung cancer on Sept. 8, 1995, at age 75.
- 1997** ▶ Tom Cordonnier retires from Clopay as Vice President of Industry Relations, after 44 years in the business.