

Prefab forms are quickly and easily carried about by modern material-handling equipment—a significant cost and labor-saving advantage.

Prefab Forms Keep Pace with Building Needs

BY JOHN G. SYMONS
PRESIDENT,
SYMONS CLAMP & MANUFACTURING CO.

In scarcely more than ten years, mass production of prefab forms has brought new speed and economies into the construction industry

For those of us who have grown up in the business it is hard to realize that the manufacture of prefabricated forms is scarcely more than ten years old. As is true in so many industries, the mass production of forms was developed in answer to specific needs—in this case to help take care of the tremendous backlog of construction that accumulated during World War II.

When we look back now, the reasons for turning to prefab forms are obvious. The need for speed was, of course, a major factor. Building forms on the job requires a lot of time—time the contractor could more profitably spend superintending the job. Prefabs also permit a contractor to start the job much faster—without waiting until forms are hammered together.

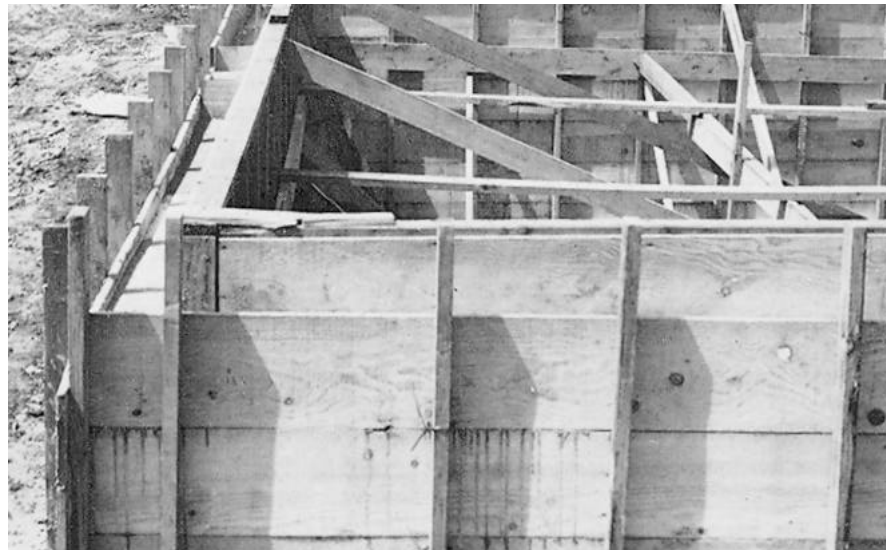
While speed is a factor, an even more compelling reason for the building industry to turn to prefabs was economy. Competition became keener than ever before. Jobs had to be figured close, and any device which permitted labor-saving short cuts immediately became important to the industry. Prefab manufacturers gained acceptance, too, by offering contractors the option of either outright purchase, rental, or rent applying on the purchase of forms. This enabled large and small contractors to compete for the same jobs on an equal basis.

The industry can now look back with some amusement at the fit of crude prefabs. Many of them were made of yellow pine and spaced in a kind of log cabin effect. The important thing, of course, is that they did

the job so well that contractors found them essential to their business.

Engineering and field service offered by some manufacturers helped speed the trend toward the use of prefab forms. Today most manufacturers will take a contractor's plans and prepare complete form layouts and bills of materials without COST to the contractor. Field service men also offer on-the-job advice on how forms can be used most efficiently, or in overcoming unusual problems that may arise.

Although evolution came fast, we would be less than generous if we didn't pay tribute to those far-seeing contractors who helped "sell" concrete as a basic construction medium. Name your structure and chances are some enterprising contractor or architect is now thinking in terms of how concrete can be used to answer his problem. The quality of concrete itself has been steadily improved, making it possible to use the material in many new ways. The greatly expanded use of prestressed concrete is an outstanding example of this. Job-built forms simply can't be used to cope with all



Before the advent of prefab forms, ordinary one-inch planks were used in assembling forms on the job site.

modern structural demands.

Manufacturers have had to answer this need. The trend has had to be toward lighter forms which can bear an increasing load. The growth of the use of magnesium in forming is a story in itself. It has doubled each year for the past ten years, and no volume contractor can afford to compete without using it in some

type of form. Magnesium forms can be used literally hundreds of times and still retain their smoothness and load-bearing qualities. Volume usage makes their slightly higher first cost insignificant.

Plywood has been improved and will continue to be as it is adapted to new uses. Plastic coating has added many reuses to plywood prefabs

In contrast to the crude plank forms above, this illustration shows steel-frame prefab forms in place for pouring basement.





In gang forming, shown here, whole units are lifted into place at once—a technique which saves costly manhours.

Illustrated is another type of modern prefab form, which features wooden frame and steel cross members.



and cut down the unit cost materially. Reusable magnesium-plywood forms are the answer for the medium to-small contractors. Most forms of this type pay for themselves after the 100th usage.

In addition to these forms, however, the concrete contractor has at his disposal steel frame, all wood, and wood-with-steel-cross member forms— all designed for a specific purpose or cost objective.

Forming hardware is also a beneficiary of the trend to fast erection and stripping. Even scaffolding and bracing is prefabricated so that the contractor need spend no time at all on this otherwise time consuming detail work.

Extensive research is going on to find materials still more adaptable to the complex forming problems of today. Glass is considered another possible material—glass and stainless steel or magnesium can make a rigid form that will withstand much abuse.

Gang forming is still another new frontier for the industry. The many uses of this new approach to forming are still being studied. Lift the whole forming unit into place with a crane and you save many costly hours of labor—a major factor in bidding.

We manufacturers are pleased to

be associated with a growth industry. Proof of this growth is readily apparent to us this year when, despite a drop of more than 25 per cent in home building, the loss was more than offset by the continuing boom in general construction. The gains that will accrue from the multi-billion highway building program are still being assessed.

Competition is as keen if not keener in our business than in the concrete contracting field. The unusual fact is its stability. Each year about as many enter it as drop out. In short, it is no bed of roses. Many see it as an easy money enterprise. Those who fail invariably have tried to cut costs by using inferior materials and workmanship. The successful manufacturer works closely with the men in the field, tries to anticipate demand, and offers a quality product that satisfies close profit margins. No one doing any volume of concrete construction work today should be fully satisfied with his performance in respect to either cost or quality until he has fully investigated the possibilities of prefabricated forms.