

## B. Walter & Company

Founded: circa 1884

Location: Huntington (1884); Brunner & Sons Manufacturing Plant, Wabash (1886?); 655 Factory Street, Wabash (1887– )

Bossler Walter purportedly bought a Huntington company in 1884 and moved it to Wabash sometime later. Walter's partner, Thomas Hennessey, a resident of Huntington, had patented a table slide, the mechanism under a table that allows it to be pulled apart for the placement of additional leaves, that the team produced. The partners started making their product in a small room on the third floor of the Brunner & Sons manufacturing plant. Three years after forming the partnership, Walter bought Hennessey's portion of the concern. In the years after 1887 Walter's product proved so popular that he had to move out of his first Wabash office and build a complex of buildings near the Big Four Railroad line. By the beginning of the twentieth century the firm had the capacity to produce as many as one million table slides a year and employed as many as twenty-five men. Walter preferred to use soft maple or ash for the table slides. The company's name became identified with quality, and according to one source the inspection process at the plant was so good that up to that time the firm had never had one of their table slides returned.

Walter was a Pennsylvania native who moved to Indiana with his mother when he was seventeen. After arriving in the Hoosier State he became a painter's apprentice. In 1871 he joined with two other men in North Manchester to operate a hub and spoke factory, but the enterprise failed after about a year. In 1872 he teamed with Jesse Arnold and again started making wagon wheels, continuing to do so until 1882 when he was elected county sheriff. Because of contemporary laws he could not be engaged in

commerce while serving as sheriff and was forced to sell the company. He was reelected in 1884. He did not seek another term in 1886, leaving to run the business he bought two years before.

Walter and his wife, Esther Williams of North Manchester, had one daughter and one son. The son, Fred B. Walter, joined his father in the business in 1906, two years before Bossler Walter's death. After his father passed away, Fred and his mother incorporated the company. While Fred ran the Service Motor Car Company, Esther managed the B. Walter Company, holding the title of president at least through the late 1910s. In an attempt to keep up with the changing technology, Fred added a hardware department in 1926 that produced metal table slides, drop-leaf supports, and table locks.

In the early to mid-1930s Walter's sons, John F., Thomas G., and Henry P. Walter, joined the firm. The economic boom and the move to the suburbs by many American families meant an increase in the demand for furniture, including tables and table slides. To keep up with the increased demand, in 1955 the company opened a second table-slide producing factory, Walter Dimensions, Inc., of Jamestown, Tennessee. Three years later Fred Walter took the post of chairman of the board, leaving his oldest son, John, as the president. John continued to run the company until ill health forced him to retire, accepting the post of chairman of the board in 1974.

John Walter's son, Graden, and his son-in-law, Arthur Jasen, joined the company in the mid-1960s. In 1974 Thomas G. Walter became the fourth president of the company. In the mid-1980s the fourth generation of the Walter family, Graden, became president, having worked for the company since about 1970. In 1999 Graden continued to preside over his great-grandfather's business. The firm employed thirty-two people

and continued to produce table slides and locknuts and dealt generally in hardware. The company's products are shipped throughout the United States and Europe.