

Bloomfield Manufacturing Company

Founded: 1895

Location: 46 West Spring Street, Bloomfield (1998)

Philip John Harrah and Oscar Shryer started the Harrah Manufacturing Company in Greene County in 1895. Shryer, an Indiana University graduate, had been a banker in Bloomfield since 1878. Harrah, born Philip Beard in Putnam County, had been orphaned in 1867 at age three. Capt. James B. Harrah had adopted the child and moved the family to Greene County in 1876.

Harrah grew famous for his tall tales and his ability to play the violin at square dances. He had sold washing machines and had served as a schoolteacher before going into business for himself. A great admirer of Thomas Edison, he wanted to produce items that made life easier for people.

Simplifying machines and making convenience items seemed to be one of Harrah's early passions. One of his first inventions was a combination anvil-vise-drill tool, named the Universal Repair Machine, and another was a seven-use tool featuring a hammer, a hatchet, wire cutters, and pliers. In 1905 Harrah came out with the Automatic A-B-C Combination Tool, now known as the Hi-Lift Jack. The jack could be utilized for a number of operations, such as stretching wire fences, holding boards in place for cutting, or changing wagon wheels, but now it is most commonly used to lift a car or truck to change a flat tire.

By the 1920s Harrah also made the Kalamity Kar Kit, a container that held automotive supplies one might need during a trip. The kit held a gas container, a siphon, a steel tow strap, and a waterproof sheet for people who wanted to work under their car

without getting dirty or drenched. In addition Harrah invented in 1927 the Kant-Slam Gate and Door Closer, a device that helped close gates and doors quietly. By 1929 Harrah's son, Chester, had become a co-owner in the company.

The Bloomfield Manufacturing Company continues to be owned and operated by the fourth generation of Harrahs and ships its products throughout the world. Beyond the Hi-Lift Jack, the company makes payload covers, garage-door openers, and its newest product, the Post-Popper, a jack that makes it easier to remove posts. In 1998 the company employed forty and expected sales of more than \$5.5 million.