

Borneman Industrial Supply

Founded: 1877

Location: 110 Main Street, Elkhart (1877–80); corner of Main and Lexington Streets (1880–83); corner of Main and High Streets (1883–1902); 224 South Main Street (1902–1957); 124 East High Street (1957–)

At the age of fifteen Herman B. Borneman emigrated from Germany with his parents to Monroe, Michigan. In 1876, after serving three years as a tinner's apprentice, he and his friend George D. Doll decided to move to Gary to work in the steel mills. When the train they were riding stopped in Elkhart the two got off and decided to look around the town, both going their separate ways. Doll spotted a man having problems repairing a tin roof and searched until he found Borneman, who helped the man with the repairs. Borneman and Doll decided to stay in Elkhart.

Borneman went to work as a tinner for John Clinger. Borneman moved to Fremont for six months, but returned to Elkhart and entered into a partnership with Doll. In 1877 the two men acquired Thomas Bigelow's hardware store. The partners sold hardware items, tools, stoves, and also offered tinning services.

Borneman typified many entrepreneurs of the day, as he had far-reaching interests outside of the hardware business, including real estate and politics. He served two terms on the Elkhart city council, owned the property on which the Merchants Hotel was located, and was director of a bank. In 1880, the same year the store moved to the corner of Lexington and Main, he married Catherine Wagner, also from Germany. In 1902 Borneman bought out Doll to make room for two of his four sons, Edward C. and Herman F. The name of the enterprise changed from Borneman & Doll to Borneman &

Sons, reflecting the shift. In that same year Borneman hired famed Elkhart architect E. Hill Turnock to design a hardware store located on 224 South Main Street.

In 1957 the business changed its name again to Borneman Industrial Supply, which reflected its orientation toward supplying the needs of milling businesses. In the late 1980s the company purchased a band-saw welder—a decision that company executives cite as a reason they have been able to stay commercially competitive. Additional services were added in the 1990s, including the most up-to-date welding machinery.

In 1999 the business remained a family affair. Edward C. Borneman III served as president of his great-great-grandfather's company, while another grandson, Charles, was a partner and salesman. They represent the fourth generation of the family to work in the business. The company continued to sell mill supplies, hand and cutting tools, ladders, and other hardware items. It had a customer base of fifteen hundred and a products list that topped 170,000 items. Borneman Industrial Supply sold products to recreational vehicle manufacturers and manufactured housing shops, tool and die firms, and band instrument companies, to name but a few.