

Capital Machine Company

Founded: 1887–89

Location: 35–37 Alabama Street (1889–96); 254–256 South Pennsylvania (1896–1909); 2801 South Roosevelt Avenue (1909–)

Louis Frederick Koss, Sr., son of a German immigrant stonemason who settled in Indianapolis in its early days, was an able and experienced machinist when he founded a machine shop in the late 1880s. Koss, born in Indianapolis in 1864, had entered the Eagle Machine Works, which was located at the corner of Meridian and Louisiana Streets, as a boy. His initial firms were partnerships, first with Dwight W. Williamson and later with Charles Herdrich. In 1893, however, Capital Machine Works, “Builder of Special and Experimental Machinery,” was listed in the city directory with Koss as sole proprietor. The firm, located at 35–37 Alabama Street, opposite the Marion County Jail, produced various types of special machinery and tools, including veneer-cutting machines and automatic knife grinders. Koss employed up to ten skilled machinists.

As Indianapolis became a center of the veneer industry in the Midwest and with a local demand for machines needed in the manufacture of kegs and barrels, the company grew. In January 1896 Capital Machine Works moved to 254–256 (later 502) South Pennsylvania Street. Koss was an innovator, improving the technology used to produce wood veneer. In 1904, for example, he invented a vertical wood veneer slicer that replaced the older and more dangerous horizontal slicers. His veneer-making machines, including staylog lathes and massive 75,000-pound horizontal veneer slicers, were sold all over the world. The equipment crafted at the Indianapolis firm was widely known to

be of high quality. In 1905 the sixth vertical-slicing machine produced was sent to the Evansville Veneer and Lumber Company and is still used daily.

In 1909 Koss incorporated his firm as the Capital Machine Company and moved to a new location at 2901 Roosevelt Avenue. By 1924 the company employed thirty-five men. Louis Koss died in 1947 and his son Louis Frederick Koss, Jr., assumed the presidency of the company. The younger Koss graduated from Purdue University with a mechanical engineering degree in 1922. During his tenure as president the company received four patents. One of the patents was for veneer machine knife clamps in 1932, another was awarded for the creation of a variable speed drive mechanism for the veneer slicer a year later. His third patent came for a knife-rocking mechanism for veneer cutting machines on the eve of World War II, and his last for a hydraulic control of veneer-slicing machines in 1952. After Louis Koss, Jr.'s death in 1963, his son, Louis Jack Koss, assumed the presidency of the company. Jack also attended Purdue, graduating in 1949. William Koss, a 1979 Purdue graduate, rose to the presidency after his father's death in 1994.

Over the years the company and the men who ran it patented several inventions, including the vertical veneer slicer, hydraulic dogging of flitches, hydraulic offset knife bar movement, and a knife bar and pressure cap that permitted veneer to be blue stain and distortion free. In the 1990s the company patented computer-controlled mechanisms that produced higher quality veneer. Since 1984 some new invention or design change has been introduced almost every year, keeping the company competitive and profitable. Customer service has also been a mainstay at the company, and the firm maintains a large

inventory of spare parts so that customers will not have to wait long to repair machines and get them back into operation.

In 1999 Capital Machine Company, Incorporated employed forty people, expected sales to reach over \$5 million, and planned to unveil a newly designed slicer.