

E. Bierhaus & Sons

Founded: 1866

Location: Main Street, between Second and Third Streets, Vincennes (1866); 121 Main Street; 402–406 Main Street (1886–); southwest corner of First and Church Streets (– 1929); 328 North Second Street (1929–65); 302 Ramsey Road (1965–)

Bierhaus Brothers (1890–1929): 127 North Second Street; 207–211 North Second Street; 328 North Second Street

In 1849 the teenaged Edward Bierhaus emigrated with his parents from Prussia and settled in Vincennes. After working for a time at the American Hotel, Bierhaus moved to northern Knox County and established a log cabin store in partnership with C. E. Baker at the junction of the roads from Linton to Vincennes and Carlisle to Edwardsport, the site of present-day Freelandville. The business had a capital of two hundred dollars. In 1865 Bierhaus moved back to Vincennes and established a pork-packing business, buying slaughterhouses in Vincennes and Bridgeport, Illinois. Bierhaus began to develop a delivery and supply business over the course of the following year, which acquainted him with general stores throughout the area. In 1866 he established a wholesale grocery business in partnership with a grain operator named Searight. He purchased Searight's share of the business the following year.

In 1878 Bierhaus purchased the warehouse of one of his competitors, Gimbel Brothers Wholesale Grocery, which was located on Main Street between First and Second Streets. Bierhaus consolidated his two warehouses into one location and, after two of his six sons (Charles and Fred) entered the business, he renamed his wholesale operation Edward Bierhaus & Sons. By the mid-1880s Edward Bierhaus & Sons was a wholesale grocer, pork and egg packer, and dealer in country produce. Eventually three more of Edward's sons (Will, Edward Jr., and John) joined the firm. The business

prospered, and in 1886 Bierhaus constructed a new warehouse at 402–406 Main Street. Bierhaus's slaughterhouse was packing 12,000 to 20,000 hogs per year.

In 1890 Edward's sons, Will and Edward Jr., left the family business and established a rival wholesale warehouse on Second Street. A third man, John W. Crook, also invested in their business. Eventually, Edward withdrew from the business to enter the retail trade. By 1901 Bierhaus Brothers had occupied a new, modern warehouse, complete with elevators and its own railroad switch, at Second and Perry Streets.

Edward Sr., retired from E. Bierhaus & Sons in 1896, and the the oldest and youngest sons, Charles and John, took over the business. The third generation entered the family business in 1912, when John's son Arthur joined the firm. In 1917 the company built a new, 100,000-square-foot facility at the corner of First and Church Streets. The warehouse was located on the site of old Fort Sackville, however, and in 1929 federal and state authorities ordered the warehouse demolished to make way for a memorial to George Rogers Clark. Instead of building a new warehouse, however, John Bierhaus negotiated a friendly buyout of the Bierhaus Brothers wholesale grocery establishment owned by his brothers Will and Edward Jr., thus ending the family rivalry. E. Bierhaus & Sons moved into the old Bierhaus Brothers warehouse on Second and Perry Streets.

The following year John retired from the company and sold it to his sons Arthur, Robert, and Edward. However, the death of his oldest son, Arthur, led John to return to work on a part-time basis, in which capacity he continued for the following ten years. John's two remaining sons ran E. Bierhaus & Sons as a partnership until 1958, when they incorporated the firm. In 1950 a sister company, Wabash Coffee, was formed to service

institutional accounts such as schools, restaurants, and clubs. E. Bierhaus & Sons affiliated with Federated Foods, Incorporated, in 1954 and became the exclusive regional distributor of Red & White foods. The company constructed a new warehouse on Ramsey Road on the southeast side of Vincennes in 1965. Leadership of the wholesale distributor eventually passed to the fourth generation of the family, Robert's son, Robert V. Bierhaus, Jr. In the 1980s Robert Jr.'s son Brent joined the firm. By 1990 E. Bierhaus & Sons employed almost a hundred workers, posted annual sales of \$45 million, and shipped 20,400 tons of goods.