

Indiana Fan Company

Founded: 1895 (formerly Specialty Manufacturing Company)

Location: Originally 187–195 (later 361 and 400–402) South Meridian Street; 32–40 East South Street (1905–46); 427 South Alabama Street (1946–)

Thomas Bemis, born in Lawrenceburg[, Indiana ?], came to Indianapolis from Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1890. For several years he worked with Frank A. Jacob at Jacob & Company, a pattern and model making firm. Jacob & Company manufactured special machinery parts, drafted blueprints and specifications, and made wood or metal patterns for casting new parts in brass, steel, cast iron, or malleable iron. The firm also acted as “inventors’ assistants,” manufacturing practical models of new inventions and supplying working drawings and blueprints. Bemis seems to have marketed the Triumph Exhaust Fan, which was used in laundries, engine and boiler rooms, theaters, and packinghouses from the same location. In 1894 Bemis was secretary and treasurer of the Triumph Manufacturing Company, listed at the same location in the city directory.

In 1895 Bemis and Josiah B. Dill established the Specialty Manufacturing Company on Meridian Street. Bemis served as president and Dill as secretary and treasurer. Josiah Dill previously was a druggist and, briefly, secretary and treasurer of the Duthie and Daggett Tool Company, which was located at the site where Specialty Manufacturing later opened for business. Bemis and Dill’s firm manufactured machinery and specialized parts, made patterns for new parts, and provided assistance to inventors. The company’s advertisement boasted: “We solicit patents successfully prosecute

applications that have been rejected in the hands of attorneys or others not familiar with the patent practice.”

The firm also manufactured fans—belt fans, electric exhaust fans, and water-powered fans, including water desk fans—as well as marketing Triumph fans. The company fulfilled contracts in cities as distant as Moscow and Sydney, Australia. Sometime between 1900 and 1902 Josiah Dill assumed the presidency of Specialty Manufacturing, and Bemis left the company. Bemis went on to own and operate the Taisey Pneumatic Service Company, the Superior Iron and Brass Foundry, and the Anderson Steam Vulcanizer Company. Between 1904 and 1905 Specialty Manufacturing moved to East South Street, and in 1907 it became the Indiana Fan Company. Frank M. Graham purchased the company in 1937. Graham was born in Loogoot and had grown up in Brownstown. He learned the sheet-metal trade in the shop run by his father, Michael Huron Graham, the son of an Irish immigrant. Frank Graham moved to Indianapolis and in 1918 began working at Indiana Fan Company. In 1946 the company erected a new building at 427 South Alabama Street.