

## Keller-Crescent Company

### Founded:

Keller Printing Company: 1885

Crescent Engraving and Printing Company: [1899]

Keller-Crescent Company: 1906

### Location:

Keller Printing Company: 24 Sycamore Street, Evansville (1885– ); 216 Upper Second Street ( –1895); 216–220 Locust Street (1896– )

Crescent Engraving and Printing Company: 417–419 Upper Third Street, Evansville (1899– ); 322–324 Upper Second Street (also 131 Locust Street)

Keller-Crescent Company: 216 Locust Street, Evansville (1906–31); 24–28 Southeast Riverside Drive (1931–61); 1100 East Louisiana Street (1961– )

The Keller-Crescent Printing and Engraving Company was formed in 1906 from the merger of two smaller printing companies. William H. Keller, a Civil War officer who later took to being addressed as Captain, opened a small letterpress printing shop at 24 Sycamore Street in 1885. He advertised himself as a steam book and job printer, bookbinder, and blank book manufacturer. Briefly in that decade he was associated with William C. Paine, and the press became Keller & Paine. Between 1895 and 1896 the Keller Printing Company moved to 216–220 Locust Street. The company employed about forty people and printed chiefly one-color catalogs but also foreign-language newspapers and product labels, such as the wrappers for Pretty Soap, the brand of a local soap company. In 1906, after a labor strike and a fire that damaged the company's plant, Keller accepted an invitation to continue his business at the facilities of the Crescent Engraving & Printing Company. The company had been founded in 1899 by, among others, F. W. Cook, Jr., a major Evansville businessman and owner of the F. W. Cook Brewing Company. Over the summer of 1906 the owners of the two companies agreed to merge their operations.

Part of the impetus for the merger seems to have come from Emil Weil, a German Jewish immigrant, who began working for the Keller Printing Company as a shipping apprentice and rose to become a traveling salesman. By 1899 he was manager of the Crescent Engraving and Printing Company. By the time of the merger he owned an interest in both companies and later became president of the Keller-Crescent Printing and Engraving Company. The new company moved into the rebuilt facilities of the Keller Printing Company at 220 Locust Street. Weil died in 1917. In 1920 the company was reorganized. August A. Brentano, an Evansville native who had previously been business manager for the *Evansville Courier*, joined the company as vice president and general manager. Ervin Weil, the son of Emil, became secretary; Sam, another son of Emil, also joined the company and later helped establish production techniques and schedules still in use in the 1980s. In 1931 the company moved into the four-story Bement & Seitz building at 28 Southeast Riverside Avenue. Brentano became president in 1934.

Under this new leadership the Keller-Crescent Printing & Engraving Company applied mass-production techniques to the printing business, a move that enabled it to weather the Great Depression relatively easily. The company instituted shorter workweeks and staggered vacations, which enabled it to avoid laying off workers. Keller-Crescent Printing & Engraving Company also developed a loan program for its employees and managed to make only one wage cut during the depression, which was restored after only six months. Furthermore, all employees were encouraged to inspect the product at all points in the production process, flagging problems and offering

recommendations for improvement. Crucial to the company's stability in this period, as well, was the continued financial health of its primary customers.

Keller-Crescent Printing & Engraving Company added a small advertising department in the 1930s, but in the 1950s, by which time it had become simply the Keller-Crescent Company, it moved more fully into advertising. In 1961 it moved into a new building on the city's northeast side. In 1968 American Standard, Incorporated, purchased the expanding company, but top executives at Keller-Crescent bought the company back in 1986. By the early 1980s the company was the thirty-eighth largest advertising company in the nation with annual billings of approximately \$85 million and five hundred employees. It offered complete marketing and advertising services and produced more than 1 billion printed ads, mailers, and folding cartons per year.