

Kunkle Division of Anderson, Greenwood & Company

Founded: [1875–76]

Location: 87 (later 95) Barr Street, Fort Wayne (1875–); 817 (or 821 or 825; the address seems to fluctuate) (–1922); 119–121 South Clinton Street (1922–ca.1975); 8222 Bluffton Road (ca.1975–)

Erastus B. Kunkle was born and raised in Pennsylvania. There he learned the machinist's trade from his father. He arrived in Fort Wayne in 1864 at the age of twenty-eight and began working in the locomotive shops of the Pennsylvania Railroad, where he remained eleven years. There he invented a lock-up pop safety valve, which was designed to release pressure in locomotive engines. Kunkle patented his invention in 1875 and in partnership with his brother-in-law, W. D. Bostick, began manufacturing the valves in 1876. The valves gained wide acceptance nationally and internationally; a modified version of Kunkle's original valve was still being produced one hundred years later.

The Fort Wayne Safety Valve Works, operated by E. B. Kunkle & Company, flourished. It was originally located in a three-story building just opposite city hall. In addition to the Kunkle valve, Erastus Kunkle also developed a water gauge, gauge-cock, steam gauge, and eggbeater. After Kunkle's death in 1913, his wife and brother-in-law continued the business for several years. Oscar A. Fox, who operated a furniture and household goods retail business with his brother, purchased the firm in 1917 and renamed it the Kunkle Valve Company. In 1922 the company moved to a new location at 121 South Clinton Street. By the mid-1920s the firm employed sixty men. Oscar Fox's son, Louis A. Fox, later succeeded his father as owner of the firm.

In 1947 Kunkle Valve Company acquired the valve division of Star Brass Manufacturing Company. Kunkle-Star Navy type relief valves were used extensively in navy ships. By the 1970s Kunkle valves were used on Great Lakes schooners and nuclear submarines. The company marketed valves in brass, bronze, iron, aluminum, steel, and other alloys, ranging from 9 ounces to 700 pounds in weight, and was shipping them out at the rate of 1,100 per day. The company moved into a new building at 8222 Bluffton Road around 1975. In 1988 Kunkle Valve Company changed its name to Kunkle Industries and in 1991 became a division of Anderson, Greenwood & Company.