

Ralph R. Reeder & Sons

Founded: 1897

Location: 609 East Michigan, Indianapolis (1897–1903); 312–14 East Sixteenth Street (1903–22); 2401 East Cornell Avenue (later Winthrop Avenue) (1922–); 2330 East Forty-fifth Street (–late 1960s); 9330 Hague Road (later Corporation Drive) (late 1960s–)

In 1897 Ralph R. Reeder moved to Indianapolis from Jennings County to work as a tinsmith. Reeder's father, Wilson Shaw Reeder, was a carpenter and contractor in North Vernon and operated the Reeder Brothers firm. Ralph learned the metalworking trade from his brother John. Later in life, Ralph recalled that he had started his firm in an old barn on Michigan and Noble Streets, where he remained for a little over two years. However, in city directories Reeder was first listed in 1899 at 609 East Michigan Street as a partner with William C. Rigler in the firm of Rigler & Reeder. The following year he was at that address but was on his own, remaining there until sometime between 1902 and 1903 when he moved to Sixteenth and Alabama Streets. Reeder performed tin, sheet iron, slate, and furnace work.

Ralph Reeder's son Roland was trained as a coppersmith while serving in the navy during World War I. After the war Roland joined his father's firm, which became R. R. Reeder & Son. In 1922 the firm moved into a new 55,000-square-foot plant, including a shop, offices, warehouse, and grounds, at 2401 Cornell Avenue (later Winthrop Avenue). Around this time Verne K. Reeder, a second son of Ralph, became involved in the family business, which became Ralph R. Reeder & Sons. The firm was incorporated between 1932 and 1933 with Roland as president, Verne as vice president, and Ralph as secretary and treasurer.

During the depression and World War II years the company flourished as a roofer, manufacturer of sheet-metal products, and wholesale and retail supplier of roofing and construction materials. By 1939 Ralph R. Reeder & Sons claimed to be the largest roofing and sheet-metal concern in the state, employing between 100 and 125 people and handling from 800 to 1000 jobs annually. Ralph R. Reeder & Sons provided roofs for Shortridge and Arsenal Technical High Schools, the Chamber of Commerce building, Ladywood Academy, the James Allison estate (Marian College), the United States Veterans Hospital, the World War Memorial, war plants and military facilities in central and southern Indiana, and the Southern Indiana Tuberculosis Hospital in New Albany.

Between February 1956 and July 1957 Ralph Reeder and his two sons died. Roland was fifty-nine when he died in 1956, and Verne was fifty-six when he died of a heart attack a year later. Orman O. McKinley purchased Ralph R. Reeder & Sons in 1960. McKinley was the founder of the Orman O. McKinley Company, an architectural metal fabrication firm, and Steril-O-Matic Company, manufacturers of restaurant equipment. In 1981 James L. Sullivan and William Pattison purchased the business. Sullivan, who became president, worked his way up through the firm, having joined Ralph R. Reeder & Sons in 1953 as a roofer. After Pattison retired as vice president in 1987 he sold his shares in the firm to Marcia Sue Long, a more than twenty-year employee, who then became the company's vice president. In 1999 Reeder & Sons, Incorporated continued to be one of Indiana's premier roofing companies with Sullivan and Long retaining their respective offices.