

Ris Paper Company (C. P. Lesh Paper Company)

Founded: 1895

Location: 85 West Market Street, Indianapolis (1895–96); 118 South Meridian Street (1897–1907); 121–125 Kentucky Avenue (1907–63); 1302 Stadium Drive (1964–)

The C. P. Lesh Paper Company, a wholesale paper dealer, was founded in 1895 by Charles P. Lesh at 85 West Market Street. Lesh, born in Kankakee, Illinois, in 1859, had been in the paper business since moving to Indianapolis with his family in 1878. He worked in various positions with the Sentinel Publishing Company, Merrill, Hubbard & Company, and the Indiana Paper Company (where he spent nine years). Prior to striking out on his own, he acted as the local agent of Lewis Snyder's Sons Paper Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. C. P. Lesh Paper Company soon became one of the largest paper dealers in the state, handling both printers' and publishers' supplies. The company adopted the hornet, which made paper out of decayed wood for its nest, as an early trademark.

Between 1897 and 1898 C. P. Lesh Paper Company moved to 188 South Meridian Street, and in 1907 moved into a building it erected at 121–125 Kentucky Avenue. Because of its capacity to print multicolored lines on a page, a Butler University professor approached the company in the 1920s to print sheets of paper for his students to use for exams, which, he suggested, might be bound together. The booklets were designed with blue covers because Butler's colors were blue and white. The company marketed the resulting "blue books" across the country, and they became indelibly associated with college-level exams for millions. By the mid-1980s the company was selling more than a million exam books a month.

Perry W. Lesh, who began working at C. P. Lesh Paper Company as an errand boy when he was 11, became president of the company upon the death of his father in October 1927. Perry was long associated with the James Whitcomb Riley Memorial Association, which raised money for Riley Hospital for Children, serving as president of it for twenty-eight years. In 1960 Perry retired as president of C. P. Lesh Paper Company and became chairman of the board. He was succeeded by his son Charles Perry Lesh, who was president from 1960 to 1962 or 1963. Charles was succeeded, in turn, by Perry Lesh's second son, Frederick H. Lesh. Between 1963 and 1964 the paper wholesaler moved its offices to 1302 Stadium Drive, a site already being used as a warehouse. In the late 1970s or early 1980s C. P. Lesh Paper Company became a division of Diem and Wing Paper Company of Cincinnati, Ohio. Ris Paper Company, based in Garden City, New York, acquired the company in 1985 or 1986.

In 1999 Donald R. Chamness was vice president and general manager of the Indianapolis facility. The firm employed forty-five and expected sales of over \$1 million in the 1999 fiscal year. The company continued to specialize in side wire and plastic binding as well as tab cutting and plastic film reinforcing.