

Rodefeld Company

Founded: 1885

Location: 416 South Sixth Street, Richmond (1885–1900); 96 West Main Street (1900– )

August, William, Frank, and R. H. Rodefeld began as horseshoers in 1885. By 1900 August and his son, August Jr. were operating the business. The new enterprise was named the Rodefeld Machine Shop and produced pipe cutters and well drilling machinery.

When automobiles became practical, August, his brother William, and August Jr. took on repair work, which led to the assembling of cars in 1905. The horseless carriages produced by Rodefeld ran on a four-cylinder engine designed by the family company. After World War I the company began producing water pumps for the Model T Ford. Production of the pumps ran as high as 1000 units per day. By 1929 repair work was phased out in favor of specialized machine shop work for other garages. In addition to some car parts, a few radios began to be stored and sold.

During the Great Depression the Rodefeld Company became a distributor for Zenith radios in Wayne and surrounding counties. In spite of the worldwide economic slump, the Rodefeld Company grew. The company opened branches in Indianapolis and in Greensburg. Growth continued to be synonymous with Rodefeld during the 1940s. In 1946 the company was incorporated, and by 1948 five branches had been established. Each branch store had sold radios since the 1920s, but beginning after the Second World War stores also increasingly carried stoves and refrigerators.

With the expansion of the two-car family in the 1950s and 1960s, Rodefeld adapted by creating automotive supply stores in Connersville, Richmond, and Ohio. By the end of the

1960s eight automotive supply stores were open in east central Indiana and western Ohio. The 1970s witnessed the same type of growth.

The 1980s brought a reevaluation of company needs and a new plan for the Rodefeld Company. In 1981 the company branched out into new directions by entering the electronics market. By 1985 the Indianapolis operation and the electronics division had become unprofitable and were phased out.

Affiliated automotive branches continued to increase in the early 1990s, and the company focused its interests in east central Indiana and western Ohio. The proliferation of Rodefeld affiliates continued in the late 1990s.