

Seymour Manufacturing Company, Incorporated

Founded: 1872

Location: 500 North Broadway, Seymour (1872– )

Ten citizens of Seymour opened the Seymour Manufacturing Company on 18 April 1872. They built a factory on Broadway between Fifth and Sixth Streets. Among the company's founders was F. M. Swope, its first president. Swope was a school board member and a partner in several other firms. The company was made possible in part because of a mid-to-late-nineteenth-century trend away from the self-financing of prisons. Social reformers wanted prisons to be more reformatory than penitentiary, placing less emphasis on work. In Seymour this trend led prison officials to stop producing wagon spokes and snaths (the long, crooked handles for scythes). The Seymour Manufacturing Company took over production almost immediately after the prison ceased making spokes and snaths, with some of its first orders coming from the Studebaker Company in South Bend.

By 1885 nine of the original ten stockholders were no longer associated with the company—Swope was the only one remaining. He and E. K. Holton, Julius C. Birge, and Lynn Faulkconer had bought out the others. Faulkconer, a native of Wabash County, was active in Seymour, becoming the city's treasurer in 1879. Birge, a businessman from St. Louis, eventually became the majority owner in the company, and his family continued to operate the business in 1998.

An 1885 publication stated that the business had two brick buildings on the two-and-a-half-acre site. The manufacture of spokes, grain cradles, and snaths took place in the main building. Each floor was powered by a fifty-horsepower steam engine. The

second, and smaller, building prepared the raw materials for manufacture and was also powered by a similar steam engine. Ninety to one hundred men worked in the two buildings. Business was so brisk that it required the “constant use during active operations of two two-horse teams between the factory and railroad stations.” Most of the product traveled to St. Louis before being shipped to smaller retailers throughout the nation. Some shipments, however, went directly to America’s largest cities. Annual sales by the mid-1880s reached \$100,000.

By 1904 the company employed 125 and continued to make agricultural implements. Early in the twentieth century the company expanded by acquiring the Hall Manufacturing Company in northern Indiana, makers of posthole diggers and augers. Birge remained the head of the company until before the outbreak of World War I. By 1916 Walter Birge had become president while Faulkconer’s son, Lynn Jr., had assumed the post of secretary and superintendent. Within eight years Stanley J. Birge, Julius’s son, had assumed the presidency while Lynn Faulkconer, Jr., remained secretary of the operation.

In the 1940s Seymour Manufacturing expanded production capabilities by adding hog rings and farm and lawn tools to its product list. It continued to make shovels, grass hooks, weed cutters, corn knives, machetes, shelf brackets, and seed and chemical spreaders into the 1990s. In 1955 the company entered the fireplace market with a line of wood-handle tool sets and other fireplace accessories. Within twelve years the fireplace line of products accounted for \$250,000 in revenue for the company.

By 1967 Seymour Manufacturing could boast that it controlled 70 percent of the American posthole digger market. Perhaps surprisingly, the company continued to make

snaths, sending 50,000 to farmers around the world. Other products included hydraulic valves, cattle dehorner, and hog rings.

Seymour Manufacturing continued to prosper into the 1980s and 1990s. In 1995 the company purchased Structron Corporation, a manufacturer of fiberglass handles and tools. In 1998 Berl Grant continued as president. The company employed 118 in Indiana and expected sales of more than \$10 million.