

Central Specialty Division of King-Seeley Began Early

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Converted to text by Robert J. Pipes August 2009

Central Specialty Division of King-Seeley Corporation has been a stable industry in the community for the past 35 years, furnishing steady work for its employees and growing with the community.

The business was founded in 1911 in Detroit at 7529 St. Aubin, by George J. Zimmerman, Joseph Robinson, and John H. Lonskey.

Products were gray iron castings for the automotive industry, end products-plumber's specialties, many of which were patented items. These lines were developed and became the major products of the business. *[Note that John Lonskey held design and manufacturing patents for Plumbing fittings. RJP]*

About 1917 they entered a new field and pioneered the individual cast piston ring. A new rapid molding machine was developed by one of the owners, which proved very successful in the manufacture of this new product. Piston ring castings were a major product of the company from 1917 until about 1930. Millions of cast iron valve heads and guides were also produced for the Ford Motor Company during this period.

The successful operation and rapid expansion of the business soon outgrew their facilities in Detroit, and a subsidiary company was formed in 1919 and the property at Ypsilanti was purchased. The name of the new company was "The Ypsilanti Foundry Company." The new company consisted of the original owners and enabled the key employees to become stockholders and have a financial interest in the business.

Ypsilanti was chosen as the new-location for the following reasons:

1. Adequate labor supply.
2. Ideal location, being near the automotive center and not too far from the parent company.
3. Former [owner] Ypsilanti Hay Press Company[already] operated as a Foundry, and the

contour of the land was ideal for a foundry. Twenty-eight acres were acquired, which gave ample room for expansion. *[Ypsilanti Hay Press manufactured the "Wolverine" brand of hay press, which today we would call a hay baler. RJP]*

Piston rings were transferred to the new plant, which prospered for many years. Profits enabled the plant and facilities to expand to several times the original area purchased.

One of the romantic phases of the business was the distinction of producing the piston ring castings use[d] in the first plane to fly the Atlantic by Colonel Lindbergh.

The development of the automotive field brought changes and the piston ring became more and more specialized so that most manufacturers acquired their own foundries. Therefore, this product became less and less important and was finally discontinued in 1940.

In 1928 the parent company sold out to the Ypsilanti Foundry Company and one of the original founders, George J. Zimmerman, retired from the business. The new organization took the present name Central Specialty Company. Shortly thereafter, the main offices were moved to Ypsilanti and active manufacturing discontinued at the Detroit location.

The depression years of 1930 to 1935 were very difficult for any business, however, the company survived and was fortunate enough to establish a new line of products starting in 1933, namely, power tools sold exclusively through Sears, Roebuck & Co. This product developed rapidly and by 1941 had expanded to two and one-half million dollars in sales annually. *[Note that John Lonskey was the owner/founder of both Ypsilanti Foundry co. and Central Specialty Co. and that this was really a merger of the entities for financial and other reasons. RJP]*

By July of 1941, the rapid growth of the business indicated need for additional capital, so the first public subscription of stock was sold. The start of World War II required a change to wartime products under conditions of acute labor and material shortages. In October 1944, the company was sold to the King-Seeley Corporation. A major expansion program was started immediately, resulting in improved plant and facilities, and greatly increased volume of business. The major product "Power Tools" has been developed under the management of King-Seeley Corporation to a position of major importance in the industry.

The King-Seeley Corporation has its main offices at Ann Arbor and operates plants at Ann Arbor, Scio, Ypsilanti and Menominee, Mich. The total employment of the corporation as of July 31, 1954, was 2,551 with 650 being employed at the Central Specialty Division. Products manufactured at Ann Arbor and Scio plants are automotive instrument panels, including ammeters, gasoline gauges, temperature gauges, speedometers, mechanical type governors for diesel engines and velocity type governors for use on trucks and busses, interval timers for stove and washing machine manufacturers. Electric corn poppers and electric table stoves are manufactured for Sears, Roebuck & Co., as well as defense products for the Army and Navy.

The Central Specialty Division manufactures wood-working power tools such as band saws, bench saws, drill presses, jig saws, jointers, lathes, planers, sanders, shapers, tool accessories and attachments. These products are sold through Sears, Roebuck & Co., who market them under their trade name "Craftsman." In addition, gray iron castings, made for use in the manufacture of power tools, are also produced for the automotive industry.

Signal Electric Division at Menomonee, Michigan, manufactures desk and floor fans, window fans, hassock fans, kitchen vent fans, ventilating and exhaust fans. These are sold under the trade name of "Signal" and "Cool Spot" through distributors located in most of the important centers of the country.