

Collection #
M1551
OM0801

THOMAS AND SKINNER, INC.
COLLECTION, 1919-2003

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Processed by

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	2 manuscript boxes, 1 half size manuscript box, 1 photographs box, 1 oversize manuscript folder, 1 OVB photographs folder, 1 OVA photographs folder, 1 polaroid
COLLECTION DATES:	1919-2003
PROVENANCE:	Thomas and Skinner, Inc., Indianapolis, IN
RESTRICTIONS:	None
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ALTERNATE FORMATS:	
RELATED HOLDINGS:	Donald J. Angus Collection, M1152
ACCESSION NUMBER:	2025.0091
NOTES:	Materials in cold storage need at least 4 hours to acclimate, so patrons should call ahead if they wish to view materials that are in cold storage.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Thomas and Skinner, Inc. began in 1901 as the Esterline Company, founded by Dr. John A. Mathews, a metallurgist, and John W. Esterline, an engineering professor at Purdue University, who together produced the first tungsten permanent magnet steel in the United States. The company later became the Esterline-Angus Company when Donald J. Angus became a partner, and the company had a Magnet Division. In 1923, this part of the business was sold to a partnership of James Thomas and Oramel Skinner and the Esterline-Angus Company moved their focus to the manufacture of electrical equipment. The Thomas and Skinner partnership moved to enhance the company's production capability, expanding the range of products, and investing in new technology. In 1926, with the acquisition of the foundry of Pioneer Brass Works on 23rd Street in Indianapolis, Thomas and Skinner was able to further expand production. During the Depression years, Thomas and Skinner had to shift production work from magnetics to anything that would keep their employees paid, so they used the equipment to produce snow shovels, yo-yos, hand calculators, cardboard puzzles, and a patented toy Disappearing Coast Defense Gun. Also during this time, experiments in cast alloys were going on in Germany, Japan, and the United States. Alnico, a permanent magnet alloy created from Aluminum, Nickel, Cobalt, and Iron, was patented and would be the bedrock upon which any magnetic material development would sit for the next 25 years. The 1940s brought increased business due to a need for magnetic material in aircraft instrumentation, radar, signal and other communication equipment for the defense sector. It was also at this time when the plant was staffed almost entirely by female employees.

In 1945, Oramel Skinner passed away unexpectedly and his son, James C. Skinner, was released from active duty in the Air Force to return to Indianapolis and help manage the company. J.C. Skinner was elected vice president and treasurer of the company in January 1946. In 1947, J.C. Skinner became president of the company, with A.S. Harlan as Vice President and Frieda Beckett the secretary and treasurer. The new leadership team made the decision to install a foundry to make alnico castings instead of having to depend on outside sources. They also began working in wound cores in the 1950s, making a variety of shapes and applications with most business coming from the defense sector during the Korean War. In the 1960s and 1970s, Thomas and Skinner branched out into producing magnetic testing equipment that could be used by their customers. They began a division that made magnetizers, fluxmeters, and gaussmeters, but this part of the company split off in 1979 so the company could give full attention to the core business of magnetic materials. 1979 was also a big year for the company as it transitioned to an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP), thus giving all employees a stake in the company.

Leadership of the company passed to J.C. Skinner's nephew, Robert "Bob" Skinner. During the 1980s, Thomas and Skinner took on a few more business interests, including the acquisition of Ceramic Magnetics, Inc., an interest in Electron Energy, portions of Indiana General Technologies, and an expansion of the company footprint at their 23rd Street location in Indianapolis. Unfortunately, this resulted in significant financial losses and bankruptcy. Bob Skinner resigned and Norris Krall was named the COO, with J.C. Skinner back as the Chairman of the Board, and the new board and leadership worked to reorganize the company for its future success.

As of March 2026, Thomas and Skinner is still located on 23rd Street in Indianapolis and remains a 100% employee-owned manufacturer of high-performance metals and magnetic materials, magnetic assemblies, and tungsten heavy alloys. They deliver American-made materials for the aerospace, defense, industrial, medical, and nuclear sectors and continue to employ the latest technology and innovations in their work.

Sources:

Materials in the collection.

“Thomas and Skinner, Inc. High Performance Metals.” <https://www.thomas-skinner.com/>

“About Thomas and Skinner Inc.” <https://www.thomas-skinner.com/about/>

“Magnets Made Here Pull Much Weight.” *The Indianapolis Times*, 13 March 1955, Page 34.

“Hoosiers First In the U.S. to Make Vital Magnets.” *The Indianapolis Star*, 15 March 1955, Page 30.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection contains historical business records and company photographs from Thomas and Skinner, Inc. The collection has been divided into two series, manuscripts and visuals, and has been arranged chronologically within each series. Of particular interest in this collection is Dr. Esterline's 1919 publication on Permanent Magnets, product catalogs, and patent information. There are also administrative records which document some major events in the life of the company, such as collective bargaining agreements with United Steelworkers of America (the company experienced a strike in 1969-1970), employee handbooks, and employee newsletters. The collection also contains rich visual documentation of the people, processes, and machinery that have made up the company over the years, and many photographs have individuals identified.

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Series 1: Manuscripts

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History of the Skinner Family from Vermont to Michigan, n.d.

Stabilizing Calibrator Drawing, n.d.

Permanent Magnets by John Walter Esterline, 1919

General Correspondence, 1923-1990

Patent Orders, ca. 1930s (1 of 3)

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Correspondence, Patents, 1933-1947

Correspondence, Thread-Tube Carrier Patent, 1938

Correspondence, Welded Butts Patent, 1938-1939

Correspondence, Jack Sinker Patent, 1938-1940

Correspondence, Welded Sinker Butts with Perforated Holes Patent, 1939-1940

Employee Manual, ca. 1940s

List of Machinery & Equipment, 15 February 1945

Advertisements and Promotional Brochures, ca. 1949-1974

Abstract of Title, 1952

Correspondence, Magnet Calibrating Stabilizer Patent, 1953-1959

Tasco News, 1944; 1947; 1955-1956

Dinner Programs, 1955

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Demagnetization Data/Curves, 1964-1974 (2 of 2)	Box 2, Folder 6
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Business-Education Day, 1965; 1967	Box 2, Folder 8
Personnel, 1966	Box 2, Folder 9
Correspondence, Mr. Magnetician Trademark, 1966-1967	Box 2, Folder 10
Reports for Proposed Lamination Production Facility, 1966-1967	Box 2, Folder 11
Correspondence, Magnetips Trademark, 1967	Box 2, Folder 12
Years of Service Awards, 1967	Box 2, Folder 13
Order of the Magnetician, 1968-1970	Box 2, Folder 14
Product Bulletins, ca. 1969	Box 2, Folder 15
Field Trip Thank You Notes from Crooked Creek School, February 1969	Box 2, Folder 16
Annual Reports, 1969-1973	Box 2, Folder 17
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Correspondence, Imaginetics Trademark, 1977-1983	Box 3, Folder 3
Annual Reports, 1978-1980	Box 3, Folder 4
Employee Rules & Regulations, 1980	Box 3, Folder 5
Board of Directors Minutes and Budgets, 1985-1986	Box 3, Folder 6
Seniority List, 1988	Box 3, Folder 7
The Melting Pot Newsletter, 1995-1996	Box 3, Folder 8
Partial Historical Timeline, ca. 2000s	Box 3, Folder 9
Research Notes, Company History by Norris E. Krall, 2003	Box 3, Folder 10
Thomas & Skinner History by Norris E. Krall, 2003	Box 3, Folder 11

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Christmas Party Group Portraits, 1942; 1944

Thomas and Skinner White 3000 Delivery Truck, ca. 1950s

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