

KEYSTONE FRICTION HINGE COMPANY

By 1862 the rebuilt, expanded, and greatly strengthened Susquehanna Boom—after being severely damaged by the 1860 and 1861 floods—which gave great impetus to industries that processed and used lumber, also created a demand for numerous kindred supply, service, and manufacturing enterprises. One man to get an early start in the lumber-related business was a German immigrant named George Luppert, who in the 1860s founded the Keystone Furniture Company.

Valentine Charles Luppert, his son, worked as a designer and wood-carver in the factory. His work in designing dressers and washstands created a need for a hinge that would hold a mirror in a fixed position between upright standards. To achieve this he riveted two pieces of metal, which were bent at right angles, tightly together. The patented invention was known as the Luppert friction hinge, due to the tightly riveted parts held together by friction.

Thomas Duer, a Baltimore jobber who had married a Gibson woman from Williamsport, visited the community frequently. He saw the friction hinge, and requested permission to market it. The item became so popular that the demand was more than could be produced in the furniture factory's basement.

In 1905 the Keystone Friction Hinge Company was originated, and a building was constructed a few hundred feet upriver from the furniture factory. As the new venture grew, the problem of skilled help became of prime importance. There were two plants in the area that had begun manufacturing metal items, the Bicycle Plant and Demorest Manufacturing Company. From the Demorest plant Luppert secured two excellent tool-and-die men—Ernest Orchard, who was

made plant manager, and Ernest Featherstone, who became the toolroom foreman.

The sons of these two machinists—both of whom had emigrated from England, arriving in Williamsport about 1909—learned the toolmaking trade in Keystone's apprentice program. Jim Orchard spent his working life at Keystone, while Hugh Orchard went with Sylvania. Charles and Art Featherstone went to Sylvania after finishing their apprenticeships.

The firm prospered through World War I and into the 1920s. During this period V.C. Luppert formed the Imperial Band Instrument Works; the Park, Keystone, and Rialto theaters; and the Keystone Food Products Company.

When the Great Depression struck, Luppert lost almost everything except the hinge company. That enterprise was saved by 10 prominent citizens who each put up \$10,000 to satisfy creditors. They were James Graham, Robert Thorne, John McCormick, Senator Charles Sones, W.L. King, Irv Gleason, L.R. Gleason, Clarence Shope, Dietrick L. Lamade, and George Graf. With their help it was possible to avoid bankruptcy, and by 1939 the debts had been satisfied and all benefactors were paid.

The 1936 flood inundated the lower areas, and put the water level at three feet on the machine floor; in addition to extensive water damage to the equipment and raw materials, there was considerable deterioration of the building.

In June 1939 Grantham Taggart joined Keystone Friction Hinge Company as sales manager, and two years later became general manager. With the advent of World War II, he enlisted in the service. While Taggart was in Europe Luppert died, and the company was sold to

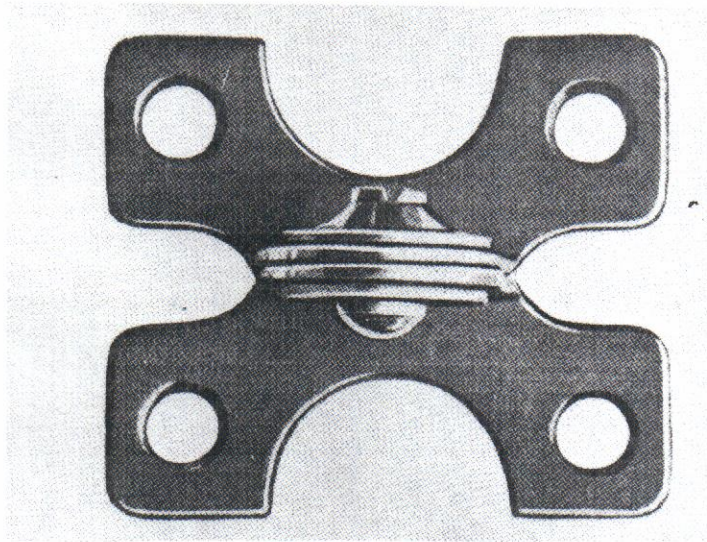
Dr. E. Lloyd Rothfuss and George Spotts as a partnership.

After the war's end Taggart returned, Lamont Seitzer joined the organization in production, and Miles C. MacGill was hired as comptroller. Also in 1946 another flood descended upon the plant, with water again reaching the three-foot level on the machine floor. The same adverse results were experienced as in 1936, as well as further problems with the deterioration of the building. Fortunately, the construction of dikes in the early 1950s put an end to the flooding problems.

Dr. Rothfuss acquired Spotts' interest in 1950, and operated the business as a sole proprietorship until 1965. During this period Keystone Friction Hinge Company grew modestly and continued to operate in the old plant, which had five separate levels with a series of ramps as the only means of moving

Valentine C. Luppert, son of the founder of the Keystone Furniture Company, invented the Luppert friction hinge which led to the Keystone Friction Hinge Company being established in South Williamsport.





One of the many styles of hinges manufactured at Keystone Friction Hinge Company.

materials from one level to another.

In 1965 Taggart, Seitzer, and MacGill purchased the firm from Dr. Rothfuss. They incorporated with Taggart as president, MacGill as vice-president and treasurer, and Seitzer as secretary.

It was immediately determined that new facilities and equipment were essential to Keystone Friction Hinge Company's prosperity. With the help of the Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority, a new structure, on one level, was

erected at 520 Matthews Boulevard in South Williamsport. This proved to be a big boost, and business began to improve.

Edward J. Hannan joined the organization in 1970 as vice-president of engineering and sales. The product line changed more to custom work, with emphasis upon quality and service. Sales mounted rapidly, and the financial condition became quite satisfactory.

The firm was purchased in 1965 by longtime employees Miles C. MacGill, who became vice-president/treasurer; Grantham Taggart, president; and Lamont A. Seitzer, secretary.



In July 1977 Lamont Seitzer, Jr., and Creighton MacGill were taken into the corporation. They are sons of two of the principals. In May 1979 Seitzer left Keystone Friction Hinge Company to join a larger organization.

The facilities have been expanded—with additions built in '72, '74, '79, and '83. A contract has been signed for yet another addition. Upon its completion in September 1984, the plant will have a total area of 51,252 square feet. There will be over 70 employees.

Only two shareholders who are members of the board are not active in the daily operation of the plant. Herbert Liebman of Long Island, New York, an original stockholder in the new organization, is a jobber whose company has done business with Keystone since the 1920s. Thomas Humphries, who represents the firm in upper Illinois and Wisconsin, rounds out the corporate group. Previously associated with American Cabinet Hardware Company, and with many contacts in the industry, he has been most helpful in the growth of the concern.

Keystone Friction Hinge Company started with four or five people working in the furniture firm's basement. During the Korean War the maximum payroll of 82 was reached, and the corporation had \$400,000 to \$500,000 in annual sales. Today there are 67 employees and sales exceed \$4 million a year.

In recent years efficiency in equipment and facilities has been stressed to make Keystone Friction Hinge Company as competitive as possible in the world market. An effort has been made to keep employment constant, and there have been practically no layoffs—25 percent of the personnel have been with the firm over 20 years and 50 percent over 10 years.