



Brief History of The Simmons Hardware Company

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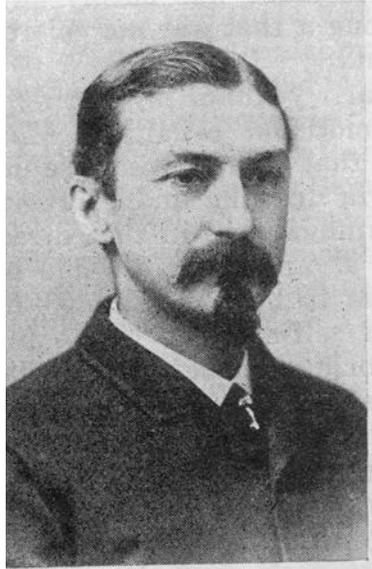
Drawing of main Simmons Headquarters, St. Louis, MO

Edward Campbell Simmons was born in Maryland in 1839 and moved with his merchant father to St. Louis, Missouri in 1846. At the age of seventeen he began his career in the wholesale hardware business on the bottom rung of the ladder as a cleaner/stocker for Child Pratt and Company.

1859 he entered the firm Wilson Levering and Waters as a clerk. This hardware business eventually evolved into E.C. Simmons and Co.

He successfully developed the Simmons Hardware Company into one of the most extensive corporations of its kind with divisions in Wichita, Sioux City, Ogden, Toledo, New York, Minneapolis, and St. Louis. By the turn of the century warehouse space occupied over 1,500,000 sq feet. The company's tool plants were in New Hampshire, and its pocket knife plant in New York was the largest in the U. S. They had their own saddlery factories as well. Mr.

Simmons retired from active participation in 1898, but he still took a great interest in the business.

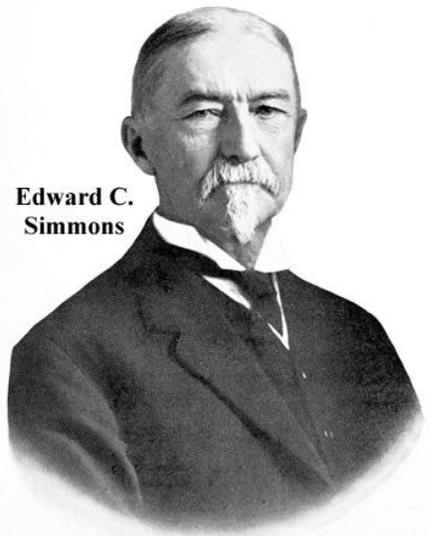


E.C. Simmons as he was in the late 1880's

Simmons capitalized on the overwhelming customer demand for his Keen Kutter items by using the KK format on many different types of products. The Simmons line included King Koaster children's wagons; Klipper Klub ice skates; Korn and Koffee Krushers; Karpet King sweepers; Kool King ice boxes; Klear Krystal lamp chimneys; Kar King accessories; King Kord tires, Keen Klipper lawn mowers; even Klicher mousetraps and locks.

Items stamped or labeled Keen Kutter or those from the KK line rank most popular with collectors, followed by those marked Simmons Hardware or S.H.Co. Many collectors include items from the company's registered lines such as Polly Prim, Run Easy, Blue Brand, Oak Leaf, Delmar, Sterling, American, Delft, Van Dyke, or Wonder.

It was no accident that customers were impressed by the Keen Kutter line and asked for it by name. The company had a well-organized marketing strategy, unparalleled in its day. Simmons put its stamp on everything the retailer could possibly require or use in his business.



Edward C.
Simmons

Taken in the early 1900's

Every size and description of display case, tool rack or shipping crate carried the brand as well. A Keen Kutter dealer would have store signs, postcards, invoices, letterheads, fans, clocks, thermometers, pencils, price tags, calendars, paper holders and even wrapping papers, bearing the striking bright red logo.



Famous Keen Kutter Logo

Not only did the Keen Kutter line include every conceivable type of tool and hardware item needed by carpenters, mechanics, gardeners handymen and farmers, but those for household use as well. Kraut cutters, food grinders and choppers, lard presses, knife sharpeners and grist mills, waffle irons, several models of coffee grinders, apple peelers, china, silverware, ice cream freezers, stoves and sewing machines, kitchen ranges, ice boxes, parlor stoves-- all marked Keen Kutter (or with some form of the KK mnemonic), brought this quality line to the housewife's attention on a daily basis.



Simmons Shotguns
Advertising Poster w/ game birds and animals

Shotguns, fishing equipment, razors, strops, honing stones and steels, tobacco cutters, pocket knives and other knives were marketed for the gentlemen's use were watch fobs and locks designed of the clever logo itself.



Simmons Fine Fishing Tackle
Advertising Die-Cut Stand-up w/ bull's eye logo

A 1909 Simmons Hardware Catalog had over 5000 pages. Simmons held firm in his belief that the "jobber's first duty is to help his customer to prosper". And the Keen Kutter line was not only for their tools and merchandise but a complete campaign designed to simplify the job of the retailer and satisfy the customer.

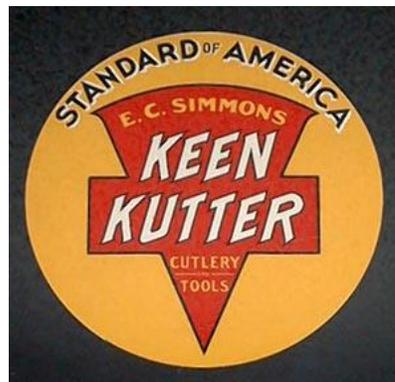


A Simmons Hardware Co Keen Kutter Store Sign

To be comprehensive, any account of Simmons Hardware Company must include the success story of another St. Louis firm, A.F. Shapleigh and Co. Due to the excellence of its own merchandise and its aggressive advertising, Shapleigh's was a leading wholesaler for well over a century. Mr. Shapleigh retired in 1901.

Shapleigh Hardware adapted the DIAMOND EDGE as their brand name for a line of superior tools and cutlery in 1864. "KEEN KUTTER" was the name chosen by E.C. Simmons in 1870 for their high grade tools and cutlery. The famous wedge and bar logo was adapted after 1904. No laws governed trademarks at that time.

Evidently this created no real problems for the sales of either company. They continued to steadily expand their trade areas throughout the West and Middle West. The years that followed were extremely prosperous ones. Due primarily to the enormous combined volume of the two businesses, St. Louis was firmly established as the largest distributor of hardware in the nation by the early 1900's.



ECS KK Advertising Window Decal
"Standard of America"

The wholesale hardware catalogs of Simmons Hardware and Shapleigh were the first and most comprehensive of their genre in the U.S with the single exception being one from a Chicago firm. By 1880, both firms were publishing large well-bound general line catalogs with sales representatives traveling to nearly every city and town hamlet and village across the nation

Shapleigh Hardware Company purchased all the assets of Simmons Hardware in 1940, after the company's bankruptcy in 1939. The trademarked Simmons lines continued to be marketed by Shapleigh until its closing in the early 1960's. They promoted the merger with the slogan; "From the past comes the promise of the future."

Today, Val-Test owns the rights to both the Keen Kutter and Diamond Edge logos

E. C. Simmons and A.F. Shapleigh not only achieved truly remarkable successes as business men in their lifetime but are greatly responsible for founding the wholesale hardware industry as we know it today.

The founders of both these historically significant mercantile companies were highly ethical gentleman with strong convictions as to the importance of both personal and business integrity. EC and AF maintained not only an excellent business relationship, but a lasting personal friendship as well, that included the families of both men and continues even today.



Keen Kutter Neon Sign

The Keen Kutter logo was first applied to high grade axes but later it was the trademark for all superior lines of merchandise directly manufactured and sold by Simmons Hardware. Simmons Hardware and its Keen Kutter brand Early on it became synonymous with an unparalleled guarantee of quality and satisfaction. Every item marketed under this highly visible brand was tested and inspected before being stamped. It was the maker's promise and the customer's protection. If it wasn't perfect, you got your money back. It lived up to its founder's slogan: "The Recollection of Quality Remains Long After The Price Is Forgotten."



ECS Keen Kutter String Holder
Used in early KK hardware stores

Anyone attempting to collect and display even just one example of all the items bearing the Keen Kutter logo or other Simmons Hardware registered trademarks would find that an average home could not contain the accumulation. So prodigious was its output of Keen Kutter items, spanning over a century, that it presents a bonanza for collectors and allows them ample opportunity to find new and different treasures to add to their collections even though the demand as well as price has continued to rise.



E.C. Simmons and sons
At home, Edward Campbell Simmons at the organ,
(Sons: L to R) George, Wallace, Edward
Photo compliments of Mrs. Paul Ingersoll,
great granddaughter of ECS. Her grandfather was Wallace.

Information compiled by Elaine and Jerry Heuring
Authors of the book, "*Collector's Guide to Keen Kutter, Identification and Values*"

- THCKK is a not-for-profit organization formed in March of 1996. It serves to distribute information and provide an interactive forum about vintage hardware companies such as E.C. Simmons, (Keen Kutter), A.F. Shapleigh (Diamond Edge) and The Winchester Store (and the popular collectibles bearing their logos and associated house brands) as well as other historically interesting hardware companies such as "Our Very Best" (Hibbard, Spencer & Bartlett), Blue Grass (Belknap Hardware), Stanley, etc. are included as interest dictates (Witte, Wyeth, Lee, Sargent, etc)

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