



100 Years Strong 1904 - 2004

In 1904 Thomas Skinner, a Scottish immigrant to America, founded T. Skinner Co. in Vancouver, B.C. Born in 1856 in the port town of Leith (now part of Edinburgh), Scotland, Thomas Skinner earned his professional marine engineering papers and before he was thirty had become chief engineer on many of the ships that sailed the Atlantic. The triumph of steam and motor vessels over the fully rigged sailing ships of the 19th century brought in a new era in shipping. At the age of 31, Thomas Skinner came to the Pacific Northwest in 1887, employed by the Great Northern Railroad as the chief engineer of their ships. In the early 1900s he moved to China to become the Marine Superintendent for the Great Northern Railroad in Hong Kong. Thomas Skinner's experience as chief of construction and assembly of Russian submarines, as well as his background as an inspection engineer on deep-sea ships made him a very knowledgeable shipping man. Thomas Skinner was truly a pioneer entrepreneur and with his shipping and mechanical expertise, opened T. Skinner Co. to serve the trans-Pacific shipping business. The company distributed equipment and supplies for both the maintenance of ships and for the shipyards.



Yorkshire Building, ca.1936
525 Seymour Street, Vancouver



Canadian Fairbanks Morse Co.,
Machine Tool Showroom, 1905

While founded in Vancouver, B.C. in 1904, T. Skinner Co. also had offices in both Seattle and Tacoma. Thomas Skinner himself, had permanently located his family of five in Tacoma by 1910. There is no official record of the Vancouver office until 1918 when the Canadian Government required all companies to be registered in order to remit the newly legislated income tax. The first known Vancouver location of T. Skinner Co. was in the prestigious Yorkshire building at 525 Seymour Street. 1918 also marked the year that John Dewar Skinner (JD) came to Vancouver to help operate his brother's company. JD was Managing Director of T. Skinner Co., Vancouver until 1947. From 1928 to 1947, T. Skinner Co. was located at 81 Alexander Street in Gastown.

The passing of Thomas Skinner in 1937 at 81 years in Tacoma, Washington, left JD Skinner to run the Vancouver office until he sold it in 1947 to Ideal Iron Works of 369 Alexander Street. Ideal's owners, Herb Elstrom Sr. and Francis Smith purchased T. Skinner & Co. and continued to distribute industrial supplies including one of Thomas Skinner's original lines, the U.S. produced Dampney Paint used for the inside of boilers and the bottom of ships, which is still sold by Thomas Skinner and Son Ltd. today. JD Skinner passed away in 1948 in Vancouver.

In 1950, Max Krainer was a successful salesman working for Fairbanks Morse, a large industrial distribution company. Ideal Iron Works was one of his customers and Max was able to capitalize on his friendship and business connection with Ideal Iron Works, to purchase Thomas Skinner and Son Co. The Ideal management had discovered that running a distribution company was different from running a machine shop and they were pleased to sell Thomas Skinner and Son Co. to Max for a reasonable sum.

Max Krainer was born the only child of Johann and Theresa Krainer in Maria Elaine, Karnten Austria on October 12, 1918. Johann, left Austria following World War I and came to Canada. Two years later, his family joined him in Disley, Saskatchewan, and shortly thereafter, they moved to Vancouver. Max grew up and received his education in Vancouver completing grade 13 at Bain's School of Business. Max was trained as a pipe fitter and worked at the Port Mellon pulp mill and at the shipyards in Vancouver. He later began working for Fairbanks Morse in 1946 as a salesman and for four years called on industrial clients in Vancouver and up the coast. Max was a good salesman and did well at Fairbanks. After purchasing Thomas Skinner in 1950, Max moved his new business to 14 Powell Street for three years and later to 51 West Cordova where Thomas Skinner and Son Co. was located from 1954 to 1969.

While running Thomas Skinner and Son Co., Max became involved in several business ventures. One was Skinner Scales, a company started by Max Krainer and Jim Mantel in 1954. They began importing and distributing Murphy scales for large weight scale use such as highway truck scales. They decided that they could make a better scale and began manufacturing the scales in the building behind 51 West Cordova. Max and Jim's Skinner Scales continued to succeed and in 1961 they sold it to Max's old employer, Fairbanks Morse, who by this time was called Robert Morse.



Michel Maillouchon of EBCO Ind., 1964
One of Thomas Skinner's Loyal Customers
1954 - present day

While Thomas Skinner and Son Co. had a few other ventures, including selling mercury outboard motors and a manufacturing air whistle business, Max's main business at Thomas Skinner and Son Co. was distributing machine tools and machine shop supplies. In 1954 Max was awarded the DoALL line. DoALL was the strongest machine shop supply company of that era. Having DoALL as a line allowed Thomas Skinner and Son Co. to open a branch in Winnipeg, in 1954 (1957 Notre Dame Avenue), a branch in Calgary in 1956 (429 – 8th Avenue) and a branch in Edmonton in 1959 (9965 – 82nd Avenue).

Max was possibly too successful with the DoALL line, because in 1959, DoALL informed him that they wanted to own their own distribution in Western Canada. Max handed over his Winnipeg branch to DoALL and in Vancouver opened and ran the Head Office for DoALL Western Canada, until 1962. He then decided that operating his biggest competitor was too much of a conflict of interest and he left DoAll to run Thomas Skinner and Son Co. solely.

Without DoAll, Thomas Skinner and Son Co.'s main lines were Voest lathes from Austria, Martin lathes from Germany, Hercus bench lathes from Australia, Strands and Arboga drilling and milling machines from Sweden, Hazet hand tools from Germany, Malcus drills and Boss taps and dies from Germany, and Hakansson blades from Sweden. All of these products were in our first catalogue in 1966.



1966 Front Cover of Thomas Skinner's 1st Catalogue

In the 1960s, Thomas Skinner and Son Co.'s business thrived. It proved difficult however to administer and be profitable in the Calgary and Edmonton locations and thus they were closed in 1967 and 1968, respectively.

During the 1970s Max grew his business by being more focused on machine shop equipment and supplies. Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd's new location at 1884 Main Street saw a shift in where our products were being manufactured. Products from Japan increasingly filled our shelves. It was at that time that Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. began to sell Mitutoyo products, which is one of our main lines today. The 1970s also marked the involvement of Karl and Paul Krainer, Max's sons. While Karl helped with sales and administration, Paul traveled to Japan and Taiwan to expand the product lines

Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. represented. These included the machine tool lines of Kingston lathes, First brand mills and Dah Lih mills. Cutting tools such as Yamawa taps and Mitsubishi carbide were added as were machine accessories lines such as Victor chucks, News dividing heads and Big tappers . Our relationship with Sowa Tool & Machine began in the early 1970s providing Sowa's Western Canadian distribution. Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd.'s products of the time all represented excellent value and were of good to exceptional quality. By the end of the 1970s, Paul Krainer was running Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. With a flourishing business, Paul opened a branch in Edmonton, in 1982 at 9767 – 45th Avenue. In 1983 Vincent Khoo joined Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. as our Accountant/Administrator. Vince quickly became integral to the success of Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd.



Home of Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. from 1969 - 1990

1982 – 1985, due to an economic downturn and interest rates as high as 20%, were tough years for Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. Growth was primarily from the sale of imported lines and numerous small machine tools. In Edmonton, in 1986, Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. moved to our present premises at 9407 – 51st Avenue. Also in 1986, in order to better serve our customers, we began to expand our service department. We had two servicemen in Vancouver and one in Edmonton. Our business boomed in the late '80s, culminating in our purchase of our present Vancouver facility at 13880 Vulcan Way, Richmond in 1989.



Paul & Max Krainer, 1990

1990 was a year that shaped the future direction of Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. We had moved our headquarters to the 30,000-square feet Richmond facility. Business slowed and our long serving sales manager, Jeremy Paine, left to set up his own distribution company. With the slow business climate and the disruption to our sales force, we were forced to re-evaluate our direction. Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. had initiated some sales of CNC machine tools in the late '80s with a few niche lines such as Mitsui Seiki, SNK and Kiwa. At this turning point in 1990, we decided to get serious about the promotion and sale of CNC machine tools to be of better service to our customers. CNC was the wave of the future and we wanted to be a major player.

In January 1991, Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. was awarded the Okuma line of CNC machine tools and in April 1991, we were granted the Haas Automation line of CNC machine tools. These CNC machine tool builders understood how value added distributors such as Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. could support the customer base. It was at this time that we added CNC service and applications to our staff.

In 1992, Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. acquired the Hyd-Mech line of Canadian-made bandsaws. Thomas Skinner also purchased J & R Tool of Edmonton, significantly adding to our tooling sale base in Alberta. In order to better serve our Calgary customers, we opened a branch there in July 1995 at 4925 – 77th Avenue. In order to strengthen our sales and administrative operations, two key positions were appointed. In 1997, Don Babineau joined as Manager of Sales and Operations and has been the initiator of Thomas Skinner's tool room management capabilities. In 1998, Dave Fawcett became our Alberta Regional Manager.

In June 2000, Thomas Skinner opened its Winnipeg branch at 820-D Berry Street. The circle was now complete. Having to abandon these locations thirty years earlier, Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. was back across the prairies.



Grand Opening of Thomas Skinner's Calgary Location July 5, 1995

In the year 2000, Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. became an authorized distributor for the Sandvik Coromant line of tooling and carbide inserts. This line allowed us to fully tool our customers on new machines. Sandvik is the world's largest carbide manufacturer and due to their depth and support, this line has been the strongest addition to Thomas Skinner's tooling offering in our 100-year history. Unfortunately, the year 2000 also marked the death of Max Krainer. One of Max's important legacies was his dedication to his customers. It was always Max's mission to tell his customers all about the latest and greatest. He had an earnest belief in helping his customers with products and services. In an effort to make them feel happy and comfortable, Max spoke a few words from every language that was spoken by our customers. While we were saddened by our loss, the memory of Max Krainer will live on at Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd. through our continuing commitment to quality products and customer service.

In 2001, Thomas Skinner added Lenox, North America's premier bandsaw blade line and also purchased Jordan Industrial. These additions culminated many years of assembling the finest and broadest line of products offered in Western Canada. We can now claim to be "Western Canada's One Stop Metalworking Supplier".

The history of the Thomas Skinner Company began with an entrepreneurial pioneer who used his expertise to help his customers maintain and build ships. Thomas Skinner was a risk taker who had the technical ability and vision to be a success. Then with Max Krainer at the helm, as an ambitious salesman, the company had great achievements and a few setbacks. His high energy, love of people, passion for the business and generous spirit built a strong and loyal customer base. Under Paul Krainer's leadership in the last 25 years, the company has recaptured the Western Canada market. The success is due to our quality suppliers and our team of skilled and dedicated employees ensuring the best in customer service.



100 Year Anniversary Celebration in Edmonton, AB; Paul Krainer above, Guests below



Head Office of Thomas Skinner & Son Ltd.
13880 Vulcan Way, Richmond
Current Location

We have accomplished a lot in 100 years and we look forward to serving the industrial metalworking industry in our next century.

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