



ACCURATE MACHINE WORKS

Ferdinand Benjamin Riek was named for his father and grandfather – two early Dallas pioneers. His father, Ferdinand, came to Dallas with his family in 1875 and became an outstanding musician like his father, Constance. Constance and Ferdinand are proudly listed in The Encyclopedia of Texas. The name "Benjamin" came from his mother's father, the renowned Benjamin Long, an early settler in Dallas who came with the second group to La Reunion in 1855. He became sheriff of Dallas County, a two-term mayor of the City of Dallas, and a distinguished United States Commissioner.

Now it was Ferdinand Benjamin Riek's turn to make his mark in Dallas. In 1929, the year of the stock market crash, he left his steady-paying job to fulfill a dream of having his own business. His dream was realized with the birth of Accurate Machine Works, (A.M.W.) a company that rebuilt and repaired all types of industrial equipment. What a chance he took at that time! Nevertheless, the business flourished and continued for seventy-one years.



The business opened in small quarters at 2516 Main Street, but by 1934, in the depth of the Depression, more room was needed. He moved to 2506 Main Street, a thirty-foot-wide building heated by two coke-burning stoves, and featuring an unusual front door that opened flat against one wall. Both locations are now under Central Expressway at Main Street.

Some Dallas area firms, not mentioned elsewhere, doing business with Accurate Machine Works were Interstate Theaters, the Adolphus Hotel, Dallas City Meat Packing Company, Morrison Milling Company, Morton Milling Company, Oak Farms Dairy, Southland Ice, Southern Ice, Kimble Milling Company, and cotton gins all over Northeast Texas. During the early years, the company knew if they delivered a job on Friday to Crystal Ice and Quality Ice, owners Ryneman, McAvoy and Sims would pay immediately; this often helped with the payroll.

When Radio Station WFAA opened its first office to broadcast, Riek built the tower and precariously installed it on the top of the Santa Fe Building. His family heard him remark, "I never want to do that again."

Early employees of Accurate Machine Works included Mr. Shoemaker, who ran the cylinder grinder and the Landis piston grinder. Because of the grinding, his glasses would constantly become pitted and scratched and Riek would send him to Woolworth's to get new ones. Mr. Hartman ran the Monarch and the Davis & Egan lathes and made most of the tooling needed in those days. Other valuable employees who helped make the shop a successful business were

Bud McCarty, Henry Hanes, Kirby Hanes, Robert Rowe, Amos Hart, who commuted every day from Sherman, John Wright, Atley Cook, George Andrews, and "Shortie" Alexander, who helped with the clean-up and cleverly camouflaged the metal chips in paint boxes so the trash man would not cut his hands when he took them. Dorothy Nethery ran the office for over twenty-five years and her husband, Robert, looked after legal matters.

Mae B. Riek, wife of F.B., gave support that was important to the business. Money from a small trust fund in her name came to the rescue when business was bad. She worked in the office, keeping books and making regular trips to the First National Bank to borrow money for new machinery and sometimes for the payroll. Since she was one of the few women in those days who drove a car, she also ran errands to get supplies for various jobs.

Years later, Mae B. Riek would tell her children about starting the business during the Depression when money was tight. At the time the Shop was doing business for Metzger's Milk and Mrs. Baird's Bread. She was comforted to know that if these two customers could not pay their bills in cash, at least her children would have milk and bread on the table. She also told how F.B., during those difficult years, would pay the company bills and then divide equally what was left between him and each of the employees.

One of the early big jobs for Accurate Machine Works was to rebuild the engines in the Dallas Railway and Terminal Company's buses. These buses had Dodge Senior Six engines in them. They held twenty-five people and were added when the city was growing. The main transportation then was the streetcar, but it was easier to add buses than to lay tracks for more streetcars. When the bus engines had to be rebuilt, the Accurate Machine Works did the job, and each engine that was rebuilt got one hundred thousand additional miles. Some years later the Dallas Railway & Terminal Company put in their own rebuilding shop. To begin with, they were able to get only thirty-five thousand miles out of a rebuild.

It takes a lot of supplies to fill the needs of a machine shop. There was no alloy steel available in Texas; so it had to be ordered from Joseph T. Ryerson in St Louis. Other suppliers included Briggs-Weaver Machinery Company, The Murray Company, Trinity Brass & Copper, The Linde Air Products Company, (where Accurate Machine Works had the third oldest contract within the city), National Cylinder Gas Company, Dallas Gasket & Packing Company, McMurry Metals, Acme Foundry & Machine Company in Oklahoma, McCormick Steel Company, and DoAll Company.

Accurate Machine Works maintained the machinery for Armstrong Cork Company on Hines Boulevard; they made the cork-sealed caps that were used on cold drink bottles such as Coca Cola, Dr. Pepper and Pepsi Cola.

In May 1935, son F.B. Riek, Jr., answered an ad his dad had placed in the newspaper. He wrote, "In reply to your advertisement for a boy to help around the shop in today's Times Herald, I wish to apply for this position. I am thirteen years of age and soon will be a graduate of Vickery Place School." He got the job! However, he had to wait until fall when he was fourteen and attending Dallas Technical High School. After classes Jr. would walk to the shop and work until closing time, when he rode home with his father. He remembers his first job was to clean the lathes and sweep the floor; in a machine shop this is a dirty job. Soon he was operating the Weaver Press, which pressed the ring gear on the differential and riveted them together.

A year or so later, Riek's second son, George (Buddy), joined the staff at Accurate Machine Works. He followed in his brother's footsteps, cleaning lathes and sweeping floors. Both boys were serving in World War II in April 1945 when the shop moved to 2626 Main Street, a building twice as large as the previous one. They wanted so much to be there for that move and the enlargement of the family company. Their cousin, Bill Underhill, Jr., helped his uncle with the move and wrote all the details to F.B. and Buddy serving in Europe.

When Carol Burnett came in 1962 to perform at Fair Park Music Hall, the air-conditioning system failed. Riek was called and with his staff worked around the clock to complete the job for the opening. He was thrilled to receive tickets to see his favorite television comedienne, Carol Burnett.

Accurate Machine Works had a small part in the beginning of the space age, when the Space Corporation of Garland gave the company a contract to machine the actuator blocks, which lifted the Titan missile to the launching pad. These blocks weighed from thirty-five thousand to fifty thousand pounds each.

Both of the sons stayed for many years with the company. F.B. left in 1962 to start his own business that later took him to Cleveland, Ohio, while Buddy stayed on. Their father loved his shop and his work, and near the end of his life, when too weak to drive, George Andrews, a loyal employee drove him to the shop for a few hours each day. He was happy just to be there. Ferdinand Benjamin Riek, Sr. died two months short of his seventieth birthday in March 1966. Accurate Machine Works, which started as a dream in 1929, continued operation until the fall of 2000, when his son George (Buddy) retired.

By Mae B., George, and F.B. Riek Jr.

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The Shop in the 1950s



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