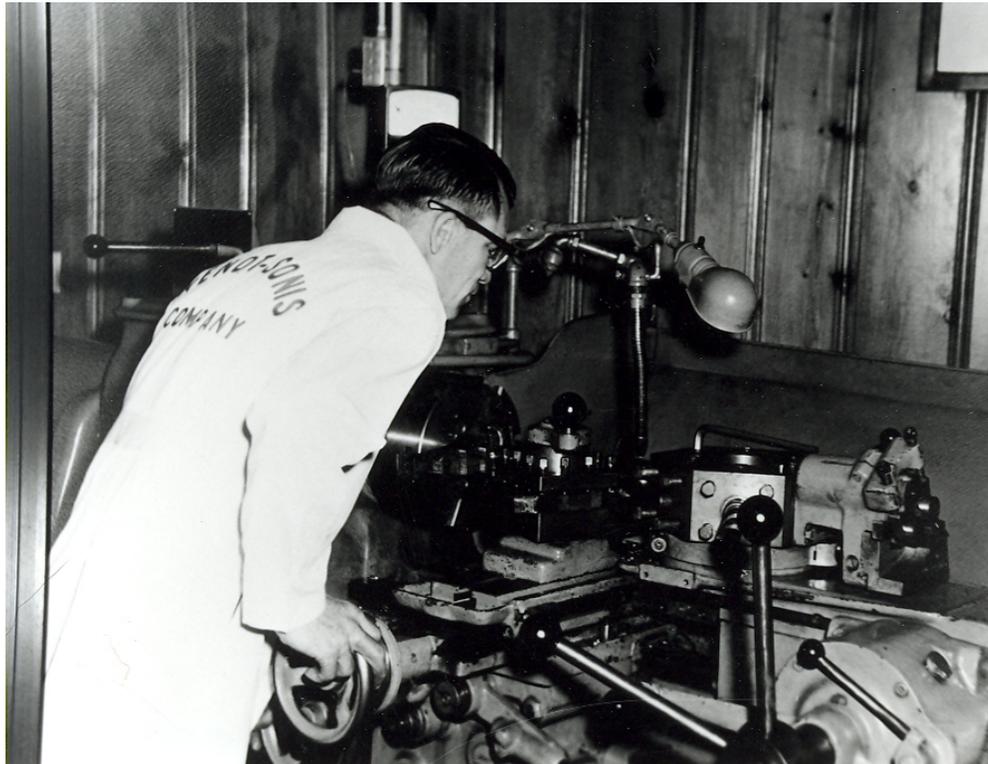


# Photo of the Month

Wendt-Sonis



Wendt-Sonis Plant in Rogers, circa 1956  
Neg. # N021084



Elmo Scott operating a lathe at Wendt-Sonis in Rogers  
Neg. # 010006

American manufacturing was in its heyday throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Industrial concerns such as Munsingwear and Pel-Freez had located in Rogers by the early 1950s and many more businesses followed suit. The Daisy Manufacturing Company came to Rogers from Michigan in 1958. This economic development activity may be credited to local businessmen who saw the potential for attracting manufacturers. These leaders formed the Industrial Foundation of Rogers in 1953 to encourage such growth.

Wendt-Sonis represents one company attracted by the Industrial Foundation in 1953. The plant in 1956 is illustrated at right. As one of the nation's leading manufacturers of carbide tip cutting tools, the Wendt-Sonis story began in 1933 in Hannibal, Missouri in Henry Wendt's home basement. The other namesakes of the corporation included Henry's brother Maurice Wendt and Hannibal businessman Alec Sonis. By late 1953 workers began erecting the plant located on North 13th Street, between Walnut and Persimmon Streets. The first job announcements were posted on January 8th and 9th, 1954 and over six hundred people submitted applications in hopes of earning a wage of \$.75 per hour. In 1958 an additional plant was opened in Bentonville and by 1963 the Rogers plant was expanded to produce metals from carbide powders. The company general offices relocated to the Rogers facility in 1968.

By the 1960s, Wendt-Sonis was recognized as an important community partner. The company provided steady jobs with good wages, which also supported other local businesses, provided tax revenue, and increased land values. A Wendt-Sonis employee operating a lathe is pictured at right. Wendt-Sonis products included tool bits, reamers, milling cutters, counter bores, and the like. These were used by manufacturing operations such as the Ford Motor Company, International Harvester, and Caterpillar, as well as the aircraft, electronics, and consumer goods industries. This Northwest Arkansas plant also contributed to the space age. The 1969 Apollo astronauts landed on the moon with a core drill bit manufactured in the Rogers and Bentonville Wendt-Sonis plants and used to take samples of the lunar surface.

Over the years the company's name changed several times as corporations merged. Wendt-Sonis joined United Greenfield in 1964 and TRW purchased United Greenfield in 1969. By 1971 the company merged with Unimet and in 1974 Wendt-Sonis/Unimet, United Greenfield Division of TRW was again renamed as TRW Wendt-Sonis Division. The Harbour Group purchased RTW (not to be confused with TRW) and United Greenfield. Wendt-Sonis then became known simply as RTW in 1986. Since 1997 Wendt-Sonis has been known as Kennametal following Kennametal's acquisition of Greenfield. Regardless of the name changes, the plant has produced over 5,000 standard items and many special tool designs. It continues to be a strong part of our community.