

# **THE FESTUS MFG. CO.**

Copyright George E. Keane February 16, 2007  
Festus, Missouri.

## **This is a history of a slide rule company founded in Festus, Missouri in 1938.**

**One would expect that Slide Rules would be manufactured in a large city. But in 1938 in the closing years of the Great Depression when Festus was a small town of only 4,400, Paul Lee Jones Jr. came to town and started making them. Festus was hardly a place where one would expect to find a company with the technology to produce slide rules.**

**Paul Jones overcame the problems of precision manufacturing that slide rules require, in addition to the proper milling of the wood and the need for accurate indexing of the numerical scales. Very little is known in Festus about this company or why Mr. Jones even started it.**

**The earliest documented reference was found in the May 12, 1938 issue of The Jefferson County Press. The Festus Mfg. Co. was listed with other businesses on a page congratulating the Festus High School graduation class of 1938. The company's existence was also confirmed by the Tri-City Independent of Festus in its September 29, 1938 issue. When reporting his very narrow escape from death in an automobile accident, Paul Jones was referred to as the manager of the Festus Manufacturing Co. with offices located on West Main St.**

**Another reference was made by Howard Litton, Festus historian. He stated in his book, Tanglefoot - Portrait of a City, Vol. 1, June 1989, that the manager of the Festus Manufacturing Co. was Mr. Paul Jones. Mr. Jones was born in St. Louis. His mother was from Chicago and his father, a Real-estate Agent, was born in Tennessee.**

**Paul was described as very smart, very handsome and 42 years old at the time. Today no one knows why he decided to manufacture slide rules.**

**The Festus Mfg. Co. was located in the S. T. Waggener & Brothers Store Company building at 318 West Main St., Festus, Missouri. The Waggener Store Company was a lumber yard and had recently installed the machinery needed to start a window sash and mill work operation and this was where work on the slide rule started. It is believed that the lumber yard owned the slide rule company but Paul Jones was the one who started it. By April 12, 1940 Mr. Jones and Waggener separated. Jones took control of the company and renamed it. The company continued in Festus and The Acu-Rule Mfg. Co. was incorporated with Directors Herman L. Schnure, N.F. Delporte and V. E. Guenther, all from St. Louis.**

**Production seems to have been uninterrupted. The company's history can be followed by looking at the manuals that were included with the slide rules. Within one year the cover title changed from**

- 1. Paul Jones, Author Copyright 1938*
- 2. Festus Mfg. Co. Festus, Mo., U. S. A., Copyright 1938*
- 3. Acu-Rule Mfg. Co. (successor to Festus Mfg. Co.)  
New York address 15 East 26th St.  
Factory & General Offices, Festus, Mo.*

**This pattern is supported by tax records. A search of the Festus, Missouri city tax records did not find a record for the Festus Manufacturing Company but a search of the Jefferson County, Missouri Assessment records for 1939 did find a record in the Merchant's Assessment Book on page 198. It is believed the taxes were paid by the Waggener lumber yard while it was under their control and the county tax record is the result of Paul Jones registering the new company that remained for a short time in Jefferson County at the Festus location. Leaving Waggener's ownership seems to have been a friendly separation.**

**At the New York address of 15 East 26th St., NY is a very large office building called the Madison Square Building. Mr. Jones hired a person with the interesting name of Magnus M. Manheim as Sales Manager. Using an Acu-Rule Mfg. Co. letterhead, Mr. Manheim circulated a sales letter and price sheet with four models of slide rules. This letter, dated August 14, 1939, was directed to wholesale vendors. This was done prior to the Acu-Rule Mfg. Co. being incorporated in Missouri and while still located in Festus. It took very little time for Acu-Rule to be noticed by the large K & E. slide rule company. By December 20, 1938 samples and price information was already in this competitors files.**

**The first Acu-Rule catalog, 1939, listed four slide rules models for sale. The wholesale price ranged from \$18.00 per gross to \$72.00 per gross, or 12 cents to 50 cents each.**

**At the same time a catalog from Laboratory Specialties, Inc., a science equipment supply house located at 144 South Wabash St., Wabash, Indiana was offering these slide rules at retail at about 100% markup with quantity discounts. The same model numbers were used. In addition slide rules were made for other companies. It seems the Acu-Rule Mfg. Co. was now in business.**

**After the 1940 incorporation, the company left Festus and was operating in rented quarters at 623 Del Monte Way, St. Louis. Mr. Paul Jones was the President and the Secretary & Treasurer was Mr. Schnure. From this time on there was no longer any association with Festus. Mr. Jones died in 1945. A succession of owners and company managers eventually moved the company to Mt. Olive, Illinois.**

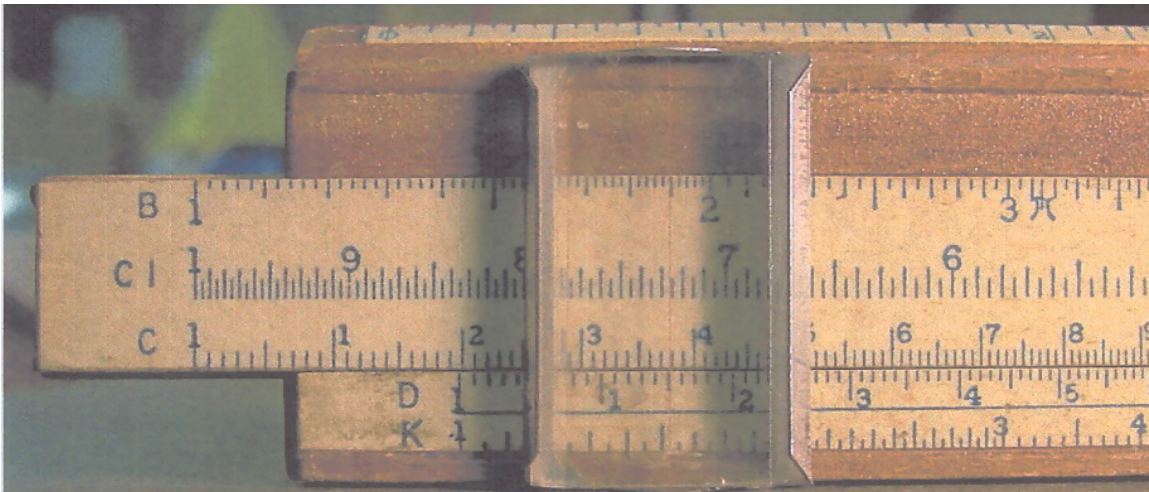
## IN SUMMARY

The life span of the Festus Mfg. Co. was about two years having started in Festus, Missouri in 1938 and into 1940. Mr. Jones took the company to Saint Louis as the Acu-Rule Mfg. Co. This company filled an important need during the Depression years of 1938 to 1940 and during WWII as a supplier of a low cost, student grade, wood slide rules as well as providing production capacity for other brand names. The company name of Acu-Rule Mfg. Co. was used from 1940 to 1969. It is estimated that about 750,000 slide ruled were made. The company Mr. Jones started lasted 31 years before being sold. He would have been very pleased with the company he started in Festus with just a few scraps of wood and paper.

### *Authors Note:*

*This simple and efficient calculating device is what engineers used to take us to the moon and back! By 1975 United States slide rule production stopped because of the introduction of the hand held electronic calculator and the teaching and use of the slide rule disappeared.*

*The full version of this story can be found at [www.sliderulemuseum.com/isrm/acurule](http://www.sliderulemuseum.com/isrm/acurule). Also a display of the company's slide rules and a book containing about 100 pages of documentation and records is in the Festus Public Library.*



Original model #50. The 1938 retail price was 50 cents.  
Printed paper scales glued on a wood body. One scale, the A scale is missing.

*Interested in slide rules? Hundreds of pictures of many brands can be viewed at [www.sliderulemuseum.com](http://www.sliderulemuseum.com) and [www.sliderulemuseum.com/isrm/dilatash](http://www.sliderulemuseum.com/isrm/dilatash)*