

Aurora Casket Company

Founded: 1890

Location: Original location unknown, Aurora; 202 Conwell Street (1993)

The Aurora Coffin Company was founded in 1890. It employed approximately twenty-five workers and manufactured hardwood and varnish finished “caskets of distinction,” as the company’s motto asserted. The company later introduced cloth-covered wooden caskets. John J. Backman was one of the founders of the Aurora Coffin Company and served as secretary and treasurer before taking the company over in the early 1900s. Backman’s paternal grandparents were German immigrants, and his maternal grandparents were from England. Backman achieved local renown as an officer in the Indiana National Guard and commanded a battalion of Indiana volunteer infantry during the Spanish-American War.

John’s son, William DuChemin Backman, joined the company after earning a master’s in business administration at Harvard University in 1926. He worked in the shipping department. Upon John’s retirement, however, leadership of the Aurora Coffin Company passed to his son-in-law, William E. Barrott. Barrott was from Lawrenceburg, where his father had owned a hardware store. He received a degree in mechanical engineering from Purdue University and after graduation worked in the steel industry. He married Brynhilda Backman in 1920 and the following year went to work for her father’s casket company. Barrott became vice president in 1922 and president in 1936. William Backman, who assumed the duties of secretary and treasurer for the company in 1937, pursued a career in banking, becoming president of the First National Bank of Aurora in 1952.

In 1937 the Aurora Coffin Company became the Aurora Casket Company. Three years earlier the firm had started to produce steel caskets, which came to be its primary product line. Wooden caskets were discontinued in 1953. In 1947 the company installed a 500-ton press on its production line. By 1954, the company employed 185 people and distributed its products from coast to coast, maintaining 3,000 accounts with retail distributors and eighteen traveling personnel. It also moved into expanded office facilities in the Chambers Stevens Building. The Aurora Casket Company remained in the Backman and Barrott families and claimed to be the nation's largest privately owned manufacturer and by the 1990s distributor of caskets, cremation urns, and funeral service management and marketing training.