

C. M. Hobbs & Sons

Founded: 1875

Location: 9300 West Washington Street, Bridgeport (1875– )

The forebears of Emery Albertson and Cyrus M. Hobbs were North Carolina Quakers who migrated to Indiana early in the nineteenth century, helping establish the Blue River Friends, a Quaker community located near Salem in Washington County. Albertson's grandfather, Benjamin Albertson, was a physician, and Hobbs's great-grandfather, William Hobbs, was a minister. Both were committed Quakers: William Hobbs's scruples against slavery led him to leave the South, and in 1818 both men helped establish the Salem, Indiana, Peace Society in order to promote their pacifist beliefs. Benjamin Albertson had a taste for horticulture and planted a small nursery. His son Oliver shared his father's interest, joining him in cultivating trees when he was old enough to carry an ax and, later, establishing a commercial nursery. Indeed, by 1875 Oliver was running one of the largest retail nurseries in the state.

Due to ill health, however, Oliver moved to Bridgeport in 1875. Although he retained his interest in the Washington County nursery and continued to take a hand in supervising it, Oliver established O. Albertson & Company, a new, twenty-acre nursery at the western edge of Bridgeport. Oliver doubled the size of the nursery by the time of his death in 1879 at the age of fifty-two. In 1875 Cyrus Hobbs came to Bridgeport as the foreman of Albertson's nursery. Hobbs previously had worked in the nurseries of both Abraham Trueblood and Albertson in Washington County. In 1876 he married Oliver's daughter, Anna Albertson. After Oliver Albertson's death, his son Emery and Hobbs managed the nursery and entered into a business partnership in 1881.

Albertson & Hobbs sold numerous varieties of fruit and ornamental trees and shrubbery to customers across the country and overseas. By 1907 the nursery employed an average of fifty workmen year-round and fifty more in “slipping season” and maintained three hundred acres of closely planted fruit and ornamental trees. The company owned additional land in Livingston County, New York, and Topeka, Kansas, to accommodate their eastern and western markets. The nursery, on the border of Hendricks and Marion Counties, was ideally located for trade, lying along the old National Road (the nursery’s office was once a toll house) and a railroad line. Albertson & Hobbs sold a variety of trees: European and Japanese plum; standard and dwarf pears; sugar, silver, and Norway maples; black locust, peach, quince, currant, and Carolina poplars; catalpa, elm, plane, and tulip.

Emery Albertson retired from the partnership in July 1907, leaving the company to Cyrus Hobbs and his three sons—Oliver, Harry, and Fred. Cyrus helped develop several new varieties of apples and held large interests in apple and peach orchards in southern Indiana. The nursery originally specialized in fruit trees but by the 1920s the majority of its market was decorative trees used in landscaping. “We do not claim for the Hobbs nursery that it has a record of fifty years of knowing how,” the owners declared in a catalog entitled *Outdoor Beauty and Your Home*. “What we do assert is that for fifty years we have been learning how and the knowledge accumulated during that half-century period is now offered to the public in the form of nursery products, the quality of which is unsurpassed.” Cyrus died of a heart attack in the spring of 1927. On the last day of his life, the seventy-nine-year-old Quaker worked in his company’s orchards in

the morning, returned home for lunch and rest, and was stricken while standing on the curb waiting for a bus to return him to the nursery.

Cyrus Hobbs's sons became owners of the firm, which was incorporated in 1932. Harry was president until his death in 1960. Frederick later served as president of the company. According to the rhythms of the industry, nursery managers must base their planting schedules on what they anticipate the demand to be three to ten years in the future. By the early 1960s C. M. Hobbs & Company contained five million growing plants and was selling nearly one million each year. The nursery deals mostly in decorative trees but also plants 100,000 fruit trees annually. The family-run business was severely damaged by a January 1982 fire in its storage area. By the 1990s the fourth generation of the family supervised over 350 acres of planting.