

Erie Pro Hardware

Founded: 1896

Location: Originally 148 (later 144–146) East Market Street, Huntington (1896–99); 817–821 East Market Street (1899–)

On 5 October 1896 Louis V. Zahm and Lewis R. Fowerbaugh opened a grocery store in a small, eighteen-by-thirty-six-foot frame building at 148 East Market Street in Huntington. In 1899 they moved the establishment a short distance to 817 East Market Street and added a line of shoes and dry goods. Five years later they added a wing and freight elevator to the rear of the building. The partners began selling coal in 1921, installing scales and bins in the rear of the building along the railroad tracks. After almost thirty years in partnership with Zahm, Fowerbaugh sold his interest in the firm to Zahm's sons George J. and William M. on 20 February 1926. Louis and his sons operated the store until the elder Zahm's death in 1929, after which George and William continued running the store as partners. The store was known as the Erie Department Store by 1927–28 at the latest, perhaps inspired by the major Erie Lackawanna rail line that ran through town.

In 1932 the Zahm brothers began to sell Martin-Senour paints, enamels, and varnishes. Ten years later they opened an east room containing a meat and cheese department. In December 1947 George Zahm died and his wife, Solina V. Zahm, took over his share of the business. Louis G. Zahm became hardware and grocery manager in 1948. Two years later Solina and William divided the business, with William taking over the dry goods and shoe department in the east room of the building. William Zahm closed his business in 1971. Louis then expanded the hardware section of the Erie

Department Store into that space. Gradually the store began to focus on hardware, boasting in the late 1970s that forty thousand items were kept in stock. The store became Erie Pro Hardware. By the 1990s George J. Zahm, representing the fourth generation of the Zahm family, ran the store.