

## Farmers Mutual Insurance Company of Johnson & Shelby Counties

Founded: 12 March 1894

Location: Original location unknown, Shelbyville (1894); 45 North Main Street, Franklin (1919); 52 ½ East Jefferson Street (1948); 80 West Jefferson Street (1952, 1975); 242 East Jefferson Street (1982, 1990); 1924 Longest Drive (1997)

In the 1890s farmers throughout the nation banded together to form mutual aid societies, gaining their impetus in the Grange movement of two decades earlier. Indiana, yet a rural state before the turn of the century, proved a fertile ground for the growth of these movements. In 1890 the Farm Alliance and the Farmers Mutual Benefit Association met in Indianapolis to organize a state party. Two years later the Indiana delegation to a Populist party organizational meeting in Ohio was the second largest group, with only the Kansas delegation larger than the Hoosier group.

Within this tradition the Farmers Mutual Fire Insurance Company began operations on 9 March 1894. John Tilson served as the first president, Samuel D. White became the first vice president, John W. Vanarsdall was elected treasurer, and George W. Bryan filled the post of secretary. Little is known of Tilson. White was active in Masonic activity in Shelbyville. Bryan was a native of Kentucky and a Confederate Civil War veteran who came to Indiana as a prisoner of war at Camp Morton. He returned to Kentucky after the Civil War, only to return to Indiana a few years later.

The group's first policy was written in March 1894. Between 1894 and 1923 the company paid out almost \$250,000 in claims and moved from Shelbyville in Shelby County to Franklin in Johnson County. Many of these losses occurred in the first few years. By the mid-1920s Farmers Mutual had \$8,952,049 worth of insurance in force, and the company had been passed to a new generation. D. E. Shelton, Thomas

Blackwell, Elisha Sexton, and John Clark made up the group's leadership contingent. Clark served as secretary of the insurance company. He was active in several civic groups including the Knights of Pythias, was a director of the Franklin Gas Company, and was also active in politics, running for the Democratic nomination for county clerk in 1919.

By the 1940s Clarence A. Wiesman became secretary, a position he retained through the late 1950s. In the same period John Shelton moved from treasurer to president of the group, and J. Arthur Hall retained the post of vice president, a position he held into the mid-1970s.

Although the company began as a group that protected farmers from costs associated with fires, it quickly began writing policies covering wind and other types of property damage. In the 1990s it continued to protect individuals from the effects of property damage. In 1997 Duane D. Smith held the post of secretary, while Eugene Morris was elected president.