

Gill Funeral Home

Founded: 1872

Location: 422 East Main Street, Washington (1872–92); 211 East Main Street (1892–1912); East Third and Van Trees Streets (1912–36); 314 East Van Trees Street (1936–41); 308 East Walnut Street (1941–)

Joseph H. Gill, the founder of the funeral business, was orphaned at age ten and a Civil War veteran by age twenty-five. In 1850 his parents died, and he earned a living by working at odd jobs near his birthplace in Bond County, Illinois. Six years after being orphaned, he moved to Princeton, Indiana, and took up an apprenticeship with a cabinetmaker. By 1858 he had relocated to Washington and was employed by the firm of Mattingly & Mulholland.

Gill returned to Washington after the war and was again employed by an enterprise headed by Mattingly, and a new partner, Martin Luther Bonham. After Mattingly's death in 1872 Gill purchased a half interest in the firm, and it continued as Bonham & Gill. The partners made and sold furniture, and like so many other furniture makers of the period, also ran an undertaking business. The partnership remained intact for almost twenty years. In 1891 Bonham's sons purchased Gill's interest in the firm.

Gill then bought the William Foster establishment and began an association with his son, James A. Gill. Joseph Gill & Son dealt in furniture and undertaking, later settling exclusively on the funeral business. Gill died in 1899, and his son James took over the family business. James was born in 1873 in Washington and spent almost his entire life in the city. He was heavily involved in the city's civic life. In 1912 James built a two-story edifice in which business was conducted on the first floor and the family lived on the second. Ten years later W. Hayes Gill joined his father in the business.

After the death of James A. Gill, his sons, James C. and W. Hayes, continued the family business, moving once before settling on East Walnut Street. The brothers built a brick colonial building just before the beginning of World War II. In 1974 James C. and W. Hayes retired, handing their grandfather's company to James W. Pirkle, a licensed mortician. In 1985 Pirkle added a wing to the west side of the building, doubling the size of the facility, and also renovated the rest of the structure. In 1998 Pirkle remained the president of Gill Funeral Home, the oldest continuously operated business in the city of Washington.