

Henry C. Smither Roofing Company

Founded: [1868–73]

Location: 27 East Georgia (1868–75); 169 (later 319) West Maryland (1875–1901); 330 South Pennsylvania (1902–8); 430–436 South Meridian Street (1909–58); 6850 East Thirty-second Street (1959–)

Henry Clay Smither was a member of a leading Indianapolis family. His father, a gunsmith by trade, owned several valuable plots of land in Indianapolis and operated a sawmill as well as the popular Smither Tavern on the Michigan Road. Henry served in the Union army during the Civil War and before entering the roofing trade operated a grocery business and a skating rink. Originally a Whig and later a Republican, he served on the Indianapolis City Council under Mayor Charles A. Bookwalter (who served as mayor from 1901 to 1903 and from 1906 to 1910).

Sometime between 1868 and 1873 Smither entered into a partnership to sell roofing materials. According to the city directory, Smither and John M. Sims were associated with the Pioneer Roofing Company on 27 East Georgia Street in 1872–73. By 1874 the two men had established Sims, Smither, and Company on Missouri Street. In 1875 the firm was listed in the city directory at 169 West Maryland Street. By 1883 Sims and Smither had sales of \$15,000 per year. Sims and Smither originally manufactured the materials used in gravel and asphalt roofing. Smither acquired tar pitch residue from coke plants in central Indiana, which he then used to manufacture the coal-tar pitch and saturated rolls of rag-base felt necessary in the interply moppings and top-pouring of gravel roofs. In the 1880s Smither began relying on Samuel Barrett of Chicago to supply coal-tar pitch and roofing felts. The firm's association with Barrett products lasted for

eighty years, continuing the association by representing the Celotex Corporation after the merger of the Barrett Company with the Philip Carey Manufacturing Company.

Smither was a leader in the roofing industry and a founding member of the National Roofing Contractors Association. Sims retired from the firm in 1888. Between 1901 and 1902 Henry C. Smither Roofing Company moved to 330 South Pennsylvania; between 1908 and 1909 the company moved to 430 South Meridian Street. Smither, who had no children and was in declining health, sold a controlling interest in the company to Joseph E. Mattingly in 1926. Mattingly, a native of Kentucky, was a sheet-metal worker. He came to the Henry C. Smither Roofing Company in 1909 or 1910 as a foreman and gradually worked his way up to manager.

Mattingly sold the firm to Robert E. Bubenzer in 1955. Bubenzer, born in Vincennes, previously had worked at the Indiana State Highway Department, E. I. DuPont, and the Philip Carey Manufacturing Company. He was elected president of the company in 1961. Between 1958 and 1959 the Henry C. Smither Roofing Company moved to 6850 East Thirty-second Street. In 1972 Bubenzer's son Robert L. Bubenzer became president. Built-up roofing (using coal-tar pitch and asphalt) was the mainstay of the Henry C. Smither Roofing Company, but it also built slate, tile, and metal roofs and used newer, rubber single-ply systems. As the Henry C. Smither Roofing Company built roofs across the state, its reputation extended throughout the region. The company was noted for jobs that demanded high-skilled sheet-metal work, and from 1976 to 1978 it reroofed the Indiana Capitol. The company also did restoration work on the Benjamin Harrison Home. By the 1990s Henry C. Smither Roofing Company had constructed roofs for a wide variety of Indianapolis buildings, including the Children's Museum,

Methodist Hospital, St. John Catholic Church, the Hyatt Regency Hotel, the City-County Building, Jordan Hall at Butler University, Castleton and Washington Square malls, and the City Market.