

## Indiana Farmers Mutual Insurance Company

Founded: 1877

Location: Originally located in office of *Crawfordsville Star*, 30 North Washington, Crawfordsville (1877– ); law office of E. V. Brookshire ( –1886); farm of William J. Miles, near New Market (1886–1906); farm of Harry P. Cooper, near Yountsville (1906–13); Cooper’s home on South Green Street, Crawfordsville (1913– ); 704 South Washington; Main Street; Crawfordsville State Bank Building ( –1928); Illinois Building, Indianapolis (1928– ); 2105 North Meridian Street ( –1969); 10 West 106th Street (1970– )

On 29 August 1877 a group of farmers from Montgomery and Fountain Counties signed articles of association for the Patrons Mutual Fire Insurance Company. When a farmhouse was destroyed by fire, neighbors would come together to rebuild it. The company was an attempt to formalize this mutualist tradition of rural life. Members of the organization purchased stock in the company and were assessed in proportion to their commitment only as fires occurred. The Patrons Farm Insurance Company grew out of the granger movement, and membership was originally limited to grangers. The Order of Patrons of Husbandry, or Grange, was a fraternal organization that flourished among farmers in the 1870s and was dedicated to improving the social and economic conditions of rural life. Nationwide, grangers proposed laws to regulate railroad freight charges and sponsored cooperative economic enterprises, such as farmer-owned stores, grain elevators, or insurance companies.

The Patrons Mutual Fire Insurance Company began issuing policies when it had received \$50,000 worth of subscriptions, and on 5 March 1878 the company declared its policies in force. The first president of the company was Archibald Johnson, a Montgomery County farmer and politician. Until 1916 the insurance company’s business was conducted in the home or office of its secretary. So, for example, the company’s

first office was in the Crawfordsville newspaper office of printer Jere Keeney, the company's first secretary. The Patrons Mutual Fire Insurance Company eventually accepted members outside the Grange and in 1881 was reorganized as the Farmers Mutual Insurance Company.

Farmers Mutual Insurance Company seems to have been plagued by hostile competitors, at least in the eyes of the company's founders. The company's early years were marred by membership losses due to high rates and the belief that someone was burning the members' property. Many came to believe that a series of fires in the fall of 1884 were set by the company's enemies. In December 1885 James A. Mount, a Montgomery County farmer active in the Grange who twice served as president of the insurance company and later served a term as governor of the state, distributed a circular attesting to the financial stability of the company. Mount decried the "constant and persistent effort by some of the agents of foreign insurance companies to injure the progress, growth and reputation of this company."

Despite these early challenges, the company survived and was characterized by great continuity in leadership. Jacob M. Harshbarger, a pioneer farmer from Lagoda and longtime president of the Bank of Lagoda, served as treasurer from 1877 to 1901. William J. Miles, a farmer from New Market who was a charter member of the company, served as secretary for eighteen years, from 1888 to 1906, and as president for twenty-one years, from 1907 to 1928. When Miles retired, the company had \$3.5 million of insurance in force. Harry Preston Cooper became secretary of the Farmers Mutual Insurance Company in 1906. As a boy, Cooper had helped keep the books of the local mutual insurance company. He was a farmer and schoolteacher before joining the

company and went on to be a national figure in the mutual insurance field. He was named secretary of the National Association of Mutual Insurance Companies in 1913 and held the post until 1946.

When Cooper moved to Crawfordsville from his farm near Yountsville in 1913, the offices of the Farmers Mutual Insurance Company moved with him. In 1916 the company's offices moved to an upstairs room on Main Street in Crawfordsville and later to the Crawfordsville State Bank Building. In 1928 the mutual insurance company moved to Indianapolis, moving first into the Illinois Building and later a building at Twenty-first and Meridian Streets. The company absorbed many other mutuals, particularly in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In 1930 the company began issuing windstorm insurance after merging with the Indiana Mutual Cyclone Insurance Company and becoming the Indiana Mutual Fire and Cyclone Insurance Company. In 1934 the company was renamed the Indiana Farmers Mutual Insurance Company. In 1943, due to changes in state law, Indiana Farmers Mutual began to offer farmers extended coverage for various types of damage aside from fire, including harm done by vehicles, aircraft, riots, or smoke. In 1954 the company, in alliance with other farm mutuals and agents, formed a companion company, Town & Country Mutual Insurance Company, to write general casualty insurance.

Harry Cooper died in 1947. His sons Earl L. Cooper and Harry P. Cooper, Jr., followed him into the firm. When Earl became secretary-treasurer of Indiana Farmers Mutual Insurance Company in 1951, the company had more than \$633 million of insurance in force. Harry Jr., who served as general counsel for the company from 1936 to 1951, succeeded his father as executive secretary of the National Association of

Mutual Insurance Companies and became chief executive officer of both Indiana Farmers Mutual Insurance Company and Town & Country Mutual Insurance Company in 1961. In the 1960s the company had more than \$1 billion of insurance in force. The company introduced “Select-O-Matic” packages with which farmers could obtain property, liability, and automobile insurance in a single policy. Under Cooper’s guidance, the company constructed a new headquarters building in 1969–70 at 10 West 106th Street. The new office building was modeled on the Wren Building, a colonial-era building located in Williamsburg, Virginia. In the aftermath of the twister that hit the state on 3 April 1974 Indiana Farmers Mutual Insurance Company recorded 1,756 loss payments, which totaled more than \$3.3 million.

By the mid-1990s Indiana Farmers Mutual Insurance Company was the second-largest writer of farm insurance in Indiana, employed 170 people, had over 120,000 policyholders, and boasted more than \$82 million in premiums written. The A. M. Best company, a leading independent evaluator, gave Indiana Farmers Mutual an “A” rating, its highest category. In 1998 Daniel E. Stone presided over the company and Aja C. Harper served as chairman.