

Johnson-Wert Title Company

Founded: 1877

Location: 111–113½ North Buckeye Street, Kokomo (1877–1986); 110 West Walnut Street (1986–98); 125 West Taylor Street (1998–)

James D. Johnson founded the Johnson Abstract Company after working for several years in the Howard County abstract office. Until his death in 1909 he provided the people of the city with the histories of their property. Dr. J. E. Morgan, Johnson's brother-in-law, and his wife, Fannie, became the next owners of the establishment. Morgan died in 1933, leaving the business to Fannie. By 1934 she offered a range of services including the drawing of contracts, escrow papers, legal papers, and mortgage exemptions.

Mina W. Tharp, an employee of the firm since 1902, purchased the company from the Morgan estate in 1937, continuing as the proprietor until 1949. Tharp had worked in the recorder's office prior to joining Johnson. Her daughter, Miriam Blake, assumed ownership of the company in 1949. By the early 1950s the abstract business had branched into title insurance, representing the Lawyers Title Insurance Company of Richmond, Virginia. Abstract insurance gives property owners protection against errors in the execution of recorded documents, misfiled documents, or improper indexing of documents by title examiners. In 1969 Phillip B. Wert became the manager of the business, later acquiring it from the two abstractors who had purchased the firm from Blake.

In 1985 Wert acquired the business and changed the name of the company to the Johnson-Wert Title Company. His son, Andrew, a graduate of Manchester College, joined the firm in 1993. The company continued to expand in the 1990s. In June 1991

the closing department of the firm moved into a separate facility on West Mulberry Street. In the mid-1990s Wert purchased Markley Title Company of Cass County, another century-old business founded by John W. Markley in 1879. Markley sold the company to Mary Jane Laird in the early twentieth century, and it was she who retired in 1995, allowing Wert to expand his title enterprise over county lines.

In 1998 the Johnson-Wert Title Company and its fifteen employees provided insurance, abstracts, advice on residential loans, and other services related to those making property purchases. The firm allied itself with some of the largest national underwriters in the nation. A new facility in Kokomo was built in 1997–98 to allow more room for the company's expanding business on West Taylor Street.