

## Klaehn, Fahl, & Melton Funeral Homes

Founded: 1876

Location: 44 West Main Street, Fort Wayne (1876– ); 39 West Main Street (1888, 1901); 203 (later 205) West Main Street (1901–13); 221–223 Washington Boulevard East (1913–26); 420 West Main Street (1926– ); 6424 Winchester Road (1991– )

John Julius Klaehn was born in Saxony in Germany and with his Alsatian wife Wilhelmina immigrated to the United States in 1852. Around 1861 or 1862 he established his own cabinet and furniture manufacturing business on Harrison Street in Fort Wayne. Klaehn's West Main Street shop, which featured a large and distinctive sign, was a local landmark. In 1876 Klaehn became a junior partner to Henry B. Hall in Hall & Klaehn, an undertaking establishment. When Klaehn died in 1880, Wilhelmina did not believe their son William Robert ready to manage the business, even though he had joined Hall & Klaehn in 1876. She sold the family's interest, and Hall & Klaehn became the establishment of Frederick H. Scheumann and H. E. William Schoppmann.

William Robert Klaehn regained control of the business in 1888, however, by buying out Scheumann. The firm was located at 39 West Main Street, and Klaehn operated it alone until 1901, when, due to health problems, he sold a half-interest to Albert E. Melching. Melching was the son of German immigrants and had previously owned a harness-making shop, a hotel, and a farmer's seed farm. From 1896 to 1900 he served as sheriff of Allen County. Klaehn & Melching moved to 203 (later 205) West Main Street between 1901 and 1902. In 1913 Klaehn & Melching built a new, modern building at 219–223 Washington Boulevard East.

In 1918 the firm became Robert Klaehn and Sons. Eventually all four of William Robert's sons—Robert W., Arthur C., Julius F., and Walter J.—joined the business.

William Robert retired from the firm in 1922. In 1926 William Robert's sons purchased a large residence originally built by Robert C. Bell in the 1880s at 420 West Wayne Street and converted it into a funeral home. Control of the firm passed to the next generation of Klaehns, and it gradually expanded its operations. In 1964 the firm's name was changed to Klaehn Funeral Home. The firm opened a new facility at 5700 South Anthony and in 1980 acquired the Chalfant-Perry funeral home at 2423 Fairfield Avenue. However, both locations were closed in 1991 when a new building was opened at 6424 Winchester Road; the main office remained at 420 West Wayne Street. The firm was managed by William Klaehn as chairman and Gary R. Klaehn as president. In 1990 the firm changed its name to Klaehn, Fahl, & Melton Funeral Homes. Stan Fahl and Larry Melton, both of whom had been with the funeral home for many years, were vice presidents. The change was an effort, Gary Klaehn said, to "bring new blood into the organization."