

May, Oberfell & Lorber

Founded: 1856

Location: Original location northwest corner of Lafayette and Washington Streets, South Bend (1856–67); 77 Washington Street (Studebaker Building) (1867–91); 122 North Main Street (1891–1910); Main and Washington Streets (J. M. S. Building) (1910–60); 224 West Jefferson Boulevard (Whitcomb and Keller Building) (1960–86); 300 North Michigan Street (St. Joseph Station Building) (1986– )

May, Oberfell & Lorber is the oldest law firm in South Bend and traces its origins to the law practice of Andrew Anderson, which he founded in 1856. Anderson was born in Whitehall, New York, and obtained his law degree from the Albany Law School. He began his practice in the office of Thomas S. Stanfield, judge of the state's ninth judicial circuit. Stanfield joined Anderson's practice after his resignation from the court in 1857, apparently due to his low salary, and Anderson remained in Stanfield's office on Lafayette and Washington Streets until 1867. Initially, Anderson's law practice languished, but, on a friend's advice, Anderson traveled to Chicago, obtained two large ledgers, and meticulously indexed the deeds, mortgages, liens, judgments, plats, and other real estate records of South Bend by section and quarter section. "I can tell the title to any farm or town lot in this county at a glance," Anderson boasted in an 1867 advertisement. "Will furnish written and guaranteed abstracts of title on special contract, when desired." The abstracts became the basis of great success for Anderson and led him to found a separate firm, Anderson's Abstract and Title, to handle his real estate work.

Anderson became a prominent South Bend citizen, serving a term in the state legislature during the Civil War and, according to at least one account, becoming the city's leading lawyer. Sometime later he became one of the first guest lecturers at the University of Notre Dame's College of Law. In 1867 he moved his office to the

Studebaker Building at 77 Washington Street and during the next two decades practiced law both alone and with various partners. One partner, Willis A. Bugbee, helped Anderson revise and perfect his abstracts and later leased them. In 1880 Bugbee purchased Anderson's abstract and title business.

Anderson entered into partnership with his son-in-law, James DuShane, in 1891. DuShane had studied law under Anderson while working in the South Bend schools, for which he was superintendent from 1879 to 1891. DuShane specialized in patent law. The same year the firm moved to the St. Joseph County Savings Bank Building at 122 North Main Street. The firm was thriving, and when Will Guin Crabill, another of Anderson's students, joined the firm in 1891, Anderson was working day and night. Crabill had started as an office boy in 1888. The firm became Anderson, DuShane & Crabill in 1897. DuShane retired in 1906 and was replaced by Samuel Parker. Anderson, Parker, and Crabill did much corporate legal work, counting as clients the Grand Trunk Western Railway Company, the Studebakers' Brothers Manufacturing Company, St. Joseph County Savings Bank, and the Vandalia Railroad Company.

In the last ten years of his life Anderson had to retire from active practice due to poor eyesight, but Arthur L. May, who joined the firm in 1919, recalled that the old attorney often visited the offices and offered stories and advice based on a career that had lasted more than fifty years. The firm moved into the J. M. S. Building on Main and Washington Streets in 1910 and remained there for the next fifty years. The partnership changed often over the following years. Several partners were active in politics or left the firm to become judges. George S. Beamer, who joined the firm in 1931, served as a South Bend city judge and county prosecutor. In 1941 he was appointed the state's

attorney general and later served as chairman of the state public service commission. President John F. Kennedy eventually appointed Beamer a federal judge in 1962. When Parker and Crabill retired from the firm in 1944, Beamer resigned his public office and, joined by new partner Nathan Levy, returned to help reorganize the firm. Three early members of the firm—May, Beamer, and Shepard J. Crumpacker—all had sons join the firm: Arthur A. May, George N. Beamer, Jr., and Shepard J. Crumpacker, Jr. The latter served three terms in Congress in the 1950s, and both he and George Beamer, Jr., became superior court judges in the 1970s. In 1960 the firm moved to the Whitcomb and Keller Building at the corner of Lafayette and Jefferson Boulevards. James W. Oberfell joined the firm in 1951, and John J. Lorber joined in 1966. In 1986 the firm became May, Oberfell & Lorber and moved into the St. Joseph Station Building at 300 North Michigan Street. In 1994 Arthur A. May retired from the legal profession and from the firm his father helped to build. May had been elected to the prestigious American College of Trial Lawyers in 1979. By the 1990s May, Oberfell & Lorber employed more than twenty attorneys and paralegals and operated additional offices in Elkhart and Walkerton. The firm provided litigation services as well as expertise in business, real estate, and probate law.