

McGann Funeral Homes and Executive Limousine Service

Founded: [1842]

Location: Original location unknown, South Bend (1842–); site of present-day Morris Inn (–1905); Engineering Hall on Dorr Road, Notre Dame ([1905?]-13); 333 North Michigan Street, South Bend (1913–25); 424 North Michigan Street (1925–67); Notre Dame Avenue (1967–85); 2313 East Edison Road (1985–); 21275 West Cleveland Road (1991–)

In November 1842 Brother Francis Xavier was part of a small group of French missionaries led by Father Edward Sorin who reached their final destination in northern Indiana and founded the University of Notre Dame. Born Rene Patois in Clermont, France, in 1820, Brother Francis had been a carpenter and mason before entering the Congregation of the Holy Cross at the age of twenty. He was the university's steward and cabinetmaker and had a hand in designing many of its early buildings. He also served as the university's mortician and coffin maker and was steward of the Community and Cedar Grove Cemeteries. At one time the university mortuary was located on the site of the present-day Morris Inn. Brother Francis was eventually licensed as a mortician by the state of Indiana. Although Brother Francis died in 1896, the university mortuary and his reputation survived. A 1909 photograph of Engineering Hall, which was erected in 1905 and housed the university's mortuary, reveals a sign for "Brother Francis, Undertaker" on a first-floor window.

After Catholic law changed requiring the church to disconnect itself from any profit-making businesses, Father Lawrence, the university's undertaker, sold the business to Lewis W. McGann in 1911. Two years later McGann moved it to 333 North Michigan Street in South Bend. McGann was born to an Irish immigrant family; his father was a farmer and stockbreeder in Macomb, Illinois. After graduating from Illinois State

Normal School, McGann taught school for three years before apprenticing with James Hainline, Macomb's leading undertaker. He entered the Hohenschuh Embalming School in Peoria, Illinois, in 1909 and graduated the following year. After working in several eastern cities as an undertaker, including New York City, McGann returned to Illinois and purchased a furniture and undertaking business. In 1925 McGann moved the L. W. McGann Funeral Home to 424 North Michigan Road.

Although officially separate from Notre Dame, the mortuary continued to provide services for the university community, including Notre Dame football legends Knute Rockne and George "The Gipper" Gipp. The funeral of Rockne was probably the largest single funeral in South Bend's and McGann's history. The Studebaker Company donated twenty-two limousines for the services, and condolences came from all over the world. From at least the 1950s into the 1970s the business also ran an ambulance service. In the 1980s the company began providing a limousine service. McGann ran the business for almost seventy years. He died at the age of ninety-six. In 1977 J. Patrick McGann and his mother, Mary Olive McGann-Orosz, purchased the funeral business. J. Patrick continued his grandfather's high standards of service, but moved the business to an Edison Road location in 1985.

The family-owned enterprise has continued an unofficial association with Notre Dame and has often been called on to bury alumni. In 1987 Notre Dame president Rev. Theodore Hesburgh asked McGann to handle moving the bodies of three priests from crypts in the basement of Sacred Heart Church to a more prominent place in the Log Chapel. As of 1999 the business has remained in the family, with J. Patrick McGann as

president, and it continued to operate a university chapel at 2313 East Edison Road and a chapel at Council Oak Gardens at 21275 West Cleveland Road.