

Meeks Mortuary, Incorporated

Founded: 1844

Location: 200 block of East Main Street, Muncie (1844–80); 115–117 East Main Street (1880–1932); 415 East Washington Street (1932–)

The oldest firm still in existence in Muncie began as Nottingham & Swain, located on the second floor of a frame two-story building on East Main Street. John Nottingham was one of the earliest settlers to the area, and Job Swain was later mayor of the city. The partners had built up a good reputation as master furniture makers. Robert and Isaac Meeks were born in Virginia (present-day West Virginia) in the 1820s. Robert became an apprentice with Nottingham & Swain in 1841 and bought an interest in the partnership several years later. Isaac joined his brother in 1846 and they bought out Nottingham, who previously had purchased Swain's interest.

The brothers produced quality furniture goods, and one publication noted that they were known for their "honesty and fair dealing." A county fair entry, submitted by the brothers, was awarded the silver cup in 1857. Caskets were built to order. The brothers prepared numerous residents for burial, including "Indian Jim," the last of the county's original settlers.

In 1871 James Meeks, the oldest son of Robert, joined his father and his uncle in the business. The firm's name was then changed to R. & I. Meeks and Company. With the furniture business booming, the partners decided to build a two-story brick building on the southeast corner of Elm and Washington Streets. James managed the furniture factory until a fire destroyed the building in 1890. In 1881 James's siblings, Martin and Will, bought out their uncle a short time before his death. The company's name was changed again to R. Meeks & Sons. Martin worked in the furniture department until the

mortuary side of the business demanded his full attention. A fire destroyed the firm's original structure, and the partners relocated the family company to East Main Street. In the 1890s the brothers discontinued the furniture-making business, but they continued to sell furniture until 1911.

Arthur, Ernest, and Charles Meeks, Martin's sons, became the third generation to run the family business. Martin remained head of the company, and the firm's name was changed to M. L. Meeks & Sons. After the turn of the century the partners disassociated themselves from the furniture business altogether, selling their stock to the Banner Furniture Company.

The mortuary strove to keep up with changes in the profession throughout the years. After World War I the brothers bought a motorized funeral car, the first in the county. After the death of Martin, the brothers began construction on a building to serve as a mortuary. Previously, arrangements had been made in the individual's home or in the church of the deceased. The first Meeks facility designed and built specifically as a mortuary opened in 1932. It featured a chapel with pews and leaded art-glass windows, and the facility also had a modern crematory, the only one in Delaware County. The facility was featured in an article in *American Funeral Director* magazine.

The mortuary celebrated its century mark during World War II. By the end of the 1950s the fourth generation, David Martin Meeks, Arthur's son, had joined the firm. He incorporated the business in 1977 and named nonfamily members as principals.

The Meeks family has always prided themselves on their reputation for honesty and fairness. David Meeks proudly noted that "no Delaware County resident had ever been denied a Meeks funeral service because of financial means." In the 1990s Meeks

family members continued to help manage the company. David M. Meeks, Jr., served as vice president, and longtime employee Gordon Cox was president.