

New Albany Steam Laundry & Dry Cleaning, Incorporated

Founded: 1887

Location: 31 East Main Street, New Albany (1887–1902); 132–136 East Main Street (1903–64); 1935 West Street (1965–)

Maj. R. P. Finney founded the New Albany Steam Laundry in the Lapsley Block on Main Street in 1887. Three years later Finney sold his interest in the plant to Reese W. Prosser and Robert G. Walesby, who in turn sold it almost immediately to Orance D. Barrass.

Barrass was a native of Saratoga, New York, and brought nine years' experience in the laundry business to his new venture in New Albany. By 1892 one publication noted that the business employed about a dozen people. The same publication described the cleaning process. First the clothes were washed using a reversible steam washer. Then they were run through a suction wringer and ironed, polished, or curled, depending on the garment. Advertising welcomed families to bring their clothes to the laundry rather than clean them at home. The company wanted workers' garments as well as those needing white collars. Barrass moved the laundry to a building owned by Judge E. G. Henry, situated on the southeast corner of Pearl and Main Streets.

Barrass sold the company to a group of shareholders, headed by W. W. Godfrey, around 1909. The capital stock of the corporation totaled \$20,000. Shares in the firm sold for \$1,000 each, with Godfrey owning eighty-one shares, more than any other shareholder. During Godfrey's tenure as manager of the facility the company began to clean carpets and before World War I advertised that it used only filtered water. In 1919 Godfrey's group bought from Henry for \$6,000 the building the laundry had been housed

in since 1902. Toward the end of the Great Depression a group of brothers, Clarence E., George A., and Roy W. Sillings, acquired the plant.

The Sillingses ensured the company would adapt to the changing needs of its customers. The brothers added dry cleaning and self-serve laundry services. By 1960 the company operated in three locations, and within four years the brothers had expanded again to five stores. A 1964 advertisement announced that the company offered pick-up and delivery services, could dry clean an item within an hour, and took drapery and wedding gowns as well as suits and shirts.

In 1976 Todd W. Sillings, Roy's son, assumed the presidency of the company. By the early 1990s the firm employed seventeen people at four locations, offering both self-service laundry facilities and professional dry-cleaning services. In 1998 Todd Sillings continued to serve as the president of the company.