

Ochs-Tetrick Funeral Home

Founded: 1860

Location: Corner of Jefferson and Second Streets, Orleans (1860–68); northwest corner of town square (1868–1930s); 187 East Jefferson Street (1930s–)

John Ochs, Sr., a native of Bilkeim, Germany, founded a furniture-making enterprise on the corner of Jefferson and Second Streets in Orleans in 1860. He had learned his trade at his father's knee and after a five-year apprenticeship had come to America. He had lived in New Albany from around 1856 to 1860 before settling in Orleans. He made furniture from his home on Second and Jefferson Streets until 1868 when he purchased a frame building on the northwest corner of the Orleans town square. The building served not only as a workshop and undertaking establishment but also as the residence for the Ochs family. John's wife, Margaret Grauert Ochs, also a native of Germany, did not come to America until her husband sent for her in May of 1856. She arrived in New Albany carrying two children and only fifty cents and without the ability to read or speak English. She became a partner in the furniture business, responsible for the finishing and varnishing.

When a fire swept through the square in 1873 it wiped out the Ochs furniture and undertaking business and left the family of nine almost penniless. Ochs rebuilt the shop and started the business anew. Margaret died in 1891, and the Ochs' daughter Amanda Ochs Alvis, a schoolteacher, took over the duties her mother had previously performed. When John died at the age of eighty-six in 1906, his son, Charles Ochs, took over the family business.

Charles, born in 1863 in Orleans, had learned the cabinetmaking trade at home. In 1888 he married Hattie Moore. After attending school he started a construction company

that he continued to run with the help of his two sons, Everett and Robert Ochs, until 1915. The construction firm was very successful. Charles and his sons built many of the homes in Orleans until the company ceased operation. In 1913 Charles gave the furniture business to his son Everett and son-in-law Edward Fields. Hattie, as her mother-in-law before her, was a true partner in the furniture and undertaking business. When a casket was ordered, it was her job to sew the bedding, muslin, and silk in the interior. If the order came late in the evening, she had to not only prepare the coffin but also cook breakfast for the customers before they left in the morning. According to family members, “a great part of the success of their business was attributed to her, as she went on every call . . . ministering to . . . families in many ways.”

The management of funerals was handled differently in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Around 1900 a poplar wood casket cost around \$10. The average length of an Ochs-made casket was around six feet, but they sometimes made smaller ones for shorter people, children, and even pets. As was then the practice, many undertakers throughout the state, including the Ochs, prepared and embalmed bodies in the homes of the deceased, and showings did not take place in a funeral parlor. Invitations arrived by post announcing the funeral of an individual, and horse-drawn carriages transported the deceased to cemeteries. In 1922 the East Jefferson Street site was purchased for the family residence and was transformed into a funeral home only in the 1930s. In the lot next to the home the family erected a furniture-making establishment in 1925, an operation that continued into the early 1970s.

When Hattie Ochs died on the eve of the Great Depression, her daughter Margaret and son Robert began to assist their father Charles in the businesses. Then their brother

Everett, a World War I veteran, graduated from a mortuary school in 1935 and took over the funeral division from their ailing father. After Robert's death in 1937, Margaret and Everett continued to run the furniture company and the funeral home until 1965, when Everett passed away. Margaret remained head of both operations for another eight years.

Margaret and Everett's sisters Gretchen Ochs Jackson and Bonnie Ochs helped in the business until their deaths in 1937 and 1955, respectively. Gretchen was the only child of Hattie and Charles to have any children—one daughter, Barbara Jackson Hancock, who had two children, Patricia Hancock and J. Brent Hancock. None of the relatives claimed the 112-year-old set of companies in 1973, and they were sold.

Charles Lewis and Frank Braman bought the funeral business, keeping it for only two years before selling it to Lewis and Georgia Tetrick. Since that time, the couple has renovated the home on East Jefferson Street to provide for more spacious viewing rooms and handicapped entrances. In 1999 the Tetricks continued to operate the home, which was the fourth-oldest funeral business in the state and the oldest continuously operating enterprise in Orange County.