

Ott/Haverstock Funeral Chapel, Inc.

Founded: 1876

Location: 118 West Fourth Street, Michigan City (1876–ca.1910); 420 West Fourth Street (ca.1910–29); 418 Washington Street, Michigan City (1929– )

Philip Ott, a cabinetmaker from the Rhine province of present-day Germany, came to America in 1869, settling in Chicago, after a short stay in Grosse Point (Wilmette), Illinois. In Chicago Ott found employment with Birren & Sons, Funeral Directors, making coffins. A month before the 1871 Great Chicago Fire, Ott moved to Michigan City. A national depression forced Ott to take any employment available. He worked for a carriage works until it closed, laid the roof for St. Paul Lutheran Church, and made wardrobes, cabinets, and picture frames in his rented house on Franklin Square.

As with many expert woodworkers at the time, making coffins was a sideline to crafting furniture. With much hard work Ott saved enough money to buy two lots on West Fourth Street and erected a combination furniture store and funeral parlor. The family lived on the premises, and Ott's wife Elizabeth and their children Johanna Antionette and Aloysius George (A. G.) helped out in the business. Several stories from the period reveal the older traditions that have been lost. It was not unusual, for instance, for Philip to fill an order for a custom coffin using the measurements derived from the length of a cornstalk.

The Otts did not own a large livery business like many funeral directors. Philip's good friend, Alfred Earl, provided the Otts with most of the horses and carriages needed for the business. Several different vehicles were needed. A first-call buggy would be used by the undertaker to go to the family residence to obtain measurements and make

arrangements, an ambulance would deliver either the sick or the dead to various locations, and the service wagon would deliver the body to the cemetery for burial.

In 1897 Philip died, and Elizabeth continued running the firm with the help of her son, A. G., who returned home from his studies at St. Joseph's College in Rensselaer. The mother-son duo continued to manage the business until Elizabeth's death in 1910. A. G. was aided by his wife, Elizabeth Ruhe Ott, a native of Chesterton. After his mother's death A. G. constructed a two-story building at 420 West Fourth Street, into which both the furniture store and the funeral parlor were moved. The firm extended its services during emergencies. For instance, after a train wreck on the New York and Michigan Central Railroad line and during the influenza epidemic of 1917–18, the company provided transportation and space for emergency workers.

During the 1920s A. G. and Elizabeth moved into a house at 418 Washington Street. They occupied the first floor and rented out the second floor to another family. Before the Great Depression struck Michigan City the Otts decided to move out of 418 Washington Street, build a two-story brick home at 422 Washington Street, and convert the old address into a new site for their funeral home. Joseph, Paul, and William joined their parents in operating the business in the 1920s and 1930s.

After A. G.'s death in January 1954 the brothers formed a partnership to run the business. They continued operating a nonemergency ambulance service along with other funeral-related activities. The brothers eventually closed the ambulance service but continued to arrange funerals at 418 Washington Street until 1977, when they sold their grandfather's firm to Lynn Haverstock. Haverstock had worked in the funeral business

for several years before purchasing the Ott Funeral Chapel. In 1998 Haverstock continued to serve as president of the company.