

Paul V. Shrader Funeral Home

Founded: 1848

Location: Main Street, between Third and Fourth Streets, New Albany (1848–52); 111 West Main Street (1852–61); State Street (1861–67); 11–13 West Main Street (1867–89); 118–120 West Main Street (1889–1919); 245 Vincennes Street (1919–1920s); 224 State Street (1920s–1930s); 1715 East Oak Street (1947, 1948–)

John Shrader, a native of Germany, arrived in New Albany at the age of twelve in 1828. He eventually became a cabinetmaker. By 1852 he had ceased his partnership with a Mr. Sanderson and purchased the assets of a furniture company owned by Thomas V. Stran. Undertaking was also a large part of his business, even at this early stage. In the nineteenth century many families bought caskets from furniture makers and sometimes rented hearses from livery stables. Shrader was already an agent for the Metallic Burial Cases company and advertised that he was able to furnish hearses, coaches, and other funeral needs on short notice.

In 1861 Shrader erected a large factory on State Street. The building was powered by steam and contained four large storerooms, one of which was devoted solely to the showing of caskets and coffins. Fire destroyed the building six years after it was built. Shrader rebuilt the factory on West Main Street, this time ensuring it was more fire-resistant by constructing it of brick. Bedroom suites, wardrobes, and furnishings for steamboats became the company's forte.

Shrader displayed his wares outside the factory in a three-story brick building on West Main Street. In the store he sold carpets, curtains, and household furnishings as well as caskets. By the 1870s he produced illustrated catalogs featuring his more elegant and expensive furniture. As a complement to his other businesses he established a livery

stable a few doors down from his store. The stables provided hacks for weddings, parties, and funerals. By 1892 Shrader's enterprises employed as many as sixty workers.

Shrader was ahead of his time in the mid-nineteenth century. Most furniture makers preferred to create household pieces and offered undertaking only as a side business. Shrader, though, offered an assortment of coffins, both custom made and premanufactured. A full supply of burial goods was also available, including shrouds and metal coffins made by the Fiske Metallic Burial Case Company. Shrader used a deodorizer to disinfect corpses, thus permitting public viewings. He provided twenty-four-hour service and also offered a full line of horse-drawn vehicles, including a white hearse, which at the time was the only proper means to convey a child to the cemetery.

Shrader continued his craft until his death in 1898. His sons, George B. and Edward, continued the business, changing the name to Shrader Brothers. They sold the furniture line of the business to other members of the family.

By 1912 George became head of the company. George had started working with his father at age fourteen. He combined the livery and undertaking businesses. His son George J. took over the business in 1919 then relinquished it to his son Paul V. in 1961. George J. was the first Shrader to become a licensed embalmer, and he provided a formal funeral parlor for viewings. He converted the livery business to a garage for housing motorized vehicles and operated an ambulance service into the 1960s.

Paul joined his father in the business in 1928. He opened a branch funeral home in Lanesville, but it did not survive the Great Depression. In 1940 he again tried to open a branch, this time in New Albany, but his service in World War II interrupted his plans. After his return home from the war he went back to work with his father.

Paul died in 1971, a decade after his father. Jan Shrader, Paul's daughter, joined the company in 1961 after attending embalming school. She bought the company from her mother in 1980. In 1998 Jan continued to operate the business her great-great-grandfather began. Beyond the traditional services offered by most funeral homes, the Shrader firm offered a family genealogy program and a computerized filing system. The company was licensed to operate in both Indiana and Kentucky.