

Pearl Steam Laundry

Founded: 1896

Location: 1015 West Franklin, Evansville (1896–97); 300 East Pennsylvania Street (1897–1902); 30–32 Upper Water (1902–12); 428 Northwest Third Street (previously 428 Market Street; originally 114–128 Second Avenue) (1912–)

Pearl Steam Laundry was founded by Daniel Korb and Jacob G. Rust in 1896. Both men grew up on farms outside Evansville. Korb became a bookkeeper, and Rust worked as a wagon driver and, later, as a streetcar conductor. The two men met and became friends when both worked for the Evansville Ice & Cold Storage Company. Korb married Rust's sister Margaret. In 1896 they formed the firm Rust & Korb, pooled their resources, and purchased a small, debt-ridden laundry for \$550. The Pearl Steam Laundry was located on the city's west side at 1015 West Franklin, but the business expanded rapidly and outgrew its facilities. In 1897 the company leased space at 300 East Pennsylvania Street; in 1902, it moved to 30–32 Upper Water, on the corner of Vine.

In 1912 the company moved to a new building at 114–128 Second Avenue. Rust and Korb carefully designed the new building with efficiency in mind; their business depended upon high volume and low cost. Laundry entered the one-floor working area on one end of the building and was systematically sorted, marked, weighed, washed, dried, pressed, bundled, routed, and, finally, deposited in waiting wagons at the other end. A tradition that continued into the 1990s was the offer of a pickup and delivery service for family laundry. Horse-drawn buggies originally plied the streets to make deliveries. After 1912 the horses were housed in a stable with concrete floors attached to

the main offices. In the early 1920s the stable's windows were bricked up, and the area was used for cold storage.

In 1928 Rust retired, and Korb purchased his half interest. The business was worth an estimated \$150,000 at the time. Later, Daniel's sons, S. O. and Gilbert A., Sr., took over the affairs of the company, eventually handing the business to grandson Gilbert A., Korb, Jr. Pearl Steam Laundry began dry-cleaning services in 1945 and replaced its steam-powered equipment in 1954. In the 1980s it diversified its services by starting a uniform rental division and adding embroidery and screen printing services. Gilbert Jr.'s son, Jeffrey, was placed in charge of the uniform rental division. In 1983 the company began planning for a \$250,000 renovation of the Northwest Third Street location, the first major structural change of the building since its completion in 1912.

In the 1990s Gilbert A. Korb, Jr., presided over the company.