

## Sheets Funeral Home

Founded: 1872

Location: Churubusco (1872– ); 206 North Main Street (1906– )

Samuel Barr opened the first undertaking business in Churubusco in 1872. About a year later he invested in a hearse, the first one in the area, made by Zollinger Wagon Works of Fort Wayne. By the standards of most furniture makers he did not continue in the business very long. In fact, the company was to face several ownership changes throughout its lifetime. The firm did not suffer badly by this turnover, in part because the owners continued to upgrade equipment and provide excellent customer service.

In 1880 Barr sold his company to John W. and W. C. Smith. John Smith had worked for Barr for three years in the 1870s before he went to work for a railroad and traveled in the American West. Smith Brothers Furniture remained a fixture in the town for eighteen years until it was sold to Ed Briggs. The second set of owners continued Barr's tradition of investing in the most modern equipment. In 1886 the Smith brothers added a Crane and Breed hearse. John Smith later became associated with his son in a lumber business.

In 1902 Briggs sold a half interest in the business to Lucas Welsheimer. Two years later Welsheimer purchased Brigg's remaining share in the concern, only to sell it in April 1906 to Francis M. Sondag. The hearses continued to be upgraded, and in 1904 a Riddle hearse began carrying the company's clients to their gravesites.

Sondag added an ambulance service to the business in 1907. Nathan Johnson was the first patient to ride in the St. Louis Coffin Company-made carriage. Sondag faced increased business as the city and county grew. In 1915 he bought a mechanized hearse

and ambulance, a four-cylinder Auburn. The first “auto” funeral provided by the Sunday agency took place on 17 February 1915. Sunday was so pleased by the new automobile that he bought a six-cylinder Auburn to use solely as a hearse.

The second generation of automobiles, less expensive and with a more powerful engine, arrived in the early 1920s. By April 1923 Sunday purchased a Meter hearse and two years later acquired a Meter ambulance, equipment that continued to be used throughout the 1930s. In the early 1930s the company bought two Chevrolet service cars that were used to transport the deceased to the funeral home and run other errands.

Sunday continued to run the company until 1960, when he sold the business to Lester K. Sheets, whose family name continues to adorn the building. The ambulance service continued throughout the early 1970s. Around 1976 Sheets helped to develop the idea of a countywide emergency service, which would be underwritten by public funds. After he helped to train the emergency medical teams, his funeral home discontinued its ambulance service. In 1986 Sheets hired C. Gregory Childs, a native of Delaware County. Childs, with his wife Jeanine, bought the business from the retiring Sheets in January 1990.

Childs has worked in a funeral home for almost his entire adult life. In 1970, as a senior in high school, he began working for the Richman Funeral Homes of Yorktown and Gaston. He continued to work for the firm on a part-time basis while he attended the Indiana College of Mortuary Science in Indianapolis. After graduating with his license he became a full-time member of the staff at Richman, working there until 1984, when he joined the Robert Loose Funeral Home in Anderson. In 1999 Gregory Childs retained

the title of president of the Sheets Funeral Home, while Jeanine worked as the secretary-treasurer of the company.