

Smith & Sons Funeral Homes

Founded: [1851]

Location: Original location unknown, South Whitley (1851–ca. 1861); original location in Larwill unknown (ca. 1865–1924); original location in Columbia City unknown (1924–); 113 South Main Street, Columbia City (–1935); Benjamin Raufer [Raupfer ?] Homestead (1935–); 207 North Main Street (1982)

In 1851 Henry Smith established a cabinetmaking and furniture business in South Whitley, about twelve miles southwest of Columbia City. As was customary for furniture makers, he also made coffins and conducted funerals. During the Civil War Henry's fifteen-year-old son Winfield Scott Smith ran away from home in order to join the Union army. Henry went after him, initially intending to dissuade him from enlisting, but he was convinced by a recruiter to join the army himself. Father and son served in Company D of the 129th Indiana as rifleman and drummer boy, respectively, and were with Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman on his march to the sea.

Henry Smith and his son returned to South Whitley and the cabinetmaking and furniture business after the war. However, Henry soon moved the business to the town of Larwill, a fast-growing community on the Pennsylvania Railroad. His son became a partner in the business and assumed control when Henry died in 1870. Shortly after the turn of the century Winfield Scott Smith built a new store building and equipped it with modern undertaking equipment. The firm remained in Larwill until 1924, when Charles S. Smith, representing the third generation of ownership, moved the firm to Columbia City. Charles entered into partnership with Thomas H. Hood, a merchant, and the firm became Hood & Smith Furniture and Undertaking. The funeral industry was gradually professionalizing. During Charles Smith's day, the embalming procedure took place in

the home of the family, usually in an unheated bedroom but sometimes in the family parlor. The body was laid out on an embalming couch or “funeral board.” A door wreath made of artificial flowers or ribbons was hung outside, indicating which door callers were to use when paying their respects. Charles Smith originally established his business on South Main Street, but in 1935 he and his two sons, Stuart D. and Boyce B., purchased the residence of the late Simon J. Peabody and converted it into a modern funeral home. The Smiths extensively remodeled the home over the years, adding, for example, a six-car garage, a chapel, and an additional visitation room. In 1947 the Peabody carriage house was made into a home for Stuart and his family.

In January 1975 a fifth generation of the Smith family assumed control of the funeral home; C. Taron “Terry” Smith purchased the firm from his father, Stuart, and uncle, Boyce. Terry added a freestanding and state-of-the-art preparation room to the North Main Street location. The funeral home also featured a twenty-four-person visitation room that could, if needed, be converted into an eighty-person chapel. Terry operated the home with his wife Gloria; their sons, Taron Wayne and Scott, received specialized training in mortuary science. In 1982 Smith & Sons acquired the Miller Funeral Home in South Whitley and operated it as Smith & Sons Miller Chapel.