

York Title & Escrow, Inc.

Founded: 1856

Location: Northwest corner of Lafayette and Washington Streets, South Bend (law office of Andrew Anderson) (1856– ); 77 Washington Street (Studebaker Building); 122 North Main Street (J. M. S. Building); 216 West Washington Avenue (Tower Building) (1957); 226 West Jefferson Boulevard (Whitcomb and Keller Building) (1970, 1973); 135 South Lafayette Boulevard (–1993); 210 North Ironwood Drive (1993– )

In 1856 Andrew Anderson, a young lawyer from New York, moved to South Bend and established a law practice. After a slow start, Anderson ensured the success of his practice when, upon the advice of a friend, he traveled to Chicago and obtained two large ledgers. Anderson then meticulously indexed the deeds, mortgages, liens, judgments, plats, and other real estate records of South Bend by section and quarter section. The complete and reliable abstracts were an invaluable resource and brought Anderson much work. He eventually established a separate firm, Anderson's Abstract and Title, to handle the business.

In 1867 Willis A. Bugbee joined Anderson's firm shortly after earning a degree from the University of Michigan's law department. Bugbee's parents were South Bend pioneers. His father had come to the city in 1837 and built a tannery on the St. Joseph River and later went to work for the Studebaker brothers. His mother had been the first woman to teach in the private South Bend High School. Bugbee's mother wrote frequent pieces for magazines, and Willis too published many articles anonymously. Bugbee eventually took over Anderson's abstract business, initially leasing the records and, in 1880, purchased them outright. In 1888 the firm became the Bugbee Title Company. The abstracts were highly regarded both for their accuracy and reliability and the method and arrangement of the records.

In the summer of 1899 Harry G. Schock began working for Bugbee. Like Bugbee, Schock had received his law training from the University of Michigan, and his father had worked at Studebaker. In 1904 Schock married Bugbee's daughter, Elizabeth. In 1911 he became a partner in the firm. Bugbee also brought another son-in-law, Walter Hale Jackson, into the firm. Bugbee retired in 1919.

In 1929 Schock became president of the Abstract & Title Corporation, a consolidation of Bugbee Title Company, the Indiana Title and Loan Company, the St. Joseph Abstract Company, and the Northern Indiana Abstract Company. Upon Schock's death in 1938 Jackson assumed control of the company in his capacity as secretary-treasurer. James E. Peterson, a thirty-year employee of the firm, took over as president upon the death of Jackson in February 1957. Three months later Whitcomb and Keller, a real estate brokerage, insurance, and mortgage-loan business, purchased the majority of the company's stock from the Schock and Jackson heirs. Sometime later Whitcomb and Keller sold the enterprise to the Portage Realty Corporation. In December 1978 William G. York purchased the Abstract & Title Corporation. York gradually moved the business away from abstracts to title insurance and escrow closings. In 1992 he changed the name of the firm to York Title & Escrow, Inc. The following year, the company moved to 210 North Ironwood Drive in order to have more space for customer parking. York removed the word "abstract" from the title because of the changing methods employed to guarantee a clean title to property. Before the age of computers and before mortgage companies began to sell home loans to other lenders, a local lawyer would need to review numerous abstract documents to insure that a property did not contain liens or

encumbrances. Since the late 1970s most mortgage companies buy title insurance to guard against possible losses rather than meticulously review the history of the property.

Beginning in the late 1980s York began opening branch offices: Abstract & Title of Elkhart, York Title & Escrow, Inc., of Marshall County, and York Title & Escrow, Inc., of Michigan. By the mid-1990s the company could claim to have introduced several innovations, including computerized title records, the ability to have title commitments to customers within three days, as well as real estate closing and escrow services.