

Young-Nichols Funeral Home

Founded: 1852

Location: 119 West Jefferson Street, Tipton (1852–1963); 216 West Jefferson Street (1935–)

William B. Young, a native of Ohio, arrived in Tipton with his mother and father in 1846. William spent a few years in Jefferson County learning the cabinetry trade but returned to Tipton in 1850 with his wife and young son. Upon arrival he took a job with his brother-in-law, John S. Anderson, a cabinetmaker. After working for Anderson for a year and a half he opened his own shop in a cabin.

As with many in the cabinetry trade, Young began making coffins and serving as the town's only undertaker. Coffins were made to order and were mostly crafted with lumber taken from walnut and oak trees that grew so heavily in the area. Often families would bring Young a bundle of string whose length would equal the size of the corpse. After five years Young's business proved a success, and he built larger quarters on Jefferson Street. He dabbled in construction as well as general woodworking and was granted the contract to build the county's poor farm in 1872.

Young organized a Union army regiment during the Civil War, entering on the tail end of the conflict, and was mustered out within a year. After 1865 he became a leader in the community, served as the town's first marshal, and filled several positions in the local Christian Church and Masonic organization. Nine years after the end of the war, Young built the Champion Planing Mill, the first of its kind in Sullivan. In 1881 he sold the undertaking and furniture-making business to his son, Seneca George Young.

Seneca Young was born in Jefferson County, Indiana, in 1849 to William and Catherine Green Young. During the Civil War he endeavored to get into the fight on the

side of the Union several times, but was disqualified because of his age and his small stature. He successfully joined the war effort on 18 February 1865 but saw little action in his father's regiment and was honorably discharged in September 1865. He worked outside of his family's firm for a decade before joining his father in the woodworking business in 1875. Six years later with partner Robert M. Roberson, Seneca acquired his father's company, later building a two-story brick structure on the same site. Roberson was a carpenter and a former county sheriff who did not remain in the business long, selling his share in the concern to Seneca in 1882.

The 1880s and 1890s were busy times for the business, and in 1892 Seneca built an addition to the building constructed by his father. Inside the structure, Seneca built a funeral parlor, a rare find before the twentieth century as most funerals were held in either the homes of the deceased or in a church. Similar to his father, Seneca became interested in politics, serving four terms as the mayor of Tipton and later completing five terms on the county council. He was active in the Christian Church and in several Masonic orders.

A year after building an addition to the furniture store and undertaking establishment, Seneca took on Phillip E. Nichols as a partner. Seneca and his wife, Mary Jane Nance Young, had one daughter who survived to adulthood, but she did not take an active interest in the business. Nichols purchased one half of the concern from Seneca, and the name of the firm changed to Young & Nichols Furniture & Undertaking. In 1906 when Seneca offered to sell the business to Nichols he could not afford to pay for the enterprise outright, so he incorporated the enterprise and sold shares to town residents.

Nichols continued to operate the furniture store through the 1950s. He was elected to the office of county coroner in 1904, and since the turn of the twentieth century, every Nichols family member active in the business has served as coroner at some point. Phillip's son, Robert F. Nichols, started working for his father in the 1920s. Robert, along with his wife Evelyn Vance Nichols, purchased the property of Glen and Edith Gifford on West Jefferson Street, turning it into a funeral parlor in September 1935. A 1935 Indiana law required that the process of embalming a body take place in a funeral home rather than in a private residence, necessitating the move to buy or build structures specifically designed to host funerals, a trend already present after 1900. The couple lived in the upstairs portion of the house and raised their children in the funeral home.

Robert was active in civic and political affairs, winning election as county coroner in 1976, and continued to guide the business until 1980. In 1957 Robert was joined in the business by his son, Phillip V. Nichols, a graduate of mortuary school. The furniture store was sold in 1963 to Ralph Parsons. Some of the money from the sale of the furniture division was used to add an embalming room, a casket display area, a garage, and a larger display room to the home. With the sale of the furniture store the name of the company changed to Young-Nichols Funeral Home, Incorporated. Phillip V. was elected county coroner in 1960, serving continuously until 1976, and reelected to the position in 1980 and 1984.

Phillip V. married Mary Alice Kinder and two of their sons, Robert L. and Bradley, entered the firm in the 1980s and 1990s. Mary Alice served as county coroner in the early 1980s. After graduating from mortuary school in February 1982, Robert joined the company, followed a decade later by Bradley who attended both mortuary

school and Indiana University. In the same year that Robert became part of the company, the funeral home was enlarged, a colonial facade was added, and the interior was remodeled. In the early 1990s the firm purchased the lot next to it, razed the building on the newly acquired lot, and built a parking lot. In 1994 the business was again redecorated.

The business employed an ambulance service until 1996 when numerous government regulations heaped added costs on the ambulance division and the county commissioners refused to grant any additional subsidy to offset the expected losses in revenue. By May 1996 the company had four ambulances in service, two of which were equipped with Advanced Life Support equipment. Phillip, Robert, and Bradley served as ambulance attendants before the discontinuation of service. Robert and Bradley had taken over 1,400 hours in instruction and in 1991 became certified paramedics. All of the equipment was sold to Rual/Metro, the third largest provider of emergency medical services in the nation, on 24 May 1996, closing a chapter in the history of the funeral home dating back to the 1930s.

The Youngs' grip on the office of county coroner continued in the 1980s and 1990s. Robert held the office from 1989 until 1993, while Bradley was elected in 1996. In 1999 Phillip V. Nichols served as president of the corporation, while Mary Alice continued as secretary-treasurer. Robert and Bradley held the title of vice president.