

Zoercher Insurance Agency, Incorporated

Founded: 1865

Location: 531 Main Street, Tell City (1954–); 723 Main Street (1998)

On 15 July 1865 Jacob Bollinger accepted an appointment as an agent for the Hartford Insurance Company and founded in Tell City what would later become known as the Zoercher Insurance Agency. Like many in the town, Bollinger was a native of Switzerland. He came to America in 1855, moving to Indiana on the eve of the Civil War to accept the job of Tell City's first school principal. He retired from teaching to take up real estate and insurance near the conclusion of the war. By the 1880s Bollinger had stepped away from insurance and entered the legal profession.

Frederick Steiner, a steamboat and hotel operator, took over the insurance business from Bollinger at some undetermined point. Steiner served as the city's wharfmaster for seventeen years, beginning in 1858. As a wharfmaster he was also an agent of the Adams Express Company and was one of the few people in the early years of Tell City's settlement who could guarantee the security of sending money and valuables out of the town. His duties as commission agent for the wharf forced him to deal with foodstuffs and other local products, complementing his ability to sell insurance to producers and passengers alike. Steiner, like Bollinger, had emigrated from Switzerland. His Tell City neighbors trusted him, electing or appointing him to several important offices, including town marshal in 1859, postmaster in 1861, and coroner in 1866. In the 1870s he became interested in banking; he helped found the Tell City Bank in 1872 and accepted the presidency of the First National Bank five years later.

Gustave Huthsteiner managed the insurance business after Steiner. Like his predecessors, Huthsteiner was trusted, well liked, and active in the community. A native of Prussia, he had been raised in Cincinnati by parents who had fled Germany in 1848. He left his hometown in 1864 to take a job as a teacher in Tell City. He gained a good reputation and was elected twice to the post of county treasurer in the early 1870s, became a state representative in 1878, sat on the school board in the late 1880s, and became mayor of Tell City in 1891. Because of his accounting skills, the Tell City National Bank hired him as its cashier in 1874, a position he held until his rise to president of the financial institution. He was also the manager of a chair factory and somehow found the time to run the insurance business. Huthsteiner envisioned a lively and industrious town and worked with many of the area's business leaders, including Christian Zoercher, to establish a branch railroad line for Tell City.

Zoercher had been born in Tell City and spent forty-five years as an insurance agent there. While actively engaged in the insurance business and its professional associations, he also served as secretary to the local chamber of commerce for sixteen years, sat as president of the Southern Indiana Council of the Boy Scouts of America, and worked for the good of the community through the Kiwanis Club. Today he is remembered as the "father of the flood wall." After the 1937 flood, which devastated Tell City, he led the charge to build a protective barrier for the town.

In February 1916, one month after the company began to write policies for the USF&G Insurance Company, Zoercher bought the insurance business Bollinger had founded. Zoercher continued to run the operation until 1947, when he accepted Ralph D. Reed as a partner. The duo incorporated the business under its present designation.

Zoercher remained with the firm until his death in 1958, then Reed partnered with George C. Wanhainen. Seven years later Preston Minor approached the pair. He wanted them to buy his insurance business, located in nearby Cannelton. Minor had founded his firm in 1917, using the Hartford Company and USF&G as his primary insurers. The partners did buy Minor's business and brought in Bob Goffinet to manage their new Cannelton office. Minor continued to hold a share in the business until his death in 1968.

Since the late 1960s the type of companies the agency uses to insure its customers has changed from large national organizations to regional and state firms, such as Indiana Insurance, Meridian Companies, and the Ohio Casualty Group. The business remained stable until the 1990s. In 1996 the agency was sold to National Bancorp, which made the Tell City firm a wholly owned subsidiary. A year later Zoercher acquired the Kennedy Insurance Agency in Santa Claus, Indiana, another National Bancorp member, giving the Tell City insurance company three locations. Goffinet retired in November 1998 as the president of the company.

Goffinet was the last manager of the independent insurance firm and helped transition the company from a wholly owned subsidiary to a branch office after Citizens National Bancshares (Civitas Bank) purchased National Bancorp in June 1998. The Zoercher Agency and its branches became part of the Citizens (later Civitas) Insurance Company of Evansville. In November 1999 the insurance company again changed hands as Civitas Bank was bought by Fifth Third Bank. The Cincinnati-based Fifth Third Bancorp has total assets of more than \$32 billion and is one of the one hundred largest holding companies in the United States.