

Shriner Funeral Home - Part 2

On December 26, 1899 Shriner Brothers purchased the furniture stock of B. A. Siggins, who no longer had time to attend to the business. Shriners intended to increase the stock and carry "a fine line of up-to-date stuff." The undertaking office remained in its location on the east side of the square with the furniture business being run independently on the west side. An article from the following February said that they had "been busy rearranging the stock and buying new goods" in order to meet the customer's needs. They had a sale that month to make room for the shipments to come in March. The brothers ran the undertaking business with the help of their mother, who took "charge of the lady and children cases." Their spare time, which was considerable, was given to the furniture business with the assistance of D. Griger, "a competent man, thoroughly skilled" in the business. They felt that they could run the two businesses together cheaper and provide cheaper goods by having the two instead of one.

They purchased a "magnificent new panel mirror" in March 1900, which was placed in the front of the store. It was reported on October 11, 1901 that Thomas Hinds had purchased it to place in his barber shop. "The mirror is larger than most plate glass windows in town and gives the barber shop a very attractive feature."



This photo shows Frank and Charles Shriner in the office at 1018 17th Avenue. The brothers operated the Shriner Brothers undertaking business for 40 years at this location after their father passed away. The photo is from the collection of Rich Hager.

Then, in May 1901, the brothers purchased a device to lower caskets into the grave from the National Burial Device Company. The device consisted of "an adjustable frame to be placed around the grave, to which strong straps are attached. These straps are operated by a mechanism which lowers the casket carefully and as slowly as the operator desires." That company also had a "church truck, on which the casket could be wheeled to the hearse as it was removed from the house or church."

D. W. Grove purchased the Shriner Bros. furniture store in October 1901 after Shriners had owned it for less than two years. At that time Grove was preparing to move his family from Palmyra to Monroe. This left the brothers with only the undertaking business. In the same month it was announced that the brothers had passed the examination required of any embalmer in the state who was going to ship any bodies; they had also received their license from the Wisconsin Board of Health.

Frank returned from Chicago on December 10, 1901 after he had purchased a massive, modern funeral car there. It was the latest make, had the 8-column design that was used then in the large cities; it had rubber tires. It was expected to be "the finest one in use in Southern Wisconsin." It arrived and was unloaded on the evening of December 18 and put into use the next day. The hearse was "known as the Pan-American model and its fittings are of the most elaborate kind." The plate glass sides and end were separated by eight ornamental oak columns fluted and beautifully carved. The curtains were "heavy black broadcloth trimmed with bullion fringe and large tassels." Inside there was a mahogany table with silver sprays instead of the usual rails. The seat was draped with flaring hammer cloth. Except for the silver sprays, there was nothing showy; the handles and lamps were of sombre black. It was planned to use a black team to pull the hearse, which was massive with rubber tires.

The brothers took on another responsibility when they teamed with George W. Breese, a monument dealer in Janesville, to open a branch here in May 1904. Breese was prepared to ship 31,000 pounds of monuments here then that he had already sold. Breese was then in town in April 1906 to assist the Shriners. More than two carloads of granite for Greenwood Cemetery had been shipped from Vermont at that time and was expected to arrive within 30 days. The business continued as two carloads of granite monuments were placed in Greenwood Cemetery by the partners in April 1907. Three more carloads were also to be placed before Memorial Day that year. Breese had recently put in a pneumatic tool, driven by compressed air, to letter the tombstones. No more was seen about the monument business in the newspapers.

The Shriners also kept up with the latest inventions when they added an improved device for lowering caskets into graves in February 1908. The device was guaranteed to work successfully with absolute safety against accident under any weight up to 1,200 pounds. Similar appliances had been on the market for years, but this was the first one that appealed to them. They purchased another hearse that May, which was similar to their best hearse even though it was lighter in weight. That hearse, made by Sayers & Scovill of Cincinnati, brought their fleet up to four hearses.

The Shriners received a carload of slate vaults from Bangor, Pennsylvania on October 13, 1908, their third in two years. The vaults weighed 1,300 pounds each, were 1.5 inches thick, and were used in the place of the rough boxes for burial. The fourth carload of slate vaults was received from Pennsylvania on May 2, 1912.

The men remained busy. On January 30, 1909 they left Monroe at 8:00 a.m. to drive 14 miles to the Union Church in Spring Grove with the body of George Davis. They also had the funeral of Archie Stanley in Juda that day, but that body had been transported by the train.

The firm extended their undertaking establishment in February 1909 by moving their showrooms upstairs where they had a room 40 feet long to exhibit their sample line of caskets. An inside stairway was able to be used to reach that room.

More about the early years of the Shriner Brothers business will be shared next week.