

Joseph E. Meyer and the Indiana Botanic Gardens



Joseph Ernest Meyer (September 5, 1878 – March 9, 1950) was born in Wisconsin. He was a botanist, writer, illustrator, publisher, and supplier of pharmaceutical-grade herbs and roots to individuals and professionals. He became a prominent citizen and eventually a millionaire in northwest.

He was the founder of the Indiana Botanic Gardens, Calumet National Bank and Meyer Publishing (now MeyerBooks). At his death he was said to be the world's largest distributor of herbs used in salves, cosmetics, and medicines.

The Early Years

Joseph spent a lot of time with his father, who was a photographer, going into the forest and fields. Meyer learned about nature and the ability to identify different plants.

Unfortunately, his father died when Joseph was a young boy, leaving a wife and six children, Joseph being the eldest. Because his mother could not care for her entire family, Joseph and a brother were sent to an orphanage where he was given a practical education and was taught the printing trade.

During his time at the orphanage Joseph became ill. While convalescing he spent his time reading the only material available which was a book on materia medica, paying close attention to the sections on herbs and herbal remedies.

In 1895 a fire swept through the orphanage damaging the dormitories and print shop. After the fire Joseph went to live with his grandmother in Milwaukee.

In Milwaukee he began working without pay as a print devil to gain more work experience. He worked for several years in print shops and then with the help of his grandmother, he opened his own print shop.



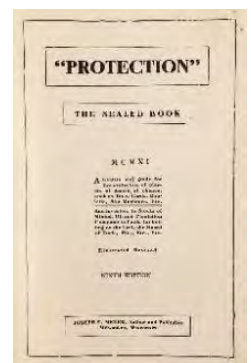
In 1901 he met and married his wife Celia (nee Hoedel), and they continued to live in Milwaukee. While living in Milwaukee they had three sons, Raymond, Clarence and Harold. In 1905, because conditions in Milwaukee did not improve, Joseph chose to move to Chicago. Leaving his family behind with relatives, he moved to Chicago to establish himself. After doing so he reunited his family and they added another son to their family, Francis, bringing the total to four.

As a result of a 1908 print strike in Chicago, he moved his family to Hammond, Indiana to work for the local paper. As he continued to work for the Hammond Times his intense desire to own his own business continued. He defined his two strengths as printing and knowledge of plants and nature. Meyer saved enough to buy a small printing press and install it in his home on the north side of Doty Street.



His family continued to grow, with births of LeRoy, Walter, Florence, and finally Edward bringing the total to eight. He moved to 226 Waltham Street where he and his family lived during the 1920s and 1930s.

He wrote and printed his first book *Protection The Sealed Book* which exposed gaming devices. The profit from this book gave Joseph the money necessary to start a small business dealing in herbs and medicinal plants.



In 1910, Indiana Herbs Gardens was born. Meyer ran this

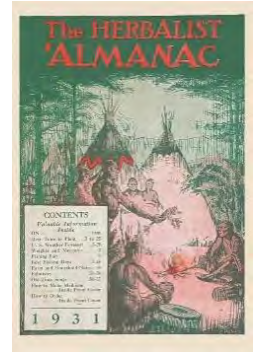


business out of a small cottage on the corner of Waltham Street and Lyman, utilizing plants from the nearby fields and forests. Joseph taught his children to harvest the plants, distinguishing between the native plants and weeds. He grew and harvested plants on vacant land surrounding his

Hammond house. His wife and family of eight children, seven boys and one girl, all worked to harvest and package the herbs for sale.



In 1918 Meyer published his 400-page book *Herbalist*, and in 1925 he began publishing *Herbalist Almanac* which contained a listing of herbs and roots that the company sold, as well as treatments for common ailments. He wrote and illustrated with line drawings and color drawings.



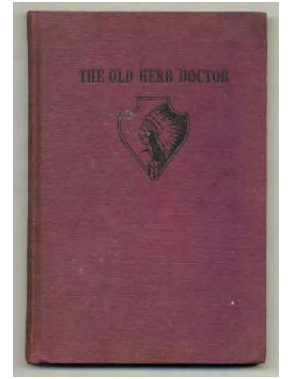
The Business Grows



Joseph's business became more successful, primarily because of the publishing of his 400-page book, *The Herbalist*. He purchased 626 177th Street, which is located on the north side of the Little Calumet River, to grow his plants. In 1925 on that land, he built a Tudor-style building that served as a mill, warehouse, packaging facility, distribution center in addition to farmland and growing facility. Henry Morris, an architect from London, designed the English style gabled building and in 1926 the beautiful Indiana Botanic Gardens, Inc. was fully functional.

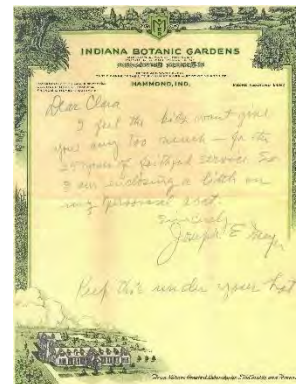


During the next few years, he traveled throughout North America to gather information on native plants and their uses. He expanded his search to Europe in 1932. During those years self-treatment with herbs was commonly practiced and often necessary due to shortage of physicians and healthcare products and the overall economic status of the country. In 1940 the *Old Herb Doctor* was published using testimonials of customers and enthusiasts complimenting the effectiveness and benefits of his herbal treatments. The Gardens also included a botanical library that ranked with the finest collections in the world.



The Indiana Botanic Gardens was not without its struggles. The company experienced a fire on December 24, 1935. The second floor was partially destroyed with an estimated loss of \$70,000. It housed the mixing department, and the roof was destroyed. No employee injuries occurred but one fireman was injured when part of a wall collapsed. Within a week, however, the plant was operating almost at full capacity. Although no reason was ever given as the cause of the fire, a rule prohibiting smoking in any part of the plant was instituted.

In addition to the growth of his company and financial success through the years, he remained kind and fostered a positive supportive work environment. He recognized individual contributions which created a workplace where employees felt respected. This was demonstrated when he acknowledged one employee after 25 years of service with a thank you letter and a check from his personal account.



The Indiana Botanic Gardens building is an English Tudor-style gabled building, with 36,000 square feet under roof built in 1925. An English Tudor-style gabled building is characterized by its steeply pitched, multiple front-facing gables, decorative half-timbering, and often included a façade of brick or stone with stucco infill. Some Tudor buildings intentionally feature stucco walls, without half-timber, such as the Indiana Botanic Gardens. These buildings often aim for a simpler aesthetic look.

Three of Joseph's sons, Raymond, General Business Manager; Clarence, Treasurer; and Francis, Pharmacist; worked with their father in the business. In 1990 the company moved to Hobart, Indiana.

After the move to Hobart the 1926 English Tudor-style gabled building was vacant for only a short time. Reapers Realm Haunted House rented the location for 34 years. The Halloween attraction ended when the property was acquired by the City of Hammond for redevelopment.



A Castle is Built

In the 1920s and 30s Joseph's herbal seed business was thriving. He



published and circulated catalogs and pamphlets handmade by his children which were distributed throughout Lake County, the Midwest, and eventually across the country.

While traveling throughout Europe, Meyer saw a medieval castle in Scotland. The castle was situated on stately manicured grounds with lush gardens surrounded by forest. So enamored he was with the castle, he decided to recreate one of his own. He bought 16 acres of land, in Dyer, Indiana at the highest point in Lake County, with a large sand dune. Meyer hired L. Cosby Bernard Sr., a local Hammond architect, to build his "castle". From 1929 to 1931, Bernard designed and built a Jacobean Revival style mansion. It was known as the most lavish home in the surrounding Calumet region. Meyer and his wife Celia lived in the castle until his death in 1950. Celia continued living in the home until her death in 1975.

The home they left behind is often referred to as Meyer's Mansion or Meyer's Castle, but the house was known to the family as Indian Hill. It sat empty after their deaths. It is currently being used as a venue for social events.

Bank Flourishes

In 1933 Joseph Meyer was faced with a particular dilemma. All the local banks had failed. As a result, he had no place to deposit checks and currency that were coming in every day at his botanical gardens.

A group of financial advisers and community leaders approached Meyer about starting his own bank. He didn't know anything about banking, but he knew how to operate a business, He had the necessary capital and now he had a team

who knew how to run a bank, so the Calumet State Bank of Hammond, 5444 Calumet Avenue, was opened on March 4, 1933.



Initially, the public was mistrustful of the new bank and for good reason. Many people lost their life savings because of all the local bank failures. So, to establish confidence in the newly chartered bank, Meyer put up his own capital as collateral. As a result, the bank prospered. In the following year the bank relocated to 5231 Hohman Avenue, the site of the previously failed First Trust and Savings Bank. This site later became Calumet National Bank in 1933, rebranded Bank Calumet in 1966 and was acquired by First Midwest Bank in 2006 which merged with Old National Bank in 2022. The building is a 100,000 square foot structure, boasting an impressive steel frame



covered with Indiana limestone with its base made up of polished Minnesota Granite. The main lobby had the original magnificent chandeliers, marble



floors, columns and an American walnut ceiling at least 35 feet from floor to ceiling. The entire interior is decorated with painted and inlaid designs. In addition to its impressive architecture, the building was well located to meet the new bank's needs, being centrally located in the hub of

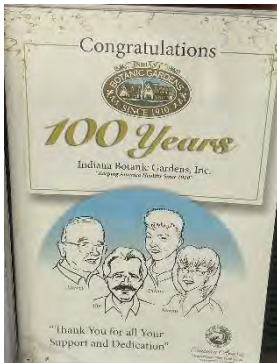
Hammond's growing commercial district.

The building at 5231 Hohman Avenue has been repurposed to a residential building with plans to create event space utilizing its lobby and basement.

Meyer Legacy

On March 9, 1950, in Miami, Florida, Meyer passed away. His wife Celia, daughter, Florence and his seven sons were at his bedside.

The family continues to run the business. In 1990 it moved from Hammond to a new facility in Hobart. The business now known at Botanic Choice, is currently run by Meyer's great grandson Tim Cleland who is Company President. It continues to sell from that location, through mail order, online and has a small retail shop. Since the move in 1990 the company has grown five fold. In recent years they stopped growing their own herbs and purchase them from suppliers around the world.



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