



McNeely & Company

Mr. Robert William McNeely, commonly called "R.W.," was born in Atlanta, Georgia on February 15, 1878. A skilled furniture pattern carver from an early age, he came to Toccoa, Georgia in 1890 at the age of 22 to work at the Simmons Furniture Company. An ambitious man, he bought the Simmons property when the factory closed and began to produce wooden furniture there.

He founded McNeely and Company and operated it in the three-story brick building next to the Merchants and Farmers Bank, the later location of the Belk-Gallant Department Store, which took over the McNeely building at some point. McNeely & Company operated different trades on each of the three floors. The first floor held the furniture and hardware store, the second floor held the casket company, and the third floor held the mortuary. Many stories were told about how he and his employees had to carry cadavers up the stairs to reach the mortuary on the top floor of the building. The motto of McNeely and Company was "From the Cradle to the Grave—" an apt vision considering the nature of Mr. McNeely's business.

As a devoted public servant, Mr. McNeely invested himself in the affairs of Toccoa business, being a Director of the Farmers and Merchants Bank in 1906 and a member of the Toccoa City Commission in 1915, when the town's first electricity-generating plant was built. He also served as Mayor of Toccoa in 1935, 1938, and 1941.

Mr. McNeely's business model proved successful. His furniture manufacturing plant in the old Simmons property (which was sold to Wright Manufacturing) expanded in a larger facility next door on Currahee Road. Mr. McNeely named this business the Toccoa Casket Company, which later became the largest suppliers of caskets to the U.S. military in the world until the end of the Vietnam War. Legend has it that Toccoa Casket Company provided the glass top liner-equipped cherry casket in which the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., was buried. Toccoa Casket Company was run by the McNeely family until it was sold and closed by the new owner.

The building which housed McNeely and Company on Doyle Street looks very much the same as it did when it was constructed in the early 1900s as shown in the Kollock print. The three-story structure is typical of commercial storefronts in the Twentieth Century, featuring large bay windows on the second floor, and simple brickwork and windows on the third floor. In the right light, the "McNeely & Company" lettering can still be seen above the entrance. In 2018, this building houses the X-Factor Grill and Cornerstone Restaurant, a downtown eatery and catering company.

-Information provided with assistance from Stephen Edmondson and Craig McNeely Edmondson.

Snapshots of Toccoa's History