

Schuetze Building Undergoes Remodel

[This is the continuation of the history of the building that currently houses the Dilly Bean on the northeast corner of the square.]

The Monroe Evening Times reported on November 16, 1900 that the two large floors were very handsomely fitted up and appointed throughout and contains an immense stock of fine and medium grade goods in men's and boys' ready to wear clothing, in all the latest patterns and designs, including the products of the celebrated eastern manufacture. They also carried an extensive line of men's furnishing goods, stylish and nobby, embracing all the winter novelties in imported and domestic productions. The gentlemen also did merchant tailoring and were prepared to make to-order suits and overcoats, affording a large stock of woolens to select from, and guaranteeing every garment as to perfection of fit and style. The article continued, "They have an establishment that is a model of its kind and they may well feel a sense of pride in the history of its growth and development."

It was in 1901 that John Discher walked out of the store and talked to Nic Durst who was standing on the corner. Discher invited Durst inside and they agreed that Durst would start to work there on Monday. Durst never even thought to ask what his wages would be. He found out at the end of the month when he was paid \$16. It was his job to sweep the boardwalk the first thing each morning. He also had to carry coal upstairs twice a day and cordwood into the store stove. He remembers that sometimes "the mud holes in the street were so deep you could bury a horse laying down." Kerosene lanterns served as street lights.

The two Johns were fitted with an attractive, electric light sign by the Monroe Electric Light and Power company in October 1906. It was the first sign of the kind to be introduced in Monroe.

These gentlemen rented the building for many years; the abstract for the property shows that they purchased it on July 18, 1921. They paid Mrs. Sophie Hoehn Karlen, Henry's daughter, \$18,000 for the property that was 100 feet from front to back and 28 feet wide.



Drawing of the north entrance leading directly to the main floor and downstairs shop. A large floodlight illuminates the entire north wall.

This sketch of the new entrance on the north side of the Schuetze building was taken from the March 5, 1953 issue of the Monroe Evening Times.

A new tile entrance into the store was installed in September 1922. It had mirrors on either side of the entrance with draperies and curtains put up afterwards. The owners believed the front entrance to the store was important to the appearance of the store.

The men continued in this partnership until they sold the business and the building to Willard Schuetze, effective February 1, 1941. Except for the three years that Albert Hoehn owned the business, this was the first time in 91 years that the clothing business at this location was owned by a single proprietor. Willard's grandfather, Louis Schuetze, had owned the United State Hotel from 1866 until his death in 1886. That building was diagonally across the avenue where the first National Bank now stands. [A photo of this building can be seen on the bottom of page 13 in the Monroe Pictorial History.] In addition, Willard's father, William A. Schuetze, built a building one block north of the clothing store (where Thrivent Financial now sits) in 1910.

Willard kept the Discher & Schneider name for a year after he purchased the business. In addition, Nicholas H. Durst and Jack Sery, longtime employees at the store, continued working

for Willard. In the 1945 directory, the business was simply listed as “W R Schuetze,” but became simply known as Schuetze’s shortly afterward. It then became known as Schuetze’s of Monroe in the mid-1960s. Edwin W. Schuetze became a partner with his brother in 1946.

A major two-year remodeling project culminated with opening day ceremonies on Saturday, March 7, 1953 from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. A hole had been broken through the outside wall on the north side of the building for a new entrance in October 1952. The lower level was remodeled to include a new basement shop. It became known as the Different Drummer where one could purchase boys’ clothes (including Boy Scout uniforms and accessories), overalls, coveralls, and work clothes.

Another addition to the place that was unusual for the times was a public address system where they could play music throughout the store or let someone who was downstairs know that they had a phone call. The original flooring of tongue and groove two by fours was worn in some places as deep as an inch after 70 years of use. It was covered with a silica sand, hot asphalt and cement mixture for leveling purposes before being overlaid with tile. One innovative addition was to include an electrical conduit strip in the floor from the front of the building to the back. Electric plugs could be placed anywhere along the strip by drilling into the floor.

A Chicago designer named Hickman was hired to plan the layout of the store. Five new fixtures that he had patented were used here for the first time in the United States. These replaced the display units that had been used since the building was built in 1883. Shelf space, merchandise display, and other details were determined by Hickman and followed completely. All of these changes were the first major ones since the building was built in 1883.

After Willard’s death in 1971 Schuetze’s of Monroe continued in operation with Paul Paulson as general manager and Ken Schneider as business manager. Mr. Paulson, who had worked at Schuetze’s since 1960, purchased the business in the mid-1980s and the firm became known as Paul’s Mens Wear. Paul and De Paulson purchased the building from Willard’s widow, June Schuetze, on December 16, 1987 and that business operated in the building until October 2002. That ended the streak that a men’s clothing store had continuously operated at this location for 124 years, with the exception of about 6 months while the old building was torn down and the new one built.

[This story will conclude next week with the history of the upstairs of this building.]