

Anton Miller Family Immigrates from Germany and Starts Business

It is difficult to imagine what the life of an immigrant was like, what prompted them to come to this country, and then the struggles they must have suffered once they arrived in the county. In this column (and the next two), I will be sharing what is known about one of those immigrant families and the businesses they built after arriving in Monroe.

Anton Miller (Mueller or Muller) left Baden, Germany in 1853 with his wife and nine children, ranging in age from 16 down to 4 years old. Their ship sailed from Le Havre, France and arrived in New York on April 23. It is unknown if the family came to Monroe immediately.

It is also not known where the family was living in Monroe before Anton purchased the north half of Lot 160 in Lybrand's Donation on August 17, 1854. This property, located on the southeast corner of what is now 12th Street and 16th Avenue, was purchased from Charles S. and Mary C. Foster for \$60.

Anton's wife, Barbara, passed away on October 7, 1856, shortly after the birth of what might have been their 12th child. She was buried in Greenwood Cemetery, where there is a marker. Anton was naturalized in Circuit Court here on September 7, 1858. He was married again about that time to Augusta Zilmer, who was younger than his oldest daughter, Caroline Schuetze. With her, he would father another five or six children. His obituary states that he had as many as 20 or 22 children in total.

To support his family, he was a furniture maker across the street from Spring Square, just south of the square. The first advertisement that I have record of appeared in the May 28, 1858 Monroe Sentinel. He had various kinds of wooden ware that included plain and ornamental chairs, lightstands, bureaus, bedsteads, tables, lounges, sofas, and more. All of the furniture was manufactured "under his immediate supervision, and will be found well put together and finished - unlike most of the stuff made to sell."

The 1860 industrial schedule (which is shared in *Becoming a Village: Monroe, Wisconsin in the 1850s*) showed that he hired three men that year and told how much raw material he used and what he produced, along with the values of each. Anton, 44, and his son, Edward, 16, were both listed as cabinet makers. Anton purchased the south half of Lot 160 from John and Elizabeth Weismiller on July 29, 1861 for \$350.

An ad in March 1863 highlighted that he had a new coffin room at the furniture store, where he kept "coffins of all sizes" on hand at all times. He also stated that he would "sell cheaper than" they could be bought anywhere in the county with a "hearse furnished free." He would also take lumber in exchange for furniture as payment.

It is unknown what the earliest buildings on this property looked like, but a mention on April 11, 1866 stated, "A. Miller has nearly completed an addition to his Furniture Ware House." He then purchased Lot 161 and the west half of Lot 162, to the east of the property that he already owned, three months later on July 11 for \$800 from Christian and Mary Ann Kaufmann. Those two and a half lots still comprise the entire Suisse Haus lots of today.

Two years later Mr. Miller announced that he had "secured the services of several first class workmen" and was manufacturing boots and shoes for men, ladies, boys, and misses. According to the advertisement, all was made with good work and at low rates with a good assortment kept on hand. The shop was just east of the furniture store. It doesn't appear that he followed this endeavor very long as the 1870 industrial census lists only his furniture manufacturing.



This photo, found on findagrave.com, along with the identifications, shows German immigrant, Anton Miller, and six of his sons. In the back are Albert, Robert, and Benhard. In the front are Anton Jr., Stephen, Anton Sr., and Edward. Anton and his sons were active in the community for many years.

Not all furniture that he sold was made here as an advertisement in August 1870 stated that he had “just received another lot of plane cane-seat and upholstered furniture, which he will sell very cheap.” By October Miller had received and set up a new steam engine to operate the furniture machinery. This machinery prepared him to manufacture “to order and for retail furniture in walnut, oak, maple and light woods, at much cheaper rates than heretofore. His works are quite extensive, consisting of one building devoted to manufacturing, another to upholstery, putting up and finishing furniture, and the third is exclusively for storing and salesrooms.” The article went on to state that this was the “oldest Furniture House in Green county, and it is one of the largest and best conducted in Southern Wisconsin.” In addition, undertaker’s goods of all styles were constantly on hand. They would also frame pictures, reset mirrors, and repair furniture with free delivery within the village. He purchased a “fine new hearse” in November 1869.

There will be more in the next two columns about this immigrant family and the businesses they created.