

## The Early Years of the Adam Schmidt Shoe Store

Main Street Monroe posted a photo of the front of the Garden Deli building on their Facebook page on November 6, 2023 while the building was undergoing some facade work. The renovation uncovered old signage above the windows that revealed that Schmidt's Shoe Store had occupied that space more than 60 years ago. That prompted me to see how much more information I could find about the shoe store and its owners. It has taken me this long to gather the information and get it printed.

Adam Schmidt, was born in 1851 in Washington County, to parents who had immigrated from Bavaria seven years earlier. According to his obituary, "as soon as he was old enough to yield an ax, he bore his part in the clearing off the land and fitting it for cultivation." He attended the local schools until he was 14 before going to an academy in Milwaukee for three years. After that he took a business course in a commercial college for a year, then came to Monroe to clerk in the Bauer & Steinmeyer grocery firm. He remained here for three years before returning to Milwaukee for three more years where he was a bookkeeper for a coppersmith.

He then formed a partnership in a shoe business with his brother, Eli, on April 1, 1875. After two years he returned to Monroe and opened a shoe store, which he continued until his death. An announcement appeared in the Monroe Sentinel of April 10, 1878 that "the new establishment" was being conducted by Adam Schmidt, recently of Milwaukee. "He has a new and elegant stock of goods in the line of gents, ladies, and children boots, shoes, rubber and felt goods, also a complete stock of leather and findings." The public was invited to call and examine both the goods and the prices. An ad also appeared in that paper stating that they did custom work, with repairing a specialty. It added, "Our stock is complete, new and durable." The business was on the east side of the square, one door south of J. B. T. [Treat].

When the large fire occurred on Thursday night, May 22, 1879, all the wooden buildings on the south half of the east side of the public square were destroyed. This included the store that Schmidt had occupied. Within a week he had rented one side of Stewart's Block; Wettengel & Son occupied the other side. Schmidt had saved some goods from the fire, but planned to immediately add new goods direct from the manufacturer. He guaranteed "just as good bargains as ever to his customers whom he invites to come down to his new place of business."

By the end of July Schmidt had moved and welcomed his customers to see him in his new headquarters in Bridge's Block [later known as Ruf's Block] on the south side of the square. He had "fine goods for men and children, a leading feature" of his trade. Repairing was done by good workmen. He stated, "The fact that my trade is constantly increasing is a good indication that I can and do please my customers in quality and style of goods, and low prices." The 1880 census showed that he was living in the City Hotel operated by Anton Miller.

Adam's marriage to Kate Alleman was announced in the Sentinel on December 27, 1882. The wedding was performed by Justice S. W. Abbott at the home of Daniel Germann at 7:30 the following



This photo, from the collection of the late William Miller, shows an advertisement for Schmidt's shoe store painted on the side of the building that now houses the Garden Deli. After being located in two other buildings on the square, Adam Schmidt moved his inventory to this location, 1624 10th Street, in February 1908.

evening with Herman Fritz and Louisa Brunner as witnesses. "In the presence of particular friends and relatives" of the couple, the bride was attired in wine-colored silk with lace and plush trimmings. "After a brief season of congratulations by those present, the parties were escorted to" Turner Hall where a formal reception was held.

After about an hour the music struck up a grand march and the promenade began. Dancing was kept up at intervals through the night. An elegant and bountiful supper was served by Louis Schuetze and his United States House staff, assisted by Fred Lutz and others. The supper was a credit to the generosity and ability of Schuetze; the 200 guests did "ample justice to the feast." Different vignettes were held throughout the evening that included singing by Ed Ruegger and his sisters, several toasts and responses, a petite drama with Mrs. Robert Miller and Rudolph Lowenbach playing the principal characters, and more dancing. The party broke up at 5:00 a.m. and the newlyweds were escorted to their apartment at the Schuetze residence on the northeast corner of 17th Avenue and 9th Street.

Business must have been good as it was reported on April 11 that Schmidt had purchased two lots on the northeast corner of 17th Street and 16th Avenue from Elizabeth Eninch for \$600 where they planned to "erect a fine residence." The foundation was nearly complete by September 26. It was stated on April 2, 1884 that it was beginning "to assume symmetrical form, and is going to be one of the finest in the city." On May 21 it was said that it was "to be entirely unique, a mixture of Swiss Callet [sic] and Queen Ann [sic] cottage - a very attractive piece of architecture."

Other than a few ads for the shoe store, not much was written about Schmidts until he purchased a lot that contained the last wooden building on the west side of the square on June 27, 1899. The 24-foot lot was purchased from Louisa Fuchs for \$3,200; Schmidt was to build a brick building. The editor added, "What a nice block it will be to be sure." Adam's plan was to build a large store, 2-stories with an outside stairway and a basement. For some reason he changed his mind and he and Catherine sold the same property to Peter Wells on July 13 for the same price he had paid.

You can find out next week how long he remained on the southwest corner of the square.