

The Schmidt Shoe Store Ended in 1961 After 83 Years on the Square

Adam Schmidt remained in the shoe and boot business in the Bridge Block on the south side of the square for a few more years. An article in the December 20, 1899 Times said that "Schmidt's reputation for fine shoes is well known. He has always carried a fine stock of boots, shoes, and rubbers, but this winter, and particularly right now, he is showing his many customers a finer lot of footwear than it has ever been their lot to see in the city before. And the best of it is, that despite the raise in leather, Adam is selling those fine tans and box calves, at the same old prices. All sizes, all widths. He has a special custom made shoe carrying his stamp and guarantee, that is the shoe for you. He can fit a shoe to any foot. And rubber goods? Anything you desire, at prices that will cause you to congratulate yourself for calling at Adam's. Adam pays the highest price for hides."

Adam announced on September 11, 1903 that he was going to retire and would be beginning a closing out sale on October 1. Their residence property was also going up for sale. Later that year, on December 21, Schmidt had a letter printed to the editor that Mr. Figi was advertising Dr. Reed's cushion shoes for \$4.00. He continued, "This is not true because Mr. Figi has no Dr. Reed's cushion shoes. His so-called Dr. Reed's cushion shoe is a cheap imitation, of which I have one pair in my store for inspection to all. Mr. Figi is simply trying to deceive customers and the public." He added, that he was the "sole agent for Dr. Reed's Cushion shoes."

S. Paul Figi, also located on the south side of the square, filed a lawsuit against Schmidt for \$6,000 claiming that each of two communications damaged him by \$3,000. Colin W. Wright represented Figi while J. L. Sherron represented Schmidt. No result was found from this suit.

Schmidt actually did not go out of business, but remained in the same location until after Paul A. Ruf purchased the building. Schmidt had to move when Ruf started to remodel the store into a restaurant. Schmidt purchased the building at 1624 11th Street, further east in the block, from the Bolender heirs on November 18, 1908 for \$7,000, but did not take possession until January 1; it was occupied by grocer C. L. Chambers. Schmidt announced the following week that he planned to "close out his entire stock of footwear" before the move, by putting everything in stock on sale on December 1; he would then purchase all new stock for the new location.

Schmidt made "extensive interior changes, improvements, and renovations" to put his new building into "first class condition throughout." He planned to vacate the Ruf location by March 1 and would have "new lines of up-to-date style-in footwear added" before the move. He still planned to be the "sole local agency" for Dr. Reed Cushion Shoes. He would also carry many other styles with rubber goods, house and street footwear, with school shoes being a specialty. Schmidt invited the public "to call and inspect the new quarters and look over the excellent bargains in fine footwear." He ran ahead of schedule and was "fully settled and ready for business" in the new location by February 26.

Adam's son, Leon, joined his father in partnership in the shoe business in 1908 while Leon was only 17. Unfortunately, there was a report in the times on April 10, 1916 that Adam could "live but a short time, a few hours at best." Adam, 64, was suffering from nerve paralysis and had been in failing health since the fall. He passed away that night at home less than nine months after Katherine's death.

The Times shared on February 24, 1909 that, "his reputation and standing as a merchant of absolute honesty and liberal methods, as an enterprising, public spirited citizen has realized a steady growth. Hence, his prosperity is well deserved." His obituary added, "his simple word was always religiously kept and his promise among his customers and friends was as good as his bond." Besides his business, he was a member of the International Order of Odd Fellows as well as a director of Citizens Bank.

Adam's will was read later that month with his four sons as equal beneficiaries. His real estate, valued at more than \$100,000, included a farm in Sylvester Township. Leon purchased the shoe business the following month and also ended up living in the home that his parents had built in 1883.

Leon started remodeling the entrance of the store in May 1920. An attractive store front with a stairway leading to the second floor on the east and the entrance to the store on the west were changed. At that time the upstairs was unoccupied because there was no front entrance. Two flats were to be added to the upstairs.

The new store front had three display windows to display the footwear. The two side windows were three and a half feet wide and six feet deep. The larger display window is set back in the middle



This photo shows the front of the Schmidt Shoe Store front entrance after Leon Schmidt had some remodeling done on the building at 1624 11th Street in 1920. The photo is from the collection of the late Joyce Koch.

leaving a space nine feet deep from the store front to the main door; that area was tiled. A restroom was constructed just inside the store in back of the display windows. The foot comfort department was also located there. The remainder of the store was re-shelved for all of the footwear.

Leon operated the store until he sold it to Don Clark in March 1961. At that time Schmidt Shoe Store had continuously operated on the square for 83 years with Leon having been there for 53 of those. Clark's Shoes remained in that location until about 1976 and then Les Moines Shoes was located there until 1984 or later.