

Miller Jewelry - A Century on the Monroe Square

Albert Miller, owner of Miller Jewelry in Monroe, passed away in his business on the south side of the Square on August 6, 1910. At the time, his oldest son, Walter, was a musician at the Lyric theatre in Elgin, Illinois; he returned to Monroe to take over his father's business. Lena was left to raise Charline, 15, and George, 5.

An advertisement on November 30, 1914 stated that "A Victrola in the home makes every one happy." It was "always ready to play" and the "Victor repertoire includes every kind of music any one can desire." The prices ranged from \$15 to \$200 and A. Miller Jewelry Co had an "easy-payment plan." November records were for sale at that time.

An ad in the June 6, 1917 Monroe Evening Times announced the beginning of a 10-day piano sale, which included player-pianos. They offered "terms to suit your convenience," for which they could "start paying when convenient" with "payments as low as \$1.50 a week." Prices of pianos ranged from \$390 to \$700 and player pianos from \$390 to \$1,000 with savings from \$75 to \$175. The store was open Wednesday and Saturday evenings "to give the man who works through the day an opportunity to take advantage" of these bargains. Another ad appeared on June 18 reminding the readers that the piano sale was "to close soon."

Albert's widow, the former Lena Sickinger, passed away in St. Francis hospital in Freeport after having been taken there a week earlier. She "had been ailing" the previous year from "a complication of diseases."

An ad on December 9, 1919 shared that there had been a shortage of Victrolas that would "soon be relieved" by expanding the plant to meet the tremendous increase in demand. It was suggested that prospective customers visit the store. An advertisement a year later stated, "your Victrola is here!" There were drawings of several different models in the ad. "It simply remains for you to select the instrument best adapted to your home and pocketbook" with prices of Victors and Victrolas ranging from \$10 to \$400.

Another advertisement on June 28, 1923 stated that the A. Miller Jewelry store had been established over 33 years earlier and had always "enjoyed a large trade, but in the past 15 years, the business has been greatly increased in volume. It is now one of the leading jewelry and musical centers in the county."

Yet another ad appeared on April 2, 1924 announcing "the most remarkable phonograph sale ever held in Green Co." One great carload of items would sell fast so patrons were encouraged to come early. The Marquette model was advertised at \$59.75 with the Colonial at \$79.75, the Tudor at \$99.75, and the Biltmore at \$112. Finishes were available in either walnut or mahogany.

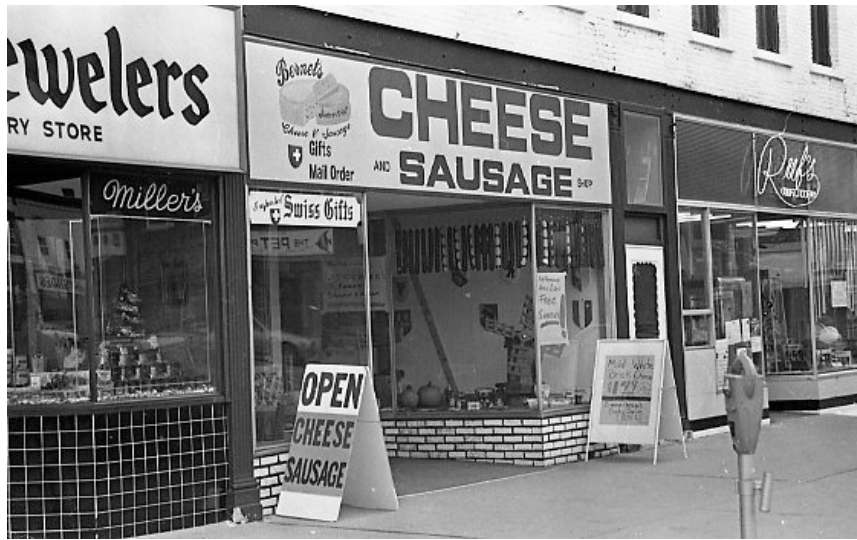


This interesting photo of the interior of the Miller jewelry store on the south side of the Square at 1604 11th Street came from the files of the Green County Historical Society. No date or identifications of the people were given.

Walter Miller was unlocking the front door of the store at 9:15 p.m. on April 13, 1925 when he “caught a glimpse of an intruder he heard scrambling out of a rear window that had been jimmed up as a means of entrance.” That thief netted \$4.50. Miller had come back to turn on the nightlight and put away some diamonds “that he had neglected to take care of when he closed the store earlier.” This was the third robbery on the Square that had occurred within three months, which were never solved.

A modern storefront, including up-to-date display windows, was being constructed on this building in August 1929. This is probably the same storefront that exists today. Whether the tiles that are still in the entryway were installed at this time is unknown.

Some improvements, which included air conditioning, were made in the building in August 1937. The rear of the store was also rebuilt with new rooms for optical examination where individual care could be given. “Repainting of walls and ceilings and refinishing of floors adds to the general attractiveness of the store.” The fronts of this building and the Ruf block were being painted in October 1947.



This photograph, taken by the Monroe Evening Times in 1987, shows the westernmost part of the Miller Jewelers building on the south side of the Square. It operated with different owners in this location for about 90 years. Bernets operated their shop next door for a few years and Ruf's Confectionery operated on the corner for decades.

front windows of the store about 5:00 on the stormy morning of August 6, 1951. Policeman had made several rounds earlier, but found nothing wrong. William Wick later reported to patrolman Robert Maurer that the window had been smashed. The rock was inside the window on a display stand and two diamond rings were on the sidewalk outside. The total loss was \$2,577.15.

Paul Menes was hired as a watchmaker in July 1954 and planned to move his family here after two years in Fort Collins, Colorado. It is unknown if he actually moved here since he is not listed in the 1955 city directory.

Miller Jewelry was still listed in the 1990/91 Monroe telephone book, but was not listed in 1992/93. Skattum was still listed as the manager in 1964. John Weckerly then served as manager in the late 1960s before Elton Magoon took over. Magoon then moved to Massachusetts in May 1974 and Janet Hartwig became manager, possibly until the store closed. Janice Camron assisted with sales in 1974; T. B. Young, a licensed watchmaker, took care of all watch repairs at that time.

This jewelry business (starting with George King) remained on the Square for more than 130 years. That has to be a record for Monroe!

Walter Miller retired from the business on November 1, 1949, ending “more than [a] half-century tradition of Millers in the jewelry store.” This was not the end of Miller Jewelry as it was announced later that month that J. J. Smith's Jewelry Stores Company of Janesville had purchased the local company. The Monroe store continued to operate here as Miller Jewelry with Robert L. Skattum as the manager.

Walter Miller, 60, passed away the following May 14 at St. Clare hospital of pneumonia and a heart condition, having been ill for two years and in the hospital for two weeks.

Thieves threw a 4- by 6-

inch rock through one of the

front windows of the store about 5:00 on the stormy morning of August 6, 1951. Policeman had made several rounds earlier, but found nothing wrong. William Wick later reported to patrolman Robert Maurer that the window had been smashed. The rock was inside the window on a display stand and two diamond rings were on the sidewalk outside. The total loss was \$2,577.15.