

# Bitter Neumann

## Celebrating 100 Years



Bitter Neumann today, 14th Street location, Sheboygan



News Clipping of founders



Original Store in Millersville as seen 1928

Millersville Store Remodeled 1942



Howards Grove Store Opened 1971

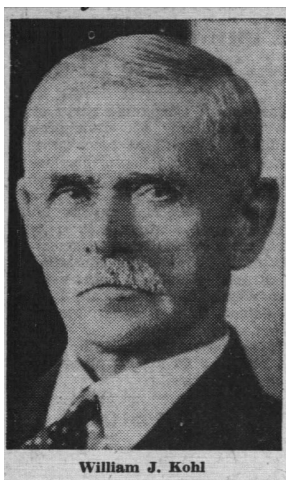


Sheboygan Store Opened 1983



Manitowoc Store Opened 2012

## Bitter Neumann



William J. Kohl

William J. Kohl was born July 10, 1853 in Town Herman, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, the son of Mr. & Mrs. John Kohl. He went to school in Millersville. In Howards Grove he learned the wagon making trade and later became a carpenter. William also worked @ Millersville Cheese Box Company and the sawmill before starting his own wagon and carpenter shop. Many of the farm homes and barns in and around Millersville where he lived were built by him. He was also the general contractor for the construction of St. Paul's Lutheran Church in 1884. In 1886 Kohl erected a small general store in the village of Millersville where he conducted business for the next 36 years. In January 1922 Kohl put the store and the 4-bedroom residence behind the store up for sale.

Alfred Bitter [Sr.] bought the store and residence "lock, stock and barrel" from Kohl for \$15,000 [\$247,000 in 2020 dollars]. Alfred was 22 years old and soon to be married. He had no money for the down payment, so he borrowed some of the money from his

mother and Kohl financed the balance. On February 5, 1922 Alfred Bitter married Miss Edna Schneider at – St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Town Herman. Later that month Alfred "*settled the deed*" finalizing the sale. They moved into the house in May after the Kohl's left and moved to Sheboygan.



Alfred Bitter Sr.



Edna Bitter

Alfred Bitter was born on September 4, 1899 to Fred and Emma Bitter. Alfred's Uncle John H. Bitter married Bertha Prange a sister of Henry Charles Prange the founder of the H. C. Prange Company a large regional department store in Sheboygan with the motto "*It's not yours 'til you like it.*" John Bitter was in charge of the grocery department, was the bookkeeper, was the president of the company and confidential secretary to H. C. Prange the man. From groceries and cosmetics, to jewelry, appliances, furniture, car-

peting, luggage, and clothing, to everyday dinnerware, fine china and silverware you could buy almost anything you could think of at Prange's.

For the first five years the Alfred's store ran as a "two-man" operation; the "two" being Alfred and Edna. Then, in 1927 Bitter merged with Roland Neumann [sheet metal & plumbing business; now Neumann Plumbing & Heating] and Walter Mueller to form the **Bitter - Neumann Company**. Just as the grocery store grew to include hardware, appliances, yard goods, work clothing and even toys for children, the plumbing and sheet metal departments also grew to include items like milking machines, barn equipment and plumbing fixtures.

Because of the Great Depression [world wide economic collapse] and World War II a lot of bartering went on in the 1930s and 1940s. People brought in eggs, chickens or potatoes to the store in exchange for other groceries and/or hardware items they needed. The business was also open evenings to accommodate the farmers' schedules. Farmers brought their eggs to the store every night then sat around the stove talking about the day's events. However, it was not open on Sundays. Alfred Bitter said, "*I like to have Sundays off and my employees do too. As long as we can make a go of it, we won't be open on Sunday..... but, if someone got unexpected company, they came to the house to ask for a loaf of bread or whatever else they needed. We were glad to oblige.*"

## Bitter - Neumann Company



L-R: Walter Mueller, Alfred Bitter, Sr., Roland Neumann  
#533-298-9

### Bitter - Neumann Feed Mill

In 1935, Bitter took over the old grain warehouse changing it over to a feed mill for custom grinding and mixing of feeds. Later the mill was used as a warehouse and the selling of Simplicity Lawn Equipment from the basement.



A cheese factory built in 1886 by John Erbstoeszler stood across the alley on the east side of the store . The upper story, aka the “Community Hall”, served as a social center for several years.

Cheese Factory

Bitter - Neumann Store



In 1942 Bitter bought the cheese factory building and combined the two structures into one. This enlarged the store and closed the alley that had existed between them.

## Alfred aka “Butch” Bitter , Jr. [1931-1987]

“Butch” was born in the Town of Herman to Alfred, Sr, and Edna Schneider Bitter. He graduated from Northwestern College in Watertown and served in the U.S. Army from 1952-1954. In 1955 he married Lois Nael. Butch’s business career began in 1954 when he joined the Bitter Neumann Company. He was secretary-treasurer of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, a member of the church choir and taught Sunday School there for 33 years. At the time of his death he was the company vice-president and treasurer.

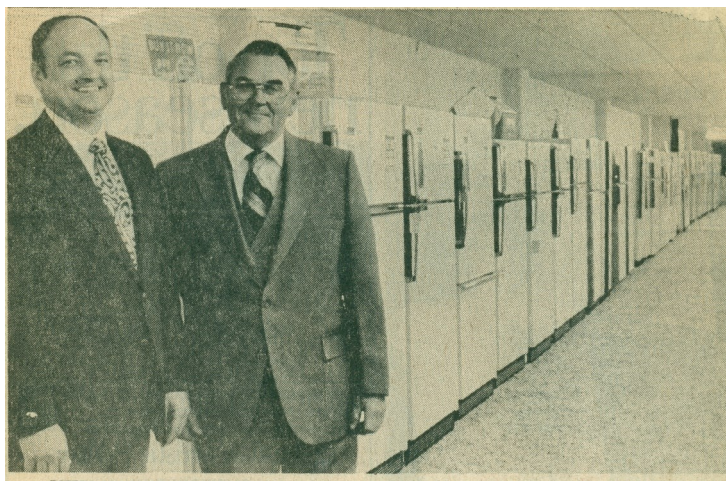


Harold Bitter [1922-1992]

Harold Bitter, the son of Alfred Bitter, Sr. and Edna Schneider Bitter, was born in Millersville. He graduated from Sheboygan Falls High School in 1940. That same year he began his career at Bitter Neumann & Company. In 1942 Harold married Benita Heuer. In 1964 he became the president of the company. He was a member of St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church. Harold served as President and Treasurer of the church, was a church choir member, Fire Chief and member of Millersville Fire Department, Chairman of the Board State Bank of Howards Grove, Director Millersville Box Company, Director East Coast Telecom [Mosel Centerville] Telephone Company, President and Trustee of the Village of Howards Grove. Above photo shows Harold when he worked in the sheet metal department of the company.

When Roland Neumann died in 1957 Alfred bought Neumann's interest in the business. The partnership was dissolved in 1960, but Alfred kept the Neumann name in Bitter - Neumann. He later purchased Walter Mueller's interest in the company when Mueller retired in 1965.

People were coming from all over Sheboygan County and beyond to shop at Bitter Neumann. It became obvious that a larger and a more modern facility was needed. Consequently, in 1971 a new store opened in Howards Grove just half a mile north from the original store. The new 25,000 square foot store quickly expanded to 36,000 square feet, and in 1979 a 6,000 square foot steel building, just south of the main building, the Bitter - Neumann Garden Center opened for business.



September 1983 [Sheb Press 9/21/83]

Ed Radue and Harold Bitter at the grand opening of the Bitter-Neumann Store Sheboygan

Another addition of 10,600 square feet was added to the store in June of 1982. With the addition the grocery department nearly tripled in size. Baked goods were made fresh daily in the store's own bakery. Shoppers could not only get their groceries they could also shop for lawn mowers, garden tillers, chain saws, televisions, stereos, ranges, radios, dishwashers, air conditioners, microwave ovens, shoes, and even a limited amount of clothing at one location.

In 1983 H. C. Prange Company had closed its appliance annex and downtown department store after a water main break caused major structural damage to the 250,000 square foot Sheboygan landmark. In October 1983 the vacant Prange's Store; scheduled for demolition, was destroyed by fire; arson was suspected. Bitter Neumann, a long time fixture in appliance and home furnishing sales in Howards Grove, purchased the home appliance stock of H. C. Prange, and opened Bitter-Neumann Furniture & Appliance of Sheboygan at 827 N 14<sup>th</sup> Street [the former D. J. Nelesen Furniture Warehouse Showroom] in Sheboygan in July 1983.

Bitter-Neumann also acquired the franchise rights to General Electric, Maytag and Marquette appliances. The Sheboygan store would also handle Frigidaire, Amana, Speed Queen, Monarch, Jenair, Tappen, Roper, and Kitchen Aid appliances plus Panasonic microwaves. Zenith, Sylvania and Sony televisions will also be sold there. The lawn & garden department will handle Lawn Boy and Simplicity equipment.

From the beginning, running the business has been a family affair. Alfred ["Butch"] Bitter, Jr. ran the company with his brother Harold. When "Butch" Bitter died Harold's son-in-law Ed Radue managed the store in Sheboygan and Harold oversaw the Howards Grove facility. Major appliances and televisions were available at both the Howards Grove and Sheboygan locations, but the Howards Grove store included a grocery department, and sold housewares, hardware, sporting goods and lawn and garden equipment, while the Sheboygan store specialized in appliances and furniture.



Edgar "Ed" Radue graduated in 1962 from Manitowoc Lutheran High School where he met Janet Bitter, daughter of Harold and granddaughter of Alfred Bitter, Sr. Ed Radue and Janet Bitter were married on August 14, 1966. Ed started working at Bitter-Neumann in 1968 and in 1972 he became an executive officer of the company.

Harold Bitter sold the grocery department to Bill & Mary Schleh for Bill's Piggly Wiggly in October [today, Tietz's Piggly Wiggly] 1990. Harold sold the TV, appliance, furniture departments, and the related service shops, to Ed and Janet. He kept the hardware and lawn and garden departments at the Howards Grove location.

Upon Harold's death in 1992, all the merchandise was moved from the Howards Grove location to the Sheboygan location and the Howards Grove store closed. From then on, the company was known as Bitter-Neumann Appliances T.V. Furniture.



Ed and Janet Bitter Radue



Third & Fourth Generations

A Family Affair

Front: Amy Radue Binsfeld & Janet Radue

Back: Dan Radue & Tim Radue [Sheb Press 12-17-14]

Alfred, Harold, and "Butch" Bitter are gone and Ed Radue passed away in 2009. But, Bitter-Neumann remains a family affair. Ed and Jan had four children. Lisa is a parochial school teacher and the other three children work in the business. Now a fifth generation has entered the business. Dan's daughter Ashley and Tim's son Justin are working in the business.

Dan and Tim Radue bought the business from Janet and Ed Radue on April 1, 2007. Youngest daughter, Amy Radue Binsfeld manages the furniture department. Bitter-Neumann opened a second store in Manitowoc in 2012. On June 1, 2020 Dan Radue became the sole owner. And, on October 1, 2021 Bitter Neumann bought Hansen Furniture Appliance & Mattress in Waupaca which will retain the Hansen name.

When Alfred Bitter, Sr. started his business in Millersville in 1922 he didn't do it to become "rich and famous" or to become the "biggest". However, little did he realize that his small general store in Millersville would one day become a major retailer in Sheboygan County. His business model was simple and obviously very successful. Give people what they need. Treat customers with courtesy and respect. Provide them with service, quality, and variety and the rest takes care of itself. This philosophy, handed down through the generations and based upon common sense has sustained Bitter-Neumann for 100 years and continues today at the start of its second 100 years.

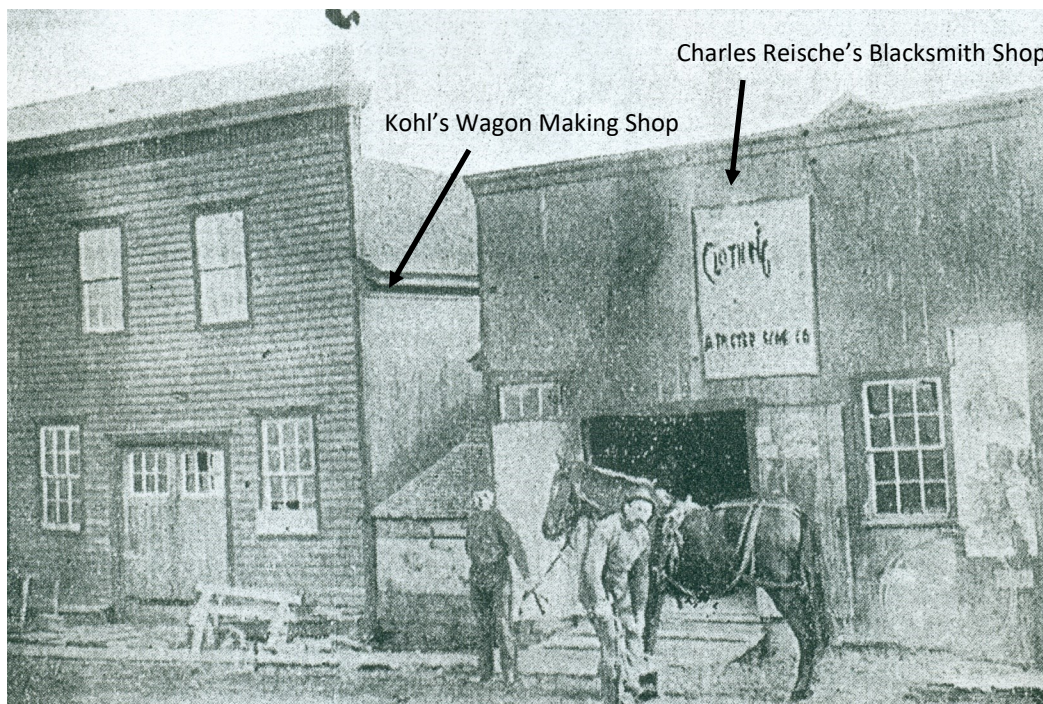
## Miscellaneous Info about Millersville

William Kohl built a wagon making shop about 1870 where Usadel's Tin Shop once stood. The old shop was torn down in 1960. It has remained an empty lot to this day.



William Kohl Wagon Shop [533-49-5]

In 1876 Charles Reische built a blacksmith shop right next to Kohl's Wagon Shop.



Reische Blacksmith Shop [1900]

Charles Reische & Son shoeing a Horse

**#533-49-5a**

William J. Kohl General Store — Birthplace of Bitter Neumann

#533-49-6



Millersville General Store built by William J. Kohl in 1886. Mr. and Mrs. Kohl can be seen on and near the porch; the man to the right is John Prigge, and standing at the railing is George Pieper.



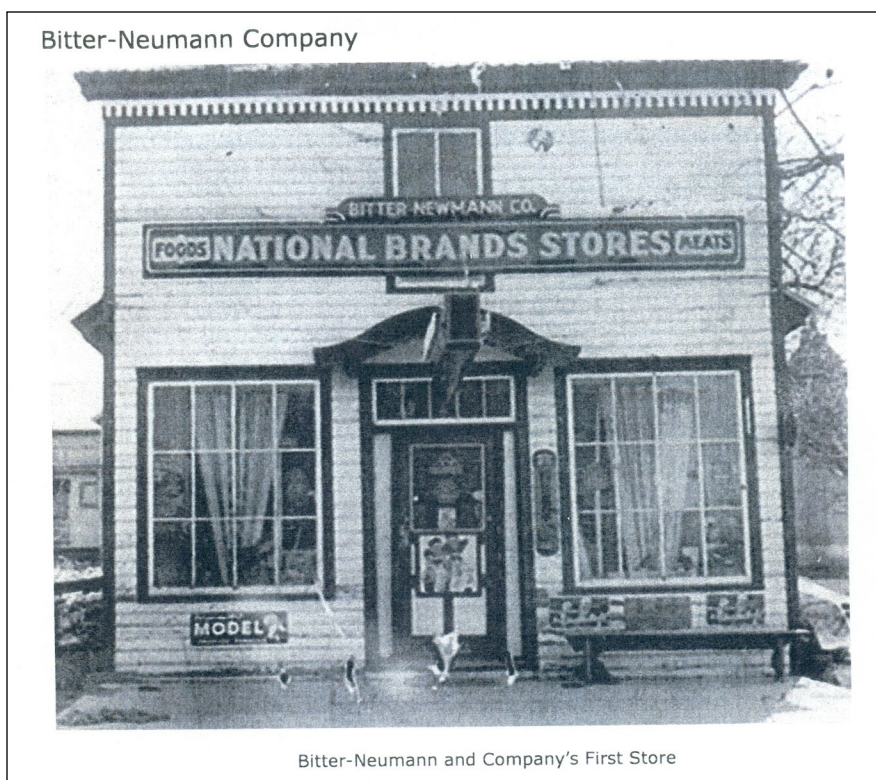
#533-49-7

This photo taken in front of Kohl's general Store in 1906 shows Kohl with one of the first automobiles in Millersville. Mrs. Kohl, Friedola and Walter and Mrs. Casper are in the vehicle with Casper Wolf and a Mr. Schaeffer standing at the far right.



Ferdinand Schneider in front of William J. Kohl's Store—1908

#533-49-8



Bitter Neumann Company 1928



Schorer's Blacksmith Shop [ca. 1902]

**#533-49-12**

In 1901 Rudolph Schorer was employed as a blacksmith for Reische; in 1902 Schorer bought the blacksmith shop and the wagon shop. He moved both buildings across the street and remodeled them into one 50 x 54 foot building. He sold the building and retired from the trade in 1952.



Neumann Plumbing & Heating Renovation-2021

[Site of old Schorer Blacksmith Shop]





Millersville Looking East ca. 1920

Original Bitter Neumann Store

Neumann Plumbing & Heating [former Schorer Blacksmith Shop]



Millersville Looking East-2021

### Arno Usadel's Tin Shop 533-269-4



In 1912 Arno Usadel built the first tin shop in Millersville. It was two stories high and located on the south side of Millersville Avenue on the west side of Bitter Neumann. The lot was formerly occupied by William Kohl's Wagon Shop and Reische's Blacksmith Shop. The shops were purchased by Rudolph Schorer in 1902 for his blacksmith shop. He moved the buildings across the street directly opposite the Bitter-Neumann Store and combined the two buildings into one. Usadel died in 1918; a victim of the influenza epidemic. In 1920 his cousin Roland Neumann took over the business. With the outstanding growth of business and the need for more modern equipment, the sheet metal department began including heating, plumbing milk machinery, etc.

In 1927 Roland Neumann incorporated his sheet metal & plumbing business into the Bitter-Neumann Company. As business growth continued the company bought and remodeled the old Rudolph Schorer blacksmith shop across the street; it became the new plumbing and heating department headquarters. The old tin shop was used for storage.



"Fritz" Boedecker—Plumber

In 1960 Fredrick "Fritz" Boedecker, son-in-law of the late Roland Neumann, partnered with Carl Harms and organized Neumann Plumbing & Heating, Inc. The old tin shop was no longer being used and it was torn down in 1960 to make room for a larger customer parking area for the Bitter-Neumann Company. The old shop was torn down in 1960. It has remained an empty lot to this day.



Millersville Looking East—1927



Millersville Looking East—1942



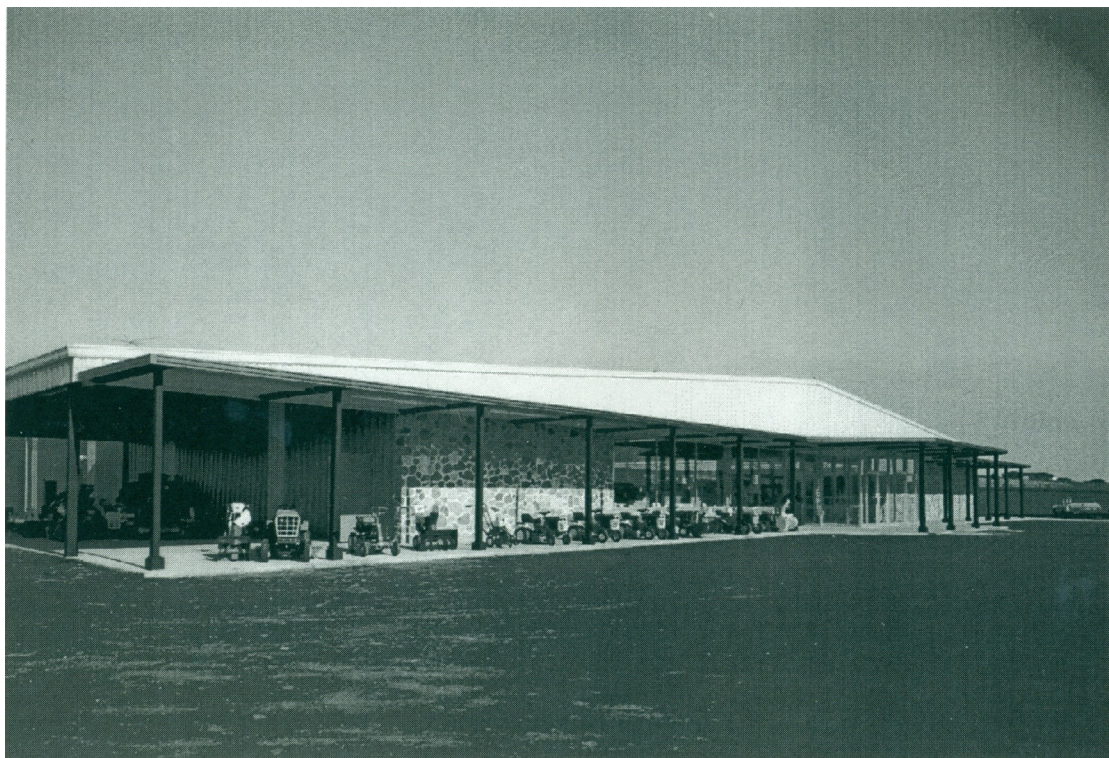
Original Bitter Neumann Store-2021



Harold Bitter in front of Bitter Neumann's Bargain Mill #533-298 (13)  
 Unique Sales Promotion — "Free Pony With Kelvinator"

In 1964 Harold came up with a unique sales promotion to sell refrigerators. He told the story in 1989.

*"My uncle sold ponies and they weren't going well, so we made a deal with him and offered a free pony with the purchase of a refrigerator. We sold 20 refrigerators that weekend, which was a lot at the time, and do you know what? We had those ponies in a little corral outside of the store, and those people spent more time picking out their pony than they did their refrigerator."*



Howards Grove Store—1971

**#200-747-2**

TVs and Appliances

#200-794-3



#200-794-2





Lawn and Garden

#200-794-4



Hardware and Housewares

#200-794-6



Grocery Department #200-794-5





Tietze's Piggly Wiggly-2021  
 [Bitter Neumann's Former Howards Grove Store]



Former Bitter Neumann Garden Center  
 [6,000 square foot steel building, just south of the main building, opened for business in 1979]