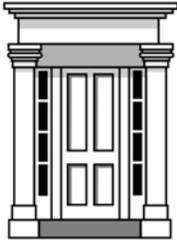


SHEBOYGAN COUNTY



HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
CENTER

The Researcher

The Newsletter of the Sheboygan County
Historical Research Center
Volume XXXII Number 3 February 2022

The Researcher is sponsored by Jay Christopher of Christopher Farm & Gardens.

Bitter Neumann Celebrating 100 Years in Business in 2022



Bitter-Neumann Company is one of Sheboygan County's oldest and best loved small businesses. The family-owned furniture and appliance firm is celebrating its 100th year in business. Congratulations to the Radue family for a job well done.

The company had its start when Alfred Bitter bought William Kohl's general store in Millersville in 1922. Bitter was twenty-one years old at the time and did not have enough money for a large down payment so Kohl sold him the business with no money down and a long payment schedule.



Alfred Bitter had one employee in those days --- himself. At that time coffee sold for fifty cents per pound and sugar for forty cents per pound. While prices did change over the years, variety has always been a hallmark of the company.

Continued on page 4

Thoughts for a New Year

"As we start the new year, it is good for us to remember that we will live on as long as we are not forgotten by those who follow us. Let us keep our stories alive. You can give your artifacts to the local museum, but give your legacy to the Research Center by donating your family documents, photographs, images, stories, and financial bequests." S.K.R.

Forgotten Facts in Wisconsin History

The first "Cheesehead" was not worn at a Green Bay Packers game. It was worn at a Milwaukee Brewers game in 1987 and was made from a couch cushion painted yellow with holes burned in it.

History Matters

A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.
Marcus Garvey

If you don't know history, then you don't know anything. You are a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree.
Michael Crichton

The Sheboygan County Historical Research Center is located at 518 Water Street in Sheboygan Falls.

Open Tuesday through Friday, 9:00am – 4:00pm.

Closed February 21, 2022 through March 4, 2022 for archiving

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The Researcher is the official newsletter of the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin 53085.

It is published six times per year in August, October, December, February, April and June.

The Research Center is the local history archive for Sheboygan County and areas surrounding the county. It is a repository for paper records of all kinds.

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schrc.org

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Go Paperless. Receive *The Researcher* via email. Save paper. Save postage and receive a more colorful newsletter. Contact Katie at research@schrc.org to sign up.

New Members

Welcome!

Nikki Batzel, Cedar Grove (Sponsored by Lois Daane)
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Charles Hinkle, Addison, MI
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Tom Martin, Racine (Sponsored by Steven Rogstad)
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Traci Schnell, Kiel
Robert Ziegelbauer, Sheboygan (Sponsored by Steven Rogstad)
Bridgitt Zielke, Kohler

2022 Sponsorships

A big thank you to:

H.C. Denison Co. for sponsoring our new speakers' series, Saloon Stories.
Sandy Mahlich, SCHRC member, for her continued sponsorship of Second Saturdays
Dr. Galan Frysinger for sponsoring SCHRC's new production studio
Justin Lorenz for sponsoring Taproom History
Jay Christopher for his continued sponsorship of *The Researcher*

Thanks so much to Chris Mauer, Tyler Johnson, Mike Miller, Naomi Morrison, James Kuplic, Steven Schmitt, Barbara Nagy, Steve Kestell, Virginia Jordan, Barbara Schirmer, Linda Gencius Fenlon and Beth Dippel for their donations to the 2021 Facebook Giving Tuesday.



Welcome a New Board Member

Steven Gallimore is a lifelong Sheboygan resident, with roots going back five generations.

A graduate of University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Steve holds a Bachelor of Business Administration degree with an emphasis in Marketing.

He is responsible for sales and marketing, human resources and IT for Skana Aluminum Company in Manitowoc, being the second-longest tenured employee in the company.

His primary passion is genealogical research and he has accumulated over 4,300 names which connect either his or his wife Mary's family through blood or marriage.

When not preoccupied with historical pursuits, Steve enjoys walking, hiking, traveling, and watching the Green Bay Packers. He and his wife, Mary, have three grown children.

The Research Center welcomes Steve to its Board of Directors!

The Researcher is sponsored by Jay Christopher of Christopher Farm & Gardens



“LET’S DEVELOP OUR CENTER”

Steven K. Rogstad
Executive Director

Like many people, each January I develop for myself a set of personal resolutions that I try to pay close attention to as the year unfolds. I usually make three of them: one that is easy (so I can experience some instant gratification), one that gives me a little bit of trouble (so I do not take easy ones for granted), and a difficult one that requires me to give some time, energy, thought, and planning to throughout the entire year. (One year I even printed my resolutions on lime green florescent paper which I displayed in my office at work and home as a constant reminder of where I was on my journey to completing them).

Similarly, I establish goals for my work at the Research Center for every calendar year. One of the goals has already come to fruition. The Center is starting a new program series we are calling “Saloon Stories,” which will take place at Chris & Sue’s Place on County Road C near Plymouth, starting this February and going through May. The Center wishes to thank SCHRC member James Testwuide and H.C. Denison in Sheboygan for sponsoring the entire series! The series will begin on Thursday, February 17, 6:30 – 7:30 pm, with my program, “What Happened to Lincoln’s Corpse?” Mark your calendars and come early to enjoy some great food. Check out the SCHRC website and Facebook page for ongoing information about the series. I hope to see you there!

Another goal I have made is to provide information to our members and supporters about remembering the Center in estate planning discussions. Recent statistics are showing that Americans are meeting more often with attorneys and financial advisors to review their estate plans, revise modifications, and create the needed documents to adequately reflect their wishes in their Will, Financial Power of Attorney, beneficiary designations, health care directives, and charitable beneficiaries.

The current economy is presenting many tax-saving gift opportunities for people by encouraging them to (1) rebalance a portfolio and avoid taxes by making a gift, (2) save taxes with a gift from an IRA, or (3) make a gift that comes back to you and saves taxes. As it relates to IRAs, a gift can be made by doing an “IRA Charitable Rollover” or through an estate gift. Please give thoughtful consideration to these options and remember the Research Center when you make financial planning decisions and directives.

Finally, we are already in the planning stages for the Center’s “Tree-mendous Celebration” that will take place during the 2022 holiday celebration next winter. It will be a notable event to be remembered by Sheboygan County. We asked for 100 artificial Christmas trees on our Facebook page a few weeks ago and already have acquired over 60! Thanks to all the members, supporters, and friends who so far have responded and donated trees. I am not yet ready to reveal all the details about what will be a grand affair for Sheboygan Falls and Sheboygan County, but I will need a working planning committee soon to help the Center put it all together. If you want to be part of something special – something exciting – something unique – we could use you in some capacity! More details will be forthcoming, but let me know if you are interested.

We are beginning our Annual Campaign this month. Please continue to support us with your financial gifts. They are crucial to the organization’s ongoing financial sustainability. Please consider increasing your annual donation. We are expanding our programs, increasing our membership base, enhancing our reach into new communities of supporters, and attracting new collections from all over Sheboygan County. All of the projects and collections, however, carry a cost, but the cost is worth it because the Center is the holder – the steward – the archive - for the history of Sheboygan County. We must always be worthy of that mission and steadfast in our efforts to promote what we could have and sustain what we do have.

Please give generously this year and enable us to do so much more!

Thank you for all you do to support and help develop our Research Center!

(Continued from page 1—Bitter Neumann)



Above: John Erbstoesz's cheese factory built in 1886 stood across the alley on the east side of the original store . The upper story, known as the community hall, served as a social center. Below: the expanded Bitter Neumann store in Howards Grove.



As late as 1988 the flavor of the old time general store was still to be found. A *Sheboygan Press* article stated that, "Milk, eggs, hammers, toasters, and cans of paint all still go through the check-out together at Bitter-Neumann."

Bitter's business grew quickly. He purchased the cheese factory next door and had the Kohl store, the alley and the cheese factory enclosed into one much larger store

Bitter's new store expanded and grew at the Millersville location. In 1927, he merged with Roland Neumann, who had a plumbing store nearby. Joining them was Walter Mueller, a neighboring feed mill operator. These three friends worked together for over thirty years as Bitter-Neumann & Company.

During the 1930s, the company, then run by Alfred Bitter, Roland Neumann and Walter Mueller, carried an extensive line of dry goods, groceries notions and a large line of general hardware. They also installed and serviced all kinds of plumbing and heating systems. They specialized in Kohler enamel and plumbing ware and were fully equipped to properly install any kind of plumbing. In addition they sold milking machines, paints and oils, and had a tin shop, all of which were of great benefit to local farmers.

As the newspaper stated, Bitter Neumann provided, "an adequate trading center for people residing in that locality."

The Sheboygan Press of 26 August 1942 reported on the gala three day celebration that was held in conjunction with the opening of the newly remodeled Bitter-Neumann store in downtown Millersville: The story follows: The most interesting event ever celebrated in Millersville was the three-day opening of the newly enlarged and modernized store of the Bitter-Neumann and Company. On Thursday, opening day, Mr. and Mrs. William Kohl and son, Walter, and daughter, Mrs. Friedola Bodestab, of Sheboygan, came to extend their personal congratulations. The Kohl family were the first operators of what is now the Bitter-Neumann store.

On Thursday evening the Sheboygan Grocers' Association, headed by the "Umph" band, with John Herman carrying Old Glory, came marching and serenading down the village street to the tune of "On Wisconsin", into the new store, much to the delight and surprise of everyone. After about an hour of serenading and congratulations, they left with a final "Aloha Oe" and marched up to Al Doro's rathskeller, where a surprise party was given in honor of the Bitter-Neumann and company.

On Saturday evening about 150 village friends surprised the Bitter Neumann company by gathering in front of the store, with the Sheboygan Harmony Boys saluting to the tune of "Hail! Hail! The Gang's All Here!" After about an hour's visit and serenade at the store, they all gathered at Al Doro's hall, where a dance was given in the company's honor.

The business continued its growth and eventually included seventy four employees in sales or service positions. Bitter purchased Neumann's interest in the company when Neumann died in 1957. He purchased Mueller's interest when he retired in 1965.

Bitter Neumann Store In City Opens Monday

The new Bitter Neumann Co. Store in Sheboygan will open Monday, July 18, Harold Bitter, president of the Howards Grove-based retailing firm, announced today.

The store, located in the former D.J. Nelesen building, 827 N. 14th St., will carry a full line of appliances, as well as lawn and garden goods.

Store hours are: Mondays and Fridays, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and Saturdays, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Ed Radue is manager of the Sheboygan store.

Delivery, installation and servicing of goods will be handled from the Howards Grove store, Bitter added.

**Sheboygan Press
July 14, 1983**

In 1983, Bitter-Neumann & Company opened a furniture and appliance store at 827 North 14th Street in Sheboygan. The second floor furniture display was completed in 1984.

The business has been a family affair from the beginning. When Alfred Bitter's sons came of age they worked in the family business. Alfred Jr., better known as "Butch" and his brother Harold ran the business after the retirement of Alfred, Sr. Butch died in 1987 and the company was then run by Harold and his son-in-law, Ed Radue. At that time Radue ran the Sheboygan operation while Bitter took charge of the Howards Grove store.

One of the most unique sales promotions in which the company was involved offered a free pony with the purchase of a refrigerator. Harold Bitter reminisced in a *Sheboygan Press* article on 7 January 1989: My uncle sold ponies and they weren't going real well, so we made a deal with him and offered a free pony with the purchase of a refrigerator. We sold twenty refrigerators that weekend, which was a lot at that 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."

In 1990, Harold Bitter decided it was time for him to slow down a little. He leased the grocery department to Bill's Piggly Wiggly. At the same time he sold the appliance, T.V. and furniture departments to Ed and Janet (Bitter) Radue. This sale also included the related service shops.

Ed and Janet Radue bought the Sheboygan property (formerly known as "D. J. Nelesen") from Don and Betty Nelesen. On 15 October 1990 the papers were signed and all of the merchandise was moved from Howards Grove to Sheboygan.

In 2007, ownership changed hands to Ed's and Jan's sons Tim and Dan, and in 2012, they opened a second location in Manitowoc.

The Radues have tried to maintain and even improve upon the values and service which Alfred Bitter started and Butch and Harold perpetuated. They have also retained the use of the same motto --- "We deliver, install and service everything we sell."

Throughout its history the store was open evenings, primarily to cater to farmers' time schedules. It has never been open on Sundays. In 1988, Harold Bitter, president of the company, explained, "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."

The original building was enlarged each time more space was needed until the business literally outgrew its location. In 1971, a new store was opened in Howards Grove at 714 South Wisconsin Drive, just a half mile from the original store. This new facility was 25,000 sq.ft. but it also soon proved to be inadequate.

In June of 1979, the company celebrated the Grand Opening of its Lawn and Garden Center facilities. A 6,000 sq.ft. steel building, located just south of the main building (later Palm's Power Center) housed the new sales and service area. The company carried a full line of lawn and garden equipment and supplies and serviced all of the equipment it sold.

In June of 1982, the company began using a new 10,600 foot addition. All stock was expanded and new lines of merchandise were added to the inventory. Harold Bitter, president of the firm said: The village is growing and we expanded to meet the needs of the community. We hope we can keep doing a good job and increase our volume. Like the saying goes, "If you stand still, you're going backwards." The company's motto is "We deliver, install and service everything we sell." We have eight servicemen to back up the products we sell.

With this addition the grocery line was nearly tripled in size. Baked goods were prepared fresh daily in the store's own bakery. Shoppers could get their groceries plus lawn mowers, garden tillers, chain saws, televisions, stereos, ranges, radios, dishwashers, air conditioners, microwave ovens, shoes, and even a limited amount of clothing.

The Era of the Wildcat

In July of 1926, newspapers across southern Wisconsin posted the headline, *Wildcat Brewery Raided at Elkhart Lake*. Operated by local businessmen, Charles Weissgerber and Frank Stevens in what was known as the old Charles Eggert cheese factory, the brewery was raided by federal agents from Milwaukee and Chicago. Its contents were seized and destroyed. Its doors shuttered.

Located just inside the northern city limits of Elkhart Lake near the old racetrack on Maple Street, it had been in operation since the fall of 1925. Neighbors did notice an abundance of electrical work done by Mr. Stevens just before opening, but no one thought it unusual, as Mr. Stevens had a license to produce near beer.

The agents reached Elkhart Lake before noon on the day of the raid on a tip that the brewery was in full operation. Production turned out an immense quantity of beer each week that contained far more alcohol than the legal limit allowed.

According to agents, the beer from the vats was dumped directly into the city's sewers as a group of beer sympathizers lamented at the amber liquid being wasted. The atmosphere was much like that of a funeral.

In addition to the brewery, Stevens owned a roadhouse ½ mile east of the Osthoff, formerly operated by Al Roth. All men involved in this illicit endeavor were well-known around Elkhart and Crystal Lakes. Now just what was a wildcat operation? Most were semi-legal, on the face making near beer and other products which needed alcohol, but behind the scenes making sure the product had far more alcohol than was permitted. Others were completely uncontrolled and unlicensed. Often, they turned out questionable and dangerous product while operating in a pop-up fashion. Here today. Gone tomorrow.

Wildcat operators were largely recruited from ex-distillers, brewers and liquor dealers who secured licenses for not-fit-for-consumption product. This was a little-known aspect of Prohibition. The alcohol involved was safe for consumption, but falsely labeled as REJECTED in order to keep it out of circulation. This booze made its way to over-the-counter medicines, soft drink parlors, delis and fruit stands. Beer was popular at church picnics and family gatherings. Sacramental wine was legal for church services and synagogue ceremonies. Permits increased exponentially as more people entered the wildcat market and sold their questionable booze and beer to the public.

Many Wisconsin breweries made near beer in order to survive. Near beer was a fermented malt beverage, much like beer, that could not contain more than one half of one percent alcohol by volume. Sounds OK, right? Maybe not. Once the alcohol was removed, the beer was flat with no frothy head. Carbon dioxide was added to carbonate it, and a little sugar was often included to improve the taste. But it was a poor substitute for the great German lagers and bocks Sheboyganites were used to. It fooled no one.

In 1926, Wisconsin voters approved a referendum amending the Volsted Act that allowed the manufacture and sale of beer with 2.75 percent alcohol, something closer to normal.



On March 22, 1933, eighteen days after taking office, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Beer and Wine Revenue Act, a law that levied a federal tax on all alcoholic beverages. It was desperately needed to raise revenue for the federal government. 3.2 beer could be sold. Wine was legal.

On December 5, 1933, the Twenty-first Amendment was ratified, and national prohibition ended, taking with it the wildcat breweries and distilleries. Such rogue operations may have disappeared with the end of Prohibition, but they were an interesting and newsworthy segment of local history.

Unnamed cheese factory retrofitted to be a wildcat distillery.



Sheboygan Press, June 29, 1923

Christmas Trees Galore

We asked and you responded. Thank you for your donations.

Bob Karste	Cindy Nettles	Darlene Reinke	Anne Berenz
Tammy Stebe	Christine Hanson	Sandy Brunnbauer	Cathy Isa
Nicki Hein	Christine Stagakis	Sharon Mueller	Amanda Flores
Joan Breitzman	Enid Luma	Maureen Zorn	Mike Kitzerow
Jean Sweet	Debra O'Brien	Nancy Behrens	Cheryl Velie
Chris Yelle	Chris Kopetsky	Kathy Ferguson	Carol Carriveau
Cheryl Roszak	Nancy Van Voorhis	Erica Fink	Christ Church,
Cindy Woyak	Scott Brammer	Larry Hackbarth	Racine
Clair Grohskopf	Katherine Wagner	Joan King	Ken Richter
Richard Daniels	Carol Thackrey	Mike King	

Programming and Classes

Second Saturdays

9:30am at the Plymouth Arts Center, 520 East Mill Street, Plymouth
Saturday, February 12, 2022 - The Legacy of Hank Aaron with Tom Armstrong
Saturday, March 12, 2022 - Lincoln - Tallmann House, Tim Maahs
Saturday, April 9, 2022 - Sheboygan's Concordia Singing Society, Bruce Timm and choir

Genealogy Classes

1:30am at the Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls
Monday, March 14, 2022 - Keeping it all Organized
Monday, April 11, 2022 - FamilySearch and Ancestry

Saloon Stories

Chris & Sue's, W3820 Co Rd C, Plymouth, 6:30pm to 7:30pm
Thursday, February 17, 2022 - What Happened to Lincoln's Corpse? - Steven Rogstad
Thursday, March 17, 2022 - Milwaukee Mafia with Sheboygan Connections - Gavin Schmitt

SCHRC is closed February 21, 2022 through March 4, 2022 for Archiving

DNA Genealogy Seminar Cancelled

The genealogy seminar planned for April 29th has been cancelled. The scheduled instructor has cancelled due to Covid 19. Alternate plans are being made, but we are not yet certain of a date and instructor. Stay tuned.

Sheboygan Falls Locals - May 27, 1939 --

Mrs. Harry Hill entertained at her home Thursday afternoon in observance of her daughter, Nancy's, fourth birthday anniversary. Guests included 10 little friends.

August 1, 1929

Big Grand OPENING

of the new

H. GROSS GROCERY

North 8th Street and Bell Avenue

Friday and Saturday August 2-3

We invite you and welcome you to come and see our new I. G. A. Food Market

We were forced to build this most modern food market to care better for the many new accounts we are now serving and adding each day. We have equipped our new food market with the latest fixtures and equipment to conform to the most modern and up-to-the-minute methods of merchandising. We invite you to serve yourself, if you wish, or to receive prompt, courteous personal attention.

Through our affiliation with the I. G. A. we have the strongest buying organization in existence behind us.

SUGAR, granulated, 10 lbs. 57c	Special Prices on Fruit and Vegetables For This Sale	SARDINES, Silver Buckle, 1 lb. Oval Tomato or Mustard sauce, 2 for 25c
PORK & BEANS, Campbell's, 3 cans 25c	Demonstration on Johnson's Cookies and I. G. A. Coffees	SALT, S. B., 2 lb. pkg. 9c
PEACHES, Broadway, halves or sliced, in syrup, 2 cans 49c	JOHNSON'S COOKIES, 1 lb. 23c, 2 lbs for 43c	DATES, Bagdad, pkg. 14c
CORN, Circus brand, No. 2 can, 3 for 29c	BREAD, Rye or Wheat, full size loaf 10c	RAISINS, S. B. 15 oz. Seedless, 2 pkgs. 21c
PEAS, Polar brand, No. 2, 2 attached, 2 for 27c	LOLLY POPS, each 3c	CORN FLAKES, Silver Buckle or Kellogg's, 2 large pkgs. 23c
MILK, Silver Buckle, tall can, 3 for 29c	MALTED MILK, Thompson, per can 49c	PUFFED WHEAT, Quaker, 2 pkgs. 23c
SOAP CHIPS, I. G. A., 2 pkgs. 37c		PUFFED RICE, Quaker, per pkg. 15c
SALMON, Silver Buckle, 1 lb. tall chinook, per can 33c	FREE! FREE! FREE! Every one entering our store or with every order will have an opportunity of winning the following prizes: 5 BASKETS OF GROCERIES, 1 SACK 40 LBS. OF FLOUR The awards will be made Saturday night at 8 o'clock.	OLIVES, Broadway, Quart 43c, pint 24c
SARDINES, G brand, 1/2 OIL, 2 cans 15c		DELL PICKLES, Broadway, Whole, quart 25c
DAWN DONUTS, per dozen 19c		MATCHES, Ohio Red Label, 6 boxes for 19c
CANDY BARS, Ass't, varieties, all 5c values, 3 for 10c	Novelties for the Children	FRUIT JAR RINGS, 3 pkgs. for 16c
CRACKERJACK, 3 for 10c		

8th and Bell Ave. H. GROSS GROCERY PHONE 3163-W

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The Radue Family (L to R): Janet Radue, Tim Radue, Dan Radue, Jenny Radue, Ashley Radue and Amy Radue Binsfeld

Janet is a Legacy Society member and advocate for The Research Center.