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## **The Schroeder Brothers Company of Two Rivers, 1891-1991: a family tradition of retail business. Monograph 69 1991**

Fay, Georgia M.

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MANITOWOC COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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# The Schroeder Brothers Company of Two Rivers, 1891-1991: A Family Tradition of Retail Business

By: Georgia M. Fay

**Editor's Note:** *Schroeder's Department Store, located on the southeast corner of Washington and 17th Streets in Two Rivers, marks its 100th anniversary in 1991. Founded in 1891 by four sons of Peter Joseph Schroeder, the business grew and flourished, and today is one of the leading department stores of Manitowoc County.*

*Over the years, Schroeder Brothers Company has played an important role in local merchandising, retail trade and banking. It is the oldest department store in Two Rivers and remains a family business operated by third generation members of the Schroeder family.*

*The author of the monograph is the great granddaughter of John Schroeder, one of the four Schroeder brothers who began the store a century ago. Her maternal grandfather, Hubert, was the second eldest son of John Schroeder.*

## THE SCHROEDER FAMILY

Peter Joseph Schroeder (1831-1917) had learned the blacksmith trade in his homeland of Germany before immigrating to the United States and settling in Two Creeks, Wisconsin in 1857. He was the first blacksmith to settle in the Two Creeks area. It was here that Mr. Schroeder met Angeline Rollinger who had emigrated from Germany with her family in 1856 and had also settled in the Two Creeks area. Mr. Schroeder and Miss Rollinger were married in Two Rivers in 1859. They purchased farmland within the township of Two Creeks where they prospered in farming and raised eight children: Peter, Joseph, Katherine, John, Mary, Theresa, Frank, and Frances.

Peter (1860-1954), the eldest child, left the family farm and worked three

years at the O. Torrison merchantile in Manitowoc. Then in 1891, with financial help from his father, Peter began his own merchantile in Two Rivers. Peter also was instrumental in starting the Two Rivers Savings Bank, and was a founding officer of the E.J. Vodra Canning Company of Two Rivers in 1901. Peter served as the mayor of Two Rivers from 1901-1904, was school commissioner from 1896-1904, and supervisor of the second ward 1893-1894. Peter also served on the city's first Water and Light Commission for four years and was one of Two River's first councilmen from 1925-1929. He married Ida Schwantes.

Joseph (1862-1929) pursued several different jobs before joining his brother Peter in the merchantile business. He was involved in the fishing business and then spent two years with the Coast Guard in Chicago. Joseph also spent several years in northern Wisconsin as a lumberjack before joining Peter in 1892 at the merchantile. He served for 25 years as a justice of the peace and was also a Two Rivers police judge. Joseph married Mary Ann Short in 1890. They had one daughter, Helen, before Mrs. Schroeder died in 1898. Two years later, Joseph married Isabella Wolf and together they had seven children: Cornelius (Neal), Hilary,



*Schroeder Brothers Store soon after its completion in 1899.*



*Schroeder Family Portrait: Standing, left to right, Joseph, Frank, Kate, Theresa, John, Peter; seated, Frances, Peter (father), Angeline (mother), Mary.*

Claude, Horace (Pete), Margaret, Katherine, and Gregory (Gary). Joseph was responsible for the Dry Goods and Men's Shoe departments. Descendants of the Joseph Schroeder family operate the department store today.

Katherine, known as Kate, (1863-1947) married Peter Beth in 1894. Peter Beth was one of the original stockholders when Schroeder Brothers became incorporated in 1904. Katherine and Peter Beth had three children: Angeline, Peter and George.

John J. (1864-1936) joined his brothers in 1893. He became vice-president of Schroeder Brothers when it incorporated and later was vice-president of the Two Rivers Savings Bank. John was responsible for the Grocery Department. In 1888, John married Elizabeth Bingen and they had ten children: Oscar, Mary, Elizabeth, Anna, Hubert, John (Ham), Louis, Raymond (Happy), Paul and Gertrude.

Mary (1869-1964) entered the convent in 1894 and became Sister Mary Hubert of the BVM Order (Sisters of

Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary) which has its mother house at Dubuque, Iowa.

Theresa, known as Tressie, (1871-1940) married John Kloeckner and they had no children. Tressie worked in the office of Schroeder Brothers for a short time.

Frank (1874-1963) attended Spencian Business College of Milwaukee before entering the Schroeder

Brothers Company. In 1906, Frank married Ervine DeLille and they had five children: Joseph, Frances, Mildred, Genevieve and Elaine. In addition to being treasurer of Schroeder Brothers Co., Frank was cashier of the Two Rivers Savings Bank.

Frances (1876-1907) lost her life in the wreck of the steamer Columbia off Sheltered Cove Coast of California on July 21, 1907. There is a picture of



*Schroeder's mercantile began in the B. Mayer building, located at the northwest corner of Cedar (now 18th) and Washington Streets, in 1891.*

Frances hanging in her honor in the Men's department of Schroeders. A commemorative plaque nearby indicates she was director of the Two Rivers kindergarten from 1899-1907.

### SCHROEDER BROTHERS STORE

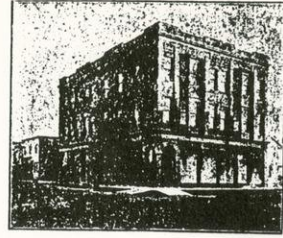
Peter, the eldest son of Peter Joseph and Angeline Rollinger Schroeder, opened a small dry goods store in Two Rivers in 1891 with the financial help of his father. The store occupied the first floor of the B. Mayer building located on the northwest corner of Washington and Cedar (now 18th) streets. The Deja Martin funeral home is currently on that corner. The following year Joseph, who had already pursued other interests, joined his brother in the business. John joined his brothers in the third year of operation and Frank joined during the fifth year.

The Schroeder's merchantile business prospered and eventually more space was needed to serve the population of Two Rivers which by 1900 had grown to 3,784 residents. After eight years in business and with additional financial assistance from their father, the four Schroeder brothers purchased land on the southeast corner

of Washington and Walnut (now 17th) Streets and in 1899 erected a large red brick building. An advertisement in Schmidt's Two Rivers Business Directory for 1901-1902 indicates the store carried dry goods, groceries, crockery, farm produce, gent's furnishing goods, boots and shoes.

The large commercial building, bordering the southeast side of the public square, was 50 feet by 85 feet and three stories high. The store occupied the basement and first floors of the new building. A privately owned bank, which Peter Schroeder began as a service to his customers, was also located on the first floor. The second story of the building housed doctor and lawyer offices. Several fraternal organizations leased the third floor space. In 1904, the brothers incorporated to become

## Schroeder Brothers,



DEALERS IN

Dry Goods, Groceries, Crockery and  
**FARM PRODUCE.**

WE CARRY A FULL LINE OF

Gents' Furnishing Goods,

AND OUR LINE OF

**BOOTS & SHOES**

HAS NO EQUAL IN THE CITY.

We pay the highest Cash Price for all Farm Produce.

Give us your attention.

**SCHROEDER BROS.,**

Washington & Walnut Streets.

**TWO RIVERS,**

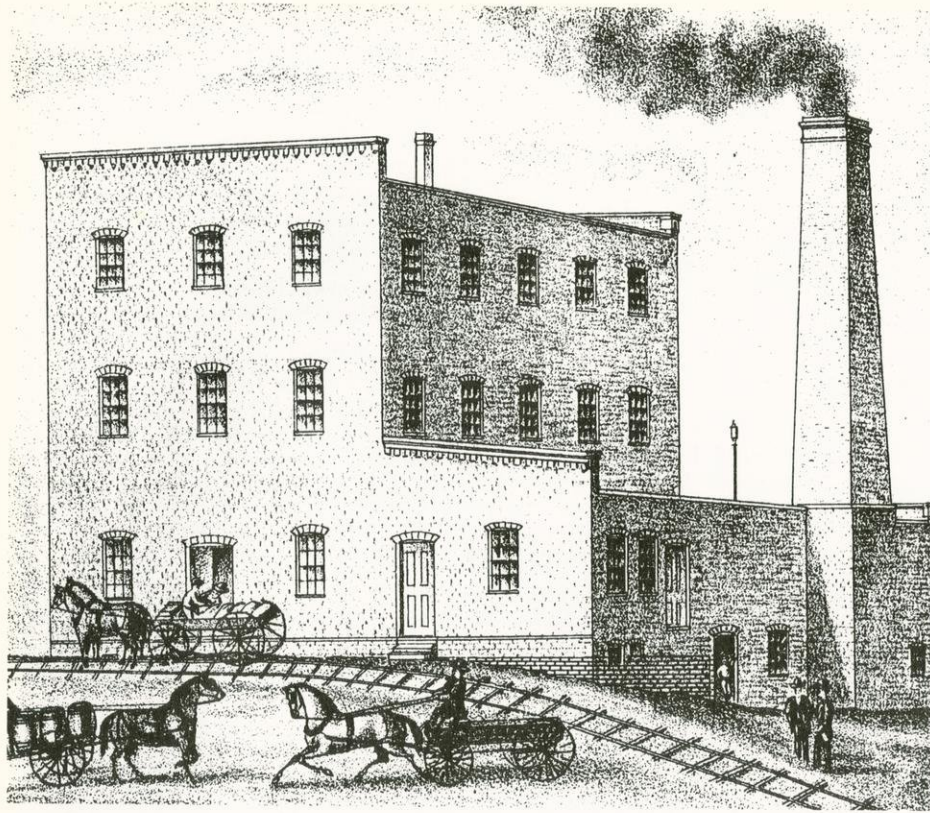
**WISCONSIN.**

1901 Schroeder Brothers advertisement.

Schroeder Bros. Co. The first officers and stockholders were Peter Schroeder (president), John Schroeder (vice-president), Joseph Schroeder (secretary), Frank



Schroeder's carried a variety of goods in a small space as seen in this first floor view.



*Albert Wehausen's Flour Mill, later Schroeder's Mill, was located at the foot of Washington Street along the Neshoto or West Twin River.*

Schroeder (treasurer), Peter Joseph Schroeder and Peter Beth (married to Katherine Schroeder).

#### **THE MILL**

In 1895, Peter Schroeder purchased the old Albert Wehausen flouring mill on the West Twin River at the foot of Washington Street, where the parking lot for M&M Lunch is located today. A flour, feed and grain warehouse had been added to the property by 1898. The mill received and transported hay, wheat, oats, rye and barley by boat and rail. Between 1910 and 1918, hay, flour and grain were marketed on a large scale. Two Rivers became a trading center for hundreds of farmers in the area. It was common for 15 to 20 carloads of baled hay, covered with canvas, to be piled along the tracks awaiting shipment. As the number of horses used in transportation and farming declined, the need for hay and grain, which was traded locally, was reduced during the 1920's. Schroeder Brothers operated the mill for many years before it was sold to Twin Rivers Coop in 1964.

#### **TWO RIVERS SAVINGS BANK**

The Two Rivers Savings Bank was chartered on April 27, 1902. The bank incorporated with \$32,500.00 of capital stock and surpluses. It was operated by Peter and Frank Schroeder for the next three decades. Originally, the bank occupied only a

small area in the center of the first floor of Schroeder Brothers store. In 1918, the bank was moved to a larger area in the northwest corner on the main floor (currently the Children's department) to accommodate more customers and offer more security.

In 1933 the Two Rivers Savings Bank merged with the Tisch Mills State Bank and the Mishicot State Bank. Total deposits at that time amounted to about \$612,000.00. Due to its continuing growth and need for a larger area, the bank relocated in 1935 to the Empire Building located on the northeast corner of Washington and 18th Streets (where Hardee's is located today). A new bank building was erected at 1718 West Park Street in 1969. Local residents still refer to this bank as the "Red Bank" because of its original location in Schroeder's red brick store.

The Schroeder family sold its interest and stock in the Two Rivers Savings bank in 1979 when Citizens Bancorporation acquired the bank. The bank has undergone several mergers and is now Norwest Bank.

#### **GROWTH AND SERVICE AT SCHROEDER'S STORE**

Since the original Schroeder Brothers store was built in 1899, it has been remodeled and enlarged several times. The first remodeling occurred in 1915 after a fire, started by a lit cigar in a wastebasket on the



*Goods and groceries from Schroeder's were originally delivered by horse and wagon.*

Peter Schroeder..... President  
 Jos. S. Schroeder .....Vice President  
 Frank Schroeder.....Cashier

# TWO RIVERS SAVINGS BANK

Capital and Surplus  
**\$50,000**

Profits **\$18 000**

DIRECTORS:

Peter Schroeder    Jos. S. Schroeder  
 John J. Schroeder    Frank Schroeder

**TWO RIVERS, - WISCONSIN.**

*1921 advertisement for the Two Rivers Savings Bank*

third floor, resulted in water damage throughout the store. In 1916, a large addition at the rear of the store was added to increase space. The office was moved to a mezzanine area halfway between first and second floors where it is located today. At this point in time, Schroeder Brothers had a trolley system for sending money and checks to the office where the sale was rung up and a receipt

returned to the customer. The sales clerk used this time to chat with customers, exchange pleasantries and catch up on local happenings.

The grocery section occupied much of the first floor of the new addition and had its main door on 17th Street. Regular customers of the grocery knew when Ash Wednesday had arrived because John Schroeder, who operated the grocery department, would always put out flower and vegetable seeds in a rack at the entrance on 17th Street.

Schroeder Brothers grocery served many of its customers by delivering groceries to their homes. Groceries were originally delivered by horse-drawn wagon. Later, they were hauled by truck. Delivery was an important service of the time since few housewives had horsedrawn carriages or wagons, or, in later years, automobiles. Women could send a grocery list with a child or place a telephone call and have their groceries delivered without actually having to go to the store themselves.

The new 1916 addition had a second story in which to expand. With the added space for different departments, the bank also had more room into which it could expand. Before the bank could be moved, however, the

floor in the northwest corner of the store had to be reinforced to support the weight of a large safe. The front of the store also was remodeled. The original corner entrance of the building was removed and a new entrance built on Washington Street. The new corner area was then occupied by the bank. The walls surrounding the bank on the inside of the store did not extend to the ceiling. This design made the Two Rivers Savings Bank part of, yet separate from, Schroeder Brothers store.

During the years of the Depression, Schroeder Brothers continued to serve the community. With a recovering economy and the move of the Two Rivers Savings Bank to the Empire Building in 1935, it was time to remodel again. New departments such as Rugs and Linoleum, Draperies, and Appliances were added. In 1937, after the Suettinger Hardware store burned, Schroeder Brothers leased a converted barn on their property along 17th Street to Walter and Helen Suettinger. Helen was Joseph Schroeder's eldest child. It was during this time that Suettinger Hardware coined the phrase, "We've got it...if we can find it." Suettinger's remained on 17th Street until 1958 when the hardware store moved to its present location on 16th Street.



*Two Rivers Savings Bank in its corner location in the Schroeder store about 1918.*

Beginning in 1941, with the entry of the United States in World War II, many items sold at Schroeder Brothers had to be rationed. For example, the number of shoes that could be purchased in a year was limited. Ration coupons for shoes were collected from customers and turned into manufacturers when placing orders for more shoes. The Grocery department was especially vulnerable to rationed goods such as sugar and meats. Other items, while not subject to rationing, were often hard to get.

With the end of the War in 1945, factories that had supplied materials for the war effort returned to producing domestic goods. In 1946, Schroeder Brothers expanded their Appliance department to offer the new electric refrigerators, ranges and automatic clothes dryers that were available for homes. The first electric automatic clothes dryers were produced at Hamilton Manufacturing Company in Two Rivers. Also in 1946, the Grocery department became self service. Up until then, employees located the products a customer wanted from the store shelves. With the change to self service, customers

selected their own items and brought them to the check out line.

In 1953 Schroeder Brothers purchased property directly south of their store on Washington Street. Later, in the early 1960's, a one-story building was erected. The Sport Casual Shop occupied this space for many years. During the 1960's changes continued as departments expanded. Around 1960 the Rug and Linoleum department was discontinued and the doctor and lawyer offices on second floor moved out. The Grocery department was discontinued in 1964. As some departments closed, others expanded. The selection of Men's, Women's and Children's clothing has greatly expanded over the years.

In 1974, when the Casual Sport Shop closed, Schroeder Brothers once again expanded. Openings in the common wall between the buildings were made and the Ladies' Shoe and Lingerie departments occupied the new space. Both of these departments received a new look in 1988.

Other interior remodeling at Schroeder's has occurred within recent years. In 1986, 2,000 square feet on the lower level, formerly used

for storage, was remodeled for Appliance and Domestic departments. The Men's Shoe and Jacket departments were modernized in 1989. Future remodeling on both the main and second floors is also planned.

### THE FAMILY TRADITION

Over the past 100 years, many children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of the original founders have worked in the store. Today, the store is operated by John and Tim Schroeder who are grandsons of Joseph Schroeder. John is president, while Tim serves as secretary-treasurer. Their respective fathers, Gary and Hilary Schroeder, who operated the store for many years with their brother Neal, still come in on a part time basis to help out at the store in which they have spent all their working lives. Together they continue the family tradition of business and friendly personal service begun 100 years ago.



*The grocery section before the 1916 addition.*



Window display in 1948 for electric household appliances.

#### FURTHER READING

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*Today, grandsons John and Tim (at left) and their fathers, Hilary and Gary (at right) continue the family tradition of "customer service and a friendly smile" at Schroeder's Department Store.*

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**Schroeder Brothers Company**

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