

F8 South Bend Tribune

BACK IN TIME

Sunday, June 22, 2003

THROUGH THE YEARS

PEOPLE AND EVENTS



Wilson Brothers shirt factory was located on West Sample Street in South Bend.

Deal all sewed up

Wilson Brothers chose South Bend for shirt factory

Just columns will deal with different topics involving around our Michiana community and its history. The large number of industries here in Michiana contributed to our history, and what follows is a history of an important South Bend factory.

—Editor's note

(These excerpts are from a story that appeared in the South Bend Tribune on June 14, 1953.)

Wilson Brothers ... World Forum

By RAY EGGES

Please South Bend

The history of the mass production of menswear in the United States is first clearly seen in the fortunes of Wilson Brothers, that is celebrating its 70th year as one of South Bend's substantial industries.

The company, that came to this city in 1883, dates all the way back to 1883, however, when John Wilson, the eldest of four brothers, opened a retail men's clothing store in Cincinnati. Four years later, he moved to Chicago, where he met two other brothers, Wilson and Hugh, the firm moved to Chicago. The brothers looked to South Bend for their first expansion from Chicago, and it appears that they looked wisely. The company still maintains its executive and

THROUGH THE YEARS is a Michiana history column coordinated by Travis Chalk from the Northern Indiana Center for History. For more information about the column, visit www.cenhistory.org.

Wilson Brothers chose South Bend as its base of operations. Close to 1,000 persons are employed in Wilson's well-known brick buildings on West Sample Street, the first of which were constructed when the firm transferred part of its business here 70 years ago. The 1,000 workers in South Bend are about 200 more than in the firm's only plant in the form of a 100,000 sq. ft. plant in Louisville, Ky. The Wilson brothers, who hailed from Fletcher, Ohio, brought the business of making men's shirts by mass production methods soon after they had started their retail business in Chicago. At that time, all men's shirts were custom made, styled to suit the individual, and the brothers began making such garments, along with their retail business, to meet the demands of customers. When the brothers moved to Chicago in 1888, the shirt business became an increasingly large part of what had started out to be a retail business. They began thinking in terms of expansion and development, and their thoughts turned to South Bend. 80 miles away, and even then a growing industrial city.

The city's industrial reputation had been enhanced on a world-wide basis by such products as Studebaker wagons and carriages, Oliver plows, Mitchell Oliver tractors and Singer sewing machines. It was probably due to this fact that the Wilson brothers considered moving to South Bend.

W.D. Davies, the first Wilson manager here, set up shirt manufacturing operations on the second floor of a building on South Michigan Street, now the site of the State Theater. He soon found that he did not have enough space and that operations further were hampered because of the lack of elevator service. Faced with the problem of finding quarters or moving out of the city, Davies looked over the south and west sections of the city as possessing the best industrial sites, especially because several well-established industries already were in the area. Davies accordingly approached Oliver, pioneer South Bend plow manufacturer, who owned considerable property in the vicinity, and Oliver agreed to sell an industrial site to Wilson on the west side of a large oak grove on West Sample Street. At that time had no industry offering employment to women, and one of Oliver's requests was that he would sell the land only on the condition that the new shirt makers from Chicago employ 1,000 women in a 10-year period.

Next week ... Wilson Brothers shirt manufacturing go to work

REMEMBERING

SOUTH BEND'S FIVE-AND-TEN-CENT STORE

Memories of the old Kresge's

On the fourth Sunday of each month, the History page publishes readers' memories of a person, place or event.

This week, readers offer their recollections of Kresge's five-and-ten-cent store, which closed in 1974 after more than 50 years of business on the southeast corner of Michigan Street and Jefferson Boulevard in South Bend.

The lunch counter served the best barbecue sandwich in town. It was always busy. There were cake donuts frying, and they were still warm when sold — people would wait for them. Could only buy so many at a time — they were limited.

—Darlene Van De Voerde, Mishawaka

I recall the sound of dishes rattling from the Kresge's food service center, while descending the stairs or sitting at the counter. I think about it a lot and would love to hear it again.

—June Welby, South Bend

My fondest memories of Kresge's are of Saturday shopping trips with my mother, Alice O'Dell. We would travel to South Bend on the street car for 10 cents from Mishawaka. We would wander through all the departments. Mom would try to get the pretty hats and I would go to the music department where a lady would play any song you requested. I wanted to be just like her when I grew up.

—Harriet Menachuk, Mishawaka

At certain times Kresge's would have yo-yo professionals from Duncan Yo-yo giving demonstrations. If you bought a yo-yo, they would carve their initials into it.

—Ron Freshkne, LaPorte

I remember getting on the Niles train line with my girlfriend, and we would go downtown on a Saturday night. We would walk the mall but we had no more than \$5 to spend, and go to Kresge's and have one of their famous banana splits. The last time I got a banana split at Kresge's was, they had bananas at one above the lunch counter — and you got to pick a balloon, which concealed the price you would pay. We truly enjoyed it, especially when the banana split cost us 29 cents.

—Kathy B., Granger

Here are memories from Kresge's that I remember. The person who played the piano with the music of your choice in the basement. The finest gadget man who demonstrated a "new" fast way to peel potatoes or a rice cooker.

—John W. Hightberger, Michigan City

Aside from the monkey, the most



South Bend's Kresge's five-and-ten-cent store closed in 1974.

memorable future of the department was Sarah, a mynah bird — not for sale. She had a raspy-sounding voice and a variety of phrases that she said quite clearly.

Although she responded randomly when talked to, sometimes her responses were eerily appropriate. She once told a friend's young brother, "You're a bad boy!" when he had misbehaved. The kid responded, "How did she know?" When Sarah died, they got another mynah named Winston, but he was never the success that Sarah had been. He didn't have the vocabulary or the charm.

—Sandra McKinney, no town given

Goldfish tank where goldfish were brought to be sold. I was the one in the line of initiation, by initials into the Central Corners Social Club. But the big thing, I thought, was the donut machine in operation. What a sight to behold, and the smell of the donut machine made you salivate.

There was a day when downtown South Bend, Indiana, lost their "Disney World," via Kresge's at Michigan and Jefferson.

—Richard K. Hronek, South Bend

I have very specific memories of Kresge's. First was the smell. Not a bad smell; it was a candy of sorts, candy, and the wonderful lunch counter. It was a noisy, busy place. I remember the snowing, crissling of the wood plank floors, and the chatter of those eating lunch. I always wanted to sit at the counter because you got to sit on a stool, and they had those little cone-shaped white paper cups that they put into a silver-colored holder for their hot drinks. I felt so grown up!

The visual memory is lots of candy. Right at child's eye height, of course, in the glass cases that seemed to go on forever — to a kid, anyway.

—Pat Zinn, Bremen

There were courses (at South Bend Central High School) offered where seniors could work in the afternoon. (This first fall of my senior year, a course, "Retail Selling," was offered.

—John W. Hightberger, Michigan City

More memories next Sunday. We received so many sales that readers, we'll share more next week.

Read more: Do you remember South Bend's five-and-ten-cent store? Here are memories, along with your own. Write them to the editor, 223 W. Center Ave., South Bend, IN 46601; e-mail, hskape@sbtrib.com.

Helpful Web sites for genealogists

Here are some helpful Web sites for those who are interested in family genealogy: **Allen County Public Library Genealogy:** The Fred A. Reynolds Historical Genealogy Department contains more than 300,000 pages of volumes and 300,000 items of microfilm and microfiche. The department's Web site is www.acpl.org/genealogy/index.html. **AFRISearch:** A site dedicated to researching African American genealogy. Web site is located at www.afrisearch.com. **Ancestry.com:** One of the largest collections of family history records. Across United States census records dating back to the first census in 1790 to 1930, as well as birth, marriage and death records for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The Ancestry.com Web Site is ancestry.com/main.asp.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: The LDS maintains the largest family history library in the world. Go to the LDS Web site www.familysearch.org to find the location of local Family History Centers. There are centers in Mishawaka, Warsaw, Shargis, Benton Harbor and Kalamazoo. **Cyndi's List:** A free-referenced database containing links to genealogical resources on the Internet. Among the uses for Cyndi's List is to use the links to find online genealogical research sites. The home page for Cyndi's List is www.cyndislist.com/. **Genealogy Master Library Catalog:** Provides links to more than 350,000 family histories, local histories and genealogical sources at libraries and archives across the country. The Genealogy Master Library Catalog Web Site is www.genealogy.org/. **Indiana Genealogical Society:** Based in Fort Wayne, this organization focuses an interest in those who contributed to the state, as well as studies the forces behind early migration to Indiana and helps people publish and promote historical, biographical or genealogical works about the state. The Web site is www.indianagenealogy.org. **Indiana State Archives:** The repository for state government records of permanent or historical significance. The state archives Web site is www.in.gov/isar/archives/.

NEWS & NOTES

TALKS, TOURS & GATHERINGS

■ The LaPorte County Genealogical Society will meet at the Senior Center for Older Adults, 910 State St., LaPorte, on July 8. There will be social time from 7 to 7:30 p.m., and the business meeting will start at 7:30 p.m. Barbara Becker will make a presentation on the Bentley Family of LaPorte County. The meeting is open to the public, and anyone interested in genealogy and history is welcome. The board of directors will meet at 8:00 p.m. ■ The Northern Indiana Center for History will hold an antique appraisal on June 26 during the Michiana Summerfest. Benton

Knowles and Randy L. Root will provide verbal appraisals of Castle View in Merrill Park. The fee is \$5 per item, and there is no limit on the number of items a person can have appraised. There will be no appraisal on firearms or weapons of any kind. Registered items will be appraised first. To register and a photograph and dimensions of the item to Barbara Spauld, Northern Indiana Center for History, 8800 Washington St., South Bend, IN 46601. ■ Four times for the Oliver Museum, on the grounds of the Northern Indiana Center for History, also known as Capitalism, have been changed. The tours will begin Tuesday through Saturday at 11 a.m., 1

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