

WM. A. SAUSER SR. WAS PIONEER IN HARDWARE BUSINESS
Family Business At Same Location For 73 Years

Michael Sauser is the third generation in that family to go to work each day in the same location that his father, his aunts, and grandfather did. Sauser's Hardware has become a family tradition, and Michael, grandson of the late William A. Sauser Sr., founder of the organization, has preserved pictures and documents that provide a history of the 73 year old family business.

Sauser's saw it all--good times and bad, two World Wars, plus Korea and Vietnam. They survived a major Depression, minor recessions, and witnessed changes in the needs and buying habits of their customers.

Raised as a farm boy, W.A. Sauser Sr. worked taking inventory for the railroad following his graduation from business college. He left the railroad and worked for a plumbing company for two years and in 1909 decided to buy a hardware store in Pine City from J. LaPage.

The total purchase price was \$2,500. and young Sauser borrowed \$1,000 from his father to make the down payment. His original intention was to go into business for a few years in order to gain experience and then work as a traveling salesman, the dream of many young men in those days.

Frank Smith, Sauser's established competitor in the business could hardly contain his laughter as he viewed the young whippersnapper who lacked any retailing experience.

"I will give you six months to go bankrupt and then you can come to work for me in my tinshop," he joked.

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Little did Smith realize that Sauser would prove to be a shrewd, hardworking businessman who would keep abreast of changes in the times, survive and succeed in establishing a business that would be family owned and operated ~~for~~ generations later.

According to records, the original Sauser's Hardware was described as a "hole in the wall". Built in 1895 after fire destroyed the entire block, the store was very small by today's standards. Dim lighting was provided by the front windows, a skylight, and a few hanging bulbs.

Michael smiled as he recalled his grandfather's opposition to a full store fluorescent lighting system.

"He thought it was wasteful to be illuminating parts of the building that weren't being used," Michael said.

A cast iron stove provided heat in the old store and spittoons were strategically located. Advertising banners hung from the ceiling.

Eventually Sauser purchased the saloon next door and by removing a wall the floor area of the store was doubled. In 1948 another major addition was added to the west side of the building.

In order to establish his solid reputation as an honest businessman in those early days, Sauser had to make many changes.

He began by increasing his inventory, adding heavy hardware, builder's supplies, farm supplies and machinery. One strategy he used was selling manure spreaders by volume.

Taking orders for the spreaders from farmers he sold them for a fraction over his cost. An early photo shows the street lined with farmers displaying their new manure spreaders on delivery day.

These promotions made his store attractive to rural customers

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and men but Sauser was sharp enough to realize that women apportioned much of the family finances. He needed something to attract women to his store so he stocked a line of jewelry and software. He also sold eyeglasses.

W.A. Sauser realized the value of advertising if his business was to become successful and he placed full page weekly ads in the local newspaper. One ad boasted of having the largest, most complete line of jewelry in Pine County.

To complement the jewelry department he hired a watchmaker and stocked a full line of watches. He also added a tin shop and took business away from his competitor Smith by keeping his prices just a wee bit lower.

Sauser also had a reputation in the community for helping those who were down on their luck. Word of his charitable acts spread and some of his success during those early days was attributed to the fact that his customers wanted to give their business to a man who helped his neighbor.

Michael recalled a story told to him by his grandfather.

"All of the stock came by railroad freight in the old days and was packed in barrels, kegs and wooden boxes. The merchandise was delivered to the store by horse and wagon and the job of unpacking was tedious," he said.

"Many times traveling appliance salesmen were aboard the train. They stored a mule team, wagon and their new stoves in a freight car and would unload in some of the bigger towns and travel through the countryside trying to sell a new stove to farmwives.

When grandpa saw them coming he would load a stove on his new truck (Sauser was one of the first in town to own a vehicle)

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and beat them out to the country. He would visit awhile with the farmwives, give the adults and kids a ride in his new fangled machine and when he had them in the right frame of mind, make an informal sales pitch on his stoves. Generally they were impressed with the personal attention and as a result, the mule team salesmen lost a lot of prospective customers.

Other promotional stunts put on by Sausser were bean and biscuit feeds that lasted for an entire week. Pancake days were also popular. Sausser's theory was that anyone could serve coffee and cookies but he put on a meal for his customers.

William Sausser Jr. and his sisters Frannie and Willie all joined their father in the hardware business shortly after they graduated from college.

Bill Sausser's son Paul carried on in the tradition and is a hardware buyer for the Target chain. Michael Sausser stepped in to the Pine City business during his dad's illness and decided to stay on following his graduation from St. Thomas College last spring. He recently received an award as "Young Businessman of the Year."

Michael brings all the enthusiasm of youth to the business. By combining his flair for aesthetics and display with his interest in antiques, he will strive to preserve the image of the store that his grandfather built years ago.

"I believe there can be a pleasant balance between new and antique fixtures," he said. "I am also a firm believer in advertising and promotion and would probably do much of it in grandfather's style."

The Sausser heritage is worthy of preservation.

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BANNER DAY IN MACHINERY BIG INCREASE IN CROPS PREDICTED

30 Manure Spreaders Go On To Our Farms Nothing will do as much to aid
harvest

Those were the headlines in the Pine Poker on August 14, 1917.

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Tuesday was a red letter day in the machinery line in Pine City and marked an invasion of great importance in the county for it brought the first big delivery of manure spreaders ever known here and such a big deliver^y that it would have done credit to any of the old, thickly settled, rich regions of the southern part of the state.

That was the day that W.A. Sauser, local dealer delivered 30 new Low I.H.C. spreaders which went into the country close to town and will do as much as any one thing to make the land blossom next year as never before.

The sale of so many spreaders means thousands of dollars to the men buying them if they are put into use. Their coming marks a new era in the county if we see things right.

The following farmers purchased the new manure spreaders:

Joe A. Toman; F.J. Kunesh; Julius Anderson; Victor Pepin;
Barney Webber; Dan Hoffman; Wensel Tuma; John Novak; J.Y. Rydlund;
David Pangerl; Fred Minse; Gust Anderson; Mike Osen; Math Sladkz;
Frank Vacek; A.M. Kaelble; Mike Hudak Jr.; Herman Teich; Henry Wosmek;
George E. Kick; Melvin Olson; W.S. Doran; Alex Pangerl; Swan Freeman;
Wm. Cort; Nick Sauter; W.O. Torrey; H. Krueger; Jos. Vacinek and
Dorr Bros.

Everyone was served a hot lunch at Mr. Sausers that noon.