



If you have gone to Shakopee in the past 89 years, you could have bought fine menswear from William Wermerskirchen, said David Scheller in *Eden Prairie Lifestyle*. Depending on the decade he may have been the original William Wermerskirchen and founder of Bill's Toggery, his son William, or his grandson Billy.

"My grandfather took a big gamble opening up a store during the Great Depression," said Billy. "He started out running dry cleaning back and forth to Minneapolis, grew to sell men's suits and hats, and eventually invested in his own dry cleaning facility. He did it all from the same downtown corner where Bill's Toggery sits today.

Billy described the trials of keeping a family business alive against all odds. His grandfather managed the enterprise for 46 years; his father was the leader for another 37 years; and he took the reins in January of 2015, after starting work there in 1985.

"I don't want to knock the big name chain stores, but they just can't tailor their business to their customers like we can. I don't sell clothes I wouldn't also wear myself, and I won't try to sell you something just because it's on our rack," said Billy.



"Owning a third generation business like mine feels as much like I'm passing down a legacy as I am working a job. I've read that the odds of a business lasting as long as Bill's Toggery are ten against one. I've kept up with modern times without sacrificing the small store feel that my customers like. At the end of the day, the secret to selling men's clothing boils down to the Golden Rule: Treat people the way you want to be treated yourself."



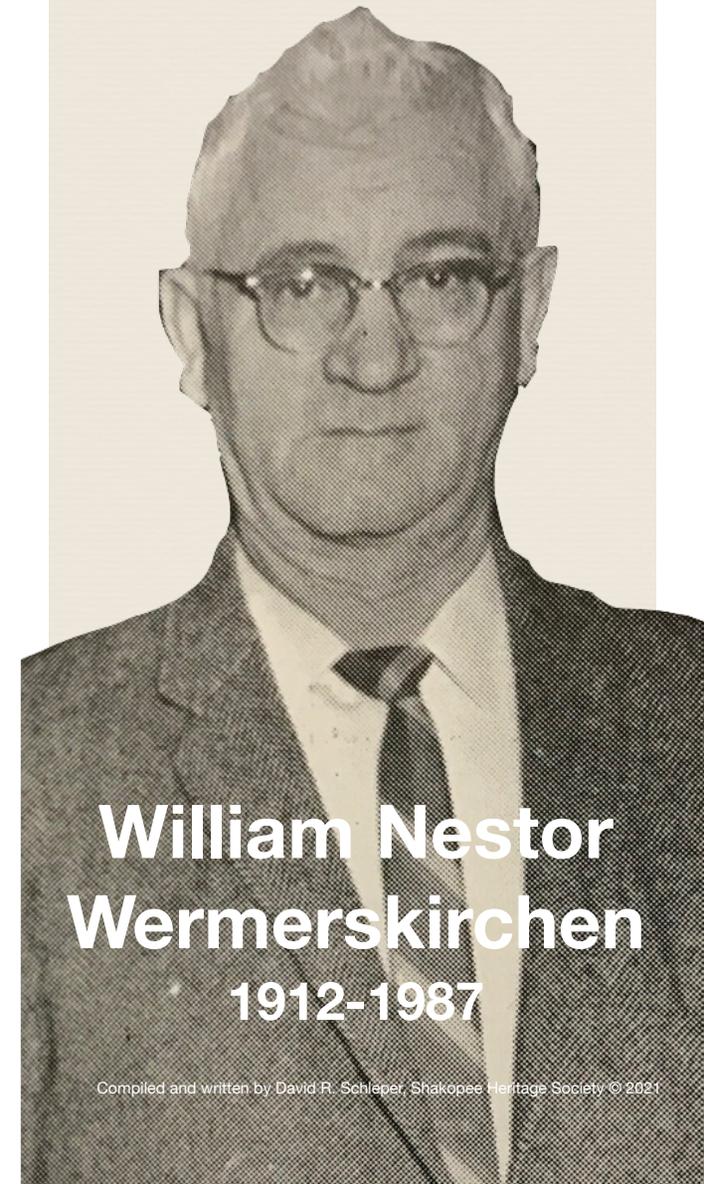
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William Nestor
Wermerskirchen
1912-1987



Lewis Street in downtown Shakopee, with Bill's Toggery on the left corner of Second Avenue and Lewis Street. At right is William Philip Wermerskirchen, son of William N. Wermerskirchen, and the second generation of the business. On the left is William John Wermerskirchen, the third generation businessman of Bill's Toggery, a popular shopping place in downtown Shakopee for over 90 years!

At the location at 128 Holmes Street South in downtown Shakopee is the location of Digital Impact Solutions. In 1917, it was Liu Kwong Kee's Chinese Laundry. And in 1931, William Nestor Wermerskirchen opened a dry-cleaning business here, not too far from the Minnesota River. He started out with \$150, and a dry-cleaning service in Minneapolis. Eventually he started his own production and then got into men's clothes and then slowly expanded into the store today.

William Nestor Wermerskirchen was born on December 24, 1912 in Credit River. His parents were Philip Wermerskirchen and Josephine Mamer. He married Florence Catherine Sauber on September 6, 1937, and move to Shakopee.

A short time later, after the People's National Bank of Shakopee, one street over at 138 Lewis Street South in downtown Shakopee, closed in 1931, Wermerskirchen moved his business there. He was doing laundry for the St. Paul House, the Riviera and the Shakopee House. In 1956 he bought the bar to the north of his building and the Red Owl Grocery Store (which moved to East Shakopee in September 1961), to expand his clothing business.

William Philip Wermerskirchen, W.N.'s son, worked at the store and later took over in

in 1978. William Nestor Wermerskirchen died on December 8, 1987 in Shakopee.

Wally Welter recalled, "I remember shopping there while going to high school during the early 1960s. They had great customer service, and it didn't matter if you were a high school kid or a local businessman.

Rochelle Brenke Faulkner noted, "My mom doesn't even live in the area (and hasn't for quite some time) and STILL stays loyal to Bill's!"

With more space, the elder Wermerskirchen stocked a full selection of fine clothing. In 1976, the family sold its rights to the drycleaners and continued leasing the space to a new owner, who kept it operating. Once Wermerskirchen added a tailor to the mix, Bill's Toggery became a one-stop shopping destination for men, according to Liz Sawyer from the **Minneapolis Star Tribune** on December 3, 2014.

The third generation continued the tradition. William Billy John Wermerskirchen watched his father restore many of the building's original features while helping out in high school. It was

there, just beneath his grandfather's massive portrait in the store's Big and Tall section, where he watched his father work and where he picked up some of dad's sales touch, and in 2015 took over the business. The tradition of customer service and small-town charm continued with the high quality, unsurpassed fit and exceptional serviced at a fair price for the third generation.

While big-box retailers across the country have put many independently owned clothing shops out of business during that time, Wermerskirchen's store has survived through a mix of hard work, speedy and specialized customer service and a small-town charm that suburban fringe cities like Shakopee fight to preserve, according to Liz Sawyer.

Wermerskirchen said the business has thrived largely by branding itself as a multigenerational personal shopping experience. He said he has found success by providing top-notch customer service to older men accompanied by sons and grandsons who often become regulars and remain loyal for life.

