



THE SCHMIDT FAMILY IN HALES CORNERS

A few months ago, HCCHS published a Special Edition newsletter that featured a history of the Dreyfuss family. We had so much fun conducting research that we decided to do so again, this time recounting the story of five generations of the **Schmidt Family**, who also have played an important role in shaping our Village.

There aren't many residents of Hales Corners who can say they were born in the Village and have lived their entire lives here. One who can

claim that distinction, however, is HCCHS member **Mel Schmidt**. At age 94, Mel and his brother, **Harlow "Sam" Schmidt**, who resides in Hawaii, are important links from the Village's earlier days as a semi-rural community to its current position as a suburb of Milwaukee.

We are most indebted to **Mel and his wife, Elaine**, and to **Sam**, for their stories and photos of the family, the homes they owned, and the businesses they operated in Hales Corners.

FIRST GENERATION: Coming to America

Our story of the Schmidt family begins with their emigration from Germany to the Muskego area, two years before Wisconsin became a state.

Peter Schmidt was born in 1800 in Wirsweiler, Birkenfeld, Rheinland-Pfalz, in the southwestern part of Germany. His parents were **Johann Gottfried Schmidt** (born 1760) and **Marie Louise (Huweler) Schmidt** (born 1775). Peter married **Katarina Weiss**, and they, with their 13-year-old son John, emigrated to Muskego in 1846. Peter and Katarina had three more children, all born in Muskego: **Charlotte, Catherine, and Valentine**.

SECOND GENERATION: Establishing Roots in the Community

From this generation, **John Schmidt, Sr.** (born 1833) emerged as an early entrepreneur in the Hales Corners area. The eldest son of Peter and Katarina, John married **Mary Wollman** in 1857. Between 1859 and 1879, they

welcomed 11 children to their family: **Amelia, Mary, John Jr., Henry, Christian, William, Lydia, Jacob, Ella, Peter, and Frank**.

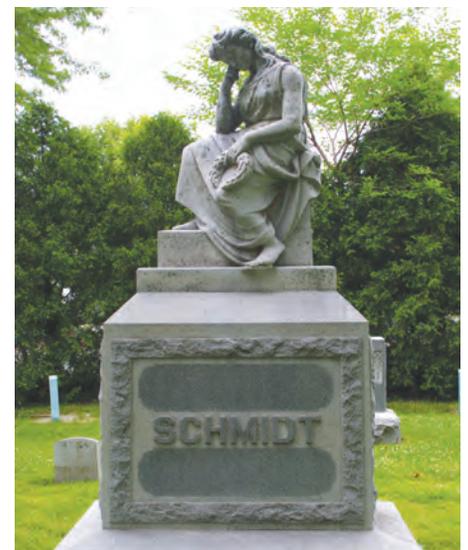
The Schmidts were a pioneering family whose determination resulted in their ownership of 260 acres of farmland in the Muskego area. In addition to farming, John Sr. was a breeder of Clydesdale horses. His love of horses was quite apparent, as three of his horses, **Netherby Jock, Netherby Jock, Jr., and Young Princeton** were mentioned in his obituary along with the members of his family. John Sr. became an agent for the

J. I. Case Threshing Machine Company. Founded in 1842, it was one of America's largest builders of steam engines, threshing machines, and harvesting equipment.

Somehow, John Sr. also found the time to become very involved in local politics, serving variously as town chairman, town treasurer, and town assessor in Muskego during the years 1857-1878. In addition, he was a member of the Wisconsin State Legislature from 1864-1880.



Mary Wollman Schmidt (1836-1919)



*Schmidt Family Gravesite,
Emanuel Church Cemetery*



General store and saloon owned by John Schmidt, Sr.

In 1888, he and his son Christian joined the building committee for the construction of a new church at 10627 W. Forest Home Avenue, Der Deutsch-Evangelischen Emanuels-Gemeinde. That church is now known as Emanuel Church, United Church of Christ. In its adjacent cemetery you can see the very large Schmidt family grave marker that John Sr. was responsible for erecting.

In 1890, John Sr. bought a general store in Hales Corners from **Jacob Siegel**, who was retiring after 36 years as a merchant in the Village. Jacob was responsible for a great deal of business development in Hales Corners, including the creation of its Stock Fair. John Sr. did not operate the store himself; instead, he rented it to **John** and **Emma Schubring**, who managed it for 13 years.

John Sr. died in 1905, and his widow, Mary, moved to Hales Corners. In 1907, she bought a



Mary Wollman Schmidt's House, built in the 1890s, razed in 2006



John Jr. and Amanda Wollmer Schmidt



Amanda Wollmer Schmidt's House at 10832 W. Janesville Rd.

house at 10900 W. Janesville Road and lived there with her daughter Lydia. The house was a Queen Anne shingle-style cottage with clapboard siding, shingled gables, bracketed eaves, a porch, pillars, leaded glass, and dormers. It stood on that site until 2006.

THIRD GENERATION: Settling Near the Triangle

Now solidly established in the area, four of Mary and John Schmidt, Sr.'s sons and their families began to set down roots around the Triangle in the center of Hales Corners.

John Schmidt, Jr., like his father, was a farmer. He married **Amanda Wollmer** and they had four children: **Lydia, Arthur, Benjamin,** and **Norman**. Shortly after John Jr.'s death, his widow, Amanda, moved

to 10832 W. Janesville Road in Hales Corners because her three sons were only in their teens and too young to work the farm.

John Jr.'s brother **Henry Schmidt** married **Emma Plucker** from Waterford. Their home, built before 1900, was located on Forest Home Avenue next to the current driveway of Emanuel Church. Henry was a maker of carriages, buggies, and wagons, and he maintained shops on both sides of his home. One of the shops later became Schubring & Witt Ford Agency, and the other building still stands within today's Hales Corners Liquor & Beer store at 10561 W. Forest Home Avenue. Henry kept up with the times, and by 1903 he had begun to handle farm equipment and gas engines, turning later to Case automobiles and even pianos. Henry also sold mowers, corn binders, seeders, threshing machines, and engines.



Henry and Emma Plucker Schmidt



Henry Schmidt's Implement & Carriage Shop with Emma Schmidt in center



Jacob Schmidt's House
at 10627 W. Forest Home Ave.

Christian Schmidt, commonly known as "Charles," also settled in Hales Corners. He married **Matilda Wollmer** and they had four children: **George**, **Charles "Tom"**, **Meta**, and **Edward**. After Matilda's death, Christian married **Bertha Kurth** and they had one daughter named **Grace**.

Jacob Schmidt, the fourth brother located in Hales Corners, married **Mamie Fohr**. In 1908, they owned a home at 10627 W. Forest Home Avenue that originally belonged to **Frederick Ruehle**, the Village's first blacksmith. Jacob, like his father, bought a tavern that was formerly owned by Jacob Siegel. It was located just a few doors south of his home. He and Mamie moved to another home in 1915 near the southwest corner of Highway 100 and Forest Home Avenue, near today's McDonald's Restaurant.

FOURTH GENERATION: Helping Feed the Village

This generation produced three businessowners in Hales Corners: two brothers and their cousin. All three managed stores near 108th Place and Janesville Road.

Benjamin Schmidt was only 14 when his family relocated to Hales Corners from the farm. Both he and his brother, Norman, would spend the rest of their lives at 108th Place, moving to their own homes a few doors south of the family home, and working with each other across the street in their grocery and feed stores.



Benjamin Schmidt in World War I

Ben married **Mildred Kussrow**. Ben and Norman went into business together by purchasing a grocery business formerly owned by **Otto** and **Bill Eisner** at 108th Place and Janesville Road. Ben also owned a building that stood in what is currently the parking lot of Whitnall Park Lutheran Church. He rented the building to **Ed Schlender** as a shoe repair shop.

Norman Schmidt, Ben's brother, was also known by some as "Sam." An avid bowler, he named his bowling ball "Sam" and painted that name on the ball. After that, his bowling pals called him Sam as well.

In 1924, Norman married **Hilda Behling**, whom he had first met at a dance hall on the second floor of the Bosch Hotel at Highway 100 and Janesville Road. They had two sons: **Melvin** (b.1926) and **Harlow** (b.1937).

Norman and Ben enlarged their grocery store in 1927 by adding a feed store where they sold seed and grain. Soon after, they built a separate building for that purpose just south of the grocery store, and a special

railroad siding, or spur line, was added by the Rapid Transit to service the building. Both stores were sold in 1960, and the building housed a number of businesses over the next years: H&C Variety Store, Getz Drug Store, Meinzer's first drug store, and Dietrich's Paint Store. Today, the entire area is owned by Holz Motors, Wisconsin's largest Chevrolet dealer.

Charles Schmidt was the second of four children born to Christian and Matilda Schmidt. He was more commonly known as "Tom," probably to avoid confusion with his father, who was more commonly known as "Charles." So, from this point on, we will



Wedding of Norman Schmidt and Hilda Behling, with Elsa Behling Panzenhagen and Elmer Schmidt, Jr., 1924



Norman and Hilda Behling Schmidt and her sister Elsa, 1923



Schmidt Bros. Grocery Store, Ben and Norman in doorway, 1917

refer to him as "Tom." Originally a farmer, Tom received his training in the food business by working at Herman Nacker's butcher shop, next door to the original Fire Department on Forest Home Avenue. He married **Liela Manney** and they had two sons, **Willard** and **Gerald**, who attended elementary school in St. Martins and rode the Interurban train to high school in West Allis.

After two years as a butcher, Tom had the opportunity to buy the stock of the grocery store belonging to his cousins, Norman and Ben Schmidt. In 1925, Tom and Liela established the Schmidt IGA grocery store at 10820 W. Janesville Road. IGA stood for the Independent Grocers Alliance. The building, which housed Hales Corners Village Florists until the early 2000s, still remains, and current plans are to make it into a brew pub extension of the Bosch Tavern.



Schmidt Bros. Feed Store



Liela Manney Schmidt and Charles "Tom" Schmidt at Schmidt's IGA Grocery Store, 1927

For many years, Schmidt's IGA Grocery was the principal place in Hales Corners to buy food. Staples came from the Godfrey Company. Charles brought out fruits and vegetables from Commission Row in Milwaukee and farmers sometimes brought their produce to the store. Cheese was cut from large wheels that came from a cheese factory in Big Bend. Bread was delivered daily by Jaeger and Wonder Bread Bakeries. Vinegar was pumped from a barrel, and meat was cut to order. Besides food, shoppers could buy kerosene (in their own cans), as well as overalls and shoes.

Tom and Liela continued operations there until their retirement in 1960.

FIFTH GENERATION: From Yesterday to Today

Our story of the Schmidt family transitions from the 20th to the 21st century with the stories of two brothers, **Melvin ("Mel")** and **Harlow ("Sam")**. They are the sons of Norman and Hilda Schmidt, as well as the great-great-grandsons of **Peter** and **Katarina Weiss Schmidt** whose 1846 emigration to Muskego began the family's history in the United States.

Mel Schmidt was born in 1926. He attended the fourth (and final)

school on the Triangle for three grades, and then went on to a brick schoolhouse on Janesville Road, where the current Hales Corners Elementary School now stands. There was no high school in the Village, so Mel traveled by the Interurban train to Juneau High School in Milwaukee.

Mel remembers that there were about 16 taverns in Hales Corners in the 1940s. The owner of one tavern, near today's Golden Chicken on Forest Home Avenue, would assume you were old enough to buy a beer if your chin was higher than the bar. Mel does not disclose whether he benefited from that practice.

After high school, he joined the U.S. Marine Corps, experienced a



Mel Schmidt as a Boy Scout, 1939

tour of duty in the Pacific theater during World War II, and returned to Hales Corners in 1946. Mel was a long-time friend of **Jerry Holz**, whose father, **Rudy**, owned Holz Motors. Rudy was also the president of State Bank Hales Corners, and he offered Mel a job there as a teller just two days after Mel returned from service. Until recent years, the bank building stood next door to the Bosch Tavern.

During the Depression, with so many banks closing their doors, some people hid their money at home. When the Depression ended, one local farmer decided it was safe to deposit his money in a bank again. On three occasions, he entered the State Bank Hales Corners and each time he deposited \$5,000 in Gold certificates, signed in ink by the president of the First Wisconsin Bank, which was the "mother" bank for State Bank. He would only deposit those certificates at Mel's teller window, even if it meant waiting for him to open. The certificates smelled of manure because the farmer kept them safe during the Depression by burying them below his manure pile.

Mel met his future wife, **Elaine Bertram**, at the bank. Her mother had an account there and she evidently took a liking to Mel. Instead of going to the bank herself, she began sending Elaine there in



Brothers Harlow "Sam" and Mel Schmidt in their front yard, 1942



Mel's Liquor Store ad, Hales Corners Shopping Center, 1961

her place. Soon after, Mel and Elaine started going out together and dancing at clubs in Muskego. They married in September 1950.

While at the bank, Mel was paid a salary of \$100 per month. One day he was approached by the sales manager of Sterling Wheelbarrows and Foundry Equipment, who offered him a job as a salesman at \$200 per month. Obviously, Mel quit the bank.

In 1954, one of Mel's uncles was involved in the building of the Hales Corners Shopping Center, the first one in the area. Mel and his wife, Elaine, decided to open a liquor and gift store there, and after two attempts, received the liquor license to do so.

One of Mel's regular customers at the liquor store would show up at 9:00 in the morning, just as Mel opened the doors. He would buy a pint of 100 proof Smirnoff vodka and then continue on to work in Milwaukee. After work, he would stop by the store and buy another pint for the evening. This was a regular routine.

Mel's Liquor, like most beer and liquor stores, was a family store. On one occasion, a young boy came into the store with his father and, while eating an ice cream cone, he shared it with Mel's dog,

lick for lick, while sitting on the floor with the dog.

Another time, Mel and Elaine were eating their lunch of ham and rolls in the back room when a couple came in with their son. While the Schmidts were waiting on the parents, the son went into the back room and made his own sandwich.

The store was labor intensive, requiring 84-hour weeks. After closing up each night, Mel still had to clean up, restock shelves, and complete his bookkeeping.

Despite that, Mel was able to find time for other ventures during the 1950s. He was involved in the creation of the Blood Donor Club in 1959, which later became a focus of the Hales Corners Woman's Club. One of his happy memories during that time was of the Hales Corners Elementary School. Mel was instrumental in establishing dances for teenagers at the school, and he would provide cases of soda for those events. In 1961, he was named "Man of the Year" by the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

In 1962, Mel became a father when Elaine gave birth to their only child, **Todd**. Todd Schmidt and his wife, **Cary**, have two daughters, **Cortney** and **Nicole**.

In 1968, after 14 years in the liquor business, Mel sold the store and took a year off. During their hiatus, Mel and Elaine traveled around the United States and especially enjoyed the southwest.

In 1969, Mel was offered a job as a salesman with Robidoux Realty. Rather than working toward a sales license, Mel studied for and received his brokers license. Some time later, he was approached by Stefaniak Realtors and accepted a job with them. Over the years, Mel became the office manager, and his staff grew from six individuals to

29. The office was located at the Edgerton Plaza on Highway 100, and took up the entire south wing of that shopping center.

Mel became a charter member of the Whitnall Park Rotary Club in 1975. He served for 12 years, eventually becoming its president. Even though he retired in 1988, his involvement with the Hales Corners community continued. Mel received a special service award in recognition of his 13 years as Commander of the Hales Corners Police Auxiliary Corps.

In 2008, Mel received the Lifetime Achievement Award when he was recognized by the Village of Hales Corners for his service on the Board of Review and as an election worker for 15 years. That year, he also was the Parade Marshall of the Hales Corners 4th of July Parade. Mel is the oldest continuous resident of Hales Corners, always having lived within five blocks of his boyhood home.



Mel and Elaine Schmidt on their 50th Wedding Anniversary, 2000

Mel's younger brother, "Sam," was born in 1937. He inherited his father's bowling ball, mentioned earlier, and became known by his fellow bowlers by that name as well. Sam attended Hales Corners Elementary School and graduated from Greendale High School. He left Hales Corners in 1955 when he joined the U.S. Air Force. Since then, he has lived in Texas, Mississippi, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, New Mexico, Arizona, Alaska, California, Korea, Japan, Okinawa, and Hawaii.

In 1959, Sam was stationed in Chattanooga where he married Polly Powell. They had two sons, John and Mark, who both live in Chattanooga. In 1975, Sam married Yong Sil Ahn who was born in Seoul, Korea. They had one daughter in 1976, who unfortunately was lost due to premature childbirth.

Sam was an air traffic controller until his retirement from military service in 1977. From 1978 to 1982, he worked for Bendix Field Engineering as a satellite tracking technician. He attended DeVry University in Phoenix, Arizona from 1983-1985 and received an Associate Degree in Electrical Engineering. That resulted in his being employed by Motorola's



Harlow "Sam" Schmidt in a Soap Box race event, 1950



Harlow and Yong Schmidt in Hales Corners during their 30th Wedding Anniversary year, 2005

Government Electronics Division in Scottsdale, Arizona as a metrology engineer from 1985-1997. Sam retired in 1997 and moved to Hawaii, where he currently resides.

HCHS Members: Do you enjoy reading stories like this that focus on individuals and families who contributed to the Village's growth through the years? If so, please let us know (our phone number and email address are below) and we'll do our best to bring you more of them!

HALES CORNERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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