

1886

KRAUS


DEPARTMENT STORE



*Celebrating 125 years of service
to the Erie community!*

1886-2011

2011



The story of Kraus Department Store goes back to Edward Kraus, who was born in Germany on July 20, 1845. His family settled in Erie when Edward was about three years old.

As a young man, he first served as a printer's apprentice. Later he handled meats for a short time before opening a restaurant, which he operated for about 15 years.

In 1886, he built a small frame building at 810-816 Parade St. from which he operated the 5 & 10-cent General Merchandising Store. In 1890, he remodeled the store, adding the wooden floors of the current electrical and clothing departments and the staircase leading to the second floor. He also constructed a three-story brick building adjacent which has housed Kraus Department Store for one hundred sixteen years.

When Edward Kraus opened the modest, one-story store in 1886, Erie was a small town. Many roads were not paved, and hitching posts for horses were as prevalent as parking meters are today.

Parade Street was the main shopping area. Some of Erie's finest homes were built within walking distance of the store. The neighborhood had been settled by German immigrants originally, and Edward Kraus became one of the most successful businessmen on Parade Street.

He was a pioneer in department store merchandising. An important era in Erie's merchandising history ended when Ed Kraus died in 1912 and operation of the store passed to his children.



The Kraus family circa 1900: (l to r) Emil, Charles, Edward, Aloysius, Lizzie, Fr. Richard, Mary, Clara, John, Elizabeth and George

By that time, the store had changed considerably. The first floor held hardware, housewares and what was then a novelty: electric lamps, which were still a curiosity in Erie where public buildings and churches were first being wired for newly available electricity.

One daughter, Lizzy, ran the men's, women's and children's clothing department on the second floor. Custom hats were also made-to-order there.

Daughter Mary handled the office while her brothers John and Charles ran the hunting and fishing departments, where licenses were issued as they are today and the latest "sure-fire" gear was sold. Another daughter, Clara, worked on the first floor in ladies' wear.





Elizabeth Kraus
circa 1900



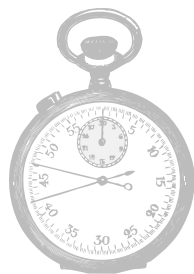
Edward Kraus
circa 1900

During the 1920's Kraus Department Store employed a man on second shift to tend the coal-burning furnace and a man on third shift as a watchman. At that time, the Kraus family lived in the original one-story building next door to the store.

In 1923, another era began for the store when Ed Kraus' daughter, Mary, wed Edward Miller. At the end of that year, Ed Miller became the manager of Kraus Department Store and he was to run the store until his death.

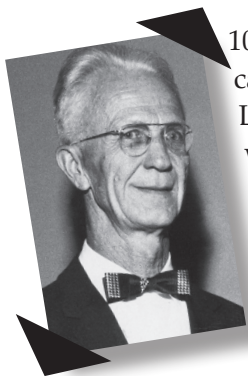
Kraus' weathered the Depression years and World War II, because of its loyal customer base and its reputation for personal service, a reputation that proudly continues today.

The store's second major expansion was in 1954, when the original structure which had served as the first store and, later, the family home, was replaced by the one-story addition, which included an elevator to the second floor. An off-street parking lot was also added.





In 1972, Ed and Mary Kraus Miller passed the store to their daughter Lou Ann, her husband, Dan Nowosielski, and their son, Jerry Miller and his wife, Betty. In 1980 the second floor was closed to the public and is now used for storage. Also that year, Dan and Lou Ann Miller Nowosielski became owners of Kraus' after they bought out Jerry and Betty Miller.



Edward Miller
1962

In 1986, Kraus Department Store marked its 100th anniversary and received a special certificate from the Governor to mark the milestone. Later that year, Dan Nowosielski died, and his wife, Lou Ann became the sole owner of Kraus Department Store.

In 1994, the store retired the old crank cash registers, some of them dating back to 1910, that had been used to record sales. "Even though they would probably still work," according to Lou Ann Nowosielski, who represents the third generation of the store's founder, "parts are impossible to get." They were replaced with new computer cash registers, which record all sales.

*Daniel
Nowosielski*
circa 1980

In 2001, Lou Ann Nowosielski's sons, Tom and Joe Nowosielski became co-owners and expanded the store's services. Customers can now rent heavy equipment as well as small tools like drain snakes or roofing nailers.



At present, the store has 12 employees, including one member of the third generation, Lou Ann Nowosielski, three members of the fourth generation, Joe, Tom and Louis Nowosielski, and three members of the fifth generation Adam, Ian and Rory Nowosielski.

Kraus Department Store continues its ties to the community as a member of the Northwest Manufacturers Association and the Parade Street Development Commission, an organization that works for improvements to one of Erie's original shopping districts.

While relics like slate boards and pencils – the kind used by school children at the turn of the century — are long gone, one tradition started by the Kraus family is still in evidence: friendly service.

As an example, a 1929 article in the Erie Times, described another of Ed Kraus' sons, George Kraus, as one of the best fishermen in Erie, a man who was willing to share his knowledge of the latest in fishing gear or the most active fishing hole in Erie County with his customers. He also took time to learn the fishing habits of his customers to match customer with appropriate gear.



That level of personal service continues today. Lou Ann Nowosielski, who works at the store, can still hand paint a new design on a lamp globe for customers. More often than not, the customer will mention to her that the lamp was originally purchased at the store by a great-grandparent.

Louis Nowosielski will still repair small appliances if parts are available, patch a screen, or replace a broken window.

They often deliver goods to customers in the neighborhood and more than once, offered a ride home during a snow storm or a ride downtown to elderly customers, some of whom have shopped at the store for half a century.

Customers still drop in searching for things like humane, wire mesh traps to get rid of pesky chipmunks or advice on how to point bricks or start a snow blower during the first snowfall.



The advice is free and friendly.

And Kraus' still has the reputation as the place to go when you're looking for those hard-to-find items, like cooking utensils or repair parts.



*Lou Ann Nowosielski with sons,
(from left) Louie, Joe and Tom*

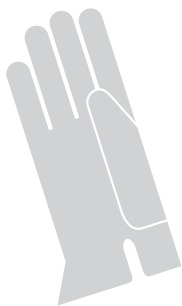
A report in the Erie Times-News captures some memories of the store from a young man who grew up within blocks of Kraus', one of numerous stores that existed on Parade Street in the 1940s and 1950s.

"On Saturdays Kraus Department Store was as busy as any store along Peach Street is today.

Neighborhood women crowded the aisles looking for clothes or, perhaps a new hat. Men talked about hunting and fishing, much as they did a century ago. And children stared wide-eyed at the penny candies in the glass cases, hoping to taste some, 'if they promised to behave until Mom finished shopping.'

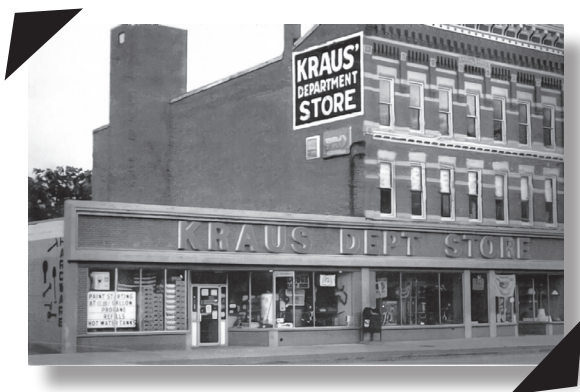
Children also watched in fascination as the metal basket moved on wires from the first floor counters up to the second floor office, where sales were recorded and change was sent back to the customer.

More than one young father in the 1950s and early 1960s stopped at Kraus Department Store to buy baby bottles or baby clothing, and maybe stop long enough to check out the newest tools."



A writer noted for a merchandising trade magazine captured the flavor of Kraus' after his visit several years ago:

"It's truly the-old fashioned type of store, where most of the hardware is loose and inexpensive instead of being blister-packaged; where 100-year-old floor boards instead of plush carpeting are underfoot; and where, yes, there is a small post office substation."



Kraus Department Store still has the old-time feel of a family-owned business, personal service and good advice. It remains the place to shop for those hard-to-find items.

And yes, the candy counter still draws wide-eyed children and the customer is still "king."

KRAUS

DEPARTMENT STORE

810 PARADE STREET • ERIE, PENNSYLVANIA 16503 • 814-453-4314