

Schum Monuments — a family affair

by Kathy Tretter

Talk about the entrepreneurial spirit! How many teenagers know exactly what they want to do with their lives and then set pen to paper and just do it?

In Andrew Schum's case it was more like putting hammer and chisel to stone. Andrew was a first generation American and a mere 18 to boot when he decided to open Schum Monument Company, most liking working with limestone found in the area to ply his trade. Five generations later, while much has changed, it's amazing how much has stayed the same since Andrew opened shop in 1888!

For one thing, this is and always has been a family business. Schum Monument is the oldest continuous business in Dale under the auspices of the same family, although Andrew began in Mariah Hill and did not move to Dale until 1914, whereas Fuller Funeral Home has also been in the same family for five generations and began in 1901 and J. Winkler and Son formed in 1911.

Still, 130 years of exemplary business is worth noting, even if it did start four miles down the road.

Andrew had been born and raised in that nearby town to immigrant parents (see sidebar).

“A memorial is purchased because someone lived ... not because someone died.”

— Hanging in the front office

And while he likely began with locally culled stone and some marble, the industrial age was building steam and soon he was traveling to Georgia to buy granite for his creations.

Andrew was busy, but not so much that he could not take a wife. He found her in Ferdinand — one Philomina Heilers, daughter of Anton Jr. and Marie Bickwermert Heilers. To Andrew and Philomina nine children were born — five boys and four girls. At one time or another, all the boys worked in the business. Frank was the stone carver because in those days a tombstone started with the raw material and was created from start to finish, from cutting and polishing the stone to etching with hammer and chisel.

Tragedy struck in July of 1949 and

Andrew's granddaughter, Sandy Troth remembers it well, even though she was not quite five.

“It was the only time I ever saw my Dad cry,” she recalls. “He came home and knelt on the kitchen floor and told my Mom ‘Dad died.’ Andrew still worked at the shop some and was helping build St. Joseph School when he had a heart attack.”

Sandy was bereft.

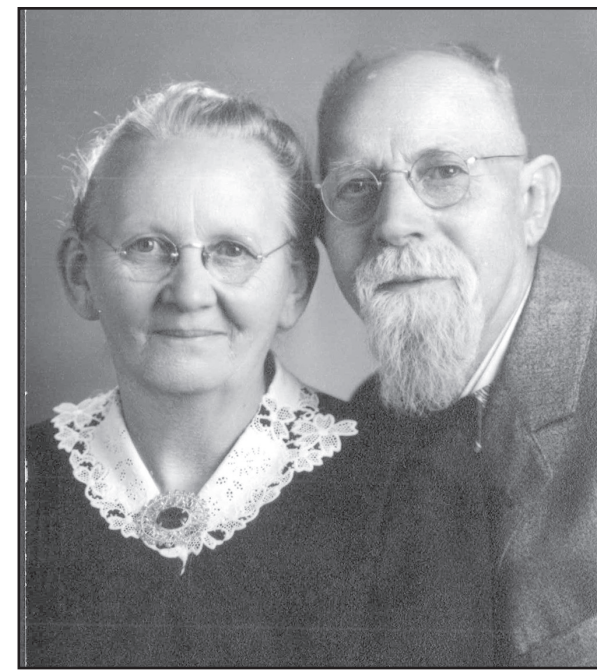
“I remember what I did. I was so upset I got on my tricycle and rode around in circles on the patio. Grandpa was a very good man — a real entrepreneur.”

Andrew had also been the unofficial tuner for the large pipe organ at St. Joseph's Church, where the family worshiped.

A man of many talents indeed.

Andrew Sr. had unofficially retired (although he helped to his dying day) in 1944 when two sons, Benno (Sandy's dad) and Andrew Jr. bought the business, the former acquiring one-third and the latter, two-thirds. This arrangement continued, with Frank still carving the stone,

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Founder Andrew and his wife Philomina (Heilers) Schum.



Chris Troth painstakingly cuts the letters that will be sandblasted into the headstone.

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