

Two brothers constructed a building, at 475 N. Franklin, 80 years ago to house the Warner Brothers clothing store. The building still stands in downtown Colby, and still it houses a men's clothing store.

Wilbur (Bill) Warner first opened a store on January 1, 1914. He said he was "in business on the streets of Colby for 60 some years." Bill moved to Colby with his family in 1902. Ever since he was a little kid, he wanted to be a merchant.

Bill's first store, called The Toggery, was a cleaning and pressing shop. This was located at 377 N Franklin. He had three-pound irons and a gas stove in the store. As time went on Bill started to add men's clothes with "a few socks, handkerchiefs and shirts."

In October of 1914, Bill and his brother, Jay, became partners, moved into the Pratt Building and opened Warner Brothers. The brothers had their store until 1918 when they were both drafted. The Warners had to sell the store even though they were supporting their widowed mother and a teenaged sister.

Bill and Jay served together during WWI in France. They rode on the train to New York, made the 13-day trip across the Atlantic Ocean to England and served together in the medical corps in France.

The Warners returned to Colby in 1919 and reopened their store in the southwest corner of the Frank Louis building. In 1921, construction began on some new downtown buildings just north of the Louis building. "Dr. Lowis, Warner Brothers and the Schroeder Furniture Company will begin a large two story building on the lots just south of the postoffice within the next thirty days. This new building will be 125 feet long by 90 feet wide with a brick front. The north 25 feet will be occupied by the Warner Brothers Clothing Company and the next 25 feet will be owned by Dr. Lowis and the south forty feet will be occupied by the Schroeder Furniture Company. Offices above this building will be for rent. This new building will be a much needed improvement to Colby and will complete the main street on the east side from the O'Pelt to the Hardman Lumber Company" (CFP 09/01/1921).

By the end of the month, work was underway. Nat Turner of the *Colby Tribune* commented, "Have young men forgotten how to work? The other day a bunch of men stopped to watch the work of excavating for the new Warner-Lowis building. Among the toilers was the veteran Nick Schroeder and a bunch of young men. The watcher from the sidewalk freely commented that Schroeder was working twice as fast and hard and doing easily twice as much work as any other man in the bunch of workers" (09/29/1921).

Work progressed. "The carpenters are making a big showing on the new building just south of the post office. These three new buildings will be completed by the first of the year" (CFP 11/03/1921). And by the holidays, "With the exception of the fronts, the exterior work of the Lowis and Warner buildings is completed. These fine new buildings will soon be ready for occupancy" (CFP 12/22/1921). Though built at the same time, with the same brick facing, the three store fronts have very distinct facades. However, the Warner Building did not end up with two stories. Research does not bear out whether the paper simply reported the proposed building's dimensions incorrectly or if the Warners changed their plans.

"The new fixtures for Warner Bros. new store arrived the first of the week and are being put into place. The boys expect to begin moving their big stock of goods to the new building the last of this week. when completed this store will be one of the best of its kind in Kansas. A complete line of gents furnishings will be carried at all times. It will pay you to stop and take a look at this new place and see what an up-to-date place the boys have. Warner Brothers believe that the best is none to good for Thomas county people" (CFP 02/02/1922).

Two weeks later both Colby papers carried advertisement and articles regarding the opening of the Warner Bros. new store. The Warners advertisement read as follows: "Here's

an announcement that will interest you and every other man who appreciates good clothes service. We have just moved into our new home south of the Post Office. You'll get better values at our new store because we won't have any high rents to pay; you'll get better service because our store is equipped with the very finest and most up-to-date fixtures; you'll get a better selection of good things to choose from because we'll have room for larger stocks. Come around and see our new store; you won't have to buy anything to find a welcome here" (CFP 02/16/1922).

"Traveling men tell us that Warner Bros. new store is the best and neatest exclusive gent's furnishings store in Northwest Kansas by a big margin. The proprietors put in a busy time last week moving their stock of goods from the former location in the Louis building to the recently completed store next door south of the postoffice, and were ready for business the latter part of the week" (CT 02/16/1922).

The *Colby Free Press* gave a particularly detailed description of the store: "The Warner Brothers are now comfortably located in their fine new building just south of the post office. The exterior of this building with its frontage of red pressed brick and two splendid show windows, each 7 x 15 feet, presents a fine appearance. These windows, which have paneled back and sides and maple floors all finished in the waxed oak, make an admirable setting for the display of the clever styles and good materials of the men's furnishings carried by this firm. A small wall case between the double entrance doors is an ideal place to display small articles.

"The fine appearance of the exterior is but a fore runner of the interior. On entering, beautiful Grand Rapid fixtures in the quarter sawed oak wax finish, greets the eye on either side. On the left the magnificent triple mirror alcove with dressing room in conjunction with three glass enclosed double decked wall clothing cases and a beautifully finished table on which to show the suits, adds not only to the comfort of the purchaser but also to the convenience of the salesman. Back of all this is alcove shelving for shoes and work clothing. At the right are forty feet of glass enclosed shelving where furnishings are always on display. A wrapping counter on which stands the cash register is another convenience as well as beautiful piece of furniture. Plenty of glass enclosed floor cases, a cap show case, a wall hat case and numerous show cases, make the equipment of this store one of the finest to be found any where. Everything is as nearly dust proof as it is possible to make.

"The 15 x 25 foot cleaning and pressing department at the rear is also modern in every way. Plenty of light and ventilation are available. The six individual lighting fixtures from which artificial light is evenly diffused by the pearl gray upper walls and ceiling make daylight out of darkness.

"This store is one of Colby's show places. In fact nothing better or modern in fixtures and equipment can be found any where. It is one of the several improvements now in the course of construction that makes for a bigger and better Colby" (02/16/1922).

The partnership continued at this location, through good times and bad, for 33 years. In January, 1930 an overheated flue started a blaze in the store: "Warner Bros. narrowly escaped having a very successful fire last Thursday evening about 5:30. An overheated flue in the postoffice building next door set fire to the heavy joists in the ceiling of the Warner store and the fire had gained considerable headway in the space between the ceiling and the roof before it was discovered. It was extremely good fortune that it did not break through the roof to open air before it was discovered. The fire wagon was quickly on the scene and the fire was conquered with chemicals in a short time, and the damage to the building itself consisted of charred joists in the ceiling apparatus and a part of the ceiling ruined.

"The room was filled with heavy smoke and the acrid fumes of the chemicals that would have caused a serious loss in the sale of the large stock of garments that were exposed to it had not the stock been well covered by insurance. After a settlement by the insurance

company the boys started a lively sale of suits and overcoats at half price and reduced prices on some other lines that has caused them to be moved out in a hurry.

"The fire was first noticed about 5:30 when the boys heard a crackling sound in the roof that they could not locate until the paint began falling off the ceiling which turned red hot where the paint fell. Smoke from this glaze got into the upper story of the Dr. Lowis building next door and caused considerable commotion there where it was feared the fire was gaining. However, it was found that there was only smoke there" (CFPT 01/23/1930). And in the same issue was a full page ad from Warner Bros. regarding their Fire Sale.

The Depression was a time when everyone struggled to survive. The dust storms could be seen making their way toward town and the Warners would string up curtains in the store to try and keep the dust out of the clothes. There was one day that Bill told Jay, "If it ever gets to where we don't take in a dollar lets get rid of the place." Well, there was a day when the brothers only made a \$1.75. Close, but not close enough to quit the clothing business.

In 1945, a young woman with a little girl came into the store and asked the Warner brothers if they would consider hiring her husband when he got out of the service. A week later, on a Saturday morning, Bernard Snyder went into the store and was working by noon. His wife, Jean, had started a business relationship that lasted many years.

Bill sold out his interest in the store to Jay and Bernard Snyder in 1955 but continued to work in real estate and mutual funds. He stayed on main street until 1975 when he retired at the age of 80.

Jay and Bernard were partners through 1960 when Jay sold out. The name of the store was changed to Bernard's Clothing Store. Bernard redecorated the store, but the 'main things stayed the same.' Jean recalled that Bernard did his own alterations. He could make his Singer treadle machine 'sing.'

Snyder also owned Bernard's Men's Wear in Hays and the Tiger Shop on the Fort Hays State University campus. He used to commute between Hays and Colby with his own airplane. One employee of Bernard's Men's Wear in Hays was Dave Jennings. In 1971, Jennings, Jim Lunsway and Fred Fischer bought the store from Snyder and changed the name to the His Shop. Jennings and Lunsway bought out Fischer in 1973, and in 1974 Jennings became the sole owner of the store.

Today, the building is owned by Don and Joan Kready with Dave Jennings still running the His Shop there. A stop in at the shop reveals the beautiful fixtures still intact as well as the tracks on the shelves where there was once glass to cover the clothes.

**IF YOUR CLOTHES DON'T BECOME YOU
COME TO US
WE CLEAN AND PRESS
WARNER BROS.**