

Knoch Cigar Store

Naperville Heritage Society History Stories

Cigar making was once a flourishing business in Naperville. The best known and largest company was the William Knoch cigar factory, which thrived from 1883 to 1931.

Naperville native William Knoch learned the cigar making trade as a youth working for a man named Obermeyer in his small cigar factory. In 1883, Knoch opened a store with his brother, George, on Water Street (now West Chicago Avenue) between Main and Washington.

William Knoch eventually bought out George's interest and in 1901 purchased the Schultz building located at the southeast corner of Jefferson and Main Streets.



The cigar factory occupied two rooms behind the store - one for making the cigars and the other for drying the tobacco. Boys or the young women who clerked in the store would strip the tobacco by removing the large central vein from a moistened leaf. The tobacco was then dried on racks. The cigar workers would fill their "cakes" (small barrels) with the dried tobacco to roll the cigars by hand. Expert cigar makers could make as many as 250 a day, and were paid \$2 per hundred. At one time, 22 cigar makers were employed in Knoch's factory.

Knoch factory brands included Parlor Smoker, Golden Days, Violetta, Royal Punch, Three Brothers and Red Wing. These brands were sold in cigar stores in Lockport, Lemont, Plainfield, West Chicago, Elgin and other neighboring towns for five and 10 cents each. The William Knoch cigar store and factory flourished in Naperville until Knoch's death in 1931.

Two statues, one of an Indian chief made of lead and a wooden one of a character called Punch, stood outside Knoch's Cigar Store for many years. Today, the statues are part of the Naperville Heritage Society's Museum Collections. The Cigar Store Indian stands in the Pre-Emption House Visitor Center lobby and Punch is part of the permanent exhibit called "Brushstrokes of the Past" in the lower level of the Pre-Emption House.

History Stories are developed by the Naperville Heritage Society Research Library and Archives staff at Naper Settlement. As a bountiful resource for learning about a variety of topics related to Naperville, they provide unique insights into the past. For more information, please call the Curatorial Department at 630.305.3535.

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