

Brill Jewelers celebrates roots

By Clint Wolf cwolf@beloitdailynews.com | Posted: Monday, November 18, 2013 4:00 pm

Tom Stier said the last time he was in Beloit he was about 6 or 7 years old.

He currently lives in South Bend, Ind., but he made the trip to Beloit Saturday to deliver a piece of history to the current owners of Brill Jewelers — a business which has a strong connection to his family.

In 1909 the Brill and Stier Jewelry Store opened in downtown Beloit by Tom Stier's grandfather, John Stier, and his partner Henry Brill. Tom Stier and his sister, Cindy, were at Brill Jewelers Saturday to deliver a photograph of the original store to current Brill Jewelers owners Andrea Kempson and Tony Grover.

"I was surprised to still see the Brill name on the store," Tom Stier said. "I think that's awesome."

Although John Stier died before Tom Stier was born, he heard a great deal about the business growing up.

Several family members from the Brill family also were at the event Saturday, which Kempson called a History Open House, with coffee and doughnuts for guests.

Howard Bjorklund, who married Henry Brill's daughter, Martha, recalled working for Brill Jewelers from 1946 to 1953. He had been schooled as a watchmaker, but felt the calling of another profession — Law enforcement.

He joined the Beloit Police Department and eventually became chief of police.

Wesley Brill has become the historian of the family, tracing the history of the store and its different locations in downtown Beloit. He said Henry Brill worked for a jeweler, John Gaard, starting when he was just a lad of 16 years old. When Henry Brill was 22, he joined with John Tier, who was from Appleton, to start their own business.

In 1923, Brill and Stier went their separate ways and Brill opened his own jewelry store. However, Henry Brill's son, Michael Brill, who had already started working at the Brill and Stier Jewelry Store, continued to work for John Stier.

Brill's store was located at 316 State St., where Austin's Barber Shop currently stands.

Brill Jewelers had several locations in downtown Beloit and several owners over the years, but the Brill name was retained. In 1983, the business was sold to Jack Marco and in 2000, Kim Beals was the proprietor of Brill Jewelers.

Tony Grover, one of the current owners of Brill Jewelers, said downtown Beloit has gone through some rough times during the history of the store, but he believes the future of the downtown business district is bright.

“We feel downtown Beloit is coming back,” he said. “It’s the right place and the right time.”