

W. Water Street 502 Businesses

- 1929 Gust J. Knaack Hardware
1960 Oestreich Hardware Store – Tru Value
2007 CHN Medical Center

1929 Gust J. Knaack Hardware

For many years, a wonderfully kind and gentle person tended a hardware store in Princeton. It was located in a building that is now the east half of the Family Center store that is presently preparing to go out of business. Since we do not know what will be next, let's take time to look back.

The gentleman who had the hardware store was Gustave J. Knaack, the father of Ruth Lehner who contributed the names and dates for this story.

He was born December 24, 1878 to Michael and Caroline Kalwitz Knaack, who lived on County J. east in St. Marie. Their homestead is now owned by Mrs. Edmond Kuharski.

Gust Knaack married Clara Lueck, the daughter of William and Minnie Krouse Lueck.

During the course of their marriage, they lived for a few years with her mother after the death of Mr. Lueck. The Lueck home where the Knaacks lived and cared for Mrs. Lueck was at the west end of Water Street. The second house from the Historical Society "Stone House". It is now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Russell Clark who lived with Henry Grams, her father who owned it for many years.

In due time Mr. Knaack's parents moved into town and bought the home owned by Dr. Wendtlatd. It was on Short Street west of the Triangle parking lot. After the elder Knaack died Gust, with his wife and family, moved into their house where they lived for many years. It is where Ruth and her sister, Norma, lived most of their young lives. Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Dryer own the home today.

Mr. Knaack was frequently known as Deacon Knaack, a nickname he acquired when he held the position of church trustee. The nickname stayed with him from that time.

He started his hardware business in 1914. His first store was on the south side of Water St. in the building now occupied by the Automotive Supply Store. Most of his years, however, were spent on the north side of the street a bit east of Swed's General Store.

His store was a long, narrow building. There were dozens of shelves, bins, and drawers from the floor to the ceiling, front to back on both sides. A ladder fastened on a track was shoved back and forth to gain access to the topmost shelves. He knew exactly how far to move the ladder to retrieve the correct product for his customer. Kerosene lanterns were hung from wires near the ceiling. Forks, shovels, hoes, and rakes were also hung from the ceiling. The handles hanging down were like wooden icicles. It was truly a hardware store where one could buy bolts, wires, screws, hammers and nails as well as stoves and stove pipes or water pipes. Cistern pumps, pails, wash tubs, copper boilers and wash-boards were all available. Jackknives were neatly displayed in the glass showcases.

In charge of the plumbing and heating was Charles Marquardt, the father of Marion Gondrezick and Lloyd Marquardt. He would go out and install heating or plumbing when people requested it. The tin shop and supplies were on the second floor.

In the center of the store a large pot-bellied stove was used to heat the store. It was where friends and cronies gathered around the stove to visit and exchange ideas on the latest happenings around town. Mostly they would exchange stories about their latest hunting and fishing achievements.

“Deacon Knaack” was an avid hunter and fisherman. He was instrumental in starting the Rod and Gun Club. He was also a charter member of the Princeton Rotary Club. He was cooperative and helpful in the community and in his store. He always greeted people who entered his store in a most congenial way. Young and old, man, woman or child were graciously helped.

A story is told of the two young boys who came in daily for “another” bolt or washer for the wagon they were building. When they asked, “How much?” Mr. Knaack invariably would say, “Oh that’s all right, just take it. It’s only one.” After quite some time he asked the boys how their wagon was coming along. They replied, “It’s finished, but it doesn’t work.”

A few of us remember the kindly gentleman and are reminded of him when we see his grandson who appears to have inherited many of Mr. Knaack’s traits and looks.

The hardware store of today bears little resemblance to Deacon Knaack’s store of over half a century ago. Mr. Knaack died March 2, 1950. Although a few others tried to carry on his hardware business, his hardware store is gone. As we think back now and then, we wonder what will be next.”

Deacon Knaack’s Hardware Store, A Gathering place for Friends and Cronies, by Laverne Marshall
The Fox Patriot, June 15, 1989

PRINCETON BUSINESSMAN BECAME COLORADO GOVERNOR
BY GARY WICK OF THE PRINCETON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

David Hanson Waite, Governor of Colorado from 1893 to 1895, was an early Princeton merchant. Waite was a partner of his brother, Francis, in a mercantile store. The store was located where today stands the Princeton Medical Clinic.

Older residents will remember the two-story, frame wood building occupied by Lichtenburg's Drug Store. This building was used as a dry goods store by Waite and his brother. The building originally built in 1850 and one of the first 15 buildings in the city, was wrecked by fire in 1955.

According to information obtained from Colorado and Wisconsin State Historical Societies, Waite was born April 9, 1825 in Jamestown, New York. He arrived in Princeton in 1855 and by 1856 was elected to the Wisconsin State Senate, representing Marquette County, which then consisted of today's Marquette and Green Lake counties, as a Republican.

He served one term in the State Senate, participating on the Finance committee. After serving out his term, he would leave Princeton and move to Missouri where he taught high school.

With the beginning of the Civil War, Waite left Missouri for Pennsylvania. After a short stay, he went back to his hometown of Jamestown, New York. He studied law under the tutelage of his father and was admitted to the bar. While practicing law, he also had time to edit a newspaper.

In 1876 Waite moved to Kansas where he engaged in ranching and practiced law. In 1879 he was elected to the Kansas State Legislature. However before finishing his term he moved on to Colorado. With his arrival, he continued his practice of law and edited a newspaper. "The Union Era."

The Colorado economy of that time depended on mining. The mines were controlled by out-of-staters. Waite decided at this point to change political parties and became a Populist. He used his own newspaper to expand Populist party ideas through the state.

In 1892 Waite received the nomination of the Populist Party for the Governor of the state of Colorado. In the November election, he received 41,344 votes to Republican J. Heimes' 38,812 and Democrat J. Maupans' 8,938. His election came at a less than opportune time as he would soon find out.

As he began his term, the country and Colorado were hit by the "Panic of 1893." This would prove to be the country's worst financial crisis before the "Great Depression." The price of silver, already in trouble, tumbled from \$1.25 an ounce to \$.83 cents an ounce in two days. The price would continue to drop until it reached a low of 62 cents an ounce.

As a Populist, Wait favored the union and its goals of a shorter workday. Among some of the other reforms the Populists favored were the woman's right to vote, initiative, referendum, direct election of U.S. Senators and the income tax.

Early in his first year in office, women received the right to vote. Colorado became only the second state in the Union to allow this. This would turn out to be one of Waite's few political victories during his time in office.

In July of 1893 Waite made a blunder from which he would never recover. In a speech before the Silver League convention in Denver, he closed his speech by stating, "The war has begun. It is the same war which must always be waged against oppression and tyranny to preserve the liberties of man....it is better, infinitely better, that blood should flow to the horses' bridles rather than our national liberties should be destroyed."

The Republican press quickly jumped on this speech and made it sound like a call to revolution. Parts of the speech became headlines nationally – including the Princeton Republic. Ever after, Waite was known by his nickname, "Bloody Bridles."

With one foot on a banana peel, he quickly put his other foot into quicksand. Waite decided it was time to clean up gambling and illegal saloons in Denver. To do so, he needed to replace the three members of the Denver Fire and Police Board, which had control over gambling and liquor. When he attempted to replace these individuals, they and their supporters barricaded themselves behind the massive walls of city hall. Their many supporters felt that they would lose money with tougher laws. Waite called out the National Guard to this problem which occurred in March of 1894. The problem did not end, as those within City Hall had better and more firepower.

The standoff continued for the better part of a day before five companies of Federal troops intervened. Eventually the State Supreme Court would agree with Waite that he could replace members of the board, but by then his image had been further tarnished.

All during the City Hall crisis, problems were developing between the miners and some of the mine owners. Over the years, the miners had gotten their hours cut from nine to eight, while still getting a raise to \$3 per day. With the price of silver low, the smaller mine owners decided to lengthen the day back to nine hours. Rather than take this, the miners forced a work stoppage.

Governor Waite decided to risk what little influence he had left to settle the strike. He would attempt to serve as a go-between to two increasingly hostile groups. The miners were represented by the World Federation of Miners (WFM) while the owners did not represent the majority of the mines.

It became apparent that neither side would budge, and both sides built up armed groups. With tensions growing daily, something had to be done. After meeting with WFM, Waite was appointed as their sole representative.

Using his power as governor, Waite kept the two armed groups apart. He called out the national guard and kept going back and forth between the groups looking for agreement. After 130 days, the two sides laid down their arms and went back to work. It had cost the state over \$67,000 to maintain the peace. In the end the owners agreed to keep the eight-hour day for \$3.

It was a victory for Waite, but in November he would face defeat in a bitter campaign. Waite would continue to write about politics and practice law until his death in 1901. Waite had traveled over three-fourths of the United States and was a politician wherever he went. While he lived in Princeton only a short time, this city helped launch him on a long, political career.