

118-Year-Old Job Shop Still Provides “Old-Time” Quality Finishing

By Don Berry



A. Werner Silversmiths is located in an upscale neighborhood in old Milwaukee.



This old advertisement for the job shop is not dated, but it shows the location of the original shop, which has since moved to a new location on Water Street in Milwaukee.

In current times in the finishing industry, longevity is a rarity. There are, however, some plating shops in the U.S. that have been around for a long time, and are still providing finishing services.

One such shop is Werner Silversmiths of Milwaukee, WI, which is still providing very much the same finishing services that it has for the past 118 years.

How it Started

Werner Silversmiths was founded by Adolph Werner who had an impeccable reputation as a plater in old Milwaukee. Some of Milwaukee's most successful finishers worked with Werner, including James Lindsteadt, founder of Artistic Plating of Milwaukee.

When Adolph Werner died, the business was past on to his son, Leo. Douglas Wied and his brother worked for Leo, and in 1955, after Leo Werner had passed away, Douglas Wied and his brother purchased the company from Leo's widow. Shortly thereafter, Douglas Wied bought out his brother's interest in Werner Silversmiths.

During all this time, Werner Silversmiths provided finishes for flatware and other household items with primarily precious metal plating. As the company name implies, it specialized in silver, and it still does. A clipping from a story in The Milwaukee Journal in 1951 tells of Werner Silversmiths repairing and refinishing communion vessels for St. Paul's Church that were damaged in a fire.

Still in the Family

Today, the business is run by Michael and Dennis Wied, sons of Douglas. The shop is still located on the same street, at virtually the same location, as it has been for many years—Water Street, in an older area of Milwaukee, which is currently undergoing a transformation to an upscale neighborhood.



Michael (left) and Dennis Wied are the proprietors of the current A. Werner Silversmiths plating shop.

The majority of the work processed at the shop is for refurbishing and refinishing antique items, although some work is provided for plating electrical contacts. Years ago, the shop even plated some components used for the first space trips to the moon, but have not provided such services in recent years.

Plating Antiques is a Niche

The Wied's work closely with local antique dealers and historical societies, from which much of their work is provided. All of the repair work, such as soldering, buffing and lacquering, is done in-house.

The shop specializes in restoration of unique metal items, such as victorian silver, old tea sets and church ornaments.

The down side of the antique business is finding parts for some of the older items. "It's just hard to find some parts," said Douglas Wied. "But, we do maintain a large inventory of older items in-house that we can use. Sometimes, you just can't find the right part."

The job shop is not large. The entire shop is located in a building that is 20 ft. wide by 50 ft. long. It's a compact operation, but the location is perfect for the clientele. The shop's advertising campaign is limited to the phone book and word-of-mouth.

Although Werner Silversmiths is not a high-volume finishing operation, it is flourishing in an upscale neighborhood of old Milwaukee. P&SF