

Schnucker's Book and Antique Store in Springwater NY

Springwater Books and Curio Shop Fulfills Dream

By Eleanor Stothard of the Hilton Record

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The Schnucker's Store in Springwater NY in 1965.

Courtesy of Hilton Record and Eleanor Stothard.

In the picturesque and historic village of Springwater a thriving business built on a life-long dream occupies the hearts and minds of a Hilton couple. It is there that Dan and Dorothy Schnucker of Lake Avenue Hilton have combined their interests in a charming and fascinating antique shop. His deep and knowledgeable love of books and her appreciation of beautiful china and other memorabilia has blossomed from a hobby to a full time operation.

Mr. Schnucker left his position at Wollensak Optical Co. in 1961 in order to pursue his interest. He had avidly collected books for 30 years and Dorothy had assembled antiques for about 15 years. The collection had filled all available storage space in Hilton and the shop was the natural outcome of that

growth. Their opening four years ago saw 2,000 persons attending.

The building, in the heart of the business section of the village of Springwater was bought at public auction in 1959. It was built in 1840, and at one time or another had housed a bank, a drug store, a clothing store and a hardware store. Deep storage drawers have been re-located in the store and serve the present purposes well.

The massive book stacks, ten in all, hold some 100,000 volumes. Rare and out-of-print books are Mr. Schnucker's forte. Some date back to 1540. Many wonderful friendships have been developed by the Schnuckers as people come from all over the world to visit and browse in the shop. Persia, South America, Canada, Australia and Japan are some of the countries which have been represented in their customers. School children in the area are welcome to borrow volumes for their research and Dan helps them with their homework.

Every day holds the promise of an interesting experience. One of the most rewarding was the visit one day of a Dutch tulip salesman who saw an ox yoke on the porch of the store and stopped to visit. He found a 5-volume Dutch history printed in Rotterdam in 1632 and illustrated by copper plates. It turned out in the conversation that he was a personal friend of the late Ernest Hemingway, and owned an original, autographed copy of a little known Hemingway work. Only five copies exist in the world. He traded his treasure for Dan's and upon his return to Holland, sent the priceless copy by mail.

The assistant director of the Chicago Symphony orchestra comes to the shop twice a year to get old music, particularly Americana, western style. Customers have come to buy "a yard of books" to acquire a library that

fits their book shelf measurements. Some buy books to carry out a color scheme in their decorating. A lawyer purchased his library for prestige purposes by choosing only elegant bindings. A prominent Rochester couple acquired their "culture" by getting the set "The Thousand Best Books of the World." And then there are the true book lovers who arrive to browse and enjoy stimulating conversation with Mr. Schnucker.

Mr. Schnucker balked when, one day, an adamant matron stacked several beautiful books with just the right proportion and then announced she intended to cut out the centers to make a lamp base.

Mr. Schnucker has a degree in journalism from Rutgers University. His father owned 1500 books in his library - all written in German - and Dads' early association with them whetted the love for good books which has culminated in this enterprise.

Over in the other half of the shop, it's a woman's world over which Dorothy holds court. The hours slip by as one finds first one treasure and then another. There are silver, china, jewelry, glass curios and furniture to take the eye. We saw an irish shelagne, assorted canes, mechanical banks, music, cigar molds, a children's harpsichord dating back to 1850, ship's lamps, spice chests, primitive utensils and even a fireplace toaster.

Open seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., nine months of the year, the Schnuckers find the shop an almost totally absorbing venture. However, there is still time for them to enjoy their family. Their son, Allan, and his wife live in Penfield Their daughter, Barbara, and son-in-law, Robert Luffman, and their two daughters are in Bath, where Bob is principal of the grade school there. Three months in Florida during the winter season give refreshment and rest to the couple.

Plans for the future? Yes. A return to their beloved Hilton NY to make their home and to perhaps open a shop there!

Love of Books becomes a Flourishing Business

By Bob Bickel of the Democrat and Chronicle

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Dorothy and Daniel Schnucker in 1967.

Courtesy of Democrat & Chronicle and Bob Bickel.

Springwater - "People who like books will drive miles and miles to any place where they can find what they want."

Thus Daniel Schnucker explains how he and his wife Dorothy have been able to build a flourishing book business in a hamlet in the hills of southeast Livingston County.

If their book and antique store on Route 15A in Springwater had to depend on drive-in trade, they would be broke in short order. It is supported largely by collectors, dealers, and bibliophiles from all over the county who know Schnuckers' exists and are happy to make a trip to do business there.

Nevertheless, it is not a specialist business. The Schnuckers keep long and regular hours, seven days a week, eight months a year. Every item in the store is price marked and out in the open to be examined.

At the same time that Schnucker was showing a first edition of "The autocrat of the Breakfast Table," marked at \$60, to a visitor, a housewife with a tot in tow ducked in briefly to pick up "Mary Had a Little Lamb" and a couple of other children's books for a total of 30 cents.

Schnucker was a part-time book scout for other dealers for years while he was working his way up the industrial ladder to become a production manager at Wollensak Division in Rochester.

He got started on books after browsing in a Salvation Arm store and picking up a 1797 printing of Washington's Farewell Address for 10 cents. He sold the book for \$25 and was hooked for life.

Eight years ago, the Schnuckers had accumulated about 90,000 volumes in storage at their Hilton home and had had enough of industry. "All at once we said, 'Let's quit, let's go all out with the books.'" says Schnucker. The attractive 1841 building they found in Springwater is one of the oldest in the hamlet. Their guess that its rural location would not hurt the business was sound, and, in fact, the move earned them some nationally distributed publicity. A few years ago the well-known Ford Motor Co. magazine "Ford Times" featured the store in an article on rural bookshops.

Another advantage of the shop's location is that it keeps the overhead low and enables Schnucker to price his volumes well below the going rate in urban stores.

Even without this price break, however, any store like Schnucker's is a happy hunting ground for a book lover, a student, or any reader of wide-ranging interest. You can get, for example, well-printed on heavy paper, in handsome, strong bindings, with age to lend them distinction and former owner's bookplates to give them character, a two-volume edition of Browning's "The Ring and the Book" for \$12.50, or Carlyle's "French Revolution" for \$5, or a set of "The Outline of History" with signatures H. G. Wells and Julian Huxley in front for \$20.

Every large-scale dealer turns up a gem from time to time, Schnuckers best find was a first edition of "Leaves of Grass" which sold for \$1,500. Another was a first edition of the Book of Mormon, printed in Palmyra in 1830, and sold by Schnucker at a handsome profit to a Moron.

It works the other way around, too. A woman customer recently paid \$2 for a book of James Whitcomb Riley verse and - after the transaction was safely completed - said, "Look what I found in it." The poet had autographed the book, using the second blank page in front, rather than the first.

This caused the proprietor no great pain. In fact, the happiest effect of the move to Springwater was that it enabled Schnucker to exercise certain humanitarian impulses which had to be kept firmly under control in the pre-books rat race.

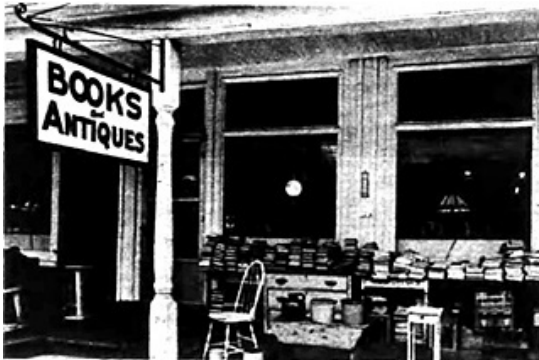
He enjoys lending books to Springwater youngsters free - they have never failed to return the books - or knocking down the price to what a young customer has in hand if he really wants a book.

The Schnuckers leave Tuesday for their four months away from the job, but will be back at the same old stand next spring.

Dan and Dot's Place

By Paul Hansen of the Democrat and Chronicle

7 December 1969



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The Schnucker's Book and Antique Shop in 1969.

Courtesy of Democrat & Chronicle and Paul Hansen.

Photos courtesy of Talis Bergmanis.

Springwater - "People are always asking us: 'How do you tell a valuable book? What is an antique?' You have to live with them, handle them, know them," is Daniel Schnucker's answer.

He and his wife Dorothy (they prefer to be called "Dan" and "Dot") have live with, handled and known books and antiques for 30 years. These former hobbies have grown into Schnucker's Books and Antiques at the junction of Routes 15 and 15A in Springwater NY.

"Having a bookstore had been our dream," the Schnuckers recalled. They moved to Hilton from Long Island when Mr. Schnucker joined a Rochester

industry. "We had to rent a barn because we had so many books in the attic that the walls of the house were caving in under the weight," Schnucker recalled.

What kind of books? "It's a general book store - we specialize in nothing," Schnucker says. He estimates his stock at 100,000 volumes ranging from local and Western New York State histories to period novels to philosophy to old National Geographics to Golden Books for the kids.

Prices start at a dime but sometimes he sells a rare volume for \$500.

With a selection of 35,000 works of fiction and the rest non-fiction, the clientele range from book dealers, professors, librarians and educational institutions (together comprising about 60% of the business) to tourists who just happen to see the store as they drive by. Mr. Schnucker has found that "they go to the libraries for fiction and get sick of the new stuff."

People from California, Utah, and Ohio join the more frequent customers from Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse, Ithaca, and Corning. Many have been known to travel the 35 miles from the turnpike so as not to miss a yearly visit. Some who haven't been able to make the annual pilgrimage have written to express regrets and ask about the current merchandise.

"We are always getting new customers but we keep the old ones," said Schnucker, whose business has grown steadily since their store opened 10 years ago August 9.

While the books are diverse and comprehensive, the antiques center around a collection of fine china and glass, but Mrs. Schnucker says "I buy for my collectors."

Because antiques of 100 years or more are now often being passed down in families rather than finding their way into shops, she also carries collectors' items which may not be antiques but are things that people want.

“Radios from the period of 1910 to 1920 are hard to find because people collect them even if they aren’t antiques,” Mr. Schnucker observed. One can find many such items of interest from bean pots to Tiffany-style lamps to porcelain figurines.

Of the books, town and county histories are “the hardest to get and the hardest to keep because they sell so fast,” according to Mr. Schnucker. “People want to know who their grandfathers were and what part they played in Western New York.”

For the last 10 years the Schnuckers have had a friendly competition over which section sells more. Until this year the books consistently outsold the antiques, but at this point, “they are neck and neck,” Mr. Schnucker said.

In addition to 25 years collecting antiques, Mrs. Schnucker raised 2 children and she and Mr. Schnucker now have 2 grandchildren. She has acquired a personal collection of dolls and accompanying miniatures. And perhaps it is no surprise that they both have a library - she on antiques, he on books - which they consider tools of the trade. From April 1 to December 1 they occupy themselves with acquiring and selling their articles. “Then we go fishing for 4 months.”