

City Beat

There are eight million stories in my albums. This is one of them...

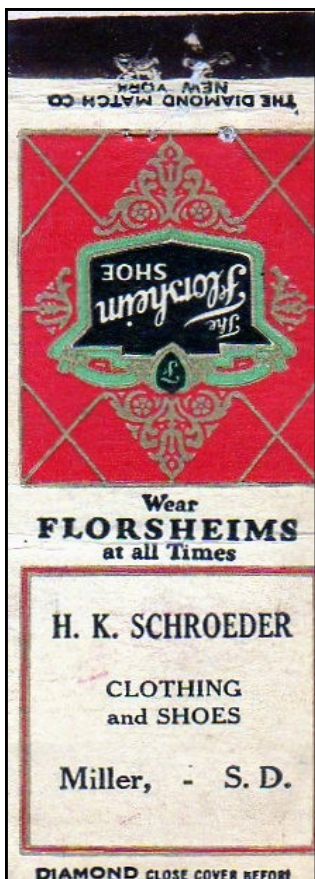
Florsheim & Co. was founded in 1892 by Milton S. Florsheim. He and his father, Sigmund Florsheim, made the first shoes in Chicago. By the time of the Great Depression, the company had "2,500 employees, 5 factories, 71 retail outlets, 9,000 dealers and a network of regional wholesale distributors".

Many small towns had stores selling Florsheim.

Eventually, some cities had stores owned by and selling only Florsheim. By 1930, Florsheim was making women's shoes and had five Chicago factories and 2500 employees, with 71 stores partly or entirely company-owned and 9000 stores around the United States selling Florsheims.

Milton Florsheim died and his son Irving took over heading the company in 1936. His other son Harold became president in 1946 as the elder brother became chairman.

In 1953, International Shoe Company, the world's largest shoe maker, bought Florsheim for \$21 million. Three years later, Florsheim became a division but operated as a separate entity. During its first ten years, Florsheim was International Shoe's most important unit, doubling its sales, and responsible for a quarter of the parent's sales and more than twice that fraction of earnings. Florsheim had 70 percent of high-quality men's shoes and succeeded when its parent company was struggling.



Florsheim eventually sold women's shoes through Thayer-McNeil stores, also owned by International Shoe (by this time called Interco).

In the 1980s, Florsheim began selling athletic shoes, and Interco's shoe division became part of Florsheim.

In 1991, Interco declared bankruptcy but kept Florsheim until the company got out of the shoe business in 1994. Florsheim became a separate company, and in 1996 changed its name to Florsheim Shoe Group.

Until the mid-1990s, almost every mall in the United States had a Florsheim store. However, with the rise of such shoe stores as Journeys and Finish Line, Inc., and the de-emphasis of shoe stores in American malls, most Florsheim stores closed down by the early 2000s. This followed the fate of other companies such as Kinney Shoes, Thom McAn and Butler Shoes. Butler Shoes became Butler Group owned by Zale Corporation. Butler Group closed in 1990.

In 2002, the company was repurchased by members of the founding family. Thomas W. Florsheim, Jr. and John W. Florsheim of Weyco Group, based in Glendale, Wisconsin, repurchased the brand for \$47 million from rival Florsheim Group, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florsheim_Shoes]