

Walk Down the Streets of Time at the Chudnow Museum of Yesteryear

By Stephanie Lecci • Jul 16, 2013

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Local grocer H. Grafman was the museum namesake Avrum Chudnow's father-in-law.

Chudnow Museum of Yesteryear

Listen

Lake Effect's Stephanie Lecci interviews Steve Daily, director of the Chudnow Museum of Yesteryear located in Milwaukee.

The streets and shops of a Milwaukee gone by come back to life at a local museum.

Wisconsin has its share of fabulous museums that tell the stories of the past – from the Milwaukee Public Museum to the Wisconsin Civil War Museum.

But there's one museum where you can literally walk through Milwaukee's history.

[The Chudnow Museum of Yesteryear](#) is only a year old itself, but it presents Milwaukee as it was in the interwar period, and focuses on the material culture of the 1920s, 30s, and 40s.



The Chudnow Museum of Yesteryear opened to the public in July 2012.

Credit Chudnow Museum of Yesteryear

Located in a converted house at 11th and Kilbourn, the museum's rooms become the literal locales that show a city in transition, and the hallway floors made to look like street bricks.

"We believe in the immersion exhibit, much like the (Milwaukee Public Museum's) Streets of Old Milwaukee," says director Steve Daily. "We are more than that, though. You can walk into the store, you can walk into the location and see what's on display rather than just look through a window."

The stops along the way include an ice cream shop from Milwaukee's Wonderland Park; hardware, grocery and drug stores; a movie palace and more. Plus, what 1920s Milwaukee would be complete without a barber shop-turned-speakeasy?

Listen

Chudnow Museum director Steve Daily gives us the password to get into Barber Charlie's Speakeasy.

Daly says each exhibit is filled to the brim with historic tools, bottles, posters and other seeming ephemera that were painstakingly collected and preserved by the museum's namesake - the late Milwaukee businessman Avrum M. Chudnow.

"He collected all these all these different artifacts and objects that...document American culture," Daly says. "It kind of shows the consumerism, the rise of industrialization and the population during that time period."

What Chudnow collected is what most of us would have thrown away once used - candy wrappers, tins of rat poison, ice cream cartons, pharmacists' bottles, old Coca-Cola bottles, boxes of Quaker Oats and Clabber Girl baking powder.



CHUDNOW
Museum
of
Yesteryear

ESTABLISHED 1991

GLADY

Oh Henry!
Milady
REX Water-Brush
LADY



Toys, candy and ice cream delighted Milwaukee's children in the past - and these recreation shops will delight today's kids.

Credit Chudnow Museum of Yesteryear

"Some of them he saved with contents still in them and some of them luckily are empty, so we've had to discard some of the petrified contents out of some of the boxes and cans," Daily says. "He labeled himself a conservator, and I think that's probably a pretty apt term for him. I think he felt he was conserving this stuff for the future."

There are about 700 items currently on display, but Daily estimates there are about 250,000 items in the Mr. Chudnow's collection. The museum is working with interns from local universities to catalog the items, some of which will go up in changing temporary exhibits. Daily says he wants to keep introducing new items to keep the museum "a fresh experience" for visitors.

"It's through these objects that we can tell the story better," he says. "It's just a way of showing people this is how history goes."

Tomorrow marks the museum's [Founder's Day](#), in honor of Avrum Chudnow. There will be half price admission all day from 10 to 4, guest speakers and a new documentary on Mr. Chudnow in the theater.

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