

Cellar Door

5150 Main Street



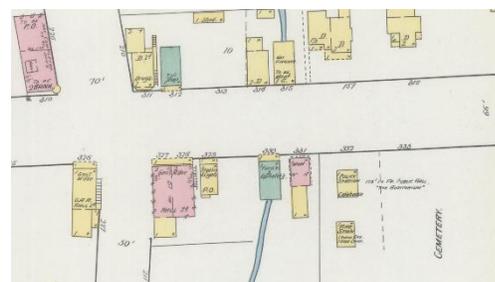
Summary

On this spot, years ago, the St. Joseph Creek flowed through the Downers Grove downtown. In the early 1960s, the creek was rerouted underground by way of a 12-foot diameter pipe. In 1964, on the reclaimed land, Herman Giesche, Jr. relocated his shoe store, **Giesche Shoes**, to this new building. **Every Day's a Sundae** opened in 1995 after the building was split into three parcels. Ten years later in 2005, **The Cellar Door**, a wine shop and bistro, moved into this location.

Building History

Early History

St. Joseph Creek, prior to the early 1960s, bisected the downtown at this spot. Due to flooding in the central business district during heavy rains, the village decided to relocate the St. Joseph Creek underground.



Just south of this property, stood the original Downers Grove Police Station and Village Offices (there is a parking lot there now). The police station was built before 1892. The Sanborn Insurance Map from that time shows the building with a “calaboose,” now known as jail cells. It was a two-story building with a basement and fire escape in back. In 1958, the police station was relocated to 945 Burlington Avenue across from the Main Street Train Station.

The Giesche Shoes Building (1964-1995)

In 1964, a large new store was built over the St. Joseph Creek’s underground route. The creek was shifted south so it no longer runs under the building location. Smaller buildings that bisected the creek were demolished. Herman Giesche, a retired Chicago police officer and son of a German immigrant shoemaker, relocated his shoe store into the building. This became the third home for Giesche Shoes in Downers Grove.

Around 1935, Herman Giesche, Jr. opened his first store on the northwest corner of Main Street and Curtiss (5138 Main Street) in the space now occupied by Citibank. He later moved across the street to the southwest corner (5138-5140 Main Street), the current location of Bank Financial.



Herman, Jr. was the son of German immigrants, Herman Giesche and Mary Thorman, who came to America in 1884. They married in Wisconsin that same year and eventually made their way to Cook County. Herman, Sr. opened his first shoe store on Clark Street in Chicago in 1887. At that time, the shoe business did not deal in mass production, shoes were individually made for each customer.

Herman, Sr. died in 1928, but the shoe business remained a part of the Giesche Family. Four generations made their living in the retail shoe business. Different family members over the years owned stores in Naperville,

Geneva, La Grange, Libertyville, Glen Ellyn, and Yorktown Mall in Lombard. The last Giesche Shoe store, in Geneva, closed its doors in 2014.

As a leading shoe retailer in its day, Giesche Shoes stores were often mentioned as the place to buy the latest shoes in national campaigns of prominent shoe brands. Giesche Shoes was mentioned in advertisements in publications as diverse as *Life Magazine*, *Ebony*, *Esquire*, *Boy's Life*, *Glamour*, *Mademoiselle*, *Field & Stream*, and *The Chicago Tribune* by manufacturers such as Tingley, Hush Puppies, and Brown Shoe Company.

Every Day's A Sundae (1995-2005)

After Giesche Shoes closed in 1995, the building at 5150 Main Street was remodeled and subdivided into three separate retail spaces.

This southernmost space next served as a second home for [Every Day's A Sundae](#). Stan and Diane Urban, residents of Downers Grove, opened an ice cream shop after a successful run of selling ice cream at the original Downers Grove Heritage Fest. Founded in 1992, Every Day's a Sundae was originally located in a store front where Capri Restaurant now stands, near the southeast corner of Main Street and Burlington Avenue. In 1995, the ice cream shop moved into the now divided Giesche Building. In 2005, Every Day's a Sundae moved to its current location on the northside of the Burlington Northern tracks in a newly constructed building at 990 Warren Avenue.

The Cellar Door (2005 to present)



In the newly vacated space, [The Cellar Door](#) was introduced to Downers Grove by Sean Chaudhry. Today, The Cellar Door serves the village as a local, no-frills bistro and wine shop, offering wine enthusiasts a place to relax and enjoy diverse wines and food.

Of the other two tenants in this building, Cocomero Frozen Yogurt opened in 2012 and [Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices](#) moved here in 2019. Other stores that have occupied these subdivided spaces include Verizon Wireless, [Knitche](#), and [Fair Game](#).

Sources

1. Building pictures are courtesy of the Downers Grove Historical Society and the Downers Grove Museum.
2. Sanborn Maps. Earlier Sanborn Maps are available at the Library of Congress website. <https://www.loc.gov/maps/?q=Downers+Grove>. Later maps for 1933 and 1947 are available on microfilm at Downers Grove Public Library.
3. Village of Downers Grove, "Inside DG: St. Joseph Creek Pipe", YouTube video, 25 Jan 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smOi967x0bM>
4. Montrew Dunham, *Downers Grove Revisited*, 2003, page 102.
5. "Business Spotlight: Every Day's A Sundae", *Downers Grove Patch*, 4 Jun 2013, <https://patch.com/illinois/downersgrove/business-spotlight-every-days-a-sundae>
6. Cellar Door Web, <https://www.cellardoorwine.com/about-us>, accessed 21 Oct 2021

Written and researched by Marty Acks in 2021.