

Expanded Edition: Who's in the Hood: Loft Antiques

For over two decades, this beloved antique store has been a literal cornerstone of the busy intersection at 50th and Xerxes. Over the years, many intersections and streets in Minneapolis have changed with the ebb and flow of commerce and shops opening and evolving, yet this particular intersection has managed to stand the test of time and retain much of its look, all the while stocking a true treasure trove of gems from our recent past.

Currently co-managed by Sandy Gooley and Kaye Monroe, the current *Loft Antiques* opened its doors in its actual location in 1996, but not many know that its history goes back even further, covering changes of ownership and location for a span of an additional 20 years.

Back in the spring of 1976, a group of ten enterprising women, many of them from Fulton and surrounding Minneapolis neighborhoods, pooled their effort and resources and applied for a new business license to open an antiques under a cooperative business model; this ultimately became the original *Loft Antiques*. Elizabeth Schoening Dolphin recalls her mother, Carol Schoening, being a life-long avid antique-hunter, working hard to create a business and establish an antique store. They chose a location in a second floor loft apartment space, right above the Sings' Chinese Restaurant (where you find *Vinaigrette* today), just kitty-corner from where the current *Loft Antiques* stands. By the fall of that year, Carol was busily preparing for the antique store's much-awaited opening, recruiting her whole family to help in the effort. Elizabeth recalls watching her brother and sister creating the display window, and seeing her father and George Robb hang the sign for this first shop. Elizabeth's sister helped to paint the walls of the shop and later that evening attended the Homecoming dance with paint still in her hair.

The other nine women founders of this first *Loft Antiques* were: Betty Robb, Jean Alexander, Betty Berg, Kathleen Griffin, Honey Kramer, Faith Hayhoe, Barb Malone, Nancy Meehan, and Fran Specht. They all worked hard, heaving up furniture, lamps and other antiques upstairs to the loft. Carol Schoening signed the notice of certificate of business name, formally establishing the cooperative business model in which they co-owned and shared the lease, hours of operation and other responsibilities, meeting once monthly. In addition to sharing the business, they had many other elements that brought them closer together: they were all in the similarly busy life-stage of raising children, so that, over the years, the partnership led to bonding and friendship as well.

As time went on, the business evolved, and new antique dealers became involved in the business. Barb Malone and Carol Schoening split from the group and opened the Loft Too in the other upstairs apartments next to the Loft. Then, in 1996, the current corner location became available for lease, offering 4000 square feet of space and a unique opportunity to expand the scale of the antique store. It was then that five of the women in the antique store at the loft decided to split and move into the new space. Dorothy Burns, Diana Hildreth, Patty McNutty, Sandy Gooley and Cookie Waldron signed a new lease and moved to the more spacious location, keeping the name Loft Antiques.

Current *Loft Antiques* manager Sandy Gooley remembers that she would often visit her mom, Barb Gillham to help out in the store after school or on weekends, riding her bicycle from Bryan Mawr to Fulton, taking the scenic route around the lakes. At the new location, the five women owners continued to operate under the original cooperative model from 1976. Working busily, they quickly filled the space with fresh flowers, plants, vintage oak furniture, hand-painted ceramics, elaborate crystal chandeliers and countless other treasures and relics from eras past,

creating the store much as we know it today, with its distinctive aesthetic of each area of the store set up as if it were a living room, or bedroom, or kitchen. When stepping across the threshold, the overall impression is more that of being in an inviting space and a well-curated home rather than just being in a shop. If there is such a thing as shabby vogue, or shabby glamour, this is it. Eclectic in scope, the pieces range from 19th Century to mid-Century, encompassing a variety of styles and periods.

16 years ago, Sandy Gooley joined the venture and officially got involved in the family business. She relished the opportunity: "Hunting for antiques, repurposing, painting and fixing each object is a fun challenge". When describing the different elements that make the antique store unique, Sandy explains: "What sets it apart is its size and the variety we offer. We have something for everyone: tables, lamps, costume jewelry, postcards, vintage signs, books... all set up on two full floors. From the high-end collector, to a young person simply looking for a cool object to use as part of a bedroom's décor, you're sure to find something that will catch your eye." I looked around and marveled at the assortment, wondering the stories, personal anecdotes and history that each object must have. The items don't necessarily get selected for their stories though! They're carefully chosen with quality as the first criteria in mind, focusing on solid, well-made items of old that feature details and techniques of craftsmanship. "It doesn't have to be expensive to be quality," Gooley asserts.

At present, 13 women and 3 men are part of the cooperatively shared business. A year ago, the store held an opening to celebrate an extra 100 square feet of newly-acquired space. No doubt the business will continue to evolve and be a landmark of 50th and Xerxes. If you're feeling nostalgic and in need of a brief trip to the past, you don't need to go far. Just a quick visit to Loft Antiques will provide you a respite from an age of mass production and standardization and, instead, offer passage to a bygone world whose well-worn and much-beloved vintage antiques lend testimony to a more elegant era dimmed only slightly by the passage of time.