



519

## W. North Water St.

Construction 1874

In 1874, J.W. Bingham and L. Cline built the second brick building in New London. Mr. Bingham had a grocery store in the center called the Center Store. Charles Lehman opened a clothing store in the east side. The local newspaper "The Times" and Cline's Hall, an event space, occupied the second floor.

The next few decades, saw numerous businesses in the building. These included Charles Lehman's clothing store, George Cline's furniture and undertaking business, A. Jacob's Great Emporium selling dry goods and clothing, F.G. Deming's dry good and grocery store, as well as the offices of real estate agents, attorneys, and doctors upstairs.

In 1912, Sam Aronson bought the building. He ran a very successful trading company. In 1918, he sold his business to Louis Wainer. The new business, called J. Wainer and Sons, continued dealing in furs, hides, metal, poultry, and farm supplies with a little added twist.



During Prohibition (1920-1933), the Wainers ran a large bootlegging business. They sent much of their liquor to Chicago. And, yes, they were in business with Al Capone. Jobs in the area were scarce and the Wainers hired many local men to make and transport illegal liquor. The work was dangerous. Stills blew up in homes, barns, and warehouses. One woman in town, a telephone operator, helped the syndicate. She sent out warnings when calls came that marshals were on their way. Federal agents raided homes and "soft-drink" parlors on a regular basis.

In 1926, federal prohibition officers raided the Wainers building. They found quantities of alcohol on the premises. Although arrested numerous times, the Wainers never went to court. Their luck ran out in 1935, when convicted of violating the internal revenue laws, Louis and Hyman (Hymie) Wainer spent six years at Leavenworth. They also faced a fine of \$12,100 (roughly \$277,000 today). At their trial, the Assistant US District Attorney branded the Fox River Valley syndicate, headquartered in New London, the largest operators of illicit liquor in Wisconsin.

In 1927, Frank Rusch purchased the building from the Wainers. He added a gas station to the west. Various businesses occupied the building over the years including Walmer's Soft Drink Parlor, Mike's Tavern, Rusch's Tavern, Boulby Candy Company, Chef's Café, Rechner's Cleaners, Bernice's café, Retzlaff's Bar and B&J's Restaurant. Most recently, it was Easy St. Bar.

