MY LIFE AS A MERCHANT

1881—1942

Sol H. Blank

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1881 to 1942.

Sol K. Blank

Cincinnati, Ohio.

1954.

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Foreword

The author's children and his children's children are responsible for the publication of this book. It will be a surprise to the author. God willing, he will celebrate his ninetieth birthday on April 10, 1956, and this book is a loving tribute to him on that occasion.

It is only a part of a much larger work. But, except for occasional visitors, few persons are acquainted with the magnum opus of which this thin volume is a mere sampling. Beautifully hand-written and containing, also, many charts and clippings and old records, Sol Blank's Family History fills three score loose leaf binders. Another excerpt, of about the same size as the present volume, is among the Manuscript Collection of the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. Its title suggests its contents: In the Home of a Scribe, My Childhood in Germany, 1866-1881.

His family prize the entire unique collection of irreplaceable records and shared memories; but others, too--particularly perhaps the many friends in Mt. Carmel with whom he has never lost touch--will find pleasure even in these few pages.

The memoirs reveal a plain and friendly man with a broad humanity. Rightfully he is honored, justly he enjoys a GOOD NAME. May he be with us le-orech yamim for many years to come!

Acknowledgment

The original manuscript, of which this book is a slightly edited copy, is deposited in The American Jewish Archives, a department of the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati. We thank our good friend Professor Jacob R. Marcus, the Director of the American Jewish Archives, for permitting the publication of this manuscript and for making a photostatic copy available for the purpose.

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Chapter 1

Germany to New York and Philadelphia, 1881

In 1881, I had given up my studies in Burgpreppach on account of weak eyes and had decided then to enter the mercantile life. My brother Moses who was five years my senior was clerking for the firm, J. S. Rosenbaum in Grebenstein, Germany and I still have a postcard, dated October 4, 1881, written to him by my father, Seligman Blank, from our home in Lendershausen, Bavaria. I was offered a place by a liquor concern in Hanau as an apprentice for three years with free board and lodging but did not accept it. Instead, my brother and I left Germany for the United States of America on November 9, 1881 at 4 a.m.

A permit called Entlassungs Urkunde (release document) dated October 26, 1881, had been granted to me by the Kgl. Regierung von Unterfranken and Aschaffenberg, Interior Department, Germany. A map, printed about 1865, shows our trip to Antwerp, Belgium. We left there for New York November 12th at 7 a.m. via Red Star line, S.S. Waesland. I have a list of cabin passengers, forty-five in all, among them the names of my brother and me.

We arrived in New York on December 5, 1881 and so we were on the Waesland for 23 days. It was a combination sail and steamboat. Experienced some rough weather and the ship was disabled for several days, commencing November 23, 1881. For three days the engines were not usable until repaired. During that time the sails took the place of the steam engines.

I was quite seasick and even drunk for the first and only time in my life. It came about this way. Before boarding the ship we had been advised to take along a bottle of French Cognac to be used in case of seasickness. While I was

seasick and lying on my cot my brother handed me the bottle of cognac so I might take a drink from it. Then he left the room as it was lunch time. On his return he found the bottle almost empty and me sound asleep. As I did not wake up for about forty-eight hours he had called in the ship's doctor who after being told what had happened offered the advice to let me sleep until the effect of the liquor was worn off. This was good advice, for when I awakened I had fully recovered from seasickness. (I do not advise this same remedy, however.)

On our arrival in New York we were greeted by our cousin Bernard H. Blank of New York City, an employee of the New York optical firm of Hammel, Riglander & Co., whose place of business was on Maiden Lane, New York. Later on he had charge of an optical factory in Frankfurt a/M., Germany, for several years and at that time visited our sisters Jane and Sellah Blank several times in Bavaria.

After welcoming us at the dock he treated us to two items that we had not eaten before, bananas and peanuts. To this day, I believe, I've not tasted anything as delicious as they were to me then.

On landing, our cousin Ben Blank accompanied us to the apartment where our sister Fanny, who was married to our cousin Henry Blank, lived and also to where our sister Leah lived. It was near Bloomingdale Brothers' Department Store at 55th Street and 3rd Avenue then. Our sister Leah at that time was on a visit to the Philip Massman home in Philadelphia, Pa. He was a son of father's sister, Karoline Massman of Lendershausen, Bavaria.

When brother Moses and I left our home in Lendershausen, our good father, of blessed memory, provided us with a prayer that was to be used in case of heavy storms on the ocean. It was printed in Hebrew-written letters. Also a printed prayer by Dr. H. Werner, Rabbi in Adelsdorf, Bavaria, in both Hebrew and German, printed in Fürth, Germany in 1854 (price: 3 Kreutzer or about 12 cents). Psalm 121 was to be added. I have retained all of this. In addition, father furnished us some papers containing the names of certain angels and these papers were to be thrown into the ocean from the four corners of the ship, which acts were calculated to quiet heavy storms while on the ocean.

We landed safely in Castle Garden near New York City. All passengers who wanted to enter the United States were detained there to give the inspectors a chance to ascertain if they had anything that required paying duties. Physicians were present also to examine the incoming passengers for contagious diseases. We passed without any trouble.

As my wealth consisted only of one gold piece, worth five American dollars, I began to look for a job while brother Moses found employment with the clothing firm of Hanauer, Kohn & Co., Mfrs. in Philadelphia, Pa. and remained about four years. My first job commenced on January 21, 1882 on a Saturday and was at Bloomingdale's Department Store, 3rd Avenue and 55th Street and lasted until February 3, 1882. Having been reared in an orthodox Jewish family it became almost impossible for me to start working on Saturday (the day of rest), and to be placed in the sub-basement of this store with instructions to split the wooden boxes there into kindling, was almost more than I could stand. I well remember that with almost every drop of the hatchet onto the wood, tears dropped also. At noon when I reached my sister's home for lunch she at once noticed my eyes which were swollen from weeping and so she suggested that I quit this job. However, as I needed the work and realizing that it would have been difficult to find a place where I would not need to work on the Sabbath I stuck it out.

In the afternoon of the first day I was called from the basement to the ground floor to stand guard over a lot of crockery and cooking utensils that this firm had on display on the outside of their building (the present method of displaying wares only in windows, on shelves, bins and counters had not come into use then). While walking up and down on the sidewalk and keeping my eyes open for pilfering I recited the mincha (afternoon) and a little later the maariv (evening) prayer in Hebrew and asked our Heavenly Father to forgive the sin I had committed by desecrating the Sabbath.

From the work just mentioned I was promoted to sitting alongside the driver of this firm's delivery wagon (motorcars had not been invented). It was my duty to take the customers' purchases from this horse-driven wagon into the homes where the driver stopped, and deliver them to the tenants. The driver was Irish, I knew scarcely any

English and he knew no German and so there was no conversation held. I remember delivering a package of kitchen utensils to a home where the lady of the house tried to hold an English conversation with me and she also asked questions. Not understanding her, I would watch her face and where I figured that I should answer in the affirmative I would say "Yes" and where I figured the negative would suit better I'd say "No, ma'm." It soon dawned on her that I did not know what it was all about and she said to me slowly and repeating it several times, "Go back to Mr. Bloomingdale and tell him for me, next time not to send a greenhorn." Before taking this message to my boss, my sister told me the meaning of it and I concluded that I had better keep mum and that is what I did. This job of sitting just back of the horses in the open with an Irishman who would stop frequently in front of saloons to indulge in drinks and allow me to wait on the seat of the wagon for his return, on the cold days in January with a scarcity of clothes on my back, was anything but comfortable. But I stuck it out because I needed the work.

On Sundays and when not on duty, because I enjoyed walking, and also to save carfare, I would walk from my sister's apartment far down town to my uncle Hyeronemus Blank's office and apartment, a distance of about fifty blocks. My uncle was then in the fire insurance business as an agent. He formerly was proprietor of a department store in New York City. After the Civil War, when he owned merchandise at the high war prices and the latter dropped considerably, he found that he could not continue in business, so he turned everything he owned over to his creditors and to quote his statement, "did not even save enough cash to buy milk for his wife and children for the next morning." On these walks and still wearing the clothes I brought with me from Germany which were quite different from the American style, I experienced the unpleasantness of being laughed at by the boys I met. I recall how tempting the oranges, bananas and other fruits on the sidewalk stands looked, but owing to lack of purchasing power, although prices were from one cent to five cents each, I had to forego the pleasure of owning them. I would also visit our cousin Bernard Blank's business on Maiden Lane. For fear I would not find that place the folks taught me to say, "Please tell me which way to go to Maiden

Lane." I learned this easier by singing it and it often comes back to my mind now, many years later. At different times I've heard my children singing it, considering it a good joke.

After working a few weeks at Bloomingdale's and then at Shatz's Law Office at $2.50 a week which I had to give up on account of styes on both eyes, word reached me from Mr. Joseph G. Arnold, a man who had married my cousin Fanny Massman, formerly from my old home in Lendershausen, to come and work for him at his clothing and furnishing goods store in New Castle, Pa. He was then on a buying trip in Philadelphia, Pa. and requested that I come there and travel back to New Castle with him. Accepting his offer, I took the train from New York on March 20, 1882 to Philadelphia, but was informed on arrival that he had entered a hospital on account of erysipelas of the face and he was confined there for nine weeks. In the meantime I landed a job at 323 Chestnut Street, at $3.00 a week, in a cigar and tobacco store. It was owned by our cousins Alfred, Sam and Philip Massman. The back part of this store had a bar where bankers and brokers of the Chestnut Street offices would congregate for their light lunches and drinks. There was a ticker handy so the patrons might watch quotations of the stock exchange.

During the noon hour it was my duty to act as cashier at the desk. Being very anxious to learn the English language I'd keep German and English dictionaries and grammars at this desk and would study when not otherwise occupied. One evening when my brother who had come to assist me and we had worked till a late hour in the store, Mr. R. H. Ertheiler, the manager, suggested that at his expense we should get a lunch at a nearby restaurant. We went and the waiter suggested ham sandwiches for us. Neither one of us knew what ham really meant as we had been in the country but a few months. We figured that ham was the English for "Hammel" which is sheep in German. So the orders were filled for ham sandwiches. They looked suspicious when the waiter set them before us and so we refrained from eating them and drank coffee instead.

While in Philadelphia, I boarded at the home of my stepcousins Alfred and Sam Massman who were distillers of liquors. Two incidents occurred there that I have not

forgotten as they taught me lasting, good lessons. While eating my meal with them Mrs. Alfred Massman stopped me suddenly with the remark: "Look out, you'll cut your tongue," and then explained that in this country it is not customary to bring the knife to the mouth while eating. The other was, when, at her request I handed her a pin with the pointed end towards her. She said then advisedly, "When handing a pin or needle to a lady, to prevent an injury, do not hand them with the points, but with the other ends, towards her."

When leaving Philadelphia on May 17, 1882 and the employ of Mr. Ertheiler to go to work for Mr. Arnold of New Castle, the former gave me a letter of recommendation praising particularly my efforts to learn the English language quickly.

May 17, 1882

To whom it may concern:

Solomon Blank, the bearer of this is about to leave to accept a position in the country. I must say while I am glad to know that he is about to accept a position which is far better than the one he vacates, yet I can say this much, he is the only young man whom I have ever known with whom I like to part as unwillingly as I do with him.

During his stay here, he has shown himself polite, obedient, attentive and best of all honest and truthful and if he continues in the future the same as he has in the past he will be a joy to his parents, a valuable man to his employer and a pride to the community and a pleasure to himself. His ambition for study you seldom find. The little fellow is only in this country but a few months yet has acquired the language far better than native born Americans. I have not said any more than is justly due him and anyone having him in his employ will endorse every word I have stated. I wish him every possible success and feel satisfied he will never have occasion to use this letter as he is going in good hands where no doubt he will remain, but give it at his solicitation and feel convinced he can obtain the same wherever he may have been employed.

P. H. Ertheiler

Chapter 2

New Castle, Pennsylvania, 1882-1885

Before leaving Philadelphia in company with Mr. Arnold he took me to a wholesale trunk and bag factory to let me select a trunk for my use. None seemed to please me and on being asked the reason I answered that all were too large for the amount of clothing I had. Then Mr. Arnold suggested that the day would come when I would have more clothes and so the trunk was bought. On April 10, 1884, my 18th birthday, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold had given me my first American-made suit of clothes.

On my arrival in New Castle, on May 18, 1882, I met my cousin Fanny Arnold for the first time, and also her two daughters, Mamie and Carrie. A third daughter, Lenah, was born to the Arnolds while I was with them. I slept on the second floor of Mr. Arnold's store and boarded at his home which was located one block from the store. Mrs. Arnold was a very fine and good-hearted woman while her husband was high strung and quick-tempered and in consequence he caused me many unpleasant hours. Any person so equipped has my deep-felt sympathy.

When I started to work in his store, his first instructions were to start brushing and cleaning the stock of clothing and men's furnishings by starting in the front of the store and to follow this up until I had reached the end in the back of the store and then start all over again in the same manner. "Keep this up," he said and as a parting shot he added, "Whenever you run out of work come to me for more work." Of course, that never was necessary under such a rule during my stay with him. The clothing was piled high on tables (no racks) and the furnishings were kept in boxes just as the factories had shipped them and not on display as the custom

was later. At one time during his angry moods, when I had done a certain job slightly different from his direction, he asked my reason for making a change. I started to explain but I only got as far as saying, "I thought" when he thundered at me, "G-- d-- you; you have no business thinking."

In the store I experienced quite a puzzle when trying to find out what a typical Irishman meant when he asked for "a pir of pants." He had to point to a pile of pantaloons before I understood that it was a pair of pants he wanted to buy. Several years later this same Irishman happened to be in front of our store in Birmingham, Alabama. I recognized him and to start a conversation I asked if the suit he was wearing had been bought at the Joe G. Arnold store in New Castle? He answered that it had, but was quite puzzled that I could recognize it and so I explained that I had seen that pattern while working for Mr. Arnold and that I seldom forgot a pattern. His name was Kelly and after that little chat he became a regular customer of ours.

Mr. Arnold was in the habit of going to the market the first thing in the morning with a basket on his arm to do the household shopping. He used to tell that it always made him quite angry while at the market place to see women handle pieces of meat with their hands and often with dirty gloves before making purchases. (In these years meats were displayed on tables where people could handle them and make their selections.) On his way to the market he would stop at the door of the store and awaken me and he would not leave there until I had shown my face. These were the years of firing coal stoves and oil lamps with much dirty work and precious little light. What a change from then to furnace heating and the fluorescent mode of lighting stores of later years!

Mr. Arnold liked the idea of walking, especially on Sundays and then would ask me to accompany him. (No doubt it started my good habit of walking in the open.) This was much to my liking. During these walks he would invariably wait for me to start a conversation. He was well versed and so I would ask him to explain things to me, whatever would come to my mind first. Then the conversation was kept up and I became familiar with the items I wanted to know. He had but three years of school life as a boy and gained his

knowledge from a great deal of reading. At his store where he spent most of his time he had the good habit of reading newspapers. Daily he would read the Pittsburgh Dispatch, as the saying goes "from kiver to kiver". When coming to the store this newspaper generally was there ready for him. Then he would sit in his comfortable chair in front of the store and read. He also believed in someone being close to the front door at all times so as to enable him to greet customers on entering. At that he was quite strict. I tried to inculcate that good idea in the minds of my clerks while conducting my own business, in later years. A clothing merchant whom I knew well, told me that he had many farmer customers in his business and that he would greet them as they entered with, "John, how are your hogs?" then would follow it with, "How are you and how are the children?"

At one time my boss Mr. Arnold gave me the job of splitting into kindling wood a lot of boxes in which the store's merchandise had been shipped (heavy paper boxes were not used in those years for shipping purposes.) After watching me doing this work he asked me to come with him to the front entrance of the store to watch the laborers who were repairing the street and then he said, "Now watch these men working and you will notice that they work slowly with their picks and shovels and by doing so, they are able to work all day long which is quite different from the way you handled your hatchet to cut up the wooden boxes. You would have tired on your job in just a little while. If you will go back to your work and handle the hatchet as you saw those laborers work, you'll get just as far in the end and without wearing yourself out." This was a good lesson. I've practiced it and have passed it on to others.

Shortly after starting my job at the Arnold store, I was about to cut a string and throw it away with some wrapping paper, Mr. Arnold warned me to desist. The order he gave me then was that all wrapping paper, heavy or light, must be straightened and folded and no string or wrapping twine was to be cut, but if knotted, the knots were to be unknotted, and if the paper and strings were at all usable were to be saved and used again. At first I could not understand why a merchant with a store full of merchandise would make such a ruling, but later I realized that if a person is taught to take

care of the little inexpensive items he will acquire the habit of being economical and save both the inexpensive as well as the expensive items. After I started in business for myself I continued the same practice and also taught it to my clerks. It seemed that all needed the same lesson. It was the custom for other merchants or friends to come to me to request wrapping paper or strings because they were in the poor habit of destroying theirs but knew that Sol Blank could and would accomodate them whenever they were in need of such items.

Here follows an episode about umbrellas: I was alone in Mr. Arnold's store when a customer entered to purchase two umbrellas. He selected two and took them along subject to the approval of his family. I did not ask him for his name believing him to be the bushelman who altered and repaired goods of this store. So the umbrellas were charged to him. Mr. Alf Wylie, who was the other clerk in the store, was renting a residence from him and when I told him what had happened he suggested that he would take the amount from the rent he was to pay at the next month. When he tried to do so, the tailor was not satisfied and stated that he bought no umbrellas. Then Mr. Arnold told me to go to him, identify him and then go before a justice of the peace, swear that he was the purchaser and in that way compel him to pay the amount. At this I balked, stating that I would go to the tailor to identify him, but that I would not take an oath, as I was taught that the Jewish people dare not take an oath. To this Mr. Arnold replied that such was nonsense and that I would have to pay the bill if I refused to take such a course. Mr. Wylie and I, started for the tailorshop and had gone but a few steps, when we met a man and I remarked "This man is not the tailor but the editor of our homepaper and all we need to do is deduct the charge when he calls to collect for the store's advertising." With that a big load was taken from my mind since, to have taken the price of the merchandise from my slim salary of but two dollars a week would have hurt considerably.

To have carried keys for locks of storedoors, homes, safety deposit boxes, trunks and suitcases and to have lost but one set of them during my lifetime is, I think, worthy of mention. One set of storekeys was stolen by a thief who

used a rod and hook to steal my trousers and store keys by drawing them through an open window while I slept in the back of our store in Birmingham, All the locks and keys had to be replaced from my funds and this was quite a sacrifice for me, but it taught me the lesson to be more careful in the future.

While living in Newcastle, I had an opportunity to attend a night school for a very short time and I gladly availed myself of it. The teacher was Miss. E. A. Stephenson. When she notified me that her strength did not permit her to continue the teaching, I wrote her a letter of thanks and below is her answer. Let me add here that this was the only time that I took any lessons in this country. I really wanted lessons in the English language but to my regret the rest of the class wanted lessons in arithmetic and so I had to submit. Here is copy of her letter:

Febuary 19, 1884

Dear Friend:

A teacher's life is one of care, labor and anxiety, but it has some bright spots and as such will I ever consider the letter you sent me. I shall put it away among my mementoes and keep it always. Your kind words brought with them a greater balm than you thought of when you penned them. These words I especially prize: "I shall pray to Him who pays well for every good deed, to pay you as well as you deserve." -they are very comforting. It really pained me to send you word that I could not hear you recite any more and had it not been, that I felt I was taxing myself beyond my strength I would gladly have continued my work. Just one word: Finish the arithmetic, if you have any trouble come to me unhesitatingly for I will gladly help you. Any favor I can do you I will be much pleased to perform. Again, many thanks for your kind words.

I remain ever your friend,
E. A. Stephenson

In a memorandum book I brought from Germany I found a record of some of my expenses and income. My tickets, from Hofheim to Cassel, 11.60 Mark; baggage; 2.50 Mark; cash on hand on arrival in N. Y.;$5.00; first week's

wages from Bloomingdale's, $1.50, of which I left 50 cents with sister Leah.

Cash on hand in New Castle on May 18, 1882 : $1.50. Some expenses: haircut 20 cents, wash-pan 15 cents, candle 5 cents, stamps 36 cents, shoes $1.90, straw-hat 75 cents, doctor bill (first one) $1.00, coat 40 cents, suspenders 25 cents, baseball ticket 25 cents, shoes $1.25, suit $10.00, hat $1.25, undershirt 25 cents, two boxes paper collars 20 cents, gloves 22 cents. Total $71. 73 drawn during the year. Salary for the year $100.00. Balance due me $28.27. Received this amount, $28.27, from Mr. Arnold and $26.73 which I deposited in the Wallace Peoples Savings Bank. The bank failed and never paid anything (Good-by hard earned first money of $55.00 total).

I remember that my cousin Mamie Arnold also lost her savings in the same bank failure and we consoled each other over our losses. As I had lost my first year's savings in the bank failure I left my salary afterwards with Mr. Arnold. My salary for two years was $200.00 and since I had drawn from it $153.45, $46.55 was due me.

From May 18, 1885 to November 23, 1885 (when I left Mr. Arnold), my salary being $175.00, I had coming to me the sum of $67.55 which Mr. Arnold paid me. This was the amount I had saved after my loss in the bank and after paying my expenses and sending gifts to folks in Germany.

My principal companion was a clerk in the Brown Clothing store. His name was Joe Ehrlich. We had but little time for recreation as the stores opened with daybreak in winter and closed about nine in the evening and at twelve to one o'clock on Saturday nights.

In 1885 Joe presented me with an autograph book which contained his good wishes on the first page and those of relatives and friends on other pages.

On a walk my friend and I took on March 16, 1884 by accident we met a stranger also walking. He had the appearance of one of the prophets of old. We conversed with him and on leaving we asked him to write something to remember him. So he wrote the following upside down commencing with the last letter and ending with the first one:

New Castle, Pa,
March 16, 1884.

Written upside down.

(By Mr. Meyer Steinfeld.)

Herr Solomon Blank, Danke fur die Ehre (Thanks for the honor.)

Pattison is Governor of this state. If you learn to control yourself you are also a Governor.

"What shall be, will be-
and no intention of ours will arrest the decree."

Joe congratulated us to our engagement. On April4, 1951, in answer to my question to Rabbi Iwan J. Gruen in New Castle, he informed me that Joe had died in New Castle at age 69 and that his only survivor was his oldest daughter Mrs. Edw. Keller, a sister-in-law of Rabbi Nathaniel Keller of New Brunswick, N. J.

In the year 1885 when stores had started to close evenings at 7 p.m. on weekdays, there was some time left for recreation. Roller skating rinks had just made their appearance. I had used roller skates for the first time on April 7, 1884, but I did not care to skate. I did enjoy watching the fancy skating, however, (So I conceived the idea that if I could report to a magazine I might gain free admissions.) So I wrote to the Mirror of American Sports, T. C. Cowles, Editor and A. Durkes, Bus. Manager, Chicago and they at once sent me proper credentials.

Chicago Aug. 24, 1885, Mr. Sol H. Blank is the regular authorized correspondent of this paper for New Castle, Pa. and vicinity and entitled to report general sporting events for the season of 1885. This gave me a start in reporting to magazines and newspapers. Since then I reported frequently to them.

On leaving New Castle, Mr. Arnold gave me the following letter of recommendation:

December 21, 1885

To whom it may concern:

Sol H. Blank has been in my employ for three and a half years. I certify to his truthfulness and honesty.

He left me at his own free will in order to better his condition. I recommend him in every way to any and all persons. He has been a member of the family during all the time who were all sorry to part with him.

Respectfully
J. G. Arnold

Chapter 3

Warren Plains, North Carolina, 1886

My sister Leah was engaged to Mr. Alex Katzenstein of Warren Plains, North Carolina. Brother Moses and I wanted to be present at her wedding in Febuary 1886, so I gave up my job with Mr. Arnold and Moses gave up his job with Hanover, Kohn and Co. in Philadelphia. I went to New York to take my sister to North Carolina. On December 17, 1885, I commenced to clerk for Mr. Katzenstein in his general merchandise store at a salary of $25 a month plus board and lodging. Moses began to clerk for Emile Katzenstein, Alex's brother. The two Katzenstein brothers had previously been partners but had dissolved their partnership.

Mr. Katzenstein was also the postmaster of Warren Plains. The postmaster's pay came from a percent of the canceled stamps, hence quite small. This little village of Warren Plains consisted of a R. R. depot and about six homes near it. The U. S. census of 1940 gave it 101 inhabitants. It was a passenger and freight station of the then Raleigh and Gaston Railroad. The county seat, Warrenton, a little larger town of 1072 inhabitants in 1940 was about three miles away and it was reached with a dinky engine and a combination express, mail, freight and passenger coach running back and forth, meeting trains in Warren Plains and transferring passengers etc. to the county seat and bringing them to Warren Plains.

The inhabitants there were almost all colored, very polite and trying to do all the work that in the northern states falls to the hands of the whites. The only time in my life I took a horseback ride was there and I wanted the horse to take me to Warrenton. It seems that the horse did not feel inclined to go there and I, not knowing the proper method

to persuade him to do so, after riding about one hundred yards, I just allowed him to bring me back to the starting place and all was well.

The Katzenstein store contained groceries, piece goods etc. and it became my duty to sell merchandise, keep the stock in clean condition and go after the mail. My work was very light, hence I did a good deal of reading and I will have to answer to St. Peter for some of the white lies I used to tell patrons of the post office. When some patrons called for their papers and I had not read them, I'd tell 'em that they had not yet arrived. I remember selling sugar, coffee and calico, and receiving in pay some of the old, very large one and two cent copper coins, now out of circulation. Most of the tenants on Mr. Katzenstein's plantation, raising cotton and tobacco, had to be staked during the year until the crops were made, with food and clothing.

The Katzenstein family's living quarters, including mine, were above the store. Mr, Katzenstein was away from home a great deal of time trading for various things and accumulating a number of tracts of land that were quite low in price then. As I was very fond of my sister Leah, it was pleasant to have her reside above the store where I could see her often. A short time after her wedding she, one day, not wanting to wait any longer for her husband's return, set the table for lunch and asked the colored hired man who was polite and clean to eat at the same table with us. It was not the custom then and perhaps is not now in the south for colored people to eat at the same table with the whites, but we did not know that. When Mr. Katzenstein arrived a little later and saw what had happened, he became quite angry and grabbed the negro by his neck and shoved him down-stairs with the remark, "This will teach you not to sit at the same table with white people again."

I stopped working for Mr. Katzenstein after seven and one half months. As he paid me in merchandise for the $186.50 due me for wages, I took same with me to Birmingham and placed it on sale in the store my brother and I opened there.

On leaving Warren Plains to go into business in Birmingham Mr. Katzenstein gave me the following recommendation:

August 11, 1886.

To whom it may concern:

Mr. Sol H. Blank has been in my employ for seven months and has shown himself honest and polite. I can recommend him to any and everybody and regret he leaves me.

Respectfully
Alex Katzenstein.

Chapter 4

Birmingham, Alabama, 1886-1892

Since neither my brother nor I could find any future in the small towns of North Carolina, we concluded to go into business for ourselves elswhere. Besides, the predictions made by our New York cousin, Bernard H. Blank, was about to come true. It was when asked about conditions in the Southern states and especially in North Carolina that we would be surprised at first at the slow movements of the southern whites and negroes and at their lazy habits and then he added, that after living amongst them for a while, we would act no different. To avoid such we decided to start a business of our own in the then booming town of Birmingham. We were short on capital, but were advised by our cousin Philip Massman of Philadelphia that he would assist us in a financial way providing we would turn over to him some of the discounts we would earn on invoices paid with money he'd furnish. This we did for several years, and until we got on our feet.

It was customary then and it is now that to start a new account with the wholesalers the customer would give a statement of his financial worth and references. In those years therewas a wholesale firm on Broadway in New York by the name of Charles Broadway Rouse that sold their wares mostly to 5 cent to $1.00 retail stores, but had higher priced items also. They issued a monthly catalog and just to make same more attractive would purposely misspell words in it. We also received these catalogs. While in the market, purchasing merchandise, we called at their immense wholesale house in New York, selected merchandise amounting to several hundreds of dollars, then gave our firm name and location and the goods were shipped to us and we were their customer for several years. The odd part in this transaction was, that neither the salesman who waited on us, nor the

credit man asked any questions about our financial resources and not even for any references. Perhaps the honesty written on our faces established our credit with this firm.

We started a men's clothing and furnishing goods store at 2112 Second Avenue, paying a rent of but $35.00 a month. As the store was quite deep, we roomed in the back of it and later took a room on the third floor of the Jefferson County Savings Bank and let our clerks who came with us from North Carolina occupy the backroom of the store. One of these clerks was old enough to be my father and following the proverb of "Old men for advice" I often would ask him to solve some of my problems. At one time I approached him with one of my questions and after waiting quite a bit for his answer he said, "Mr. Blank, how do you want to be advised?" I said, "That'll do John. You taught me a lesson that a person seeking advice really wants to hear that which suits him best and not that which is best for him."

The city of Birmingham having almost everything in its immediate neighborhood, the Red Mountain among others which is almost all iron ore, large coal beds etc., items necessary for the manufacture of iron, boomed as few cities ever did in the U.S. In consequence, the price of all property went sky-high, almost as high as property on Broadway, New York. Rents climbed also. Luckily we had to pay but $35 a month, but since ground floor offices were all taken, we were offered $150 a month rent for each of our front store windows from real estate agents who required only as much room as a desk and chair would take up. We refused the offers, because our windows were needed for the display of merchandise.

The location of our store, 2112 Second Avenue was near Buzzard Roost, the locality where the colored people held their dances and quite often used razors or pistols during quarrels resulting in many murders. We decided to leave that locality and moved to 1915 Second Avenue a more central location, which called for a rent of $150 a month. It proved an unwise move because we lost much of our old trade that figured that they were not wanted in our more fashionable quarters. In addition, the boom had ended, the price of iron had dropped, factories were leaving the city, all of which caused business to diminish.

We had another clothing store on 19th Street between First and Second Avenue where brother Moses and his brother-in-law, Mr. Edward Wald, who was a pawnbroker, carried on. Edward Wald was not our partner, he only used part of the clothing store for his business.

Quite a few Jews came to Birmingham during its boom. A temple was erected and Rabbi Maurice Eisenberg was the spiritual leader. He was followed by Mr. Samuel Ullman, a former hardware merchant who was well posted in Hebrew and was a good speaker. He was one of my very good friends and we corresponded for some time after I left Birmingham. He wrote good poems which his family published later in book form. My friend and roommate Dave Rich and I at times assisted Rabbi Ullman in reading the services on Saturdays and holidays and by helping him in Sunday school work. When living in Anderson, Indiana, some years later, I was honored by a number of very friendly letters from Rabbi Ullman which I have retained. He died at age 84 on March 21, 1924.

For some time I was Vice-president of the Y. M. H. A. I did some work in assisting the Jewish refugees who had left their unhappy country, Russia, owing to the mistreatment that was theirs. These refugees were scattered all over the United States and Birmingham had its share.

Dave Rich and I roomed at my brother's home after he had married Miss Bertha Philips of Louisville, Kentucky. As roommates and companions we agreed very well except that often I would object to the burning of lights in our bedroom quite late when I would have preferred to sleep, but there were no blows dealt. About twenty years later I spent a week with him at French Lick and West Baden, Indiana (known for their health waters). He was in the habit of spending his vacation there. The two resorts are but one mile apart. I stopped at a hotel in West Baden at $2.00 a day while he had room and board at French Lick Hotel at $7.00 a day. We were together most of the time. One day while playing golf he had a heart attack. This was followed by others and caused his passing about three years later, causing me to lose a very good friend.

At the age of nineteen I took out my first life insurance policy in the New York Life Insurance Co. on the 20 year

life plan for ten thousand Dollars. It came about in this way. My brother who was my senior by five years, one day approached me with this statement, "Don't you think, as I do that instead of constantly increasing our stock of merchandise and using our cash in payment of same that we should look out for the future by using some of that cash in paying premiums on life insurance?" I fully agreed and each one of us took out ten thousand dollars in life insurance. I was always highly pleased to have made this start. Later on I increased my insurance to $37,500, but still later reduced it to $20, 000. My reason for carrying life insurance was to help my family in case of my death.

Shortly after we started in business in Birmingham and about the year 1888, we were shown one of the first models of a cash register, made by the National Cash Register Co. of Dayton, Ohio and we realized its value in business. We calculated that it would cause the proprietor as well as his clerks to be alert and careful about cash as well as credit transactions. The first models were built mostly of wood and gave but little information in comparison with later models. Instead of occupying prominent places where customers could see the numbers that show the amount of the sale. we had a platform and desk built for it. In addition we had a rather heavy wire-netting placed around this desk and the cash register. There was a step and an opening on the platform that led to the cash register.

I got to be quite a friend of cash registers and would trade in the old one for a new one almost as soon as one came to the market. The last one I traded for was priced at almost $1,100 and was arranged with drawer and the separate credit keys. I used to say that if I were to start a new business, the first thing I would purchase would be a cash register and later the merchandise.

For a number of years we used the cash register checks as one way of advertising. The checks to be given to the purchaser were printed inside the register and would show the salesperson's initial, cash or credit transaction and the amount of sale. In addition to printing the items mentioned, it would print on one side, "50 cents in trade on return of $15 in cash register checks." Later this offer was changed to, $10 in checks good for 30 cents in trade." As we would accept

only checks in the $10 or $15 amounts or multiples thereof, people would continue trading at our store until they had sufficient to trade them in. On the backs of these checks we advertised such items as Munsingwear, Iron Clad hosiery, Ed. Price made-to-measure clothes etc. For a while some of the manufacturers of these wares would pay us a small amount for the advertisements.

Many times, but especially during a busy season, at Christmas and New Year's and for birthdays, lady customers would call at stores for men's wear to be used as gifts. When asked about sizes wanted they often would give strange answers, for instance, a woman when asked what size trousers she required for brother or husband would answer, "I really don't know but he wears a 7 1/8 hat." Since quite a number of sales were made under such guess work, many exchanges followed, causing much loss of time and effort. So I figured that the folks at home should have for reference a memorandum or list of all the sizes needed by the men folks. So I prepared copy for the inside cover of a pocket memorandum booklet. It read: My size hat is....My size shirt is....My size coat is.... My size trousers is....Waist....Inseam....My size shoes is....My size gloves is....My height is....My weight is.... My age is....The number of my watch....movement....case.... My residence is....I am a member of Lodge....My name is....

The inside of the back cover gave postage rates and space for advertisment. The front cover gave the name of the merchant and the title of the booklet which was "Just my size", Copyright 1892 by Sol H. Blank." The outside back-cover was left for an advertisement. I had it printed and sent a copy to Washington, D. C. to have it copyrighted and it was granted. This copyright then was good for 28 years. I did not renew it which no doubt was unbusinesslike on my part, because the same idea, slightly changed, so as not to interfere with my copyright, is now being carried out in most diaries, time and memorandum books even now, 62 years later. I had several thousands of these booklets printed and a thousand letters of explanation which I intended sending to merchants in the United States, enclosing in each letter one of the booklets and requesting them to mail me their orders for as many booklets as they wished to buy. The difference between the prices I named and the printer's prices to me

was to be my profit. This was about the time I moved my stock of merchandise from Birmingham to Anderson, Indiana. There my mind was busy with the work of getting the business started and in consequence I got cold feet about the booklet venture and never mailed any of the letters. By doing so, no doubt I incurred quite a loss of profit. The booklets were used in my stores.

Chapter 5

Anderson, Indiana, 1892-1896

After spending seven years in business in Birmingham, four of which proved profitable and three the opposite, I left there, my brother remaining, and located in Anderson, Indiana, a town that experienced quite a boom on account of natural gas having been discovered. This gas was furnished free to old and new factories. In order to procure a favorable location and because empty stores were not in existence there I bought out a grocery store at 5 South Side Square, in a building owned by Mr. Louis Loeb who was the uncle of Byrde Haas of Carmi, Illinois whom I married later. It was necessary to pay one hundred cents on the dollar for all goods in this grocery and the first cost of its delivery-wagon and horse and a horse and buggy.

I sold everything except the horse and buggy and used them for trips and rides when a little spare time presented itself. I always thought that some buggy rides with a certain young lady then helped to secure her for my life's companion. After our marriage, my wife preferred a piano to the horse and buggy. So we traded them for a piano. One week after this trade was made the horse died. About 1905 we sold the piano to a farmer near Mt. Carmel, Illinois for $150 and when we heard of it last in 1939, it was still in use there.

After a short time in business in Anderson my brother disposed of his interest to me and then the firm name of Blank Bros. was changed to Sol H. Blank.

When leaving one town to locate in another one with my business I would wonder what would be the reception I could figure on receiving from the merchants in that new-to-me town. Generally, I would find lukewarmness on their part that indicated their wish that I had stayed away from their midst, especially was this noticeable by merchants who were competitors.

There was an exception that was quite noticeable, it

happened when I started business in Anderson. An old established merchant there by the name "Bing, the Clothier" on the day I opened business came to my store, introduced himself, welcomed me to the town, wished me success and then urged me to take advantage of calling on him at his store when I would have customers for boy's clothing (which I was not carrying). He said he would sell them to me at what they cost him. This act was highly appreciated by me and then and there I concluded to welcome new businessmen to the town soon after they'd arrive in town, which act I carried out for many years and found that they did appreciate it and it made me feel better at the same time.

At Christmas time in Anderson one year a duplicate shipment of neckware and other holiday wares from a New York manufacturer reached us there without an invoice. Several hundreds of dollars were involved in this deal. As this was an error of the manufacturer and done no doubt by the packing clerk, or perhaps by a new clerk who did not know of the first shipment having been made, I repacked the merchandise for its return. When my landlord who was an old time merchant saw me do this, he inquired about this action and when I had explained it to him he called me a darn fool for being so honest, as he put it. However, I never regretted it for "Honesty is the best Policy" I always thought.

This same merchant was in the habit of saying to me, "Sol Blank, you never will be rich", and when I'd ask for his reason he'd say, "Because you are too d...honest." He was right, I never acquired any riches but felt contented at possessing a clear conscience.

While the natural gas boom was on in Anderson, there was sufficient business at my store to employ four clerks whose names were Henry Gabriel, Sol Epstein, William Moneyhun and Ed Smith. My principal companions were Dan and Joe Rosenbaum, who were in the jewelry business.

There being sufficient Jews in Anderson, we organized a congregation. Mr. Louis Loeb donated one of his residence rooms over a store on the south side of the square. We held Jewish services on Friday evenings and on holidays. He also loaned us a Sefer Torah (the scrolls). As I was familiar with some Hebrew and had some practice as a reader of our prayers while in Birmingham, I was asked and consented to

conduct services almost the entire time I spent in that town. In addition to reading the prayers I would give sermons of Rabbis and always gave proper credit. It pleased me greatly to have an almost perfect attendance of the members on Saturdays and holidays. Of course, I made no charge for my little service. However, the congregation donated a useful reading light.

One very unpleasant recollection I have when in 1894, I conducted the funeral service of a Jewish child that had died of diphtheria.

An engaged couple, emigrants from Russia, asked me to perform the marriage ceremony. I objected because I was not an ordained Rabbi, but as they insisted that I should officiate anyhow I wrote and asked Rabbi Isaac M. Wise of Cincinnati if I could and should do so. His reply follows:

Cincinnati, July 19, 1894

Rev. Sol H. Blank
Dear Sir:

As you have yourself elected as a Rabbi, you must answer your own questions to the best of your Burgpreppach knowledge. I answer questions of congregations not of Rabbis.

Yours,
Isaac M. Wise

In consequence of this letter, I did not officiate at this wedding.

My Engagement and Marriage

While Miss Byrde Haas was visiting her relatives in Anderson, we became very good friends and we corresponded with each other after she had returned to her home in Carmi, where her father Mr. Louis Haas conducted a successful general merchandise business. In one of her letters she invited me to visit there. I complied by coming to Carmi, where I stopped at the Damron Hotel and sent word to her father to please call on me there. When he came I stated to him that I had fallen in love with his daughter, Byrde, and would he

pleased to gain her as my wife. However, there was an obstacle in the way and it was the fact that as a new merchant I did not have enough capital to give her a home such as she was used to having and if he would assist me financially I would propose marriage to her, otherwise I would leave town without doing so. He then left me to consult his family and report after that. I spent very anxious hours the rest of the day and night that seemed like years. But the next morning he came back to the hotel and brought me the looked for YES answer, took me to his home where I proposed and was accepted by Byrde.

There appeared in the Anderson newspaper of August 2nd the following item with photos of both of us.

Prominent Hebrew Wedding:

Sol H. Blank, the well known clothier to be married August 16, 1894.

In local Hebrew circles to-day there is rejoicing over the announcement of the coming marriage of one of their most prominent leaders. He is Sol H. Blank, the well known South Side Clothier. The bride-to-be is a relative of the Loeb family and it was during a visit here that the acquaintance and engagement occurred.

Invitations issued to-day read:

Mr. and Mrs. Louis Haas
request your presence at the marriage of their daughter Byrde to Mr. Sol H. Blank Thursday evening August 16, 1894 at 7 p.m. at Masonic Hall, Carmi, Illinois.

After a tour in the Northwest, Mr. Blank and his bride will take permanent residence here.

Congratulations are in order.

We were married in Carmi at the Masonic Home which was in Berry's Hall by Rabbi M. Spitz of St. Louis, Mo. The

same Rabbi had married my wife's parents about twenty-two years earlier, when they lived in Anderson in a very modest home. Mr. Haas was in business in Carmi for nearly fifty years and established a reputation as an upright, fair dealing merchant and an excellent citizen. Byrde, my wife, was the first child born to Mr. and Mrs. Louis Haas on October 21, 1873.

Chapter 6

My Business Life in Mt. Carmel, Illinois, 1896-1942

When the natural gas diminished in Anderson and the factories there were not getting this fuel free, they either shut down or left town altogether. So it was that business fell off considerably and I decided to leave also. But where to locate was the next problem. My wife's parents in Carmi came to the rescue. They wanted us to live near their town, besides they thought that business in factory towns, where I had been, was too uncertain and that a town depending on farmer's trade was more stable. So my father-in-law, Mr. Louis Haas and I met in Mt. Carmel, for the purpose of finding out what the prospects would be for locating there and to see if a store building could be rented.

I decided to locate in Mt. Carmel and was able to rent a store next to the corner of 5th and Market Streets; moved my stock from Anderson into it; remained there seven years; then moved to 420 Market Street and remained there until November 1939 when I sold out to my clerk, Mr. Clarence C. Dorsch. During our stay from 1896 to 1942, there was sufficient business for us to make a comfortable living in this town which then had 7,000 inhabitants and the county (Wabash) had 14,000.

Business here, as in all towns, had its ups and downs. Some years passed without any financial gains and in most of the years one had to be economical and on his toes to keep afloat. Many fly-by-night concerns started as competitors and although they were short lived, they caused me and other merchants considerable headache because they took the trade that rightfully belonged to the permanent merchants. As they failed in the end anyhow, they did not profit for themselves either.

I tried to get along with hiring as few clerks as possible by doing most of the store's work, such as buying, marking prices of new merchandise on their arrival, keeping books, writing the advertisment, corresponding and selling. The dressing of the windows and the indoor decorating I left to the clerks as I had no knack for it. Often I heard my wife state that my store was a one man's store on account of all the duties I tried to perform single handed. In order to keep up this work I had to use Sunday mornings and many week-day evenings for it. That naturally caused me to stay away from our home a great deal, which I often regretted then and later, since I knew very well that a father is needed also in a home where children are growing up. As I took interest in lodge work, partly to become better acquainted with the men of the community that also kept me away on evenings from our home.

I was fortunate in having a wife who was a willing worker and one who well understood the proper rearing of children and so it was that I left the latter to her almost entirely and this job was well done. After our children were old enough and self reliant she assisted me at the store and proved to be splendid help, indeed so much so that I used to say that if she would not be able to help me there, especially from Thanksgiving on to New Year's I would be inclined to give up business. She also helped on most Saturdays and proved a good advisor, besides being a good saleslady there.

Since Mt. Carmel is halfway between Cairo and Danville, the Big Four Railroad, a branch of the New York Central, had their repair shops and round house there. Before and after our arrival, it was often stated that the railroad company would repair the track, increase the rolling stock and enlarge the shops, therby increasing the payrolls considerably. But it was about ten years before these changes were made. And five years later, a strike that caused the company much inconvenience brought about their decision (mostly as a punishment for the citizens who did not agree with the company) to have their repairwork done in another one of their repair shops, Beach Grove, near Indianapolis. And so for a number of years only a few men were left in Mt. Carmel for work in the shops. However, the fact that Mt. Carmel was a division-point between Cairo and Danville, conductors, engineers and

brakemen lived there and brought in good-sized paychecks. Other good sources of incoming funds were the wages paid by the strawboard (paper) factory, the Oscar Marx Clothing factory, the Meisner Radio Parts factory, the Snap-on Tool factory and several other smaller factories. Of the farmers it was said that Wabash County never had a loss of both wheat and corn crops in the same year. And it was from these sources I procured my business.

The town for several years boasted four banks. During the depression all failed and there were but two small banks left in the county. One was at Allendale, ten miles north and one at Bellmont, ten miles south of the town. This was inconvenient since the Mt. Carmel people and merchants had to go there to deposit funds and transact other banking business. Since the year of 1943 there has been but one bank in Mt. Carmel which is the Security Bank. The principal of this bank was originally owned by East St. Louis and St. Louis bankers. The Allendale Bank continued to function, but the Bellmont Bank liquidated. The Security Bank had grown to an eleven million dollar institution in 1954.

Shortly after I opened my store in Mt. Carmel, I advertised two prizes to be given away, one to a boy and one to a girl who would construct the most words from the letters contained in the words "Sol H. Blank, Clothier". A number of replies came in. Some had several thousand words. The boy's prize went to Roy Caskey (he died in 1952) and the girl's prize to: Fanny Goforth, later Mrs. Bernard S. Landes of Colorado Springs, Colorado. The answer with the fewest words was submitted by Jessie M. Kirk and this is her attempt:

St. Francisville, Ill. July 2, 1896.

Dear Sir:

I thought I would try for a prize, will send my words: (8)

ho, us, he, be, to, in, lot, he

Jessie M. Kirk Age 10 years.

After having served in the clothing and men's furnishing goods business from 1881-1903, I concluded that my life would be more pleasant if I were to conduct a men's furnishings, hats and made-to-measure clothing business (giving up ready-made clothing entirely) and so I let it be known that I wanted to sell the clothing stock. At that time Messrs. George A. Clark and William A. Smith were my competitors and they offered to buy the clothing, providing I would sell the furnished goods also. No doubt they calculated that by doing so they would eliminate me as their competitor. I agreed, not specifying, however, that I would discontinue business there. After selling my stock to Clark and Smith, I moved to 420 Market Street with a new stock and here is a copy of the Mt. Carmel Republican Register's report on same:

The New Globe

To be opened with an entire new stock of goods on Sept.5, 1903. Mr. Sol H. Blank starts in the morning to complete his buying of an entire new stock of men's furnishings, hats, and shoes for the Globe. The stock formerly at the Globe has been sold and there will not be an old article in the store when the new Globe opens on September 5, 1903. The business will be conducted by Mr. Blank, proprietor, with Carl Shively and Lyman Seibert as clerks.
One Price, and fair and square dealings will be the store's motto, as before.

When starting in business in Mt. Carmel, I let it be known and advertised it strongly that I would conduct it on a strictly one-price system, never charging one customer more or less than another one and have prices appear plainly on all articles. Several of the old time merchants there ridiculed this idea, claiming that it could not be done there, for no other merchant had ever adopted such a plan. My answer was that it would be the only plan I would follow and if it did not work I would leave the town and move elsewhere in preference to making a change. I had a sign made reading: "One price, cash, fair and square" and placed it high on the back wall where everybody entering the store could read it. I con-

ducted business in Mt. Carmel under that plan from 1896 to 1939, 43 years and had plenty of followers, but I was the originator of it in the town. Many times I felt persuaded and tempted, especially during dull seasons or years to accept offers made by customers that were lower than the marked prices of our goods, but never gave in and now that I am out of business I would suggest to anyone going into business to follow the one-price system to the letter. For special sales the original and reduced price should appear on the same ticket, thereby giving all customers the same opportunity to purchase at the new price.

The first suit of clothes I sold in Mt. Carmel was to Mr. John Bruner. He said that up to that time he had never paid the merchant's asking price. When buying this suit he also tried to have the price reduced for him. I informed him that this firm was conducting its business on the One-Price system. He left the store but had expected that I would call him back and accept his offered price, but when he found that I did not break the store's rule he returned and bought the suit at its marked-in-plain-figures-price. It was a heavy weight, blue, clay-worsted Hart, Schaffner and Marx suit and the price was ten dollars. Forty-one years later, in 1937 he returned the coat of that same suit with the request to have it relined. The lining was the only part of the suit that was worn out, although he had given it the long wear.

During the sixty years I spent in the men's clothing and furnishing goods business it became quite natural that I should have a pet or preference of a certain department. My hobby was the made-to-measure department of suits and overcoats. I did the measuring and the part that is so essential for preserving perfect fitting garments, the proper description of the bodies of the customers. The cutters and tailors state that the proper description of the body is more essential than the measurements and it was here that I excelled. I tried to teach the clerks the proper way to describe the bodies, but never found one to satisfy me. So I made it a rule to do this work and greatly enjoyed turning out good fitting garments that pleased the trade and caused them to return to this store for additional made-to-measure garments. About one year after I had sold my business to my former clerk I met an old customer of mine who stated that he had

just selected the material for a made-to-measure suit at my former store and that he left instructions that it had to be made according to the measurements and description I had made or he would not accept the garments. The former measurements were retained.

Almost from the day my brother and I started in business in Birmingham, we were made agents for the tailoring firm of M. Born & Co., Chicago and we (or I alone) continued selling made-to-measure suits, overcoats and trousers from this well-known company up to the time I gave up business in 1939, over fifty-eight years. In one of the magazines M. Born & Co. issued, my picture was shown and praise was extended for having done business with the firm continuously for over fifty years in a satisfactory manner, on both sides.

Another firm I dealt with all the time I was located in Mt. Carmel, was the tailoring firm of Ed V. Price & Co., Chicago. The same held good for the famous underwear manufacturers, Munsingwear of Minneapolis, and for several other firms. I always believed in the "live and let live" principle. I tried to abide by their rules and never received an unkind word from them.

Attorney and banker Howard B. French of Mt. Carmel, approached me one day with the proposition of buying stock of clothing and men's furnishings in Allendale, a small town ten miles north of Mt. Carmel. A Jewish merchant there whom I had not met, had been in business for a while and failed. Mr. French, as assignee, asked me to buy the stock at fifty cents on the dollar of cost price. I accepted this offer after he proposed to lend me the amount of money on my note assuring me also that this note may be renewed as often as I'd care to renew it simply by paying the interest. When this note came due then the cashier of the bank would not accept the interest I offered and renew the note, although I had explained the contract I had with the president. So I paid the note from money I had in another bank and naturally did not continue doing business with that institution.

Another time, Mr. John Mitchel, president of the American National Bank approached me with the proposition of buying the bankrupt stock of the firm of Fisher and Williamson Co. He was the assignee. I offered to buy it at fifty cents on the dollar. He refused, wanting seventy-five cents on the dollar, but finally accepted my offer. At once I contracted

with the Kelley Chicago Sales to conduct a sale. As that store was just opposite ours on Market Street we advertised the stock of both stores and did a thriving business for about ten days, selling more goods than ever before for the same length of time. My objection to the salesman the Kelley Company had sent to help in conducting the sale was that during the rush he would change prices to figures far below the cost prices of the goods. As I was to place the selling prices on the stock, his action was contrary to my contract, but owing to the rush, I had but little chance to correct this evil, but it soured me on the tactics employed by the representative of this company and I would not on that account ever recommend them to any other merchant. As the fixtures there were newer and better suited to a store of my kind than what I had I allowed them to be moved to my store. While I made little profit on this transaction, the change of the appearance of my store with the newer shelving was greatly helped. At that time I had the carpenters add a mezzanine floor for the placing of safe and desk and to use as my office.

Mr. L. Bettman who was the senior partner of the wholesale firm of Bettman, Kleinhauser & Co., St. Louis, called on me with several large trunks of men's suits samples in the years when the coats were shown of the suits to make one's selection for orders. As he was past seventy years of age and seemed tired, I asked him to rest in a chair and let me handle the transaction. He fell asleep and I unpacked the trunks, selected the items I wanted, made out the order on his order-book and repacked the trunks. When he awakened I handed him my order and he was greatly surprised at such and the fact that the trunks were packed and was very grateful for the favor.

Governor Horner of Illinois who served two terms and was elected for a third term but did not live to serve it, had a great memory for faces and names. I met him one time for just a minute or two after he had given a talk at the Mt. Carmel courthouse. Next time I met him he called me by my name. It was at the Carmi fairgrounds where hundreds of people were gathered to hear him speak. I had been told that I resembled him in looks. No doubt that was true because at that fair two young men came to me, told me of favors they wanted the Governor to grant them. When I explained that I

was not the Governor they were surprised. As I left the fairgrounds the gatekeeper waved his hand to me and yelled: "Good bye Governor, come soon again." I did not mind being taken for that good Governor.

After many enjoyable years in Mt. Carmel, I sold my business to my clerk, Clarence Dorsch. This sale is best described in a letter written by my wife to our children.

> That I am writing this story this day isn't a surprise to me, but the conclusion of it certainly is a surprise. Several years ago Dad once said to Mr. Josowitz, a clothier who has been in business in Lawrenceville, Illinios since 1910 that he might some day want to retire and that he, Josowitz, might want to buy him out. Well, when Clarence Dorsch, the clerk, was seriously ill and Dad was determined not to train another man, he was thinking one day that he might go see Josowitz. You wouldn't believe it, but just a little while afterwards in walks Mr. Josowitz, he first asked some trivial questions but soon came to the point and asked if Dad was ready to sell now, since he wanted to set up his son in business and thought this would be a good place. Dad asked him 100 cents on the dollar which he wasn't quite willing to give, he made a good counter offer which Dad still didn't think was enough and he made another offer. Then comes Josowitz with another man named Loeb who also wanted his son to go in business and thought the two could form a partnership. It went on till last Tuesday when the two of them came over, signed a contract, the contents of which aren't very interesting when you find what became of it. They gave Dad a $250.00 check to clinch the bargain. There was one proviso and therein lies the surprise. Dad had promised Dorsch, his clerk, that he would never sell without giving him a chance to buy. Dad told this to the Lawrenceville men and proceeded to tell Dorsch who answered that he had first chance and that he was going to get the store and would get the money to buy it and he did. There is a little more to this story. After consulting invoices he decided invoicing would be a

lot of trouble and expense and take time and he would rather pay the lump sum Dad asked for. I do not think either is getting the worst of it and I do think it is close to 100 cents. Here is another interesting phase of the sale. Dad has the privilege to sell made-to-measure clothes inside of the store or out, for which he will retain half the profit. We both feel very well satisfied over the whole transaction and I hope you do too. Dad expects to stick close to things till after the holidays and then we will take a long vacation and I am particularly glad that Dad is so pleased and with his good health for which we are very thankful, I think he may still get a lot of joy out of life.

Mother

Of course, the $250.00 check was returned to Mr. Josowitz.

The following was the first ad of the new proprietor of the Sol Blank store:

Notice to customers of The Globe (Formerly Sol H. Blank)

Effective October 2, 1939 Mr. Sol H. Blank sold the stock and fixtures of the Globe to me. In the 44 years in which Mr. Blank has been proprietor of The Globe he has established policies of fair dealing with which most of you are familiar, and the change of ownership will in no way change these policies. The new owner has been assistant to Mr. Blank for 11 1/2 years and is thoroughly acquainted with the customers, the stock and the policy of the Globe.

So to all our customers, new and old, we say again that we will continue the policy which has for many years made the Globe one of Mt. Carmel's leading men's wear stores. Your continued patronage will be appreciated.

Respectfully yours
C. C. Dorsch.

When I sold my business to my clerk, who had been in my employ a dozen years and had given entire satisfaction, he came into the possession of a well established and favorably known store. And as he is conducting it in the same manner I did and besides having the advantage of starting during an oil-boom in the county, there is no reason why he should not prosper and he does.

Clerks

During my business career I had a number of clerks, yet not nearly as many as other merchants engaged. In Birmingham, there was Roscoe Joyner, Harry Bridges and John Tarwater. These men had hesitated to clerk for us because of their prejudice against Jews. Later they acknowledged that such was the case, also that still later they had a change of heart and because they had experienced the splendid treatment we had given them, they would in future attempt to work for Jews only. Lew Lusky of Nashville, Tennessee was another clerk then, a splendid salesman but one who could not control his appetite for strong drink. It was remarkable that he could sell merchandise when so drunk that he had to hold on to furniture to keep from falling. He was such a good natured drunk that customers did not mind this failing. We discharged him several times, rather we tried to, but he would talk us out of it by saying, "Now Mr. Blank if you discharge me, you'll want to hire me again and then I'll demand higher wages. Better let me stay," and we would comply in the hope that we could reform him.

In Anderson, our clerks were Sol Epstein, Henry Gabriel, William Moneyhun and Ed Smith. They were with us nearly four years. We never fancied the idea of changing clerks, often believing that perfection is not to be found in human beings.

In Mt. Carmel, I had Mr. Estes first. He left because he had developed tuberculosis and so went to Arizona. After clerking for me for several weeks I presented him with a suit of clothes. He hesitated to accept it, claiming that no other merchant had done such an act for him. I explained that he had done outstandingly good work and that I wanted

to show my appreciation with more than a thank you. His brother-in-law, Charles Burns clerked for me for a while after that but I discharged him for drunkenness. Shortly after, he watched for a chance to find me alone in the store and then demanded some money. I knew what he intended it for and refused, so he grabbed me by my arms and tried to force me to comply. Although he was twice my weight I showed fight and ordered him out of the store. He complied and so I saved my coin and my face.

John Avery was a clerk for several years, a good honest fellow, who was so particular about the statements he made to the trade that when asked about the contents of the wool in the cloth of a garment he would always refer the answer to me. Mr. George L. Kenner often helped as an extra clerk. Ray Bland clerked for me for several years before going on the road for Marshall, Field & Co. Carl Shiveley was another clerk who left me to go into business for himself. Later he traveled for Munsingwear in their hosiery department. Wilson Babb clerked for several years before taking a job in a Chicago shoe store. Young Harris from Lexington, Kentucky followed him. Then came Clarence C. Dorsch who after clerking for me for 11 1/2 years bought my stock, fixtures and good will.

I do not want to omit a habit, call it good or bad or even odd, of one of the above mentioned clerks, John Tarwater. He was quite hard-hearing but used this failing to a good advantage. When waiting on customers he would produce the items called for then tell of their merits, state the price and after giving the customer sufficient time to grasp it all, would walk to the wrapping counter, wrap up the items and hand the package to the customer. Often the customer would say, "I did not say that I would buy" but John made it a point not to hear that and usually the customer would pay and leave in good humor.

Another clerk I had in Mt. Carmel was Lyman L. Seibert, commonly called Lon. On account of a throat ailment he had in his youth he did not talk clearly. He was extremely faithful and very reliable. I seldom left the store for any length of time but when doing so, I knew it was in good hands. He clerked for me for about fifteen years. After an auto accident he did not feel able to work steadily but he said, " If at any time you want me to help you in the store just call and I'll

come," and he'd add, "but this does not hold good for any other merchant." I found that he kept his word and I have always appreciated such willingness on his part. He died on September 23, 1936.

Another odd experience we had with the clerk Lew Lusky. He, unknown to us, dropped in the Birmingham store one Saturday afternoon and noticing that we were busy took off his hat and waited on customers and made a number of sales. Finding him to be a good salesman, we hired him and benefited by his good salesmanship. At different times he failed to do the work assigned to him. At one of those lazy spells I said to him, "Lew, why don't you work?" His comeback was, "You see Mr. Blank if I do all my work to-day, I'll not have anything to do to-morrow."

One of my clerks called Ott Seitz who was related to the owners of one of the oldest and very reliable Mt. Carmel firms, Seitz Bros., had but little store experience. After he had clerked for a few weeks I turned the job of window dressing over to him. He dressed one window while I was out of the store and when returning I saw his work and explained to him that his way of showing men's coats in the window was the wrong and not the usual way. He had turned the suit coats inside out showing the linings instead of the face of them. At once he said that he knew he was not cut out for a clothing clerk and resigned. As he would not listen to my advice to stay and learn I had to accept his resignation. He later became a successful wholesale grocery merchant in Peducah, Kentucky and in 1954 we still corresponded.

When I was employed by Mr. Joe Arnold, I had to work from daybreak until 9 p.m. from Monday through Friday and until 1 or 2 a.m. on Saturday nights. It was then that the clerks of the various stores and who worked the same amount of hours concluded to request the merchants to close their stores at 7 p.m. at least on week days. There were at that time few unions in the town and their motto was, "An injury to one is the concern of all." They called themselves K. of L., Knights of Labor, and were in favor of the clerk's request- And so the Clerk's Union became a reality and even a boycott got its start. There was a dry-goods store by the name of Stritmater Bros. that refused to close at seven o'clock. So the clerks persuaded many of that store's cus-

tomers to ignore it and pay no attention to their special sales advertised for the evenings when other stores were closed. Finally the proprietors, because their business was suffering, saw the errors of their ways and adopted the closing hours of the other stores. After becoming my own boss I used to mention this occurance to clerks and told them that I was a union clerk many years before some had been born and that I could sympathize with them, having experienced their trials and tribulations as a clerk.

Chapter 8

Oddments from my Business Experience

At a meeting of the Wabash Retail Merchant's Association the first question the chairman asked was, "Is it better to place price-cards on merchandise displayed in merchant's store windows or not?" I suggested, "It is better to state prices in the store windows of such merchants as are represented at this meeting because their customers want to know the selling prices of the merchandise before entering the stores to ask for the information. Not so however with stores like Marshall Field where patrons care only to find the merchandise they seek and rarely ask the price but instead have the bookeeper of the establishment mail the bill to their homes or offices." All agreed except one dissenting voice and it was not from a prominent merchant.

A man by the name of A. M. Orr was a good customer at our store in Mt. Carmel. He owned considerable land on the Indiana side of the Wabash river near Mt. Carmel. It was said that he had an offer of a million dollars for it but refused He had a number of people employed on this land and supplied them with groceries at a store he ran at a place called Orrville. One day he asked me if I could furnish him with some clothing and furnishings for this store? I said I could. Then to all questions I asked in regard to the merchandise, its quantity and prices he would reply, "I'll leave all that to you, select the goods and send them over to my grocery store." As I was not sure of the payment I would require of him I consulted a man there who knew his financial ability well and he told me to select the goods, pack them, then procure a note for the amount selected and send the goods to Mr. A. M. Orr. After that I was to bring the signed note to him and he would cash it at less ten percent. As the amount was

nearly one thousand dollars it meant the largest sale I ever made to one person. What I liked most about this transaction was the fact that the buyer, Mr. A. M. Orr, placed all this confidence in me. He was well satisfied with the goods I selected.

When the style of ladies' shoes changed to oxfords and merchants tried to dispose of shoes, it proved a great task. Much money was lost because few women would buy them, no matter how low the merchants prices were. A shoe salesman, who called on us regularly, told of what he witnessed in a retail shoe store in another town. On entering the store he watched the proprietor pouring a lot of ladies' shoes onto a burning coal fire in the stove. Asking for the cause of this odd act he was informed that the best offer that this merchant could get from a buyer was ten cents and as he put it, "I got angry and decided to burn them, rather tham sell 'em at 10 cents a pair."

The Scholl Mfg. Co. of Chicago tried without success placing the agency for arch supports in any of the drugstores or shoe-stores in Mt. Carmel. As I was selling men's shoes I was asked to handle them. The first customer to whom I sold a pair was a barber by the name of Ed Kuhlman. He told me that he would have had to give up barbering because he could not stand on his feet and do barbering. The Scholl arch-supports benifitted so much that he was able to continue his trade.

During more than forty years in business in Mt. Carmel, I supplied our customers with wall calendars. They were of the artistic variety and carried an advertisement of the Globe. I figured that it was the only way I could purchase space on the walls of homes gratis. As I tried to select attractive subjects for them they remained on the walls of the homes for an entire year or longer. I remember coming to a home to attend the funeral of a lodge brother. It was then that I noticed on the wall of the sitting room a certain framed picture and it came to my mind that it was the picture from a calendar I had furnished years before and that they were so fond of it that they had it framed and would retain it as long as possible.

At one time Brother West, a methodist minister, came to our store and stated that he wished to buy a shirt, a necktie and some hose. Then he held a conversation with

one of his parishioners and I went ahead, selected the items and prepared them for his approval. He took a look and said, "How did you know the size of the shirt and half-hose I need and how did you manage to select the exact color and style of the necktie I want?" I said, "I waited on you once before and so I remembered your sizes." "But you have waited on hundreds of customers since then, so how could you remember?" was his comeback. I answered, "I heard you delivering sermons without notes and was surprised at your good memory as much as you are surprised at my memory now."

In the year of 1896, a New York clothing manufacturer offered me men's suits as low as $1.50 a suit. To find out what they were, I ordered one half dozen. On receiving them I found that they were made of shoddy (cotton and flyings of wool) and put together in the cheapest manner possible. As an advertisement, I offered them at $1.50 a suit and sold them, but did not re-order, knowing full well that such garments make only dissatisfied customers.

During an absence of a few hours from our store in Birmingham, I had this experience. A young man by the name of Schwabacher who claimed that he had several years of experience in clothing business asked for a job. He asked for a trial. Then he decided that the appearance of our store would be much improved if all boxes of the same color were placed together on the same shelf. (In those years goods were sold from boxes and not as is the present custom from showcases, open boxes, or opened on counters and shelves). So he paid no attention to the contents of the boxes and assembled them according to colors. On my return to the store I discovered his foolish act of an awful mixup of merchandise and concluded that he was too dumb to be of any service to our business and gave him his walking papers.

About 1890 after terrible pogroms in Russia, many Jews sought refuge in Birmingham. Some merchants gave them goods to peddle to the country folks. One merchant, Mr. Geary, told about one unsuccessful peddler who, when he rang the bell of a home, said, "I guess you don't want any of my goods today." Mr. Geary said he would take the next customer. When he rang the door bell the first thing he did was to place his foot inside, greeting the lady with a pleasant, "How do you do, madam, I have some goods I know you will

like and wish to buy," and while saying this he unpacked his wares. The lady bought some wares and the peddler was taught how to make a sale.

One day a lady walked into our store in Birmingham and asked to be shown a "pair of the others." As I did not know what she meant I told her that we did not carry them. "Oh yes, you do, for I see them in the store window," she replied and with that she pointed out a pair of men's drawers. In those years ladies were so modest that they would not use the word "drawers."

We had a sign above the store entrance reading Blank Bros., the Bros., of course, meaning brothers. Many of our colored customers on the strength of it called us Mr. Bros; some would call my brother Mr. Blank and me Mr. Bros.

A customer for the sum of one dollar sold me the wedding shoes I had sold him twenty-two years previously. They were not worn out and had the original soles still in good condition. He had a son twenty-one years of age when he sold the shoes to me. I used them in our show-window to prove the good wear our shoes gave.

It was during World War I that a farmer came to our store. I was glancing at the news of the front page of a newspaper and then remarked, "What a pity it is that so many of our soldiers have to lose their lives in the European battles." At that, the farmer took a glance at the outdoors and in all seriousness said, "Well, anyhow they have a pretty good day for their fighting."

After a long drought of several months a very welcome soaking rain came to the rescue of the crops. A farmer came to the store and my opening remark to him was, "Well, this glorious rain will surely save the corn crop," to which this pessimistic farmer replied, "Yes and it'll make the weeds grow too."

One afternoon I was passing out some handbills containing advertisements of Munsingwear with reading matter and some pictures of women clothed in them. It happened in the year 1898. When I handed one of these circulars to a lady at the door of her residence she glanced at it, became quite indignant and handed it back to me and upbraided me for passing out such indecent literature as she called it. I have wondered what that same pious woman would think if she saw the

cuts appearing now in newspapers, and cataloges of ladies' underwear, bras, girdles and swim suits.

I was alone in our store one day when a customer came and asked for a striped sweater. As there were none in the stock I suggested that since stripes are used in penitentiaries he should select one of our solid colored ones. Imagine my surprise when he replied, "I've worn striped clothes in a penitentiary and I don't think there is anything wrong with them." Needless to state that I made no further effort to make the sale, but walked to the front door hoping that this ex-convict would follow me and leave the store, which he did and I felt much relieved.

We called our store in Mt. Carmel, "The Globe, O.P.C.H." The O.P.C.H. stood for One Price Clothing House. A youngster came to the store one day and asked if his claim was corrct in that it meant Oh, Please Call Here?

A lady customer in our Mt. Carmel store after buying an inexpensive Christmas present for her boyfriend costing her 50 cents asked me to place the figure 2 in front of the 50 cents selling price of the ticket (or $2.50). I explained to her that such a thing would be unjust for me to do and refused. She came back at me with the excuse, "Well, that's what he did to me."

A customer brought his young son to the store and asked to have him fitted with a cap. After this deal had been made, he was asked to buy a hat or cap for himself. When requested to state what size he needed he asked what size the boy required. On being told that it was 6 7/8 he answered, "Well, if the boy took 6 7/8 (6, 7, 8,) then give me 9, 10, 11."

A customer called for a green hat. The salesman produced a hat, then the customer, after looking it over, asked, "Is this a green hat?" Without answering his question the salesman showed him another hat. Again he asked, "Is this a green hat?" And as the salesman started to bring the third hat the customer stopped him and said, "Enough of this now, I am color blind." "And so am I", the salesman said.

In Birmingham we had a customer by the name of Colonel Hibbard. He was a very bright attorney. My first experience with him at our store was when he bought a $5 silk umbrella and asked me to send it to a sign painter and request him to paint these words in prominent letters on the inside

of the cloth: "Stolen from Col. Hibbard." He then stated that all his umbrellas bore this same sign and that in consequence he never lost one. One day a stranger came to our store and asked for a good collector of notes and accounts. As we were new in town then, we turned to an older resident for an answer to his question and he said, "I know a man," referring to Colonel Hibbard, "who would dun a man in church." "Tell me his name quick," the stranger said, "He is the man I want."

At one time several of us in the store had a little argument about the genuiness of a five dollar bill (it was mine). Colonel Hibbard came along and we hailed him and put the question up to him whether the bill was a counterfeit or not? He took it, examined it carefully, then pronounced it perfectly good, put it in his pocket and said, "My fee is $5" and he walked away. He returned the money a few days later, but it taught me the lesson not to ask an attorney such questions.

In Mt. Carmel I had a customer named John Keller. He manufactured building bricks, later ran a hardware store. While celluloid collars and cuffs were in vogue he was a regular customer for such collars. He wore size 17 and always the same style. After selling his hardware store he moved to a farm in Alabama and for years always sent for the same style and make of collars. The very odd part of this transaction was that he wore these collars day and night and claimed that he was unable to sleep unless he had one of the celluloid collars buttoned on to his shirt and around his neck.

In Anderson there was an exceptionally clever salesman by the name of Sam Rose. He had the following experience: A lady customer called for a pair of overalls which were priced at 50 cents a pair. So this lady told him that she had been offered the same kind at 40 cents a pair at another store. This quick thinking salesman then said, "Oh but the overalls you were offered had no buttons, did you notice that?" She said she did not. So he said, "Of course, if you allow me to cut off the buttons, you may have ours for 40 cents also." She remarked, "All right cut them off, for I have plenty of buttons at home and can sew them on." So the sale was made at the 40 cent price.

When in London, England, in 1901, in a store window I noticed water being sprinkled on a man's cloth overcoat. I

stepped inside, inquired about the meaning of this procedure and was told that a new process of waterproofing had been invented. The process was called "craveneting". I bought one of their light weight overcoats, waterproofed in this new way and presented it on my return trip to my clerk Mr. John Avery. I believe it was the first craveneted garment brought to this country. Heretofore, only rubberized garments were considered water or rain proof.

Chapter 9

My Real Estate Transactions

In the sale of my stock to Messrs. George A. Clark and William A. Smith in 1903, Mr. John A. Mitchel, President of the American National Bank there furnished part of the cash necessary for this transaction. The balance was paid by deeding several pieces of property to me. One of them was a piece of land 300 feet in length and abut 50 feet in depth, along the Wabash River, called Six Pole Reseve in Mt. Carmel. At first this land proved of little value to me as only the poor inhabitants of the Wabash River front would rent it for gardening, but failed to pay me rent. I paid the annual tax which luckily was small, only about $2.00 a year. I continue to pay this tax.

Shortly after I had acquired this land I had two cottages erected on it, had collected a very small amount of rent when a flood of the Wabash River carried them off, perhaps to the Gulf of Mexico. I did not build any more cottages there.

In the year 1923, I made a sale to Roy Hunt, a coal miner, of fifty feet of the original 300 feet for $50 on the installment plan. He wanted the ground for the purpose of building a shack (as he called it) to be used by his old and disabled father. About a year later he came back to me and asked for the return of the $50, agreeing to deed back to me the ground and the shack. Then I asked him what he would do with his father if I accepted his offer to which he replied that he had no other place for him. So I refused his offer and urged him to let his father remain in the shack. He did not take this advice and sold the land to William F. Trimble and used the proceeds to pay a balance he owed on a used Ford automobile. This transaction proved quite a gain for Mr. Trimble and a loss to me because later, when oil was found on the three

hundred feet, he received monthly payments from the promoters of the Sol Blank oilwell adjoining his fifty foot lot. However, I always felt better for not being instrumental in depriving old Mr. Hunt of his home, humble as it was.

In conveying the same fifty feet from Roy Hunt to W. F. Trimble, the wrong description was made on the deed, which required a quit-claim-deed from Trimble to Blank in order to establish my right to the royalty for oil found on my 250 feet. Mr. Trimble held out for weeks attending to this matter, claiming that he wanted to be certain of receiving his part of the oil royalty before giving the quit-claim-deed, and the Merimac Oil Co., who bought the oil, would not pay out any money until this was done by Trimble. He was finally persuaded to give the quit-claim-deed and the company commenced paying me.

In 1941, an oil-well was drilled in the center of 600 feet (according to a city ordinance, only one well could be drilled on 600 feet frontage) and it happened to be on the 250 feet owned by me, hence was called the Solomon Blank well. The proceeds of this oil well were divided between the promoters and the owners of the 600 ft. The Mt. Carmel Republican Register of 8/26/41 stated: Sol H. Blank well No. 1 on the Six Pole Reserve to the East of the fairgrounds is now producing at the rate of 160 barrels daily. The Mundy well next to it up the river is producing at about 60 barrels.

In a letter from the Sohio Petroleum Co. of 2/15/51 I was informed that there were no oil runs from this well in November and December of 1950. In 1954, when Mr. Elmer M. Novak of Salem, Illinois, procured the lease from Mr. Lebow he flooded it with water and did succeed in getting production started again but in smaller yields.

Another piece of property I obtained in the sale of my stock of clothing and haberdashery to Clark and Smith, was an apartment building in South St. Louis, Missouri. Through the agency of the Utter Bros. I traded my equity in it to a man in Indiana for a forty acre farm in Alpha Springs, Alabama. I went there to inspect this farm, at the time I was paying a visit to my relatives in Birmingham which city is about fifty miles north. This farm was not in cultivation but was well stocked in timber. Some of the trees were large, hence valuable. While inspecting this land one of the neigh-

boring farmers approached me with the question: "Will you sell me some of the larger trees on your farm?" I told him I would, but when he proposed to buy them at only five dollars a tree I refused his offer. A few years later, when inspecting this farm again, I discovered that those large trees were cut down and not being able to trace the thief I was the loser. I continued to hold this land paying taxes on it, they were not high, and when visiting my sister Leah and her family in Warren Plains, I sold this land to my brother-in-law at five dollars an acre or $200. I do not know what disposition he made of it.

Also I acquired in this transaction with Clark and Smith a store building in Frankton, Indiana, not occupied. There was a first mortgage on it and the equity in it was not large and it was located in a town in which the boom had died because the natural gas had given out. Through a real eatate agency I succeeded in trading it for a half interest in an anthracite coal mine. It was forty-five feet under the ground on a farm owned by Messrs Coal and Epler in Bellmont, Illinois. Not being from a deep vein it was considered surface coal and not very valuable because it made too many ashes and hence not very salable either. I acquired my half interest from Mr. George E. Barton and I have retained three certificates of 33 1/3 shares each. The other half interest remained in the possession of a coal miner Mr. J. H. Sloan who bought more equipment and had the invoices charged to me. The first knowledge I had of this was when a justice of the peace, Mr. Wallace, notified me to pay them or be sued. I paid and instructed my partner hereafter to have nothing charged to me. Neither did I want to share in the sale of the coal and the revenue derived from it. I remember taking an attorney, Mr. George P. Ramsey to this coal mine and when I asked him to go into it he said, "Go down into that hole, not for the whole world would I go." In consequence I never saw the inside of the mine either.

A short time afterwards, Mr. Marshall Hastings who was elected as Sheriff acquired my partner's interest in the mine and then bought mine also by deeding a lot to me on Seventh Street just west of Division Street in Mt. Carmel. This lot I traded for a stock of shoes held by a merchant in Wayne City, Illinois. As I was handling shoes in my store I mixed

these shoes with what I had on my shelves and in that way realized the cash for them. He also deeded to me his equity in a residence on Poplar Street in Mt. Carmel occupied at that time by the renter, Mr. Everet West.

One day while Mr. Henry Rawitsch, a salesman for Eisenstaedt Bros., a neckwear firm in Chicago, was in Mt. Carmel to sell me neckwear and had some spare time before boarding his train, I took him for a walk and showed him this residence. When I told him that it was for sale and named him my price he considered it a bargain and without seeing the inside of the house bought it from me. As the tenant would pay the rent to me, I remitted it to him. Later the tenant, Mr. Everett West decided to buy it and so Mr. Rawitsch sold it to him without loss or gain.

Chapter 10

Lodges and Clubs

At the age of twenty-one, the joiner-bug took a hold of me. I wanted to join a secret society. So I consulted a near-relative who belonged to various lodges, the Masonic among others, and asked him which of the many he'd advise me to join. Without hesitating he named the Odd Fellow lodge. Then he added that if later on I should want to join another one he would suggest the Knights of Pythias which he said was a younger lodge and composed of the younger element. I took his advice and about the year 1886 or 1887 I joined both lodges in Birmingham. In the Odd Fellows I advanced as far as Vice Grand's office and as I left Birmingham during that year for Anderson, I did not reach the top office which is Noble Grand. In Anderson I deposited my transfer card in 1892 and have been a member of Anderson Lodge number 131 I.O.O.F. ever since (62 years). From that lodge I received a fifty year membership lapel button. My Knights of Pythias transfer card I deposited with the Anderson Lodge when I moved there and in 1896 when moving to Mt. Carmel, I deposited it there and continued to be a member until this lodge gave up its charter in 1937. Thomas Berry was the Secretary, called Keeper of Records and Seal, for a number of years and when he died about 1900 I was elected to that office which had no salary connected with it except non-payment of the annual dues which were $5.20. I held this office for about twenty-five years and did its work gladly. I was a member of the team that does the degree work, being the senator in the third degree. I possess a card from the Grand Keeper of Record and Seal, Al Douglas of Springfield, showing that I was a member of good standing for fifty years. Several times I was the delegate of the lodge to conventions held in Spring-

field, Peoria, Jacksonville and other Illinois cities.

About the year 1900 my wife and I joined the order of Rebeccahs, which is a branch of the Odd Fellow lodge for women mostly. However, men may and do belong. We paid our dues for about thirty-eight years, seldom attended any of the meetings and finally gave up our membership.

About 1910, I joined the order of Modern Woodmen of America in Mt. Carmel. This is a fraternal order and has life insurance also. I joined mostly to obtain this insurance and also because it took care of members when afflicted with tuberculosis. Now in 1954, it makes payments in cash to victims of polio instead. It gave me fellowship with about three hundred and fifty other members in Wabash County. The cost of the insurance at first was quite low, but in later years dues were raised for me to $6.25 a month for one thousand dollars of insurance.

For several years I was quite active in the lodge work in the I. O. R. M., Improved Order Red Men. At one time I was asked to act as judge of teamwork done by different tribes of various tribes of the state. What attracted my attention greatly while in Danville for that purpose were the playgrounds of the public school there. They were equipped with various kinds of apparatus new at that time. One that was patronized mostly was a curved slide. The children, mostly boys, would walk up about a dozen steps on one end, sit down and slide to the ground on the other side of the slide. At once, I made up my mind that I would buy one of them for the Mt. Carmel school. But after thinking the matter over and fearing that the parents of boys would conclude that since I was selling boy's clothing, I did this act so that I would benefit by being able to sell more boys' clothing since the slides were especially hard on boys' trouser seats, I gave up this plan. Some years later the school board of the town bought such slides and other items for the playgrounds.

For about twenty years and until the tribe gave up its charter, I had held many offices in the I. O. R. M. including chairmanship of the state finance committeee for several years. Like many other fraternal orders, the Mt. Carmel tribe lost its charter and so I lost my state job. Mileage and per diem was all one recieved for doing this work. Before giving up my membership card I belonged to Bellmont, first,

and later to Harrisburg until those tribes also disbanded.

In 1920, a Rotary Club was organized in Mt. Carmel, and I became a member of it about sixty days after it had received its charter. My classification was: men's furnishings retail and according to its rules I was the only member in this category. Almost from the day I was chosen (members always are chosen and do not make application for admission) I was given the offices of historian, editor and correspondent. As historian, I was to write the history of the club. I kept account of the names of the speakers, their locations and the subjects of their talks, besides giving the activities of the club. At the end of the fiscal year (July 1.), I would read at one of the meetings what had been done by the club during that past year. For twenty-one years I kept up this practice and when I left Mt. Carmel in 1942, I turned my records over to the secretary. I also handed him the authentic autobiographies of most of the members. At the passing away of some of the members the editors of the home papers were always anxious to copy them for their eulogies. As correspondent of the club it was my duty to keep the home office of Rotary International in Chicago posted on any special happenings and these items would be published in he monthly magazine called The Rotarian.

As editor I wrote and copied suitable matter for the single sheet called Mt. Carmel Rotary Bul-let-in. After the Monday evening meetings of the club I would prepare the items for its next issue. On Tuesday, I would hand this matter over to the printer for his work on it; then I'd proof-read it and when about one hundred sheets were finished, I would distribute part to members personally or mail to the families and send some by mail to editors of bulletins in other towns. This took quite a bit of my time but I enjoyed giving this service to the club. The printer's charge was about $5.00 a week and as the finances became quite low during the depression, it was decided by the club that we discontinue incurring this expense. From that time on, in order to keep the members' families and the public in general posted on what was being accomplished, I would give an account in writing of what happened at the meetings to the newspapers and they were pleased to receive it and would let it appear in the Daily Republican Register on Tuesday evenings and in the Weekly

News on Fridays. It helped to correct the wrong impression prevailing amongst the public that Rotary was a singing and eating club only. Several times at the district conference I was on the program to give my views and experiences as editor of a Rotary bulletin and correspondent. The editors of other bulletins often quoted ours and praised my efforts. There was considerable good-natured kidding done and it all helped to cement the friendship existing between editors, besides giving information about our club work, their meeting time, purpose of future meetings, their programs etc.

At one of the Rotary District Conferences in Champaign, several of the editors were gathered at one table to discuss several items. The question came up if it was necessary and ethical to give credit to the author, when one copies his writing. I contended it was not and gave as my reason that in the first place "there is nothing new under the sun" as the wise King Solomon claimed and secondly that the author of an article is but stating that which he read or heard others quote and that all he can claim for himself is that he has put together the ideas of others in his own way.

When the Rotary Club of Mt. Carmel celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, 1920 to 1945, a good report on the work of the club was written by Rotarian Phil Bernhard and was printed in book form. The following is part of it:

> "A fortunate selection was naming Sol H. Blank as historian. Sol came into the organization during the month of May 1920 and for the next 20 years most faithfully chronicled every happening of the club. He reviewed the minutes as kept by the secretary and in his own pleasing fashion outlined the events from day to day from week to week and month to month. One particular innovation that Sol inaugurated was the securing of each visitor's signature to the visitor's record. Sol's work will stand as a perpetual monument to him in the annals and records of the Mt. Carmel Rotary Club. It is too bad that we have lost the services of this efficient and able worker who several years ago removed from our midst in order to be near his children in retirement."

In 1938, I presented a gong to the Club in honor of those members who had died: Dan Keen, Philip Fishman, Father Emile Chuse, Fred Husk, Louis Kamp, James Carson, Rev. Jack Gent, Jake Shurtleff and Pat Harvard. On April 10, 1938, my seventy-second birthday, I presented the Club with a bell and on May 29, 1951, the secretary wrote to me, " It is with pleasure that the club again extends you an honorary membership for the coming year and we all hope that we will be able to issue a membership card for a long time to come. Rotarian Phil Bernhard, when cleaning up some papers around the Utility Building found the bell that you gave the Rotary Club a number of years ago. We are now using your bell.

Sincerely yours,

Don Price

Secretary Rotary Club."

To comply with requests of program committees I gave talks on vocational service, on criticism of the Mt. Carmel Club, on prejudice and persecution of the Jews in Germany, on the Evian, France conference, and on my early life (given at my age of 71). I was delegate to the Rotary International Convention in Cleveland, Ohio on June 19, 1939. In 1941, I gave an account of my vacation trip to Cincinnati and Indianapolis. On November 18, 1952, I talked to the Rotary Club of Carmi, Illinois urging it to establish a social club like the one in Cincinnati of which I was president for six years. I told them this was a club of about 200 men and women, age 60 and over, and has as its motto: "We know nothing of tomorrow; our task is to be good and happy today." Its purpose is to make life more pleasant for its members during their declining years. Its business is transacted a good deal like Rotary and other clubs.

About the year 1930, which was before the friendship of United States with Russia existed, the Rotary and Kiwanis clubs of Mt. Carmel had as their speaker a man who told of his life in Russia. He stated that the Russian government had asked for American engineers to instruct the workmen in ironmills, and machine tool factories, and in the methods for

using the articles produced. It had been reported that during their revolution some of these men had been assassinated. His talk was uncomplimentary in every way to Russia and he did not hesitate to ridicule the inhabitants high or low, rich or poor and stated that people were murdered without just cause and that the country was in a terrible condition. At the conclusion of his talk he held a forum und when he was asked who was responsible for those conditions he said, the communists and when questioned who the communists were he replied: the Jews. To this answer I found exception and gave him a tongue-lashing, telling him among other things that I had read articles and books of writers of that country who made no such claims; further that undoubtedly some Jews belong to the party and if so, they were very much in the minority and that he was not truthful in his statements. Mrs. Oscar Marx, a prominent lecturer, was present and stated that I was right and that she would have answered him if I had not done so.

The Rotary Club would have a meal for its members before attending to the business. The sessions were usually held in the basements of the various churches and the ladies of the churches would serve the meals. They became aware of the fact that I was opposed to eating the meat of the swine and so they made it a rule to furnish beef for me when the menu called for it, a favor I appreciated greatly. It showed me that one is respected for upholding our Jewish dietary laws by the good people of the Christian churches.

The meetings of the Rotary clubs usually start with singing the National Anthem, salute to the flag, a prayer and these are followed with a meal, more songs and the business meeting. Although in the Mt. Carmel club there were deacons, Christian ministers and some quite devout church members I was usually called upon to offer the prayer. Generally, I would offer this prayer: "All merciful Father, who lovingly sustainest all creatures, we praise Thee for the blessings Thou dost vouchsafe to us. For the food we are about to eat, we humbly thank Thee. May it give us strength to do our work with energy and courage and may it give us strength to do Thy will. Help us to remember that man liveth not by bread alone but by all that Thou hast ordained. For all Thy mercies, which are with us at all times, we praise Thy holy name, Amen."

I might add that as there never were more than ten per cent Jewish members in the Rotary Club or Chamber of Commerce of Mt. Carmel, for me to be singled out to offer the prayers at most of their meetings was pleasing to me as well as to the other Jewish members. I have several quite complimentary letters from the founder of Rotary, Paul P. Harris of Chicago.

Chapter 11

Some Civic Activities in Mt. Carmel

A short time after coming to Mt. Carmel, the pleasant or unpleasant job of soliciting donations for civic affairs often was entrusted in my care. On one of those trips, my good friend Charles Olendorf accompanied me. He was born there, had been city clerk, and mayor and in consequence knew the people and their traits of character. On calling on one merchant, we stated our mission which was asking for a donation to carry on the program mapped out for a Fourth of July celebration by the merchants. He got very angry at us for asking him to donate. At that I motioned to Charles to leave his office, but he paid no attention to me. Instead he talked on other subjects for several minutes and greatly to my surprise the once angry individual reached for the petition, signed for a liberal sum and paid it to us. Then we left him while he was cool and collected. On leaving, my friend Charles explained that with men like him you must allow them time to get rid of their accumulated steam, or what have you, before they are normal again. It taught me a valuable lesson that came in handy in my dealings with people of this type.

During World War I, the organization that gained the most praise for the help it rendered the men of the army and navy when they were wounded, hungry or in need of any kind of assistance was the Salvation Army. Shortly after World War I, the headquarters of this instituion decided on making a change in the method of collecting funds. Committees were selected in the various towns whose duty it was to hold an annual appeal, instead of letting the members of the Salvation Army do the soliciting while holding prayer and song meetings on the streets. The commitee in Mt. Carmel consisted of ten men, but they decided to follow the line of least resis-

tance and let me do all the work.

A request came to send one of us to Springfield for a meeting and I was chosen. Plans for the annual appeal were made and adopted there. On my return I was asked to act as treasurer of the funds in Wabash County. I consented and held the job until I left there in 1942. Though they said it was very unusual, headquarters granted a request I made, to let us retain one third of the funds raised for home use. Once a year the home office in St. Louis would send us some one and I would accompany him or her to make a house to house canvass for funds. Some years the appeal would yield several hundred dollars. Before leaving Mt. Carmel, I turned over the funds on hand to Mr. Kenneth Wood and as he decided a little later that he could not act, he in turn handed the amount of several hundred dollars to Mr. William Underiner. I was informed that the solicitation of funds then had to be done by the St. Louis representative alone.

A member of the Wabash County Farm Bureau by the name of McGregor approached me one day and asked if I was a Jew. Acknowledging that I was, he then wanted to know how, as a Jew, I could take so much interest in the Salvation Army. I answered him by stating that in case he, a Christian and I, a Jew, should meet with an accident and be injured and a member of the Salvation Army came to attend to our injuries the question of our religious beliefs would not be asked and we would be helped even if we were not members of any religious denomination. I also stated that I was glad to be of help to this fine organization whose motto is: "A man may be down, but he is never out." Mr. McGregor was well satisfied with this explanation.

On November 25, 1950, the following reached me:

> Please find enclosed an "Honor Certificate" which we desire to present to you as an expression of our appreciation for your valuable service. We know thal you will appreciate this for its intrinsic value rather than its actual value in dollars and cents. It is an expression of our desire to make you feel that we do indeed value your service. May we express

the hope that you will receive it in the same spirit that it is sent.

Yours very sincerely
James Fookes.
Special Efforts Secretary
The Salvation Army.
St. Louis , Mo.

During the years of 1934, 5 and 6, I was disbursing officer of the C. W. A., chairman of Emergency Relief and chairman of Employment Office of Work Relief. As chairman of Emergency Relief, it was my duty to sign the placards displayed in the various stores that were permitted to furnish merchandise to the under-privileged persons. When invoices were OK'd by the office force in the city, they were paid by checks from the State of Illinois. On August 8, 1936, Mr. John C. Martin, chairman of Illinois Emergency Relief Commission wrote:

> You have contributed without renumeration a valuable and necessary service. Furthermore, you have had a part in a public task which you can now leave with the satisfaction of a task well done. The Illinois Emergency Relief Commission by action in its meeting of Friday July 31, 1936 expresses its gratitude to yourself and all members of County Emergency Relief Committees.

In the various appeals for Red Cross donations I usually was the sole solicitor preferring it to the work of instructing helpers. At a Red Cross annual meeting on October 4, 1940, I was elected to be Civilian Relief Chairman with Rev. William Frese as county chairman and B. J. Walter as treasurer. I saved a list of names of contributors.

During World War I, I participated in many appeals and drives. In some, I acted as chairman or treasurer. A list of them follows:

Smileage Books	45.00
American Jewish Relief Com.	1,345.65
United War Work Campaign	9,291.36
Salvation Army	400.00
Red Cross	1,162.36
American Legion Endowment Fund	568.85
European Children Fund	57.00
Military Entertainment Council	45.00
Community Chest	7,000.00
Will Roger's Memorial Fund	15.46

The St. Louis Post Dispatch printed an article and my picture in its columns of April 13, 1934 and stated that I was perhaps the only person who held ten offices without any salary. They gave them as follows: Certifying Officer of C. C.C., Secretary of C.W.A. Asst. Disbursing Officer of C. W.A., Secretary Emergency Relief, Secretary Knights of Pythias, Chairman Emergency Relief, Secretary of Business and Professional Men's Club, Treasurer (county) of Salvation Army, Secretary of Chamber of Commerce, Historian and Correspondent of the Mt. Carmel Rotary Club. Another office came to me a short time later: Chairman of U.S. Re-Employment Office.

While I had the office of chairman of Wabash County Emergency Relief which was all work and no pay (and I would not have served if it had been for pay) I was approached by a grocer with this request: "I am furnishing groceries to the people your office sends to me and I find this objection. My delivery man according to the rules of the office is required to get the signature of the person who is to receive the goods. As this often takes time, will you please have that rule changed so that anyone at home may sign for it." My answer was, "In the first place you are benefitted by selling the merchandise and besides I have no right to change orders issued by headquarters in Springfield." To this he replied in anger, "Yes, you can talk big as the job pays you $250.00 a month." Then I gave him to understand that he was badly mistaken as to my salary and that I did not receive one cent for my work. I always doubted that he believed me for I felt satisfied that he would not have done my work without renumeration.

During World War I, like many others, I was quite active

in selling War bonds. Mr. Howard B. French, an attorney and later the president of a bank, was head of the organization in Wabash county. Under date of May 29, 1919, a War Medal Certificate reached me from Washington, D. C. that read:

> This certifies that S. H. Blank, address, Mt. Carmel, Illinois, is awarded by the U. S. Government a medal made of metal from captured German guns. This award is made for valued and distinguished service in the flotation of the Victory Liberty Loan.
>
> Howard P. French
>
> War Loan Organization Eighth Federal Reserve District, St. Louis, Mo.

After World War I, when European Jews were in dire need, funds were being raised in this country to help them as much as possible. I received a letter from Mr. Julius Rosenwald, the great philantropist, in which he stated that since I was taking interest in collecting funds for various charitable institutions I should accept his invitation to come to Chicago and be one of several visitors he had invited for a Sunday as his guest and to talk over the matter of soliciting funds for European Jews, at his home. I felt flattered over such an invitation from this good and great man but did not accept it because I felt that I should remain at my post in Mt. Carmel and do all possible to help in the good cause.

For quite a few years, I was very active in promoting Chautauqua sessions for Mt. Carmel. As the companies always required a guarantee that they would receive their charges for the week or ten days of entertainment., it was necessary to procure enough signatures of citizens who would guarantee the companies' charges. The Redpath Company was the last one to appear here. I have retained a copy of the last guarantee for 1926 which was signed by A. L. Richmond, Rev. Ernest F. Roesti, Rev. John J. Gent, Sol H. Blank, Dr. W. B. Baird, Benjamin G. Habberton and J. M. Mitchell.

At one time Rev. Light, the Presbyterian minister and the local head of Red Cross, undertook to procure guarantors

for the approaching Chautauqua. He tried, but returned the blank guarantee to me stating that he had had no luck. So I took the paper, saw a number of men and procured the necessary signatures. Then, as I showed Dr. Light this contract he was greatly pleased and surprised to see that I had accomplished it in such a short time.

Besides these Chautauquas we had lecture courses and to procure them I was also quite active. Their charges also had to be guaranteed. Dr. Newell Dwight Hillis, a noted divine and lecturer of N. Y. , Miss Evangeline Booth of Salvation Army fame, Opie Reed, the comedian, and other famous lecturers and actors were the talent.

On December 20, 1915, when Mt. Carmel was about to elect a board of Aldermen, I wrote a column in the Republican Register, urging the voters to adopt the Commission-form of government. It carried and continues so in 1954.

Evansville, Mt. Carmel and Olney Interurban Company

I have a photograph showing the start of an interurban, the Evansville, Mt. Carmel and Olney Interurban Co. in 1910. Mr. Louis Seitz, a banker, born in Mt. Carmel, later associated with Mr. Bement of Bement, Seitz Co. of Evansville, and also president of the Mt. Carmel Trust And Savings Bank is shown throwing the first shovel of dirt for the building of the road. Commencing on North Market Street in Mt. Carmel it was to reach Friendsville, Lancaster, Olney and later Effingham and Springfield. This happened before good concrete roads had been built and before automobiles were in common use. As it was almost impossible in wintertime for country people living in the northern part of Wabash County to reach Mt. Carmel on the poorly kept dirt roads for their business and shopping, the merchants there were anxious to get this project started. There was no railroad that they could patronize.

The plan adopted was to sell $250 bonds, first mortage, bearing 5% interest. As the distance to Friendsville was seven miles it was agreed that one seventh of each one of these bonds would be due and payable after each mile of the road was constructed. After completion of the first mile, and the first payment of the bonds was due, some buyers paid the

first installment, others paid the full amount of $250 but there were some who, in order to keep from paying the installment due, found fault with the method of construction or gave some other excuse for not paying. The directors, however, decided to build the second mile and borrowed the necessary funds from Evansville banks. I have a photograph showing gathering of bondholders at the completion of the first mile. A car was bought and copper wire strung and the car by the aid of electric current from the Mt. Carmel Electric Light plant ran the distance of the rails that had been laid. Another mile of rails was laid, but less and less of the subscribers to the bonds paid for them or the installments and so the building was stopped.

About that time the Evansville promotors who had borrowed money from their banks got cold feet and concluding that the finished road would benefit Mt. Carmel people mostly, asked Mr. Louis Seitz to hunt up Mt. Carmel men who would take over all that had been accomplished on the road and pay the notes they had made at their banks in payment thereof. Mr. Seitz called these men: Messrs. W. P. Habberton, Charles Oldendorf, Ed. G. Seitz, Herman E. Pieper, Frank Orr, Sol H. Blank and John E. Avery. Mr. Seitz explained at the first meeting that the Evansville promotors felt that since Mt. Carmel would gain the most from the project, they were willing to transfer their holdings to Mt. Carmel men providing they would pay the notes they had made in their banks. Mr. Seitz, knowing most about the project, explained the details and assured his listeners that no loss could be sustained because what was on hand, if sold as junk would realize more than the amount of the notes. So the offer was accepted. Mr. Habberton was elected president and Sol H. Blank secretary of the company. Mr. Seitz continued as treasurer. This occurred in 1913.

For about two years we tried to interest capitalists or companies in various cities to finance the road but were refused. We were told that the people of the towns reached and the farmers living along the line should buy sufficient stock and then the capitalists or banks would be willing to finance the road further. We, the directors, spent perhaps a year or two driving about the proposed road, mostly in Mr. Pieper's open top Ford car on one or two days every week interview-

ing people and urging them to buy bonds, but we made slow progress. Mr. H. P. Leavitt, a bright Oklahoma attorney, was hired to give advice. He was honest and very willing. I have retained a copy of the stock subscription.

After about three miles had been constructed, Mt. Carmel promoters of the Interurban line although spending much time and effort failed to procure sufficient subscribers to undertake further building of the road. World War I broke out and rails, ties and copper wire went sky high. We managed to sell materials on hand as junk and there was realized the sum of six thousand dollars.

Along came a man by the name of French. Our attorney knew him and also knew that he had been instrumental in financing a proposition similiar to ours, but he did not know anything else about him or his honesty. Our president called the Mt. Carmel promoters for a meeting to hear Mr. French's proposition to see the road financed, providing the $6,000 was turned over to him. It was done and Mr. Leavitt and Mr. French left for Chicago with the funds. There they were arrested. Mr. French was charged with having perpetrated a crooked deal. There was no charge against Mr. Leavitt, but he was held for a while, on account of being an associate but honorably discharged. What became of Mr. French and the $6,000, one time ours, was never discovered.

This ended the company in Mt. Carmel. We paid the notes in the Evansville banks but had nothing left for our hard work. The road was not built then nor at any later date. As "everything happens for the best" this also was best for the promotors. Soon afterwards, concrete roads were built and with them automobiles became all the rage, taking the place of interurban lines. If our promotors had placed a large sum of money into this deal it would have been lost because nearly all similiar ones went bankrupt.

I remember being called by Attorney Willhite who was receiver for the bankrupt Trust and Savings Bank. He showed me a note for several hundred dollars payable to said bank and signed by me as secretary of the Evansville, Mt. Carmel and Olney Interurban Co. I explained to him that I had signed it as secretary and that I had no funds of said company with which to pay this note and so ended the matter. Some funds of the Interurban Co., as I remember it, were still in that

bank when it closed its doors but no dividend or cash were ever received by me or any other member of this company. I have quite an assortment of correspondence also receipts of payments I made on bonds and receipted banknotes of $5,700.

Mr. H. P. Leavitt worked on another proposition for us which was a bus line and no doubt it was the first time that a bus line was suggested. The Chicago Tribune wrote to me, the ex-secretary, for information about this matter when they heard of it. I turned the inquiry over to Mr. Leavitt to be answered. We failed to produce the necessary funds for the bus-proposition and so this idea was also dropped. Perhaps this was a mistake on our part but we were afraid to invest further, after our sad experiences.

About the time autos came into use and concrete roads had to be constructed, a request came to me from Past Supreme Chancelor Commander of K. of P. Mr. William G. Edens, then a banker in Chicago to act as chairman of Wabash County in the appeal to the voters for a fifty million dollar bond issue to be used in the building of concrete roads in Illinois. This bill carried and many more millions were spent on good roads, so Illinois became one of the states with most and best concrete roads in the U. S. A.

Industries in Mt. Carmel

During World War I, I was instrumental in procuring a clothing factory for Mt. Carmel. It came about in the following way. The firm of Marx and Haas, clothing manufacturers in St. Louis, was making uniforms for the soldiers and was in need of more factories for that purpose. So Mr. Joseph Marx of the firm interviewed my sister-in-law, Miss Edna Haas, who was doing welfare work in their factories and asked her if she knew of any town where they could occupy a building and engage sufficient women for the sewing. She answered that Mt. Carmel had an empty building which the furniture firm Barlow & Co. (Mr. Barlow was the father of Howard Barlow) who were making furniture for Sears, Roebuck & Co., had vacated. Miss Edna Haas suggested my name as the proper person to contact. Thereupon he phoned and asked if we had sufficient women who

could and would sew in a factory and asked me to have several hundred cards printed and distributed among the women of the town to ascertain how many wanted work. I did so and he was satisfied with the results. Then he asked for a cash donation from the citizens, which they claimed was too much. I had more interviews with Mr. Marx who stated a lower sum which was accepted. A building was erected in the south side park for their use. It is still used as a clothing factory in 1954 and has given work to thousands of people. Various firms occupied it after the Marx and Haas Company.

Just like most cities, Mt. Carmel was always anxious to have factories locating there. It's a way of changing the saying "all going out and nothing coming in." Instead of the people of the town sending their money to other towns for all kinds of wares, the town manufactures items that can be sold to out-of-town people, thus bringing money into the town. So it was that a secretary of the Mt. Carmel Chamber of Commerce found out that two men in Chicago (formerly from Greece) were looking for a city that would assist them financially in starting a factory to manufacture a fountain pen, called Security pen. The bonus they asked was granted by the Mt. Carmel citizens. The factory was started. I remember that at a Booster meeting, the first pen manufactured was auctioned and brought $100. The price of the pen was from $5 to $10. The advantage of this pen was in having a device in the top which, when run over a bank check would puncture the check over the written part and mark it with red ink, so a forger could not raise the amount. As not enough pens were sold, the company failed and the First National Bank that had advanced funds was partially paid with the stock of pens on hand. The bank disposed of them at $1.50 each.

About 1920 to 1930 there was quite a large business in shell digging from the Wabash River near Mt. Carmel. Blanks for shirt buttons were cut from the shells in Mt. Carmel and sold to factories in other cities. Occasionally a good-sized pearl in perfect condition was found inside of the mussel. Imperfect pearls were called slugs. Buyers of pearls came from large cities, even from Europe, France mostly. After the supply was exhausted, the digging was given up. Many a poor fisherman came into possession of

several hundred dollars for the first time in his life and was made happy.

My Friends Among the Clergy

I was on good terms with all the Christian ministers, about fifteen. My opinion is that a Jew can live with and be respected by all the citizens of a town as long as he lives a clean and upright life and takes interest in the people and in civic activities.

The various ministers of the Methodist Church took a liking to our store and did about all their buying there, commencing with Bros. Harmon, West, Cummins. Rev. M.G. Soners, especially spent much time at my store. When I told him of the passing away of my good sister Jane in Wurzburg, Germany, he presented me with a book entitled: "Death and Its Sorrows" written by Willis Duff Piercy and he autographed it with these words, "With sincere sympathy, M. G. Soners."

Another minister was a frequent customer or visitor at our store. When he was about to leave town to enter another pulpit he came to me and stated that he had not sufficient funds to pay his and his family's way and would I take up a collection for him? It was odd that he should ask me instead of a member of his congregation, but I did it and sent the family off rejoicing to New Orleans, Louisiana.

Father F. H. Budde of the St. Mary's Catholic Church in Mt. Carmel and who died on January 26, 1924 was a regular patron of our store and I often called on him at his office. Since Catholics pray for the souls of the dead, he inquired of me is such the custom among the Jews? I explained that Jews offer a prayer in memory of the dead and brought him a Hebrew prayerbook that contained the prayer called Kaddish and its translation. Then he asked about the book of Job. I procured through my son Sheldon a commentary on the book of Job by Dr. Buttenweiser, which he studied with much interest.

At one time he stopped at my store on his visit to an old gentleman by the name of Baumgart. This man had been praying for death so as to be relieved of his severe pains. In this connection Father Budde made the statement that he had

been at the bedside of many sick or dying men or women who, like Mr. Baumgart, prayed for death so as to be relieved of pains, but that he had never found one who was ready to leave this world when called hence.

I recall a conversation with Father Budde on the subject of "Redmanship." Some of the members of his congregation belonged to the Red Man Lodge. He contended that owing to the fact that this lodge was an enemy of the Catholic Church, no Catholic should belong. I assured him that he was wrong in his conclusion. Then I told him that I was a member, that I had committed to memory the entire ritual, that I had served in nearly all its offices and there was not one word in the ritual against the Catholic religion. Then his quick comeback was, "If you say that such is the case, I believe it and will have nothing to say against the Red Men Lodge from now on."

During the last ten years of my stay in Mt. Carmel, I became well acquainted with Father Voll of the Catholic Church. At one time he said to me, "You do not look like a Jew, nor act like one. You take so much interest in the townspeople and their activities, although they are not of your belief, so I've come to the conclusion that you are not a Jew and that you should be a member of my church." I assured him that I was a Jew and would remain a Jew all my life. That answer did not stop him from trying to convert me. When later he approached me with the same subject, I told him that were I to accept any other religion, it would only make a hypocrite of me and that the Lord hates a hypocrite. He would quite often converse with me on religion and would pay me the undeserved compliment that he liked to talk about religion to me because I was better versed on it than any other citizen there. All our conversations were conducted in a very friendly manner. On account of ill health Father Voll left Mt. Carmel in 1945.

About the year 1900, Brother West was the pastor of the Methodist church. During his term the new church on Fifth and Mulberry Street was erected. I offered and gave 3% of my gross sales to the building fund. I mentioned this act to Rev. Cummins, a former Methodist minister when I met him in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1942 and asked him (in a joking way) if this act would entitle me to a seat in heaven and

he answered without hesitation and most emphatically, "No."

Several times, while in Mt. Carmel, I was asked to speak to the members of the Christian Church there. I consented by reading sermons of prominent rabbis and, of course, gave them proper credit. In 1942 I was asked to talk before the Ministerial Alliance of Mt. Carmel on the "Persecution of the Jews". The Republican Register reported that, "the ministers present declared it was a fine talk, showing thorough study of the question and tracing the persecution of the race from earliest times to the present war years."

At one time I was asked by the minister of the Evangelical Church to explain to a class of their Sunday School what Judaism is and in what way it differs from Christianity. I consented and ended my talk with the urge to the class to remain true to their church's belief, for by so doing they would be best satisfied.

Chapter 12

Remaining Years in Mt. Carmel

After selling my store, I decided I did not want to retire. I asked Mr. John Taylor of Springfield, Illinois, manager of the Mutual Life Insurance Company, if I could sell insurance for his company. On May 1, 1940, after I returned to Mt. Carmel from a visit with my son in Belmont, Massachusetts, Mr. Dague, an agency organizer, came to Mt. Carmel to get me started as an agent. When I suggested my willingness to answer his inquiries about my past life, he stated that he, as well as his company, knew that I was suited for the place and that they were satisfied with my reputation as a citizen of Wabash County. So he installed me and gave me literature to study. I had to send written reports to the Springfield office. I also had to study lessons in order to obtain a license from the state of Illinois for this work. The license was granted at an examination held in Olney.

Mr. Dague would call on me once every two weeks with instructions and later helped me in procuring applications from prospects. I wrote in 1940 a total of $37,500 in applications and again about the same amount up to July 1942. At that time, I took sick with a heart ailment and remained in an Evansville hospital for three months. After giving up our residence in Mt. Carmel, we went to Cincinnati to make our home and hence I lost my chance to write more applications for insurance because I had no license for the state of Ohio.

Here is an exact copy of a framed certificate I received from the Mutual Life Insurance Co.

This certifies that Sol H. Blank has completed the course of study for Life Insurance Agency Rep-

resentative required by the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York and has fulfilled all the conditions imposed by the company for the awarding of this certificate.

March 24, 1942
F. Rogerson, Vice President and Mgr. of Agencies
John L. Taylor, Agency Mgr.

Our home in Mt. Carmel at 710 Cherry Street, was built in 1908 and was converted into two apartments in 1924. It was then that we rented the lower apartment to various families and it was always occupied. We occupied the second floor. On April 1, 1942 we sold the house to Mr. Louis Carnahan for $4,800 and he sold it to Mr. Robert Walters who occupies it in 1954. I retained the Carnahan contract. After selling our store and home we moved to Cincinnati, to live and enjoy life with our son Sheldon and his family there.

All in all, I am patting myself on the back to have been able to dispose of the various properties including the clothing and men's furnishing goods store and our residence without loss. Luckily, we held on to what we had considered for years a worthless piece of property on the banks of the Wabash River on which a productive oil well was located a year before we left Mt. Carmel.

When I first considered moving to Mt. Carmel, I inquired of some of the prominent citizens as to the advisability of locating there. I was not encouraged by them because they claimed that up to that time no merchant of my religious belief had succeeded in that hundred year old town which had been founded by a Methodist clergyman. But I decided to take my chances, even if my religious belief differed from that of nearly all the other residents. I have never regretted this step. Although we were members of the reform Jewish congregation in Evansville, Indiana, we at times attended services in the local churches. We associated with the inhabitants, took interest in things they were interested in and assisted in civic affairs. My life as a merchant and my long years of business experience brought me in contact with many people and through these contacts I established warm and valued friendships.