

Garbers

Mrs. Evans Garber

In 1906 when Garber's store first opened its doors for business, Tsar Nicholas II reigned in Russia, King Edward VII reigned in England, Theodore Roosevelt was President of the United States and World War 1 was still eight years in the future. The dirt roads of Batesburg, a rural community devoted largely to growing cotton, had hardly been touched by the automobile. Paul Garber was barely eighteen years old when he founded the store, yet he already had many years of work experience behind him.

Born in Kobrin, Lithuania, which was part of the Russian Empire, in 1886, nine year old Paul emigrated to the United States in 1895 with his old brothers Phillip and Aaron. Phillip and Paul settled in New York City, where Paul went to work as pants cutter in a garment factory during the day and attended school at night.

Meanwhile Aaron migrated south to Williston, South Carolina, where he opened a dry goods store. In 1902 Paul joined his brother and began working for him. In 1906, at Aaron's urging, Paul resolved to go into business for himself.

Searching for a promising location for his store he travelled by train around rural South Carolina. In later years he always declared that when he got off the train at Batesburg, he knew immediately that he had found the right spot.

His new store, which sold clothing material and ready to wear, was located in a small building on Oak Street which he rented from Miss Alice Jones. This original building is now the central portion of Garber's. The present store includes what was on three separate buildings. In 1906 the two adjoining buildings were occupied by a bank and a grocery store. The back portion of the present store was a later addition. The second floor of the present Garber's could only be reached by an outside entrance and contained several offices, including those of Dr. Mitchell and Dr. Timmerman. On Saturday nights this space also served as the town dance hall.

Paul Garber found a faithful employee in 1907 when Arthur "Babe" Miller came to work for him. One day as he passed Mr. Garber on Oak Street Mr. Miller announced to him that he was coming to work at Garber's. With some embarrassment Mr. Garber tried to discourage him as Mr. Miller was already employed by his good friend Mr. Whitten

who lived at the same boarding house. To Mr. Garber's surprise over dinner that same evening Mr. Whitten told him that Mr. Miller has resigned, telling his intention to work at Garber's before Mr. Miller ever talked to Mr. Garber. Mr. Miller continued to work for Mr. Garber in the store until his retirement in 1952.

1912 was an important year for Paul Garber and for Garbers store. First Mr. Garber married Tillie Pauline Morris in a big wedding in Sumter with Dr. C. C. Bates, Batesburg druggist, as his best man. The newlyweds rented a house on Saluda Road where their first child, Sarah, was born in 1913. A few years later they bought the large white Victorian house on Peachtree Street which is now owned by Bill and Beth Kiesling. Their other children, Julius, Miriam, and Leon were born there.

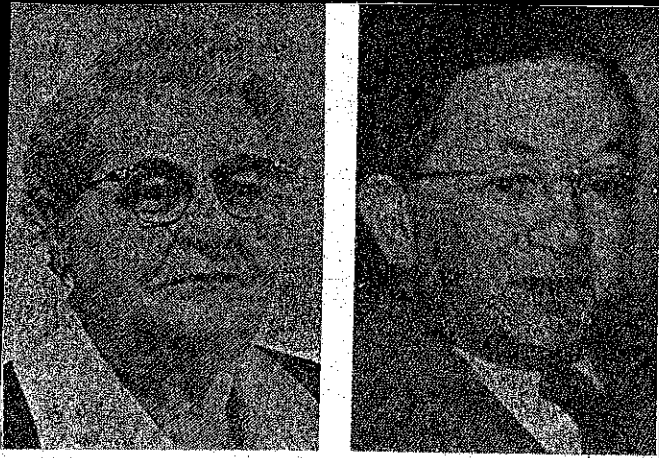
1912 was also a year of expansion for Garbers Store. Paul Garber bought the building the store occupied and the two adjoining ones cutting doors to connect the three buildings. The main floor of Garber's thus reached its present dimensions. The present facade of the store was not added until 1970. After this expansion, Garber's which incorporated in 1913, became a full fledged department store carrying in addition to dry goods and ready to wear, millinery and an expanded shoe department.

In 1925, Garber's Inc. opened a store in Allendale. In the 1930's stores were opened in Laurens and Bamberg. In the 1940's Garbers came to Columbia and Denmark. Finally, the Orangeburg Garber's was opened in 1955. Paul Garber's nephews, Sam and Murray, who were Phillip's sons, were employed as managers in these branch stores for many years.

Good years for Batesburg have meant good years for Garber's. Likewise when local people have difficult times, Garber's has shared. The area was plagued by erratic cotton prices in the 1920's. Along with other merchants, Garber's took bales of cotton in trade piling them outside on the sidewalk until a buyer could be found. The depression years were also difficult as Garber's and other merchants had to take in state issue scrip from local teachers which was not redeemable until the late 1930's.

Hard times continued in the late 1930's and early 1940's as local farmers abandoned cotton for asparagus farming. Harvesting the asparagus was a demanding task—left too long the stalks went to seed. Two cuttings were necessary on Saturday to ensure that Sunday was a day of rest. The town merchants including Garber's stayed open until 2:00 a.m. Sunday to allow the exhausted workers to do essential weekend shopping. The local economy began to improve after World War II as peach farming was introduced on a large scale and as more manufacturing plants were built in the Ridge area.

Garber's expanded after the war, adding the base-



Paul and Tillie Garber

ment in the large upstairs which carried lower priced merchandise and toys. Confident of quick American recovery and anticipating increased demand from returning soldiers, Garbers bought large quantities of clothing from orders cancelled by big city merchants wary of the post war economy. Thus Garber's was one of the few retailers which had a supply adequate to the enormous demand. Employees still remember how customers came from several hundred miles to shop at Garbers.

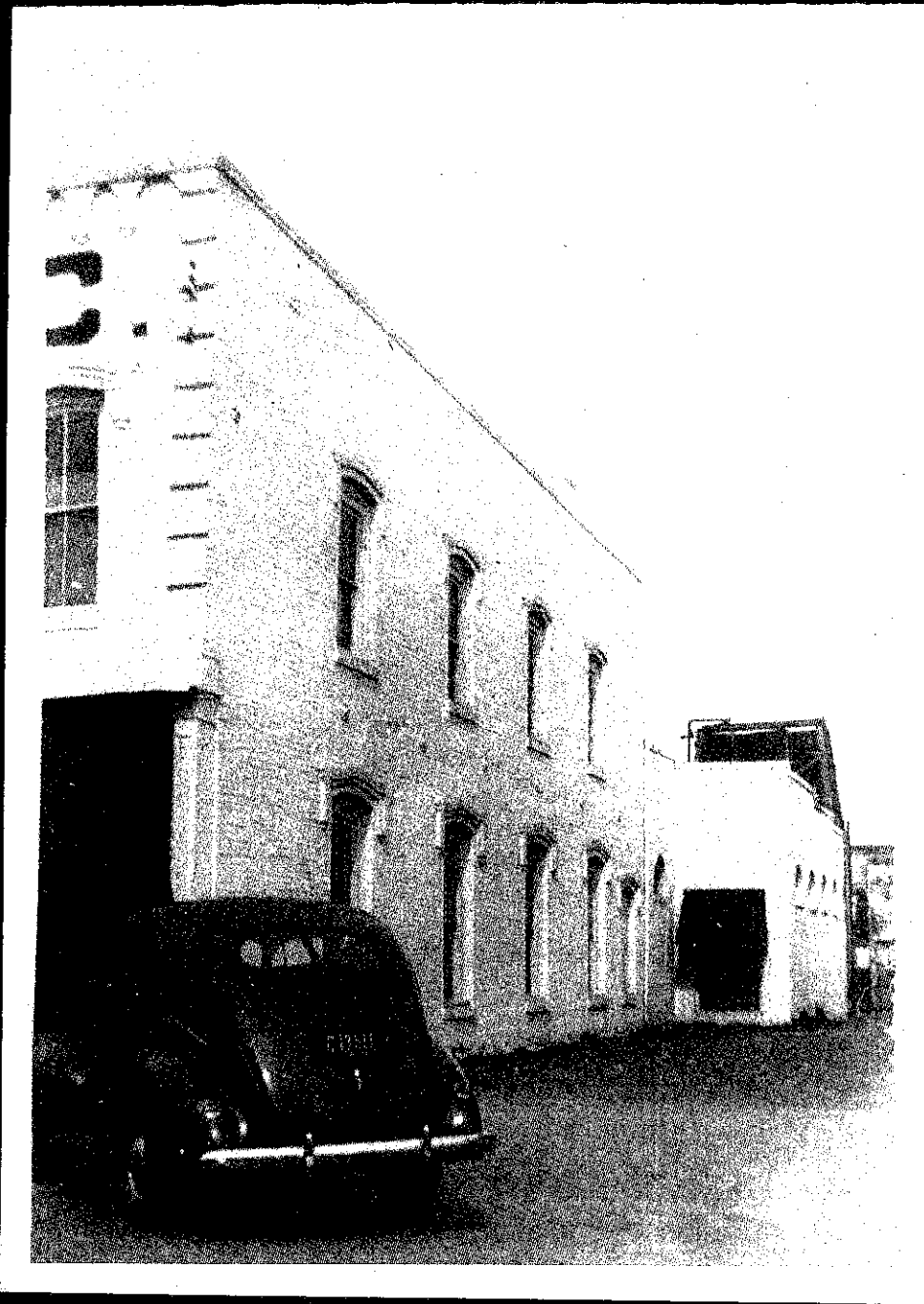
Julius Paul Garber's oldest son had worked in Garber's since graduating from college in 1936. After serving in the navy during the World War II he and his younger brother Leon returned to Batesburg to work with their father in 1950. Paul Garber died suddenly of a heart attack and Julian succeeded him as President of Garber's Inc. with Leon as Vice President. Leon left Garbers in 1955, retaining ownership of the Allendale store and moved to Columbia where he opened Garber's Shoes.

In the late 1950's and early 60's Garber's divested itself of all the branch stores except for Columbia. During this time Julius' wife, Bessie, a Hendersonville, N.C. girl whom he had married in 1940, began to play an increasingly important role in the management of Garber's Inc. serving as vice president and buyer of women's fashions.

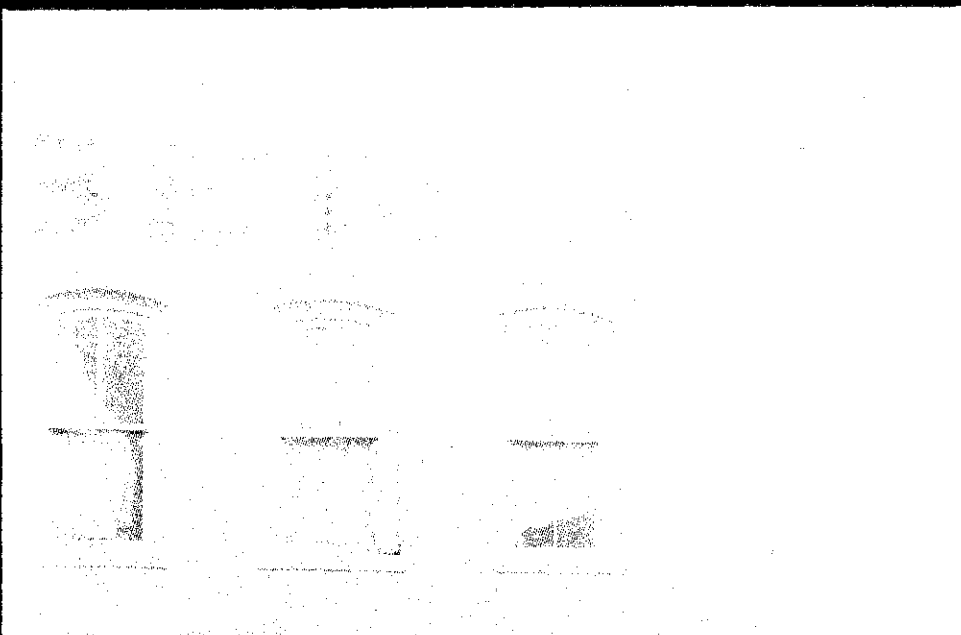
Garber's is the oldest family owned store in Batesburg. Its strong attachment to the community has always been reinforced by the fact that many of its employees serve for an extraordinarily long time. Mr. Miller worked for Garbers for 42 years. Miss Leona Cooper came to work for Garber's in 1916 and finally retired in 1971. Mrs. Nannie Lou Aull worked from 1933 to 1977, in alterations. Mrs. Viola Lowman worked from 1938 to 1970 and Mrs. Imo Klapman worked from 1930 to 1979. Current employees with long length of service include Miss Maurice Shealy who came to work in 1931 and Al Depace who came to Garber's Inc. in 1963.

Family tradition hold that children in the Garber family begin work in the store early in life. Julius and Leon both worked in the store in their teens and in the 1950's and 1960's. Julius children, Ronnie and Gail, worked there in fact Ron although now a physician in practice in Greensboro, N.C. still takes an active part when he comes to Batesburg in the men's dept. Garbers most enthusiastic family employee at present is Ron's daughter Leslie, now eight who enjoys helping her grandparents in the store during her frequent visits.

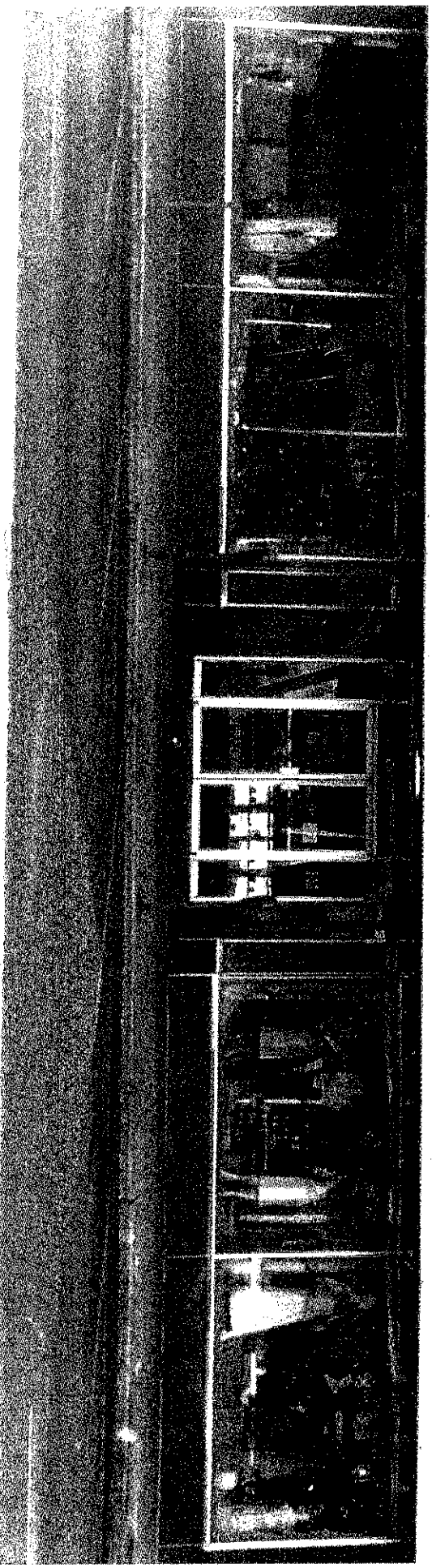
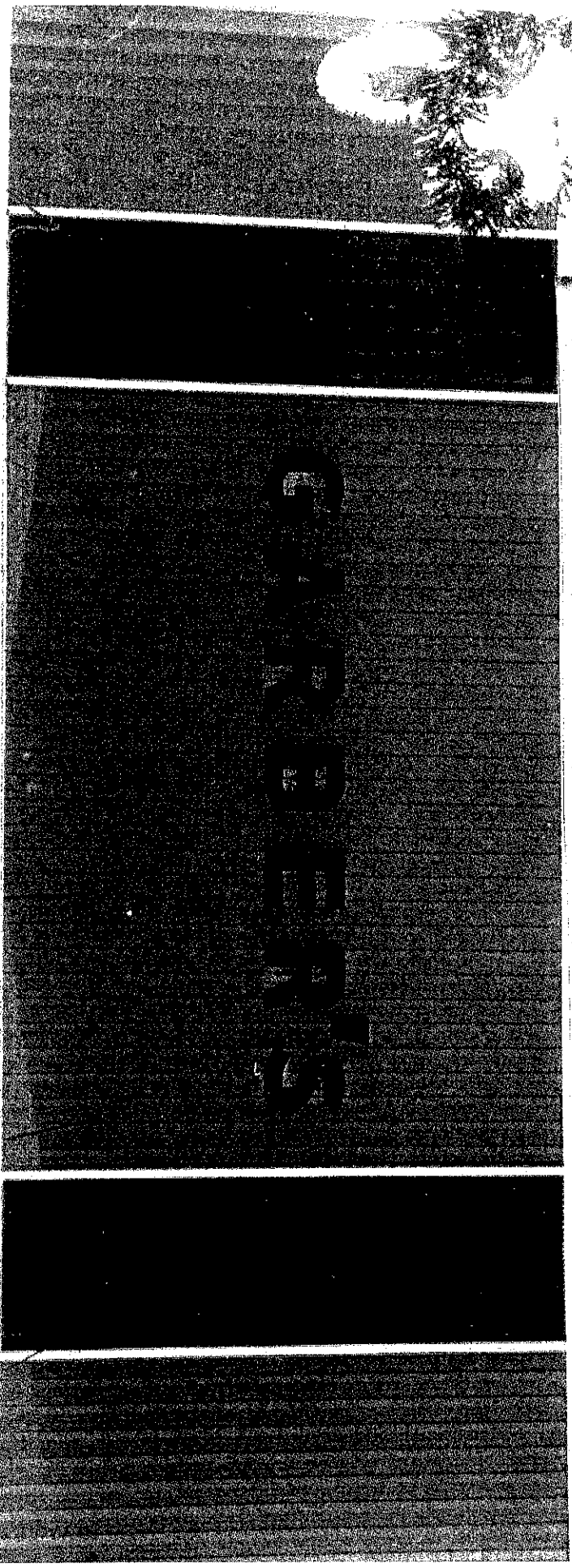
Last year Garber's Store celebrated 75 years in business in Batesburg. The Store is looking forward to their 100th year of celebration.







GARBER'S (OLD FIRST NATIONAL BANK). Oak Street. (Photo 106). Constructed in 1900 as the First National Bank of Batesburg, this building has undergone complete modernization of its front facade. Modern double glass doors center expansive plate glass windows. The upper facade is covered by colored corrugated aluminum sheathing.



Old First National Bank (First Location)

Built 1900 The bank was located in the building where Garber's Inc. was.