



Cross section of Bangor, 1892. Note Broad and Exchange Streets parallel to Kenduskeag Stream. The large road that intersects Broad at West Market Square is Main Street.

married Rose Migowsky, a New Yorker who was visiting her mother and step-father in Bangor, and from that time through 1907 he maintained his family, which by 1900 included daughters Maude, Pearl and Ada, in Brownville. It was during these years that Max developed the grass roots ties with rural residents and forged relationships with local elected officials that were to become vital to his later influence in Republican Party politics. After returning to Bangor in 1907 the family settled at 43 E. Summer Street, about a quarter mile from the banks of the Penobscot.

Max initially worked as a peddler in the Brownville area; he seems eventually to have established a business there, although no official record of this survives. By 1903 he began a brief association with the New England Shirt Manufacturing Company at 31 Mercantile Square in Bangor, but he did not return to the city for good until 1907 when he opened his first store at 77 Exchange Street, where he sold clothing and acted as a pawnbroker. This enterprise continued until 1914 when he became the manager of the American Jewelry Company at 31 Hammond Street. A year or two later a jewelry and sporting goods store was established at 187 Exchange Street which was to become a fixture in the political life of the city.

Simon Cohen married another Russian immigrant under circumstances that followed the traditions of the Old World. Simon Kominsky, who was one of the first of the Vilna Jews to come to Bangor, approached Nathan and Rosa about a possible match between his sister Fannie, who was still in Europe, and their son. This was viewed favorably as Simon was already nearing twenty and the prospects of finding a suitable mate in Bangor were limited.<sup>2</sup>

Simon and Fannie's first children, including Samuel, Jr. (b.1892), Annie (b.1895) and Robert (b.1896), were born in Bangor; shortly after Robert's birth Simon established himself as a clothing dealer in Sangerville. Six more children were born from 1898-1907, but only Nathan (b.1901), Dora (b.1903 in Bangor) and Phillip (b.1907) survived. The family resided at 4 School Street in a town where agriculture was the primary business. Some 175 farms were located within the town limits and as a centennial history noted, Sangerville stood "seventh in point of population among the towns of Piscataquis County but is first in the number of cows kept..." In addition to farming, the largest employers were the three woolen mills, the first of which, the Sangerville Woolen Co., had been established at the end of the Civil War. The town's centennial history also noted that "the woolen industry has been the means of changing Sangerville from a small rural community to a large, prosperous village, filled with neat homes mostly owned by their occupants. The mills employ about two hundred operatives, and there is disbursed each month in wages the sum of fifty-five hundred dollars. The operatives are happy and contented; there are no labor unions, and there has never been a labor strike."<sup>3</sup>

Simon proved to be the most entrepreneurial member of his family, expanding from selling clothing to the farmers and mill workers of Sangerville to owning commercial and real estate properties throughout the state. He had moved his family back to the duplex at 305 Essex Street in Bangor around 1907 (the Epsteins, Rosa and her two youngest sons, Samuel N. and Louis, were all jammed into No. 303) and within a few years the cornerstone of his business empire had been laid. This was the New York Syndicate Store which

was initially located (circa 1909) at 96½ Exchange Street. A year later the store moved to 118 Main Street where it remained a fixture of downtown Bangor shopping for the next thirty years. By 1919 the store boosted itself as "Maine's biggest cut price store on men's clothing, furnishings and all kinds of footwear." This was no exaggeration as the New York Syndicate introduced the concept of discount retailing to the state.

The New York Syndicate underpriced the competition by stocking the shelves with the inventories of businesses that had been purchased in liquidation. As early as 1911 the store advertised "stocks bought and sold for cash. Bankruptcy stock a specialty" and by 1919 that "We buy all kinds of stocks for spot cash. You get a square deal with us." A 1918 article in the *Bangor Daily News* noted that "Simon Cohen purchased the stock of goods owned by John F. Crowley & Son on Main Street. Mr. Cohen will offer these goods for sale soon at cut rates. 'Sold out to the N.Y. Syndicate Store' is getting to be a common term in the state these days."

This was just the first of a number of notices to appear in the newspaper concerning Simon's business activities. A 1924 headline blared "Cohen Buys Main Street Property;" in 1925 it was "Simon Cohen Buys Sweets Corner" with the subhead "Merchant adds Adams and Pickering Estate Buildings to his Adjoining Property;" and in 1927, "Simon Cohen Buys Midtown Property" - this with the subhead "Famous Merchant Acquires Building at 40-44 Main Street Occupied by Two Stores and Chamber of Commerce. A Remarkable Career of Success in Trade and Real Estate Investment."

If the considerable excitement that these transactions generated in the press seem overstated, the fact was that Simon was acquiring a number of Bangor businesses and properties that had been held by prominent merchants and families for many decades. Instead of the xenophobia that might have resulted, praise was heaped on the tycoon's accomplishments, as the January 1927 announcement of the purchase of the 40-44 Main Street property attests:

Simon Cohen has been conspicuous in the business life and progress of Bangor for 20 years and he was a successful merchant in Sangerville, Piscataquis County before coming to settle here. From the day 43 years ago when he first set foot in this region, Mr. Cohen's career has been one of uninterrupted progress and the success has all been achieved through the industrious application of sound business principles.

Within the previous five years he had purchased five major downtown properties, including the four story Bass building at 32 Main Street where the Boston Button Store was located. This store, which Simon bought in 1920 as a wedding gift for his daughter Dora and son-in-law, Harry Broder, occupied floor space "equal to two ordinary stores" and was "finely situated in the heart of the retail shopping district" according to the *Bangor Daily News*. It was "a Bangor institution familiar to shoppers for more than 50 years, and was originally located in one of the old wooden buildings at the bend of Central Street..." The old inventory of threads and buttons was cleared out in a going-out-of-business sale and was replaced with men's, women's and children's fur-



Main Street, Bangor. The Boston Button Store (left) was acquired by Simon Cohen for his daughter, Dora, as a wedding gift. The New York Syndicate Store was one block up the street. *Bottom*: Market day on Pickering Square. Jacob Cohen's shoe store was located at No.85. (Author's collection)

nishings. It was renamed The Boston Store, and Harry Broder was appointed manager.

At the time of the Bass building acquisition Simon already owned the Enterprise Shoe Store at 60 Main Street, which he had presented as a wedding gift to his daughter Annie and son-in-law, Morris Shafmaster, and the J.F. Parkhurst & Son Co. at Main, Rowe and Barker Streets. This last business, known as the Parkhurst Trunk Factory, had been purchased from the heirs of Frederick H. Parkhurst who served as the Republican governor of Maine from 1920 until his death a year later.<sup>4</sup> The factory was established in 1866 and grew to manufacture some 30,000-40,000 trunks annually. By 1899 over a hundred men were employed there turning out fifty styles of trunks as well as saddles, harnesses and other goods which were shipped throughout New England, New York and Pennsylvania. The main building that housed this enterprise was five stories in height and incorporated an acre of floor space - an ideal setting for the Chrysler dealership that moved in after the trunk business folded. Another building on the lot was leased to an auto mechanic; the rest were rented to small businesses or occupied by residential tenants.

But this was not all: the four story brick building known as the Sweet's Corner at Main Street and West Market Square and the adjoining five story Pickering Building at West Market Square were picked up literally at a fire sale from the estates of Frederick W. Adams and George W. Pickering. They were restored so that the Caldwell Sweet Company, a wholesale and retail druggist that had occupied the site for fifty years, was able to move back in. Then the four story building at 40-44 Main Street was added to Simon's holdings, secured after lengthy negotiations with fourteen heirs of the estates that held the deeds. The ground floor was occupied by the John Connors Shoe Co. and the Dolliver Shop; the Bangor Chamber of Commerce rented the other three floors. A four story brick building at 122-124 Main Street, occupied by the Hotel Commodore, was also a Cohen property.

The *Bangor Daily News* remarked that "altogether Simon Cohen may be regarded as a busy man whose career has been an unbroken record of successes. And everyone says he deserved every bit of his success." While Simon was energetic and dynamic, he had able assistance from his sons Samuel, Jr., Nathan and Robert. Sam graduated from the University of Maine Law School and practiced for a short time from an office at 189 Exchange Street prior to joining his father's business in 1919. After marrying and settling in a home at 22 East Summer Street he was soon managing the New York Syndicate store, which was in every way a family enterprise. After graduating from Columbia, Nathan returned to the store where his older brother Robert, who had obtained a law degree, was working as the shoe buyer. Nathan married Betty Cooper in 1925 (her family lived on French Street across from Robert and Fannie Cohen and owned the Economy Clothing Store on Pickering Square which was later acquired by Robert's son, George) and continued at the store until becoming a representative for a clothing manufacturer.

Another successful career launched in the rural clothing trade was that of Samuel H. Cohen. Sam, who traveled from Dunilowicze to Maine in 1889, was recorded at the time of the 1900 census as living with Simon's family in Sangerville, where he worked as a clothing salesman. The cousins had proba-

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bly worked together peddling clothing in Bangor, for Sam lived for a time (circa 1896) at 305 Essex with his uncle Nathan's family; when Simon moved to Sangerville, Sam went with him. He maintained his rural career after the Sangerville years by moving to Brownville (circa 1905) where he established a men's clothing store on the corner of Main and High Streets in the building known as the Brigg's Block. This store was called S.H. Cohen Co., which was advertised as "dealers in custom and ready made clothing, boots, shoes, gents' furnishings, etc." His motto of "good quality at low prices" was borne out by having the Hart, Shaffner & Marx concession for the area. Sam married Dora Bunevich from Passaic, New Jersey and brought her back to Brownville where they stayed for the next two decades. Dora established a confectionery shop (circa 1909) on Central Square; this was known as Mrs. S.H. Cohen Ice Cream and Confectionery. These enterprises went well, for within two years another clothing store was established in Brownville Junction's Dillon Block, across the street from the train station. This store also included an apartment for the family. By 1927 Sam had built a house at 36 Garland Street in Bangor to which he moved Dora and their daughter Edna (b.1909), although he continued to operate the stores for several more years.

Jacob Cohen peddled for a brief time from the family base at 305 Essex until establishing a store (circa 1898-9) at 162 Broad Street. His clientele were mostly woodsmen and farmers to whom he sold shirts, coats, boots and dungarees. After his father died in 1901, the store was operated in association with Rosa and became known for a time as J & R Cohen. The business moved across the street to 155 Broad around 1913, the year in which Jake opened a shoe store at 85 Pickering Square. (The huge fire that started at 176 Broad Street on April 30, 1911, leveling over one hundred business buildings and nearly three hundred houses, also probably consumed the site of Jake's original store. In later years, an Esso station was located at this address.)

Meanwhile Jake had met his attractive cousin, Alice, who had arrived from Dunilowicze (circa 1902) and was living with her brother Sam and Jake's older brother, Simon, in Sangerville. The couple was married in 1903 and lived at 305 Essex until moving in 1912 to 50 E. Summer Street, across the street from Max's family at 43 E. Summer.

When Julia came to Bangor (circa 1907) she stayed with her uncle Samuel M., who helped her get settled, prior to living with Alice and Jake. The prospects for finding a husband in Bangor were not good at the time, so after several years Julia left for Chicago where her sister Sophie had settled with her family. There she met Louis Saltzman, also from Dunilowicze, whom she married and brought back to Bangor. Louis worked with Jake in the Broad Street store, which by 1920 became known as Cohen and Saltzman. This shop also employed Samuel M.'s eldest son, Robert, for a number of years; this commenced soon after Robert returned from the war (circa 1916), after being injured in combat. Louis acquired this business after Jake devoted his energies to the Brockton Cut Price Shoe Store (later renamed Cohen's Shoe Store) on Pickering Square. Louis moved the clothing store (circa 1927) from Broad Street to 85 (later 81) Exchange Street.

Annie Cohen was just turning twenty when she came to Bangor in 1904. She lived with Alice and Jake for three years and earned a living making