

QUODDY OPINION

Eastport Clothing store closes

It was on a clear, bright day in 1916 that my father first saw Eastport, Maine. He was a young man who had come to America to escape European oppression, and had arrived in New York, along with many thousands of fellow immigrants, a few months previously. Through a chance conversation he had been told of a thriving seaport in the State of Maine, and decided to see it for himself.

After purchasing some wares, he took a train to Eastport, hired a horse and buggy, and started peddling his recently acquired goods. People were courteous and friendly, and business prospered. Shortly afterwards he opened a small store on the east side of Water Street. As business grew, he moved to the site currently occupied by Newberry's. From time to time he would travel to New York and return with the latest ladies' fashions. Berman's became famous in the area for coats, suits, dresses and millinery.

During this period my father met and married my mother, the former Ruth Wolff of New York. They bought a house on Boynton Street and began raising a family.

On a cold February night in 1928, disaster struck. A fire completely destroyed the store and merchandise. Sam Berman was faced with a big decision. Should he stay in Eastport or move to another area? His answer was to build a bigger and better store. Shortly after the fire the three stores adjoining the destroyed one were purchased. After extensive renovations a new Berman's was born in 1929. The store front and display windows were the most modern in eastern Maine. The business grew in the ensuing years, and became the shopping center not only for Eastport but also for the neighboring communities, especially the nearby Canadian islands.

My father had a special fondness in his heart for his many Canadian customers and friends. Many of them travelled long distances over open water, under the most severe conditions, to trade with him.

A short time ago I met a Canadian couple who told me the following story. It seems that they had gone to Eastport and decided to get married. They confided their intentions to my father. After outfitting them, he arranged for the minister, drove them to the church, and stood up with them.

I remember an incident that reflected my father's faith in his Canadian friends. One day a Canadian fisherman came into the store and said, "Mr. Berman, I need \$200 for a new engine for my boat". My father reached into the cash register and handed him the money. After he had gone out of the store, Dad turned to one of the clerks, almost as an afterthought, and said, "What's that fella's name?"

Many customers looked upon Berman's clerks—Della, the late Mrs. Lewis Stoddard; Nellie, the late Mrs. Nelson Camick; and Susie, Mrs. Eugene Cassidy—as close friends and confidants. Many Christmas purchases were made by male customers simply saying to them, "Pick something out for my wife. You know her size and what she likes."

After I got out of the army at the close of World War II, I entered the business. The year was 1946. Tragedy struck the next year, as my father was fatally stricken with a heart attack while on a buying trip to Boston. Shortly afterwards Nathan Cohen, who had married my sister, Miriam, just before my father's death, joined us in the business, now being managed by my mother.

She retired in 1958 and I formed a partnership with my brother-in-law. When I moved to Bangor in 1968 to become a stockbroker, he became the sole proprietor, with my sister, until his retirement in November of this year.

The bustling seaport of Eastport is no more. Most of the sardine factories are no more than silent pilings dotting the waterfront. The hundreds of boats from the Canadian Islands are gone. The closing of Berman's marks the end of an era.

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