

November 15, 2023

Mayor Gettys, thank you so much for inviting me to represent my family, descendants of the Friedheim family, on the day this special plaque is unveiled. It is an honor to share my memories with you all.

Arnold Friedheim and Sophie Stengel, both German born, met and married in Baltimore and in 1866, they moved to Rock Hill. Arnold was already a well-educated retail businessman and built his first Rock Hill store right across the street from where we are now. He encouraged his brothers - August, Julius, Sam and Harry - to move to Rock Hill and one or two of them also started businesses here. Arnold constructed a wooden structure on Main Street as his general store but after years of business, it was completely destroyed by fire. Arnold vowed his next building would be indestructible, and here it is - 125 years later - this timeless granite building, which is now Wells Fargo.

The Friedheim brothers gained high respect in the community and were well known for their integrity, friendliness, generosity and wit. Their success and popularity attracted other Jewish merchants who also established businesses downtown.

Arnold and Sophie raised 10 children and I have memories, some very vague, of six of the 10 Friedheim siblings: Sadie, married Pride Ratterree, Carrie whom we called "Tatty", married Dr James Massey, Albert (Sophia Beers father) married Marie Yoder, and my grandmother, Fannie, married James Edward Marshall. Dolph, the store "greeter" and Sam, a medical doctor, never married.

Now, I want to tell you how I fit into this wonderful family.

My grandmother, Fannie Friedheim Marshall, was Arnold and Sophie's youngest child. My grandfather was affectionately known as Ned and I don't know how he and my grandmother met, but they were married in 1904. Papa, as we called him, was a Presbyterian and their 4 children, Ed, Arnold (my father), Frances and Sophie, were baptized and raised as members of First Presbyterian Church. The Friedheim family is documented in that church's history book as friends of and contributors to First Presbyterian Church.

One of my earliest childhood memories is going to the Friedheim house. Some of you will remember that magnificent place, which was located where Fountain Park is now. When we'd go to visit the family, my sister Genie and I would take some of Daddy's heavy cotton socks - the ones he wore with his hunting boots - and as soon as we had spoken politely to the family, we'd dash upstairs, put those socks on, take a running start and slide down that long, highly polished hallway.

I attended Uncle Dolph's funeral at the Friedheim house, which was officiated by a rabbi from Charlotte (there was no synagogue in Rock Hill) and Dr Gregg, the minister at First Presbyterian. Polly the parrot squawked during the service causing little chuckles among those attending.

I remember Friedheim's store so vividly. A real general store in every sense of the word. Mother always parked in the back lot, we entered through the rear doors and were greeted by Uncle Dolph, who positioned himself on a 3-legged stool at a desk - actually a nail keg - near the back door. A man of few words, all I remember him saying was a gruff "G'morning".

On the first floor of this grand 3-story building were departments for women's shoes on the left, fabric and patterns for dressmaking in the middle section, and a large men's department with everything for the proper gentleman, on the right.

Halfway up to the second floor was an overlook sort of space where Miss Nellie sat. Miss Nellie was the cashier. The store had a new-fangled rail system with little boxcars where the sales ladies put money from the sale, placed the boxcar on the rail, and sent it up to Miss Nellie's station. I remember her well in her green visor, with a huge pile of white hair arranged on top of her head.

The second floor was a mezzanine reached by a grand stairway as well as a cage-type elevator. That floor had women's wear including fine dresses and gorgeous hats as well as undergarments. There was also a spacious department for children's clothes, infants to teens.

A large part of the third floor was used for storage but there was also a special room for the alterations lady, Granny Shultz, and her treadle sewing machine. I remember during Rock Hill's bi-centennial, people retrieved dresses and hightop, lace-up shoes which had been stored in that space for eons and women got all dressed up for the Centennial festivities.

On the first floor, in the very back of the store was the grocery department and in addition to fresh meat, milk, cheese, etc, farmers could purchase gear for their horse-drawn wagons or carts, plus tools, nails and screws and other hardware items.

Friedheim's had a grocery delivery truck driven by Pickney Brown and my mother regularly ordered groceries. Lillie Belle was our cook and she Pinckney were good friends. When I was just a little girl, Pinckney would drive his truck down the driveway to our kitchen door and Lillie Belle would call out to me, "Sister! Pank is here!" So of course, his name was Pank to me. He'd pick me up and put on the front seat right next to him and we'd "ride the rounds" delivering groceries down College Avenue then Myrtle Drive, which at that time was a dirt street with crepe myrtles in the median. Those are the only streets I remember, but thinking of riding the route with Pank is one of my sweet memories of a wonderful childhood.

Uncle Albert, the last Friedheim family member to operate the store, knew I was interested in fashion design and he understood that I regularly bought fabric and patterns from Friedheim's.

He gave me a little mannequin, only 18 inches tall, wearing a real girdle and bra to advertise Gossard undergarments. I designed and made dresses for that beautiful little figure and Daddy made a motorized box and attached the mannequin so she could rotate and show off her fine dresses.

When Uncle Albert died, the building was sold to another department store which lasted a few years, then it became a bar, O'Sullivan's, which is another story in itself! The building was vacant for years, but during the revitalization of Rock Hill's downtown, A. Friedheim & Brother was brought back to life and that historic building was redeveloped as a bank.

My siblings and I and our cousins are all so fortunate to be part of such a wonderful family.....a family full of wit and wisdom. The Friedheims were generous and kind to everybody and a big part of the business life of Rock Hill from the very first year of moving here. My memories are warm and blissful. I'm a very fortunate woman to have been born into such a grand family and I am proud of my Jewish heritage.