

"A Corner of the Tapestry"

by Carolyn Gray LeMaster

"The Pfeifer name, which appeared on stores in Hot Springs and Pine Bluff as well as on the flagship store in Little Rock, became as well known in Arkansas's department store history as did that of Blass. Joseph Pfeifer (1835 - 1926) followed his brother Philip Pfeifer to Little Rock in 1864. Having come to America with only five dollars in his pocket, Joseph began his career in Little Rock in partnership with G. F. Miller; after one year Joseph opened his own men's store, "Jos. Pfeifer." By November 1874 Joseph was broke - as were many others who attempted to start businesses after the war - but he rallied again a year later and was on his way to success.

His sons, Leo and Harry, joined him in his clothing store, and in 1910 this was merged with a jewelry store headed by two others of his sons, Preston and Albert. Pfeifer's Department Store was born, and the enterprise grew until it became one of the most prestigious stores of its kind in the state. When Preston Pfeifer donated to the Little Rock Kiwanis Club a large sum of money in memory of his father (who died in 1926) for an underprivileged boys' camp west of Little Rock, the camp was named the Joseph Pfeifer Kiwanis Camp. The Pfeifer store became known for its charity and community service. Both the Blass and the Pfeifer stores gave elaborate picnics for employees annually and chartered streetcars for the events.

Leo Pfeifer (1871 - 1960) and his brother Harry (1873 - 1960) bought their dad's business interest at his retirement in 1909. Beginning in the business at age thirteen, Leo later became known as one of the state's foremost retail merchandisers. He served on the boards of numerous organizations and was an original member of the Donaghey Foundation. He and his wife (Ruby Siesel) had one child, Eleanor, who married Sam Strauss. Harry Pfeifer began his career at age sixteen in his dad's store. He became interested in Little Rock's development as well and was in several real estate and business ventures that contributed to the growth of greater Little Rock. His son Harry Pfeifer, Jr. served as president of the M.M. Cohn company (Harry Pfeifer, Jr. had married the daughter of Albert Cohn). Leo's and Harry's brother Preston (1881 - 1961) served as president of Pfeifer Bros. from 1929 to 1934; he was succeeded by Sam Strauss. Preston was active in the land purchase for what became War Memorial Park in Little Rock and served on other boards, such as those of the Pulaski County Flood Control and Navigation Association."