

The Family Store: A History Of Jewish Businesses In Downtown Asheville, 1880–1990

Harry Blomberg (1904-1991) lived in Asheville, North Carolina, his entire life. His motto was: “Work hard, treat your customers and employees fairly, and always give back to your community.”

His father, Lewis Blomberg, had emigrated to America

from Linkova, Lithuania, and moved to Savannah, Georgia. Lewis had been a peddler who probably obtained his goods from The Baltimore Bargain House, which provided immigrant peddlers with credit, merchandise and an assigned territory to peddle their wares.

Harry Blomberg

Harry, the youngest of Lewis’s five children, was born in 1904. He grew up on Spruce Street, which was a bustling neighborhood of family homes and boarding houses, including My Old Kentucky Home, Thomas Wolfe’s mother’s boarding house.

Lewis was upset that Harry, a high school drop-out, would not go into the family business. Harry loved automobiles, a fairly new invention in the 1920s. Lewis told his son, “You will never amount to anything; you have wheels in your head.” His Asheville High School principal, Andy Hutchins, told him, “You’re wasting your time fooling around with cars. You ought to get a job and go to work!” Harry proved them both wrong!



Blomberg Family photo in front of Woodfin Street home pre-1904. (Harry not in photo.)



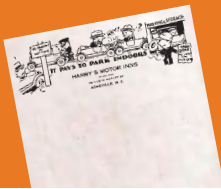
HARRY BLOMBERG 1950s

Like many other Jewish merchants, Harry was active in the local civic community. He belonged to Kwanis, the Masons, the Shriners and served on the board of directors of St. Joseph Hospital.



LEWIS BLOMBERG 1903

Over the years he had numerous businesses in downtown including the Model Cigar Store, The Racket Store, Blomberg’s Sporting Goods and the Strand movie theater (listed below). He also had a salvage business and a junk and hide business. These enterprises were at a variety of locations including Blummore Ave., Patton Ave., and Lexington Ave.



One Man’s Generosity

“Except for one man’s love of heritage and lack of greediness, the Wolfe home would have been torn down in 1941 and turned into a produce market.”

— Bob Terrill, Asheville Citizen Times article, August 23, 1981

Harry bought My Old Kentucky Home in 1941 to save it from demolition and then sold it back to the Wolfe family three months later because he believed it belonged with them.



MODEL CIGAR STORE

1887-1900

Lewis (Harry’s father) opened a cigar store, a dry goods emporium called The Racket Store, a toy shop and sporting goods store, a movie theater called The Strand and an amusement company.



BLOMBERG’S SPORTING GOODS

1923

Harry’s first business, a gas station, on the corner of Market and Walnut Street. Is now The Blomberg Annex to The Asheville Community Theater.



HARRY’S CADILLAC DEALERSHIP

1937

Harry was awarded area Cadillac dealership and opened showroom across Haywood Street from Harry’s Motor Inn #2. Later added other makes including Pontiac. Celebrities including Bob Hope and President Franklin Roosevelt rode in Harry’s cars when they came to Asheville.



HARRY’S MOTOR INN

1953

Harry purchased Blummore Industries from Fred Sotter, owner of Grove Park Inn, and reopened it to continue to provide jobs for mountain craft artisans. It survives today as Groveswood Galleries.

1967

Harry’s moved to West Asheville to become Harry’s On the Hill. Today it is run by Harry’s granddaughter, Pat Grimes.