

This Week in Saratoga County History

461 Broadway: A Saratoga Christmas Tradition

Submitted by Carol Godette December 18, 2024

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*Glickman's Men & Boys Shop 1929-1989
George S Bolster Collection-Saratoga Springs History Museum*

G. Willikers: On This Spot

For generations, stepping inside 461 Broadway has been a sensory delight for Saratogians. Currently home to G. Willikers Toy Store, the address remains a hub of enchantment and community connection. For over 40 years, Linda Ambrosino and her husband have infused downtown Saratoga with holiday magic, captivating locals and visitors alike with their NYC-quality Christmas window displays.

This year's display is no exception. The first window invites onlookers into a warm, nostalgic scene: a family gathered around a classic movie projector. The following windows come alive with intricate depictions of the films they are watching, drawing delighted murmurs from passersby. People pause to marvel, trying to identify each movie, their faces lighting up with childlike wonder. Inside the store, the enchantment continues. The upper shelves are adorned with snowy landscapes and whimsical woodland creatures, creating a magical atmosphere that makes every visitor feel like a kid again.

For Linda, these festive displays are a labor of love. She smiles when asked about her favorite Christmas window from the past four decades but admits that it's an impossible choice. "They're like children," she says. "You love them all in different ways."

But the magic of G. Willikers extends beyond its decor. The store's charm is steeped in the history of its location. Before Linda brought toys and holiday cheer to 461 Broadway, the building housed another beloved family business that defined downtown Saratoga for 60 years: Glickman's Men's and Boys' Shop.

A Look Back: Glickman's Legacy

Founded in 1929 during the Great Depression by Henry and Pauline Glickman, Glickman's Men's and Boys' Shop quickly became a downtown Saratoga institution. Specializing in men's workwear, the store served local firemen, policemen, and tradespeople, offering durable clothing at fair prices with top-notch customer service. Over the decades, Glickman's expanded its offerings under the guidance of Charlotte Glickman Albert, the founder's daughter, who introduced women's apparel to the store.

For local teenagers in the 1970s, Glickman's was the go-to destination for fashion staples. "It was where we got our uniform of the day," recalls one loyal customer. That uniform often included jeans or corduroys, a Northern Isle patterned sweater, a navy CPO jacket, and Converse sneakers. Kathy Wilson Cleary fondly remembers the rainbow stacks of cotton turtlenecks lining the store's old wooden counters, while Weezie Foye describes weekly visits after cashing her paycheck at Adirondack Trust.

The sensory experience of shopping at Glickman's remains vivid in the memories of many Saratogians. Entering through one of the two wooden and glass doors, customers were greeted by the hum of fluorescent lights and the distinct smell of mothballs from wool sweaters. The creak of wooden floors alerted the Glickman and Albert families to greet their next customer warmly.

A Family-Run Business with Heart

Glickman's wasn't just a store—it was a family operation that reflected the dedication and values of its owners. Henry Glickman worked well into his 80s, while his son-in-law, Jerry Albert, joined the business in 1958. The Alberts' three daughters—Robyn, Sharon, and Alicia—helped out during summers and holidays. Alicia, the youngest, recalls being relegated to the basement to inventory Levi's jeans, underwear, and other items, attaching handwritten price tags.

Upstairs, her grandmother managed the cash register with unmatched efficiency. Always dressed in a circle pin with an attached pen for writing receipts, she epitomized the professionalism and warmth that customers loved.

The family's commitment to their business often meant long hours and few days off. Glickman's was open six days a week, expanding to seven during the holiday season. Alicia remembers her

father attending her high school graduation but leaving early to man the store, a moment captured in family graduation photos taken in front of the shop.

The personal touch extended to the customer experience. Bill Petit, a longtime Saratogian, recalls seeking advice from Mr. Albert for a wardrobe update. He left the store with a new outfit that boosted his confidence and even helped him impress the girl of his dreams that very night.

An Era Ends, A Legacy Continues

When Glickman's closed its doors in January 1989, it marked the end of an era. A heartfelt editorial in *The Saratogian* lamented the loss of "homespun, meat-and-potato retail stores" that had long defined downtown Saratoga Springs.

Yet, the spirit of 461 Broadway lives on through G. Willikers Toy Store. While the creaky wooden floors and mothball-scented sweaters have given way to snow-dusted shelves and whimsical toys, the building continues to create cherished memories for generations of Saratogians.

At Christmastime, this legacy shines brightest of all. Whether it's the nostalgic glow of the holiday windows or the timeless warmth of a family-run business, 461 Broadway remains a beacon of Saratoga's enduring magic.