

Sanger Brothers

When I was a child, there was a wealth of shopping available in downtown Dallas. The city center nestled in a broad curve of the Trinity River which divided the metropolitan area. Downtown as I knew it began farthest from the river with Titche-Goettinger's on Elm Street and ended some six long blocks farther west with Sanger Brothers' Department Store, just a few blocks from the old red sandstone Dallas County Court House and the School Book Depository, which became infamous many years later. In between Titches' and Sanger's, as Elm sloped almost imperceptibly toward the river, were several other department stores, each with its own personality and memories left with me today. All were owned by local people who had been successful in building them into the prosperous stores I grew up with.



In those days, when we went to town by streetcar (and we generally did), I was always happy and excited when we got to the corner of Elm and Akard Streets, where I recognized the big, square, elegant buff stone building that housed Titche-Goettinger's. Before the streetcar turned west from Akard onto Elm Street, we would get off, cross to the southeast corner of Elm, and enter Titche's by the Elm Street doors. Just inside the second set of doors, I loved to try a sample of cologne from an ingenious little fountain that flowed with the scent of the day. After doing our shopping, we generally left the store by the wide doors on Akard, where we negotiated the two steps down to accommodate the gradual slope of the land toward the river. Sometimes I could persuade Mother to walk through the men's wear department all the way to the Main Street exit in order to walk past all the dazzling show windows on the way back up to Elm.

Then we would cross Akard to go west down toward the rest of the stores on Elm Street. We generally passed Volk's, a specialty store smaller than Titche's. We seldom entered there although I loved to walk around the big island show window formed by two walkways from the sidewalk into the store. Volk's had no yard goods department, and fabric was most often Mother's goal, sewing as she did for herself and two daughters. We would pass Philipson's, too, a small shop for women's clothes where, years later, I won a fur coat in an essay contest. At the next corner, we might look south to Neiman Marcus, which occupied most of a block at Ervay between Main and Commerce Streets. Neiman's was the only major store not on Elm, but then Neiman Marcus was, from the

start, a special case, catering to the general state-wide wealth in Texas. We seldom included that store on our itinerary, but Neiman's windows were a special thrill at Easter and Christmas.

We did occasionally enter H. L. Green's back on Elm in the next block. I thought of Green's as a mere half-store, for it was narrow, with an entrance only on Elm, but it contained a world of exciting children's clothes and, for some reason, I always think of lamp shades at Green's and elevators, for a number of years later I was on the elevator there when it fell at a dignified pace from the eighth floor to the basement. There were no injuries; in fact, one or two persons were able to get off as the elevator passed each floor. When the car stopped sedately in the basement, the rest of us got off and *walked* back up the stairs to the main floor.



On down Elm, we would pass several shoe stores, several variety stores, McCrory's, Woolworth, and Kress's. Then we would reach A. Harris', a beautiful store with enticing jewelry and cosmetic counters on the main floor, but on the third floor Harris' had a marvelous display of fabrics to tempt us. It too had entrances on Elm, Main, and a side street. The shape of the store especially interested me because, although it was narrow on the Elm Street side, it opened up into a wide store where the men's clothes were sold on the Main Street side. Because of the slope of the land, we had to go down three steps from the narrow portion of the store into the men's department. On all the other six floors, the store was the full width of the Main Street side.

After Harris' would come a dull stretch of a couple of blocks with shops which had no appeal for me except for one nondescript shop which perpetually had a "going out of business sale" announcement in its windows. Then finally we would reach Kahn's Men's Store, across Lamar Street from Sanger Brothers, the end of downtown and the promised land so far as I was concerned. Sometimes the entire scope of our shopping expedition would be centered on Sanger's, in which case we usually drove to town, parking in the Sanger garage across Lamar and Elm Streets in the next block. It was a multi-storied garage, although I doubt that it was as large as it seemed to me at the time. I found it exciting to watch Mother surrender the car to a parking attendant in return for a small ticket. I was never entirely sure that the ticket would really redeem the car for us.

On those occasions, we would use the northwest entrance to the store, its least conspicuous door, which passed close to the first-floor lunch counter. Past the bakery and candy counters, we finally arrived at the real front of the store with its excitingly aromatic cosmetic counters and its, to me, dull men's clothing department. I don't remember stopping at the cosmetics or hosiery counters until years later when I usually shopped alone or with a friend.

In the center of the main floor, dividing the clothing departments from the food sections, was a long bank of elevators, each operated by a uniformed man or woman who called out the departments on each of the seven floors as we came to them. I wondered why the people who wanted off on the second floor were always in the back of the elevator. Even though we tried, Mother and I couldn't always be the last to board the elevator, for we generally wanted off on the second floor, attracted to the luxurious array of fabrics and dress patterns. In my early teens, when hand knitting became popular enough for Sanger's to have a knitting department on the second floor, I spent a great deal of time there getting help in learning how to make sweaters and skirts.

When we finished on the second floor, we sometimes waited for the next "up" elevator to take us to (I can still hear the operator announce the floors) Better Ladies' Wear, Linens, Furniture, Offices, and finally to the dining room on the seventh floor. I don't remember that we often had lunch there, but one or two occasions during my childhood were enough to create great memories of deciphering the menu and ordering, even occasionally being allowed to have a Coca-Cola. Mostly, we had a quick lunch at the ground-floor luncheonette, where I thought sitting at the counter was many ways superior to the elegance of the upstairs dining room.

The elevators at Sanger's had a special fascination for me. Actually, I had to hold my breath when we boarded an elevator on the first floor, for once as a very little girl I had been separated from Mother on the crowded car and had gotten off with the wrong navy-blue dress. I can still remember the horror with which I looked at the strange woman who had substituted herself for my mother. She must have been a mother who had once had a similar experience with her child. When I tried to run frantically in any direction that would take me away from her, she talked soothingly to me and held my hand gently but firmly until the right navy-blue dress came rushing down the nearby stairs, and I was reunited with my mother. The fear of separation from her on the elevator never bothered me in any other store than Sanger's, but for many a year I had to swallow hard in order to board a crowded elevator at Sanger's.



Frequently, when we completed whatever shopping we had come for, we would pause at the bakery counter to choose a cookie for whatever sibling had stayed at home. Then we would retrace our path to the parking garage where I experienced my never-ending thrill of waiting for our car to be delivered to us from one of the floors above. The curved ramp from the upper decks ended right at the waiting room, giving me full sight of the car as it seemed to hurtle down to us from above, as well as a thrill of doubt that the driver could make the turn and stop in time.

The return home on the streetcar, on the other hand, held its own excitement. We would catch the car at any corner along Main or Elm between Lamar and Akard. I thought it was great fun to struggle on with several department store packages and select a seat where we could generally turn back the reversible seat in front of us to hold our purchases. Sometimes I could rest my tired feet on the seat in front of us, although I was reminded that it was not lady-like to do so. I never tired of watching the passing parade of buildings, the Palace, Melba, and Majestic moving picture houses across the street from all those department stores, all of which gradually disappeared over the years, absorbed into syndicates. Titcher-Goettinger's became Dillard's. Then Sanger's and A. Harris's first joined forces to become Sanger-Harris and later were taken over by Saks. The vacant Sanger's building was remodeled to house the first of the Dallas County Community Colleges. Only the *name* of Neiman Marcus survives today, but no Marcuses are connected with the store any more. Neiman's *may* still have their downtown store, but I doubt it. Shopping as we knew it on Elm and Main Streets is only a memory for me and my contemporaries.

