

Caro's Old Herman and Fritz Blocks: The Legacy of Small Business Stores

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In 1889, in Caro's early downtown, the Herman Block was built that was composed of a two story building that had at its first level . . . four small business stores. Seven years later, the Fritz Block was built adjacent and south of the Herman Block and was likewise a two story building. The Fritz Block along with an up-stairs office also had a ground level store. This section of Caro's downtown today comprises the One Day at a Thyme Shop and until the fire of December 9, 2016, the Kid's Closet Shop. The Fritz and Herman Blocks have represented a vital part of Caro's early, small business, entrepreneurial spirit and legacy.

The Herman Block: John R. Herman built the Herman Block in 1889 . . . at that time, he owned Herman & Co., which was a clothing business that he started in 1882 that would in one form or another be a stalwart or resolute part of the Herman Block. The proprietors of the stores of the Herman Block started operation in 1889 and were the following:

224 N. State St. In 1889, F. A. Wilson the proprietor of the Caro 99 Cent Store moved from the Truesdell Block to this store that was located in the newly built Herman Block and that was adjoining and south of the Caro House, a hotel, that today is the site of the Chemical Bank in downtown Caro. Shortly thereafter within the following year, Herman & Co. operated their business here. Herman Bros., the successor of Herman & Co., which was also a men's clothing business, had its doors open from 1891 to 1907. Also, in 1899, Dr. P A. Barlow, a physician and surgeon, who specialized in Turkish and Russian baths with massage treatments, had his office above Herman & Co. In 1909, Henry Herman, John's son, had a men's and boy's clothing line in the first level of this store. By 1926, likely at this site, Mallory & Common sold teas, coffees, wearables, radios, and canned goods. By 1932, a liquidating business took over the store and sold bankruptcy items. In 1940, the Dorothy Jeanne Shop, which was well known in the Caro community, was at this location. It was owned by Dorothy J. Parsell an artist and beautician. Dorothy was the founder and organizer of the Tuscola County Pumpkin Festival—Car Show—that each year in the fall attracted thousands of people to downtown Caro. About 1970, and onward, Larry's TV & Radio Shack was in the building. This address was also later the site of Just Me and most recently the One Day at a Thyme Shop, an antique and gift store.

218 N. State St. From 1889 to the early 1890's, Frederick A. Poole occupied the store adjoining and to south of 224 N. State St. and ran a confectionary and ice-cream parlor. In 1894, within a few years, W. A. Calbeck opened a grocery. In 1896, the Herman Cash Grocery store sold food and teas at the store. By 1902, a Crockery, Glassware & Wallpaper store opened at this site under the ownership of John R. Herman. In 1909, Louis W. Luder moved his business consisting of motorcycles, bicycles, guns, fishing tackle, and general sporting goods onto the store. Previously, Luder had worked for three years at his very successful business in

cramped quarters under the office of Mr. Reynick who was the justice of the peace in Caro. After moving, Mr. Luder decorated this new show room and changed the shelving to better accommodate his new line of sporting goods.



At the Right Next to the Automobile and Showing the Gleaners Sign are the Early Herman and Fritz Blocks



The Early Luder Store at 218 N. State St. about 1910

Everything about the place sparkled like a newly cut gem or freshly stamped copper coin or button. Compared to his previous location, the repair shop in the rear was much larger. In every way, the new shop was a grand improvement over his previous store. Louis Luder gave strict attention to the details of his business—he was a genius in repairing light machinery. He also won the confidence of the public with his straightforward methods in conducting business. At his new store in the Herman Block, Mr. Luder continued to give his traditional prompt and careful attention to the needs of each and every customer.

In 1925, the Luder business was followed by the 5 Cents to 1 Dollar Store that was owned by Emil Kremer. His business lasted fifteen years and closed in 1940. In 1907, Emil Kremer attended the Bliss-Alger Business School in Saginaw and then worked for the Caro Light and Electric Power Interests in the Caro area for the next 18 years. Kremer entered the Caro small business field first as a furniture seller and later owned the convenience business housed by this Herman Block store. After Kremer, about 1942, J. L. Herman again had a crockery and wallpaper business here. In the 1960's, a Lenox store occupied the site. In 1970, the Caro Piano & Organ Co. owned by Jerry Holmquist was in the building while in the late 1970's and 1980's a Holden Red Stamp Center was at this location. Most recently, this was the site of the Kid's Closet shop.

212 N. State St. Starting in 1889, the next and smallest store, really an office, was initially occupied by John Piper for a short span of time while Dr. Watson a local physician and surgeon likely rented the upstairs office. From 1890 to 1894, the storefront was occupied by F. L. Stone, a jeweler. In 1894, the first office of Gleaners Insurance was opened in an upstairs room above the printing shop of Grant Slocum. Mr. Slocum was the editor and owner of the *Courier* an

early Caro newspaper. In 1894, the Ancient Order of Gleaners was formed in Caro in this building. It was founded by Mr. Slocum. From about 1900 to 1910, W. W. Moore sold newspapers and eventually had a news, book, stationary, and art store here. Mr. Moore likewise sold cameras and supplies and became a very talented photographer. In 1902, Dr. Fred Bender a University of Michigan graduate opened a medical practice in the lower office. In 1914, Dr. and Mrs. Leo E. Wescott rented the apartment above after it was vacated by John Herman. Wescott was also a physician and surgeon and had his practice on the first floor. Later, in 1919, Dr. Race occupied the small first floor office. Dr. Race had chemical and X-ray laboratories and an operating room in the back of the office. Dr. Race later became the county coroner. In 1942, a practice was opened again by Dr. Bender. It appears afterward that the Sandwich Shop occupied the site. By the late 1900's, the optometric center owned by Michael Sinchak, OD, was located in this small building. The Village Pride—Wallpaper and Paint came later, and in the early 2010's, the site was last occupied by the Catty Wampus Fabric Company.

206 N. State St. In 1889, David A. Horner & Co., a drug and sundry business, moved into the last store in the Herman Block. In 1896, Joseph L. Beckton became the owner of the business, which was next door to the Fritz Building. In 1904, a continuous roll awning was put in front of the J. H. Beckton Drug Store, W. W. Moore's, Herman's Grocery, and Herman Bros. Clothing Store all situated next to each other in the Herman block. In 1930, a tornado struck the McNair, Fritz, and Herman Blocks in downtown Caro—the Herman Block was at that time described as the Palmer Block. The 206 N. State Street store existed into the mid-1900's as the well-known Carl Palmer Rexall Drug Store. The Palmer Drug Store closed in 1974, and Karen Raymond soon opened Karen's Town & Country, a women's clothing store. Karen expended her business into the corner building or the Fritz Block, which was vacated by the Sherwin-William's Paint store. In the late 1900's, this was Town & Country Casuals that was owned by Laura Polega and was later the site of the Kid's Closet Shop.

The Fritz Block: By 1896, William S. Fritz, a dentist, built the Fritz Block that also had a store at its ground level. The businesses in the Fritz Block follow:

204 N. State Street. From the time it was first built, William Fritz and later Fritz & Son had their dental parlor in the upstairs of the Fritz building. It was last the location of the dental practice of Dr. Thomas J. Fritz who practiced until 1964. Because of their local pioneer ancestry, he and his wife Della were named King and Queen of the 1952 Caro Centennial celebration. The upstairs office later became an apartment that was assigned the new 200 street number.

Old 200 N. State St. In 1901, O. A. Taggett's stock of groceries was removed from the Reynick Building near old City Hall, to the first floor of the Fritz Block, opposite the Post-office, which was in the McNair Building. Taggett's store was fitted up to meet the demands of this large and increasing trade in business. In 1905, W. A. Calbeck moved his stock of shoes to the ground level floor of the Fritz Block where he conducted Calbeck's Cash Shoe House, which was very neatly arranged and organized. In 1932 when Mr. Calbeck's business called Quality Shoe, he moved out of the Fritz Block. J. L. Kaufman Grocery moved in and stayed here until 1939 when

it removed to its E. Burnside St. location behind Zemke's, which is now the old Gamble store. In 1939, Western Auto moved into the Fritz Block.



The Town & Country Bridal Store about 2014

The Fritz Building later housed Sherwin-Williams and not far along after 1970 was owned by Karen Raymond who operated a women's clothing store that was called Karen's Town & Country. Afterward, Town & Country Bridal was operated here by Josephine Spaulding. This store location had been combined by Karen Raymond with the 206 N. State Street location in the Herman Block. It had been made into one shop with an adjoining door, and both were purchased by the final owner. Both are finally known today as the Kid's Closet shop.



Early 2016—the Herman [Also Called the Palmer] & Fritz Blocks

The small size of the Herman and Fritz Block stores encouraged the early sales of newspapers, books, and art items. Also other business elements of this section of Caro included medical, pharmacy, and optometric services along with the sales in the surrounding stores of clothing, food, china, and even motor cycle and automobile items. Foot traffic has always been high in the Herman and Fritz Blocks in the central part of downtown Caro—in the landscape of Caro’s downtown, these stores represented opportunity for self-employment and professionalism and were seen as the community’s small business gems.