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Office of Historic Alexandria
Alexandria Legacies
Oral History Program



Project Name: *Alexandria Legacies*

Title: *Interview with Sidney Abramson*

Date of Interview: *August 4, 1981*

Location of Interview: *Dr. Abramson's office @ 312 S. Washington St., Alexandria.*

Interviewer: *Claudine Weatherford*

Transcriber: *Claudine Weatherford*

Abstract: *Sidney Abramson was born in 1911. He lived above his father's store at the corner of King and Washington streets. During the interview, Mr. Abramson describes the changes in businesses on King Street starting from the 1920s and 1930s over time, and includes references to Wiel's Butcher Shop, Askins Men's General Store, and Hoffman's Tailor Shop, to name a few. Memories of flivver trucks and pianists at silent movies are also recalled.*



Sidney Abramson, 1981

Sidney Abramson:	Starting with King on the north side...of course, I go back kinda far, but I don't know if I go back far enough [laughs]...was Warfield's drug store [at King and Pitt streets]...then next to these was the First National Bank...
Claudine Weatherford:	Any idea of the year?
Sidney Abramson:	When I was a boy...
Ethel Abramson:	Well, the First National Bank was the first...
Sidney Abramson:	But they don't want that...let's say I go back fifty years.
Ethel Abramson:	More than that.
Sidney Abramson:	Well, I mean, eh...fifty years is enough, isn't it? All right, SIXTY years.
CW:	We'll take it as far back as you can go. Drug store was there sixty years ago?
Sidney Abramson:	Oh, sure. All right, and the First National Bank...then next to the bank was Wiel's Butcher Shop...[heading east to west along King's north side] now, a...now there was a clothing store, but that was a little bit later...called Ridgely and Jones. A men's haberdasher...next was a grocery store called Howard's Grocery Store. Then there was a little hot dog place...[to Ethel] what was the, what was his name? You know his son used to go with Allan? They lived around the corner.
Ethel Abramson:	Oh, Poppa George [sp?]
Sidney Abramson:	Poppa George. Yeah, the hot dog place was called Poppa George. Used to have, you know, hot dogs, and I guess chili and stuff. Then there was the Citizens' National Bank.
Ethel Abramson:	Citizens' National and First National merged and then it became First and Citizens' [later].
Sidney Abramson:	Now that's the north side between Pitt and Saint Asaph. Now, when we go back to the south side on Pitt and King streets was an Opera House...[still about sixty years ago].

	Now I don't think they had any stores downstairs at that time. Later on they had like Atcheson's, you know, oil...
CW:	So the Opera House was upstairs?
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah, well, you had to go up the steps...and then there was...a...Askins Men's general store, I don't know...but see they were a little later, you know what I mean?
CW:	Yeah...that was a general store?
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah, like men's, ladies'...
Ethel Abramson:	Not as big as a department store...like a general merchandise...
Sidney Abramson:	See, in those days they didn't have department stores. All we had then was Bradshaw's shoe store next to Askins...
Ethel Abramson:	You mean next to Askins?
Sidney Abramson:	Well, that's the Opera House! It was the Opera House building.
Ethel Abramson:	Oh, it was? Sorry...I don't go back as far as he does! I didn't move here 'til '27.
CW:	Well, that's plenty good...Bradshaw's shoes...and we're moving west now up toward the Memorial, right?
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah. After Bradshaw's was a small little store...Rosenthal, or Rosenberg....
Ethel Abramson:	Not Rosenberg.
Sidney Abramson:	Rosenthal I think the name was...you know, she was a little lady, and later on she moved around to the George Mason Hotel.
Ethel Abramson:	Oh....
Sidney Abramson:	Roseberg... I thought it was Rosenthal...she had a son...I'm pretty sure it was Rosenthal. They had such a small ladies' store...Rosens....
Ethel Abramson:	Too bad I don't remember. All I remember is the barber shop and the....
Sidney Abramson:	Barber shop?
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah, there was a barber shop.
Sidney Abramson:	Damned if I remember any barber shop.
Ethel Abramson:	Leroy Bendheim owned it. It had a hot dog thing next to it, you know, with a 'K' on it....yes, it did!
Sidney Abramson:	All right, now that's the Rosenthals...then the Piggly Wiggly grocery store. I think it was one of the first ones in the chain.
Ethel Abramson:	There definitely was a barber shop next to the Hayman's...and a little store with a counter. People used to come eat there on the counter. Two pieces of property...
Sidney Abramson:	Well, that's where Rosenthals and Piggly Wiggly...
CW:	Was it between, you think, Rosenthal and Piggly Wiggly?
Sidney Abramson:	Nah...it probably moved into these stores a little later. Then there's a -let's see- there...

Ethel Abramson:	How 'bout Shuman's Bakery?
Sidney Abramson:	Oh, yeah, Shuman's Bakery...down between Bradshaw's and Piggly Wiggly.
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah, everybody in town used to eat there.
CW:	Yeah, that was quite a hangout, huh?
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah, yeah...
CW:	A lot of politics...
Ethel Abramson:	A lot of deals went on there.
Sidney Abramson:	All right, now...
Ethel Abramson:	You know, in later years...wait a minute...was it Cochran's Candy Store? What was the name of it? Cocky's...Cockey's Candy Store. After the Piggly Wiggly. Check with Mrs. Renehan about this block. She knows a lot about it. This is going way back now...
CW:	Longer than sixty years?
Ethel Abramson:	Because subsequent to that these stores all changed.
Sidney Abramson:	Then the...I believe on the second floor was a YMCA...yeah, there was a stairway that went upstairs, and the YMCA was up in there. I remember they used to have a couple of pool tables up there...then there was the Graham and Ogden Real Estate...but what was there before then I don't know.
Ethel Abramson:	Well, what did the candy store become?
Sidney Abramson:	I don't remember.
CW:	Sounds like the candy store was there by the time you [Ethel] came?
Ethel Abramson:	Before.
CW:	Was the YMCA there in '27?
Sidney Abramson:	No, that wasn't there when you [Ethel] came. Well, Graham and Ogden Real Estate firm was next to it...all right? Now, on the corner was my father's place [St. Asaph and King streets]. He used to call it 'the busy corner'. Benjamin Abramson.
Ethel Abramson:	What did he have? General merchandise.
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah, men's store.
Ethel Abramson:	And the railroad people used to come in there and buy all their stuff there.
CW:	Huh? So he sold men's and ladies' clothing?
Sidney Abramson:	Ladies' later on, but this was a mostly men's store.
Ethel Abramson:	Then that store on the corner, where the men's store used to be, became a cigar...
Sidney Abramson:	Much later.
Ethel Abramson:	But she wants to know that!
CW:	Well, I do but we can start again and go back for the later phase.
Ethel Abramson:	Okay.

CW:	So the railroad people used to come into your father's store?
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah, like the Southern RR...now this was before Sands and Co. You ever heard of Sands and Co.?
CW:	I haven't.
Sidney Abramson:	The Southern RR, the RFP, and the...this was even before the fruit growers...but the RFP and the Southern RR used to patronize the store.
Ethel Abramson:	Now above the store was a very large apartment, and that's where his [Sidney's] family lived.
CW:	Oh, [to Sidney] so that's where you were raised?
Sidney Abramson:	[Nods head affirmatively]
Ethel Abramson:	He and Dr. Alfred Abramson, and Miss Margaret Abramson...
Sidney Abramson:	Now that covers that part.
Ethel Abramson:	Now you want to know what happened afterwards?
CW:	Yeah.
Ethel Abramson:	Starting at the Opera House...did that become a pool room, Sidney?
Sidney Abramson:	No, a bowling alley...a bowling alley...south side.
CW:	[To Ethel] Was that already a bowling alley when you came in '27?
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah, I think so.
CW:	What about Atcheson's Oil and Askin's general store that were beneath the Opera House?
Sidney Abramson:	It was still there, that's all... See, they were a little later.
Ethel Abramson:	Where was the synagogue, Sidney?
Sidney Abramson:	Down on the next block [400 block].
Ethel Abramson:	Rosenfeld! It was that woman's name. Not Rosenthal.
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah, Rosenfeld.
Ethel Abramson:	Wait a minute –you haven't got all the way up the block.
CW:	Well, for the later...
Ethel Abramson:	Next door to his father's cigar –when it became a cigar and soda fountain store- next door Hayman's opened up a store.
Sidney Abramson:	Wait a minute, wait a minute. In later years, my father divided the store into two stores. And on the corner was a united cigar store agency...then my father had a small store next door [but continued to sell general merchandise...then Hayman's...
Ethel Abramson:	Clothing store...that's the one down there on the corner of 400 block now.
CW:	Would that be on the space where Graham/Ogden Real Est...?
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah, yeah.
Ethel Abramson:	That was general merchandise...men's....I think they lived upstairs, didn't they?
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah.

Ethel Abramson:	This is in the later '30s.
Sidney Abramson:	Next store where the candy shop used to be was Hayman's shoe store... [going east] yeah, where Cokey's was...then later it was a barber shop...where there was Pig/Wig and Miss Rosefelds.
Ethel Abramson:	That Pig/Wig property was divided into two small stores, and one of them became a barber shop, and the other one was on the side of a Little Tavern...it was like a Little Tavern, but it wasn't called a 'Little Tavern'. They sold hot dogs and hamburgers, and...a quicki thing. And Bradshaw's was still there.
CW:	So we've moved back to the end to the east.
Sidney Abramson:	Oh yeah, there was a shoe repair shop in there someplace. You know, about the same time as...a...we're talking now.
CW:	Ah ha! Late '20s, early '30s...
Sidney Abramson:	There was a shoe repair shop...what the hell was his name? He ran for the city council. Was it Linch? Not Linch. It was...he died not too long ago. Stacy Lyle's brother-in-law. Then he moved up on King street -next to the flower shop up on King street there.
Ethel Abramson:	Stacy Lyle's brother-in-law? I can call her.
CW:	He had a shoe repair shop?
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah.
CW:	Where would that have been?
Ethel Abramson:	Let me call her.
Sidney Abramson:	That would fit in there...eh...around Bradshaw's and the Opera House, somewhere in that area. Oh, yeah...then there was White's Electric Shop. That was next door to Bradshaw's down toward the Opera House.
Ethel Abramson:	[Telephone conversation] Is Stacy there?
CW:	Did they sell electrical merchandise or fix it?
Sidney Abramson:	Well, he used to fix it...
Ethel Abramson:	Did they sell any stoves or anything, Sidney?
Sidney Abramson:	Huh? No. You see, you get down to the 600 block... [broken by Ethel's phone conversation with Stacy].
Ethel Abramson:	Sidney, she said her brother-in-law never had a shoe repair shop on King street...[to Stacy] your husband's cousin...what was his name? Herbert what? Herbert Lyles. He had a [to Sidney] shoe repair shop! It was on the 500 block. Herbert Lyles. [To Stacy] Yeah, we've got somebody from the archaeology society trying to get a run-down on that 500 block...that may have been before your time, Daisy [laughs]. Okay, I just couldn't think of his name, honey. Okay, honey. He's your cousin...yeah. Okay, honey [hangs phone up]. [To Sidney and CW] Herbert Lyle's. He died, but that same shoe shop is in the 900 block of King street right now. Next door

	to that florist shop.
CW:	Okay....
Ethel Abramson:	Now, across the street, I'm trying to think of the changes... Well, the bank came down [Sidney: that's right]. And Warfield's came down...let's think of the block before United Virginia's went in there. The big United Virginia.
Sidney Abramson:	Then, you see, they were there until they tore it down. Uh, what is it? Bank Square? Huh?
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah...what happened to Wiel's? What happened to Wiel's butcher shop?
Sidney Abramson:	Damned if I know [laughs].
CW:	Was Warfield's still around in the '20s?
Ethel Abramson:	Oh, yes...
CW:	And Wiel's, was it still there too?
Ethel Abramson:	Yes.
CW:	Lasted into the Depression, anyway.
Sidney Abramson:	Oh, yeah.
Ethel Abramson:	[To Sidney] Can you think of anyone else who was across the street from you in later years? After we were married?
Sidney Abramson:	I think they were all still there, and then they tore down the place to make Banker's Square. Howard's stayed there. Wiel's was -I think- where Jones' had their store. Wiel's was there first, and later Jones' clothing store was there [by the '30s or so].
CW:	Let me see, the next would be Howard's grocery...
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah, they stayed.
Ethel Abramson:	No, they weren't there when Banker's Square was opened.
Sidney Abramson:	Well, how about...the AP. Did they move in there?
Ethel Abramson:	The A&P moved where you first opened your office. Was that the Safeway?
Sidney Abramson:	No, that was A&P but that was later. But was A&P grocery store after Howard's?
Ethel Abramson:	I think there was a grocery store in there. I just can't remember.
Sidney Abramson:	The A&P store in where Howard's was, before or after, I don't remember which....
Ethel Abramson:	I think it was afterwards. [Phone rings -Ethel answers it]
Sidney Abramson:	That about covers the lot... The banks merged. It became First and Citizen, and then it became United Virginia Bank. See, it was the Citizen's Bank and it was the First National Bank, and it merged into the First and Citizen's Bank.
Ethel Abramson:	Wait a minute, I have something else to tell you. After the United Cigar store -on the corner that his family owned a...his brother ran a store there for years -Jaye's.

Sidney Abramson:	Jaye's Ladies' Dress Shop.
Ethel Abramson:	Now then, after that –Julius, he died- then after Jaye's on this corner, Eddy Wolf...
Sidney Abramson:	Oh, yeah, but see, that's later.
Ethel Abramson:	Well, that's all right, she wants to know. Eddy Wolf had a Rembrandt's shoe store. Very, very nice shoe store.
CW:	That must have been in the '30s?
Sidney Abramson:	'40s I'd say...
Ethel Abramson:	'30s and '40s. Rembrandt's moved in in the '50s...or was it? I'm not sure of the date. His name is Eddy Wolf. I just don't remember the date.
CW:	Also, I think you said on the phone that you know about the 700 block?
Sidney Abramson:	And 600 too. Moving on the south side of King street...of King and Asaph streets moving west. Hoy's Stoves and Tin-wares. Next door to How's....
Ethel Abramson:	Hoffman the tailor.
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah, but I was going back before him.
Ethel Abramson:	BEFORE HIM?!
Sidney Abramson:	I think it was a notions, a...a notions store.
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah, that notions store subsequently was....
Sidney Abramson:	Hoffman's tailor shop.
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah, they used to call him 'Hoffman the Tailor'. I can still see him. Ruddy face, bald head, round face...
Sidney Abramson:	Kinda paunchy.
Ethel Abramson:	Very paunchy. Very, very nice gentleman. Very nice.
Sidney Abramson:	He had a men's store down King street before he moved up here.
Ethel Abramson:	You mean the 400 block? [Sidney nods affirmatively] [To CW]: Did you know that for the 400 block?
CW:	No.
Sidney Abramson:	I tell you what the notions store, a men's...
Ethel Abramson:	You said the notions store became Hoffman the Tailor.
Sidney Abramson:	Oh, is that so?
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah. That's the part that sits back there.
Sidney Abramson:	I know there was also a bakery shop in there, and I think I was the only one who knew it was there [laughs].
Ethel Abramson:	Why? Because you used to go in there and buy goodies, huh?
Sidney Abramson:	I remember they used to have a flivver...a little flivver truck they used to deliver...
CW:	A flivver? What's that?
Ethel Abramson:	A tin Lizzy. Called 'em flivvers. F-L-I-V-V-E-R.
Sidney Abramson:	You know, they took donuts to the grocery stores and all that, and I used to sneak up there at 4 o'clock in the morning and got up on that there little truck. That's how I know it was a

	bakery shop.
CW:	How is it that you got up that early? You got up just for those donuts?
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah, then my father was wondering where in the hell I was disappearing to, you know, 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. I was just a little boy. And he caught me. He caught me, you see. And he shook his finger at me – 'no more running around on that truck' [laughs]. Then there was the Rexall Drug Store in the middle of the block there.
Ethel Abramson:	See, I don't remember any of this.
Sidney Abramson:	Then there was a grocery store which later became the Safeway...after the Rexall. Then Woolworth's was..before the drug store [before Rexall's]. Then Safeway.
Ethel Abramson:	Now, where Woolworth's is now were..it was two other things. So there must have been two stores there...? And Nick Latsia had a store on the corner. But what was there before he did?
Sidney Abramson:	A restaurant called the Virginia...
Ethel Abramson:	The Virginia Restaurant. But what was on the corner before he opened his restaurant? Can you remember? 'Cause that restaurant didn't open until...a...late thirties, I think. 'Cause I know it was there during World War II. But there was something there before...can't remember.
Sidney Abramson:	Moving across to Washington and King...
Ethel Abramson:	[North] 600 block going east.
Sidney Abramson:	See, my father had a men's store there for a while, prior to the time he had a store on King and St. Asaph's. That's back to about 1911, I guess.
Ethel Abramson:	Oh, before then, because Alfred was born upstairs. He was born about 1908. Yeah, so the store was about 1906. Mr. Abramson had a men's store on that corner of King and Washington, and the family lived above. And Dr. Alfred Abramson was born in that building up above. He's deceased. Then he [Mr. Abramson] moved down to the 400 block. Then he moved up to King and Asaph. Now, what was next door?
Sidney Abramson:	As far back as I can remember it was Sander's Jewelry store.
Ethel Abramson:	They're still there.
Sidney Abramson:	They've changed hands several times. Then Knight's Hardware Store.
Ethel Abramson:	No, there was something before Knight's.
Sidney Abramson:	No there wasn't! Knight's Hardware Store.
Ethel Abramson:	Hey, I'll tell you who can tell you ALL about the 600 block. But I mean ALL of it. Marian Redman!
Sidney Abramson:	Yeah, Knight's Hardware store. Then next to that, Reed's music store.
Ethel Abramson:	They used to have a piano that they used to play for people.

	A pianist who played all the pieces for you. I used to buy all my music in there. Real popular music, and classical music.
CW:	So they had a pianist who played for the customers?
Ethel Abramson:	Yeah! And also...well, let me give you Marian Redman's [phone] number. She can really tell you about the 600 block. <i>[Note: See contact cards for details on Redman]</i>
Sidney Abramson:	All right now, going down after Knight's used to be the Dixie Movie House. Changed to the Ingamar after that. But the Dixie Movie House, that's going back now. That's when they used to show pictures of William S. Hart.
CW:	Did you go there very much?
Sidney Abramson:	Well, yeah. Admission used to be 5 cents.
CW:	Wow! Must have been in the early 1900s?
Sidney Abramson:	Well, I was born in 1911, so I'd have to be about 6 or 7 years old before I went to the movies. About 1918, then.
Ethel Abramson:	When I came here, it was the Ingamar Theater. By the '20s. Because they needed a pianist one day because that was a silent movie, and I think I...I was just a little tiny girl, I couldn't have been more than 12 or 13, but I did play for them. Those silent movies always had a pianist, you know, how to play all these...
Sidney Abramson:	Now, next door to the Dixie Theater [but this was later] was a place called Bennet's Pool Hall. Then next door to that was a furniture store but I don't know what the name of it was...and then down on the corner [King and St. Asaph] was where Eli Rubin had a furniture store.
Ethel Abramson:	Oh, but that was LATER. Which store did he take over? Wolf.
Sidney Abramson:	Where that restaurant is now...what's the name of that restaurant?
Ethel Abramson:	I'm not talking about NOW. What was in there before Mrs. Wolf opened his store?
Sidney Abramson:	You know, also along the middle of that block was a baker shop -Spurling's Bakery Shop.
CW:	Spurling's Bakery...
Ethel Abramson:	I thought they were up there on...
Sidney Abramson:	Blocks! It was Blocks had a bakery shop. Block.
CW:	West of the movie house.
Sidney Abramson:	Then later, Spurling's Dry Goods Store went into where the bakery shop used to be...subsequently Spurling Dry Goods Store. I think that about covers that block.
CW:	You must be getting tired. Shall we make another appointment to talk more about the 700 block? <i>[Appointment made for second interview]</i>