

Martin's Dry Goods and Shoes

by Donna (Martin) Heid © 2000

Bud Martin's Dry Goods—also known as Martin's Mercantile—served as Dalton's Macy's and Wal-Mart during the late 1930s until the mid-1940s. The store and its owners Bud and Clara Martin provided much needed merchandise when it was available, and extended much needed credit when it was not otherwise available, particularly during the World War II years. The following article was written by their daughter Donna. This article was also included in the Dalton's Heritage history book published in Dalton in 2002.

My Daddy, Elmer L. Martin ("Bud") learned the business in Dalton working for Mr. W. S. Woolsey who owned the first grocery store. He taught Daddy how to order, keep books, stock, arrange merchandise and take inventory. Later, Mr. J. A. Walford opened a grocery store with Harvey Heizer managing that area and the south end of the store was devoted to clothing. This area on Main Street is where Daddy worked. His dream was to expand the stock and own and open his own dry goods store.

Daddy had no capital to begin his venture, but Mr. Walford did. I've been impressed with the story all my life. Daddy drove out to Mr. Walford's place and told him he wanted to buy the building and open his own store, but had no money. Mr. Walford thought it over and told Daddy he wouldn't have to pay anything until he could "make a go of it." They shook hands on the deal. This was Daddy's first life lesson to me, a man's word is as good as a written contract. The deal was closed based on the integrity of two businessmen. As I recall, Daddy was able to start paying off the debt after six months in the amount of \$20 a month. Mr. Walford's trust in Bud Martin enabled him to offer the people of Dalton more selection and availability of things needed without a trip to Sidney.



Elmer "Bud" Martin in his Martin's Dry Goods and Shoes store in Dalton, 1939. Photo provided by Donna (Martin) Heid.

I helped Daddy in the store stocking shelves, dusting, sweeping, unpacking boxes, and waiting on customers. I couldn't see over the counters so I stood on a stool to wait on people. Daddy taught me to make change. At night, we counted the money from the cash register and loaded it in an old black lunch pail and took it home. We had a huge black safe at the store where legal documents were stored, but the day's take went home each evening.

Business was conducted on a cash and carry status or delayed. Delayed meant the customers would pay when his crops came in. If harvest was good and you didn't get hailed out, the bill was paid in full. If any hardship occurred, Daddy would wait.

We went to Denver, sometimes by car or train, for Fall Market to order for the store. I remember going through the wholesale houses in Denver and seeing beautiful things. Much of the time Daddy was in the business office doing serious talking. I later learned he was asking for credit to be extended to him, as he hadn't been paid by farmers who had bad seasons. His exit from these meetings often reflected a weary face and I know it was hard for him. He loved Dalton and all his family and friends there and never cut off credit to anyone. His pride may have hurt, but he let no one down who needed his help.

The War years are most vivid. Shortages were experienced first, followed by rationing. The government dictated what items and how many would be allotted to our store. Many forms had to be completed and submitted with substantiation for items ordered and sold. Since we were a dry goods store, which means fabric, our clothing, yardage and hosiery lines were affected and limited. A composition book listed the name of each family, what they needed and their sizes. Our farmers wore overalls and they were in short supply. Some men preferred OshKosh, the blue and white stripe, and some wanted Big Smith, the dark blue denim. Each order was filled as your name came to the top of the list when goods arrived. Women wore silk stockings, not panty hose, and the brand was Hanes. When the war started, silk was needed for parachutes so women had to wait their turn for replacement hosiery. These stockings were made of Lisle, a very fine cotton thread, but not as attractive as silk hose. Toward the end of the war, silk hosiery began arriving and Daddy could allot one pair to each lady in town. Each was grateful and excited.

During the war, men rolled their own cigarettes on a small machine. This activity took place at our store in the office area while Daddy and I listened to President Roosevelt. It was a serious time and I knew to be quiet. A huge world map hung on the wall and tracked where our troops were. Customers came in and listened and discussed the news. Daddy taught me map skills and history during these times together.

If hardship hit any family due to lightning striking their wheat, or being hailed out, that family went to the top of the items needed list. No one complained, for all the people of Dalton knew and understood the genuine meaning of compassion. When the Leger farm burned, Daddy assembled bedding, towels, and clothing for the entire family at no charge. Daddy was a good friend of the local priest and often donated items to him for quiet distribution to those needing help. Yardage, craft items, and yarn were often shared with the 4-H Club to defray their expenses.

Martin's Dry Goods and Shoes was the vehicle for Bud Martin to give of himself to others. I'm sure his sense of kindness was not unique among local businessmen, but I honor him for his honesty, and character. He sold the store to John and Bonnie Ewing in 1945 when our family moved to Boulder, Colorado.