

## [The Depression was a Republican Trick]

THE DEPRESSION WAS A REPUBLICAN TRICK

Written by: Mrs. Ada Redford

Augusta, Georgia

Edited by: Mrs. Leila H. Harris

Supervising Editor

Georgia Writers' Project

District [7?]

July 17, [1940?].

Mr. Clifford C. Farr

833 Broad St.,

Augusta, Ga.

A. R.

THE DEPRESSION WAS A REPUBLICAN TRICK

The Skinner Clothing Company, located at 833 Broad Street, an old established business, is one of Augusta's few remaining home-owned stores. When I walked in Mr. Skinner was placing price tags on brilliantly colored sport suits, which are so popular this summer. He glanced up with a smile of recognition and remarked:

## Library of Congress

"Well, what do you think of the Republican presidential nominee?"

Absorbed in what he was doing, he hardly waited for my reply before he went on, "Personally, I never heard of that man before, but from the race he ran with Taft he is well-known in the Republican party, but he hasn't a chance. Roosevelt will be president for the next term whether they like it or not."

"Yes, I too, believe Roosevelt will run and be re-elected, but that is not what I came to talk about, Mr. skinner."

"Pardon me, I was so excited I forgot for the moment, what can I do for you?"

"How long have you been in business?"

"About twenty-six years. Why?"

"I want you to tell me of your business experiences and of the causes and effects of the depression."

"That's a large order, but I will tell you what I know. Where do we begin?"

2

"First tell me where and when you were born. You don't mind, do you?"

"Oh, no! But I wasn't in business then."

"Of course you weren't, but I would like to know of your very early life, your boyhood days and, in fact, your whole build-up to the successful business man of today."

"That will take a lot of your time, as I will have to take care of the trade, but if you want it that bad I will do my best to give you the information you want or at least what I know."

## Library of Congress

"I will work at your convenience, Mr. Skinner."

"All right, I was born in McDuffie County near Thomson, Georgia, August 27, 1887, the first six children of George Fletcher Skinner and Julia Brannon Skinner. At the age of 15 I finished grammar school at Sardis, Georgia, and went to work as clerk in Appling's General Merchandise Store for \$7.00 a month and board. Being keenly interested in advancement I decided to take a business course and after a few months I came to Augusta.

"Before I entered school I met a boy from home who was working at Lombard's Iron works. He was so enthusiastic and happy over the work he was doing, I gave up the idea of business school and thought I would try to be a machinest. My friend took me to the boss and after looking me over he gave me a job as apprentice. It wasn't long before I learned I didn't care for hot iron and realized I should have stuck to my original plan of taking a business course. The trouble with me was I wanted a pay day and once you get 3 the yellow envelope on Saturday, you just can't give it up, even if it contains only a few dollars. I left Lombards and got a job as clerk with the J. B. White Company. Augusta's largest and leading store at that time. I was back in my own line of work and though I was only 17 years old, I sold more than any of the other clerks.

We had the range of the whole store and were not assigned to departments as they are today. I don't think I was a better salesman, I just know a lot of people. My boyhood days on the baseball teams of Columbia, McDuffie and Lincoln Counties were now paying dividends in business as well as affording as a lot of pleasure. My salary was only \$5.00 a week, while the others were drawing \$10.00. I know I was worth more and I asked the manager, Mr. Denton, (a Yankee) for a raise.

"Why you are just a kid and haven't been here long enough to get a raise." He answered.

## Library of Congress

"I felt that I was entitled to as much as the other clerks and told him so, but he refused to pay me a penny more, so I quit.

"About that time Ben Jordan, of Grovetown, was elected superintendent of schools in Columbia County. Ben had a large store and had to have a man during the school term. I accepted his offer of \$7.00 a week and board and worked until the schools closed. Then I worked at Norvel's Store for the same salary. I was still in my teens, and while I was satisfied and happy in my work, I realized there was no future for a clerk in a small town store, and I decided to come back to Augusta. It was then I got my first real job with the Augusta Aiken Railway Company at 12 cents an hour."

"What kind of work did you do?"

"I was an all round man. I know you remember when they had open streetcars?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, my job in the summer was training men to operate open cars, then running to Lake View, Augusta's amusement park. Most of the men were medical students who worked during the summer to be able to pay their way through Medical College. I also had a side line. J. W. Creasy, a tailor, had a shop on this block and I sold uniforms to the man on commission and made on an average of \$40.00 a month. With my salary from the Railway company my earnings for the month were around \$80.00."

Just at this point a man wearing overalls came in and asked if his uniform was ready. Mr. Skinner told him it was, but that he would like for him to try on the coat. I noticed that it was a Salvation Army officer's uniform. When the man left I asked Mr. Skinner about him.

"Yes, he is an officer and a working one at that. The Salvation Army is doing a good work in our city; more than the general public and the churches are willing to give them credit

## Library of Congress

for. Not that they want any praise. They are interested mostly in helping the forgotten men and woman.”

“And you still sell uniforms?”

“Yes, I usually have a contract with some company and furnish 5 uniforms for the policemen and firemen every year.”

“Getting back to our story, Mr. Skinner.”

“Oh, yes! Where did we leave off?”

“You were working for the Augusta and Aiken Railway Co. How long were you there?”

“Two years and twelve days. I then went to work for Mentor & Rosenbloom, an old New York credit corporation that sold on the \$1.00 a week plan. Shortly after I went to work there, on September 2, 1908, I married Miss Lillian Glisson, my boyhood sweetheart. She was from South Georgia, but we attended the same school and I had looked forward to the day when I could claim her as my bride.

“I was with Mentor & Rosenbloom about seven or eight months, when I found out that the office force was not honest; they were stealing my commission and I quit and went to T. R. Maxwell Furniture Company. After about a month Mentor & Rosenbloom wanted to know why I had left the company. They sent a man here to investigate and when they learned what the trouble was they sent for me and made me manager at a salary of \$35.00 a week, with a bonus.”

“How long were you there?”

“I don't remember whether it was five or six years, but during the time I was there I decided if I could manage a business for the other fellow at a profit, why not have one of my own. I had a little savings account, \$1,000, to be exact and I believed with \$1,000 more

## Library of Congress

I could begin business. I went to the Culpeppers, who at that time were operating a very successful furniture business.

6

I offered to give them a half interest for \$1,000. They agreed readily, and gave me W. P. Seigler, one of their oldest men, as a partner. I opened at 1044 Broad Street, under the name of Skinner & Seigler, and from the first month business was good and in less than two years, it was worth \$3,700.

"I soon learned that Seigler was not the man for my business. He lacked personality and tact in selling. I gave him \$1,000 and bought Culpeppers' interest and then ran the business alone for five years. Then I sold a half interest for \$18,000 to Hogan, my most recent partner, and moved to 958 Broad Street. We were incorporated in 1919 as Skinner & Hogan for \$100,000, but sold very little stock. We opened three stores, one in Savannah and two here. Our business was thriving and we were in fine shape.

"Hogan and I each had a drawing account of \$5,000 a year and we employed fourteen men in the three stores, all making a good salary. Then came the depression. I saw the crash coming and tried to head it off by liquidating the Savannah store. Hogan being a high salaried man, we gave him the small store where Thom McAn's store now is, and part of the liquidation that was still incorporated. I now owned 95% of the store at 958 Broad Street and employed five men. I cut my drawing account in half. In 1930 the Stelling Shoe Store, next door to my place, caught fire and my place was damaged so badly that I leased a store two doors below for the next five years, continuing business as usual.

"After a period of three years, business began to pick up and gradually increased, but it has never been the same. The chain stores have ruined the independent merchant. The big moneyed men who were on the inside of the political scheme knew the rise and fall of the stock market and when to buy. The results were chain stores in every city and town

## Library of Congress

of any size, selling their merchandise for less than we could buy for. What chance did we have for a comeback?

“When my lease expired in 1935, I moved here, and each year business has increased. Today there are seven families getting a comfortable living out of the store and I can't complain. But with the competition and high cost of living, I will not live long enough to regain what I lost during the depression.”

“What do you think caused the depression?”

“It would take a more brilliant mind than mine to tell you the real cause. My ideas along with a lot of other small merchants is about the same. It was Wall Street against the world, along with a political upheaval, in other words, a Republican trick. Millionaires were made over night from the life savings of others. The war got the credit for a lot of and rightly so. I remember the close of the Spanish American War; cotton dropped to 3 1/2 and 4 cents a pound, why? Politics and the little man being crushed and beggared by the man or men who were in power. Take my business for instance; before the last depression fourteen families were being supported from it; my own personal loss was 50%. I was worth around \$40,000 with an income of \$5,000. That was cut in half and today my average 8 is a little more than \$3,000.”

“What to you think of conditions today?”

“They are about the same as the pre-war days of the last World War. When this program is over, there will be an increase in business. The present administration is wise now to all the Republican tricks and there will not be another depression such as Hoover and the Republicans caused. The people in our country know now that it was a political trick to enrich the big man and make beggars out of the little man. We have more unemployed than any other country in the world today, and the cry is that this is a machine age. That is

## Library of Congress

true, to a great extent, but who built the machines? Where did the money come from? Out of the pockets of the working man? Again I say, 'Wall street against the world.'"

"Do you own your own home?"

"Oh, yea! I bought my first home in 1920, on the corner of Baker and Central Avenues. Three years later I sold at a profit and bought Mayor White's home on [Meiga?] Street. In 1928 I built my present home on Anthony Road at a cost of [19,000?].

"I have three sons and one daughter. My two older boys finished high school and had two years in college. The oldest boy is married and associated in business with me. The second boy is assistant secretary for the Department of Health. My youngest son was graduated from the University of Georgia and attended Students Art League in New York taking a course in commercial art, which he finished in June of this year.

9

He helped to paint the mural at the World's Fair. My daughter has another year at Shorter College.

"This is my story of the depression so far as it effected my life, should we have another I don't think I would be lost in the struggle. With my knowledge and experience I would take advantage of the market and be ready for old man Depression."