

Popper's Clothing

Founded: 1879

Location: 184 Main Street, Brookville (1879–98); 515 Main Street (1898–ca.1994)

Ignate Albert Popper, a Jewish émigré from Bohemia, opened a small dry goods store in Brookville, with capital assets of only \$135. As the town grew the store prospered. Two disastrous fires forced Popper to move to a new location. In 1898 he sold his dry goods business to C. A. Charni, moving the clothing part of the business to the new location. Popper married Laura Wise, another German-speaking Jewish immigrant, in 1878. The couple had three daughters and a son.

Popper proved to be an imaginative marketer of his venture. With other companies, he took out advertisements in the *Brookville American*. Some of the ads reported that he had the largest stock of best-fitting and stylish made suits, hats, caps, and “Gents’ Furnishing Goods.” The cost of men’s suits started at only \$2.75, with higher-end suits costing \$14.50. Men’s pants cost as little as thirty-eight cents, and straw hats started at a dime. In addition to the traditional advertising, though, Popper reminded Brookville readers of his business through his tales of travel abroad. In 1895, for example, he wrote letters to the editor of the *American* concerning his trip to Europe. In each letter were references to the store, his son, or other topics that might remind area residents of his business. The articles were always placed on the front page, and many times Popper advertising would be close at hand.

Arthur L. Popper began working for his father before World War I. In 1923 Popper opened a shoe store in quarters above Popper’s, previously inhabited by the Peoples Trust Company. After Arthur Popper’s death his son, Ruby, and his brother-in-

law, Harry Sachs, inherited the business. The store survived the Great Depression and prospered during the 1940s. In the mid-1950s Owen Crooke, Roman Ripperger, and Walter Sears purchased the interests of the Popper family but retained the family's name for the store.

In 1961 Crooke sold his interest in the firm to Ripperger and Sears. The partners remodeled the store in 1967 and constructed an addition. In 1974 Ripperger bought out Sears and continued to operate the business as the sole proprietor. Ripperger remained in business for only two years, however, selling the store to two couples, William and Margaret Murray and Sherman and Betty Sparks.

The Popper family continued to be interested in their hometown, even after they sold the family business. On 2 December 1981, Hannah M. Popper, the last surviving member of the Popper family in Franklin County and the daughter of Ignate, died. She left \$10,000 to the Franklin County National Bank to be used for a scholarship at the Brookville High School. Hannah had been a teacher for thirty-five years in the Franklin County School system, retiring in the late 1940s.

By 1991 Ralph and Thelma Blanken had purchased the store specializing in men's and ladies apparel. Competition from large merchandisers, such as Wal-Mart and J. C. Penney, had left little room for family firms, even in the smaller towns of the Midwest in the 1990s. The Blankens closed Popper's Clothing sometime after 1993.