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to 1955*

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## Schiffman and Company Inc. Dodge-Plymouth Agency 314-316 Franklin Street, Huntsville, Alabama

Historic Huntsville Foundation

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**I. Schiffman & Company, Inc.,  
Dodge-Plymouth Agency  
314-316 Franklin Street, Huntsville, Alabama**

INTERVIEW with Mrs. Maggie Whitt Bradley

I began working for I. Schiffman & Company, Inc., at its Dodge-Plymouth Agency in 1948; the Agency was located at 314-316 Franklin Street where Constitution Village is now located. Prior to opening an automobile dealership, I. Schiffman & Co., Inc., sold wagons and buggies from this location. The Agency building was one-story facing Franklin Street with a large storage area facing Madison Street. A painted window sign proclaimed us: I. Schiffman & Co., Inc., Dodge-Plymouth Agency.

The floor of the building was painted with red and green squares. The brass inside and outside, around the windows, and in the showroom, was cleaned every week. The city kept the sidewalks and street clean; we washed the sidewalks three times a week or more. The building was hot in summer; fans were used for cooling but had little effect. Radiators, however, kept us warm as toast in winter.

Since WWII had just ended, cars were scarce; customers had to get on a waiting list; and business was booming! Each month we received four new Dodges and four new Plymouths. We sold and financed all the cars we could get.

And a new year model car was an event! Word-of-mouth and newspaper advertisements announced a one-day *Grand Showing*. The new model was put on display in the showroom and hundreds of people came to look and buy. Mementos would be given the ladies. I remember one year we gave live, miniature orchids. When the showroom model sold, another would be brought in from the storage lot out back.

In 1948, the Dealership employed twenty people: Denton Given, Sales Manager, with four salesmen; Grady Jones, Parts Manager, with one assistant; Lem Gattis, Shop Foreman, with six mechanics and one "grease monkey"; William "Buck" Sublett, Body Shop Foreman, with one assistant and two men

on the wash racks. Mr. Given and I worked in the office; William Davis, Bookkeeper, was located in the I. Schiffman & Co. office at 231 East Side Square.

Saturday was THE shopping day, especially for farmers. It seemed as if all of Madison County was downtown on Saturday. All the department stores and businesses were located around and off the Courthouse Square and every business, including the Courthouse, was open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday. Normal business hours were 8 to 5, Monday through Friday. Employee benefits consisted of four paid holidays a year and one to two weeks of paid vacation each year.

I was called periodically by Mr. Lawrence Goldsmith, Sr., (President) and Mr. Lawrence Goldsmith, Jr., (Secretary-Treasurer) of I. Schiffman & Co., Inc., located at 231 East Side Square, to take dictation. I would take my Gregg Shorthand pad back to the Agency and transcribe/type on my brand new Royal manual typewriter. Other office equipment I used included a Burroughs Style #9 adding machine, Burroughs typewriter and a cash register. An interesting story told me by one my co-workers was how they had to manually verify the addition/subtraction/multiplication/division against the first adding machine owned by the company in the 1930s.

In the mid 1950s, Chrysler began allocating and contracting a monthly quota of vehicles with its dealers. Mr. Goldsmith, Sr., didn't like this business practice and gave up the Agency. We then operated the business as I. Schiffman & Co., Inc., selling International Trucks and used cars. In the 1960s, the business was closed; in 1967 the property was sold to the Huntsville Housing Authority.

The I. Schiffman Building, 231 East Side Square, has changed very little since 1948. Most of the original building with its furniture, fixtures, and equipment is still intact. I do remember the basement designated a Civil Defense shelter. I also remember the James Steak House located next door as offering a good noon meal and a favorite restaurant of the farmers and tradesmen.

The I. Schiffman Building has always had people living on the second and third floors. In fact, Tallulah Bankhead was born here.

The face of downtown Huntsville has certainly changed. I miss the old Courthouse and the Saturday morning crowd of shoppers and friends. But history has a way of repeating itself, if not in total, then in bits and pieces. So, perhaps what was “old” will again become “new and improved.”

Note: Mrs. Maggie Whitt Bradley has been employed by the I. Schiffman & Company for 50 years and three Schiffman generations. Mrs. Bradley is a native of Madison County. Her late husband was also a native of Madison County. Mrs. Bradley’s father was born in Limestone County, Alabama; and her mother, in Lincoln County, Tennessee.

Note from Margaret Anne Hanaw: The interview was given to Phyllis O’Connell, October 10, 1998, over apple cider and a turkey sandwich, at the office we share and where Maggie still works.



Fig. 1 East Side Square, circa 1947, showing Hill's Grocery, looking north. Courtesy Huntsville/Madison County Public Library.



Fig. 2 East Side Square, looking south, Armed Forces Day, May 1955, showing Hill's Grocery with awning down. Courtesy Ben Walker from his father J.B. Walker's collection.