



According to family tradition, Florence Butt started her grocery store on November 26, 1905, in a small rented two-story frame building at what was then number 609 Main Street. The little building stood about where the Hill County Cafe stands today. Mrs. Butt opened her grocery store in the small room that served as the first floor; the family lived over the store. The windows were open upstairs summer and winter to provide ventilation and the 'dry air' needed for her husband, Charles Butt Sr., who suffered from tuberculosis.



The store (with rooms above) was tiny, about 20 feet wide by 38 feet, or 760 square feet, which she rented for \$9 per month; she stocked the store with what was left of her savings, \$60.

According to one of her grandsons, she made a discovery when sweeping out the room downstairs for the first time: she found a Bible left behind by a previous tenant. She immediately prayed for her little company, and dedicated it then and there to her Lord.

Her neighbors on that block included a tailor on the corner of Main and then-Mountain streets; behind her, about where Fidelity Abstract Company is today, there was the coal-powered Kerrville Ice Factory. The maps I own show rest of the block contained small residences and several buildings marked 'dilapidated.'

Despite many hardships, her store

took hold somehow, and survived, providing for the young family. Her young sons were enlisted in the effort: the first deliveries were made in what must have been Howard Butt's baby buggy, later in a small hand wagon.

Florence Butt ran the store alone for many years; her son Charles was active in the business as early as 1917, and her son Howard, upon return from his military service in World War I, also worked in the business, eventually becoming its moving force. She retired from active involvement in the company around 1934, though she would often go to the store in the afternoons, visiting old friends and greeting customers.

The store was originally on Main Street, but moved to Earl Garrett Street to the rock building that had been the community's post office, and now houses Sheftall's Jewelers.

After Earl Garrett street, the grocery moved to a larger building on Water Street, now gone, but about where One Schreiner Center is today. My first memory of the store was at its fourth location when it was on the corner of Water and Quinlan, facing Quinlan; it was enlarged in the 1970's to face Main in the building that now houses Hasting's music and book store.

Its fifth and present location is in the 300 block Main Street, only six blocks northwest and 110 years away from that original store.

The company that has grown so successful was founded by a woman of intelligence and faith, whose need to provide for her family was so strong she overcame countless obstacles, from the humiliation of slammed doors to the prevailing convention that said women couldn't run businesses. She was ahead of her time in many, many ways and she was very determined.

She was also very generous, giving back to the community that had supported her

and her family. She was active not only in her church, but also in the Eastern Star. She organized a Baptist mission at Oak Park here in Kerrville, and paid the pastor's salary for many years. I have heard many, many stories of her kindness to those in need in our community.

Florence Thornton Butt lived for 89 years. She passed away at her home on Earl Garrett Street, a few blocks from her first store. Her life was not easy in Kerrville: she buried her husband and her eldest son here, and now she rests beside them at Glen Rest cemetery near Schreiner University.

Some might consider her company, given its tremendous success, to be her greatest legacy, though, in my opinion, the enduring gift she gave her family and our community was the strength of her faith as demonstrated by her caring service to those in need. Her story is compelling to me because after she had one door slammed in her face she knocked on another door, and it was opened to her.

Joe Herring Jr. is a Kerrville native.



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