



1 Budd Clark Sr 2013

Furniture Store Icon Budd Clark, Sr.

Almost 57 years to the day that he opened his furniture store in Wysox Township, 97 year-old Budd Clark, Sr. was honored by his fellow commerce and civic leaders. After determining that selling Plymouths and Desotos was not his calling, Clark's all but random decision to sell furniture garnered the Mansfield native a comfortable living and changed the landscape of Wysox Township forever.

Clark told a Rocket-Courier reporter in 2012 that he first considered purchasing a hardware store in Towanda, but his barber, Tracy Phillips, suggested that he might have better luck with a furniture store along Route 6, where Clark had built a house in 1948.

Clark admitted that he exhausted his resources to construct the modest retail store, which opened on March 29, 1957. It was designed by Glenn Arey. According to the Grand Opening ad in newspapers, Clark Furniture featured furniture for every room of the house, in addition to baby strollers, portable cribs and beach umbrellas.

Clark related that he barely cleared \$3,000 in his first year of business, but he sensed that he was on to something. He forged a professional relationship with a furniture dealer from his hometown who took him to wholesale markets in New York city and mentored him on how to buy furniture.



2 *Clark Furniture June 1968*

“For several years thereafter, I attended the market with him,” Clark once wrote of Ray VanNoy. “We had some great times, and I learned a lot about furniture from him.”

As of the store's third anniversary, Clark told the Daily Review that inventory and sales had tripled. In 1966, the store was greatly expanded with the help of local architect Richard Sweitzer, who more than doubled the frontage and gave it the Colonial look that it has to this day.

A patio constructed at the rear of the main showroom that featured a fountain with colored lighting was soon absorbed into the floor plan as the store continued to expand backwards and then downstairs. In the mid 1970s, a large warehouse was built at the back of the property that would eventually become Carpetland. “Each year, as we became known, we did a little more business than the year before,” Clark related.

Clark's family has always comprised the bulk of his staff, starting with his wife, Almeda, who

would tend to the business when Clark went on purchasing trips or deliveries. His sons, Budd, Jr. and Tim started working “as soon as they were old enough to lug furniture.”

Clark's Furniture also expanded its line of products when flooring and appliances added to the ever evolving layout. Through the years, subsequent generations of Clark children became involved in the business. Today, the business is managed by Budd, Jr., and employees include Cindy Clark, grandsons David and Adam Clark, and son-in-law Ron Burlingame. The fluctuating popularity of various styles of furniture and floor coverings were a constant challenge to such a business, but the biggest calamity to strike Clark Furniture came at a time when the family was selling furniture almost as quickly as it was coming into the store. The natural gas boom that seemed unstoppable in 2011 resulted in shortages of both housing and new furniture in the area, and Clark noted that inventory at the store had to be doubled to keep up with demand.

On Sept. 7, 2011 Tropical Storm Lee stalled over the area and produced excessive flash flooding in Wysox Township, including the formerly flood-free Route 6. Laning Creek had twice before backed up to the rear of the store and seeped into the basement, Clark once noted, but the entire property was inundated this time.

Clark related that his son, Budd, Jr., rushed to the store in the middle of the night to start moving furniture to higher ground. By daylight, the rushing water was filling Carpetland, and David and Adam canoed from building to building until it was obvious that all was in vain in the face of disaster.

Clark conceded that “It was the worst flood we ever had,” but he credited his dedicated staff for pitching in to salvage anything that could be and for having parts of the store reopened in less than two weeks.

Clark Furniture donated the majority of the flood-damaged furniture to The Bridge, an agency that helps Bradford County families in need. Furniture that was damaged but not destroyed was sold cheaply to customers with a full disclosure of the status of the pieces.

“Many of them needed new furniture,” Clark recalled.

In the course of several interviews over the years, Clark shrugged off his long life and relative healthiness as a “a matter of luck.” A Daily Review article noted that it was not uncommon to see Clark power walking to the bridge at Towanda as recently as 2012. Though he eventually reduced his regimen to exercising with machines and actively maintaining his lawn, Clark eagerly dressed up each morning through early 2014 for another day in the office. “I like being here and seeing things happen,” he told a reporter. He also enjoyed meeting the children and grandchildren of longtime customers.

On March 27, 2014, The Central Bradford County Chamber of Commerce presented Clark with the Old Faithful Award and honored him with a standing ovation at their annual banquet. Clark was praising his already loyal customers in a 1960 newspaper ad and continued to regard his store's patrons as “friends” to the end of his life in July 2014. He and Almeda, who survives him, celebrated their 63rd wedding anniversary in June. Their children, in addition to Budd, Jr. and Tim, were Becky Clark, and Sarah Clark Burlingame.



3 Chamber of Commerce Award Ceremony March 2014