



RHODE ISLAND  
JEWISH HISTORICAL NOTES

Memorializing the Death of President William McKinley by assassination, September 14, 1901. (*Courtesy of The Outlet Co.*)

# RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL NOTES

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RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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The Outlet Co. store, occupying one-half of the first floor of the Hodges Building, as it appeared during the earliest years following its opening in 1894. (Courtesy of the Providence Public Library)

## THE OUTLET COMPANY STORY AND THE SAMUELS BROTHERS

by ELEANOR F. HORVITZ

"The Journal and Bulletin point blank refuse to print our advertisements and give us no reason for doing so. If our ads were not truthful we would not blame them. If we attempted to fool the public, we would not blame them, but their intellect is so badly clogged that they cannot even invent an excuse, but then, what can you expect of a paper that does so many ridiculous stunts . . ." This was part of an editorial in a newspaper called *THE OUTLET BULLETIN*, dated November 7-9, 1901.

Joseph and Leon Samuels solved their advertising problem by publishing their own free newspaper, and a good newspaper it was, championing the rights of the underprivileged. This was only one of hundreds of problems which they confronted and successfully met. Theirs is a Horatio Alger story.

Joseph Samuels was born in Washington, D.C. on June 7, 1868, the son of James and Caroline (Katzenberg) Samuels. He spent his childhood in his native city of Washington, where he attended the local public schools, proving himself to be an alert and earnest student.<sup>1</sup> As a youth he accompanied his parents to their new home in Philadelphia, where he obtained his first business training. He remained in Philadelphia until 1891,\* when (according to Bicknell) he came to Providence with his brother, Leon. It is recounted that "their success in Providence was instantaneous, having accomplished many achievements in the way of overcoming obstacles and the development of every opportunity which have marked the career of the Outlet Company Department Store. The early days of their venture were difficult ones for the two young men whose progressive advent was resented by the merchants already established in the city. They were both possessed of considerable experience in the line of business they intended to follow. They came with new ideas and enterprise that was remarkable and readily overcame the obstacles placed in their way by their adversaries."<sup>1</sup>

Another source<sup>2</sup> gave 1894 as the year the Samuels brothers came to Providence, likely a more accurate date. The latter author however describes their father as a "successful merchant" in the national capital and later in Philadelphia, a statement disputed by others. For example,

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\*More likely 1894. See below.



COL. JOSEPH SAMUELS 1868-1939  
*(Courtesy of The Outlet Co.)*



LEON SAMUELS 1869-1929  
*(From oil portrait, Courtesy of  
The Outlet Co.)*

in a Resolution<sup>3</sup> adopted by the Directors of the Retail Board upon Joseph Samuels's death, it was stated that "He was forced to start earning his living as an errand boy at the age of 11 following the death of his father. Colonel Samuels received his training for many years in the rough and tumble of the school of hard knocks before going into the clothing business for himself and coming to Providence with his brother 45 years ago. Here the two brothers started from scratch in a small Weybosset Street store which with gradual expansion has developed into the great business block now housing the Outlet Company, one of the biggest and most progressive business establishments in Providence." From this Resolution it is learned that the father of Joseph and Leon was a native of New York City, and that their mother had been born in Philadelphia. It refers also to the minor jobs held by Joseph Samuels in Philadelphia business houses before he decided that to be successful he had to work for himself. Thus, setting himself up with a small sign announcing a clothing business, he embarked on a form of salesmanship which was in vogue in those days. He would go from place to place conducting the sales of clothing in small towns throughout the east, making a brief stand in each town. He opened his first permanent store in Meriden, Connecticut with a sales force of two people. They advertised by distributing hand bills from door to door.

Their route took them to Providence in 1894. The brothers intended to remain for only thirty days, but after looking over the field decided that Providence was the place they had been looking for as the site for a permanent business. The little store out of which the Outlet Company was to grow was bare of furnishings, and the stock was piled up on packing cases which were used as counters. The business in those first years was widely advertised, with one bargain sale following another. They used methods not considered proper by other merchants. They showed that you could get good values, and sales skyrocketed. The store was originally called the Manufacturers' Outlet because it was considered a direct outlet from the manufacturer to the consumer with no middle man costs. Joseph Samuels married Alice March Murr, daughter of Lewis and Bertha (Silverberg) Murr, on January 17, 1900 in Boston, Massachusetts. He had one daughter, Bertha Carol, born in Providence on June 4, 1903.

Leon Samuels was one year younger than Joseph, having been born on July 4, 1869.<sup>1</sup> Like his brother he attended the public schools of Philadelphia. At age 12 he was selling papers in the street, but before reaching 21 he is reported to have acquired a good knowledge of the

mercantile business. He and Joseph engaged in several selling ventures and acquired a modest capital and good credit. Bicknell describes his rise thus: "Like the majority of men who have risen to commercial prominence during the last half century, he is emphatically self made, cutting his way from the most humble walks of mercantile pursuits, defeating inch by inch and step by step the many obstacles piled high in his path, but relying upon his own alert and farseeing judgment he quickly gained the uppermost rung of the commercial ladder." He married Mildred Eidelberg in New York City on February 19, 1899. He had one daughter, Claire.

#### THE EXPANSION

In the small Weybosset Street store the Samuels brothers bought and sold little stocks of merchandise, mainly clothing, but in addition they must have carried such items as tobacco, for Mrs. Claire Mandell recalls how her father, Hyman Katz, would sell them tobacco from his store on North Main Street. Katz, who saw the brothers daily as they picked up their supply of tobacco (for roll-your-own cigarettes), called them "very smart boys" and "hustlers". Mrs. Florence Zacks's father, Bernard Kwasha, purchased his wedding pants from an Outlet stall in 1897.

The small store with its crude cases for displaying merchandise (display tables were improvised from packing boxes and boards placed on wooden horses) soon was inadequate for the business generated. An article published in 1903<sup>4,5</sup> contains an account of how the store expanded from its location in a small section of the Hodges Building on the ground floor of 176 Weybosset Street: ". . . from the start the business prospered and soon outgrew its quarters. To overcome this difficulty, the land in the rear of the Hodges block, fronting on Pine Street, was cleared and a brick building erected. The original front space was more than doubled. As time went on and the business grew, more space was needed, and finally the whole of the Hodges Building was occupied by this enterprising concern. In the year 1902 the firm purchased the old City Hotel property, adjoining the present quarters and began the erection of a modern business block. This building is now completed, and on October 1st the enlarged store was opened for business. On this date 35 new departments were added, and the Outlet Company became one of the largest department stores in New England. Commencing nine years ago in a small corner of the present mammoth store, the growth and success of this concern has been unparalleled in the business annals of Providence." At the time when this enthusiastic



Opening of the new block on October 1, 1903. *(Courtesy of the Providence Public Library)*



Outlet Store circa 1909 occupied the whole block on Weybosset Street from Garnet Street to Eddy Street with the exception of the Jacob Wirth's Café building just out of view to the right of the Outlet Hat Store. *(Courtesy of The Outlet Co.)*

article was written (1903), the *Providence Journal* and *The Evening Bulletin* were not accepting their advertising.

In a 1909 *Board of Trade Journal* there are six sketches showing the expansion of the Outlet Company. These illustrations, according to the accompanying article, "disclose a monument to the enterprise, energy and business methods of Joseph and Leon Samuels." From a small unpretentious store on Weybosset Street, they started on their journey to progress. Referring to the conservatism and business acumen of the Samuels brothers, the *Journal* commented: "Each expansion, however, was not thought of until the increased business absolutely warranted the new move. Today the store occupies, with the exception of a small part on Weybosset Street, the entire block from Garnet to Eddy Street and from Eddy Street, with the exception of one small building, back to Pine Street. When the Outlet Company first started in its small store, the buildings surrounding it were of old vintage and in dilapidated conditions. The expansion and improvements of this block started the big boom for Weybosset Street."

In February of the same year an article in the *Providence Journal* carried this headline: "Samuels Bros. in Big Realty Deal. Purchase Building at Weybosset and Union Streets. About \$300,000 Involved." It was described as "one of the most important real estate deals of recent years. The property at the northwest corner of Weybosset and Union Streets, [is] at present occupied by stores and offices of Mrs. Spink's dancing academy. [There are] No immediate plans and all tenants can stay. It might be for expansion of [the] store or a hotel or theatre." Whatever the plans, Joseph Samuels commented, they will be carried out "so as to reflect credit on the city and add to its attractions for the travelling public. . . . The land will be occupied by a block that will add to the attractiveness of the business section. For a number of years we have been considering the possibility of securing the property as a part of our plans to develop Weybosset Street which we firmly believe is to be more and more the main business street of the city."

By 1914 the *Board of Trade Journal* referred to the "Outlet of today" as occupying the entire square block with the exception of two small corners, while overflowing to a big structure in process of construction on Pine and Eddy Streets.

Plans for their modern building of steel construction to be erected at Pine and Eddy Streets were announced in the *Providence Sunday Journal* of March 28, 1920. The structure was to consist of five floors



The Outlet Co. store as it appeared in May 1914. (Courtesy of the Providence Public Library)

and a basement, giving the company a total additional floor space of 78,000 square feet, with a frontage of 148 feet on Pine Street and 78 feet on Eddy Street. There would be an entrance on Pine Street and a continuous straight main aisle from Weybosset Street to Pine Street, devoted exclusively to bargain tables. The structure of steel was to have "fancy gray brick and terra cotta trimmings." Angell and Swift were the architects.

To carry out this expansion some familiar buildings were demolished. The old City Hotel on Weybosset Street built in 1832, where Charles Dickens had stayed when he paid his one and only visit to Providence on February 20, 1868, was torn down in 1903. For the expansion of 1912 (mostly on Garnet Street) three buildings including the old Hof Brau Haus and numerous saloons were razed. Expansion was not only for store space. In 1914 the old Oriental Saloon on Pine Street was purchased and torn down to make room for a new warehouse and garage. The warehouse and garage at the corner of Eddy and Pine Streets, comprising 14,000 square feet of floor space and six stories high, was considered one of the most modern fireproof buildings in Providence.

The famous old Jacob Wirth's Café property was first acquired for use by lease in March 1917. On February 25, 1922 the *Providence Journal* reported that the "Samuels Land Company gets Weybosset Street property. \$110,000 worth of revenue stamps attached to deed. The property at the corner of Weybosset and Garnet, owned by Jacob Wirth of Boston and Eliza Wirth Fidler of Philadelphia." When that was also demolished, the *Evening Tribune* of Providence reported nostalgically on June 21, 1923: "The demolition of the small two story building at the corner of Weybosset and Garnet Streets marks the passing of a land mark which was famous in pre-Volstead days . . . formerly occupied by Jacob Wirth & Co. it was for many years a gathering place for the elite of the beer imbibing fraternity. The choicest of imported and domestic ales and beers were dispensed by the Maxs' and Ottos' of former times. Many an overworked or overheated businessman, as well as the proletariat, found rest and pleasure at tables or leaning upon the bar, consuming countless steins of Narragansett, Pilsner or Wurtsberger. The steady march of progress which has marked the growth of the Manufacturers Outlet Co. from a small beginning to its present gigantic proportions demands the removal of the landmark to permit erection of a new modern structure which will be the last of the building units needed to complete the Outlet Company stores that

now cover the entire block bounded by Weybosset, Eddy, Pine and Garnet Streets."

On the first floor of the Outlet Company, near the Garnet Street entrance, there is a plaque bearing the following inscription: "1894. Presented to the Founders, Joseph and Leon Samuels, by the employees of the Outlet Company on the completion of this entire block. 1923."

Thus they occupied the entire block, which included a street originally chosen because it was in the low-rent district. Weybosset Street was in marked contrast to the high-rent retail establishments on lower Westminister Street between Dorrance Street and the Turk's Head Building. That they had great imagination is evidenced by their willingness to start in business in an area where "every door and window of Jacob Wirth's establishment breathed the aroma of good food, spiced with the fragrance of light and dark beer . . . where swinging doors of saloons flapped hospitably . . . and the change of seasons was marked only by the transition from hot toddy to bock with, of course, sloe gin for the ladies."<sup>6</sup>

The Samuels brothers had not only imagination, but also remarkable native business acumen. Thus we learn that in 1894 "every possible card was stacked against the new venture. . . . The country as a whole had not yet shaken off the inertia of a widespread depression. . . . Capital had gone into hiding and credit had disappeared; manufacturers brooded over stocks of goods that no one would buy; workmen loitered outside plants that had shut down for lack of orders."<sup>6</sup> In this depression they used a unique method which led to their financial success. "Buy quality goods in quantity, and turn them over fast—at the smallest possible profit per unit."<sup>6</sup> This merchandising policy attracted hoards of customers who could not afford the prevailing high prices.

#### UNIQUE ADVERTISING

From the beginning their methods of advertising were unlike any to which Rhode Islanders had ever previously been exposed. When they could not get newspaper advertising, they retaliated with every device of publicity. "Into the 'high-rent district' they sent patrols of sandwich men, wearing signboards that shrieked: 'It's a bargain! Come and get 'em while they last!'"<sup>6</sup> The angry reaction of the conservative downtown merchants to the sandwich men parading up and down Westminister Street was well known. It was manifest in the behavior of the *Journal-Bulletin* papers.

There are still a few copies extant of the original *Outlet Bulletin*, the Samuels brothers' answer to the *Providence Journal's* rejection of their advertising. This newspaper was published weekly and distributed by their own carriers, with a free circulation of 100,000—the largest in Rhode Island. It was no throwaway; it was a crusading newspaper with an editorial policy. The motto under their heading of "Weekly—Reliable and Interesting News" was "The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in our advertisements." The news stories and editorials in the issues still available for study were concerned with winning free transfer tickets on the street railways for the people. That they were successful is of great credit to the Samuels brothers. Lincoln Steffens wrote about this contest: "A powerful bloc ruled the Rhode Island street railways at the turn of the century. The greatest popular grievance against their control was that the bloc would permit no transfer tickets, as in other states from one street car line to another. For every ride, a full fare was charged, and it was only when the voice of the people screamed the political house down that transfer tickets were introduced."<sup>6</sup> The *Outlet Bulletin* succeeded in having free transfers issued as of July 10, 1902. The newspaper took up other issues on behalf of the people. It exposed the "Money Loan Sharks" who charged exorbitant rates. It advised its readers that it was the "duty of every citizen to register" to vote and that it would print reviews of candidates' speeches. During the years of the newspaper, the early 1900s, it explained the laws on registration and naturalization to the many readers who were recent immigrants. In this connection there was an unfavorable editorial on Senator Nelson W. Aldrich who was referred to ironically as "our great boss of Rhode Island."

The newspaper also contained a section titled "The Outlet's Home Corner," which included a children's column featuring puzzles and games, an article on physical culture, cooking recipes, advice from the family physician, and health and beauty tips. A short story in the issue of September 26, 1901 had the fascinating title "Her Second Engagement".

A considerable portion of the newspaper was devoted to advertisements showing values in men's, women's and children's furnishings and such items as suitcases. Accompanying the pictures of the sale items was a column on "What Fashionable Women Wear".

It editorialized in many issues on the absence of Outlet advertisements in the leading Providence newspaper. Thus on one occasion it commented: ". . . probably our ads always brimful of interesting and

tempting values would make some of their advertisers' advertisements look insignificant. We have from the very beginning sold the very highest standard merchandise at cut prices, such low prices they fairly threw some of their Westminster Street merchants into hysterics — — — they thought they could put a damper on our progress by keeping our ads out of the *Journal and Bulletin*, but they reckoned without their host, the people know a thing or two and it would not take them long to find out where they could get the most for their money, and that is why the Outlet continues to grow larger and stronger each day."

They used their newspaper as a means of publicizing the values they offered to the public. "Talk About Colossal Nerve. When manufacturers come to us and want to buy back at our prices the merchandise which they sold us it is mighty good evidence that we are tramping on someone's toes. Only last week a well known silk manufacturer came to us with the above proposition and said other merchants objected to our cutting prices. There are many things they object to. If they had their way they would probably remove Weybosset Street off of the Providence map. They object simply because they know we give standard values and undersell them, and it is such extraordinary silk, velvet dress goods and lining values as we offer you in this advertisement that we are drawing the knowing ones to our store. 'Old Friends',\* trading stamps, premiums and other alluring tactics have no weight with the people in the face of our genuine value-giving."

#### CHARITABLE ACTS

Another way in which the Outlet Company's name was kept before the public was in its various acts of philanthropy. For example, each Christmas 500 tons of coal were distributed among poor families.<sup>7</sup> In the *Outlet Bulletin* there was an advertisement soliciting applicants for this coal. In a 1919 publication the free coal distribution was described as follows: "For over twenty years we have distributed at Christmas time free coal to the worthy poor. Our method of distribution has been through the clergymen of all denominations. The giving of this coal is a cherished custom which we enjoy and we want all our patrons to feel that they are a party to the giving of this coal because it is a testimonial of our appreciation of their continued patronage."<sup>8</sup>

There are many examples of the types of charitable services rendered. A *Providence Journal* news story of August 18, 1920 told of a truck being donated to ex-servicemen at Wallum Lake, the Rhode Island

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\*Unexplained.

state tuberculosis sanatorium. During the summer months the Outlet Company placed its automobiles at the service of the various orphanages throughout Providence. On these outings the children were taken for rides into the country and served refreshments. A story of March 16, 1931 in the *Providence Journal* refers to the Outlet Company sending a truckload of blankets to the Home for Aged Men on Broad Street in Providence when fire destroyed much of the building.

Doctor Irwin Graubert, an optometrist, whose office was formerly located in the Outlet Company building, has displayed on his waiting room wall a clipping from the *Outlet Bulletin* of 1904 conveying the following information: "Free examination and free glasses to those who cannot afford to have their eyes properly treated. Free examination in our optical department."

This tradition of service has continued. For example, *Women's Wear Daily* of July 27, 1960 reported: "Outlet set new world record by setting up anti-polio clinic in Men's Furnishings Department when epidemic hit Rhode Island. 11,020 persons were given Salk shots by Navy medical men." Space in the store is still made available for the sale of merchandise made by the blind.

#### DENTAL CLINIC FOR CHILDREN

By far the best known and most enduring act of charity is the Joseph Samuels Dental Clinic for Children. News of the gift appeared first in the *Providence Journal* of September 7, 1929 announcing that Samuels had presented \$300,000 to the Rhode Island Hospital for construction and endowment of a children's dental clinic. This endowment was an outgrowth of an interest he had had in the sponsorship of a dental clinic in Cranston, which provided the children of needy families with oral treatment and education in oral health.

Plans called for the building to be erected on the hospital grounds. The clinic services would be free to children whose parents were for financial reasons unable to provide them with proper dental treatment and without consideration of race, creed, or color. The clinic was also to serve as a medium through which medical and dental practice would be brought into closer contact. The facilities of the clinic were to be offered to dentists who studied in the extension courses in dentistry at Brown University.

On March 18, 1931 the new dental clinic was opened officially. Many paid tribute to Joseph Samuels: "A Providence business man, who put into action an idea born of a desire to fill a community need, was told

last night that a grateful state and city and the kindred professions of medicine and dentistry realize that the unique institution he made possible not only will be the means of more effective work to relieve or prevent human suffering but likewise will promote equality of opportunity throughout the world.”<sup>8</sup> Governor Norman S. Case in his remarks stated: “This clinic was founded because Colonel Samuels wished to give every Rhode Island child an equal chance for health. The thanks of the parents and children of today are due him.” Mayor James E. Dunne remarked: “Although Colonel Samuels has achieved prominence in the financial and business life of the city, he always has kept the common touch and thought of those who have not been so fortunate. The idea of giving a dental clinic to Providence was characteristic of this man who finds his greatest pleasure in giving and sharing with others the successful results of his labors.” A resolution was passed by both houses of the Rhode Island Legislature lauding him for this magnanimous act. Modestly Samuels replied: “The people of Rhode Island have been very good to me and I know of no better way to show my appreciation of their goodness . . . .”<sup>9</sup>

In May of 1932 Samuels gave the dental clinic an additional \$10,000, which gift was announced at a meeting of the Rhode Island Dental Society. The society also thanked Samuels for use of radio station WJAR for its weekly broadcasts on the prevention of dental diseases.

In March of 1933 Joseph Samuels was made a fellow of the American College of Dentists. He was the first layman to receive this award. On bestowal of the fellowship he replied, “I would not be human if I did not feel proud and pleased at the honor which I received tonight. I know that the American College of Dentists does not confer its degree without good reason, but I believe I have been honored too much. My only contribution was to furnish the funds to build and equip a clinic for the children of the state . . . .”<sup>10</sup>

#### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Free band concerts were provided for the people in various public parks throughout the Providence metropolitan area by the Outlet Company. Arrangements were made with Fay’s Second Regiment Band to give these concerts at a cost of \$60.00 and carfare each Friday evening during the summer. The city clerks of the various communities were consulted for sites at which to hold the concerts. The cost of sponsoring these concerts was well worth the resulting publicity. A typical notice read, “The concert in Pawtucket on baseball grounds will include popular and classical selections calculated to please all music

lovers. The affair is entirely free through the generosity of the Outlet Company" or "Special concert to be given for baby food fund. Outlet Company will offer fine musical treat at Roger Williams Park."<sup>11</sup> Eventually the city of Providence appropriated sufficient money for public sponsorship of the concerts.

The Samuels brothers were always interested in sports and sponsored what they called "The Outlet Marathon" held on February 22, 1909. The runners started from Greystone, Rhode Island and finished in front of the Outlet store, a distance of 7½ miles. The time was 41:31:04. Arranged by the Providence Athletic Association, it attracted thousands of people along the entire route, not least at the Outlet Company.<sup>5</sup>

#### ADVERTISING STUNTS

In other and more flamboyant ways, the Samuels brothers saw to it that the Outlet Company became an institution well-known throughout Rhode Island. Their showmanship was legend. Leon Samuels, who handled the advertising for the Outlet Company, dreamed up the "gimmicks" to sell the store to the public. His role in the management of the store was always subservient to his brother's, although as the store grew Joseph Samuels was willing to take almost any risk his brother urged upon him if it would promote the retail business.<sup>12</sup> It was no coincidence that the brothers were such good friends of Edward M. ("Ed") Fay, well-known theater owner. Edward "Eddie" Higgins and Warren Walden spoke of this friendship. "He (Ed) was quite the guy with the Colonel." They believed that many of the publicity stunts originated with Fay, who in turn was helped by the Samuels's financial backing. A good example of this teamwork was the appearance of the magician, Houdini, in February of 1906. Fay's theater,\* then Keith's Theater on Westminster Street, and the Outlet Company's props made Houdini's performance a sellout. Standing room and even the stage were utilized to accommodate the crowd. The Outlet packers brought out their especially constructed box, which was a large packing case made of boards. Houdini allowed himself to be bound and tied with a strong rope as securely as if he were in a strait jacket. He was lifted into the packing case, its top was nailed on, and the packing case was bound with heavy ropes. It took him 11 minutes to get out. The box was intact and the ropes were in place.

The period July 29 to August 3, 1907 had been declared Old Home Week in Providence. Ready as always to take advantage of this event

\*Fay's Theater opened about 1917. Keith's was located at 260 Westminster St., Fay's on Union St.



Old Home Week arch, showing the wedding and bridge to the Outlet Store, August 3, 1907, Crown Hotel in the background. (Courtesy of *The Outlet Co.*)

was the Outlet Company. A triumphal arch was erected across Weybosset Street with Mayor Patrick J. McCarthy driving the first nail for its erection. The set piece on top of the arch represented the landing of Roger Williams. What brought the most publicity was a plan to hold a wedding on top of the arch. The execution of this idea entailed many problems. The advertising department finally persuaded a young couple, Charles Irving Adams of Providence and Nettie A. Pinkham of Pawtucket, to hold their scheduled wedding on top of the arch by promising to reward them with three rooms of furniture for their new home. The next obstacle was to persuade a clergyman to perform the marriage. Joseph Samuels had been refused by six clergymen, until one, more daring and adventurous than the others, finally agreed. The wedding party had to climb out of a third story window in the Hodges Building section of the Outlet Company block to mount the arch. A band below played the wedding march. The public was invited to attend the marriage ceremony, and thousands filled Weybosset Street. At high noon the couple were married. A story in the August 4, 1907 *Providence Journal* called the wedding, "As beautiful a wedding as any bride might wish". The same article reported also that the wedding had advertised the Outlet Company all over the east. A generation later, with somewhat less fanfare, the Outlet Company again erected an equally impressive arch for the Rhode Island Tercentenary Festival (1936).

The Outlet Company was the first store to commemorate Mother's Day in Rhode Island and encouraged observance of the day by giving away free carnations each year.<sup>5</sup>

The Samuels brothers were fascinated by the advances being made in the field of transportation. They arranged a display of what their publicity department called "the first genuine aeroplane". It was called "The Bleriot", a French aeroplane, 26 feet, 3 inches long and 27 feet, 7 inches from wing-tip to wing-tip. This French monoplane was the first to cross the English Channel and was brought to the Outlet Company at considerable expense. After the exhibit it was shipped to Los Angeles.<sup>5</sup> This was in 1909. Later they displayed Charles A. Lindbergh's "The Spirit of St. Louis".<sup>6</sup>

Their interest in the field of communications, which led to the founding of radio station WJAR, first manifested itself in exploring the possibilities of the telephone. In 1915 when the first transcontinental telephone circuit was completed, Providence Mayor Joseph H. Gainer talked to the Mayor of San Francisco from the office of Joseph Samuels. In January of 1927 there were front page articles about Samuels's tele-



Transcontinental telephone circuit established in 1915. Mayor Joseph H. Gainer calls the mayor of San Francisco from the office of Joseph Samuels. Standing left to right: Leon Samuels, Mayor Joseph H. Gainer, Joseph Samuels. Seated: Mayor Gainer's executive secretary. (Courtesy of *The Outlet Co.*)

phone call to London over the first transatlantic telephone circuit. He talked with Harry Gordon Selfridge of London, head of Selfridge & Co., Ltd., one of the largest and oldest department stores in London. The headline reported: "Providence man phones London as service is opened. New England marvels at ease in which another country is linked with the United States". At a cost of \$25 per minute, Samuels spoke for three minutes and is quoted as saying, "I couldn't have heard any better if I had been talking to a friend in Pawtucket." He went on: "It certainly is most remarkable to think we in Rhode Island can establish direct contact with the life of a nation 4,000 miles away. Before many years I believe we will be able to go to London in 48 hours time. Perhaps then our talk will be about the good old days when it took six days by ocean liner from New York."

Mortimer L. Burbank, who rose from clerk in the early 1900s to become president on Joseph Samuels's death, kept fascinating diaries while he was in the advertising department of the Outlet Company. In an entry of June 30, 1906 there is an item to the effect that a Professor Allen of the Rhode Island Normal School would ascend in his balloon and throw out one hundred tickets worth one dollar each when cashed at the Outlet Company store. The Providence newspapers, the *Providence Journal*, *The Evening Bulletin*, and the *Evening Tribune*, gave considerable publicity to the professor's 4th of July "perilous and sensational voyage and descension." The Outlet Company itself included announcements of this daring act in its advertisements in addition to erecting a huge electric display in front of its store. The outcome was documented in the August 2 entry of Burbank's diary revealing that 47 of the one dollar vouchers had been caught. About 5,000 persons watched as Professor Allen, dressed in a suit of dark clothes and wearing a soft black hat with a broad brim, dropped the package of Outlet Company vouchers, which came fluttering down over Francis Street.

Another entry in the diary records a Stout Women's Convention, which gathered at the Outlet Company to show the results of the Nemo self-reducing corset. The newspapers picked up these items from the Outlet's advertisements and gave them double coverage by making news stories out of these schemes.

There was no limit to the diversity of their appeal—from corsets to books—as another diary entry shows: "The Outlet Company Selects Authors: \$150,000 series to be sold here. The Authors' and Newspapers' Association chose the Outlet to be their sole distributor of their \$150,000 series of books by famous authors. Only one leading store in the

principal cities will have these books. *The Rock and the Baltic*, the first book of the series, takes place in Russia”.

The store windows were as often used to attract attention as for the display of merchandise. In the *Providence Journal* issue of January 28, 1907 there is a reference to a window exhibition of ostriches. (Perhaps this tied in with the ladies' millinery of the day.)

Lillian Berger Rubinstein recalls that the Outlet Company borrowed two dresses one of which had belonged to her mother, the other a child's dress, both having been brought to this country from Romania by her mother. The reason for displaying the dresses was to honor Queen Marie of Romania, who was then visiting the United States. These dresses were reputed to have been copies of models worn by the Queen.

On July 12, 1917 Harry Gardiner, "The Human Fly," climbed the front of the Outlet Company store from the street to the top of the roof, using only his hands and feet. Thousands watched, causing traffic to halt for 25 minutes. "The people held their breath and many emitted shrieks at times when the 'human fly' appeared to be losing his hold on the architectural embellishments", it was reported.<sup>5</sup>

"Happyland" at Christmas time in the Outlet Company store was an annual event, going back to the very early years of the store's history. A *Pawtucket Times* December 13, 1906 news item reported enthusiastically: "'This is a city, not a store', said a transient straying into the Outlet yesterday. An apropos statement because of the immense business being transacted at Weybosset Street in Providence. When you enter the door you are at once struck by the fact that an advertising genius has planned and executed the decoration that meets the eye. It was Happyland and all that means for the little people. Santa Claus in all of his splendour reigns supreme in this fairy bower. It is one of the most entertaining Christmas displays in the state of Rhode Island." Happyland was conceived by the same persons responsible for designing the New York Hippodrome theater. Meanwhile Santa Claus moved about the store, shaking hands. *The Evening Bulletin* in a news story described the Outlet Company's Happyland as being a place where persons could "gratify their desires by not only practicing the strictest economy but make their purchases at a reputable store. Whether the pocketbook be a thin one or overflowing with the coin of the realm, the Outlet will be found one of the shopping meccas of New England and no one need feel that a gift purchased there will not be acceptable in the highest degree."

Credit for the Santa Claus idea is given to Joseph Gettler, who had started out in the advertising department in 1901 and remained with the Outlet Company for 32½ years. He demonstrated the value of combining advertising with news coverage.

The Samuels brothers never missed an opportunity to acknowledge the holidays. Newspaper photographs of the outside of the store, especially for the celebration of the 4th of July, show the elaborate details of these decorations. A July 1, 1906 *Evening Tribune* article relates: "Of the many and various ways of displaying patriotism by large department stores in recognition of the national holiday never was there a prettier or more effective way than that which the Outlet exhibited in front of its store last night. The electricians did themselves proud. There were 200 electric bulbs in the display, the colors being red, white and blue."

Finally, the most notorious publicity was that surrounding Joseph Samuels and Baby Alice, the elephant. Alice the First had been donated to Roger Williams Park in 1928. "Gettler's flair for promotion fit Colonel Samuels's perfectly. In December 1928 the two publicity mongers brought a small zoo to the Outlet store to attract customers. One of the most popular animals in the collection was Alice, an elephant. Perhaps the funniest photograph still in existence at the Outlet Company is one in which the store's founding father, Joseph Samuels, holding his cigar in hand, and looking as dignified as he can, is seen petting Alice for a publicity story."<sup>12</sup> Alice the First died in April, 1936. A new 600-pound, harmonica-playing elephant was first on display at the department store before going to the zoo. This "Baby Alice", which replaced "Alice the First", was to make her debut on Christmas morning at the Roger Williams Park zoo. A photograph shows Samuels posing with the elephant, Doctor Joseph Castronova and Martin Noonan, superintendent of the Roger Williams Park, seemingly pleased to be involved in this showy philanthropy. Doctor Castronova, who was then chairman of the Board of Park Commissioners remarked: "I wish to thank Colonel Samuels . . . . We are fortunate in having a citizen as charitable as he. I anticipate a renewal of happiness in the children who will see this elephant and I know it will please Colonel Samuels immensely to see these children thrilled."

Their innovative advertising devices not only attracted considerable business but also earned the Samuels brothers praise from the Board of Trade. In the December 1914 issue of their *Journal* the changes

wrought by these methods are decried: “. . . the town had been much infested with itinerant merchants of the ‘fly-by-night’ variety whose activity and irresponsibility were about equally matched, and whose ‘bankrupt stocks’ and thrilling fire sales were conducive neither to the public welfare nor to the stability of legitimate trade. The ambitious young men from ‘foreign parts’ were not immediately identified as being of quite a different calibre. . . . It was a grand chance for playing to every part of the house from the pit to the gallery with the demand of fair play as the house desire to cater to the working people at living prices. The public responded. It not only patronized the brothers, but it enjoyed fully the laughable things that were put over on the other merchants. . . . Innumerable clever advertising schemes were concocted and carried out, each of which helped make the Outlet and also Weybosset Street, such as the out-door wedding, Christmas pantomimes and tableaux. . . . Every advertising move was a legitimate one. The little shop had become a giant store, its success drawing other merchants to Weybosset Street, making it fully as prominent as Westminster and booming land values and rentals to a marked degree. As for the business the Outlet does with the public, that goes without saying. It is tremendous and ample reward for the pluckiest kind of fighting against great odds.”

#### JOSEPH AND LEON SAMUELS AS EMPLOYERS

As the vast amount of material relating to news coverage is reviewed, one forms the impression that every act of philanthropy, of civic betterment, of spectacular showmanship originated solely for the promotion of the Outlet Company. What sort of men were Joseph and Leon Samuels? A different picture is drawn depending upon who is being interviewed. There is the “one big happy family” image given by some present employees who have been with the Outlet Company for many years. One such is Mary Perry, who went to work for the Outlet Company in 1921. The oldest of eight children, her father dead, she lied to get a job at the store. Being very young, she invented previous work experience. She gave as a reference Shepard’s Department Store. She reasoned that since Shepard’s had had a fire, their records might have been burned, and no one could check on her. When it was discovered that she had lied, she was to be fired; but when her desperate home situation was discovered, she was kept on. Miss Perry who has remained in the dress pattern department for over half a century, speaks very highly of Joseph Samuels. “The Colonel had a lot of finesse. Leon was kind of cocky. The brothers were very close, but very different.

They did a lot of good. They were quiet about their giving. If they knew someone was having it tough, they'd help out." She referred to their distribution of coal. Miss Perry continues: "A co-worker of mine had a toothache, and when the Colonel found out, he saw that she got dental care. He said that he had been poor and knew what it was like not to have enough money for dental care. He was always concerned about his employees and did a lot of good for them." She recalls with pleasure the good times Joseph Samuels provided for his employees, such as the outings at Rocky Point, for which the store closed at noon. To Mary Perry, Samuels was a man who was interested in people and became involved with them. He was good-hearted and always wanted to help children. He inquired of his employees as to how he could help them.

Kenneth Logowitz, now president of the Outlet Company, had little personal contact with the brothers. To him they were both "hard-headed aggressive business men who knew all their employees by their first names. Logowitz remarked that Joseph Samuels "was a good shot at the spittoon". Smiling as he reminisced about the two brothers, Logowitz recalled that they expressed their differences of opinion in very loud voices. Burbank, whose office was located between their two offices, often would do the communicating between them when they were angry at each other. Joseph Samuels's grandson, Joseph S. Sinclair (known as "Dody"), corroborated the story of the two brothers shouting to each other from their respective offices. He added that a secretary would also relay messages when they were not on speaking terms. In comparing the two men, Logowitz considered Joseph Samuels to be "slightly more polished". He too emphasized their personal approach to employees, whom they knew by first name.

Sarah Leichter Musler, who worked Saturdays at the Outlet Company while attending high school, found retailing very exciting. It appealed to her so much that she became a full-time salesperson. She commented that the Samuels brothers "ran things right; they were strict and very official; all instructions came from their office". Mrs. Musler worked in one of the very few departments in the Outlet Company which was leased out, the picture frame department owned by David Leon. It was not generally known that the practice of leasing existed in the store. However, even though this department was leased, Leon had to live up to the rules and regulations of the Outlet. Sarah Musler advanced to buyer. Leon retired in 1945; she took over the department. She comments about the owners: "Leon (Samuels) was quite a character, a nice good man, but quite a character. He did not bother

with the employees the way Joseph did. One had the greatest respect for Leon and Joseph”.

There are others still employed at the Outlet Company who personally knew the brothers. Helen Rose, who manages the first floor office accommodating desk, has worked there for 43 years. She recalls how Joseph Samuels would walk through the store, cigar in hand, and flower in his lapel. She remarks on how much he had done for the poor and less fortunate. Two sisters, Bertha and Bessie Boslowitz, have been employees of the Outlet Company for 46 and 43 years respectively. Bertha Boslowitz, connected with the shoe repair department for all but three months of that time, thinks of Joseph Samuels as a “wonderful man”. She remembers the annual outings with nostalgia. Her sister, Bessie, started as a salesgirl, was promoted to the position of assistant buyer in the handkerchief department, and is at present the buyer of budget sportswear. She too recalls Joseph Samuels’s wearing a white carnation in his buttonhole, greeting the employees as they would file in to work. He would tell them that the “prettiest girls worked at the Outlet Company.” She described him as “warmhearted”, “a great guy”, and “lovable”.

The Samuels brothers sponsored outings and costume parties for the employees. These affairs not only encouraged the “one big happy family” concept, but also were a source of publicity for the Outlet Company. In *The Evening Bulletin* of December 13, 1937 the following news item appeared: “Not Hallowe’en — Outlet Lets Out. Pedestrians on upper Washington Street rubbed their eyes last night and wondered if their calendars were playing tricks. They weren’t, it wasn’t Hallowe’en. It was the Outlet Company Beneficial Association Masquerade Party. Over 1,000 attended.” Accompanying the story was a picture of Joseph Samuels and Mary Newcomb, personnel director, who led the grand march at the costume party held in the Elk’s Auditorium. They were costumed as a colonial gentleman and lady. On another occasion the annual Christmas Masquerade Party was held at the Arcadia Ballroom on Washington Street. The illustration again showed Joseph Samuels (holding his inevitable cigar, but not in costume this year), and also Mortimer L. Burbank, William Payton, Mildred Manning, Mary Malley, and Jacob Edelstein.

#### FAMOUS OUTLET OUTINGS

In 1906 a news item appeared in the *Evening Tribune* of August 25 referring to the Outlet Company’s 10th annual outing. This would indicate that the Samuels brothers must have initiated this custom

soon after their establishment was large enough to have employees. The article described how the employees, together with their families, left the Outlet Company building at noon and marched along the streets to South Water Street, where they boarded a steamer called the "Favorite" for Boyden Heights.\* A band preceded them. Everything was free. A ballgame between the floormen and the managers was held with suitable prizes awarded to the successful team. Dancing was held in the evening.

Every summer a headline would appear in the newspapers announcing the outing with pictures of the participants. In later years Rocky Point was the site of these activities. On file in the advertising department of the Outlet Company are copies of the brochures that were distributed to the employees announcing the Outlet outings. That of 1928 used the theme, "You'll have a whale of a good time on the great free for all Outlet Employees Summer Outing at Rocky Point". It also noted that the president would be with them as usual, but the illness of the vice president made it impossible for him to attend. The 1926 notice reflected the wit of the period: "Anybody that can't have a good time on an Outlet Outing must be a dumb-bell (and so's his old man)." In 1930 these lines were sung to the tune of "The Stein Song, University of Maine":

"Folks now we are proud to say  
 We're from the Outlet Store  
 Stand and let us give a great cheer  
 You bet we're glad to shout Hooray  
 Then thanks to our great President,  
 For this holiday,  
 Cheer to him our Colonel Samuels  
 The man who gives us all our pay  
 To his health, to his wealth,  
 To the store and its glorious prosperity,  
 And we know that the store  
 Is safe with him ruling its destiny;  
 To the man who is known for all of his generosity;  
 And we hope, and we pray  
 He'll be spared to us many a day."

According to Cyril Ryding, who worked in the Outlet Company from 1922 until 1970, the outings were a great deal of fun. He described the feeling as one of "one big happy family". A picture comes to mind of

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\*A former amusement park in East Providence, Rhode Island.

how these over one thousand people must have appeared as they marched en masse from the store to board the electric trolley cars down to Rocky Point, a band accompanying them. After the 1938 hurricane the site was changed to Crescent Park. Ryding started working under the original advertising manager, Joseph Gettler. For Ryding, Leon was a "stunt man, publicist and a promoter", while Joseph was "more conservative and a business man". He felt that their personalities complemented each other. He spoke of their kindness to him. He had had an appendectomy and had to stay out of work for six weeks. During his illness they sent him gifts and treated his absenteeism as a paid vacation. Their business acumen was stressed by Ryding. He explained that they would buy manufacturers' surplus or over-manufactured goods. Joseph Samuels was always aware of what was going on in other cities from a business point of view. The Samuels brothers conducted a discounting type of business long before it became popular in such enterprises as the Chase family's discount store, Ann & Hope. He knew of instances in which they would price merchandise below cost for advertising purposes. All of their sales promotion ideas did not work. For example, circulation of the Sunday newspaper was small, and there was no appreciable advertising in it. Therefore Monday was always a slow day for shoppers downtown. They tried a big advertising campaign to attract Monday shoppers, but it did not work. There was also a time when they stayed open on Saturday nights. They originated the idea of "the girl on the aisle", who sold the bargain items. Ryding recalled that the Outlet Company went "on the curb"\* in 1921, a share of common stock selling for \$36.00. Stock shares were given to employees.

The current traffic manager of the Outlet Company, Edward (Eddie) Jennings, first met Joseph Samuels when he, Jennings, was a caddy at the Metacomet Country Club. Samuels made him his own private caddy. Jennings recalled that in 1919 the Ledgemont Country Club was established in Warwick by Jews who were feeling the pressure of antisemitism at the Metacomet, or who could not get membership in that club. Joseph Samuels joined the Ledgemont, but continued to play at both courses. He was described as a "good average golfer who was even tempered on the course."

A story recalled by Jennings was one which Joseph Samuels had recounted of the days when he could not advertise in the *Providence Journal*. He would advertise on the sides of horse-drawn wagons, which

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\*Now the American Stock Exchange.

would "break down". The nuts on the wheels had been loosened so that they would come off. This would attract a crowd of people who could not help seeing the bargains advertised on the sides of the wagons. According to Jennings sales were really sales in the days of the Samuels brothers. People would line up around the block to await the opening of the store.

Working as a sort of bodyguard for Joseph Samuels, Jennings eventually took on the job of assistant to a Mr. Brown, the traffic manager. That was in 1935, fourteen years after he had met Joseph Samuels. Having such close contact with Samuels, Jennings could describe him as "always wondering what he could do for the unfortunate. He would find out about a family who were in distress or who came to him for help. Then I would be sent to verify the circumstances. He gave only when actual need was proven and never let on he was the one who picked up the bills, such as hospital bills. He would give me a blank check to fill in the amount of money needed. In my book he was a great man. He had a good heart. He was not religious, but was tolerant of all religions and colors. He was a great kidder, but stern when needed and in conducting his business. He loved all sports. He would go to New York for the fights and often took me. I remember seeing the Joe Louis and Max Baer fights at Madison Square Garden. He also took me to Saratoga Springs." Jennings spoke of Samuels's love of gambling and how he would have a weekly "Tuesday night" game at the Narragansett Hotel, which game included the owner, Charles Brown. The adjective "humble" was also used by Jennings to describe Samuels. "Every morning his chauffeur, Billy Good, and the Colonel would start out from his home either in Narragansett or in Providence, but most of the time he would drive. His first stop was always the Narragansett Hotel for a shave." "A lot of men resented the Samuels's their success", but this devoted man left the impression that they deserved it all. "Joseph Samuels was concerned with his fellow man and made no distinction between color, religion, or race."

Mrs. Madeline Trowbridge, now retired, worked in the Outlet Company as a secretary from 1922 to 1926 and from 1936 until 1969. She was one of 125 persons working in the office. She was secretary to Mortimer Burbank, the controller at that time, who in turn served directly under Joseph Samuels. About Leon Samuels, she commented, he "hollered a lot and was not as close to the employees". She concurred with the other employees interviewed in considering Joseph Samuels as the more friendly and better dressed. She described him as "dressed beyond his time, that is, wearing a golf cap in his open tour-

ing car and sporting a tweed jacket when most men wore suits. He was suntanned from his golf. As one who had worked in the business office, Mrs. Trowbridge said that the "Samuels brothers had good business principles and were business men before their time. Even when they were in the 'packing box stage' they were always ready to accept returned merchandise. They never borrowed large amounts of money for purchasing merchandise or for expansion and never carried big mortgages." Ryding agreed with Mrs. Trowbridge in observing that they did not build up inventory by buying on credit as is done in merchandising today.

#### RADIO STATION WJAR

Mrs. Trowbridge further recalled Leon Samuels's role in the broadcasting aspect of the Outlet Company history. He was fascinated by it, she said, and left the merchandising and retail business functions to his brother. In his home at Narragansett Pier Leon Samuels had set up a ham radio station although the actual commercial facility was installed on the top floor of the Outlet Company building (where it is in operation to this day). In 1923, she remembers, she, another secretary, an advertising man, and some other persons drove to Leon Samuels's home. He would dictate to the girls, they would take down the dictation in shorthand, and transmit it by telephone for broadcasting. They felt like pioneers and were all excited about this advanced scientific breakthrough.

Ralph J. Begleiter in a detailed study of the Outlet Company's role in commercial broadcasting wrote as follows: "Leon became interested in wireless broadcasting in 1919 and 1920. At home, he fiddled with the latest versions of then very primitive wireless receivers . . . he saw the value to the store of having an Outlet Company broadcasting station. It would be a public 'first' which would attract attention and prestige to the Outlet Store. The store could benefit from increased sales that would result." "The Samuels brothers . . . belonged to a political 'club' in which former Governor James Higgins, who had served a one year term in 1907, was also a member. [Theater owner] Edward Fay, and a young electronics experimenter, Thomas P. Giblin, were also present at some meetings of the group. Here the Samuels brothers became intrigued by the radio feats of Giblin, who had already broadcast recorded music over his experimental radio station on an upper floor of his home since 1919 . . . in course of his experimentation Giblin received financial help from Leon. By 1922 Leon convinced Joseph to allow him to go ahead with Giblin's proposal to install a

radio station at the Outlet store as a public relations gimmick. In April 1922 word was out in Providence that the Outlet would be setting up a powerful radio station. Radio, by then, had become a national craze and the *Providence Journal* gave the news much attention. But WEAN went on the air first in June, 1922."

Giblin had another reason for the setting up of an Outlet radio station. He had begun to turn out radio receivers, called "RadioBar" sets, which the Outlet sold. Begleiter elaborated further on the origins of the station: "WJAR, the Outlet Company station, went on the air September 6, 1922. The first voice was that of Blanchard (who had set up and operated the store's radio set department), who introduced Governor Emery J. San Souci. . . . Also Providence Mayor Joseph Gainer, the Samuels brothers, and former Governor Higgins spoke". The station opened purely as a publicity gimmick for the store . . . the fact that the Outlet Company was proud of its radio station as a mark of prestige is indicated by the fact that a picture of the store, with WJAR's antenna perched conspicuously atop the roof, was used on Outlet Company stationery until well into the 1940s and 1950s, even though the antenna was removed from the roof in 1935."

Programming in the early days was unstructured. Lillian Rubinstein recalls playing the piano on the radio in the late 1920s while she was a student at Pembroke College. She was on the air with Celia Moreau, the team being called "The Girl Friends". She considered it a lark to give of her talents and time and to receive fan mail with requests for selections. A lark was all she realized for she performed without pay. She also accompanied singers on the programs, one of whom was Peter Bardach's mother. Sources for piano and vocal talent were suggested by Blanchard, the Samuels brothers, and Ed Fay.\*

In the early days all expenses incurred by the radio station were allocated to the radio department of the store or to its advertising budget.

As innovators and promoters who turned all of their enterprises into advertising for their store, the Samuels brothers on October 9, 1923 placed an advertisement in the *Providence Journal* announcing that WJAR would broadcast live from New York the World Series between baseball's Yankees and Giants. "Colonel Samuels had followed the series annually, on occasion taking time off from work in Providence to travel to New York for the games. On October 10th he chartered a private railroad car to transport specially purchased equipment from

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\*Two early announcers were James A. Reilly and James Boyle ("JAR" and "JB"), the first of whom gave his initials to the station's call letters.

RCA to Providence which would make the games audible on the streets outside the Outlet Company store. A crew of Outlet delivery men unloaded heavy loud speakers and amplifiers . . . on the day of the second game, speakers were moved to the front of the store on Weybosset Street to accommodate the crowd . . . World Series broadcasts were accomplished using the tie-line between Radio Stations WEAJ [of New York] and WJAR. . . . For Colonel Samuels the link was a boon to Outlet Store business. The Providence community was impressed with WJAR's ability to broadcast the World Series live from New York."<sup>12</sup>

Joseph Gettler, who became the station's manager in 1924, succeeded in turning WJAR into a money-making appendage to the store over the next ten years. "In October of 1933 Joseph Gettler had his last promotion fling; for \$1250 he secured a demonstration of a new broadcast medium TV for the Outlet Store. In a ground floor window, radio announcer 'Sud' Abbott stood in front of a camera, which consisted of a rapidly rotating disc, and his image was transmitted to a receiver in the 5th floor auditorium. His friends said he looked terrible, because he had refused to paint his face with the dark purple makeup required for early TV pickups."<sup>12</sup>

#### MORE EMPLOYEE HISTORY

Another ex-employee, Eleanor Saunders Schuman, who sold handbags, recalls the friendly atmosphere in the store. Joseph Samuels was often on the floor just observing how sales were progressing. The vision of the owner of such a large business acting like a small store owner is unfamiliar to a later generation, and yet this image is one which Joseph Samuels never outgrew. Mrs. Schuman recalls how he would go to the cashier's office in the back of the store and request money, which he would then give to someone needy whom he saw coming into his store. This handing out of money was characteristic; for example, he would give change every morning to the person sweeping the sidewalk in front of the Narragansett Hotel when he entered it for his morning shave.

The late attorney Arthur J. Levy wrote in 1970 to Logowitz that he had found among some old family papers letters from Leon Samuels to his father. These were written on stationery with the heading, "Manufacturers Outlet Company, Trade Mark Registered, Telephone 420". Under the owners' names, J. Samuels and L. Samuels, was the blurb, "Spot Cash Buyers and Sellers of Manufacturers Stock Apparel for Men, Women & Children". One such letter, dated September 23, 1901, contained the following information: "Mr. J. M. Levy, 230 E.

117th Street, New York City. Dear Sir: You can come on and report ready for work Monday morning September 30th at the wages agreed upon. If this is satisfactory, wire me upon receipt of this letter. Would like to have you come on a couple of days earlier if possible, so that you could have all arrangements made. . . . Yours truly, L. Samuels." Levy recalled that his father was to start at \$35.

Enclosed with a memorandum from Arthur Levy were some statement forms. He sent these to Logowitz, for he assumed that his father had once worked for the Outlet Company. The statements, headed "PROVIDENCE, R.I. . . . 190- to Manufacturers' Outlet Company, Dr.", contain the interesting information that "we have no charge accounts" but do have a "telephone connection".

#### THE BUYERS

The numbers of persons who got their start at the Outlet Company and became successful merchants of Providence is sizeable. Benjamin Trinkle, who died on March 28, 1963 in Miami, was a director. In 1931 he assumed the position of men's furnishings buyer, having been the buyer for the umbrellas, luggage, handbags, and leather goods departments. He was connected with the store from 1913 to 1960. His name lives on in that of his son, Murray Trinkle, of Trinkle's Floor Covering business.

Nannie R. (Mrs. Theodore) Loebenberg's entire married life was involved with the Outlet Company, for her husband was hired by the Samuels brothers in 1909, and she married him one year later. Theodore Loebenberg came from Baltimore, Maryland to take on the position of buyer of yard goods at the Outlet Company. Eventually he assumed the buying of all domestic items, which included sheets, woolen blankets, and related merchandise. Loebenberg was typical of the buyers whom the Samuels brothers "imported". The buyers rarely rose from the ranks of sales help, which fact, according to Mrs. Loebenberg, is largely responsible for the store's success. An expert in his field, a buyer would be brought to Providence to be given complete charge of his department. Incentives for high sales records were many. Nannie Loebenberg cited the bonuses at the end of the month as well as at the year's end commensurate with the total volume of sales.

There was much socializing among the buyers as well as closeness in their business relations. One evidence of this was the Buyers' and Managers' Club with over forty members. Many of the buyers, including Theodore Loebenberg, belonged to the original Ledgemont Country

RCA to Providence which would make the games audible on the streets outside the Outlet Company store. A crew of Outlet delivery men unloaded heavy loud speakers and amplifiers . . . on the day of the second game, speakers were moved to the front of the store on Weybosset Street to accommodate the crowd . . . World Series broadcasts were accomplished using the tie-line between Radio Stations WEAJ [of New York] and WJAR. . . . For Colonel Samuels the link was a boon to Outlet Store business. The Providence community was impressed with WJAR's ability to broadcast the World Series live from New York."<sup>12</sup>

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Enclosed with a memorandum from Arthur Levy were some statement forms. He sent these to Logowitz, for he assumed that his father had once worked for the Outlet Company. The statements, headed "PROVIDENCE, R.I. . . . 190- to Manufacturers' Outlet Company, Dr.", contain the interesting information that "we have no charge accounts" but do have a "telephone connection".

#### THE BUYERS

The numbers of persons who got their start at the Outlet Company and became successful merchants of Providence is sizeable. Benjamin Trinkle, who died on March 28, 1963 in Miami, was a director. In 1931 he assumed the position of men's furnishings buyer, having been the buyer for the umbrellas, luggage, handbags, and leather goods departments. He was connected with the store from 1913 to 1960. His name lives on in that of his son, Murray Trinkle, of Trinkle's Floor Covering business.

Nannie R. (Mrs. Theodore) Loebenberg's entire married life was involved with the Outlet Company, for her husband was hired by the Samuels brothers in 1909, and she married him one year later. Theodore Loebenberg came from Baltimore, Maryland to take on the position of buyer of yard goods at the Outlet Company. Eventually he assumed the buying of all domestic items, which included sheets, woolen blankets, and related merchandise. Loebenberg was typical of the buyers whom the Samuels brothers "imported". The buyers rarely rose from the ranks of sales help, which fact, according to Mrs. Loebenberg, is largely responsible for the store's success. An expert in his field, a buyer would be brought to Providence to be given complete charge of his department. Incentives for high sales records were many. Nannie Loebenberg cited the bonuses at the end of the month as well as at the year's end commensurate with the total volume of sales.

There was much socializing among the buyers as well as closeness in their business relations. One evidence of this was the Buyers' and Managers' Club with over forty members. Many of the buyers, including Theodore Loebenberg, belonged to the original Ledgemont Country

Club along with Joseph Samuels. A number of the buyers' families in fact lived on the same street in Providence, Elton Street. The Loebengs lived at 104. Mrs. Loebenberg mentioned particularly the Daniel Donig family, who were their neighbors.

To Nannie Loebenberg, who shared her husband with his position at the Outlet Company (he would have to be in New York about three days out of every week for buying of merchandise), the atmosphere at the store was of "one big family". Memories of the outings and the dances held by the Outlet Company are pleasant ones for Theodore Loebenberg's widow.

Her impression of Joseph Samuels was of a generous man, and she spoke of how sad it was that he died of "Bright's Disease", which today might not have been fatal. She also referred to Alice Samuels's long crippling illness, which kept her from accompanying her husband to social events.

In Nannie Loebenberg's possession is a Resolution given to her by the Board of Directors of the Outlet Company after her husband's death on June 28, 1941. She believes it to be the first memorial presented by the company to a buyer's family.

In part it reads: "Theodore Loebenberg, our esteemed business associate and a member of our Board of Directors, who in the service of our company for 32 years had endeared himself to the entire Outlet organization. His ability in the work he carried on so successfully is the best evidence of his long and faithful service.

"Every Outlet employee was his friend, and his genial nature, his sincere interest in the welfare of others, was characteristic of his fine make-up as a man in the business world, as a devoted husband and father, and in all, a friend of man."

Among those who survived him on the Board of Directors were: Jacob E. Edelstein, Benjamin H. Trinkle, and Benjamin Markowitz.

Helene Donig Bernardt, the daughter of Daniel Donig, remembers frequent visits to the Outlet Company. Her father was in charge of men's furnishings and women's handkerchiefs. She spoke of the very substantial bonuses the buyers received. Doctor Maurice Adelman, Providence pediatrician, commented that the Samuels brothers "made wealthy men of their buyers".

Harry Meyers, father of the present owner of T. W. Rounds Co. (luggage), worked as a buyer of luggage at the Outlet Company, and then went on to open his own establishment.

Ryding had commented that these buyers took care of their own merchandising, handled their own situations, and even their own advertising. In this respect they were autonomous. He referred to the buyer of housewares and china in the period from 1929-1946, who reputedly earned as much as \$46,000 annually.

Jacob E. Edelstein, starting as buyer of boys' clothing in 1906, rose to the office of Vice President of the Outlet Company before his death in December 1953. He had also been publicity director in charge of both newspaper advertising and publicity for broadcasting. Edelstein served as the first president of the Ledgemont Country Club, organized in 1924.

The Buyers' and Managers' Club was established in 1906. Their annual dinners were always newsworthy. The *Pawtucket Times* of October 2, 1906 reported: "Buyers', Managers' Club Prospers. This novel and practical organization established by the Outlet Company . . . the most enterprising department store. . . . The aim is to improve and better the store's service."

A letter was read at the club meeting of October 1906: "Gentlemen: it is the most unusual pleasure to address your club complimenting you on your good work. Mr. Joseph Samuels, having attended your last meeting, not only enjoyed the good fellowship and harmony existing among you, and which it is hoped will continue, but he was deeply impressed with the interest and business like manner in which your meetings are conducted. The interchange of ideas . . . while of great benefit to the store in general, is in no small measure a great help in broadening new business ideas making better managers of your respective departments. . . ."

In the *Providence Journal* of July 4, 1916 it was announced that the Outlet employees were given company stock. Department heads and others would share in a plan "for faithful and efficient services". Among the 47 who benefited from the Samuels brothers generosity, were: Samuel Steiner; Jacob M. Hamburger; Jacob E. Edelstein; Theodore R. Eisner; Daniel Donig; Theodore Loebenberg; Mildred, Rebecca, and Gertrude Frank; Philip Nathans; Mortimer Burbank; and William Steiner. Store stock was given not only to men and women in responsible positions, but to several in minor capacities as well. The article pointed out that these shares were not in lieu of any earnings, but to recognize length of service and loyal endeavor.

This rapport among the managers and buyers and the owners could only result in profit for all. Given the incentives, with considerable

leeway to be creative and enterprising, it is not remarkable that there was such long tenure of service among the key personnel at the Outlet Company.

#### THEY KNEW THE SAMUELS BROTHERS

Doctor Maurice Adelman first knew the Samuels brothers in 1923. He spent summers at Narragansett Pier as did Leon and Joseph Samuels. They all commuted to Providence in the morning. Joseph Samuels's car was easily recognized by his license plate No. 333. Doctor Adelman described how Joseph Samuels would take the driver's seat (his chauffeur sitting next to him) and some days take as little as 35 minutes to get into Providence. This was on roads which bore no resemblance to our freeways. At that time he drove a Simplex runabout, a very costly automobile.

A spectacular accident involving Joseph Samuels attracted considerable attention. He and his wife Alice had been in Saratoga, New York to attend the races. There were conflicting stories about exactly what had happened and who was driving. At any rate on August 15, 1906, while ascending a steep hill, the emergency brakes failed to hold, causing the car to descend backwards precipitously. It crashed into a watery ditch with some doleful effects. The party was drenched and several of the occupants were injured. A *New York Times* reporter who had reached Leon Samuels was referred to Mrs. Samuels. According to her story: "Mr. Samuels had one rib fractured and was recuperating in his room at the U. S. Hotel . . . the auto was put out of commission . . . the accident brought to an end what was to have been a very enjoyable trip of two weeks duration." They returned in their 35 horsepower Locomobile touring car.<sup>11</sup>

In July of that year another newspaper account referred to Leon Samuels's arrest for violating the speed laws. This was at Sterling Place in Brooklyn where, the police claimed, he was driving his automobile at 30 miles per hour!<sup>11</sup>

On another note Doctor Adelman spoke of Joseph Samuels's philanthropy. Samuels had discussed with him the setting up of the Dental Clinic for poor children. Adelman called him "a soft touch. He did not advertise his philanthropic deeds." He recalled all the poor families who had received turkeys at Christmas and Thanksgiving and about Samuels's distributing of coal and clothing among the needy. He believed that Joseph Samuels was unhappy that he did not have a son, and took his daughter Bertha (Babe) with him to many sports events. He even took her to New York for the prize fights. One of these fights



Joseph Samuels at the wheel of a Stevens-Duryea, circa 1910. Taken in front of the Roundtop (Beneficent Congregational) Church on Weybosset Street. This very expensive automobile was manufactured in Springfield, Massachusetts until 1914. (Courtesy of *The Outlet Co.*)



Start of automobile race sponsored by The Outlet Co. in 1906. View of Weybosset Street shows Crown Hotel, Jacob Wirth's Café, and the Narragansett Hotel. Joseph Samuels is believed to be the driver of the central car. (Courtesy of the *Rhode Island Historical Society*)

lasted only through one punch. Adelman chuckled over the effort involved in going to New York for a fight which lasted only a few minutes.

Edward (Eddie) Higgins, administrative aide to Senator Theodore Francis Green, first knew Joseph Samuels when Green became governor in 1933. "The Colonel was tops in my book". He often spoke to Higgins about his hopes for his only grandson, "Dody" Sinclair. "He didn't want that boy to go to Annapolis. He wanted him to run the business, not to be an admiral! But you know what? He went into the Navy and into the business. He ended up coming up on top of both worlds."

Higgins related an interesting story about Joseph Samuels in regard to the airport which was to be built at Hillsgrove. Governor Theodore Francis Green had received five million dollars from Washington, D. C. (that was at the time of Roosevelt's WPA money) to build an airport. He formed a committee on which Joseph Samuels served. At the dedication Samuels thought it would be a good idea to have some noted flyer land at the airport during the ceremony. Roswell Turner was a famous aviator, and he agreed to come. "All went well — he did it to perfection". The Outlet Company took care of all the expenses, and after the ceremony Joseph Samuels spread a lavish party in his house for all the dignitaries.

Higgins reminisced about little personal habits of Joseph Samuels, how he would have the Narragansett Hotel barber, Tony, who shaved him every day at the hotel, go to his home on Sundays to shave him. He claimed that his chauffeur was so devoted to him that "He would kill someone for Samuels", and "He knew how to handle the Colonel under all sorts of circumstances."

It was R. Livingston Beeckman, Rhode Island Governor and socialite, who made Joseph Samuels a Colonel on his staff. A news report in the *Providence Journal* of November 20, 1917 described this event: "Colonel Samuels receives gold-trimmed sabre. Outlet buyers managers club honors employer at dinner . . . this was in honor of his recent appointment to the staff of Governor [R. Livingston] Beeckman with the rank of colonel. The presentation address was made by his brother Leon. The dining hall was decorated with American flags and nautical colors. Fay's orchestra entertained." As far as Higgins knew, the Samuels brothers never had anything to do with the political scene in Rhode Island. They always had good connections with whomever was in office, but they "never butted in anywhere." He was always known thereafter as Colonel Samuels.

"Governor Green liked to do his shopping at the Outlet Company. He would go by himself to buy shirts and things like that," said Higgins. "The Colonel would say to me 'Why the Hell didn't he call me? I'd show him the good ones.' I'd answer the Colonel that the governor liked to do his own shopping."

Doctor Earle F. Cohen, Providence pediatrician, remembers when Joseph Samuels would come as a patient to the office of his father, Doctor Leo Cohen. The Samuels limousine with chauffeur must have made quite an impression on the neighborhood surrounding Doctor Cohen's humble Prairie Avenue office. The fee for an office visit in those days was 2 dollars, but Samuels, resentful of waiting in the crowded waiting room, offered Doctor Cohen twenty-five dollars if he could be taken right away. Cohen answered no, that he would still charge only two dollars, for to him Joseph Samuels was the same as all his other patients.

An entirely different facet of Joseph Samuels's personality was gleaned from Rabbi William G. Braude of Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David (Temple Beth El). Both Leon and Joseph were members of the congregation. The late Rabbi Samuel M. Gup had officiated at Leon's funeral service. Rabbi Braude knew only Joseph Samuels. To the question, Had Joseph Samuels ever used the facilities of the temple? the Rabbi replied, "He was brought in there when he died."

In Rabbi Braude's view Joseph Samuels was not the philanthropist which he was judged to be by others interviewed by the author, since he had never extended the same degree of generosity in giving to Jewish as to non-Jewish causes. Rabbi Braude summarized the situation thus: "I must say that Joseph Samuels, in my opinion, whatever he may have been in business, I am no judge of that, was a disaster in the Jewish community. You see, he was very, very wealthy, by far the wealthiest man in town. The people with whom he surrounded himself in the store naturally had to be in the main people like himself, especially some of the buyers. Here was the wealthiest group of the Jewish community, and it never gave anything of consequence to charity. So that, let us say, when a man like Archibald (Archie) Silverman began giving, he would measure himself by what Samuels gave. But Samuels did not give very generously. When Alvin Sopkin came to town, he created a new standard no longer based on Samuels's giving." The Rabbi cited other examples in which he was personally involved, such as requesting Joseph Samuels's signature on affidavits needed to bring Jews out of Germany in the 1930s. In none of these instances did Samuels cooperate to any degree.