The Schafer Company Traces Its Roots To 1870

A History of The Schafer Company 1870-2000

Abraham Schafer came to Little Rock, South Carolina, in the late 1860’s from Darlington County. He first worked for Mr. Tom Dillon. Mr. Dillon, ran up with the land owning farmers who owned all of the land around Little Rock—and would sell none of it—so he built Little Rock business to Mr. Schafer in 1870, and thus was started The Schafer Company.

In 1888, Sam Schafer, the only son (and three nephews) of Khorham and Rebecca Schafer, was born. He began working in his father’s store at an early age. In about 1888, Sam Schafer along with his friends in the 4th grade (Ernest Cottingham and Bill Stachoski), all got mad at the teacher who had mispronounced their names, went back to that night and burned down the Little Rock School. Of course, they could never go back there, so they all had to find work about 2 miles away from Little Rock to attend the Bunker Hill School. This did not last long, so my father actually wound up with a bit of a fifth-grade education. This never held him back; he was a voracious reader, and in his adult life was as well educated and well versed as anyone I had ever known.

Sam Schafer became General Manager of the dry goods part of The Schafer Company, while Abraham protested to manage the hardware and grocery departments. This was a country store, largely to supply the neighboring farmers with whatever their “necessities” needed, and would pay for when the crops came in in the fall.

Alan Schafer was born in 1914, attended Little Rock School through the 7th grade, and graduated from Dillon High School in 1930. During his 8 years in high school, Alan Schafer worked in his parents’ and grandparents’ store, and saved every penny he could from this, even setting up his own ice cream stand beside the store where he sold Eisner Pies every Saturday. By 1928 Alan Schafer had saved about $1,000.00 with which he planned to attend college, but decided to go into business instead. Due to crop failures, and the drop of the cotton prices, many farmers went broke, and this in turn caused the 3 Dillon banks which had been behind the doors in October, 1929.

Alan Schafer also broke a job on his bank account for $250.00 on the 8th of April and used to have to keep the money to keep his business alive. When Alan Schafer attended the University of South Carolina in Columbia, in 1930, all he had was a $25.00 Scholarship that paid for his room (roommate rent, $25.00 in Dillon County Scip). The County had no money to pay its teachers or other employees so they owed 10% to the local merchants to accept, or go out of business themselves. When Alan Schafer went to Columbia, they would not accept Dillon County Scip, until the late Senator Jim Hanner prevailed on them to accept it. This still left Alan Schafer with no place to go, and no money. He worked a job or two in the mess hall for his food, but found this too boring and still left him with no cash. So, he washed dishes in Columbia offering to work any place on a strict commission basis. Finally, a small ladies’ shoe store hired him, and soon he was making $3.50 a week, which was a huge salary in those days.

In 1933, as he teamed his junior year, Alan Schafer was called by his father to come home. His grandfather was at the point of death. As his favorite grandchild, there was no question, Abraham Schafer died in the fall of 1933, at age 83.

In 1932, Franklin Roosevelt was elected President and his #1 campaign promise was to repeal the 18th Amendment which outlawed the sale of Alcohol. Sam Schafer saw an opportunity, and he went to Baltimore, bought a pickup load of beer, and came home to sell it. Amazingly, people who could not pay their grocery bills were buying cold beer for cash in 75 cent bottles. From that beginning, Sam Schafer and Alan Schafer began the Schafer Distributing Company, which in this day covers 26 of the state’s 46 counties, distributing such great beers as Miller, Miller Lite, Coors and Heineken. With 150 employees, it is one of the state’s best and most progressive businesses.

Alan Schafer had been diagnosed with cancer in 1942, but with his three sons in the military, he swore that he’d beat it until War II was over. He did. The war ended on August 14, 1945 (Joe surrender), and Sam Schafer passed away on August 18th—4 days later, pure case of mind over matter.

In 1948 Schafer Distributing Company had branched out with added warehouses in North Carolina, including one in Maxton (Robeson County). Out of the clear blue, N.C. passed a local option law, and Robeson County was the first to vote, to start buying up properties adjacent, around and near South of the Border, including 300 acres in North Carolina, to be prepared for the new Interstate. Unfortunately, a few local people, jealous of South of the Border’s success, went to the State Highway Commission and asked them to remove the -10 corridor away from South of the Border—even if it meant going through Marion County. If they have succeeded, you can imagine the disappoiment [sic] of Dillon County’s tourist industry and its growing industrial businesses that came here largely because of the -10, 95, 301, 461 routes.

In 1959, the Miller Brewing Co. signed Schafer Distributing to take over South of the Border market, Miller, including Dade and Monroe Counties (Miami & Key West). They did, and created a new company “Miami High Life, Inc.” The year before Schafer took over the Miami operation, the previous wholesaler had sold less than 25,000 cases for the year. After the first year, the new Miami operation had passed 300,000 cases per year and by 1954 had a volume of more than 5 million cases, at which time the company was sold to Texas Multimarketing, a large profit for the 14 years we built that business.

In 1980, Alan Schafer retired as an active manager of Schafer Distributing Co., Inc. and turned it over to his sons Richard and Billy Schafer, who have won a multitude of awards and prizes for success. This past year (2000) they got off their radar for a week vacation paid for by the Miller Brewing Company for ranking in the top five (among 600) wholesalers in the country.

From 1960 to 1999, Alan Schafer and his wife, Patty South, built South of the Border and its related companies to 100% increase in traffic and business and profits. It continues to be the best known tourist complex on the eastern seaboard, attracting at least 7 million visitors per year from every state in the union, plus a number of foreign countries.