

Abe Kanter and Brothers – Merchants of Clanton
By Derric Scott
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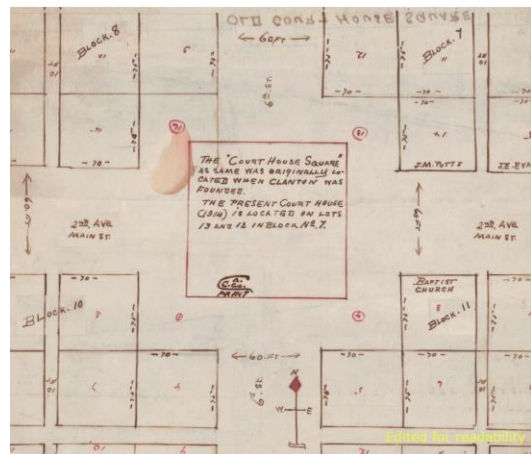
Abraham Kanter was born October 1877 in Lithuania. On the 1910 US Census he says he was naturalized in 1895 and it notes he is Hebrew (Jewish). He was part of a family of several brothers and at least one sister that moved from Lithuania to the United States in the 1890s or early 1900s. They listed "Russia" as their birthplace on some papers and Lithuania on others. It is very likely that they emigrated from Lithuania to escape from Russian anti-Jewish pogroms, persecution, and harsh restrictions levied on Jews by the anti-Semitic Imperial Russian Government, which controlled Lithuania during the 19th Century. Particularly harsh laws were passed in May of 1882 called the "May Laws" a few years before the Kanters arrived in the U. S.

The first notice of Abe Kanter in Chilton County was when he rented the old courthouse building to renovate and use as a store in the summer of 1897. It is mentioned that he is from Troy (Alabama) but no records from there have been found. By August it is "*completely transformed*" and Abe has \$20,000 worth of "*well selected stock of general merchandise*" from New York for sale. These early advertisements simply called the store "**Abe's**" and later just listed "**Abe Kanter, proprietor.**"

Mr. Abe Kantner, of Troy, has rented the old court house building, which is now being altered and put in thorough repair, while he has gone to New York to buy a \$20,000 stock with which to open in a few weeks.

Union Banner July 8, 1897

A bit on the "old courthouse:" In 1871 the first Chilton County Courthouse, located at Grantville, burned. Clanton was then selected as the county seat and a new one was built. It was two story, wood framed, and was located directly in the middle of the intersection of 2nd Avenue North and 6th Street in "Courthouse Square."

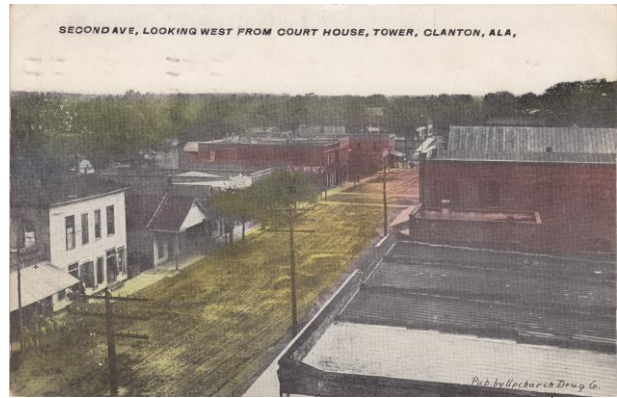


The 1872 Chilton County Courthouse and a map of "Courthouse Square," replaced in 1896.

When the 1872 Courthouse was replaced in 1896 with the new brick structure the old building was bought by Dr. J. S. Johnson, Sr. and moved into place in a city block and used as a store. Abe Kanter was likely the first to use it in 1897. One of his advertisements says "*the cheapest store in Clanton is The Fair Store on the corner opposite the Court House,*" meaning the southwest corner of the intersection.

Since it was two stories, some of the upstairs was rented out to other businesses. One example is when Col. R. H. Knox was burned out, he then opened an office upstairs in the Kanter Building.

Abe Kanter and Brother – Merchants of Clanton



Two early postcards of Clanton. The old 1872 Courthouse is the white two story building on the left – Abe Kantor's 1st store. On the right the two story brick building is P. D. Wilson's.

Business was good and in August of 1899 Mr. Durwood Foshee went to Catherine, Wilcox County, to manage a new branch store opened by Mr. Abe Kanter. Sam Jaffee also went to work in the store as an assistant.

Soon, unfortunately, things took a turn for the worse and Abe was forced to have a bankruptcy sale in February of 1900. In October of that year he was noted to be very sick and the newspaper editor wished him well and hoped he would get the store opened up again soon.

Apparently business turned around and about a year later, April 1901, Abe was back advertising again! It seems he was also in a new building, but the exact spot was unclear and his old building (the old courthouse) was going to be used by **Judson Strock** for books and stationary and by **J. E. Evans** for general merchandise. The first advertisement simply listed "**W. Kanter, Clanton**" as the business. Apparently within a year it was named "**W. Kanter & Bro.**" Note that the "W. Kanter" was apparently his brother William (born Oct 1867, immigrated 1891) who was in Shelby County and Abe was the "brother" indicated in the name. Perhaps William helped restart Abe's business after the bankruptcy?

Another brother, Elbert, was in Clanton a bit later, around 1905-1906. He had run a store in Prattville for a year or two, but then moved to Clanton and started his own business, so he was clearly not the brother indicated in the "**W. Kanter & Bro.**" name. In March of 1908 Elbert sold his business to Abe and moved to Duluth, Minnesota. They also had a sister, Sarah, who came to Clanton from Canada and rented the Carroll house with Abe in 1904. She also later lived Minnesota.

At the end of 1904 when fellow merchant P. D. Wilson decided to retire, the W. Kanter and Bro. bought his business and moved into his two story brick building, called the Wilson Building. It was located about mid-way down the block on the north side of 2nd Avenue North between 6th and 7th Streets.

A black and white photograph of a street scene in a small town. On the left, a two-story brick building with a storefront porch is visible. A line of vintage cars is parked along the street in front of the building. The street is paved, and there are trees and other buildings in the background.

In the 1908-1909 timeframe there were humorous skits and hijinks done in town. Abe Kanter participated in several; including one fake trial and one debate on bachelorhood vs. marriage (Abe was unmarried). In 1910 Abe is living in the Palmer Boarding House.

22	Talmer John J.	Kitt	2	W 64 M 72		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse	Cowley House OR	Hempes	P N	
	Vilgus J.	Rife wt	5	W 70 H 27 6		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Manager		Hempes		X
	Gibbs	Dough	5	W 19 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 70		
	Gibson Jr.	Jr.	2	W 17 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 60		
	Straut Jr.	Jr.	2	W 13 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 60		
	Vigors	Dough	3	W 11 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 60		
	Morgan Muller J.	Marriage	2	W 53 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 60		
	Mello Nellie	President	4	W 59 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 60		
	James James	Breeder	2	W 58 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 60		
	Dudley J. O.	Breeder	2	W 58 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 60		
	John G. Zimm	Breeder	2	W 58 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 60		
	Jordan Isaac	Breeder	2	W 58 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 60		
	Henry	Breeder	2	W 58 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 60		
	Lewis Alie	Breeder	2	W 58 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 60		
	Feltzler Tom J.	Breeder	2	W 58 S		Haberman Haberman Haberman	English	Nurse		Hempes 60		

Sadly, on Saturday, July 15, 1911, Abe's body was found in a well near the Wilson house (Palmer Boarding House) where he lived. The newspaper reported he had been despondent lately and suicide was suspected. His brother Elbert, now living in Blocton, was called and Abe's body was taken to Birmingham and buried in the Kneseth Israel Jewish Cemetery.

Elbert Kanter continued to live and work as a merchant in the Shelby County and Birmingham area, sometimes with his brother William. He was born on August 15, 1882 in Lithuania and died May 18, 1959. All the Kanter brothers were buried in the Kneseth Israel Cemetery in Birmingham.

References

Facebook groups “U know u lived in CLANTON as a kid,” “WE GREW UP IN CLANTON, ALABAMA.”

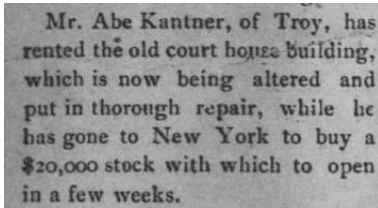
Thomas Blalock’s tireless research in old newspapers and Internet archives.

A History of Chilton County by The Clanton Study Club: Pages 10, 70, and 71.

Union Banner: 3/5/1908 – Humorous story.

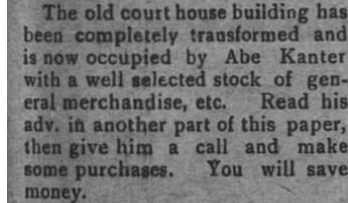
Union Banner: 3/25/1909 – Humorous story.

Union Banner:



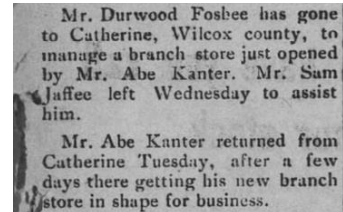
Mr. Abe Kantner, of Troy, has rented the old court house building, which is now being altered and put in thorough repair, while he has gone to New York to buy a \$20,000 stock with which to open in a few weeks.

UB 7/8/1897



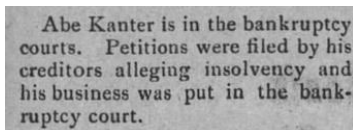
The old court house building has been completely transformed and is now occupied by Abe Kanter with a well selected stock of general merchandise, etc. Read his adv. in another part of this paper, then give him a call and make some purchases. You will save money.

UB 8/12/1897



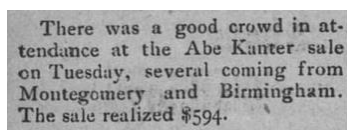
Mr. Durwood Fosbee has gone to Catherine, Wilcox county, to manage a branch store just opened by Mr. Abe Kanter. Mr. Sam Juffee left Wednesday to assist him. Mr. Abe Kanter returned from Catherine Tuesday, after a few days there getting his new branch store in shape for business.

UB 8/10/1899



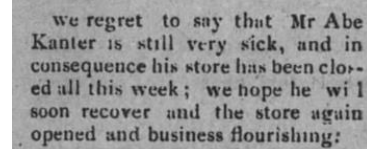
Abe Kanter is in the bankruptcy courts. Petitions were filed by his creditors alleging insolvency and his business was put in the bankruptcy court.

UB 1/4/1900



There was a good crowd in attendance at the Abe Kanter sale on Tuesday, several coming from Montgomery and Birmingham. The sale realized \$594.

UB 2/1/1900



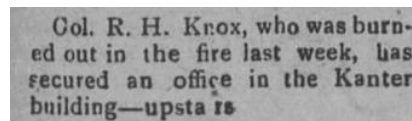
we regret to say that Mr Abe Kanter is still very sick, and in consequence his store has been closed all this week; we hope he wi l soon recover and the store again opened and business flourishing:

UB 10/25/1900



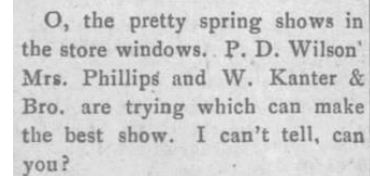
GROCERIES
Come and select what you want from this mammoth stock.
First Come, First Served!
YOURS TO PLEASE,
W. KANTER, Clanton

UB 4/4/1901



Col. R. H. Knox, who was burned out in the fire last week, has secured an office in the Kanter building—upsta is

UB 7/18/1901



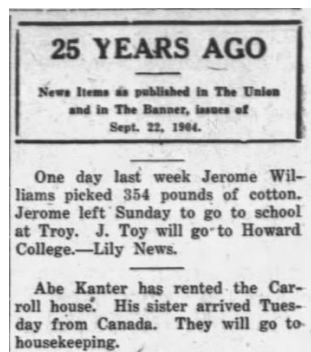
O, the pretty spring shows in the store windows. P. D. Wilson' Mrs. Phillips and W. Kanter & Bro. are trying which can make the best show. I can't tell, can you?

UB 19020327



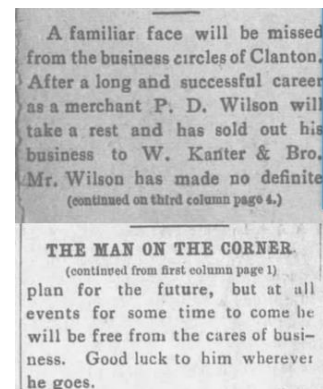
Great sale
Having bought out the entire stock of goods of Stewart & Middleton, we will sell the same at their store at
20 PER CENT
BELOW COST
GREAT BARGAINS IN
DRY GOODS,
CLOTHING,
HATS, SHOES, ETC.
COME AT ONCE
Respectfully,
W. KANTER & BRO.

UB 11/6/1902



25 YEARS AGO
News Items as published in The Union and in The Banner, issues of Sept. 22, 1904.
One day last week Jerome Williams picked 354 pounds of cotton. Jerome left Sunday to go to school at Troy. J. Toy will go to Howard College.—Lily News.
Abe Kanter has rented the Carroll house. His sister arrived Tuesday from Canada. They will go to housekeeping.

UB 9/22/1904



A familiar face will be missed from the business circles of Clanton. After a long and successful career as a merchant P. D. Wilson will take a rest and has sold out his business to W. Kanter & Bro. Mr. Wilson has made no definite plan for the future, but at all events for some time to come he will be free from the cares of business. Good luck to him wherever he goes.

UB 11/17/1904

Abe Kanter and Brother – Merchants of Clanton

CHANGE

We are now located in the Wilson building,
where the much larger premises give us room
for a bigger stock of goods. In all of the
departments we have a well-selected stock and
respectfully invite your attention to our

DRY GOODS
DRESS AND FANCY GOODS
CLOTHING, HATS, SHOES.

Then the housekeeper will find our

GROCERIES

....are all of the best--fresh and wholesome.
Call and see us in our new storehouse,
(Recently occupied by F. D WILSON)

W. KANTER & BRO.
Clanton

UB 1/26/1905

OUR SPRING GREETINGS
To the Citizens of Clanton and Chilton County

Springs to life its leaves has stirred and with it we are gladdened to
welcome you to our store. Here we are displaying the largest and
best seasonal stock of

Dry Goods, Clothing, Millinery
Men, Ladies' and Children's Shoes

We have been selected prize this season and shall make some
special reductions on our stock. We have also received a large
stock with ready cash we have been enabled to pay for. We
will sell all our goods at the lowest possible prices.

We have the pleasure to let you know—

GROCERIES

Our Millinery goods are on hand and ready to display at

New Spring Millinery

Two experienced milliners have the supervision of this department.

Last year our staff of the City of Florence was so much
impressed that we have realized it in our customers here. It

\$80 Railroad Fare Buggy

With over 400 new buggies for your convenience a choice
made up of the best of the best.

We Pay Railroad Fare

Our friends who are traveling with the Great Southern,
Thomson, Lenoire, Green, Yamacraw, Western Coast, or Railway
lines, will find it to their advantage to call on us. We
will pay for us as well pay the railroad fare back.

—Sincerely,
W. KANTER & BROS.

General Merchandise

CLANTON

UB 3/22/1906

FALL AND WINTER GOODS
My stock of Fall and Winter Goods
is Complete.
DRESS GOODS, SHOES, HATS AND
NOTI NS
Come and get more goods for the same
money; save goods for less money.
I also pay the Highest Price for
WOOL, HIDES & BLESWAX
Remember the place:
Next door to the Hardware Store
ELBERT KANTER
CLANTON - - - ALA

UB 11/29/1906

Mr. Elbert Kanter has sold his stock of goods to W. Kanter & Bro. and left, Tuesday, for his future home at Duluth, Minn.

UB 3/5/1908

Amongst the business changes in Clanton is that of Mr. Harmon Headley, who has sold to Messrs W. Kanter & Bro. his stock of merchandise and will continue in business as the proprietor of a soft drink stand at his old stand on the corner.

UB 1/5/1911

**SAD END OF CLANTON
MERCHANT.**

On Saturday morning last Clanton was shocked at learning that the body of Abe Kanter, the well known merchant, had been discovered in a well in the rear of the Wilson house, at which place he boarded.

There was about fifteen feet of water in the well and the body of Mr. Kanter was in a stooping position with the head bending forward. He had evidently been dead for several hours. With considerable difficulty the body was brought to the surface. Mr. Will Armstrong descending into the well, aiding in the melancholy task.

Mr. Kuntz had been in rather a despondent condition recently, neglected his meals and appeared somewhat worried. No message was left assigning any cause for the rash act. His brother, Elbert, of Blocton, was communicated with and the remains were carried to Birmingham Sunday for interment in the Jewish cemetery.

Mr. Kanter was a genial pleasant man, well thought of in the community and his sad end is greatly regretted.

Peace be with him.

Elbert Kanter Visits Clanton

Many of his old friends who knew him several years ago when he lived in Clanton, were delighted to see Mr. Elbert Kanter back here for a brief visit Tuesday. When he got here he said he had only a few minutes to stay, but when he began to see his old friends and talk over olden times, we believe Elbert almost made up his mind to stay here. It seemed to us as he left we could see a wishfulness in his eyes that said he wished he were back in Clanton for good.

Mr. Kanter was a merchant here some eighteen or twenty years ago. He is now in the mercantile business at Boothton.

"I pass through Clanton quite often," said Elbert, "but mostly at night. Every time I come through here and see the bright street lights and nice show windows, I am reminded of the time when I was here twenty years ago when the only lights you could see at night was lightning bugs. If I had known then what a fine town Clanton was going to be I would not have left here. But it isn't too late to come back, yet is it?"

UB 5/30/1929

61 Might as well have some fun as we go along. When I want fun I always go to my friend "Sweet William" Sartor. This week he was having trouble with a rat in his store. The rat died, and the smell was most awful. From the size of the smell, Mr. Sartor guessed that the rat must be as big as a mule. When he found it, it was only a mouse. Well, of course the rat was only a small matter, even if it did smell big. It only served as a means of getting Mr. Sartor to relate a really funny story of many years ago.

You will, of course, remember Abe Kanter, the big Jew who used to run a store in Clanton. Abe was a good sport. Everybody liked him. He could always enjoy a joke, even if it was on Abe. And there was a plenty of fellows who were always ready to play the joke on Abe.

One time, a bunch of fellows induced Abe to go possum hunting with them. I think it must have been Harve Chandler, Bud Alred, Tom Littlejohn, Caldwell McMorries and Heath Jones. When they had gotten far into the woods and into the night, the dogs treed something. Of course, the fellows wanted to get it, and Abe should climb the tree and punch the varmint out. After sufficient assistance from the others, Abe reached the first limb of the tree and went on up. By and by he came within close range of the little animal. By a peculiar physical device, the varmint let loose a terrible smell, and Abe shouted to the top of his voice, "P-o-o-l cat! P-o-o-l cat! My Gawd! Forty men smell it at one time."

UB 3/6/1930

I notice much renovating being done on the inside of the old P. D. Wilson Building, now the property of Mr. J. R. Mullins and recently vacated by the Parisian Store. Messrs. Mullins and Scott are preparing the building for a brand new dry goods and ready-to-wear store, which will be opened up within a few days. This old building dates back to the days of Clanton's early history, a long and successful business having been operated there by Abe Kanter under the firm name of W. Kanter and Brother. Several other business concerns have operated there, and it has suffered one fire in which the back end was considerably damaged. But Messrs. Mullins & Scott are putting it in first class shape, and when finished it will be one of the prettiest places in the city. They expect to open up about Saturday, February 21st. They will continue to operate their present store on Seventh Street.

UB 2/12/1942