

Michelson's Shoes Celebrates 90 Years in Lexington



Above: Michelson Shoes with its distinctive backlit sign. Below: The present-day interior of Michelson Shoes.



By S. Levi Doran

This August marked the ninetieth birthday of Michelson's Shoes, the oldest family-owned store in Lexington Centre.

Isadore "I.J." Michelson founded the store in August of 1919, along with B. Aronson, his cousin. Aronson left the business almost as soon as it was begun. Originally the store only did leatherwork; this was mainly comprised of harness repairs, though also included shoes. As the age of horses began to fade, so did the harness business, and shoes became the primary focus at Michelson's.

The September sales list for Lane Broth-

ers of Boston ("Specialty Shoes") shows a shipment to I. Michelson, totaling \$18.65. This would have been Michelson's original order!

The year 1919 was an exciting one in Lexington. On February 2nd, seventy-five returning servicemen were welcomed home from the Great War (World War I). Another 200 were welcomed on the Common in June. "Several one-man cars for the Middlesex and Boston Street Railway arrived at the car station in North Lexington by freight" in late February. The next month, the gift of Emery Park was accepted by the town.

The Lexington Country Fair and Cattle Show was held September 27th to "help the

Setting the standard for service and dedication to the community

1919-2009

"Our pride is that we employ over twenty salespeople, all trained for service."

~Dick Michelson

child welfare work." This is also the year equal suffrage was granted. Articles from Lexington talk a good deal of "War Gardens" or "Victory Gardens," urging people to continue planting them even after the war's end.

Michelson's opened for the first time in a part of today's Wales Copy Shop. The front door of the shoe store was where Wales' door is today. E. E. Gray the grocer operated out of the right side of Wales, with his door right in the corner of the building at Muzzey Street. (Later, the two storefronts were combined to create the present space.)

The first known advertisement for Michelson's isn't in a newspaper or maga-

zine. Instead, the ad, dating from the early '20s, is in a cookbook from a local organization. Advertisements were sold in the book to raise money for the club, and I.J. Michelson purchased one to help them out. This shows an early example of the Michelsons' legendary involvement in the community.

The store spent less than a decade in its original location, for in 1926 it moved to 472 Mass. Ave., today's Number 1810. (The former location of Lexington Jewelers, soon to be Avenue Deli.) The reason for this move was the expansion of the neighboring grocery, then run by Teresa Napoli.

Wanting to expand their retail space,

Dick Michelson has always been involved in the community. He is pictured below hauling the float for the Lexington Bicentennial Corporation.





Eric, Dick and Jerry Michelson at work in their store in the Center.



Above: an early Mass. Ave location.

Michelson's moved again in 1941, to one third of today's Theatre Pharmacy. (The Pharmacy was once three storefronts, and Michelson's current location was once divided in half.)

The store ended its shoe repair work in 1962. The man who had been doing the repairs at Michelson's set up his own operation on Bedford Street, in the block where Videosmith is today. As a result of this, Michelson's was able to focus more on retail sales, and further expand their selling space.

They opened in their current location, 1780 Mass. Ave., on June 21, 1965. Upon moving into their new storefront in 1965, a back-lit sign was installed facing Mass. Ave. This is the same sign that still adorns the front of the building today. It was also in that year that the "park scene" layout inside the building was first set up, the brainchild of Richard Michelson.

In 1985, Michelson's looked to expand their operation even further, taking over the existing Wells Shoe Store in Needham. To

this day, the Needham store has remained Michelson's second location.

I.J. Michelson was the first generation owner in 1919. His son Harold became the second owner in the mid-1940s. Harold's son Richard took over the business in 1975. And today, the fourth generation at Michelson's is represented by Eric and Jerry, who have worked there since they were in Junior High. "We all work together," says Dick, "including my wife Barbara. And the grandchildren come in and work as well. They're the fifth generation."

Eric, who graduated college in 1982, designed the modern computerized inventory system. Jerry graduated 1989 and is responsible for Michelson's presence on the Internet today. (He created *MichelsonShoes.com*.) The two brothers collaborated on the new barcode scanning system for the sales register, in 2003.

But the Michelsons don't just work in Lexington – they live here too. Through the years, they have been involved in town

"It was always about customer service, and it still is—customer first."

~Jerry Michelson

organizations and government. Dick recalls that his father, Harold, "was very committed to making sure the community was a stronger community." Dick himself was instrumental in forming the Lexington Jaycees, and has always been very active in the Lexington Lions Club. In addition, he has been a Town Meeting Member for over forty-six years. His two sons are on various town committees, and are Meeting Members as well.

Dick goes on to say that "we have fitted at least four generations of Lexington families, and continue to service their needs. Families keep coming back. Our customer base is from as much as thirty miles around. People drive all the way, for the service we offer."

Michelson's Shoes has had many mottoes and slogans over the years. In 1958 the

catchphrase was "Shoes for the Entire Family." Later, "We cover these with care." Today their website proclaims that they are "Your family shoe store with more." But in summing up their ninety years in business, the Michelsons don't use any of these phrases. Instead, they claim the common pattern through the years was dedicated service to their customers. "Our pride is that we employ over twenty salespeople, all trained for service," says Dick. According to his son Jerry, through the years "it was always about customer service and it still is – customer first."

The author, S. Levi Doran, welcomes any comments, questions, or concerns of the reader. He can be reached at LexHistory@gmail.com.



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Below left to right: Richard Michelson, Harold Michelson (back), Isadore (I.J.) Michelson and two employees.

