

The Anniversary Story

A Century of Shoes



Dear Friends,

As we mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of George's Shoes, we believe we have much to celebrate and a story to tell.

Joseph and Said George, our grandfather and father, arrived in America with no formal education and survived on their trade skills and an unyielding commitment to hard work.

The Anniversary Story pays tribute to their Lebanese emigration experience, and the future we forged as individuals and as family.

Thanks to all of you for making this 100-year anniversary possible.

Jerry and Ron George

Brief Sketch

Lebanese American Emigration

Before World War I, Lebanon was under the repressive rule of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, and the country was in desperate economic straits. A wave of Lebanese immigrants — primarily Christians — arrived in America in the early 1900s to escape the poverty and the social and religious persecution. Full of hope and faith and filled with the prospect of a new freedom, they departed from their small ancestral villages and traveled to an unknown land.

A portrait emerges of these early immigrants that illustrates the ideal "rags to riches" American story. Speaking little or no English and bringing only their trade skills or a product to peddle, the fiercely independent entrepreneurs became retail shop merchants who likely worked more hours than anyone else and for less money. Their "shops" began as part of a residence, and then later moved to neighborhood storefronts.

Family owned and operated enterprises — bakeries, restaurants, and shoe repair shops — flourished and spread throughout the Dakotas, Minnesota, New York, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. Ties to the old country were preserved and money was regularly sent to relatives in Lebanon. This tradition of strong commitment to family still remains at the heart of the Lebanese American today.

It's convenient for our customers and the service is much more personal. We get on a first name basis with everyone who comes through our door."

In 2005, standing at the 100-year mark, Jerry and Ron are confident about the future of George's. With their business longevity and extensive trade skills, the brothers know firsthand that each generation just keeps getting better — and the best is yet to come.



GEORGE'S AWARDED TWIN CITIES
BEST SHOE REPAIR
MPLS/ST. PAUL MAGAZINE
DECEMBER 2004



RON GEORGE - ARDEN HILLS
GEORGE'S SHOE STORE
OPENED IN 2004

George's now offers a full service leather repair department and specializes in comfortable, quality footwear, and accessories for men and women, including: Dansko, Munro, Naot, Merrell, Haflinger, Ecco, UGG, New Balance, SAS, Minnetonka Moccasin, and Steger's Mukluks.

Good fit and arch support are an integral part of getting the right shoe size. "Because of our extensive years of

experience and training in shoe construction," said Ron, "we know when the shoe fits." And, in honor of the family's immigrant roots and humble beginnings, Ron initiated a special shoe donation program to benefit local homeless shelters. Customers participate by donating their slightly worn shoes.

Ron, who became a grandfather for the first time last year, is aware that "he has gone full circle" in the family's long-established business. He proudly points out, "In our new store, we've returned to the old fashioned retail values and traditions of my grandfather and father — we're selling shoes again, and we're doing it from a retail storefront on the street — rather than tucked away in a Mall.



GEORGE'S SHOE FLOAT FOR GRAND OLD DAYS PARADE — OLD LADY IN THE SHOE
- RON & JUDY GEORGE & KIDS

The Christian Lebanese communities brought the Maronite Church to the United States from Lebanon, and as early as the 1880s, a Maronite prayer community was established in Minnesota. The Maronites are part of the Universal Catholic Church. Their traditions and beliefs include a special regard for religious freedom and this outlook assisted the immigrants from Lebanon in their assimilation into American society.

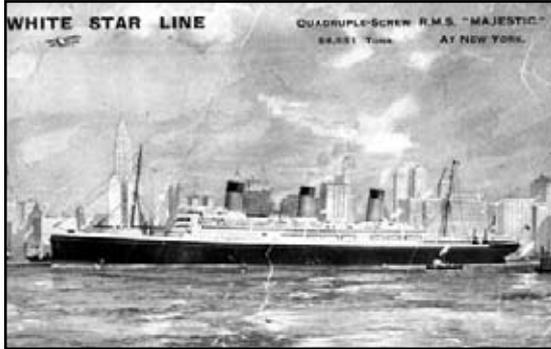
West St. Paul's first Maronite church structure was constructed in the early 1900s, and in 1950, the existing Holy Family Maronite Church was built. Today, descendants of the early immigrants continue to remain active in the parish.

Regardless of nationality or religion, the descendants of immigrant parents discover it becomes the decision of each generation to embrace or reject the dreams set out by those who came before. Starting with boot maker Joseph George, each successive generation embraced their grandfather and father's dreams. Recorded here are the stories of the cobblers who founded George's Shoes and the family members who continue to honor the legacy.

Vicki Audette

Biographer

Coming to America



Born Into the Trade

In 1988, in an act of good stewardship, Jerry and Ron divided the family corporation to prepare for the fourth generation of family cobblers. Today the family business is consolidated into two independently owned stores:



DAN, BRIAN, JERRY, RON, JIM & CHRIS
GEORGE

- **George's Shoe & Skate Repair – 672 Grand Avenue in St. Paul, which is operated by Jerry and sons Brian and Dan George.**
- **George's Shoes & Repair – 3673 Lexington Avenue North in Arden Hills, which is operated by Ron and wife Judy, with sons Luke and Matt, and daughter Melissa.**

After spending more than twenty years in multiple Mall locations where long hours and staying open 7 days-a-week (and on holidays) is a standard requirement, Ron George decided it was time for a new business direction; one that would allow more time for family.



RON & MELISSA GEORGE

In February 2004, Ron, wife Judy and their five children "pulled together" and moved George's Shoes & Repair into a new store location in Arden Hills.

Ron George & Family



RON AND SON MATT



RON & JUDY GEORGE AND FAMILY



MELISSA GEORGE WORKS ON
INTERNET SALES

Section One

The Early Years – Joseph George



TOULA, LEBANON
THE BIRTHPLACE OF
JOSEPH & MARY GEORGE
AND THEIR CHILDREN,
SAID & SADIE

The history of George's Shoes began in Lebanon in 1905. At age seventeen, Joseph, son of Tanous and Fatina George, opened a custom boot making shop in Toula, the mountain village where he was born.

The George family resided in a



A PHOTO TAKEN MANY YEARS LATER OF THE
OLD STONE HOMESTEAD BUILT BY
TANOUS AND HIS BROTHER GEORGE

primitive stone house that Tanous built with his brother George.

The homestead consisted of one large room lit by an olive oil lamp and a fireplace for heat and cooking. Water came from the

village well. As far as work was concerned, men were the sole providers as it was considered an insult for wives to provide an outside income.

Women and children did, however, work in the fields and tend to the animals. Tanous raised potatoes, corn, and beans on a small patch of land

and sold the vegetables to provide for his eight offspring. Fatina was an excellent cook. Zlabia and potato kibba were her specialty. The family always had enough to eat, but never anything extra. Old world marriage customs were honored in the village; unchaperoned courtship was



JOSEPH & MARY GEORGE

forbidden, and matchmaking was a village preoccupation. On August 27, 1908, Joseph married Mary Sarkis, and son Said was born on January 11, 1910; a second child, daughter Sadie, was born on June 15, 1912.

The well-liked Joseph earned a reputation as a gifted boot maker, and he was rewarded with a steady flow of customers. Unfortunately, the poor villagers couldn't pay, and the Turkish merchants would refuse to pay. Discouraged by this arrangement, Joseph could see no future for his family. His brother Moses George lived in America where he owned a quarter section of farmland, a pool hall, and a restaurant in McIntosh, South Dakota. In hopes of joining him, Joseph stockpiled money for a passport and ship fare. He promised Mary as soon as he was settled he would send for her and the children. Said was two and Sadie nine months at that time.

When Fatina heard Joseph's travel plans, she implored, "It is not good for husband and wife to be separated," and pressed ticket money for Mary

Miss Saigon, Phantom of the Opera, and Oklahoma," said Jerry. "We were born into the trade, and we've got the experience, the knowledge, and the machinery." Ron agrees, "When it's a family enterprise like ours, you have a lot of pride in your work. Said would always say 'If you don't have time to do it right the first time, when are you going to have time to do it over?'"



JERRY & SISTER ANNE
WITH ST. PAUL FIREMEN.
AFTER 9-11-2001 – JERRY GEORGE
MADE A LEATHER FLAG AND DONATED
IT TO ST. PAUL FIRE DEPARTMENT –



ST. PAUL POSSES WITH FORMER ST. PAUL
POLICE CHIEF BILL FINNEY –
STANDING THIRD FROM LEFT.
JERRY GEORGE –
STANDING THIRD FROM RIGHT



100-YEAR-OLD SEWING MACHINE BELONGED
TO JOSEPH GEORGE IN MCINTOSH,
SOUTH DAKOTA



ED BELFOUR -
FORMER NORTH STARS
& BLACK HAWK GOALIE
WITH JERRY GEORGE

including the Wilds and Notre Dame — and mites and high school players.

"We do repairs that most people won't tackle," said Jerry. "I can look at something and make it happen." For example, boots purchased for the Minnesota Viking cheerleaders posed a repair challenge. "The legs were too wide on the boots, but I found a way to take them apart, alter the size, and give each cheerleader a custom fit."

Now, after almost thirty years on Grand Avenue, George's Shoe & Skate Repair is a popular fixture in the neighborhood. When producers for Disney's 1994 *Mighty Ducks II* movie arrived in the Twin Cities, they went in search of an authentic skate repair shop. Of course, they located Jerry George. Always happy to be of service, Jerry relocated his entire repair shop from Grand Avenue to a Minneapolis sound stage for three weeks of filming. Over the years, the George brothers have established repair relationships with major retail stores and theater companies, including Nordstrom's shoe department and St. Paul's Ordway Theater. "We've repaired shoes, costumes, and leather props for many plays including



JERRY TRAINING EMILIO ESTEVEZ TO
SHARPEN SKATES FOR THE MIGHTY
DUCKS 2 MOVIE

into her son's hands. Joseph's parents persuaded the young couple to leave Said and Sadie in their care and all of this seemed like a good plan. But the young parents never anticipated the 16 years they would be separated from their offspring.

In 1913, 26-year-old Joseph George and his 25-year-old wife Mary boarded a ship bound for America.

McIntosh, South Dakota

McIntosh, South Dakota, was a ranch and farming community situated near the North Dakota border. In 1907, when the Milwaukee Railroad was built, the town became a major shipping point for transporting cattle. McIntosh would prove to be an excellent choice for the industrious boot maker and his family.



MAIN STREET
MCINTOSH, SOUTH DAKOTA
PHOTO TAKEN AROUND LATE
1950'S, EARLY 1960'S

Shortly after he arrived in town, Moses introduced Joseph to the local shoemaker who led him to "a big pile of boots" in need of fixing. In less than a week, Joseph finished all the repairs. Around 1916, when the old cobbler retired, Joseph purchased the boot and repair shop on Main Street and stocked the store with more than "2800 pairs of new shoes." In the years that followed, Joseph and Mary had nine American-born children; one son was lost to typhoid fever in 1923.



JOSEPH, WITH SONS
PETE & BILL
GEORGE,
MCINTOSH, SD
BOOT & REPAIR
SHOP

"I spent a lot of time watching Joe fix boots," recalls retired McIntosh cattle roper Jon Brooks. As a teenager, Brooks ran errands for Joseph. He remembers the amiable boot maker engaging in lively conversations with customers, even with his broken English.

"Joe always wore a heavy canvas apron and rolled his own cigarettes. He smoked Peerless tobacco," said Brooks, "and when he ran out, he would say to his son Peter, 'Go get Poppa some more tobacco.'"

In 1914, World War I brought great anxiety to the Lebanese Americans whose families were starving overseas. Communication channels were blocked, and there was no way to send money to relatives. People in Lebanon had little food and no means to escape their plight. The war lasted four years, and Tanous mortgaged the homestead for \$5,000 to feed his children and grandchildren. In 1919 when the war ended, it brought an end to the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile,

During the 1980s and 90s, Ron built out and operated several George's stores in Malls throughout the Twin Cities, including: Ridgedale Mall, Maplewood Mall, and the Mall of America.

Meanwhile, Jerry George explored advanced sewing and repair technologies. He pioneered new leather applications for sports equipment and expanded repair services to include: repalming hockey gloves, reconstructing goalie pads, reconditioning shin pads, and relacing baseball gloves.

The Miracle Team

In 1977, the George brothers bought a St. Paul shoe repair shop on Grand Avenue from Henry Michalsky and his wife. Henry built a small but loyal clientele for sports equipment repairs, and after the purchase, Jerry George "picked up the ball and ran with it."

He pursued more teams and bigger names, including: Minnesota North Stars, Minnesota Vikings, and the University of Minnesota Gophers.

In addition, Jerry branched out into leather repair services for individual motorcycle riders and groups. When the U.S. Olympic Hockey Team won the Gold in 1980, coach Herb Brooks recruited Jerry George to repair and service the teams' hockey equipment. Today, George's Shoe & Skate Repair is the sports equipment repair depot for many universities, professional teams, and NHL teams across the United States,



GEORGE BROTHERS PURCHASE HENRY'S
SHOE REPAIR - GRAND AVENUE, ST. PAUL

Legends

George Family Tradition

From early times until now, key family members have contributed to the success of George's. Starting with boot maker Joseph George; then Said George; and later with Said's sons Tom, Jerry, and Ron George. The George brothers broadened their father's vision, and in the mid-1970s, began a major expansion into malls throughout the Twin Cities. For more than twenty years now, Jerry and Ron George stayed the course and built Georges Shoes & Repair into a global network of customers through their respective websites. After a century in the leather trade, the George family continues to provide customers with quality craftsmanship, innovations, and personal service.

George's Store Legend

1905	Toula, Lebanon
1916	McIntosh, South Dakota
1930	Selfridge, North Dakota
1943	464 So. Robert, W. St. Paul
1957	947 So. Robert, W. St. Paul
1963	Har Mar Mall
1977	672 Grand, St. Paul
1979	Maplewood Square
1980	Rosedale Mall
1981	St. Paul's Northwest Crossing Skyway
1984	Ridgedale Mall
1986	Twin Cities Sears Stores/Drop-off Centers
1989	Maplewood Mall
1992	Mall of America
2004	3673 Lexington North, Arden Hills

Joseph contributed to his father's mortgage payments, and twice he sent steamship tickets for Said and Sadie. Tanous, however, cashed in the tickets; the first time to pay for his son Azores' funeral and later for daughter Maria's wedding. In 1922, the disappointed and angry Joseph wrote 12-year-old Said, "Next time I will send the tickets directly to you." But another five years would pass before Said and Sadie were united with their parents and American siblings.



Section Two

A New Land, A New Life: Said M. George

At age 18, Said George had no idea what he was getting into when he came to America with his 16-year-old sister Sadie. The only formal education Said received took place "under an olive tree in Toula," where boys were taught Arabic and French. Sadie, like the other girls in the village, did not learn to read or write; and neither sibling spoke English.

In 1927, Joseph made arrangements to bring his Lebanese-born children to the United States, and this time he was leaving nothing to chance. He contacted the American Consulate in Beirut to inquire about steamship tickets; a third-class fare cost \$110. During the 1920s, the elegant four-story vessels operated by White Star Line were much improved, and four and six-berth cabins replaced the cramped steerage compartments used by earlier immigrants.



JOSEPH & MARY GEORGE WITH
THEIR AMERICAN-BORN FAMILY.
FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:
HELEN, MARY, ESTHER.
BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:
SALMA, PETE, BILL

The Mall Stores

Said George retired in 1975, and Jerry and Ron began to formulate a plan to modernize, to increase the number of stores, and to expand their customer base. About this time, shoe repair technologies and fast-acting glues were just beginning to revolutionize the trade. And, by 1977, each brother had identified a special niche in the family enterprise.

While Ron took an active interest in directing George's expansion into Mall locations, Jerry grew the sports equipment repair business. In 1979, they opened a store in Maplewood Square and the following year in Rosedale Mall, which Ron George managed.

During those years of growth, Ron attended a variety of business and entrepreneur programs, including the University of St. Thomas. He went to trade conventions and traveled the East and West coasts searching for new ideas to incorporate into the stores. Often he found himself in the right place at the right time returning home with innovative ways to modernize displays and equipment, and speed up repair services.

One new trend Ron brought to Minnesota and made available only at George's was a "Shoe Repair Bar." Fast, shiny, and modern repair equipment was moved into the front of the store so customers could slip off their shoes and watch them get resoled.



RON & LUKE GEORGE
MALL OF AMERICA

Jerry George & Family



DAN, JERRY, BRIAN
& CHRIS GEORGE



JERRY GEORGE
RETURNS FROM
VIETNAM WAR
1971



JERRY & BRIAN GEORGE



JERRY & ANNA GEORGE



SAID & SADIE GEORGE
PHOTO TAKEN IN LEBANON

The American Consulate agreed to hold the steamship tickets, but unknown to Joseph, the passport costs were miscalculated leaving Said fifty dollars short. Disheartened at the prospect of missing the long-awaited reunion, the tall, proud son resolved to borrow the money. Joseph agreed to repay the loan, but with no collateral Said was turned down. Then, a miracle happened.

Despite widespread poverty in Toula, one man, Zides Jelwane, came forward, opened his money pouch, and produced five ten-dollar gold pieces—a story the grateful Said would retell many times.

On February 14, 1928, Said and Sadie George departed from Beirut on a dirty, two-story dinghy. Fatina had bundled a few possessions in a hand-sewn quilt for her grandchildren, and the young travelers wore notes with the words "Food" and "Bathroom" pinned to their coats. Six days later, they disembarked in Marseille, and then took a train to Cherbourg, France. On their arrival February 29th in Cherbourg, Said learned their ship to America already sailed, which left no alternative but to sleep on benches in the terminal until another one arrived.

Sailing into New York Harbor, Said and Sadie landed at Ellis Island wearing the same clothes they started with. Upon docking, they were met with unintelligible commands and led to a team of doctors and inspectors who would decide their fate. A 1917 law required all immigrants sixteen years or

older to read a forty-word passage in their native language. Said passed the literacy test, but Sadie did not.

Throughout the transatlantic journey, the older brother wisely steered them out of trouble, and he would do it again. Somehow he convinced the inspector that Sadie would attend school in South Dakota, and the pair was "waved on through" the Golden Door —just like their parents before them.

Arriving at the train station in McIntosh, South Dakota, on March 17, 1928, the weary, unkempt travelers were met by family and 500 townspeople — a number higher than the population of McIntosh. Everyone chipped in and bought the brave pair special gifts: a silver ring for Said and a ruby ring for

Sadie. A party was held at the George home where guests enjoyed music and dancing, and Joseph's homemade beer.

The joyous homecoming celebration was the talk of the town in McIntosh for years to come.



SAID GEORGE - PASSPORT



SELFRIDGE, NORTH DAKOTA
UNKNOWN MAN STANDING IN DOORWAY
OF SAID'S SHOE REPAIR SHOP

Section Three

Third Generation Cobblers: Jerry and Ron George



JERRY GEORGE — CIRCA 1979
GEORGE'S SHOE & SKATE REPAIR
— GRAND AVENUE

Even though the George family legacy was forged in 1905, each generation would improve on past skills. Jerry and Ron George invested their childhood to acquire their father's trade, but when Said retired, the sons were eager to initiate change.

Whereas Joseph George excelled in harness repair and Said in shoes, Jerry and Ron pushed the family

business to a new level and diversified the repairs to include all leather — jackets, hats, belts, gloves, purses, and luggage.

Ron said, "Dad's specialty was repairing soles and heels." Jerry described a different era while working with Said on the West Side in the 1950s.

"Said sold Red Wing Boots to the men employed at the South St. Paul Stockyards, and when it came time to resole, he would point to the rain barrels behind the shop where they washed the manure off their boots."

The Third Generation



JERRY GEORGE



RON GEORGE

The Boot Maker's Son

While adjusting to all that was new in his life — a new community, family, language, strange customs, and landscape — Said established new skills and learned a trade from his father that he would rely on until he retired in 1975. With the exception of five demoralizing days spent in a first grade classroom, Said learned English by working in a busy McIntosh restaurant. In two years, he mastered the language and was ready to go to work for his father. Joseph borrowed money in 1930 to open a second repair shop in Selfridge, North Dakota, thirty miles from McIntosh. Said managed the store until the Great Depression brought business to a standstill. In 1934, when Joseph closed the shop in Selfridge, he gave Said \$100 worth of equipment to start his own business.



SAID & ANNA GEORGE

St. Paul, Minnesota

The Dakotas during the Depression were no place for an unmarried and unemployed young man. At age 24, Said shipped his repair equipment by rail and followed it to St. Paul, Minnesota. He settled on the West Side where relatives resided and went to work earning \$9 a week at the Wide Awake Shoe Shop on St. Peter Street. In 1934, the shoe repair business was booming at Wide Awake; in addition to its own work, the store repaired boots and shoes for several downtown St. Paul retailers. After three years, Said was earning only \$40 a week, and he was anxious to open his own shop—but first he would marry.



SAID WITH BROTHERS AND SISTERS
FRONT ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:
ESTHER, MARY, SADIE.
BACK ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:
BILL, SAID, GEORGE & PETER

While still living in South Dakota, Said's West St. Paul relatives introduced him to Anna, a lifelong West Side resident. On January 10, 1937, Said and Anna were wed.

The West Side Years

West Side grocer Howard Joseph offered Said a small retail space in back of his store, which was located on Robert Street near Concord. The repair equipment that passed from father to son and traveled from McIntosh to St. Paul was sold by Said soon after he arrived in Minnesota. The eager newlywed borrowed

\$300 to purchase new equipment. The venture, however, was short-lived as health inspectors objected to the disparate retail mix of food and shoe repair. So the cash-strapped cobbler resurrected George's Shoe Repair in the basement of his mother-in-law's home where it remained for several years.

Shoes were among the items rationed during World War II, and demand for repairs

After work, it was a different story. Neighbors, relatives, and friends congregated at the George family home on Isabel in West St. Paul. Anna was an excellent cook. Dinners were noisy and fun and, there was always room for one more.

Like all successful entrepreneurs, Said George knew when it was time to make a change. In 1963, news circulated that Marie Slawik, founder of Midway Ford, was building the "biggest enclosed mall in St. Paul." After twenty years of doing business on the West Side, Said signed a lease and moved the shop to Har Mar Mall where George's Shoes became a repair-only business.



SAID GEORGE BECOMES
A UNITED STATES CITIZEN - 1946



ACTOR DANNY THOMAS VISITS
HOLY FAMILY CHURCH
IN WEST ST. PAUL
JERRY GEORGE ON RIGHT

Word spread and shoe and boot repairs quickly stacked up. Soon George's Shoe Repair became a household name on the West Side. Working alone ten and twelve hours a day during his first week of operation, Said made over \$200 — and he made good on his promise to Anna.

In 1957, George's moved a few blocks to a new location at 947 South Robert Street, a space twice the size of his previous shop. Making it possible to carry a complete line of name brand shoes and hard-to-fit sizes

for the entire family. The store was open six days a week — 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. — and on Fridays until 9 pm. In addition to the long hours, the enterprising cobbler offered customers a unique service: Free pick-up and delivery on leather repairs of \$1 or more.

Said and Anna George had eight children: Jeannette, Shirley, Thomas, Joanne, Joseph, Jerry, Ron, and Anne Marie.

Starting at an early age, sons Jerry and Ron learned their father's trade along with a strong work ethic. The boys worked in the family business after school and on Saturdays. Jerry said, "My only regret growing up was that I didn't play sports." But with the demands of the family business, playing sports or participating in any extracurricular school activity was out of the question. Jerry remembers, "When we were at work, we worked. There was not much conversation."

dramatically increased. In 1943, Said spotted a vacant storefront at 464 South Robert Street conveniently situated next to the popular Marquardt Bakery. Rent was only \$15 a month and the bakery was a neighborhood favorite. Timing, location — everything was right, except for finances.

Anna George was eight months pregnant with their third child at the time. In order to pay for a hospital delivery, she pinched on the grocery money and managed to save \$85. According to family lore, Said pleaded with his wife to "lend" him the money for the new store. Anna reluctantly agreed on one condition: Said must promise to repay the "delivery fund" within seven days. Jerry and Ron George tell about the good humor exchanged between their mother and father whenever they told this story.



GEORGE FAMILY PHOTO - CIRCA 1950's
FRONT ROW LEFT TO RIGHT: ANNA, JEANNETTE,
SHIRLEY, JOANNE, ANNE MARIE.
BACK ROW LEFT TO RIGHT:
SAID, TOM, JOE, JERRY, RON



SAID GEORGE - 1952

George's Shoe Store



GEORGE'S SHOE STORE AD - 1950's
464 So. ROBERT, (NEAR CONCORD),
WEST ST. PAUL



GEORGE'S SHOE
STORE AD - 1950's
947 So. ROBERT,
WEST ST. PAUL

Har Mar Mall Store



SAID GEORGE HAR MAR - 1963



RON & SAID GEORGE 1980
HAR MAR MALL REPAIR STORE



HAR MAR MALL STOREFRONT