B. G. FOAT BUSINESS PLACES

A man’s avocation is that which calls him away from his regular employment or vocation. It is what he does in his leisure hours—his hobby that for which he has a special liking or talent. His vocation is his regular employment—that which he does to earn his “bread and butter.” Not infrequently a man’s avocation becomes his vocation. This has been true of B. G. Foat, who began his business career in the village of Waterford as a barber but who has so developed his two hobbies—music and flowers—that today they take practically all of his time and his first vocation, his tonorial work, is looked after almost wholly by his son, Irving G. Foat, who is his partner in the business.

It was on March 17, 1891, that B. G. Foat opened a barber shop in the Ole Hedjord block on Main street, Waterford, where the Waterford State Bank now stands, which makes him the veteran barber in the village. He learned his trade of the late “Mike” Best, for many years one of the best known barbers in this vicinity. Mr. Foat proved to be a credit to his teacher; his work gave satisfaction from the first, business increased and in the fall of ‘92 he took Ed. Meany, a Dover boy, into partnership. This partnership continued for three years and was dissolved when Mr. Meany decided to open his own shop in Burlington.

Teaching the trade to others was an important part of the work in the earlier days. Among Mr. Foat’s pupils were Henry Dufenhorst, Dan Bradshaw, James Best (for many years Mr. Best, who was a son of the man of whom Mr. Foat learned the trade, conducted a shop in the village of Rochester. He is now in Madison.) Almir Krakofsky (now in company with Fred Albrecht, operating a shop in Waterford), William Kepke, Max Stoneberg, Roy Alby, Hall Carpenter and Irving Foat, who is now associated with his father in business under the firm name—B. G. Foat & Son.

Six years after Mr. Foat opened his barber shop he bought a lot of Pal-day and night, to carry on the business. The barn on Second street proved too small and a larger one was built by Mr. Foat on the Foat property, large enough to meet the needs of the growing business. The coming of the electric car and the automobile drove out the horse and after fourteen years Foat & Patrick went out of business. The large barn still stands but it is now used for storage.

The second floor of the Foat building was first used for a dance hall, then by the Modern Woodmen as its place of meeting, and later was remodeled into offices and living rooms, occupied at different times by Dr. George Newell, Dr. Swan, Dr. Baird, Dr. M. Huber, and Dr. Violet. At the present time it is unoccupied.

In the great fire of July 2, 1898, when the larger part of the business section of the east side of the village was destroyed, the Foat building, then only a year old, was the only one in two blocks that did not burn. After the fire came the “New Waterford.” An era of building began, new grades were established. The level on Main street was raised and if Mr. Foat was not required to erect a new building on the ashes of the old one, he did have to raise the one he had erected the year before 8 feet and 4 inches in order to be “on the level” with his neighbors.

Music has always had a special interest for Mr. Foat—it was one of his hobbies—vocal as well as instrumental. He not only enjoyed good music but was himself a pianist of
more than ordinary ability and frequently played in public. That was secondary, however, to his success as a vocalist. No musical program was complete in the late '80's or early '90's without a solo by Bert Foat. His "vandevile stunts" were chased with those of professionals. It is therefore not surprising that very early in his career he became identified with the sale of musical instruments and "talking machines" which were fast coming into popularity.

The little dog listening to "His Master's Voice" has held a place in the show window of the Foat store since the Victor was first manufactured. Mr. Foat carried the first disc machine with six inch record, made. The Victor keeps its popularity. It has won its right as it faultlessly reproduces the work of both individual artists and musical organizations. Great artists choose it undoubtedly, because it reigns supreme in the talking machine field. Mr. Foat has himself invented, or "assembled" he says, a talking machine which is the equal, according to competent judges, of anything on the market today. Some day this, too, may be "on the market" and Waterford may become famous as its home.

Interest in the piano naturally led Mr. Foat to add this line to his stock. He has carried on a particularly successful business the last few years in the sale of pianos, player pianos, and the electric player piano. Many of the latter have been installed by Mr. Foat in public halls, movie houses and ice cream parlors in this vicinity.

The Foat Flower Shop (a picture of which is shown on this page together with the Foat business block and the old Foat home) like the music department of the Foat store, is the development of that which was another hobby. From childhood Mr. Foat was interested in flowers. This might have been his inheritance or it might have been environment. "Sally Ann" Foat, as the older residents still speak of Mr. Foat's mother, was passionately fond of flowers and growing plants. Her flower garden was the pride of the village. Today the Foat Flower Shop stands in the midst of what was once that garden—a monument, it might be called, to a mother's memory and her interest in flowers.

This old garden where the greenhouses stand is a part of the land which has been in Mr. Foat's family since territorial days. His great-grandfather, Levi Barnes, one of the two first white men to visit and locate in what is now the village of Waterford, took the land from the government. It was in the fall of 1856 that Mr. Barnes and his son-in-law, Samuel Chapman, reached the west bank of the Fox river after a long day's ride and were so pleased with what they say that they determined then and there to make this their future home. The story goes that they dismounted, wrapped their blankets about them and laid down to sleep. So soundly did they sleep that when morning came they found that stealthy Indians had stolen from their heads the red handkerchiefs which they had tied over them the night before. Mr. Barnes and Mr. Chapman "staked their claims," returned to their eastern homes, and when they came back to the new country soon after, brought their families with them.

Mr. Barnes' possessions, which were almost wholly on the east side of the Fox river, amounted to about six hundred acres at one time. For some of this he paid ten shillings an acre, for some the munificent sum of twelve cents an acre. The Foat and Barnes families are today living on a part of what was once this large tract of land.

The house, now the home of B. G. Foat, was built by Levi Barnes in the late '50's or early '60's. The frame was of tough oak, seasoned with pegs. All lumber used in its construction was taken from the land where the buildings now stand. A huge fireplace, replaced by a modern electric range, occupied one side of the large kitchen and many times Indians slept on the floor in front of the hospitable hearth.

The old home became the property of Hiram Barnes, one of the seven children of Levi Barnes and the one with whom the aged father spent his last days. The other children were, Elmina, who died before the family came to Wisconsin; Harriet, Mrs. Samuel Chapman; Adelise, Mrs. Samuel Russ; Martha, Mrs. Richard Short; Sally, Mrs. Hiram Page; and Alpheus. This pioneer family was of English ancestry. Levi Barnes, one of the forebears, came from England on the Mayflower.

Hiram Barnes, who was the maternal grandfather of B. G. Foat, was the father of three children. Curtis, father of Seymour Barnes, of this village, died of smallpox in the awful epidemic which swept through this little settlement sixty-five years ago, leaving his young wife and infant son. His body, like the bodies of the other victims of the dread disease, was carried by ox team at night to the old cemetery on the outskirts of the village, later moved to the Rochester cemetery, where rests his grandfather, father and other members of the family. Sally Ann, the only daughter, married Daniel Foat. Their entire married life was spent on the home place. They were the parents of Irving Foat, who died several years ago, and B. G. Foat, who has always lived in the old home erected by his great-grandfather Barnes. Many times this old house has been added to and remodeled. It is today a pleasant, modern home.

The other son, George Barnes, is still living. His home is in Axtell, Marshall county, Kansas. Though past eighty years of age, he is professor of violin in Axtell college. He is a veteran of the Civil War and has lived in Kansas many years.

It is at the old home that the last of Mr. Foat's business interests has evolved. He saw that to keep in line with the other progressive towns, needed a greenhouse and in September, 1922, he erected the first unit of his greenhouse. This was soon found to be too small for the rapidly growing business and in March, 1923, another unit was built. These are equipped in an up-to-date manner. A modern system of heating regulates the temperature. It is a pleasant place to visit. In the cold winter months one finds the atmosphere laden with fragrance and beautiful flowers of all varieties.

Mr. Foat also carries a large trade in garden plants, selling cabbage and tomato plants by the hundreds as well as hundreds of plants for summer flower gardens. Many come to the Foat Flower Shop from Milwaukee, Burlington, and other cities for these plants. He also keeps the only sale for garden truck. Eight-five baskets of ripe tomatoes were sold in one day this season. Mr. Foat's location is an exception on concrete roads border two sides of his property. It is near the M. E. R. & L. station and convenient to the business center of the village. The windows of the B. G. Foat store are used to display cut flowers and potted plants. The greenhouses are now filled for the winter trade and are prepared to "Say it With Flowers" for you at any time and on any occasion.

Thus from an interest in music and flowers with modest beginnings, has grown two lines of business which have progressed and expanded until Mr. Foat finds himself the head of two large and reliable business concerns in the community. He firmly established as a Gibraltar of reliability, he sells musical instruments, plants and flowers of quality which he backed with personal guarantee. As a result his word in this section of the country, is final in these matters.