

MONTEVALLO
Main Street
Memories

DELUXE CLEANERS

by Clay Nordan
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The spot on the high bluff overlooking the Farrington Bridge over Shoal Creek on Main Street has been an important center for commerce, government, education, religion, and local society since the early days of settlement in the area. According to "Montevallo, The First One Hundred Years" by Eloise Meroney.

Montevallo's first Masonic Lodge was constructed on this site

in 1848 and the town's first "Calaboose" or jail was located here until it burned in 1873.

Today, this area is dominated by the new Montevallo City Hall and its parking lot. But from the mid-1930's until the early 1970's, **DeLuxe Cleaners** operated out of a narrow metal-clad building that sat where traffic turns in to the city hall today from Main Street. It had a tall black smokestack at the back of the building that belched thick smoke from its coal-fired boiler year-round. Close by was the historic Ward Chapel A.M.E. Church (1872 – present) on West Street behind the building.

Ownership and management of DeLuxe Cleaners was taken over in 1954 by local businessman, Clarence Chism, when he purchased the business from Charlie Crisswell. Mr. Chism had owned Montevallo Cleaners on Middle Street and Mr. Crisswell began his career in the business when he worked for Chism for a few years in the 1940's. Mr. Chism had most recently operated a clothing store on Main Street that he dissolved with the acquisition of DeLuxe.

Advertisements from the period often refer to DeLuxe as "Charlie's Place" or offer "Charlie Sez" enticements to its clientele. After the sale, Crisswell was retained as an employee at DeLuxe and Chism took advantage of his popularity with his ex-



Photograph courtesy of Carey Heatherly & Aldrich Coal Mining Museum

DeLuxe Cleaners provided pick-up and delivery service to customers all over town and had student agents providing the same service to all dormitories on the Alabama College campus.

isting customer base by reassuring them that Charlie was as involved as ever with the care and expert cleaning of their garments.


Clarence Chism continued to own and operate DeLuxe Cleaners until he sold it to a new owner sometime between 1971 and 1973. He died in 1974 at the age of 72. He is buried in the Montevallo City Cemetery.

DeLuxe Cleaners did not last long following the sale and Chism's death. The 1950's era Montevallo City Hall had been pinned in by the cleaners building from the start, squeezed between DeLuxe and the Montevallo Motor Co. (later Victory Automotive) building, so the city took advantage of the opportunity and purchased the property, tore down the building, and began to use the lot for much needed new access and parking.



Mr. Clarence Chism was an active member of the Montevallo Chamber of Commerce for many years and kept this sign posted behind his customer counter at DeLuxe Cleaners.



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MONTEVALLO MAIN STREET MEMORIES is adapted from the series, **THROWBACK THURSDAY**, a **Montevallo Historical Society** and **Montevallo Main Street** partnership started in 2018. Each installment revisits commercial and residential life on Main Street and in the downtown area in the early to mid-twentieth century. The series remains available online and may be viewed at www.historicmontevallo.org under "Local History".