

## East Falls Past – Harry Prime

*The Fallser*, March 2012, by Wendy Moody

Harry Prime, a 92 year old former Falls resident who became a noted big band singer, shared his lively memories of growing up here in a recent oral history interview at Epicure Café. Ironically, as a child, Harry lived above this café at 3401 Conrad, back when it was Clayton's Market. Here's what he remembered about it:



### *Can you describe Clayton's?*

This place was Clayton Brothers Meats & Groceries. One end was the meat department run by Willie Clayton, a little bow-legged guy. He was the nicest of all the Claytons. Harry was taller, wore glasses, and ran the dry goods area – cookies, canned goods. When kids came in with their mothers' grocery lists, they wanted to give it to anyone but Harry because he would say "What's this! I can't read this!" There was always something wrong. But he was a nice old guy, God bless him.

The merchandise was so fresh. There were delivery trucks every day. They went to the wharf for produce two, three times a week. When you came in here for a steak, they'd go into the freezer, carry out a side of beef, put it on the block, take a big saw, cut the fat off, and you'd have a steak this big!

### *Did people from all over Falls use the store?*

Most were lifelong customers from Scots Lane to Ainslie and Tilden. That was the dividing line - you had another class of people on Queen Lane, being from what I call a better background, people of means. It didn't mean they were better people, but they were far more educated and elegant. Friday nights were always busy. They would take orders from people in the Manor on Queen Lane - the new development up there. It was another world but it was good business for Clayton's.

But *this* area was mainly for the blue collar people of East Falls who felt this grocery store was a lot better than any other because everything was so fresh. To make it even more intriguing, they delivered! People ordered by phone - they didn't even know what half of their customers looked like! They stayed open on Friday nights to fill these orders and I mean the floor was covered with boxes... We'd help - we'd pick up a slip and say "This is the Stromeier's order" and help load it up.

### *Were you an employee?*

No, I was a volunteer. I got free cookies and it was something to do on a Friday night besides taunting the guard at the library. We'd listen to the radio as we worked - everybody was a boxing fan in those days, even the Methodists. The hero of the day – the guy everyone talked about - was Joe Louis, the "Brown Bomber."

(We'll share more of Harry Prime's memories next month)