

NARRATIVE TEXTS

Carrie Marcus Neiman, Businesswoman, 1883-1953

In an era when few women worked outside the home, Carrie Marcus took a job as blouse buyer for a Dallas department store. She proved herself to be a conscientious employee and by age 21 had become one of the highest-paid female workers in Dallas. Carrie married a coworker, Abraham Lincoln Neiman, around 1906. Teaming with Carrie's brother, Herbert Marcus, they ran a successful sales promotion campaign in Atlanta, Georgia. With the \$25,000 earnings from this venture, the trio planned their own business enterprise and in 1907 opened the first Neiman Marcus store in Dallas.¹

From the beginning their establishment was billed as "a store of quality and superior values."² It was Carrie's job to convince wealthy patrons that women's ready-to-wear could match the caliber of custom-made clothes. With an intuitive sense of fashion, she insisted upon excellence in craftsmanship and materials. She purchased an initial inventory of fine silks, satins, woolens, and furs, advancing over \$17,000 to New York wholesalers. Her selections sold out within the first month.³ Soon she was making seasonal buying trips to Paris.

During her furloughs in Dallas, Carrie insisted on waiting upon customers herself, offering advice and doing fittings. By her personal actions, she implemented her brother's motto, "It's never a good sale for Neiman Marcus unless it's a good buy for the customer."⁴ Clients looked to her as an exemplar of style. She dressed in understated elegance, typically a black dress with a strand of pearls and two gold bracelets.

In 1928 Carrie divorced her husband, prompting her brother, Herbert, to buy out his share in the business. In 1950 she became chairman of the board. Even in the head position, she frequently interrupted meetings to wait on favorite customers.⁵ Carrie encouraged the company to institute weekly fashion shows, fall fashion expositions, and the annual Neiman Marcus awards for distinguished design.

Gracious and intense, Carrie built the Neiman Marcus reputation for quality and service. For 50 years she set standards of good taste.



Photo

Caption: "Carrie Marcus, c. 1903." Richard C. Marcus for the Marcus Family.

Endnotes

¹ Biographical details in this article are from Ruthe Winegarten and Cathy Schechter, *Deep in the Heart: The Lives and Legends of Texas Jews* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1990), p. 108; Dorothy D. DeMoss, "Neiman, Carrie Marcus," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/NN/fne30.html> (March 30, 2005); and Alan Lee Haworth, "Neiman, Abraham Lincoln," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/NN/fne32.html> (October 14, 2005).

² "Neiman, Carrie Marcus," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

³ Winegarten and Schechter, *Deep in the Heart*, p. 108.

⁴ "Company History," *Neiman Marcus Online*, <http://www.neimanmarcus.com/store/service/nmAbout.jhtml> (October 13, 2005).

⁵ Winegarten and Schechter, *Deep in the Heart*, p. 108.