



# Clarence Saunders and the Founding of Piggly Wiggly: The Rise & Fall of a Memphis Maverick (Landmarks)

*Mike Freeman*

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The grocery business began as a complicated service industry. Random pricing, inconsistent quantities and prescriptive salesmen made grocery shopping burdensome. It took one brash Memphian with uncommon vision and unbridled ambition to change everything. Clarence Saunders worked his way out of poverty and obscurity to found Piggly Wiggly in 1916. With an unprecedented approach, he virtually invented the concept of the modern self-service grocery store. Stores flourished, franchises spread and Saunders made millions. Yet just as the final bricks of Pink Palace--his garish marble mansion--were being laid, Saunders went bankrupt, and he was forced to sell Piggly Wiggly. A variety of new ventures helped Saunders out of bankruptcy, but he never duplicated his prior success. Memphis historian Mike Freeman tracks the remarkable life of this retail visionary.

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