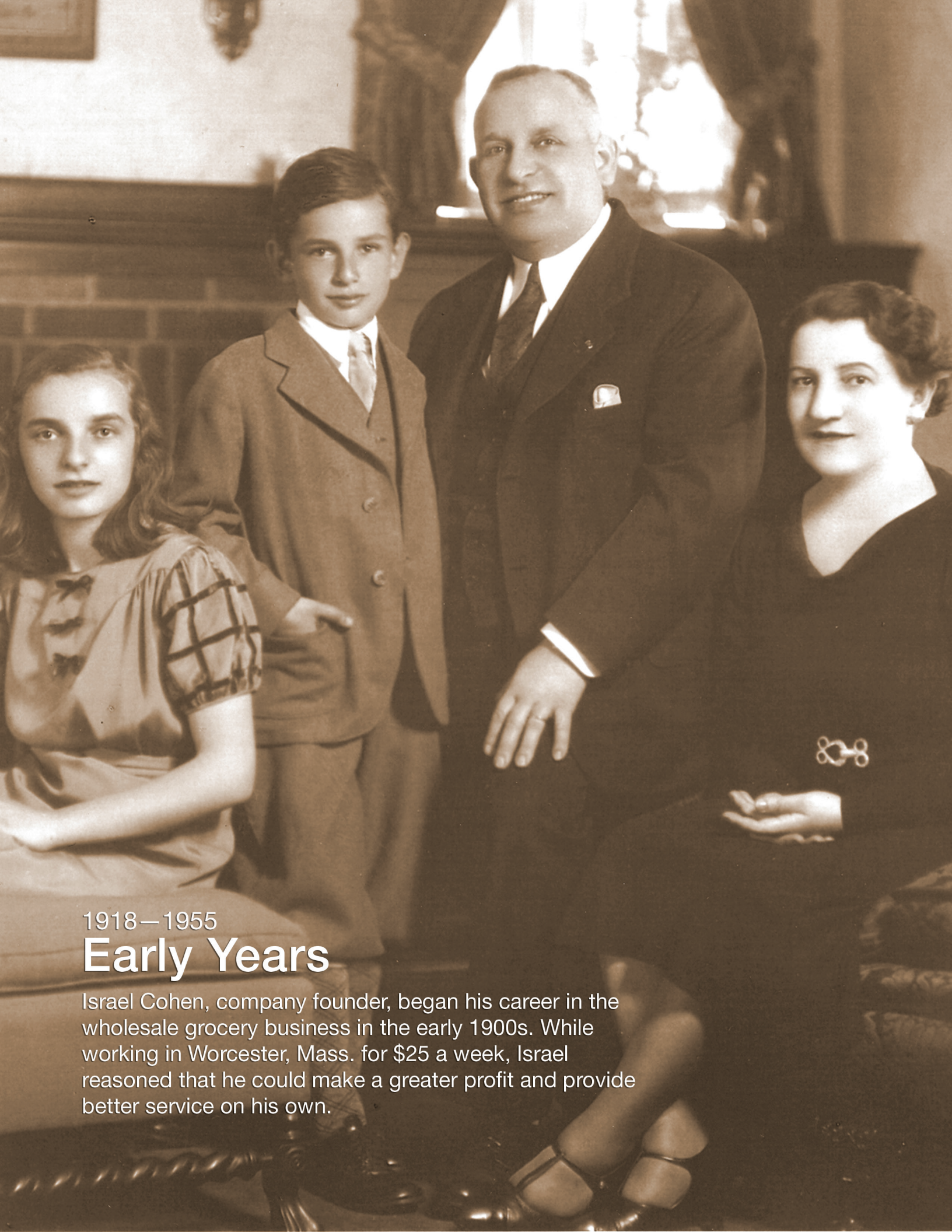




# Our Story

1918—Today



1918—1955

## Early Years

Israel Cohen, company founder, began his career in the wholesale grocery business in the early 1900s. While working in Worcester, Mass. for \$25 a week, Israel reasoned that he could make a greater profit and provide better service on his own.



Together with his business partner, Abraham Siegel, Israel founded C&S Wholesale Grocers in 1918. The company's 5,000-square foot, three-story warehouse facility was located on Winter Street in Worcester and was managed by three warehouse workers who distributed 1,200 grocery products. Competition was fierce in the wholesale grocery industry. Growing urban populations were demanding more from their tiny neighborhood stores, while an economic war was threatening to permanently change food distribution.

Different wholesale companies served many independent grocers, resulting in fragmentation and inefficiency. The average wholesaler worked with hundreds of small retail customers, using multiple copies of buying orders to price, extend credit, bill, select and deliver products. In 1933, for example, United States wholesalers received 12 percent of their orders from retail stores with annual volumes under \$10,000 and 87 percent from stores that averaged \$32,960 in annual sales.

The average gross margin for all wholesale grocers at this time was about 11 percent of wholesale value. Following World War I, independent retailers began to band together, forming cooperatives. These cooperatives increased buying power and gave wholesalers the ability to share large orders and, consequently, benefit from economies of scale.

The traditional structure still challenged management of the wholesale business. During that time, C&S grew through innovation and attention to customer service. The company responded faster to customer needs through more efficient warehouse practices. While concentrating on speed, C&S maintained a tremendous amount of respect for its customers, always willing to help in any way.

Israel Cohen had learned very early that there would be no C&S without the customer. While some wholesalers were more aggressive with their customers, bullying their way into stores and stocking the shelves as they wished, C&S representatives took the time to talk with the clients, listening to their ideas and concerns about stocking, and were polite and professional. Slowly, C&S's customer service reputation spread, increasing not only the number of customers but also company profits.

During World War II, Lester Cohen, Israel's son, served as a B-24 navigator in the Pacific. From this experience, Lester saw an opportunity for C&S to work with the commissaries on military bases. When he returned to the United States after the war, he brokered several U.S. commissary contracts for the company. C&S currently services 19 military bases in the Northeast and 5 in Hawaii.



*Isreal Cohen family*



*Lester Cohen during WWII*



*1918: The first C&S building on Winter Street in Worcester, MA*

1955—1974

## Strength Through Perseverance

In 1955, C&S was a successful, mid-sized wholesale company and was ready for another move—this time to a 35,000-square foot facility on Millbrook Street in Worcester. Lester enjoyed the business and now was working with his father full-time. A born salesman, Lester was soon “pounding the pavement,” calling on 30 small grocers a day and returning to visit each one weekly. He worked hard at sales, and his perseverance paid off; C&S now had more business than ever before. Israel saw that his son had the talent and inventiveness to take C&S to the next level, so he transferred executive power to Lester.

In 1958, C&S’s pivotal moment came when C&S won the Big D supermarket account. This eight-store chain was ahead of its time, an industry leader that signaled C&S’s transition from small independent stores to supermarket chains. When other supermarkets learned that the innovative Big D was working with C&S, they also looked to C&S to service their stores. The company focused on the acquisition of larger supermarket accounts, and its sales soon reached \$2 million. In 1963, after just eight years at the Millbrook Street storage place, C&S needed more warehouse space and moved to a 200,000 square foot facility on Pullman Street, the former home of the famous Pullman train cars.

By the mid-1960s, the role of the wholesaler had dramatically altered. Small retailers began to follow Big D’s lead, opening multiple retail store locations. By the 1970s, many retailers operated 11 or more stores. As these supermarket chains grew, they needed to be located at greater distances from each other to avoid competition for the same customers. As a result of this, many chains consolidated and closed their inefficient and outdated warehouses. This suddenly generated tremendous opportunities for wholesalers to provide buying, warehousing and distribution services to the growing supermarket chains.



*Lester Cohen*



*Early C&S Warehouse*

**1974: C&S annual sales reach \$14 million**

1974—1997

## The Risk Is Worth the Reward

Lester's son, Rick, joined the company in 1974. By this time, C&S had grown to annual sales of \$14 million, but the lack of a modern warehouse facility severely hindered further growth. The Pullman Street warehouse was more than 100 years old and lacked the design structure necessary to satisfy modern food wholesale techniques. Its ceilings were too low and could not efficiently accommodate the growth that C&S hoped to achieve.

C&S now faced a difficult situation. The company needed modern warehouse facilities to serve the large supermarkets, but it required large supermarket contracts to afford these types of facilities. The outdated Pullman Street facility could not service large contracts, so a tough decision had to be made.

Much to his father's surprise, Rick determined that the business must move west. C&S needed a larger location with better access to interstate highways, a good work force and new markets in order to survive in the shrinking wholesale industry. Rick also developed the company's unique strategy of supplying to mostly large supermarket chains.

Today, C&S can provide supplies to a chain at a lower cost than the market could supply itself. To support the new strategy, C&S built a 300,000-square foot warehouse and distribution complex in Brattleboro, Vt. in 1981. The move came at an exciting but challenging time for the company. The new space was 50 percent larger than the Pullman Street location and had been costly to build. Employees were asked to take temporary pay cuts, and everyone worked together to keep the business running. The goal was to reach \$300 million in sales in the next five years, though many doubted that C&S would even survive for two years.

Rick's calculations proved correct. A&P supermarkets, who previously believed that C&S did not have the capacity to meet their needs, were impressed with the new modern Brattleboro facility and soon gave C&S their business. Other large supermarkets, such as Edward's, Waldbaum's and Stop & Shop, quickly followed suit. Earnings rose and employees were soon making even more than they had before the pay cuts.

As warehouse skills grew, C&S ambitiously pursued new clients. During the first 10 years in Vermont, C&S surpassed their \$300 million goal and grew to more than \$1 billion in annual sales. By now, Lester had retired, Rick was the third-generation CEO and the company flourished under his leadership. C&S purchased a 350,000-square foot warehouse in South Hatfield, Mass. in 1993 to accommodate increasing business. That same year, C&S opened one of the largest freezers in the world in Westfield, Mass.



*Rick Cohen, Executive Chairman*



*Chester, N.Y. Facility*



*North Hatfield, Mass. Facility*

**1991: C&S annual sales reach \$1 billion**



1997—Present

## Growth Through Expansion

Toward the end of the 1990s, C&S continued to grow rapidly. In 1997, the company opened a warehouse facility in Newburgh, N.Y. The following year, C&S signed agreements with more supermarkets and added the Woodbridge, N.J. and Aberdeen, M.D. distribution centers. A Harrisburg, Pa. facility joined the family in 2002 and, in 2003, C&S purchased select assets of the former Fleming companies, including warehouses in Hawaii and California.

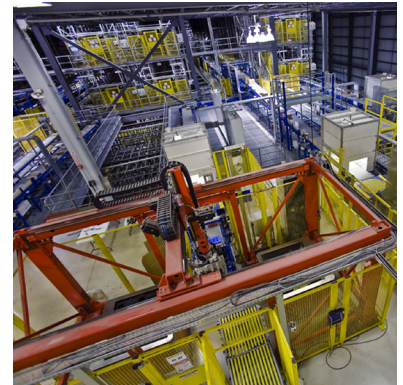
In 2005, C&S added facilities in the Southeast, proudly serving customers from warehouses in South Carolina. In 2014, C&S was awarded the winning bid at bankruptcy auction to purchase nearly all of the assets of Associated Wholesalers, Inc. (AWI), expanding C&S's independent customer base in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York. C&S also completed the purchase of Grocers Supply in Houston, allowing C&S to branch into a new region with diverse consumer needs. Then, in 2015, C&S acquired FreshKO Produce Services, Inc. This expanded C&S's fresh and organic customer base and strengthened C&S's presence in California and throughout other trade areas.

C&S's growth journey continued as it entered the retail market space. In the summer of 2021, C&S acquired Piggly Wiggly® Midwest. Later that year, C&S officially brought 11 iconic Grand Union supermarkets and one beloved Piggly Wiggly back to New York state and Vermont.

Now in 14 states, C&S continues to grow, powered by outstanding employees who deliver best-in-class service for our customers each day. Today, C&S is recognized as a dynamic and progressive leader in the grocery industry.



*Lester & Rick Cohen*



*ES3 Palletizer*

**2018: C&S annual sales reach \$27 billion**