

“Sold on John Wanamaker”

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Wayne minister writes a book on clothing magnate

Tale of a Retailer proves inspirational for Wayne Minister

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Wayne, PA - The way his eyes sparkle and his voice rises with excitement when he talks about his hero, you might think that the Rev. William Allen Zulker is a boy discussing his sports idol.

“He was amazing. He did great things for the Philadelphia area,” he said, leaning forward on the edge of his seat, wearing a broad smile.

Mr. Zulker, 67, a minister and educator who lives in Wayne, is full of contagious energy and enthusiasm as he talks about Philadelphia clothing magnate John Wanamaker-his hero.

He took his admiration of Wanamaker to the highest level by writing a book about the clothing merchant. His promotional tour will make a stop at Encore Books in Wayne from 2 to 4 p.m. March 5.

“I was very inspired by his life of integrity, honesty, and public service,” Mr. Zulker said of his subject. Now, he hopes his book, *John Wanamaker: King of Merchants*, will inspire others.

That wasn't the original plan.

Mr. Zulker was pursuing his master's degree in library science at Villanova University in 1988 when he got the chance to organize a collection of Wanamaker memorabilia for the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

“Wanamaker had been a hero of mine for many years, and I loved working on the exhibit,” he said. The idea was that Mr. Zulker's work at the historical society would count toward completion of his degree.

As it turned out, he got so consumed with the exhibit and writing the book that he never completed the degree. Nevertheless, Mr. Zulker said he loved writing the book and the sense of accomplishment from publishing it.

Besides, he has spent enough time in academe.

With diplomas from Eastern College and Temple and Villanova Universities, in everything from sacred theology to education, Mr. Zulker has learned plenty. He also spent 30 years at Eastern College-as dean of admissions, financial-aid director and assistant to the president.

He retired in 1990 to write the book, which seemed appropriate, given his connection with Wanamaker, although the two never met.

Between 1953 and 1960, Mr. Zulker was a pastor at Bethany Temple in West Philadelphia. Although he was not a minister, Wanamaker founded Bethany Temple and three other churches, all Presbyterian, between 1858 and 1906.

The first church, which Wanamaker started three years before opening his store, was Bethany Presbyterian at 27th and Bainbridge Streets. In 1948, that church moved to Havertown, where it is known today as Bethany Collegiate Presbyterian.

While pastor of Bethany Temple, Mr. Zulker said he learned a great deal about its founder. Wanamaker became his hero.

“What impressed me was that he was a successful businessman who implemented his faith into daily life,” he said. “It’s refreshing to see someone who practiced their principles.”

Wanamaker’s principles included a strong faith in God and a sense of fairness for his employees and customers. He instituted many retail firsts that are commonplace today, Mr. Zulker said.

Wanamaker’s was the first store to open a restaurant, to sell Paris fashions to use electricity, to offer a “White Sale,” to close on New Year’s Day and to have the public singing of Christmas carols.

He also pioneered other practices. He started an art gallery, founded a school to teach young employees, offered two weeks’ free vacation at his camp at Barnegat Bay, N.J., and opened an athletic field on the roof of the store so the employees could stay in shape.

Wanamaker was a busy man who remained actively involved in his community right up to his death in 1922 at the age of 84.

Having been a pastor, an educator, and an author, Mr. Zulker seems to be emulating his hero's active lifestyle. He even became a publisher to publish the book, founding Eaglecrest Press and hiring a proofreader, a cover designer, and a printing company.

The book can be found at Encore Books, Borders Book Shop and Barnes & Noble. Mr. Zulker is doing a speaking tour to promote his book and is a guest speaker at churches about 35 Sundays each year.

So what's next? Another book? A return to academia?

"No way," he said. "Unlike Wanamaker, I want to slow down."