



Katherine Ryan . . . displays the glassware at Ryan's Junketeria.

# Junk pushers

by Michael Border

By another name, a junk shop is a repository for memories. On entering, one may not immediately discern that any of the objects have had meaning to someone. But, upon inspection one wonders who owned that now-dusty portrait of a little girl. Or whose initials are on the back of a fancy gold pocketwatch or on the inside of a wedding band.

In his own words "a junk dealer-hobbyist," Floyd Mehan may be found sitting amid a vast number of ancient and recent relics. He estimates there are 10,000 items in the two shops which he and his wife Rachel run.

Between puffs on his pipe he recalled a long list of articles which both of the Mehan's have handled since she opened Rachel's Used Clothing, 16 years ago, in a house at 1945 R St.

Mehan said the most frequent purchases by college students are cheap furniture and cooking utensils.

Rachel Mehan originally rented the old house for a month to sell some things which she no longer wanted. Rather than closing, her venture expanded seven years ago, to the house next door at 1943 R St.

It isn't hard to spot Floyd's. The front yard is filled with large charred cauldrons, a railroad pushcart, old chairs and many weatherbeaten objects.

He said he doesn't like to buy things from people

he doesn't know. They must sign a police record book in case the articles are stolen.

"If it's hot don't sign the book," he said he tells them, and he added that if they refuse to sign, he declines to buy their goods.

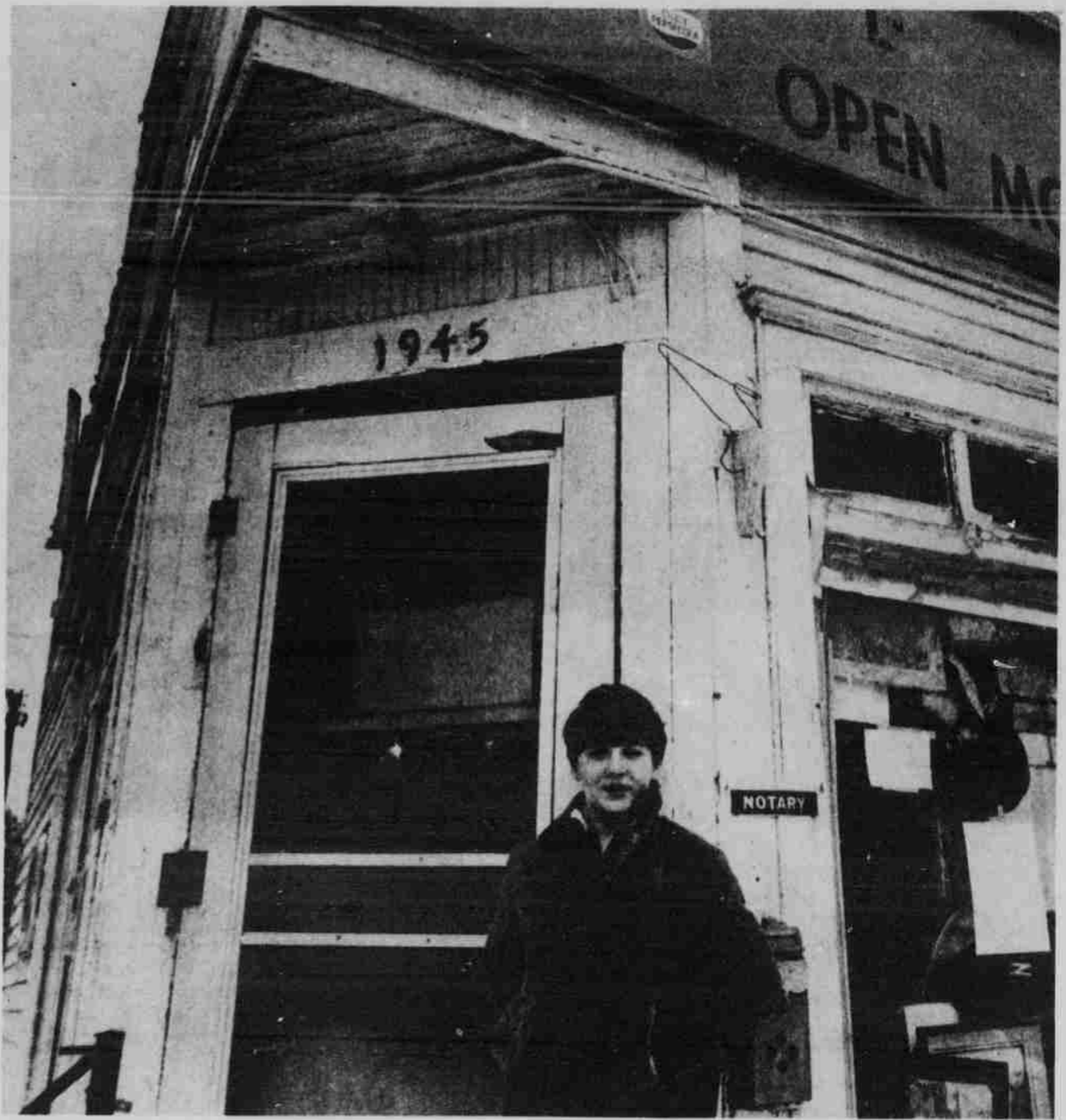
"I don't want to get anyone in trouble."

Mehan said he never has handled a stolen article.

Because he doesn't make his living selling the objects in his shop, he marks his goods up 15 per cent, he said. He added that he lives on income from an auto glass company that he owns.



Ryan's Junketeria at 1945 Q St., is owned by Katherine Ryan, a slight woman in her seventies and a widow of some 30 years. Her silvery hair is pulled back into a pony-tail and her conversation is punctuated with many a "honey." She told of the many things which have been stolen from her shop since she opened in 1922.



Son of the owners . . . Steve stands in front of the Meehan shop.

She also predicted that carnival glass, valued for its rainbow hue and comprising part of her wares, will come into its own again. Her shop, in a small square room in a frame house, exhibits the many sets and partial sets of dishware which she sells. She has a multitude of salt and pepper shakers in a case with glass doors. She said storing them in the case is necessary because of shoplifters.

She doesn't mix with other dealers because she knows "a lot of good ones, and some bad." She said her markup is 20 per cent.

Ms. Mehan and Ryan both said that they obtain many of their articles from the children of recently deceased parents.

Mehan said he knows some people have parted with cherished personal belongings because they need money. It makes him angry, he added, when he hears of someone buying something from an old person for its antique value, for much less than it is worth. He said this sometimes happens when one marriage partner dies and the other is forced to move to a rest home or apartment.

"No one with a conscience would do that," he said.

In some cases though, the strength of a cherished memory gives way to economic value.



Rachel Mehan . . . in business 16 years.