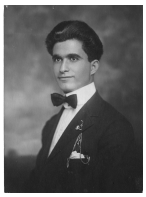

Augustus Nickolas Bartis (March 15, 1894—January 17, 1956)

Augustus Nickolas Bartis, his older brother, and their sister were among the millions of East European immigrants who came to America in the early twentieth century seeking a better life. Born in Greece, he was only sixteen years old when he and his brother Komos passed through Ellis Island in 1910. They lived for awhile with their sister Bessie in Elmira, New York. Gus, as he was always known, worked in several restaurants in New York City and North Carolina before moving to Mebane in the early 1930s, where he and his wife Katie settled and spent the rest of their lives.

With only $200 in their pockets and the Depression in full bloom, Gus and Katie opened the popular City Cafe near the corner of Center and Fourth Street and ran it for several years, working long hours six days a week. Gus later ran the little town's bus station on Center Street, then a billiards parlor where Rice's Jewelry is today. As his business grew, he moved to a larger new building on West Highway 70 and worked there until his deteriorating health forced him to retire.

Gus never forgot his impoverished background in Greece and the many people who helped him along the way to his successful career in Mebane. After Katie's father died in 1930, he and Katie took in and reared her six brothers and sisters to keep them from having to enter an orphanage. Throughout his long restaurant career in Mebane, and especially during the hard times of the Depression and World War II years, he often gave food and clothing to his employees and to needy townspeople, including some professional men. He was also known for helping people find jobs and for paying the bail for people jailed for minor infractions of the law. Reared in the Greek Orthodox Church, he was an active member of the Mebane Methodist Church for most of his years in Mebane.

Gus Bartis found the better life he was looking for in Mebane, and he was one of many newcomers who helped make “the biggest little town on earth” a better place.