The Robert Runyon photo triggers a lot of memories. He would periodically come to the Harlingen area from his Brownsville home in order to visually document the community. Many of his more notable Harlingen pictures were taken in 1912, 1915, and for his photograph of the west side of North Commerce Street likely in 1924.

Starting from the left of the photograph we see a side door to the Ewing and Phillips Hardware Store, later to become Harlingen Hardware. It was in the year 1912 that F. Finley Ewing of Ballinger, Runnels County, TX came to San Benito. After four years there he worked for the government in border construction projects. Then, in 1919, he comes to Harlingen to enter the hardware business as half-owner of Ewing and Phillips Hardware Company, Inc at the northwest corner of Commerce and Jackson. Later he is president of the Peoples Gin Company. By 1929 he is president of the Harlingen Development Company. This is the relic of the original townsite company which was acquired by local interests from foreign capitalists in 1924. At this time in the original townsite there are 1000 building lots left which this company owns and controls. He is elected Mayor on 4/6/26 and serves until 1928. His term is remembered as one with great progress for the city. His partner, Frank T. Phillips, commuted from his San Benito home and the hardware store which he owned there. By 1931 and for or at least six years the hardware company that occupies the premise goes by the name Rio Grande Hardware and Machinery Company then in 1936 becomes Harlingen Hardware. Harriette Armacost, whose family was long-time owner of Harlingen Hardware and who herself was a familiar face in the store before it was sold several years ago to Broadway Hardware, claims both Phillips and Ewing as ancestors. In its very early days the hardware store building housed the Eastern Seed Company owned by Grady C. Clark, Sr. of Corpus Christi.* When it closed, its 25' frontage was incorporated into the hardware store.

The next office is that of the Western Union Company. Before the days of reliable long-distance telephone communications, it was this company which served through its telegraph and telegram home delivery system nationwide to connect businesses and families, the latter usually in times of emergencies or to impart special news. Its 20 foot frontage and 25' depth was later absorbed by the Rhone Feed Store.

J.W. Rhone's feed and seed store is the predecessor to Jackson's. Coming from Winnsboro, TX, James Rhone was a pillar in the successful establishment of the (First) Christian Church here. About the time the photo is taken he will be serving as a City Commissioner for a two year term. Sharp readers will notice that the Rhone building has but a single story. It is only after a 1948 or so fire in the premise that the now existing second story was added. In 1937, twelve years after selling his business here, Rhone will own and operate Rhone's Man's Store in Raymondville. This is after he tried his hand at a
men's clothing store in Wichita, KS. Rhone, owner of considerable property, was badly hurt by the 1930s depression. This Floresville, TX native is to die in 1975 survived by a son, Louis.

It is in 1925 that Fred G. Jackson takes up Rhone's seed and feed business at 119 N. Commerce and in 1926 sets up Jackson Wholesale Grocery Co. at 101 E. Polk. He is a native of Delta County, TX, has attended E. Texas Normal School College in Commerce, was for a time bookkeeper for an oil mill, a cashier at a bank in Enloe, and manager of the Security State Bank of Cooper, TX before coming here. For a time Jackson's son William Harold Jackson, Sr. is store manager. Later F.G. will bring Harold's twin bother Darold into the operations then daughter Freddie, but daughter Mary Frances apparently has other interests. Still later Jackson will give all the corporate stock to William (still alive in 4/04 at age 90 and living in Plano, TX), his twin, and daughter Freddie Jackson McEver. In 2002 they were to sell it to a syndicated real estate group. Mr. Jackson's wife Myrtle will die on 7/29/77 at age 84, and he will outlive her by a decade, dying at age 95 on 2/10/87. The original Rhone store had a 30' frontage and 94' depth. Behind the store was a 50' by 25' sheet metal building where Rhone's employees put together tomato crates. At the time tomatoes were shipped red ripe in four-basket flat crates made by the Cummer Graham Co. of Paris, TX. Each tomato was hand-wrapped in special tomato paper tissue.

Next in line is the Lockridge Millinery Store. Millinery is an old word meaning women's headwear, hats and notions. This store was short-lived and had disappeared by 1930. Before this 75" section was absorbed by Jackson, it had a Chrysler agency for a time.

Adjacent to it one can barely make out Edelstein's Furniture Store. What gives it away is the familiar logo and font of its sign. The style of the logo has remained unchanged for over 75 years. By 1930 Edelstein's will have moved to 217 W. Jackson and still later to larger quarters across the street at 230 W. Jackson. Over time Jackson's store will grow and encompass the old Western Union premise along with the Lockridge and the Edelstein ones to the north.

Last in line in the photo is the R. Fulton Jones Warehouse. It was in 1920 that Fulton Jones came to town. His first business is delivering ice. Two years later he starts the Fulton Jones Moving and Storage Co. when he purchases a truck with solid rubber wheels. He soon will needed larger facilities so moves to one in the 1000 block of West Harrison. He may have constructed it in 1926 but in any case is there by 1930. Allen Trucking then occupies the old building. Jones' drayage business becomes Valley-wide, and he uses the names Jones Motor Freight lines and Jones Transfer and Storage Co. for his businesses. As the Harlingen area becomes more congested and additional space is required, the now Jones Moving and Storage Co. builds a warehouse facility at 2404 Wilson Road. Living at 320 Pecan, McAllen in his later years, he dies at age 65 on 12/16/62 leaving his wife Ottie and brother George of McAllen. This Church of Christ member left no children.
Between Edelstein's and the next building a barely discernable object is what looks like a Texas Company (later to be Texaco) gas pump with its star logo atop in the lighted portion. Whether this serves the public or is for use by the Jones Company only is not known.

Beyond the photo's lens was the Crown Willmont Paper Co. with its brick structure having 150' of frontage. To its north lay Winkler's Harlingen Bottling Company.

It is obvious that this short stretch of North Commerce Street encompasses a great deal of Harlingen history. We can be thankful to Runyon for recording it for posterity.

* On March 1, 2006 the following information was volunteered: My family owned the Eastern Seed Company (later renamed ESCO Distributors, Inc. in 1968) for 75 years. We had a large wholesale warehouse (32,000 sq. ft.) in Pharr, Texas (right off 83 W. Expressway). Our "wholesale only" field and vegetable seed plus lawn and garden products business had grown to seven wholesale branch locations throughout Texas. We employed 169 people and had gross revenues of $37 million at the time of the sale. We sold our family-owned wholesale business in 1994 to a publicly traded national corporation, Central Garden and Pet corporation (NASDAQ symbol: CENT). My paternal grandfather, Grady C. Clark, Sr. started his seed business in 1918 here in Corpus Christi, TX. 
Signed Curtis R(ay) Clark, who added "I'm proudly named after both my grandfathers."