

## THE OLD GENERAL STORE

Many of the stores were typical of an era when packaged goods were unknown and germs unsuspected. Boxes and barrels stood open to dust and flies or whatever else might gravitate towards them. The passage ways were crowded with barrels containing flour, sugar, syrup, molasses, soda crackers and fancy biscuits...these would often become broken and you could buy the damaged ones at a reduced rate but a lot of the broken ones were handed out as a treat to small children while parents shopped for other household goods, which were many and varied.

We are thinking in terms of the General Store in a rural community which was mostly patronized by farmers both active and retired. Trading in butter and eggs was carried out extensively. Some people in those days, as in this day, were noted for their pride in quality. The store keeper could depend on the eggs being fresh and the butter sweet and tasty. It would be a common thing to hear a shopper ask "Have you any of Mrs. Smith's eggs in?" or "Mrs. Jones' butter". Then there was the other small majority who would trade anything they could get away with. There was the odd hatching of eggs that didn't hatch..they found their way along with the good ones or the nest that was found in the hayloft. The butter that was made from cream not cared for...this could be sold for axle grease.

The storekeeper had his problems but as his business was with the public, he learned to cope with it or them. Do you remember when there was no refrigeration? No fresh vegetables and the only lettuce we tasted was what we grew in the garden a few weeks in the summer? I still think the big bowl of lettuce, onions, sour cream, vinegar and sugar was a tasty dish. Do you remember when Mrs. Egan brought her first basket of tomatoes to the store? They specialized in the most delicious early tomatoes, but you had to be a good customer to get some of these. Then the stocks of bananas hanging on a hook..these were sold by the dozen and we all wanted a dozen of the big ones, however the storekeeper had to get rid of the smaller ones too, so he drew your attention to something in the store while he slipped a few in the bag with the large. Then in the wintertime the old box-stove was fired and a few chairs put around to sit on. This then became a place of planning, story telling, gossip or what-have-you where men gather. I think of the two elderly gentlemen who were neighbors and very close friends but whose politics differed, so about three weeks before an election and three weeks after, they sat on opposite sides of the stove and didn't speak to each other. I think of the words of Emerson "Procure not friends in haste and when thou hast a friend, part not with him in haste".

When the hunters came home, the close calls they told of were hair-raising and no place was so opportune as around the old stove with a male audience to listen and take in every detail. There there was the store across the street with no place for shoppers to sit but they did sell delicious roasted peanuts from 50 lb. sacks. These were bought in large quantities and taken back to eat around the box stove. The shells did not always find their mark so when everyone had left for home the storekeeper had to sweep up the shells of his competitor.

Do you remember when we got our first commercial ice cream. Before that it was made at home in hand-turned freezers but just a few people had access to ice. I recall the first ice-cream parlor, fixed up near in one corner of the general store. What a delight to sit with one of our friends or family and enjoy a delicious banana split. This was on a saturday night, as that was the night most people came to town and the one night ice-cream

was available.

As spring approached, the farmers had loyalties to various places for rest and conversation. The most popular was the blacksmith shop next door, where they could sit on a bench in the sun. However, when the ladies came to town, their interest was on the window of the General Store, where displays of coal-oil stoves in various sizes took their eye...you could see the longing look in their gaze and could almost read their thoughts. "Oh dear wouldn't it be nice not to have to cook in the heat of the summer over that old wood stove. How I would like one of these new stoves".

We have come a long way in our living habits since those days, however this town still boasts a fine general store, where one can buy almost anything. The stove has long since gone. The gatherings have moved to various places. T.V. has played a big part in breaking up the old gang. We are so organized we have little time to sit and chat. It would be nice to have a club room for senior citizens where they could enjoy the pleasures of their day and age. Some towns have them. Maybe we are too small. Older folk get the feeling they are in the way and stay close to home where loneliness overcomes them, especially the men folk.

True happiness consists not in a multitude of friends. But in their worth and choice.

He who has many friends  
Has never one to spare  
And he who has one enemy  
Will meet him everywhere.

*Mrs. Davis*