

This is the time of the year when clanging and chiming church bells in countless tall towers in countless lands, toll the sweetest story ever told, the birthday of the Christ Child. This is the time when thoughts and deeds of Christmas fill the air, when in some lands singing minstrels and church chorusters sing on street corners and brass bands serenade; the time when the tightest "Scrooges" loosen the purse string to help less fortunates; the time when pleasant odors from the big turkey and the steaming pudding permeate the home for the family dinner. It is the best time of the year for young and old.

What a big part the old country store played in the hearts and minds of boys, girls and grown ups in yesteryears! The usual large stock was supplemented at Christmas time. Fresh molasses, a huge cake of cheese on the counter, sometimes covered with gauze and sometimes not, and stuck in the cheese a huge knife which was as sharp as a razor. Once in awhile the storekeeper cut off a piece for a customer to taste and this "dodge" always paid off well for the merchant.

Then there was the big cake of dates, sticky but, mighty good. The slabs of pork and big fat homemade sausage always were tempting. The barrel of molasses was close by and at times the cider sold well.

The old time storekeeper was actually a merchant prince and the conglomeration of good things to eat and home spun clothes to wear could be found in abundance and there was everything for dad and his lad and for the "Missus and her Miss." Calico and gingham by the web and bolt, blinds for the parlour and blinders for the horse, saddles for the pony and staves for the corsetted female, oil for the stable lanterns and kerosene for the lamps, long gaiters for women and tall boots for the males, twine for the farmer and string for the kites.

The old country store sold chewing gum to the kids and tobacco in plugs to the men. The aisles were spilled over by kegs of nails, boxes of soap and stacks of colorful dishes which would bring a fortune today. Another article quite plentiful, but as scarce as a 'hen's tooth' today, happened to be the four inch, four sided cut-nail with the square head, an article now a collector's,

item. Hanging from the ceiling there was a beautiful lamp with a large brightly painted shade, also valued as an antique today. In this store of by gone days there was usually a large horse collar and a horse blanket.

Patriotism to King and country was at times evidenced by a picture of Good Queen Victoria and later on by one of Colonel Sam Hughes and still in later years three colored pictures of Sir Sam could be found in the majority of stores and farm homes, especially if they were Tories and this breed seemed to predominate.

The old general store in the country had been gradually disappearing, the store where farmers and others sat on long benches in front of the store waiting for their spouses to come out and if the females were taking a longer time than usual, the men might be found guzzling frothy beer in the hotel close by for be it known every village had one or two hotels and beer was cheap. It is reported that many a time the friendly storekeeper loaded the farmer and his parcels in the wagon or cutter, tied the leather lines around the dash board and started the horse, or team down the right road and the animals invariably landed the precious cargo at the rear kitchen door.

Farmers, their wives and family members, were possibly more neighborly in the old days than in these modern times. There was not the radio and TV but the family organ, the accordion, the mouth organ and the fiddle and they were always in demand, especially Sunday nights when it was the custom to gather in different homes to sing songs that were secular and religious hymns. The farmers and their families could sing well and always there were basses tenors, altos and sopranos.

"Believe it or not," as Ripley was famous for saying there was a very friendly, hospitable and fine life among farmers and their families in the golden, olden days.

Back to the general store. It was a gathering place where friends met to buy from a kind and friendly storekeeper. The keeper of the store was a veritable walking encyclopedia and he generally could talk politics, tell the price of wheat and predict the weather by turning the pages in Dr. Chase's Almanac. He trusted the farmer, sold goods on credit and then waited for the farmers to have bountiful harvests so they could pay their

bills. Farmers were trustworthy and paid when they could, according to one former country storekeeper. "Most of them attended Church regularly and many of them attended their chosen fraternal Lodge. They worked long, hard hours and the women folk were always hard-working and wonderul help to their husbands, raised fine families and were staunch and loyal people."

Among the country stores which have been in business through the years is the old Sinclair store at Glenarm, the Burns store at Janetville, the Coulson store at Valentia, the old Laidley store at Dunsford, the Mercantile at Woodville, Neall at Victoria Road, Vandyke at Cambray, Hewie at Cameron, Red and White at Little Britain, and the larger stores at Coboconk, like Shields and the LeCraw stores at Norland, Carnegie at Omeemee as well as the fine stores at Downeyville, Bobcaygeon,

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Fenelon Falls, Kinmount, Manilla, Lorneville and other centers.