

Remember when ....

Sunday Sept. 13, 1992

## Personal touch really counted

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stroyed.

When glycerin was taken out of the tobacco in cigarettes, Marner placed a glass of water in the case with the cigarettes, to keep them from drying out. If a customer got a bad pack, the tobacco dried so quickly it fell out while the cigarette was still in its container.

Marner recalls in the '30s five cigarettes sold for five cents. At Christmas people bought "flat 50s" (a package of 50 cigarettes in a flat, tin container) and gave them as gifts to the mail man or milk man.

"That was their year's tip," he says.

Other Christmas specials included mincemeat and ginger bread that Frances made and sold in the store. Customers baked their own cakes with it at home.

On Good Friday the store stayed open until noon to allow patrons to buy hot cross buns made in Dicken's Tea Room

and shipped to the store.

"They all sold that morning. That was the one time of the year you had hot cross buns."

Being near to Belleville Vocational Institute, the store had plenty of teenaged customers, who, in the late '40s and

an itemized list with their bill.

However, not all store owners were as trustworthy. One gimmick Marner heard of was to place a broom near the cash register and then charge the customer more than the correct amount. If the person checked their bill and complained, the man said, "Oh, I thought that broom was yours." They would sell the same broom five or six times a day, he says.

After closing their store in 1984 the Marners converted the space into their living room. A hook used for hanging bananas on (bought in large bundles standing three feet high) now holds a hanging plant. The store's door handles have been mounted on wood and make good bookends. A portion of the maple top counter that saw money and goods exchanged over it for nearly a century, sits in their kitchen and the wooden drawer used as a cash register is still below that counter.

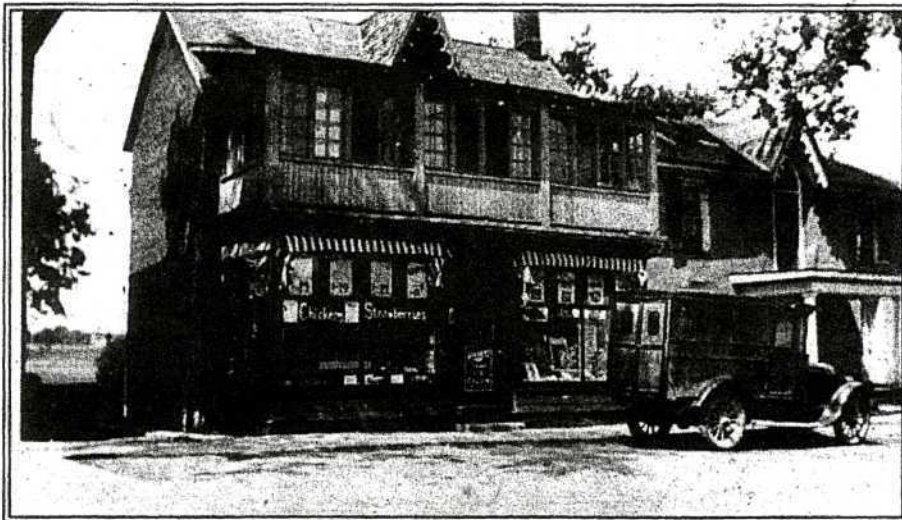
*'There were as many ways to beat the ration as there were ration tickets.'*

early '50s, were allowed to put things on the "chit list" or on account. Adults did this regularly, paying their accounts weekly, monthly or, with some, "when you caught them."

A half dozen customers were so trusting of Marner that they told him not to bother sending



Wally and Frances Marner in the doorway of their store, upon retiring in 1984. Belleville's city directory shows the store opening about 1911 under a different name. The store was built first, with the house being added later. When the Marners retired, they converted it into part of their home. They knew their customers by name and put items on account for many.



Wright's Food Market opened in 1931 at 84 W. Moira St., Belleville.

Hastings County Historical Society