

Family business ends after 90 years

At 3 p.m. Friday, Walter Johnston of Cape Croker walked into the Purple Valley General Store and made a purchase.

There was nothing extraordinary in that, except he earned the distinction of being the last customer of a family who operated the store for almost 90 years.

An auction sale Saturday cleaned out the remaining stock. Gordon Gilbert, owner of the store said he just "Couldn't compete with the chain stores," adding that he had to pay more to the wholesalers than what he could buy the goods for in stores in Wiarton.

He stated he would sell the store if he could get a severance.

The auction was a sad event for some. Faces reflected the memories of a different time when the general store was a very viable and important part of the community.

At one time, the store was a popular meeting place. A place to take a break after a hard day of chores and talk over the latest in politics or weather.

It was also a very important necessity to the communities of Purple Valley and Cape Croker. When winter storms would isolate Cape Croker, many emergency trips by sleigh and horses and sometimes by foot, brought in supplies from the store.

But with the advent of good roads and faster cars, people began to do more shopping in the larger centres. However, the General Store remained a popular spot where you could get a quart of milk or loaf of

bread or just talk with the proprietors.

The general store at Purple Valley was first built before 1890 by Mr. and Mrs. Antoine Charbonneau. The original capital was one hundred dollars. In 1980 Mr. Charbonneau died from a heart attack while attending a political meeting held in the school house.

Around the turn of the century, she married Mr. Malcolm McMillan. By this

time the business had prospered and a new building was erected on its present site.

Except for a few years when the store was rented by Mr. Percy Trout, Mrs. McMillan ran it until 1913. She then rented it to her daughter and son-in-law, Margaret and Chas. Gilbert. Mr. Gilbert died in 1964 and following the death of Margaret in 1968, her son Gordon took over the store.

There is no doubt the general store is going to be missed in the community.



The original store.



The auction sale Saturday marked an end to a 90 year family business.