

Are you in the market for a bundle of corset laces, or for wick for oil lamps by the yard? How about some brand new canvas for your grain binder or even a couple of those three-foot wide wooden forks, "barley forks", as you sometimes find in antique shops?

You can get all that and much more at the Neilson General Store in Stella, on Amherst Island. And it is not classed as antiques there, but simply as stock that has not sold too well in the last few decades.

The Neilson store changed hands last week, ending a 108 year career of the Neilson family as caterers to the needs of the 400 some islanders. That career started in 1865, when James Silman Neilson came over from Sandhurst to go in partnership with a Mr. Polly, who operated a store on the island already. In 1873 Mr. Neilson started running his own store and in 1883 he moved into the large id roomy building where the store is still located.

Frederick Neilson, nearly 72, but easily mistaken for 20 years younger, decided to sell the store when he had some health problems a couple of years ago. His only son, Jim, tried working in the store for a year when he was a teenager, but he did not like it. He is now an island dairy farmer.

Mr. Neilson is closing a personal career of 55 years, which began when he entered the store as a helper in 1918. His father had died a couple of years earlier, and his older brother Rodney had taken over management of the store in the employ of the boys' mother, who was the official owner.

In those early years the Neilsons did not only handle household goods. They handled large quantities of malting barley, for which the island was famous, and later, when the farmers had mostly switched to livestock farming, they set up a feed mill, grinding and selling up to 600 tons of feed per year.

They had their own wharf and docking facilities, right on the property. To keep the islanders in fuel during the winter, the Neilsons bought, stored and sold up to 600 tons of coal per year as well. And for 95 years the island's postoffice was located in

the general store. To make his spare time useful, Fred Neilson went out to see farmers and buy their finished hogs, calves and poultry, which he would sell again on the mainland.

But most of that is memories now. The dock and wharf have not been used in years, the chopping mill has been sold some 15 years ago, and the postoffice moved out after Rodney Neilson died. The business has been concentrating on household goods in the last few years.

Like most small general stores the Neilson business carried a wide variety of goods in addition to the strange old items still in stock from years past. There is a good assortment of veterinary supplies for farmers and there is a walk in cooler for meat and a good choice of just about anything you might need in a normal household.

Near the well-worn carving block where Mr. Neilson cuts the meat is a display table containing an array of articles without any visible attempt at categorizing. There are hammers, packages of pizza mix, toilet paper, fence pliers, breakfast cereals, light bulbs, dried mashed potatoes, toilet bowl cleaner, a tool designed to hold a cow by the nostrils, bananas and disposable diapers.

And business appears surprisingly good for a country general store. Not only Mr. Neilson works there, Maurice Hogeboom has been in Neilsons' employ for a full 43 years. Mrs. Wemp, there since 1967, completes the staff.

Fred Neilson used to play a lot of hockey. During parts of 1918 and 1919 he attended the Kingston Collegiate, but he says it was more for the hockey than for the education that he travelled to Kingston. He gave up serious hockey in 1945, but last winter his grandson coaxed Mr. Neilson into a game on the ice in the harbor. For grandfather it was a disappointment; he could not keep up any more.

He has watched the recent games on television closely, and will enter into a lively discussion on why Montreal should not have won the Stanley Cup any time you give him an opening. He admits to have had "dismal

hopes that Boston would win the Cup", and he feels that the Montreal team is too packed with talented players to give the other teams a decent chance in the play-offs.

In addition to all the work in the business Mr. Neilson found time for a second career. He has been involved in township and other politics ever since he first worked in the campaign for the elections of 1923. He has not missed an election since.

He does not leave much doubt about where his party affiliation is. He readily informs people who discuss the bubble system which keeps an ice-free

path for the ferry during winter months that the system runs on surplus hot air from the Progressive Conservatives in Toronto. He considers Flora (MacDonald MP) as phoney as a \$3 bill and he says the present reeve of Amherst Island is a "blankety-blank dirty Tory".

In 1935 he was chosen as township councillor and in 1938 he fell heir to the position of reeve of the township, when the incumbent reeve suddenly died. Mr. Neilson held on to the post until 1945, acting as Amherst Island representative on the schoolboard as well. In the early 1950's he took over the position

of township treasurer, when his brother Rodney retired from that job. Mr. Neilson remained treasurer until two years ago.

He is still active at election times. During the most recent election day he travelled around armed with a 40 ounce bottle of rum, which he would use "guardedly" on some of the voters. He did not use quite as much care in his own consumption of the persuader, resulting in two minor accidents involving bumpers of other peoples' cars. Mr. Neilson thinks maybe that was his last election as an active vote getter.

He recalls that prior to the

1930s the riding of Kingston and the Islands would always return a Progressive Conservative to Parliament. "For years any collie dog could get elected in Kingston, as long as he used the same hydrant as John A. MacDonald's dog," he claims. All that changed when from the thirties on only Liberals were elected in the riding, right up until the victory of Flora MacDonald.

Now that Fred Neilson is retiring he has not specific plans. He would like to do some travelling, but apart from going to see some relatives in the West, there is no particular place he

would rather go than Amherst Island.

"They say I will be going crazy when I retire," he says. "But I am planning to have some fun going that way."