

HISTORICAL STORES IN DELTA

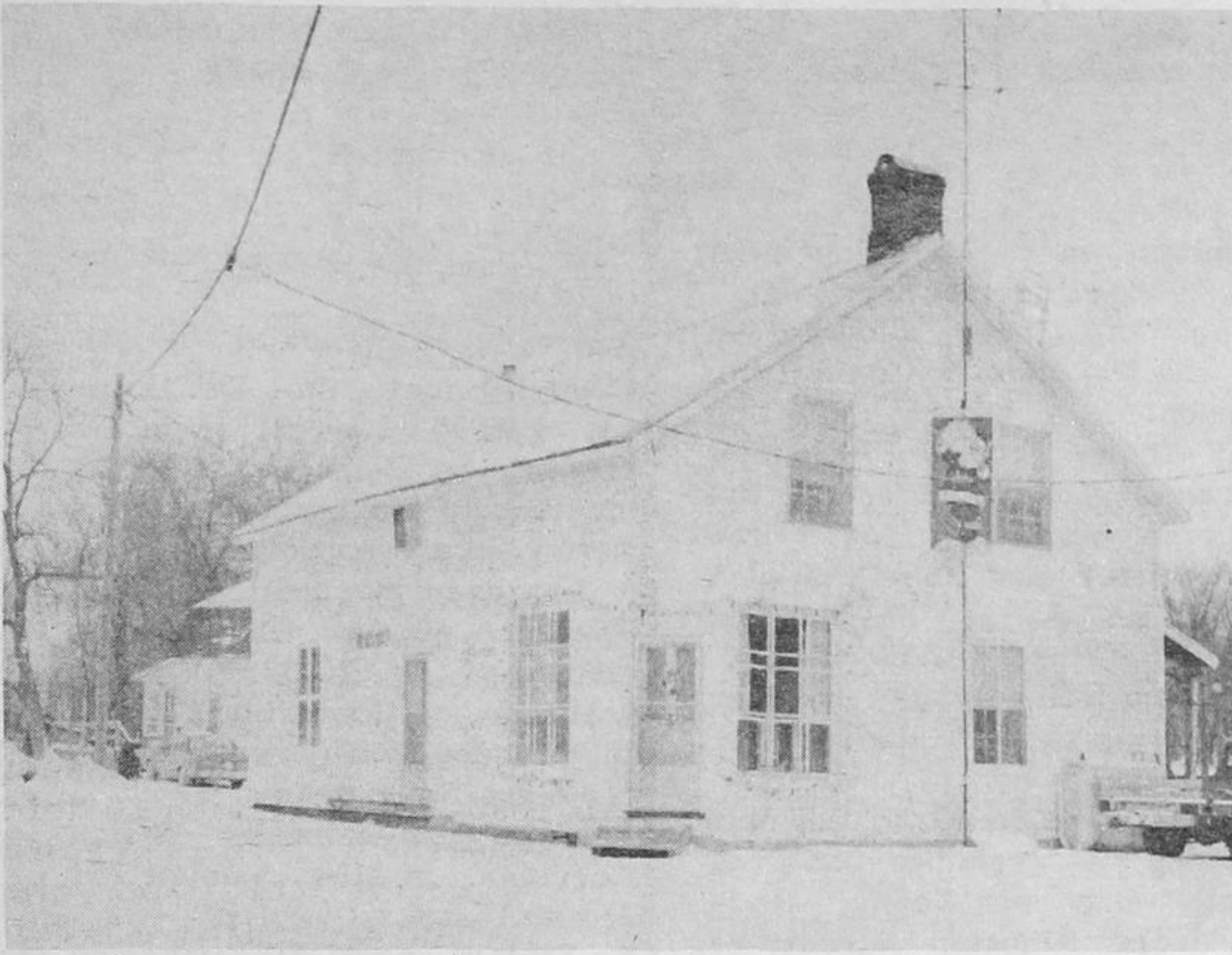
Exactly seven years ago, I bought the Hicock (Beadle) house in Delta and so became a citizen of this village and township. This has been a most instructive and pleasant association.

My interest in Canada's history before Confederation gives me a special attachment and concern for this region. In most of our towns and cities, the old buildings, the general stores, and the people in them who would chat about stories of the old days, are long gone. With them has gone the record of the "silent people" in the childhood of our great nation. The silent people are the farmers, teachers, builders, housewives, weavers, physicians, and those who organized industry, etc. No one published material about those salt-of-the-earth people who really built our country. What a pity that so much information about them and their lives is being lost. What a treat to see some of these buildings and old ways still alive here.

Last weekend I had a great conversation with Harold Griffiths, another newcomer to Delta, during which he showed me a book that he had just borrowed from the Elgin library. The book was The General Store by Carol Priamo (an authorhistorian who has written about the Delta Mill and who has given talks there). We talked first about Ron and Vivian Morris' store in Delta and how this was often the place where the newcomer first got to know Delta and its past. (Cover picture). It differs from most of the general stores in Carol Priamo's book because it's still open and functions the way it has for the last ninety-odd years.

Ron's account of its past follows: Morris Grocery was built by W.J. Birch in 1897, in the Jubilee Block on the Main Street in Delta, after a fire had destroyed the previous business block. Bill and Evelena Birch operated the grocery store from 1897 to when Clifford and Zelda Ralph occupied the premises. In 1927, Bill and Keitha Morris carried on the business until 1946 when Harry and Nettie Morris purchased the store property from W.J. Birch and the stock from Keitha Morris. In 1950 Harry Morris suffered a heart attack and his son, Ronald, and Ronald's mother operated the store until 1974. From 1974 to the present day, Ronald and his wife Vivian have operated the grocery store.

The store is virtually unchanged from 1897. The doors and windows are original, and inside the Morris operate it as a full service store with the original counters and shelves. They stock a full line of groceries, fresh fruit, meat, and fishing licences.



ROBERT BIRCH STORE



APRON FACTORY

I guess I was unfair to Ron by asking him to keep his description to about 100 words. It lacks the colourful stories about the carbide lighting, the early telephone, the I.O.O.F. lodge upstairs, the electric lights, and the early street lamps. In the early 1900s, the Morris store had a room at the rear known as "The Dog House." Here, the men of the village would gather on a Saturday evening, and in the smokey light of the coal oil lamps, would swap stories and gossip of the day, and play cards. A radio came on the scene in the 1920s. Ron also recalls conversations and histories from the old timers. One of his favourites was Edgar Halladay. Now back to the conversation with Harold Griffiths: we turned our attention to some of the other old stores of Delta. The Robert Birch House and Store (My Own Four Walls, p.56, Figure 2) was originally built by Robert Birch as a home and tailor's shop in 1864. Priamo's book points out that this style of store, with the main door located on a corner,

is an occasional but rare feature in country stores in Ontario (The General Store, p.92).

Nancy Penstone's "Apron Factory" (Fig.3) is one of the finest country store buildings in Ontario. There is a similar one pictured in Priamo's book. It is the General Store at Doon Pioneer Village.

I hope I've been able to give you a little insight into the fascination I have with Delta. You see that not only the buildings such as the Robert Birch Store and the "Apron Factory", but institutions such as the Morris Store give us information about those salt-of-the-earth and silent citizens of our past.

References:
Haskins, Diane. My Own Four Walls. Council of Bastard and South Burgess Township, 1985.

Priamo, Carol. The General Store. Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978.

Further Reading:
Russo, David J. Keepers of Our Past. New York: Glenwood Press, 1988.

Robert Dent

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SENIORS ELECT OFFICERS

Portland: The Rideau Welcome Club no.693 began the new year with a regular meeting, preceded by a pot luck luncheon on January 3, 1990.

The shopping bus to Kingston on the second Tuesday of each month has been very successful. The next bus will be on February 13. The carpet bowling on Thursday afternoons is catching on and being enjoyed by a number of members.

The president thanked all the committee members and everyone for their cooperation and support over the past year. The Nominating Committee consisting of Jean Polk, Buddy Moores and Mervin Mills, presented a slate of officers for 1990. There being no further nominations, the following were declared elected by acclamation: President - Joe K. Raison; 1st Vice - Doug Crawford; 2nd Vice - Charles (Bud) Woods; Secretary - Claire Myers; Treasurer - Claire Mills; Imd. Past President - Mary Sutcliffe; Directors - Betty Bond, Clara Hull, Jean Polk, Myrtena McVean and Clifford Moores. Byron Myers was Installing Officer.

An hour of games, carpet bowling and euchre, was enjoyed by all.

The next meeting will be held on February 7 with a pot luck luncheon at 12 noon.

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