

# The country store

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One hundred years ago every little hamlet had a country store. It was a way of life, a necessity and an American institution which has largely vanished from our contemporary way of life.

From penny candy to lamp wicks, from horse whips to calicos, from kerosene to fly traps and button hooks to five cent cigars, who could get practically anything you wanted at a country store.

Local farmers brought in their eggs, butter, cheese, etc. for trade. It was a place chucked full of merchandise with a special aroma and an atmosphere quality in brownish tones all of its own.

Aside from being a trade center, the country store was a social center where particularly the men of the neighborhood would gather around the pot belly stove after supper for a hot game of checkers.

And yes, it was a post office, a gossip, message and information center where the ideas and political decisions of the day were often made. In some cases it was even the town clerk's office.

It truly was a center where the hub of community generated from, most frequently holding the most prominent location. It was not the church, school or home but the country store on the most prestigious corner in the small hamlet.

Take for example, Clarendon, Eagle Harbor, West Kendall, Two Bridges, Kenyonville, Millville, Gaines, Barre Center, Childs, Carlton Station or Kent. The prominent location in each of those places has, or had at one time, a country store. Besides those hamlets, there were country stores which have long been forgotten in such places as Rich's Corners, Gaines Basin and Hindsburg to mention a few.

Some store keepers even ran delivery wagons.

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## Bethinking of Olde Orleans



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Surely the country store was where everybody went sooner or later making for closeknit communities of the 19th century and early 20th century. Of course, the automobile and supermarkets changed all that.

I'll try now to tell a story about a situation in a country store my father passed down. It seems many years ago there was a man who lived in Gaines by the name of "Hoddie" Howes. The men who gathered at the Gaines store were always playing tricks or razzing him about something. Evidently, he was one of those people who was just fun to pick on.

One evening in late September, "Hoddie" came into the store and sat down near the stove exchanging in conversation. After awhile he pulled out of his pocket what appeared to be a huge fire cracker. One of the other men said "Where did you get that firecracker "Hoddie." His reply was "Oh its something I found leftover from the 4th of July a couple of years ago. It probably wouldn't even go off now it's so old."

With that "Hoddie" got up

and calmly walked over to the stove and opened the door! One of the men said, "I wouldn't do that if I was you."

Then "Hoddie" threw it into the stove. In a split second the group of men in the store flew to the door for a mad exit. "Hoddie" went back to his chair, sat down and laughed and laughed and laughed.

It seems "Hoddie" had cut a chunk out of an old broom stick, glued on a piece of string and painted it to look like a firecracker so he could pull off his little caper. It was one time he had the last laugh.

"He who laughs last laughs the loudest."

**Notice:** An antiques appraisal will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday at the Cobblestone Museum.