

Calling the market

1-10-14

Let me direct your attention to the advertisement, which appeared in a booklet published by the local Women's Christian Temperance Union in 1902.

I suppose you wonder what's special or important about it?

At a quick glance, I'll admit it's totally uneventful, but when we stop and analyze all the parts, it suggests that life was different around the turn of the 20th century.

The ad states: "Ring Up." Just imagine that! Imagine calling your friendly grocer and giving him the list of your needs over the phone and then having him deliver the groceries to your house free of charge.

Well, I can remember a few people doing that even as late as the 1950s; however, by the 1970s, locally owned grocery stores gave up offering such a service as it was just too costly for them to offer.

In fact, I tried to look up phone numbers in the White Pages for several



local supermarkets. Guess what? Some aren't even listed. Indeed, we are living in a different era than our grandparents a couple of generations ago.

Notice also that the ad indicates Bell and Citizens' phones. Just imagine that problem. You see, there were two phone companies at the time and they were not interconnected. Therefore, if you were to receive calls from all your customers, you had to have two phones, one a Bell and one a Citizens'. As the ad notes, Brooks & Marshman also had both phone systems in their residences as well. Naturally, some people only had one phone system.

Now let's note their products. Look at what they've used for an illustra-

tion: A full grown sheep. Just imagine mutton! Years ago, it was a meat staple.

By contrast nowadays, one might find in the supermarket a leg of lamb and lamb chops. But because lambs are so cute and associated with children and innocence, I'm sure no butcher would want to illustrate his business with either a lamb or a sheep.

And finally, note the oysters. This is probably one thing that has become absent from menus more than anything else. Believe it or not, oysters were a part of every festive meal and for some people a part of almost every meal. Raw oysters on the half shell, oyster cocktail, oysters Rockefeller, oyster stew, escalloped oysters, smoked oysters, fried oysters and even oyster dressing for that Thanksgiving turkey. Just imagine all that! People ate oysters and lots of them.

Around the turn of the century, my grandfather, Nahum Lattin, would buy

RING UP Brooks & Marshman,

Dealers in

MEATS,

Poultry, Fish,

OYSTERS and

VEGETABLES,



14 East Bank St., Albion. Bell and Citizens' Phones. also at both residences.

a barrel of unshucked oysters shipped up on the canal. These live oysters were put in the basement and fed cornmeal to keep them alive, so that he always had fresh raw ones to eat out of the barrel. There was hardly a restaurant where you wouldn't see oysters of some sort on the menu. But in the last 25 years, with oyster beds becoming polluted, we've seen the popularity of this seafood drop off drastically.

The very last restaurant in Orleans County to have oysters on the menu

was the Maple Crest in Medina, under the ownership of Margaret Raymond.

With Margaret's passing we saw the end of a long era in our restaurants.

I'm sure Diamond Jim Brady, the noted 19th century entrepreneur who was said to eat two dozen raw oysters just to start off a meal, would be pretty disappointed nowadays with our fat-free, low-cholesterol diets.

When you do find oysters in the store, they certainly are very expensive and a delicacy. I imagine my grandfa-

ther got a whole barrel of them for what we pay for a half-pint.

Charles H. Brooks and Burnett Marshman were grocers and butchers around the turn of the century in Albion. As their ad indicates, they were located at 14 E. Bank St.

In my youth, I remember that storefront as Mr. Pilato's fruit and vegetable market, with crates of produce for sale out on the sidewalk. And what's more, he even delivered. Just imagine that!