

# *The Alfred Historical Society*

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MONOGRAPH NO. 12

## THE ALFRED GROCERY BUSINESS OF THE JACOX FAMILY

Compiled by Jean B. Lang

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The first part of this monograph is told by John Jacox, who besides the grocery business and his other interests was Mayor of Alfred for many years. The information was recorded in March, 1974.

"I started in the grocery business in Alfred in 1923 and sold the business twenty-seven years later. These years saw the transition from the old style grocery store with pot-bellied stove and open cracker barrel to the present fashion serve-yourself supermarket.

"When I took over the store from the Wheaon brothers, we had no electric service in the village. For refrigeration I would buy about a half a ton of ice at a time. (Lester Burdick had an ice house and made deliveries. He cut his ice from John Langworthy's pond. The pond was above Hillcrest Drive. A nickel an evening was charged for skating there.) So, in the store much of the meat cutting was done by hand. Pork chops and lamb chops were chopped with a cleaver, which no doubt gave the name to the product. I had a six horse power gas engine to run a meat grinder. If one wanted a pound of ground meat, I was obliged to start the motor in order to do the job. Out of respect for my Sunday people, I was careful not to start the motor during the church service. You can guess why.

"In those days, most of what you bought for the store was in bulk and there was much work involved in measuring things out by pound or number. Shortening came in 60 pound tubs. There was lard, compound, and Cottasuet, a yellow cotton seed product that looked like axle grease. Sugar came in 100 pound bags and had to be weighed out in sacks. It took an expert to get 20 five pound sacks from a 100 pound bag. Once I had the opportunity of buying a barrel of pepper at 16 cents a pound. That was the best deal I ever made. Beans, rice, rolled oats, soap flakes, crackers and the like had to be weighed out from 100 pound containers. At that time very little came in individual packages. Rice and beans in open tubs caused difficulty once, when a small boy, now a prominent Alfred citizen, mixed them together.

"We had to buy produce when it happened to be in season. I would get 50 bushels of peaches in the fall, and sell them for canning. Apples and grapes and potatoes were bought in quantities and repackaged in the store. Bananas were bought in bunches on the stem, and were sold by the dozen. There is a story about Mrs. Don Van Horn's grandfather, a grocery man at Alfred Station, who remonstrated with a farmer who wanted the peewee eggs he had brought in to exchange for groceries, to be accepted as large eggs. The farmer insisted 'an egg is an egg.' When the farmer wanted bananas, Mr. Niles picked off the small ones that were always at the top of a bunch and said, 'a banana is a banana!'

"We delivered groceries at first with a one horse vehicle. Then I made a delivery truck from my 1922 Model T Ford touring car. This was good for bringing stuff that had come by freight to Alfred Station. Once, before the village had snow removal facilities, we had a big snowstorm that made delivery impossible by our truck, so I hired Jerry Baker with team and bob sled to make our deliveries. I never had a delivery request such as is credited to an earlier Alfred firm, Green and Baggs, for whom George Place worked. Mrs. Judson Burdick ordered a spool of thread to be delivered to her house up on Terrace Street. Mont Collins was engaged to

deliver it. He backed his dray up the driveway, lowered a plank and delivered the spool of thread to Mrs. Burdick.

"There was a certain pleasant communication between the old fashioned grocery man and his customers. We knew how thick a customer preferred his bacon to be sliced. Once when our delivery man was late, the housewife left a note directing him to salt the roast and put it into the oven at 100° temperature (Hot?). Yes, we served our customers what they wanted, however small. I remember selling two slices of bacon.

"There were no laws then that prohibited our taking calves, pigs and poultry to process ourselves. The young cockerels weighing six to ten pounds would put to shame the tasteless fryers you get nowadays. Can you imagine so much pork being raised that little pigs were killed to ease the surplus? In fact, I enclosed a half pound of bacon free in each order at Christmas time. Then pork chops sold for ten to fifteen cents a pound. We took in on trade country eggs and butter, though sometimes the butter wasn't good enough to sell to our customers. One farmer who brought in eggs to trade, would pop any broken ones into his mouth, so as not to waste any.

"Store hours, when I first started, were 7 A.M. to 9 P.M. except on Friday when the store closed at sunset and opened again at sunset Saturday night.

"One learned ~~to~~<sup>a</sup> lot about people and about human nature in a grocery store. Amusing things sometimes happened, too. Once Mrs. Lottie Champlin drove her horse and buggy to the back of the store. There was no hitching post, so she tied her horse to the rear bumper of Gene Reynolds' car parked there. Gene didn't notice, and drove off with the horse and buggy attached. The strap eventually broke.

"Running a grocery store was not exactly a new thing for me, for I had worked for Earl Place in his grocery store which was where the barber shop is now. (corner Main and W. University St.) That was in 1906. I had graduated from High School and needed money for college. I got \$6.00 a week working for Mr. Place. I drove a horse named Maudie on the delivery wagon. Maudie was spirited and fast and we enjoyed racing drivers of slower horses.

"Running a grocery store was simpler in the old days. There was no unemployment tax, no withholding tax to bother with. But the government regulations were a great nuisance during the rationing days of the war. Stamps were required for sugar and for meat. This was a bad time for cats.

"The building in which my store was located was built in the 1870's. It was owned by the C.D. Reynolds Cheese Co. There is a metal plate at the threshold of the front door bearing the letters 'Alfred Centre' and a date worn thin from a hundred years of foot traffic. There was an elevator in the back. Reynolds used the second and third floors for cheese storage, the first floor for office space. Between the first floor ceiling and the second floor, cinders were used for insulation. I was told that there are eighteen inches of cinders. Those of you privileged to read C.M. Potter's account of cheese factories in Alfred Township will not be surprised to know that C.D. Reynolds no doubt bought the cheese made in this district. I believe the Kraft Co. took it over later.

"When the C.D. Reynolds Co. constructed the building at Alfred Station for their cheese expansion, the Fraternal Association bought the building. In it, the Masons, the Eastern Star, the Odd Fellows and Rebaccas held forth. The Odd Fellows gave up their charter some time ago, for lack of interest. There was a player piano in the meeting room and much social activity went on there.

"A meat market run by Ernie and John Button was formerly across the street. Their building burned and the Buttons moved over to the first floor of the Fraternal Building. Subsequently, Coit and Chrlie Wheaton took over the Meat Market and added groceries. I bought out the Wheatons. When I sold, it was to my nephew Howard Jacox."

In July, 1949 Howard Jacox became owner of the grocery business which he ran with his wife Iva's able assistance until 1966. During this period a walk-in cooler was installed and new cases. The whole front door, casing and all, could be removed to bring in the larger items. When Mr. Jacox went into the U.S. Postal Service in Alfred, he sold the business to William Ide in May, 1966. This business was well known for its excellent meat department. In 1973 Mr. Ide no longer could operate the store efficiently because of the competition from larger supermarkets, etc. and for a while the store was closed.

Older Alfred residents and persons without cars keenly felt the lack of a neighborhood grocery store and the Telefoods firm from Buffalo was prevailed upon to try its hand. Another Jacox enters the picture as manager in January, 1974 in the person of Howard's young son William H. Jacox. At this time Miss Hazel Humphreys congratulated "Will" by sending over a bouquet of flowers in a ceramic pot made by Professor Binns with the inscription "From oldest business to newest business," refering to her Box of Books, of course.

The store, at this writing is a truly self-service type with a limited supply of meats and fresh vegetables. The store itself was completely renovated. This management was a great challenge for such a young man and in March, 1974 Mr. David C. Jillson, retired professor and researcher, with his PhD. from Yale University, became manager with the assistance of his wife. They had been Alfred residents for quite a number of years and felt this grocery store had a real community need to keep functioning.

(The above information was gathered from Mrs. Howard Jacox and Mrs. David Jillson by Jean B. Lang prior to June, 1974.)

*note by N.B. Higgins, 1981. Subsequently managed by  
Douglas Larow of Almond*