

Memories of My Mother's Grocery Store
In Old Ballston, Virginia, During
The Years 1910 Through 1917

By

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My mother, widowed in 1909 and with two small children, decided to open a grocery store in the front living room of our Victorian-style home. This action was taken upon the advice of a close neighbor.

A good-sized sign was hung just above the doorway reading "Groceries and Drug Goods!"

With no Social Security nor any income what else *could* she do, back in those horse and buggy days?

A broom-holder with four brooms soon appeared for display and sale on the front porch. A bread-box ready to receive freshly delivered bread for early morning customers was already waiting.

Many items to be sold required weighing and packaging. Lard came in large wooden tubs and other foods such as apricots, prunes, and peaches were all in wooden boxes. Also, sugar, black and green tea, cookies and potatoes in season. Coffee had to be ground and packaged. All was time-consuming and a lot of hard work for my mother.

The store had four or five shelves which had to be stocked with canned goods, syrup, and molasses in glass jars.

A drummer appeared regularly to get a replacement order. He came by horse and buggy from Georgetown, D.C. The horse waited patiently. The drummer dropped a large iron weight from his carriage. It was attached to a leather strap and to the horse's harness. Somehow the horse understood and waited.

A long wooden counter held the large iron coffee grinder at one end. A money-drawer (with a loud gong when opened) was under the center part of the counter. There were two glass cases at the other end; one contained all kinds of old-fashioned candies, some one penny each! The second glass case had lovely colorful floral patterned hair ribbon for little girls to wear in their hair. There were also packages of fine white lace, and crochet thread for making all kinds of fancy work.

The shelves just above this area held lovely bright colored percales and gingham for making aprons and dresses. My mother made every effort to supply her customers with their needs. She bought her dry goods merchandise from the Guy Curran Wholesale Co., at 9th and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. The goods were sent in a heavy wooden box which required a strong person to open it -- and he needed tools to do this job!

Many customers came long distances to reach my mother's shop. Sometimes a late customer knocked at our door after dark for some forgotten item. My mother hastened to let them in, often they visited with us a while.

In one corner of the store there was a large kerosene drum to supply the oil lamps, cooking stoves, and kerosene heaters used at that time.

My brother received a shiny new red wagon one Christmas and delivered groceries to some of the store's customers. He was a small boy and sometimes he grew tired of his job. Except when he took groceries to one customer. She received the groceries wearing a heavy leather belt with a halter and gun. Someone had threatened her life, so her husband insisted that she wear it when she was alone at home. This excited my brother; he was always glad to deliver there "to see the lady with the gun!"

At sundown we removed the broom holder with its four brooms to the inside. We closed the two folding-slat blinds and shut up shop.

At the end of the day when all was still and quiet my mother often fell asleep in her chair with the unread *Washington Star* newspaper nearby. She was exhausted.

In the early morning hours we could hear the breadman delivering fresh loaves of bread in our front porch bread-box. We knew that it would soon be time to arise. Another day was upon us! Customers would be waiting.

It was an interesting and fascinating shop!

P.S. My mother was Cecilia Kidwell and our home was at 1041 N. Stuart St.