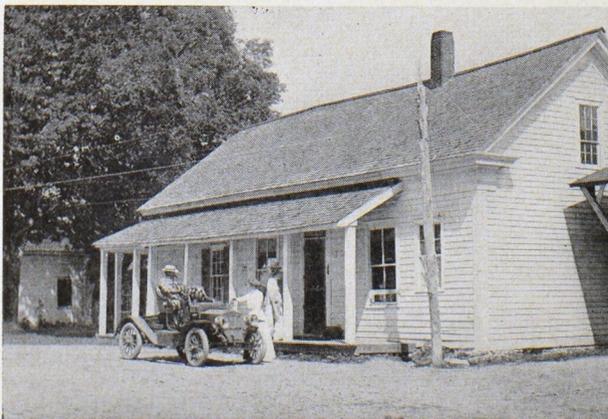


The Country Store

*It's not what it used
to be 100 odd years ago
—in the goods it sells.
But it's still there and
still serves the needs of
the community.*

For 128 years so far—and still managed by the same family.

The store looked quite the same outside a half-century ago.



CHAMPAGNE AND BEER, electric blankets and oil lamps, pressure cookers and crosscut saws, nylon stockings and woodsman's boots—these are just a few of the items that the Peru country store keeps in stock, carrying out the tradition which the store's founder, J. J. Hapgood, inaugurated back in 1827 to stock what this small community needed and wanted.

Country stores are interesting places whether they are the variety dressed up for the tourist trade or the type such as Arthur Kelton is running in the same pat-

By RUTH MANSFIELD

Photography by FRANCES MACDONALD



tern in which it was started by his wife's great grandfather. The store has been owned (and operated except for a brief period) by the Hapgood family and its descendants and Mrs. Kelton is anticipating that their two sons, 14 year old Arthur and 11 year old Benjamin will carry it on in the same manner.

The paid-in-advance charge account, used today by some of the biggest department stores, is neither new nor original. Marshal Hapgood, son of the founder, issued passcards as the one, dated 1872, on the present cash register testifies. It

reads, "This pass card is good for \$10 less the amount from the margin in goods at the store of J. J. Hapgood & Co."

This correspondent is accustomed to country stores and has purchased everything from shampoo to frozen lobster meat at the one in the neighborhood. On entering the Peru store, smaller than the one I trade in and with seemingly fewer customers upon which to draw, I was struck with the enormous variety of merchandise. Of course, Peru, boasting only 120 registered voters, is a tiny resort, with several inns catering to summer boarders, leaf-trade

tourists and skiers who flock in by the thousands annually to Big Bromley, located within its boundaries. This may partially account for the champagne, sparkling burgundy, the Clos des Tomeiers and other fine wines that are displayed on top of the meat counter. But then there is a large selection of saws, axes, rifles, knives, wool for knitting, oil lamps, air conditioners, shirts, paints and contemporary American cooking pots. In fact, every place I looked I saw different items. Learning that they had just completed the annual inventory, I asked Mr. Kelton, busy at the moment in his role of postmaster as the post office is at one end of the store, how many different items he carried in stock. "Goodness, I don't know," he declared. "There is one thing I know I haven't got. That's a washboard. I sold the last one a short time ago and I don't intend to restock that item," he added.

When I came out of the store, I almost expected to see horses and buggies drawn up outside. Reading the old records and talking to the Keltons, I was transplanted back to the early eighteen hundreds when men brought in shingles and hard wood ashes to barter for molasses, tea, spices and calico.

Outside of the early account books of the store, kept in a system that only the proprietor could fathom, little is known of the store's founder, Joseph Jackson Hapgood. The Hapgood genealogy says "J.J." was born in 1805, moved from Marlboro to Peru, Vermont, 1806. Purchased lands, built a house using the lower part for a store. "He married in 1832, Hepsibah Barnard, who tended the store and he the farm, carrying on also an extensive lumber business. He prospered, built more houses, and for many years was the only merchant in the town, became a man of wealth and standing. He died in Peru, in 1875."

Of Marshall Jay, his son, much is known. Marshall liked publicity. In fact, it would almost seem, after listening to a few of Mrs. Kelton's stories of her grandfather, that he lived his life for posterity. Hapgood Pond, that little gem of water set in the midst of the National Park area, is named for Marshall.

He attended Burr and Burton Seminary in Manchester, where his great grandson Arthur is now a sophomore, was graduated from Williams College, studied law at Harvard Law School, passed his bar examinations but he returned to the store where he divided his time between merchandising, buying huge tracts of land (at the time of his death he owned 10,000



Postmaster Arthur Kelton distributes morning's mail.

acres in addition to the land he had given towards a national park) and erecting and operating steam saw-mills.

Marshall Hapgood transported me back 75 years, to the times when a man could and did write the following instructions for his clerks:

"Never on any account run this store for a day unless you have had eight full hours sleep on the night previous. This will necessitate you to be in bed by ten at the latest. I will have no person undertake to run my store who has had only a half rest the night previous. Saturday and Sunday nights are yours—do what you please with them. But if upon the other nights, you fail to be in bed by ten o'clock, you are positively forbidden to unlock the store the next day. This of course does not apply to cases of illness or necessity but due to sitting up with any healthy young lady.

"Put your whole mind, during business hours, upon business and business—only business alone. Tell no stories, listen to no stories. Talk about nothing but business in business hours. There will be enough to

keep you fully employed if things are kept perfectly straight. When folks detain you to tell you a long story, leave them. Consider every moment as worth something and you will just hit the mark. Waste no time upon fooling with customers,—and let me repeat, talk nothing but business in the store and be hindered in nothing by listening to anything but business talk."

That doesn't sound much like the old country store we read about where customers came in for a plug of tobacco and stayed to chew, not only the tobacco, but the neighborhood gossip for hours on end. Despite old Marshall's instructions and his attempt to make the store a place of business only, it was the club of Peru. The store opened at 6.30 in the morning and closed according to Mr. Kelton "when everyone got ready to go home,"—a contrast to the present hours of eight to six except on Saturdays. The clerk probably did have to follow the retiring instructions as he slept over the store where his lamp or candle would shine out like a beacon over the village.

Despite these rather severe instructions, Marshall Hapgood revealed a mellower side in another document which is now displayed in the store. This was composed before he went into the lumber business, which made him quite a fortune. He was his own clerk when he posted this upon the door:

Until Further Notice
Our
STORE will be CLOSED
Wednesdays and Fridays
J. J. Hapgood & Co.

Peru, Vt., Nov. 1st, 1876.

Let those of our friends who are inclined to doubt the propriety of this measure remember that

Your merchant can enjoy none of the delightful autumn and winter evenings. He is penned up.

He cannot employ a clerk without raising the rate per cent of profit upon his goods.

He desires leisure time in order to better himself for his chosen profession.

The Millington twins in a bygone era conversed by the store with Marshall Hapgood.

He loves the Open Air and the open air loves him.

In other words, Marshall Hapgood was a hunter and, like any other true Vermonter, he was not going to be confined in bird season or restrained by a store from tracking down deer and bear.

Marshall built up the store and the Keltons have carried it on, adding the items which the community needs or wants. But old Marshall had other interests as he grew older. He was interested in education and for years was superintendent of schools. Then he got into politics. Six terms as town representative earned for him at Montpelier the nickname of the "The Great Objector." He was the foe of cigarettes and fought for their suppression, largely because the cigarette was responsible for so many disastrous forest fires. He was the author of a bill prohibiting the operation of games of chance at agricultural fairs and it was his custom to go the rounds of Vermont fairs in an effort to see that the law was complied with. The state of Vermont benefitted largely through one of his bills. "Though not heralded as an important piece of



legislation," as the Brattleboro *Daily Reformer* wrote in his obituary, "nevertheless it saved the state thousands of dollars. This was the bill that provided that bills in both houses proposing amendments to existing laws should have the new matter printed in italics and the matter to be eliminated printed within brackets, showing at a glance how the new law would read, without the necessity of looking it up."

As Mrs. Kelton recalls her grandfather was eccentric. "He had two strange habits. He never went to bed like other folks. He would wander around through the house, reading, thinking and dozing. Then he would nap a bit through the day.

And I cannot remember his ever sitting down to the dining room table—even at family Christmas parties. A place was always set for him but he would wander back and forth, helping himself to whatever he wished to eat."

The store is now on a side road since the main highway, Route 11 from Londonderry to Manchester, was moved outside the village a few years ago. "I was glad of that," said Mr. Kelton. "When the main road by-passed us, it made the village a pleasanter place in which to live. No, I don't put out any signs to advertise this store. After all, we are just a country store, in business to serve this village. That's all." END

Mrs. Ray Hulett waits on Ahial Crandall, Chester Alden.

