



HENRY HANKY'S OLD STORE, NEW ALBANY.

THE OLD COUNTRY STORE

SOME PICTURESQUE EXAMPLES OF IT STANDING.

CENTER OF VILLAGE LIFE

The Comprehensive Stock in Trade and How it was Disposed Of –
How It Differed from the Modern Country Store.

[Written for The Indianapolis News.]

In the records of life when Indiana was young, surely no more interesting or valuable details can be preserved than those which relate to the old-time country store. Such a store in the earliest quarter of the nineteenth century was indeed what might be termed "the welfare-center" of all country neighborhoods. It was the place for news, recent and stale; for gymnastics, wrestling, pitching quoits, running, rifle shooting and story telling. Under one roof and in one room in those days were conducted a wonderful multitude of business enterprises, which, after all, paved the way for the great "department store" that is now the pride of metropolitan commerce. The man who kept the old country store was a

man of many activities; he was what would be called nowadays an "all-round man," and the busy period of his existence, with its value to his own times and to later times, should not be allowed to fade dim on the treasured tapestry of recollection.

A Rural Settlement.

From lower Main street, in New Albany, between the old stone bridge which crosses Falling Run creek, and the point where the Corydon road, the Air Line Railway, the Budd road and the River road, go off on their various tangents, stretches a little length of turnpike which is unique and interesting. It is neither town nor country, yet bears a busy kinship to them both. Silver hills climb up from one edge of this curious bit of highway, and along its other edge, clutching close to level ground or dropping by flights of stone or wooden steps far below the grade, rambles a little village of about thirty houses, cottages and two-story dwellings, three good groceries, a saddler's shop and three blacksmith shops. Here the country wagons from down Corydon way, from the old French settlement, "Porrentruy," and from farms along the River road, meet and cluster to do "trading" and to enjoy companionship. Down this little road the good Catholic priests are sometimes seen speeding in little buggies to visit the sick in old French town, or to administer church rites to the dying. Country stages wind down this way, too, carrying passengers to little towns off the railways.

At the very entrance to this much-traveled, useful ligament of roads, stands a sturdy, well-built, old brick building – "Hanky's grocery" – with a wide, old-fashioned, slanting slab pavement spread out in front of it. Nearly seventy years ago, a covered wooden bridge crossed the creek 120 yards south of the stone bridge; and a dirt road – afterward a corduroy, then a plank road – led up from the bridge, past a toll gate, behind the present Hanky grocery. Prior to the building of this wooden bridge, Harrison and Floyd county farmers had a serious time of it, driving down or up the steep banks of Falling Run creek, the only good ford near old "Boiling spring" – in the hillside – below the homestead of the late Senator Josiah Gwin.

Building a Bridge.

The old bridge was built by subscription, Preston F. Tuley heading the enterprise, and all farmers who contributed \$5 to the bridge fund were granted a lifetime free right-of-way through the tollgate, which stood on the west bank of the creek, just above the bridge. Shelby Yenowine, of Georgetown, remembers that the huge poplar sills for the bridge were cut on his father's farm at Edwardsville, and brought down the high hills in New Albany. At that time, what is now called "Southern hospitality," was the rule in southern Indiana; and the ample home of Preston F. Tuley, not far from the covered bridge, often entertained eight or ten jurymen, from

the country round about, for weeks at a time, without charge. Fourteen riding horses in the early days stood in the Tuley stables.

The first tollgate keepers were "Uncle Billy" and "Aunt 'Tishy" Pitt. Farmers who wished to evade the required 15 cents toll used to drive up and over the steep hills – then called "Caney Knobs" – and down on the old Vincennes road, to enter the town. When the tollgate company climbed the hills and felled trees across the farmers' private route through the almost unbroken forest, the farmer ingeniously placed small logs on each side of the larger obstructions, thus making a rude, double-faced, inclined plane, over which the horses could pull the loaded wagons. Cane poles, twelve feet high, then grew on Silver hills; the lesser poles being used as riding whips. Now, a small number of dwindled cane poles still grown on the hills, but their whereabouts are cherished by a few men, who cut them every year as stems for clay pipes. In the high water of 1847, just before Christmas, the big wooden bridge turned over, being rendered top-heavy by its ponderous roof. Men and boys assembled, after the water subsided, took the roof off, and with block and tackle pulled the huge structure back to its place. Just before the bridge turned over, a New Albany man, who drove down from the knobs at twilight, found the floor afloat. There was no other way to cross the raging creek to his home, however, so he urged his horses and started over. The intelligent animals managed to step on enough submerged beams to avoid going through. Shortly after, the floor beams turned sideways and floated away; then the bridge, with a mighty splash, fell into the water.

Obeying the Scripture.

Difficulties and obstacles seemed only to whet the activity of those early settlers in Indiana. Three horse ferries plied across to the Kentucky shore from Floyd county, but no public vehicle on the other side conveyed passengers up to Louisville. So the New Albany or the country woman who would visit that city crossed the ferry – ferrage, 12½ cents – and, generally accompanied by her small son, walked the five miles to Louisville, made her purchases and walked back to the New Albany ferry. As no detail of life in the early times can be counted irrelevant in a pioneer chronicle, let here be recorded a story of one Dick Flock – a "born natural," or village simpleton of old New Albany. Dick had notable accomplishments: he could stick pins deep in his arms and legs without wincing, he could do chores faithfully, and he could eat valiantly. On one occasion he was awaiting his supper in the basement kitchen of a household for which he worked. The family was upstairs, engaged in evening prayers – Godly ways characterized the households of that time and place – and Dick, becoming impatient, the supper being spread in full view, fell to without invitation, and nearly demolished the entire repast. On being reproached for such treachery he remarked: "Well, the Bible says you must watch as well as pray."

The First Hanky's Store.

In conditions like these, on the creek side, near the end of the wooden bridge, flourished the first Hanky's store – a one-story, square building, with a narrow front porch. It was first owned and kept by Gottlieb Eisman; then by Henry Hanky, Sr., who came from Germany in 1837. The earliest country store was a log cabin, whether of the Scotch hewed, stick-out corner, or cut-off corner, is not known. It contained a rude wooden counter and a few rude shelves, made by what was called the "jack-leg carpenter" of the locality. A few barrels and boxes, rude benches made of planks nailed across kegs; a cast-iron drum-stove, set in a low square box full of sand or sawdust, its straggling stovepipe suspended by wires – sometimes a rough, swinging shelf hung from the rafters; grain bins in the corners, a little common crockery on the shelves, a few hanks of spun cotton or wool hanging about on nails, several bolts of calico and muslin on the counters, and the furnishings are catalogued. No windows adorned the early country stores, and as no competition existed, window displays or advertising were wholly superfluous. A Harrison county storekeeper, in the early '40s, had one competitor, two miles away. At the end of a year these two storekeepers had completely changed customers; all those in debt to each merchant having found it agreeable to open an account with the other.

A New Era.

When the era of show-windows began the primitive exhibits, no doubt, formed an interesting and diverting chapter; one country store which is recalled had its little window decorated with one broom and a pair of suspenders; another displayed merely a full load of pumpkins. Men who clustered at "the store," to "trade" and talk, wore homespun clothes – cotton or tow linen in the summer and jeans or "wool" in the winter, with "wool hats," or straw hats, which were called, in the vernacular, "palmeeters." The rough straw hats – now called "jimmies," and sold at 50 cents – were then plaited of rye straw by the women, and sold for 25 cents. Women who came with basket or jug in hand wore calico frocks or homespun linsey-woolsey, and sunbonnets. "Linsey-woolsey," by the way, has a venerable record. It is mentioned by Shakespeare, and dates back to 1576. Customers came in wagons, sometimes horseback and often what was called "footback." Even within the last five years, a Frenchtown woman over eighty years of age, thought nothing of walking four miles to a New Albany store, to trade her chickens and basket of eggs, carried in her hands, for sugar, coffee, molasses and other "town truck."

"Set people back even fifty years," said "Uncle Henry" Hanky, "and they wouldn't know how to live."

The Stock in Trade.

In the older country stores everything was in bulk; green coffee was loose in barrels, and had to be roasted or browned at home – in skillets

over the open fire, or later in ovens. Sugar was mainly brown sugar, and often full of big, long-legged ants. Baking powder was unknown, cream-tartar and soda following the earlier saleratus and buttermilk biscuit. Flour was mostly sold from the barrel to purchasers, who brought pillow-slips in which to carry it home. A few pillow-slips still come in from the country to New Albany stores for flour. Paper bags were then unknown. Bar soap and bottled blueing are modern luxuries, soft soap and the indigo bag of our mothers' day being still remembered. Bulk mustard and whole pepper, stick cinnamon and whole cloves, were to be had, but "grocery catsup and pickles" had no existence. "Orleans molasses" was a great feature of the early country store – a prime favorite with old and young. The molasses pitcher of those days is now indeed a curio; some of them were fully a foot tall, of massive glass, with heavy pewter lids and handles. No canned goods, in red and yellow labels, made gay the primitive store, and no dried fruits were on sale, as all farmers' wives made their own supplies in this line. Dried pumpkin was a great gastronomic "standby." Upstairs bedrooms in the fall were hardly navigable, so full were the cabin rafters hung with strips of yellow pumpkin.

Few "notions" were found in the old country stores; pins, needles, wooden button molds and half a dozen rough-handled pocket knives being the only small articles on sale. Every housewife made her own thread; and small hanks of home-made linen thread, then round balls of thread, were seen in the stores long before spool thread appeared. Tea was a great rarity, the cheapest being \$1.25 a pound. In 1817, to a home near Charlestown, Clark county, came a Kentuckian, who was born in Virginia. As a compliment to this guest, the farmer's wife made tea for supper; it was an entire novelty to the man, and apparently a delight. In a few weeks, at the same hospitable hearth, appeared a Kentucky girl, who weighed 200 pounds. She had walked many miles and had crossed the Ohio river ferry to ask information about making tea. "Pap," it appeared, had procured a quarter of a pound of tea and had boiled the entire quantity in an iron kettle full of water over the open fire. His decoction had not proved palatable, and the girl had made a long pilgrimage to Indiana to ask what was the matter.

The Life of the Time.

Nails and tacks and small hinges were on sale; and the storekeeper would take orders for big hinges, hatchets and axes, buying them at the nearest town, perhaps in two weeks from date of order. Every family had its own little tobacco patch; and several whisky stills were found in every neighborhood. Large stories are told of the whisky barrel with half its head knocked out, and the hospitable gourd or cup on top, which stood in the corner of the country store; while other historians merely claim that the bottle or jug was always on the counter, to celebrate every "trade" – as the customs of the times demanded. Coin was scarce; and a silver dollar

was often cut into five pieces, each passing current as a legal "quarter." In 1822, John Anderson's father and three other men walked from Clark county to Indianapolis – a journey of three days each way – to prospect for a new home; but returned with the report that Indianapolis was too low, flat, and wet for desirable residence. Much trading, by flatboat and keelboat, was done down New Orleans way; and "Orleans" current prices, in 1825, were as follows: "Kentucky rope, 8½ cents per pound; bacon, 8 cents; butter 12½ cents; green Havana coffee, 17 cents; cheese, 15 cents; Spanish cigars, \$8 per thousand; corn in ears, 87 cents per barrel; flour, \$4 to \$5 per barrel; ginseng, 28 cents per pound; lard, 10 cents per pound; molasses, 28 cents per gallon; sugar, 10 cents per pound; beeswax, 35 cents per pound; whisky, 25 cents per gallon." Candles, which were then used, were often made by the storekeeper's wife, after a beef was killed – four at a time, in tin candle molds, up to the number of a hundred. Lard-oil came in about 1848 or 1850; and lard-oil lamps are now curios. A conservative New Albany grocery is still lighted by candles at night. Its owner is a reflective, elderly man much esteemed by all who know him. After his evening paper, he sits in the dark until a customer comes in, when he lights a candle; when the business is concluded and the customer departs, out goes the candle until it is necessary to light it again.

Ways of Trading.

Often the country store was kept locked nearly all day, as the farmer who attended it was busy about his farm work. When a customer came to trade he had to hunt the farmer up or blow a horn to call him to the store. Of course, no goods were delivered from those early stores; nowadays the washerwoman, half a mile "down the pike," telephones for soap and starch, and the delivery wagon rattles off with it at her behest. Butter and eggs were the main dependence in "trade," and eggs sometimes brought only 5 cents for two dozen, with butter at 10 cents a pound. In an old New Albany newspaper – the *Microscope* - of 1825, James Ridge, of Jeffersonville, advertises: "Great bargains for cash; beeswax, whisky and ginseng." Boots and shoes were almost priceless, and the storekeeper made 40 per cent profit on their sale. To the "meeting-house," boys, girls and even young women, would walk barefooted, carrying shoes and home-knit stockings under their arms. In sight of the church they would don these ornamental articles, and after service remove them, and carry them carefully home again. Many women could block out a rude shoe last with ax and knife, and make their own shoes; hides were tanned on shares, the owner paying half the skin for the process. The housewife did all her own spinning and weaving – a long, interesting chapter of itself – and she always made extra lengths of linen and wool, to trade at the store for some desired article or

commodity. Home-knit socks and stockings could be traded, too, bringing 30 cents a pair.

Every man had his own flint-lock musket or gun, and skins of all kinds, deer, coon, otter, squirrel and muskrat, were as good as coin at the country store.

The 1840 Campaign.

In the William Henry Harrison presidential campaign a large log cabin, of buckeye logs, was built, as campaign headquarters, in New Albany, on State street, where Goodbub's confectionery now stands. It was literally covered with coonskins, the product of the county. The country storekeeper had his embarrassments, too. Often in the autumn all the women for miles around would bring in nothing but "soft soap" to trade. He had to accept it and often had difficulty in disposing of it to merchants in town.

The modern country store, although much altered in contents and character, still holds great prestige as a trading point, news and companionship center. It now has big windows and window exhibits of the latest city styles in all articles of commerce, even to jardinières and curtain-poles, wall paper and picture moldings. On the shelves are found everything mentionable in canned and bottled vegetables, fruits, pickles and catsups. The tinware, glassware, china and crockery rival like exhibits in the city stores, and in dry goods, linens, umbrellas, parasols, fans and notions of all kinds the new country store carries a complete outfit. Trading is kept up as in the old times, but fresh vegetables are added to the butter-and-egg traffic. In many cases villages have grown up around the old country store and garden produce is therefore in demand.

[Source: Emma Carleton Scrapbook #4, p. 354]