

THE LIFE & TIMES ON RAILROAD AVENUE IN

SAXTON , PA.

EICHELBERGER STORE

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## Eichelberger's Store

Among the fondest memories of times in Saxton, was the Eichelberger Store. Located directly across the park from our home, this general store had the name E. Eichelberger & Son emblazoned in big bold letters above the entrance to the store. E. Eichelberger was Grandfather Eli and Son represented Dad, J. Allie Eichelberger. We were indeed fortunate to be born into a household with a "family-owned" store. I suppose when one raises six children, the size of the Eichelberger clan, about the only way one could feed and clothe them was to get things at wholesale through the Eichelberger Store.

A general department store indicated that they handled a general line of merchandise, which meant most anything a customer would want to buy. This included fresh and canned fruit and vegetables, meats, flour, butter, bread, hardware, clothing, shoes, hats, molasses, and even a kerosene pump where one could buy kerosene filled in two-gallon cans. There was an unlimited supply of nuts, bolts, screws, nails, hammers, saws, and general household gadgets in the hardware department. "Berry" Banner appeared to know more about this area and was generally considered head of this department.

Mr. Piper took care of the clothing and shoe department. This was located in an adjoining room from the main part of the store, but it was all under one roof. He was also in charge of the wall paper department where one could choose from dozens of patterns and have them cut and trimmed to fit any room in the house. Charley Stapelton appeared to be the general supervisor. He always opened the store promptly at 6:30 a.m., after carefully sweeping the entire floor and the large front

sidewalk outside. The store opened early to accommodate the man of the house on his way to work in the railroad shops or the Penn Central Power Plant. He would stop by the store and order the daily food supply, buy some tobacco for himself, and be on his way.

Eichelberger's Store would always deliver any order, free-of-charge, to the entire surrounding area of East Saxton, Stonerstown, Saxton and about once a week to Six Mile Run. The first deliveryman was Charley Weaverling who delivered in a wagon pulled by two big horses. Orders for supplies, which included food or anything else, were placed in strong woven wicker baskets. The name of the purchaser was placed in each basket to identify him and when enough baskets were accumulated to warrant a delivery, they were placed in the delivery wagon. As kids, we loved to ride in the delivery wagon and later on in the delivery truck. We would help by handing out the baskets to the driver at the correct address. After a time the Eichelberger boys learned to know where practically everybody in the Saxton area lived.

The first official horseless carriage purchased by the Eichelberger store was a one-ton Republic truck, replacing the horse-drawn team. It had solid rubber tires, which made it about as comfortable to ride as a modern tank. At least the tires were puncture proof, which proved to be a great boon. Later on Grandfather Eli's big Oldsmobile was geared down and a truck body put on it for an additional delivery wagon. It proved to be a real lemon, always needing some type of repairs or other. Dinah Smith was added to the staff of deliverymen to help man the newly acquired truck.

One of the advantages of being one of the Eichelberger boys was the opportunity to visit the store on the way home from school, or after school. It proved to be a great place to get a "snack," such as a cookie or two from the large display rack where a variety of cookies were on display in big cans with hinged glass-covered lids. Right next stood the "cracker barrel" with a removable lid with a handle where anybody could help himself to a handful of oyster crackers. There were open boxes of dried fruit, prunes, apricots, and peaches.

They made a delicious chewy bite. Then there was the cheese box with a big round piece of "rat-trap" cheese which was readily available for slicing off a piece with the big cheese knife. It was delicious on a soda cracker.

Then there was the candy case which displayed a large variety of candies in a glass-covered case. It was opened by a sliding door in the rear of the case. There was hard candies, soft candies, chocolate covered candies, Hershey chocolates wrapped in tin foil, stick candies, tootsie rolls as well as licorice sticks. While we never had an open invitation to just help ourselves, we had been told by Dad to always ask any clerk nearby before taking any delicious tidbit. One day brother Dick stopped by the store on his way home from school and was about to take a banana from a big bunch of bananas when he asked Berry Benner whether he could have one. Berry, realizing it was right before lunch thought it might spoil his appetite, replied in a loud voice, "No!" Dick, taken by surprise at this refusal retaliated by saying, "You act like you own this store." That took Berry Benner by surprise. It was just sassy enough to irritate him and he started for Dick, who by this time has sensed it was the wrong response, and beat a hasty retreat from the store, across the parkway to home. Dad heard about the incident and properly chastised Dick for his behavior and remarks to Mr. Benner. Dick shied away from the Eichelberger Store for at least a week before he felt things had cooled down enough to safely venture in again. The fact that Berry Benner was also the town's constable may have had something to do with his reluctance to appear too soon.

In the cellar of the Eichelberger Store were two large "pickle" barrels which held sweet and sour pickles. When one had an order for them, they were scooped out with a long-handled spoon. A close fitting lid was kept on top of the barrels when not being opened. There was also a "molasses" barrel with a hand turned pump

which was used for serving up an order. The colder it got, the thicker the molasses became, and it was very difficult to turn the hand pump.

This is where the saying arose - "Slow as Molasses in January."

It was the truth, as any store clerk would testify. Also, in the cellar of the store were stored large cases of quart bottles of "Canada Dry" ginger ale. That became one of our favorite drinks and we would snatch a quart bottle, open it and drink it while hiding in the store cellar.

As the Eichelberger boys reached the driving age of 16 years, one by one, they were entitled to drive the family Buick and help drive the delivery trucks at the store. Dad never learned to drive, but he always had many willing chauffeurs. One day Dad assigned brother Bob and me the task of driving to Everett, a distance of about twenty miles from Saxton, to get a load of flour. We felt pretty important going such a distance alone in the good old Republic truck. We arrived safely in Everett at the mill and loaded the 25-pound sacks of flour on the truck until it could hold no more. We then started homeward. As we approached the village of Yellow-Creek and driving on a clay and rut-filled road, suddenly the front wheel bounced out of a rut, turned to the left, and threw the truck loaded with flour into a deep ditch.

We were not hurt, just surprised and chagrined at the sudden turn of events. Try as we could, we were unable to get the truck out of the deep ditch. Fortunately, there was a nearby farmhouse with a telephone. Bob decided to phone Dad for further instructions after relating what had taken place.

Dad said if we could not get the truck out of the ditch under its own power, unload the truck and get the farmer to pull us out with a team of horses. We did as directed and the farmer brought over two horses with a "hitch" attached. We unloaded about half a truck of flour and put it along the roadway. The

farmer hooked the hitch to the front of the truck and the horses promptly pulled the old "Republic" back onto the road. We told the farmer that Dad would pay for his time and effort. We did not have any money with us. Our next job was to reload the truck with the 25-pound sacks of flour. The rest of the trip to Saxton was uneventful, but we were late getting home and we still had a truck load of flour to unload in the grain and flour storage building in the back of the store. We were a couple of tired but proud and happy kids to have completed that assignment in one day.

Another well-known person who worked at the Eichelberger's Store was Charley Morningstar. He was quite deaf, but did wear a hearing aid which did not help much. There was John Kelley the bookkeeper. He ran the charge account section, sent out monthly bills to customers, and paid store bills promptly to gain the 2 percent discount. Alice Piper worked in the store office, but also helped the clerk when the occasion demanded. Maggie Little worked in the office and Elsie Benner, Annie Moreland, and Peyton Turner were clerks. Dad was an official greeter and general supervisor of store activities.

I never saw him actually serve any customers, but he would see that they got prompt attention by the store clerks.

There were two other stores in Saxton who were competitors of the Eichelberger Store for the town's business. One was the Stoler Store and the other the Fulton Store. Mr. Fulton eventually decided to sell his store and retire. He was then about 70 years of age. He retired about a week, then approached Dad about giving him a job. He said he could not stand being cooped up all day with his wife Mollie. Being an old friend, Dad hired him on the basis that he could report for work when he felt like it and quit when he was tired. He continued working as a clerk at the Eichelberger Store until his

**death some years later. It was a standard joke that when any retired person came to the store Tom Fulton would say, "If you are 70 years of age and retired, Allie will give you a job!"**

**The Eichelberger Store is an active on-going business in Saxton to this day. The store is now owned and operated by Coolidge Eichelberger and his son. That is Dad's half-brother. But times have brought many changes from the old days. It is now a self-service store. No more free deliveries. Only a few supervisory people operate it. The good old days of lots of clerks, many customers, and lots of general merchandise are gone forever.**