

Park Street Grocery – A Glimpse of Times Gone-By

The era of the “neighborhood” grocery store, fondly remembered by many, is no more. Gone are the days of stopping at the “corner” grocery store for some items needed at the spur of the moment or simply for some friendly conversation with the store owner. They were unique in many respects. They were family owned, they were open when you needed them to be open, they frequently let families carry charge accounts, kids went behind the counter to pick out candy or gum, and they would often deliver grocery items to their customers’ homes.

One prime example of this type of business was Park Street Grocery, formerly located at 717 South Park Street in Fairmont. Some of the owners of the business included Rupert Rempel, Harry Miller, and Burton “Bud” Lund who owned the store up until it closed in 1974. So, what was Park Street Grocery, how did it operate, and why was it important?

Park Street Grocery existed for approximately forty years and was a fixture in that Fairmont neighborhood it served. It not only provided grocery items for the neighborhood, but was also known to the neighborhood youngsters for its penny candy, to the older generation for providing delivery services, to those in need of credit that didn’t have the cash to pay for their goods until later, and to everyone that simply wanted some friendly conversation. In other words, it served the entire neighborhood in more ways than might be imagined at first glance.

Park Street Grocery’s last owner, Burton “Bud” Lund, grew up in Dunnell where his father owned a store, bar, pool hall, barbershop combination. It was likely a result of that experience that inspired Lund to want to become a store owner.

Shortly after he graduated from high school in 1935, he was hired by Harry Miller as a clerk at Park Street Grocery. At that time, his work day was frequently 16 hours in length and his salary was a whopping fifteen dollars per week. In 1942, Lund entered the military. He returned to the store in 1945, later becoming a partner with Miller in 1948.

In the early years of Lund’s ownership, the store was very labor intensive as clerks were needed to serve the customers, stock shelves, bag sugar and flour, write up charge slips, and make deliveries. In 1964, the store became self-service which in turn reduced the need for as much labor as was previously necessary. Park Street Grocery continued to make home deliveries, even though it was an inefficient method of doing business, as it was a tradition they weren’t going to stop. In addition, regular customers were still allowed to buy on credit, paying once per month.

“Bud” Lund’s daughter, Susan Naumann, has many fond memories of the store. One vivid memory she has was when she, her father, Rupert Rempel, and her brother, Gary, all delivered groceries. At that time, in the 1960s and early 1970s, no one locked their houses and those making deliveries would simply let themselves in the house and put the items delivered in the refrigerator or freezer. Another of her memories involves the neighborhood children coming into the store for candy. They were allowed to go behind the counter and pick out the candy of their choice. Penny candy was located on the lowest shelf, nickel candy in the middle, and dime candy on the top shelf. She also told of sacking potatoes into ten pound bags, sorting pop bottles, and working from 6:00 a.m. until 8:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 7:00 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. on Sundays.

The “corner” or “neighborhood” grocery stores are gone, apparently as a result of what might be considered to be progress. Those stores may not have been the most efficient means of doing business, yet they supported family owners for decades and neighborhoods in ways that only those of us that lived through that era can fully understand and appreciate. They provided goods, services, a place for youngsters to meet, a place for anyone to stop for some friendly conversation, and they were available when an item was needed that might have been missed on the regular grocery list. The stores and their owners were fixtures of their neighborhood; they were symbolic of what was good for the neighborhood. They were loved, respected, and finally missed when they eventually closed. Times have changed, retail grocery has evolved, but the memory of that era and those “neighborhood” grocery stores that at one time existed throughout communities in Martin County and beyond will never be forgotten by those fortunate enough to have been in some way a part of that time.

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