

# The Corner Store

by Lynne Belluscio

Recently I visited Strawberry Banke in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. It is a collection of buildings in the old section of Portsmouth which was threatened by neglect. In the 1950s, groups of interested citizens began to single out particular buildings that needed to be saved from the wrecking ball. Many of the buildings were built in the 1700s and had been adapted through the years.

The Strawberry Banke section of Portsmouth was named for the wild strawberries that grew along the banks of the river. Right in the middle of the neighborhood was a boat slip and pier known as "Puddle Dock", which through the years had been filled in. It is now the central square of the area.

Some of the houses have exhibits. Others show architectural restoration and construction. Some have living history demonstrations. I happened to walk into the Abbot Store on Jefferson Street. Walter and Bertha Abbot opened the store in 1919 and after

Walter's death in 1938, Bertha operated it alone until 1950.

The store is furnished to reflect the period 1943-1945, during World War II and when I stopped by, I met Bertha Abbot's neighbor, who told me that Bertha had stepped out for a few minutes, but if I wanted to leave my order on the candy counter, Bertha would fill the order when she got back and I could pick it up later. (It reminded me of the corner stores that I remember growing up in Rochester off South Avenue. And were probably just like the corner stores here in LeRoy at the time.)

I walked inside Abbot's Corner Store and there on the counter shelves were boxes of Jell-O. There were only two flavors - strawberry and orange. (I looked carefully at them and they were real boxes - not replicas!) The shelves at Abbot's store were filled with about 400 different items - a far cry from the nearly 20,000 items carried in today's grocery stores. Packaging dur-



**South Side Grocery, 37 South St. Established 1939 E.L. Robless Jr.; D.E. Levinstein; P. Levinstein, Proprietor - from the 1940 LeRoy Book.**



**Abbot's Corner Store in Strawberry Banke, New Hampshire. Mrs. Abbot's friend sits outside talking with visitors.**



**Inside Abbot's Store. The Jell-O is on the second shelf from the top on the right, right above the Sunkist raisins.**

ing the war was being changed because of the need to divert metal and other materials to strategic wartime uses. Instead of tin, coffee and shortening were packaged in glass jars. The prices on the shelves included the price and the number of ration coupons needed for the purchase of each item. Storekeepers had to give the coupons to suppliers in order to re-order stock. Of course in those days, not all the items for sale were placed out for shoppers to put into their baskets. Many items were behind the counter and you had to ask the storekeeper for help. Sometimes he had to climb up a short ladder or many had long handled "grabbers" that could reach the high shelves.

It was important to know the brand name of the products you wanted. So it was common in advertising to remind people

to "Ask for it by name." Jell-O Brand gelatin - or Maxwell House Coffee - Gold Medal Flour - - and Oxydol laundry soap.

In those days, it didn't take a long time to go shopping for groceries. You bought what was available. Today, I can spend 10 minutes just looking for the size and the brand of the item I want to buy much less trying to compare prices or reading the ingredients to make sure I'm getting the daily supply of vitamin A. I think the only choices of cereal in those days was corn flakes, Rice Krispies and Cheerios. Today, it takes you five minutes just to walk down the cereal aisle. When people ask where does all the time go, I have to think, some of it is spent trying to make a choice. It's nice to have a wide choice, but we forfeit a lot of time.