

W. S. Henry & Son – General Merchandise

A Village Store

By Roger E. Shaffer

The building which bore the sign “W. S. Henry & Son – General Merchandise” was indeed a focal point in the village of Hanover Junction, Pa for many years, until the structure was consumed by flames in 1930. The walls of the building, itself, were not consumed by the fire, but had to be taken down later; however, the interior was extensively damaged. Some small items which may not have been damaged were sold later, but most of the store's contents had to be sent to the garbage dump.



Figure 1 W.S. Henry & Son - General Merchandise

My own personal recollections of the store are many. I guess the glass case containing candy would rate as the highlight of the store's contents. Talking of the store's items for sale, the sign on the east side (front) of the building described the business place accurately: "General Merchandise." The only thing not available that I can think of would have been electronic or computer equipment. But then, the store's existence ended in 1930, and no one knew of the modern-world “electronic gadgets.”

W.S. Henry, to his family, was “William” — known to most community folk as “old Bill Henry”, “Pop-Pop” to his grandsons, and “Uncle Bill” to me, for he was my Grandma Shaffer's brother. My Dad and I both called him “Uncle Bill.” The "Son "part of the store's identification was William's son, Leonard. Leonard played an important role in local policy. He was the mainstay in the planning, construction, and paving of the road from Seven Valleys to Glen Rock.

The store building itself had four floors. Basement, main floor, second floor, and attic.

The basement was used mostly for storage. Among items that I can recall were barrels of syrup (regular and baking syrup). When a customer desired to purchase this product, they would supply their own container and the storekeeper would fill it by pumping by hand from the barrel. Then there were auto tires, tire chains, miscellaneous hardware articles such as plow shares (used by the farmers of the area), an auto-battery charger, and cases of Soda Pop. This is by no means meant to include the complete inventory, but to cite a few articles which were for sale by W.S. Henry & Son. The store was a place where a youngster like myself had the opportunity to view the tremendous amount of goods which were for sale there.

The main floor of the building was really a multi-purpose area.

Here was located, on your left upon entry from the front door, the United States Post Office. Leonard Henry was Postmaster, for “Hanover Jct, Pa.”, the post mark that appeared on all out-going U. S. Mail material.

Post Office Box No. 34 was depository for mail consigned to our family, as well as that mail addressed to the Railroad Agent at Hanover Jct. On this floor, too, was the main area for customer activities. The shelves were loaded with groceries, dry goods, hardware, nails, screws, staples, tools, tobacco products, etc. The Office area occupied space in the north east corner of the building, composed of a desk with an old "OLIVER" typewriter, making it an actual office, and a safe to complete its official part of the business. A special area which cannot be forgotten was the candy case — a large glass-enclosed case, set on a counter — which contained many goodies and caused a lot of wide-eyed youngsters to yearn for some of its contents. Since the container was on the counter, it was necessary for us kids to stand on the wooden bench in front of the counter, otherwise we could not have seen into case, and see all the goodies. The "Penny" goods were in the left side of the case and the "Nickel Bars" were on the right side. What a thrill it was, on rare occasions, to purchase a nickel piece of candy.

The old wooden bench also provided a convenient place to rest and chat for a while, for those so inclined. The bench was close-by to the furnace register in the floor, providing comfort for the bench occupants in the winter. During the winter months, the farmers who brought milk to the station for shipment to the Baltimore market, would usually spend some time at the store before returning home. They tied up their horses in an area provided for this purpose. During the summer months the farmers would return home as soon as possible to continue their chores, and bypass the get together in the store. As a younger kid, I can recall the presence of a spittoon — a wooden box filled with sawdust — in the area where these "Socials" were held. However, later on it was taken out of service — a good idea!

Another small area was used specifically by Uncle Bill for a service to the farmers. It was necessary for the users of milk cans to have each can identified as to the owner and user of the container. So the service which Uncle Bill provided was to provide a brass plate, stamped the farmer's name and Hanover Junction on it. Then using a soldering iron, heated by a gas flame, he attached the tag to the milk can.

The second floor of the store building was primarily for sales of footwear (a bit of memory — "STAR BRAND SHOES"), gloves, overalls, along with a minimal selection of other work clothes.



Figure 2 Star Brand Shoes

The third floor, or attic, was used primarily as a storage area for less-often used items.

As a kid living in the Station House, I was always glad when the Railroad track repair gang — Allen Gladfelter, Foreman — would be working in the station area. I tried to stay close-by, for I was sure "Mr. AI" would have me run to the store to purchase a pack of "Red-Man" chewing tobacco for him. This always meant I would be rewarded with a penny for my efforts. I held this tip money as long as possible, or until the urge to purchase a penny bar of candy at the store could no longer be resisted.

The store owners were providers of more than the materials held in the store building. Gasoline, kerosene, and lubricating oils were available. The east side of the store building had a porch extending the entire length of the building. Since it was a few feet above ground level, a pipe railing served as protection to prevent an accidental fall from the porch. This pipe railing, however, served another useful purpose. The porch benches were frequently used by patrons enjoying a snack or just resting. They would use the railing as a foot rest. Many were the times when I wished I could participate in such a leisurely pastime. There was one restraint, however — finances.

The store was open for business six days per week, never on Sunday. A five-day week would take place if Christmas Day fell on a day other than Sunday. The store opened early in the morning, prior to the arrival time of the early morning Mail Train, due at the junction at 5:53 A.M. The store closed about 9:00 P.M.

Green groceries were a rarity, but bananas were always available. Fresh meats and vegetables were provided to the community by vendors using their own old stand-by method of transportation, the horse and wagon method. Supplies for the store arrived by local freight train service, or by using the store-owned Ford truck to secure provisions from the P. A. & S. Small distributors in York, or sometimes by a trip to Hanover.

Fancy wrapped, individually-packaged items were not the standard practice. Brown butcher paper was commonly used, and was dispensed from a roll on the counter next to the candy case. Brown paper bags were used for many purchases. These bags were suspended on a circular ring from the ceiling, on which were attached hooks to accommodate the various sizes of bags. Also suspended from the ceiling was a small cast-iron container holding a ball of cord string. From this, the store-keeper would pull the needed length of cord string to tie a particular package. After filling a customer's order, the items most often were placed in his empty basket which was brought from home. Big shopping bags of paper or plastic had not yet been invented.

This "W.S. Henry & Son - General Merchandise" store was typical of an important focal point in rural areas across the United States. Not only was it a source of supply for needed materials for the residents of the area, but often a point for dissemination of news reports of interest to a specific area.



Figure 3 Model of W.S. Henry & Son - General Merchandise, built by Roger Shaffer.

R.E.S. - 1999