

A General Store in the Early Twentieth Century (Paquin's store)

In 1903, the house built on this land was partially converted into one of the village's first general stores. The owner, Léandre Gauthier, was certainly not aware that the building's new calling would last more than one hundred years!

Mr. Gauthier improved the exterior by covering it with clapboard and added a storehouse. Then in 1921, his son Joseph Édouard Gauthier took over the business and ran the store.

At that time, the general store was an absolute necessity in a village, both for obtaining merchandise and for meeting people and exchanging news. This store was no exception and was typical of its era.

First, outside, there were posts to which horses were tied, and then inside, a big counter, behind which reigned the master of the premises, ready to serve his customers. Attached to the wall, there were a number of wooden bins containing sugar, brown sugar, peas, dates, dried currants, beans, rice, flour, various spices (ginger, cinnamon...), sulphur, saltpetre, and more. On the counter: a cash register, a scale for weighing bulk products, a big roll of brown paper and a spool of cord for wrapping merchandise. It was customary, of course, for the owner to serve the customers. There was no self-service. The seller, once informed of his customers' needs, walked to the shelves or bins, returning to put the merchandise on the counter. Then the customers would examine the goods and, if they were satisfied, buy them. Depending on their means, they paid cash or had the goods "marked" – bought on credit.

The villager, the country resident or the housewife might each turn up for different purchases. There was a great quantity of men's clothing for work on the farm, on work sites, or for fishing and hunting. For fishing, there were four sizes of bamboo poles as well as a wide variety of lures, and there was ammunition for hunting guns. The store also sold fishing and hunting permits. People no longer had to travel by train to Saint-Jérôme to get what they needed.

It was the same for the housewife, as she was able to find in this store pots, pans, colanders, tin-plated trays, strainers, utensils, pottery dishes and food sold in bulk.

As to foods, once it was determined how many pounds the customer wanted, the seller weighed the chosen product in front of the housewife and put it all into a brown paper bag. In this way, one could purchase candies, cookies, yeast for bread-making, and anything else tucked away in the drawers. Caustic for making soap was also available.

Molasses was a different matter: it was kept in a big barrel. The customer brought in a glass or pottery container and the owner priced the molasses according to the size of the container. The base price was twenty-five cents a gallon. Honey was very popular, as well. Its sale started in the 1930s. Two suppliers supplied the store: Joseph Guillaume Thibault, a local beekeeper, and Mr. Benoît, honey inspector for the province of Québec

Some specific items were also offered for sale: food products from the Victoria chain, medications and harness items for horses, lamp oil, neatsfoot oil, coffee ground on-site, *Chalet*-brand skis and even engagement rings for five dollars.

Leaf pipe tobacco was sold in the store. There were several kinds: *Grand-Rouge fort*, *Petit-Rouge*, *Petit Canadien* and *Curé* tobacco... not to mention the tobacco grown locally. There was a tobacco-tasting contest among local farmers every year and the winner had the privilege of having his tobacco sold in the general store for a year. The sale of various kinds of tobacco, including local production, amounted to more than one thousand pounds annually.

The general store was also a meeting place. During the day, people came to buy, but in the evenings, the old-timers met here to smoke their pipes, play cards or checkers, and discuss news and politics.

Édouard Gauthier died on January 26, 1954. One year later, Ludger Paquin bought the store, the house and its outbuildings. Until his death on April 2, 1975, he maintained the tradition of the general store without making any major changes. In the same spirit of continuity, his son Jacques, took it over and again retained the same format for the store. The small house, however, changed from its residential role to become a jewellery store.

In March 2010, Jacques sold everything to a promoter and all the buildings were torn down or taken apart to make room for a public square. Note the log building; it is the old house in which one of the first general stores opened its doors more than 100 years ago.

Making soap

In most households, the mistress of the house made her own country-style soap. First she saved the household grease all winter. Then, come spring, she melted it all in an iron cauldron. She mixed in caustic and stirred it as she cooked it. When it achieved the proper consistency, she allowed the mixture to rest all night. The next day, she cut it into bricks which she placed on small openwork wooden supports to harden. When they were hard, the bricks were stored and became the household's supply for the year. The liquid residue in the pot was also kept to wash the hardwood floors.

Research and writing: Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC, heritage society
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Legend: Shelving with hunting and fishing items.
Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC



Legend: Shelving and wooden bins located behind the counter, where the goods for sale were kept.
Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC



Legend: The general store's sign when the store closed in 2010.
Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC



Legend: Store facade when Joseph Édouard Gauthier was the owner.
Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC



Legend: Store counter with Jacques Paquin (in the foreground) and his employees.
Source: collection of the Société du Patrimoine SOPABIC