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COUNTRY STORES ON JEFFERSON PIKE

IN THE JEFFERSON AREA

by: Adeline King

There is a historical marker standing at the intersection of Jefferson Pike and Sam Davis Road which reads as follows:

"William Nash opened the first store here in 1803 and the first county courthouse was here in 1804, following the first meeting at Thomas Rucker's house. It was a stopping place on the Georgia Road. It was an important river port and trading post. In 1811, the County Seat was moved to Murfreesboro. Thereafter, until 1815, the Court House housed the Jefferson Seminary of Learning. (The "here" and "it" referred to above referred to settlement which became Old Jefferson.)

William Nash's trading post was on the hill above the junction of the East and West Prongs of the Stones River. The community was given the name Old Jefferson at a later date. William Waller married Elizabeth Nash, daughter of William. Her grave remained in a small burying ground in Old Jefferson until the 1960's, when it was moved to Smyrna because of the preparations for the impoundment of the waters of Percy Priest Lake. William and Elizabeth Waller were the parents of Ephraim, George, Bill, Ben, and James Waller. The William Nash trading post, established about eight years after Tennessee became a State, traded with trappers, hunters, and wilderness men who tied up their canoes, rafts, flat boats, etc., at the nearby banks of the Stones River.

For the period between the time of William Nash's trading post and the latter half of the century, there is little record of other posts and supply stores here. In this discussion, we are covering a period of about 100 years, between 1870 and today in the immediate area of Old Jefferson. In that period, nearly every small community had a country store, sometimes more than one. Some are still in existence, doing business, serving their community; but

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there have been changes in their wares and services.

The country store was a community gathering place and news center, a town hall, a forum of the people and their opinions and ready comments. Every store had its "regulars" who came often and stayed long to talk farming, families, fishing, weather, politics, people. The store was the scene of elections, of personal arguments over candidates and religion. Some men talked best when whittling on a small or large piece of wood. Some expounded longest and loudest when

fortified with a big "plug" of hard chewing tobacco wedged into their jaws and bulging out their cheeks. Taking time to walk over and spit was opportunity for a dramatic pause in the midst of some profound statement. Some just came and sat and listened; the talkers knew all the answers to all the problems (like how to raise children, whom to vote for, what was the best way to cure hams or grow the biggest watermelon or take care of their stint in maintaining their stretch of the County roads.) Although the participants never thought of or labeled their gatherings as such, most of the gatherings were also variety shows.

The country store provided staple goods that people could not produce on their farms for themselves. Every child in the community on their rare trips to the store had his time of staring through the glass case of the candy counter and knew the kind of sweet goodies he could find there. One early kind was called "bacon candy," as it was a thin strip of folded brown and white striped sweetness with a marble as prize hidden inside the folds. Many stores had pickle barrels, and just about all had big rounds of cheese in a wooden container, from which the storekeeper would slice off portions for the customers. "Gimmee a nickel's worth of cheese 'n crackers" was a familiar order. "Coal oil" was a major necessity for lamps and lanterns and therefore a big item for sale in the store. "Onion sets" and other seeds were

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available in the spring for farmers who had not kept them over from the previous year; plow points and harness repair items and work clothes were frequent purchases.

In a short area on Jefferson Pike, between Florence Road and Mona Road, there were a number of country stores, dating back to the early trading post adjacent to the Stones River at Old Jefferson. This record is more a reminiscent narrative than historical report. It journeys back into a pleasant rural era when the church, the school, and the store were the gathering places and fostered neighborliness and mutual exchange. This record has been compiled from material generously provided by a number of people whose families have been in the business of operating country stores, and we express our appreciation for their willingness to help. They are the J. P. Smith family, the R. S. (Sidney) Waller family, Lucille Mullins Fergus, Mrs. Jenny Phipps, Bob and Katherine Barrett, Everett Waller, Bessie Moore, and Inez Peyton Vance.

About 1870, the Ben Wade store was built on the Jefferson Pike north of Old Jefferson and in the northeast corner of the front yard of what came to be known as the McCulloch place and the J. P. Smith place, not far from the bridge over the West Branch of the Stones River. This store was operated by George Robertson until it was destroyed by a windstorm in 1908. Bessie Moore recalls that on an early morning in 1908, when she was visiting Rubye and Lorene Waller, Walter Wade Lenoir ran across the Pike to tell the Waller family that the previous night's storm had "blown away" the George Robertson store. Ben Wade, when he had turned that store over to Robertson, moved up to Jefferson and began another store on the Square and in front of his house. After Wade's death, and the destruction of the earlier store, George Robertson and R.O. (Bob) Davis ran that store for several years. Davis moved to Smyrna and established a flour mill where he had made the well-known and widely

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distributed "Sarah Davis Flour," With the departure of Davis Robertson and R.I. (Bob) Martin

operated the store together and Martin continued it after Robertson's death.

George Robertson's store was appointed as official location of the local post office, and he was named postmaster on November 25, 1902. Before him, Sal i a Waller (m. Finney) and Bettie Waller (m. Wright) had served as local postmistresses during the administration of Presidents Grover Cleveland, 1893-1897, and William Mc Kinley, 1897-1901. During the same period, Mack Clark, brother of Wiley and Dyson Clark of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, ran a store on the north side of the Square in the corner of Ephraim Waller's property. Bessie Wright Moore recalls that the store was in the corner of the yard of her grandfather Eph Waller was purchased by her father, W. W. Wright, and moved to a location in Smyrna (the site on Front Street just off Wright Street where the Bi-Rite Grocery recently stood).

John Lenoir was another store operator; his place was at the southeast corner of the Square. All stores in Jefferson faced onto the Square, which for a brief time, 1804 to 1811, was the County Seat of Rutherford County.

Around 1910 to 1911, R.S. (Sidney) and Claiborne Waller, sons of Ephraim, built a store on the Square's south side. R.S. Waller's residence was adjacent to the store. Joe King went into partnership with the Waller brothers, and the business was known as "Waller Bros, and King." Later the Waller brothers bought King's interest; and the store was known as "Waller Bros." In 1918, Claiborne Waller sold his interest to Sidney who, with the help of his wife Margie, operated the store there until about 1930, when it was sold to Sam Hall.

R. S. Waller, General Merchandise, had for sale a large variety of items -coffee beans (roasted but not ground), sugar, canned goods, tobacco for chewing

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and smoking, snuff, hard candy, work clothes and shoes, needles and pins and thread, flavorings, harness, farm equipment parts, and many other things; later, when the soft drink industry offered their products, the store stocked them. Bessie Moore says that, even if Mr. Waller had a selection of candy on his shelves, his daughters Rubye and Lorene liked to take their Cousin Bessie across the road to George Robertson's store for a favorite kind.

Mr. Waller had a two-horse wagon with a tarpaulin cover, in which he made weekly trips (Wednesday-Thursday) into Nashville to sell the country produce he had purchased on his house-to-house market route, and to buy wares he needed to restock his store. His main wholesaler and supplier was Orr, Mizell and Company, later Robert Orr & Company. He also bought some items from H. G. Hill, who at that time had only one store in Nashville. Mr. Waller purchased his dry goods from Yeargin's. Some weeks, Mr. Waller would ride to early morning 7 a.m. "Short Dog" into Nashville, while his helper drove the wagon into the city. Mr. Waller would stay overnight with his brother-in-law Emmett Starkey and family, and the helper would stay with the team and wagon. Sometimes, Mr. Waller took his daughters Rubye, Lorene and Evelyn (son Robert Sidney Waller, Jr., was born later) into the city on these weekly trips. He would make a comfortable resting place for the girls in the back of the wagon so that they could, if they wanted, to sleep for much of the drive. They left home "before daylight", and it was a long, tedious journey.

Mr. Waller also ordered goods from "drummers," who were regular callers at the country stores. One of the drummers who come regularly was J. Edgar Evins who sold coffee for the Arbuckle Company of St. Louis. This Mr. Evins was the father of former U. S. congressman from Tennessee Joe L. Evins. Other drummers were salesmen for medicines (standard home remedies of the time), and many other items. Mr. Waller often said that he had to be very careful

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when these salesmen speeded up their sales pitches or he might find he had ordered more than he needed or wanted. Bob Lee was a well-known drummer and an especially interesting one. He represented the Robert Orr Company and could recite rapidly and without notes all the items on his sales list. People of the community liked to be at the store on the days when Bob Lee was to be there; they watched in awe as he leaned against a porch post and "spieled" off a hundred or more separate items without stopping. He drove a T-model Ford and that created interest also; it was said he never let any kind of bad weather keep him from coming on his appointed day.

From people along his "market wagon" route, Mr. Waller bought produce that people had for sale, like chickens, turkeys, hams, eggs, butter, all kinds of hides (possum, skunks, fox, coon, muskrat), and many other things. He paid cash or exchanged merchandise carried on his wagon. The purchased produce he sold locally or in Nashville at various markets. When someone in the community brought a hide from a beef animal, Mr. Waller would spread it out on the ground, sprinkle it with salt for curing before he took it into Nashville on his next trip.

Mr. Waller's "market wagon" (sometimes called rolling store) went regularly along the roads and farms on the community. People along the route always welcomed the arrival of the market wagon whose driver brought them news of other people in the community or Nashville or the world beyond; and so the driver's trips along the country roads moved slowly, as the conversations went on. One day, according to Mr. Waller's family memories, when he was examining a ham offered to him for sale, a large roach ran up his sleeve and lodged in his ear. He struggled to remove it, but it was embedded there. The story goes that he almost panicked, whipped up his horses, and raced down

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Florence Road until he reached the home of Mrs. Ernest King, who was recognized for knowing what to do in cases of emergency, and asked for her help. Using an old home method, she went for her kettle on the kitchen stove, brought warm water and dripped it slowly into the occupied ear; and the roach crawled out, Mr. Waller was calm and could continue on his route.

There were always "regulars" visiting at the Waller store. Some of them were Oscar Mann, Jim Creech, "Boots" Lenior, Ben Ward, Eph Waller. One of them, Jim Creech, had a habit of coming early in the day, staying much of the day without making a purchase; then, when the store was closed for the day, the Waller family had eaten their supper, and were ready to retire, Jim Creech would knock on their door to ask Mr. Waller to sell him what he had come for in the morning, maybe a "nickel's worth" of tobacco. Mr. Waller would open the store to get it for him.

At Christmas time, many of the men of the town and community gathered to celebrate on

Christmas Eve. They played pranks on each other, told stories imbibed considerably, shot off fireworks. One of the annual Christmas Eve customs was to "shoot off" an anvil. They put gunpowder on the anvil, touched it off with a torch, and created a loud explosion that was considered the finale of the celebration. It is said that, at one of these occasions, Mr. Eph Waller, senior of the group, dared to stand on the anvil when it was shot off. Like the schools that had their "programs" like churches that gave the teaching and preaching on religion, the country store also provided a gathering place.

Another store in the town of Jefferson was run by the Mullins family. it was located on the east side of the Pike and on the south side of the Square, down the hill, and not far from the toll gate farther south. Some-time in the early 1900 ' s, Mr. Robert D. (always known as D) Mullins and his wife Vera Walden Mullins and their family came to live in Old Jefferson. Before

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that, they had lived near the West Fork of the Stones River; their house was near the spring house on the John Dement place. When the Mullins family first moved into Jefferson, they operated a store in a small room at the back of their house. Later they built a store at the corner of their front yard, facing Jefferson Pike, and across the road from the town's blacksmith shop (this had been the stables for the old tavern on the hill in earlier days.)

Mr. and Mrs. Mullins were the parents of ten children. Their names, not in order of birth were: Ethel, Ernest, Ruth, Lillian, R.D., Jr., Roy, Jack, Beatrice, Lucile, and Nell. The Mullins store offered for sale or trade all the items generally provided in country stores; and they also, like other store operators of the time, "ran a market wagon." Their son Ernest drove the wagon along country roads to sell goods and buy produce. Frances King Johns recalls an incident on a summer afternoon when she and her sister were walking along Florence Road on their way to visit school friends and neighbors, Lena East and Maggie Warpool, whose house was on the right side of the road and facing down-hill to the river. The road was narrow at the point when they saw Ernest Mullins turning his wagon. He backed too far onto the down slope of the river bank, and the wagon went halfway over the edge and hung there, while produce and eggs spilled out over the rear end of the wagon and the side of the road.

The Mullins store could claim credit as matchmaker as it was there that a handsome young lady of the community, Miss Nell Holloway, who enjoyed horse-back riding and did it well, stopped at the store for a rest and there was introduced to her future husband, Mr. George Hart, salesman for Arm and Hammer Soda Company.

The regular "drummers" called at the Mullins store, which carried on its shelves, salt, sugar, piece goods, work clothes, farm supplies like nails and plow points, needles and pins, candy, "coal oil" of course and other items.

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At these early stores, when a customer came with his oil can to buy oil, the storekeeper after filling it would push a small potato over the spout to keep the fuel from splashing out as the customer walked home.

Mr. Mullins died in 1925; his family continued to operate the store for a time. It is not known definitely in which year it was discontinued.

Another store on Jefferson Pike in the area was known by several names, such as Phipps, Martin, Smith. Mrs. Jenny Phipps, Smyrna, Tennessee, remembers that her husband's family lived in the old Walnut Grove School building after it was converted into a residence. It stood on Jefferson Pike where the Stones River Baptist Church is located today, a short distance from the intersection of Jefferson Pike and the Sam Davis Road. Mr. Phipps, Sr. drove a market wagon in the area. His mother, known by all as "Aunt Minerva", lived with the family and was in charge of growing and tending the chickens and the flower garden and was recognized for them. Mr. Phipps' son Cons (C.J.) Phipps and Miss Jenny Oliver were married on December 22, 1914; in 1915, they moved into the senior Phipps 1 home, known in the area as "the Holloway place," also on Jefferson Pike. In 1916, the elder Mr. Phipps and family moved into a small house owned by J.J. Martin, near the intersection of Jefferson Pike and Florence Road, and began the operation of the store, which was property of Mr. Martin, and across the road from the residence of the Phipps family. At that time, Mr. and Mrs. Cons Phipps moved to the "Macy place," at the intersection of Jefferson Pike and Weakley Lane, where presently a boat-building business is operated. Like other storekeepers, Mr. Phipps and son Cons operated a "market wagon," selling or exchanging for farm produce all the usual items carried on these rolling stores. He purchased butter, eggs, country lard, poultry, etc. He carried at the back of his wagon a big coop for the poultry he bought. Mrs. Margie Waller, before her husband opened his

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Old Store building on Mona Road about 2 miles north of Mona

Now on Eades Farm

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store, would buy for her children and visiting Bessie Wright the rare treat of bananas which Mr. Phipps carried on his wagon. It was a risk for storekeepers to buy bananas for country sale, as they had to buy a stalk and would have to do a good selling job to dispose of them before they became overripe.

Once a week, Mr. Phipps made an overnight trip to Nashville for selling and buying, as was the custom with all market wagoneers of the time. The Phipps family operated the store until 1920, when they moved to Nashville. The J. P. Smiths were in charge by 1921. Before the Smiths came to the Jefferson Pike location, they were for short periods in charge of stores on the Mona Road and at Lamar. Before he was married to Grace Estes, Mr. Smith had run a market wagon.

The Smith store, as it came to be known, was composed of two rooms and a cellar, but the cellar was never used. They sold feed, farm items like plow points, nails, harness equipment, as well as piece goods, work clothing, needles, pins, thread, food items, "coal oil," etc. Drummers called at the Smith store representing suppliers of coffee, tobacco, dry goods, farm implements, candy, and various other things. The Smiths operated the store for 21 years, built up a good business, made many friends. Like other stores, they had "regular" visitors, customers, sitters, talkers, some of the frequent comers were Mr. John Dement, son Carlos Dement, the Will

Martins, "Squire" Jim Martin, John Coleman, Jim Massey, Ernest King, brothers Frank, Rufus, Glendon Johns, Joe King, Dan Muse, Frank Cheatham Ward.

The store was a gathering place, an interesting place; children liked to stare through the glass of the candy case and buy a "penny piece" if they had a penny. The store owners daughter Mary Alice wangled her father out of many pieces to eat and dispense at school. Mr. John Dement, the elder of

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Roy King store at corner of Jefferson Pike and Florence Road

Barretts store Mona 1984

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the "regulars," had never heard of health-seeking "brisk walks" or "jogging" enthusiasts, but he generally walked from his home by the river on Florence Road on his visits to the store.

The J. P. (Peyton) Smiths discontinued their operation of the store in 1942. It was not re-opened.

In 1947, Everett Waller built a small, modern store and service station at the corner of Florence Road and Jefferson Pike. It was operated by his brother Ernest H. (Bud) Waller for five years. In 1952, Roy and Marie King who lived directly across Jefferson Pike from the store and at the site of the former residence of J. J. Martin, bought the store and did a flourishing business there until 1976 or 1977, when the operation closed and the structure was removed. With automatic gasoline pumps, freezers for maintaining food and cold drinks, with large trucks delivering products at the door, the store stocked all items of a modern grocery. It was a stopping place for people of the community, for men of the Corps of Engineers surveying the area of river and land prior to the building of Percy Priest Dam. Its services changed with the times, but the store was still a center for gathering and talking.

A few miles south of the Town of Jefferson was the Mona Store, which is the only one of the stores covered in this study that is still in operation and doing good business today. The first store building, at the intersection of Jefferson Pike and Mona Road, was constructed by Mr. Bill Harris, father of Mrs. Minnie Harris Beaty of Smyrna, to be used by Elvis Rushing and Hayes Tomlin. They had bought an acre of land, had the store built, and opened for business sometime around 1896. Mrs. Charles E. (Minnie) Beaty grew up in the Mona community. Another Harris family, the John Harrises, were local residents; they were related by marriage to Bill Harris, who had moved here from Kentucky.

Bob Barrett, Rufus Barrett Tom Mallard and Henry Gooch

in front at Mona Store

From 1896, there was a post office in the store; it remained there until 1904 when the rural routes were initiated out of Murfreesboro by the U. S. Post Office. Mrs. Beaty says that the name "Mona" was given to the community when one was needed to identify the post office. Someone who was reading a romantic novel of the time liked the name of the heroine, Mona, suggested to the group deciding on a name; and it was adopted. They agreed it sounded good, was short and easy to spell, sent it off to Washington, and it became official.

In 1912, Mr. Oscar Phillips purchased the store from Messrs. Rushing and Tomlin. During the next seven years, Messrs. Ash and Spencer Short ran the store and a local market wagon. They went about buying eggs, poultry, butter, and other farm products. Fannie Short Wright, daughter of Spencer Short, says that her father carried in the wagon a "lard stand" and, as he bought butter along his route, he put it into the "stand" (can); later, he and Mrs. Short would "work" the butter and mold it into units for sale in Nashville. For a short time before the Shorts began operation, Clyde Rushing, son of Elvis Rushing, had been in charge of the store and wagon.

About 1922, Mr. & Mrs. Brum Peyton bought the store from the Shorts. Mr. Peyton lived for only a few years after the purchase; and his wife Katie Lee Phillips Peyton, daughter of Oscar Phillips, continued the store. Her brother Shelah Phillips had some business of his own there, too; but lived there with his sister and her family and assisted them. He ran his part of the business from a storehouse at the back of main building; a covered walkway joined the two; and, in winter, Shelah Phillips hung rabbits he had bought and prepared for sale later in Nashville markets. (Mrs. Inez Peyton Vance, daughter of Katie Lee Phillips Peyton, furnished much of this material).