*Back Home by Chris Hardie*

**Reader memories fill in details on general stores**

The small general stores that served our rural communities have all nearly vanished, but they certainly have left behind vivid memories.

A few weeks ago, I wrote about the general stores located in Disco and Franklin in western Jackson County, along with Hegg and Beach Corners in eastern Trempealeau County. There were four stores within 14 miles of each other.

My story generated a lot of reader response through both email and social media. Clearly, I am not the only one who fondly recollects what seemed like simpler times. The responses also filled in some of the missing information on the history of the stores, particularly in Beach Corners.

Deb Householder said she grew up in Disco and her best friend’s parents were Disco Store owners Ray and Ann Zindrick. “Lots of good memories of the neighbors who gathered there to catch up on the latest gossip,” Householder said.

Some relatives of mine weighed in on their memories of the Franklin Store, which was where I spent many an hour in my youth.

Margaret Young, my aunt, grew up in my grandparents’ house right across from the store. “I remember before I started school, my dog Smokey and I would cross the road to visit with Augie (store owner August Yahr) and he would cut off a hunk of summer sausage or a pie-shaped chunk of longhorn cheese and the three of us would sit on the porch and eat. He always had a crisp white apron on fresh every day.”

My cousin Patricia Steine Stahl also remembers my grandmother sending her over to the store for a chunk of longhorn cheese. “I loved that store,” Stahl said. “They also carried the best bib overalls, which was the rage when I was a teen.”

August and Josephine Yahr operated the store until 1959 and sold it to Theodore and Borghild Fosse. Their grandson Ted Graff recalls that his grandfather had a coat with the slogan “Franklin Store, the biggest little market in town. If we can’t find it, you can help look for it.”

Several folks said they remembered the Underheim family that was long associated with the Hegg Store. Lars Underheim ran the store from 1901 (buying it in 1907) until 1949 when his son, Kasper (“Kappy”), took over with his wife, Veronica (“Ronnie”). Lars — who died in 1971 — still helped out from time to time.

Wanda Vehrenkamp, who grew up in Hegg, said: “The Hegg kids knew Jerry the Sunbeam bread guy, Ralph the pop delivery guy and Ron Truax, the Marigold milk delivery guy. The Underheims still had it when I graduated high school in 1973.”

Much more information has come forth on the Beach Store, which was built in 1922 by Knute and Synva Lynghammer, according to a descendant. The Lynghammers sold it to Gordon Herried in 1936.

The store was sold to Sander and Irene Lynghammer before it passed to Harry Cox about 1945, then to Ted Hulberg and then to Ed and Mabel Gunderson, who ran it for about 25 years.

Lori McCann said she grew up next to the Beach Store. “If the store was closed, I’d just go in the back door, which was where Mabel and Ed lived. They would let me go in the store, get what I needed, write it down on the register and off I’d go. My parents charged their groceries by the month.”

Others recalled buying penny candy in the store or being dropped off by bus at the store if they lived in the neighborhood.

I did have one connection to the store building that slipped my memory. After it closed as a general store, the building was operated as Beaver Creek Piano and Trading Company for a few years before being sold to Christa Berg for her yarn store in 1983.

I bought a guitar at the store when I was in junior high.

I had aspirations of being a rock star.

Those dreams have gone the way of the stores.

But I still have the guitar.

*Chris Hardie spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and publisher. He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and won dozens of state and national journalism awards. He is a former president of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. Contact him at chardie1963@gmail.com.*