

# HILLSIDE'S ORIGINAL STORES

As prepared by the Staff of  
The Hillside National Bank



*Looker's General Store from an old Photograph*

The retail merchant has long been considered the backbone of the American system of free enterprise and democracy.

The first store in present day Hillside was operated for more than 40 years by Horace Greeley Looker on the site of today's Baker and Taylor Co.

Begun more than 70 years ago, the general store specialized in groceries for the community known as Lyons Farms, feed for horses and cattle and conversation for all.

For many years, the Lyons Farms Post Office was situated in a five foot cubicle at the right of the main entrance and the store became the main gathering place in Lyons Farms. It was here that plans for separation from Union Township were formulated in 1912 and 1913.

Mr. Looker served as postmaster. Like his famous namesake, he was the source for most information dealing with community affairs.

New York-bound commuters then moving into the changing community, stopped at the store en-route to the station to warm themselves by the pot-belly stove, exchange ideas, purchase a good five-cent cigar from a glass case and sample Mr. Looker's variety of cheeses. These cheeses, favored by many, were kept in an enclosure known as a "safe" to keep them free from mice and flies.

A large scale used for weighing the feed for farmers functioned in the same capacity for neighboring children. Many children also made their first major purchase from the row of large glass jars containing penny candy.

Housewives could purchase their smoked hams or beef and bacon from the display on hand and watch their coffee ground to order. Stacks of wax-paper wrapped soda crackers lined the old wooden counter. Sugar was sold from a large barrel at the end of the counter.

With the advent of the automobile, Mr. Looker purchased one of the first in the township. His son, Stuart Looker, drove from house-to-house obtaining and delivering orders to the housewife becoming the first free motor delivery service.

Business continued well after the township was established in 1913.

Mr. Looker retired when the store was removed in 1928 with several others to make room for the new overpass in North Broad Street over the contemplated State highway and the Lehigh Valley Railroad.

## THE WOODRUFF STORE . . .

Charles T. Woodruff erected the first store between Looker's store and Elizabeth in the Saybrook section about 1900. It was operated briefly by him and later by George C. Ryno.

Probably the best known operator however was Gilbert Eaton who followed Mr. Ryno. In the middle twenties, the Eatons moved to a new building in North Broad Street at Ridgway Avenue and remained there until they retired in the early thirties.

The Conant Street store has been operated at various times since the Eatons left it. It last was used as a bakery in 1940.

### **KAL'S DELI . . .**

William Thomas, a retired tailor, who served the township as both special policeman and truant officer during its formative years, opened a candy store in Union Avenue at Virginia Street opposite the Saybrook School shortly after it was built in 1910.

He was replaced by Joseph J. Scannell, a member of the Saybrook Volunteer Fire Department, about five years later. The store became the meeting place for the "Salem A.C.," a group of boys, who played under the name, "Hillside Yankees," on the open fields in Hurden and Looker Streets.

Mr. Scannell enlarged the facilities and added a bakery business in 1918. The family used a gay red truck to deliver the freshly baked goods. Later the grocery business also was added.

In 1925, Mr. Scannell began a luncheonette in a store in North Broad Street at Hollywood Avenue where a gasoline station stands today. This store also served as a trolley station.

He moved to the present location of Scannell's Tavern in 1927 with a luncheonette and changed to a tavern following the repeal of prohibition. His tavern license was the first issued here.

Mr. Scannell sold the Union Avenue store to Isadore Sidwa about 1926 for a delicatessen. Mr. Sidwa was succeeded after 23 years by his nephew, Eugene Kolakowski, present proprietor. Now trading as "Kal's Deli," the store also features fresh vegetables and frozen foods in addition to groceries and delicatessen items.

A small paper store equipped with an exterior sheltered area and a bench was erected by Gottlieb Schnabel at the trolley car's exit into North Broad Street near Williamson Avenue in the second decade.

There the customer could sample candy, soda and ice cream with the magazines and newspapers while he sat and waited for the trolley car to Newark or Elizabeth. This structure was removed when the trolley was abandoned.

The first major grocery and delicatessen on the "hill" at the intersection of today's Hillside and Maple Avenues was opened by Michael Sabin about the same time the township was founded.

In addition to edibles, Mr. Sabin also was known among the small fry as the best source of supply for firecrackers for Independence Day celebrations. Benjamin Bernstein replaced Mr. Sabin as proprietor 30 years ago.

Another delicatessen was operated briefly during the same period by Jacob Turner at the site of Zilahy's Cleaners. He was replaced by his son, Amzi, who also added a restaurant.

## WUKITSCH AND VIT STORES . . .

On the west side in Salem or West Lyons Farms, the first store was operated by Joseph Wukitsch on Broadway from about 1910 to 1930. Lists of voters were displayed there or at the grocery store and ice cream parlor in Long Avenue organized in 1915 by Mrs. Anton A. Vit, Sr., mother of the former township attorney.

Mrs. Vit began serving lunches with the help of her young son, Anton A. Vit, Jr., to the 100 workmen employed to build the Bristol-Myers Co. in 1919. Deliveries were made in a wheel barrow pushed by young Tony.

By 1924, her business had grown so much that Mr. Vit quit his position and joined his wife. Today it continues under Henry Vit, another son.

Mr. and Mrs. Steven Toth operated a bakery opposite the Wukitsch store and Mrs. Mason, mother of the former Deputy Police Chief John Mason, conducted a candy and grocery store in Long Avenue at Pennsylvania Avenue.

Frank Doll and his former employee, Harry Huttle, who had peddled their wares by horse and wagon, opened butcher shops in Hollywood Avenue when that area was subdivided.

Opened at the same time was Thomas Kirkman's stationery store, which he sold in the early twenties to William Bahret. Since 1924, the store also has served as a post-office sub-station.

The first World War period saw the beginning of many other stores. Some of these were Wade's Store in Woodruff Avenue at Coe Avenue and Morris Blonsky's confectionery store, opposite it.

A Mr. McCrorie ran a drug store at Long Avenue and Pennsylvania Avenue, becoming the first in the township. William Smith operated a store in North Broad Street at Hillside Avenue and the Collani family conducted a hardware business adjacent to it. The building was razed for a gas station.

The Kern Drug Store was opened next to the Looker Store in 1920. When it was removed with the Looker Store in 1928, it moved to the corner at North Broad Street and Mertz Avenue becoming the Kern-Wuensch Store a year later. The store was closed in 1948.

Another pharmacy opened in the early twenties was operated by Joseph Caden at Long and Hollywood Avenues opposite the McCrorie store and was followed by Miller's Pharmacy.

By the twenties, store areas were growing rapidly in Hollywood, Coe, Liberty and Maple Avenues.

Today there are approximately 172 stores providing nearly every service.