

The History of Wannamaker's Store, Northbrook, Ontario

Wannamaker's Is 25-Year Tradition in Northbrook

(Article written by Rod Dawson, approximately 1983)

The sign on the door at Wannamaker's Store in Northbrook states, "Trump Cigars, Canada's finest at 5 cents".

The sign is old and the doors are original. Things have changed since that sign first went up.

Twenty-five years ago there was no self-serve. A checker board was set up near the oil stove and the customers gathered round to chat and watch the checker or chess game in progress.

While their customer socialized, the Wannamakers would be filling orders.

Prices were much different in those days. Records from Sandy Drysdale in 1947, the year before the Wannamakers took over, showed prices were quite modest. Butter at 63 cents a pound. Bread 13 cents a loaf. Lard 29 cents a pound. Large tin of salmon at 37 cents. Steaks at 45 cents a pound.

An axe sold for \$1.85. A package of cigarette tobacco sold for 20 cents and many people rolled their own rather than use tailor made.

In 1949 prices were still relatively low. Bread, two for 30 cents. Coffee 38 cents for a half pound. Milk up to 15 cents a quart. Coal oil 32 cents a gallon. Two pairs of shoes cost only \$2.20. Sugar was 10 cents a pound.

By 1953 prices were up. Cigarettes, 42 cents a package. Gas for the car was up to \$1.33 a gallon. Margarine was 40 cents a pound. A tin of carnation milk was 17 cents.

In 1963 prices were still going up in most cases. Sugar was 11 cents a pound. Lard was down from a 1947 price of 27 cents to a low of 25 cents a pound. Bread was up to 21 cents a loaf while butter was



down to 57 cents a pound. You could pick up a new broom for 50 cents, mail a letter for a nickel, buy a bottle of pop for nine cents, including deposit, and a quart of milk for 24 cents a quart.

Sausages cost 52 cents a pound but vegetables were cheap. Onions nine cents a pound, tomatoes 10 cents a pound and a one pound cabbage cost only one thin dime. Chocolate bars a nickel, salmon 51 cents a tin and bologna 35 cents a pound.

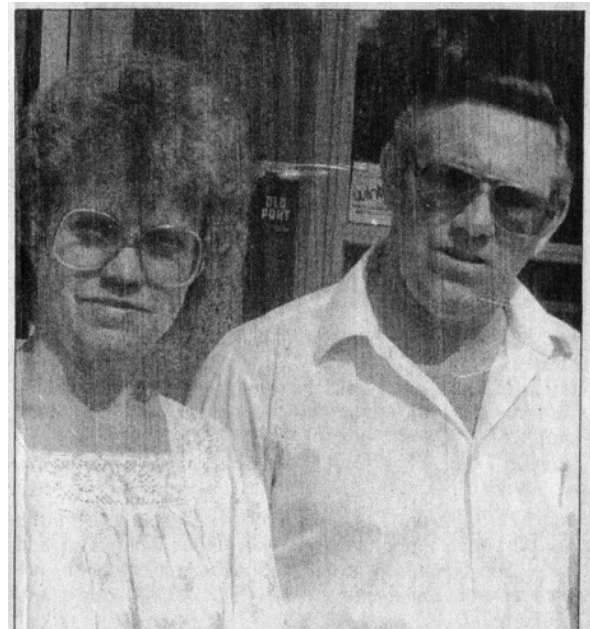
By 1970 the price of bologna had risen to 49 cents a pound. A tin of tomato soup was a mere 16 cents with 50 pounds of potatoes for a modest \$1.79.

The physical layout of the store has changed over the years. No longer large containers of bulk food, the store has goods on shelves and counters so customers can help themselves. Gone are the chess and checker games and the socializing around the stove.

The cold water filled pop cooler with pop at five cents a bottle has long gone to whatever heaven these things go to. A set of fan scales is no longer legal and is stored away with an ancient typewriter.

A modern meat room was added in 1972. There is one other memento of the old days still present, as well as the sign advertising Trump cigars at five cents. In "olden days", as youngsters often say, parcels were tied with string fed down from a wire dispenser that hung from the ceiling. Walk into Wannamaker's and you can still see the old string dispenser guarding its place among more modern conveniences.

It is nice to save some momentos from the past to help us remember where we came from.



(Dawson photo)

Years of service

Connie and Don Wannamaker in Northbrook look back over the 25 years of service to area people and tourists.



Northbrook Storekeepers Look Back Over Years

(Article written by Rod Dawson,
approximately 1983)

There is a little bit of nostalgia in the air for Don and Connie Wannamaker as they look over 25 years Wannamaker's Store operated in Northbrook.

Jean and Clayton Wannamaker 25 years ago purchased the business from Sandy Drysdale. On June 18, 1958, they opened for business as Wannamaker's Store.

The business is still in the Wannamaker family, now run by son Don and his wife Connie.

Northbrook was smaller back then in 1948. People speculated that if there was to be any growth in Northbrook it would be towards the south. North of the Northbrook Hotel there was only Wannamaker's, Shotten's Restaurant and Sower's Live Bait.

The village did grow, but it grew at the north end. So now Wannamaker's store is about the centre of the village, rather than on the outskirts. New additions to the village include a bank, the medical centre, a brewer's retail outlet, a liquor store, post office building and a fairly large senior citizen apartment unit.

The quiet village store has not been immune from the impact of big and distant government. Provincial sales tax is now one of the many gifts government has sent to plague the small businessman.

Canada pension plan, surely a benefit for all employees, is another bookkeeping job adding to the burden of the small business man, say the Wannamakers. The latest government interjection into village life has been the metric system.

Metrification requires new equipment and expenses so goods can be sold to customers in units many customers neither understand nor want.



Jean and Clayton Wannamaker



Note: Mrs. Vogen's house is in the background - now the location of the LCBO

Formerly the liquor store and the beer store operated as one unit. They had no room to store empty bottles so Wannamaker's was designated as an empty bottle return depot.

One summer there was a brewer's retail strike. While no empties went out they kept coming in. Wannamaker's store was kept busy with returns during that hot summer holiday week.

In these uncertain times it is a pleasure to see a small country business proudly carrying on a 25-year record of service to their community.

Store Receipts The First Day Were Only \$10

(Article written by Rod Dawson, approximately 1983)

Back in June, 1958, when Clayton and Jean Wannamaker had their first day of business at Wannamaker's Store in Northbrook, it could not have been called a roaring success.

The total take that day was less than \$10. Jean, a cook to tempt even the most picky eater, began selling her own homemade butter tarts, bread rolls, loaves of bread, pies, cinnamon buns and other treats that attracted many customers.

From that \$10 beginning the business increased so that at the beginning of the summer season Don and Connie Wanamaker needed Debbie Kosziwka, Sandi Kosziwka, Tracy Wood, Richard Cuddy, Nora Timmerman and Joyce Parks to help run the business.

Wannamaker's store has had some interesting customers. There was Acie Hartin, an older gentleman who, with pack on back, walked the three mile distance to the store every Saturday.

He brought gifts of turnips and asparagus from his garden when they were in season. Even the cold and snow of winter didn't stop his regular shopping trips.

One winter weekend Hartin didn't show up at the store so Don Wannamaker and some other villagers visited him to make sure he was well. He had no phone so it was necessary to go right to his house.

Hartin was suffering from three cracked ribs but when the boys arrived he was strapping on snowshoes to try and make the trek. He settled on having his shopping delivered by snowmobile.

Dave Trumble, Canada's oldest living citizen, was a regular customer. He grew gladiolus and delighted in presenting Jean Wannamaker with a lovely bouquet when he came to town.

Merrill Denison was a frequent visitor to the Wannamaker's store. His land on Mazinaw Lake north of Cloyne eventually became part of what is now known as Bon Echo Park.

Susan Hawley is another regular customer. Hawley has been a customer for most of the 25 years and is only one of many long time customers.

The Wannamakers credit their staff of years gone past, as well as the present, for retaining the loyalty of their customers. Past employees come back to shop and just for a visit.

Almost as much a community centre as a store, Wannamaker's is a place where people like to drop in.



Brenda Scott using meat saw



Connie Wannamaker at the check-out counter.



Written for June 18, 2011- 100th Birthday Celebration for Jean
A Bit of History about Wannamaker's General Store and Meat
Market

Jean and Clayton Wannamaker purchased a general store in Northbrook at an auction sale in the year 1958

They gradually increased the business known as Wannamaker's General Store

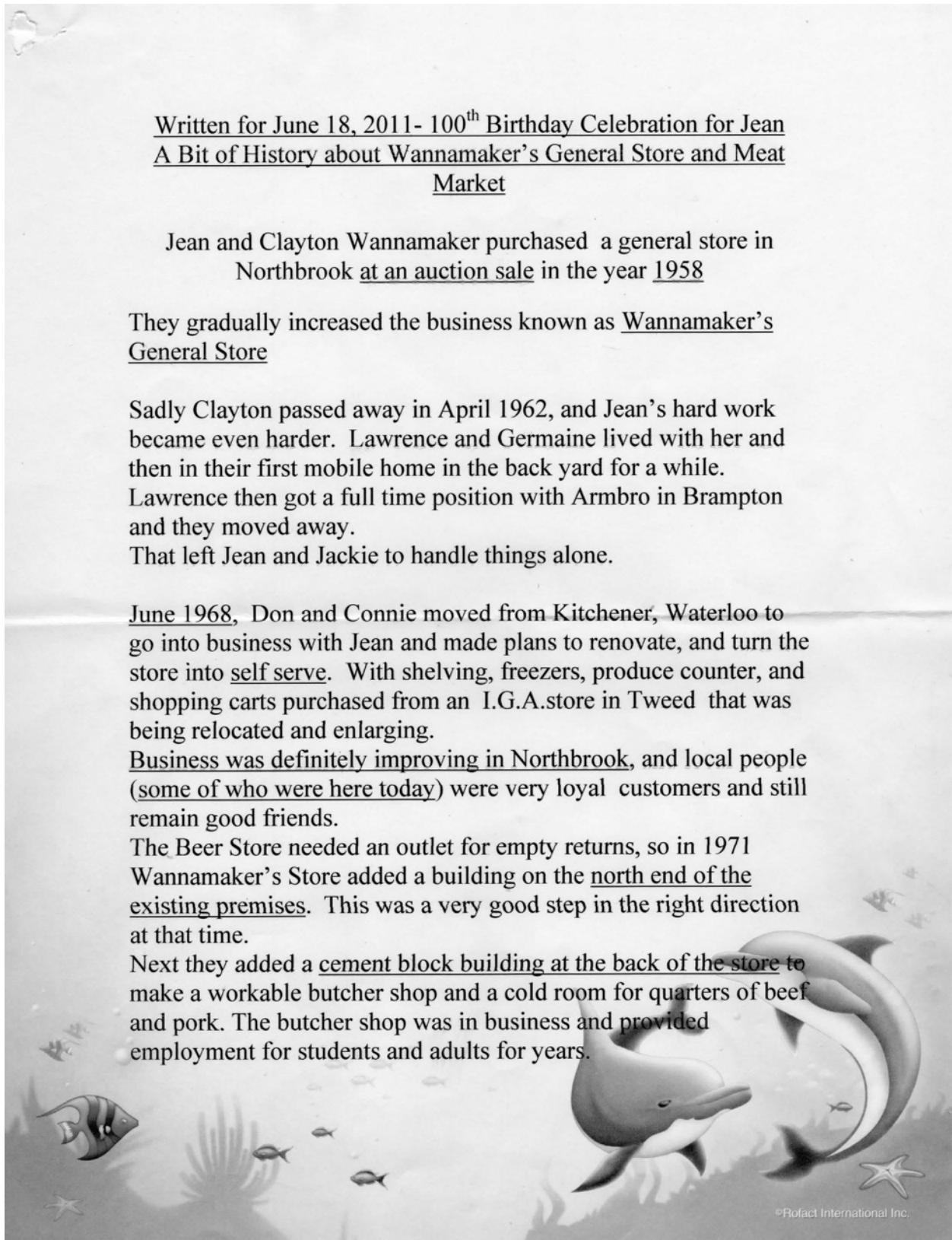
Sadly Clayton passed away in April 1962, and Jean's hard work became even harder. Lawrence and Germaine lived with her and then in their first mobile home in the back yard for a while. Lawrence then got a full time position with Ambro in Brampton and they moved away. That left Jean and Jackie to handle things alone.

June 1968, Don and Connie moved from Kitchener, Waterloo to go into business with Jean and made plans to renovate, and turn the store into self serve. With shelving, freezers, produce counter, and shopping carts purchased from an I.G.A. store in Tweed that was being relocated and enlarging.

Business was definitely improving in Northbrook, and local people (some of who were here today) were very loyal customers and still remain good friends.

The Beer Store needed an outlet for empty returns, so in 1971 Wannamaker's Store added a building on the north end of the existing premises. This was a very good step in the right direction at that time.

Next they added a cement block building at the back of the store to make a workable butcher shop and a cold room for quarters of beef and pork. The butcher shop was in business and provided employment for students and adults for years.



Jean worked very hard baking buns, bread and pies for years to help bring in more customers. Summers were just crazy busy but we all had fun working together. Our staff are still real good friends today.

Don and Connie bought a mobile home and parked in the back yard at the store, and lived in it for a couple of years and then it became Jean's and she was able to purchase a lot across the road from the store and move it over there to have her own little home. Don and Connie then remodeled the living quarters at the store. Many games of cards and other board games were played in the kitchen with family and friends while it was part of that Wannamaker's Store.

Later Jean and Jackie purchased a "double wide mobile unit" to replace the smaller one where they lived and could still see the store. Jean finally was able to take it a little easier, and when she became a senior she worked a little, but took much more time for herself and actually went on several bus trips and enjoyed seeing a little more of the world. She eventually moved to the Senior's Apartments, where she loved it and was able to stay there until her health showed her that she should not be alone and moved in with Lawrence and Germaine in their 4 bedroom house in Northbrook.

That tells a bit of history about Wannamaker's Store that should be interesting for the grandchildren, great grandchildren and great, great grand children. It was sold in June 1987.

Now we all just play cards with Jean as much as possible, where she is quite competitive, and go and sit on the swing with her in the summer.

She is a truly remarkable lady, and a wonderful example for all of us to follow in this life.

Happy 100th Birthday Jean Wannamaker.

