



“THE PASSING OF AN ERA”

Their last day behind the counter at Henry's Store. C.T. Henry turns a tad wistful as Maxine expresses her appreciation for the loyal support of friends and customers alike. Photo by Phil Audibert



Location, location, location. In this era of \$4.00+ gasoline, business has actually picked up at Henry's Store located at the fork in the Monrovia Road. Photo by Phil Audibert

“It's the passing of an era,” said Sammy Higginbotham breathlessly one Friday in late June. “You have to go down there and talk to them.”

Down there at the fork in the Monrovia Road right where longtime Board of Supervisors Chairman Lindsay Gordon lost it at 60 miles an hour, sits Henry's Store. And right next to it, C.T. and Maxine Henry had set up a tent. Customers, friends and family dropped in all afternoon and evening, helping themselves to heaps of food, trading stories, reminiscing. Cars honked in appreciation as they sped by.

After 30 years together behind the counter of this quintessential country store, C.T. and Maxine were retiring. It

was truly the passing of an era.

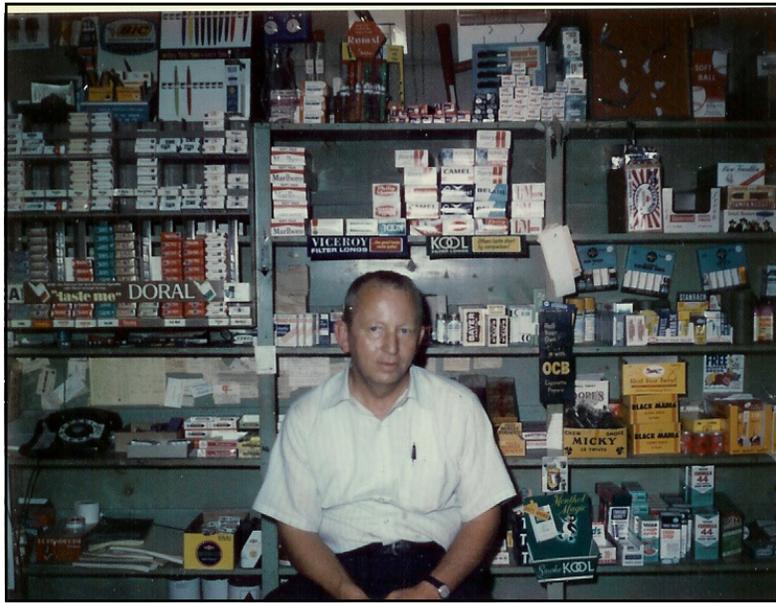
There's something about a country store. It's not just a place to load up on beer, gas and cigarettes, or milk and bread in a snowstorm; it's also a community center... a place where you stand on equal ground no matter what your station, a place where you find out the news before it's printed. The front door, plastered in posters, is a history book of what's happening in this hood: a church supper here, a night of bingo there, a loved lost dog desperately sought.

Henry's Store is such a place. Why, Sammy Higginbotham remembers driving a tractor down here most every evening just so he could watch *Beverly Hillbillies* on TV. His Dad wouldn't allow one of those new fangled things in the house; thought it was frivolous, would get in the way of his lawyerly studies. But on Thursday nights, there they were, sometimes father and son together, and a dozen other neighbors, all glued to Jedd Clampett or Sanford and Son on the magic box mounted to the wall. In winter the woodstove puffed; in summer the fans blew, and all the time, Redd Fox would berate dimwitted Lamonte.

“We've been here 53 years,” says C.T. Well, actually not in this exact space; his dad, William bought the business from John Rawlins just down the road and rented a building there for \$12 a month. But, today, that building has just about collapsed.

No, where it's happening, is up here where the two roads diverge. If you can't make up your mind between going to “the lower end of the county,” or taking the back way to Madison Run, you might as well stop.

“When we first started the store, potted meat was eight



William Henry, C.T.'s father, bought the lot for \$350 and built the store for \$1600. He worked alone behind the counter from 6:00 AM until 11:00 PM every day that the store was open.

cents a can. Vienna sausages were 19-cents a can." C.T. speaks so quietly and with such a strong accent that it's hard to understand him. You catch yourself overcompensating and shouting like he's deaf, which he isn't. It's just that since the heart attack in '92, he's a bit weak, hobbles about with a cane, can't stand upright for long.

"We had a gas station where you pump the handle and you pump the gas up in a glass bowl and then it would drain into the tank," he continues. He thinks, he's not sure, that they moved to the present location at the fork in the road in 1957. The owner of the half acre of "nothing but bushes," needed to raise money quickly. He sold the lot for \$350. William and Lucille Henry, C.T.'s parents, borrowed \$1600 from the bank and built the store. "That's the only money that we borrowed that I know of, and he paid it back in six months," says C.T. with a note of finality.

Spelled only occasionally by his wife, William Henry tended the store by himself every day from 6:00 in the morning until 11:00 at night! Maxine produces a sales slip from 1962. It seems a Mr. F.D. Burruss was running a tab. He owed Henry's Store \$14.94 for a series of purchases. Ten gallons of gas, \$3.58; five gallons of oil, 95 cents; two packs of smokes, a quarter apiece reads the December 12th entry.

Back in those days, C.T. didn't have that much to do with the store. Sure, he'd help out nights and weekends, but he was busy cutting hair in Orange. In fact when he went to work, right out of barber school, he made \$40 his first week. His dad, at the time, was making \$36 a week as a machinist assembling bomb fuses at Clark Manufacturing. "Yes, I made more money than my Daddy, first week of work," he says proudly, adding "the most hair I ever cut, I cut 112

heads in one day...one Saturday, it was mostly Woodberry boys and it was mostly flattops."

Thirty five years Charles T. Henry cut hair, mostly on Main Street in Orange. And when his Dad died in 1976 and he came back to run the store fulltime, he couldn't resist tucking in a barber's chair behind the office. At one point you could come to Henry's Store, get your hair cut, buy yourself a brand new pair of Red Wings, fill up your car with gas and yourself with groceries...all in one stop.

The year was 1977. C.T. Henry was going through a difficult time in his life...a divorce, a farm to run, the store too. "It was more than my mind could take," he says. "Stress." Or, it may have had something to do with the amputation he suffered as a child, but at the young age of 37, C.T. Henry suffered a stroke. It paralyzed his right arm; shriveled it to half normal size.

But he bounced back. And that might have something to do with the daughter of a Madison County school principal, Maxine Duff. Originally from Greene County, Maxine and C.T. had dated in high school, then drifted apart, married other people, had children, divorced, and then, 16 years later, re-established contact. They were married in 1978. Between them they had eight children!



This is where Henry's Store first started alongside Monrovia Road. William Henry, C.T.'s dad, rented this building from John Rawlins for \$12 per month. In 1957, he bought the 1/2 acre lot where the store stands today. Photo by Phil Au-

For 30 years, every morning Maxine would arrive at 5:30 from their farm just down the road, to open up for business at 6:00. And the store would stay open 15 hours till 9:00 PM six days a week, all with the help of just three part-timers. On Sundays they opened shamelessly late...7:00 AM and closed at 6:00. There were even a few days when they rode a tractor through the snow to open up. But they never missed a morning.

It was hard to get away. Maxine and C.T. managed to slip off to see some NASCAR races in the 80's and early 90's, to egg on their man Bill Elliott. They remember one time going to Talladega; C.T. tried to rent a car. "I had never rented a car before, so we called Hertz. And they asked me what my credit card number was. I didn't have no credit card. They told me you can't get no car with no credit card. So, I went down and talked to



Standing right at the fork in the road, Henry's Store, although four times larger today, still looks pretty much the same as it did in 1962. Contributed photo

(bank president) Ed Woodward, and he told them he'd send them a \$1000 certified check." C.T. shakes his head incredulously. "They sent it back. They told him if he don't have no credit card, he don't get no car." C.T. paid cash for a Rent-a-Wreck instead.

Today, in this credit-drunk world, the Henrys have plastic, but Maxine is loath to use it. "When that bill comes, I send that money on." She shakes her head. "I couldn't handle that interest."

Some things never change; the Henrys still pay cash and the biggest seller in the country store business is still beer and cigarettes. "I would say that beer might be a fourth of the business," says C.T. sagely.

It's also what people like to steal, and although they have never been robbed at gunpoint, Henry's Store has suffered its share of break ins. Most recently, two kids knocked out a window pane, squeezed in between the narrow mullions, and made off with, you guessed it, beer and cigarettes.

Which reminds Maxine of a story. "One time we had a guy break in and ...he had a baseball bat, and he left his baseball bat out there." She points to the front door. "And the car wouldn't crank, so he left his car settin' here." She rolls her eyes. "He got a case of beer and a carton of cigarettes and walked on down the road. The law picked him up walking down the road. Now, how dumb can you be?"

The Henrys remember people hanging out on the bench out-



Regular customer, Larry Bond gets a cold drink as Maxine Henry rings up the purchase as she has every day for the past 30 years. Photo by Phil Audibert

scoffing. "And I put it in a box (cooler) over here. And that's one of the best sellers we have now."

Outdoors, they still use a blessedly simple and uncomplicated spinning dial gas pump. No computers, no little voices trying to sell you coffee, no LED crawling displays instructing you to swipe this and push that. A sign says the price is \$2.00+ per gallon, and that they will double that price when you come inside to pay. That's because this old fashioned gas pump cannot be programmed to read more than \$3.99 per gallon. Ah, the good ole days.

"We know they can get it cheaper up town, and they know it too," says Maxine of her loyal regular customers. She's found, with the cost of the trip into Orange factored in, "if anything our business has picked up." Summertime is traditionally best for business, after federal and state taxes have been paid and before local taxes are due. It also picks up during the holidays, "because we still slice ham and everything; we have the oysters."

On the Monday morning after the customer appreciation day and farewell party, C.T. and Maxine quietly spent their last day in this store that has been their home away from home for the past 30 years. That evening, after taking inventory, they handed over the keys to Sarah and Ken Stanley and Alan and Beth Aylor. This foursome will lease the store with an option to buy over the next two years. Most importantly, for Maxine and C.T., the store stays in local hands; passed down to a younger generation.

C.T. becomes wistful. "What am I gonna do tomorrow? I don't know," he mumbles. "How does it feel? Well not very good, but I really didn't want something to happen ..." He's referring to that debilitating heart attack of 1992. He turns 71 this month.

"I can't complain," Maxine changes the subject. "It's been a good living and I wouldn't trade the experience for nothing. I wouldn't trade meeting the people, and I've met all kinds. When you're working with the public, you meet all kinds and the majority are good people. I've got quite a few that I think of as good friends."

The passing of an era.



Maxine Henry was born in Greene County, and although she knew C.T. Henry in high school it wasn't until 16 years later that they married. That was in 1978, and she has been opening up Henry's Store just about every morning since then. Photo by Phil Audibert

doors just talking.

"People don't have time no more like they used to," grouses Maxine. "Everybody's in a hurry," echoes C.T. Gone is the community TV, the dozen mismatched chairs and the woodstove. Racks and racks of candy bars and chips and antacids and heaven knows what all have taken up every inch of spare space. Over the years, the store has quadrupled in size; so have the number of items for sale.

Any surprises? One day, C.T. went by People's Grocery and, on impulse, picked up a case of bottled water. "What are you doing buying water? Ain't nobody gonna buy that," he remembers Maxine



Maxine and C.T. Henry each brought four children into their marriage. The kids, who do not consider themselves step brothers and sisters, would help clean the store in the mornings before they caught the bus to school. Photo by Phil Audibert

OUR CHILDREN

“OUR children,” C.T. and Maxine Henry simultaneously correct. “They’re our children.” This clarification comes in the middle of a conversation about the fact that the owners of this classic country store actually did not have any children together; they each brought four kids from previous marriages into the family.

“They all consider themselves to be brothers and sisters. They never refer to them as stepbrothers or half brothers and we don’t either,” says Maxine emphatically. “He doesn’t consider mine his step children and I don’t consider his my step children. They’re ours.”

In a beautiful cursive script she carefully writes down the name of each, insisting that they be included: Junior Koontz, wife Holly and sons Jake and Christian; Susan Swope, husband Bobby and sons Holden and Zack; Tracy Shifflett, husband Terry, daughter Kelly and son Cole. She even lists their occupations.

“At one time we had seven teenagers in the house with one bathroom,” chimes in C.T. in his signature whisper-soft drawl. “They had to take turns. Some would take a bath at night and some would take it in the morning,” continues Maxine as she writes more names.

Mike Koontz, wife Carol, son Hunter and daughter Danniele; Lee Wilson, wife Missy and son Jared; Gayle Orozco, late husband Scott and daughters Skylar, Taylor and Kristin. She’s the one living in Wisconsin. And then Mike Henry; he lives in Florida. But all the rest live right around here, except one who died years ago.

Seven kids living, 12 grandchildren, but none wanted to take over the store.

Maxine barely conceals her disappointment, but not taking over the store is understandable, particularly for the ones who were scheduled to bathe in the morning. They had to get up even earlier than C.T. and Maxine because they all had to be at the store by 5:30 to clean up and restock the shelves before they caught the bus to school. “While they were waiting for the bus, they’d fill all the boxes...sweep the floor and dump the trash. It went like that for years and years,” says Maxine.

Little wonder that the children didn’t want to give up their current occupations and come back to run the store that had been a second home to them almost as long as they can remember. When you spend 15 hours a day in a place, seven days a week, well....

“I guess being confined,” responds Maxine to the inevitable question: what is the worst thing about owning and operating a country store. “You can’t make plans to go anywhere.”

Sarah Stanley is learning about that first hand. She, with the help of four part time employees, will keep the Henry’s store tradition going during the day. She will be joined nights and weekends by her

husband Ken, who is keeping his construction business, and their business partners Alan and Beth Aylor, who will keep their daytime jobs as well. These former loyal and local customers now find themselves on the other side of the counter at Henry’s Store.

And all four of them will learn about the best part of this business...the people. “I know I’m going to miss it,” says Maxine, with a hint of a quaver in her voice. “I’m going to miss the people terribly. It’s like a family with the same customers.”

C.T. points to the front door. “My Daddy used to have a sign up over the door that said, ‘some of the best people in the world walk through these doors.’”

Time to put that sign back up.

A PAIR OF COWBOY BOOTS

It was February of 1945. C.T. Henry was eight years old and he was playing hooky from Bellview School in Orange. Actually, he was running for his life. A schoolyard bully was chasing him, threatening to cut him if he didn’t give him an apple or something out of his lunch box.

C.T. darted out into the street and into the path of a Trailways bus. Brakes squealed, someone screamed. “I got under the tire and he skidded on me...then gangrene set in and they had to take the leg off...eight years old...no rescue squad,” C.T. tells the story in short phrases.

He remembers the ride to the hospital in Charlottesville in Mr. Fray’s Chrysler automobile. A woman had spread a coverlet over the back seat. “She told me not to cry or nothin’ and she’d give me anything I wanted if I didn’t cry. And I told her I wanted a pair of cowboy boots,” says C.T. stonily.

Six months he spent in the hospital. He underwent two amputations of his right leg, the first below the knee, the second above. Four years he spent on crutches before he received his first prosthesis at age



Neither an amputated leg in 1945 or a stroke in 1977, slowed C.T. Henry down. But a heart attack in 1992 kept him from being able to stand for long periods of time. And that’s what forced him to give up being a barber after 35 years. Photo by Phil Audibert

12, and he’s been on one ever since. Trailways settled with his dad for \$1600.

“It hasn’t been real easy but it’s never hindered me much. It’s never been a benefit, you know,” he says stoically. He even made hay on a regular basis for all his neighbors, and worked his own farm just down the road from the store.

And the cowboy boots? “I didn’t get the cowboy boots,” he shrugs, “but since I lost the leg I couldn’t wear cowboy boots no way.”