Keller's Store, Senecaville, Ohio, where the author bought penny candy and schoolbooks in days gone by.

Keller's Store

By Rose McAfee

When they razed the old Keller's Store in 2005, they took away the site of many childhood memories.

Located on the square in downtown Senecaville, a village in southeastern Ohio, Keller's Store was a landmark to generations reaching far back to the 1920s and 1930s. The brick building housed a general store that sold everything from farm equipment, tools and household appliances to yard goods and more.

To me and many other children, it was a mecca for buying penny candy. When I started first grade in 1926, Keller's was just one block from school.

I learned that just inside the door was a glass showcase filled with penny candy. How luscious looked the sticks of black and red licorice, the jawbreakers, the all-day suckers, the strips that looked like slices of bacon, the sticks of Juicy Fruit gum.

Almost all the candy could be bought for a penny, but I do remember squares of Baker's chocolate that were 2 cents. And if one *really* were loaded, there were nickel candy bars: Baby Ruth, Zagnut, mint circles and caramel all-day suckers.

Most of us had just a penny at a time, so we were careful to select something that would last. Then we carried our little sacks of goodies to school, to eat slowly and sometimes share with others who didn't have a penny that day.

Because it was my first day of school, my sister, who was five years older, had a whole nickel to spend. It was to be a special treat since I was just beginning first grade. She told me to choose whatever I wanted, and I did, filling the sack with penny and two-for-a-penny sweets. I was in candy heaven!

By recess time, I still had plenty of candy left, but I was full. So I gave the sack of goodies to a little boy. Of course, he grabbed it gleefully and soon gobbled it all up. When it was time to go home, my sister met me to accompany me on the half-mile walk. "Where is your candy?" she asked.

"Oh, I gave it to Andy," I said.

She was very provoked with

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me. She informed me that the candy could have been saved for another day. The next day, there were no pennies. I learned my lesson.

During the Depression years, there weren't many pennies to spend. Some had none at all, while others had only an occasional coin. This was a coal-mining town and wages were small.

Keller's was also the site for purchasing schoolbooks. Those were the days when we paid for our own books. One whole corner held books for all classes. Each reader, each arithmetic volume and every language book was there for every grade. The books sold for 25–30 cents apiece.

Books were often handed down from the oldest child to the younger siblings. Sometimes those with fewer children would sell the used books to others for 10–15 cents.

Groceries of all kinds were sold at Keller's. You could buy meats, canned goods, crackers, bread, milk, eggs and much more. One counter held yard goods from which mothers often made school clothes, aprons, housedresses and any other clothing they needed. And in the back were men's things: tools, farm equipment and yard and garden supplies.

The store was operated by two brothers, Brice and "Hink" Keller. They were always patient with their youngest customers, and I know they sometimes slipped extra candy in the special sacks.

Also at the back of the store was a potbellied stove, which was kept fired each day. The men of the community would gather there to chat, smoke their pipes and discuss world problems and community events. ❖

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