

THE CORNER STORE

By Chris Sanders

It's hard to believe that over two years have passed already since the building which housed Fireside Video in Millville, Pennsylvania, burned on July 10, 2015, and was doomed to be torn down.



Article in the Press Enterprise

The space, now empty, leaves a huge ugly gap on the square in the quaint little village. The store has always been in my memory and I'm sure in the memory of generations of Millvillians. It was the last of the original buildings that once stood on the corner of State and Main Street or otherwise known as the intersection of Routes 254 and 42.

The Millville Hotel, where Sunoco now stands is gone. The bank, which replaced a home, is now an apartment building. The post office replaced an earlier shop.

Upon reviewing the July 1, 2015, Press Enterprise newspaper article relating to the fire, I was surprised to find that the daughter of Luther Baker, who at one time ran "Bakers Grocery Store and Meat Processing Plant" from this spot, did not know when the original store was built and by whom. But then her dad did run the store for "decades," so she wouldn't necessarily have that knowledge. Peoples' memories fade fast.

I, however, happen to know who the original owners were, as my grandmother, born in 1900, often used to speak of the store and relate her memories of going there. The store as I recall from my childhood summer visits to my grandmother's house in Millville had creaky wooden floors, a butcher counter in the back where the meat was wrapped in paper and tied with string, and your groceries were put on a wooden checkout counter—no conveyor belt, of course! I would quietly look around in awe at this back-in-time establishment—my, my quite a difference from the A&P stores I was used to in Virginia. And, yes, the grocer would greet my grandmother by name and chit chat for a while. Wow, he had all the time in the world!

She recalled how there were big bolts of colorful material for sale and how there were huge barrels of cheese and crackers. The men would sit around the pot-bellied stove playing checkers, smoking and talking. She also remembered, to her utter embarrassment, walking down the icy sidewalk in front of the store one wintry day, with her fancy fur-collared coat on, when she

slipped and fell flat on her posterior. Of course, this did not miss the attention of the men sitting inside watching from the over-sized windows, who all started laughing heartily. THIS brought her ego down a notch!



From the CCHGS Photo Collection

Regarding the original owners, according to *The History of Montour and Columbia County (Battle Book)*, “in 1870 four Eves brothers—Ellis, John, James B. and W. Webster—engaged in mercantile business as partners under the name of Ellis Eves & Bros. They dealt in dry goods, groceries, boots, shoes, hardware, notions, china, lumber, etc., doing a large trade.” All were descended (actually great-grandchildren) from John Eves, a Quaker and founder of Millville. Millville of course was named after the mill he built. “The Boys” were also engaged in other enterprises such as the infamous Eves wagon factory. Over the years after 1870 the brothers juggled their partnerships around and Ellis, age 49, and Webster, age 34, became sole partners operating under Ellis Eves & Bro. in 1882. Webster’s 1911 obituary stated he was in the mercantile business over 40 years and his brothers probably even longer.

The brothers were very active, either individually or together, in the Millville community, being not only involved with the Quaker Meeting, but in the development of Millville itself, i.e., the Water Company, the hotel (no alcohol allowed, thank you!), the bank, Greenwood Academy, Millville Mutual Insurance (which is still in business today), the mills and factories, just to name a few. In my research I have seen their names on just about everything—boy they were busy men!

I have also scanned the old-microfilmed Millville Tablet newspapers of that time (around 1880-1910) and am amazed at the amount of advertising that Ellis Eves & Bro. ran. Each ad was different and changed with the seasons. Walmart has NOTHING on these guys! If you couldn’t buy it at the Eves’ store, you just couldn’t buy it!

For example, per an 1889 Christmas ad: “We have a full line of groceries. Cranberries, Raisins, Prunes, Peaches, Crystalized Figs (what the heck are these?!) and Apricots. Eggs and butter 26C.” Blankets were also for sale.

New Year 1907: “Good shoes, over shoes, boots, felts. Black dress goods, Mohairs, Henriettas, and Serges. Cream flannelette and vesting for shirt waist as well as all kinds of trimming.” I don’t know what half of this stuff is!

Christmas 1906: China, table linen, toys (dolls, games, tea sets, balls, blocks, banks and more). Men’s gifts—slippers, collars, shaving sets, watches, overcoats, hats, driving gloves, neckties, knives, skates, and more. Useful gifts—handsome dress patterns, beautiful material gloves, handkerchiefs, mufflers, etc. (this sounds suspiciously like women’s useful things!)

Spring of 1903 has the store selling clover seed, garden seeds, men’s straw hats and umbrellas, plus more. This is only SOME of the goods they carried. Very overwhelming to me! How did they stuff all this merchandise in one little old store? I would LOVE to have gone shopping there!

I’m sorry that this part of Millville history burned down. It’s in ashes, just as the memory of the first owners. You see W. Webster Eves, brother of Ellis, is my great-great-grandfather.

Webster lived on the corner of Walnut and State Street, in a huge Victorian house which he had built. His wife Anna Margaret was the daughter of Joseph Sands, another prominent Quaker who started the woolen mill at Mordansville in 1856. She sadly died of Tuberculosis on December 4, 1894, at age 47. Their four sons, Pliney, Edward, Winfred (Fred, my great grandfather) and Frank became successful businessmen in their own right. The only daughter, Esther Irene, died at age 22 “after a lingering illness” only two years after her marriage. Webster also lost several grandchildren. He eventually did remarry Alecsta (Eves) Sands, his cousin and his sister-in-law (her husband was Anna’s brother).

My grandmother, who lived a house up from Webster’s in her married years, always pointed out the impressive marble block—probably a carriage step leftover from horse and buggy days—embedded in the sidewalk beside Webster’s house, his name boldly chiseled in the stone. It’s no longer there, apparently discarded when a new sidewalk was put in in later years. I guess nobody recognized that this name was indigenous to Millville history. Webster Eves—WHO?

Speaking of carriages, Webster drove around town in a “surrey with the fringe on top,” yep just like in the movie Oklahoma. Guess Quakers had no-objection to a few luxuries here and there!

Webster would take my grandmother, as a child, to the Quaker Church up on the hill. She remembered the big black hats and clothes—just like on the Quaker Oatmeal box, and the horses drank from the spring. I guess Webster wanted to indoctrinate her with a little Quakerism, as you see, his son Fred, married a Benton girl that went to the Christian Church. But apparently Webster had a more subtle way of instilling Quaker values into his young granddaughter. They would play checkers together and he would not say a word throughout. She didn’t understand (or like) this. She thought he was “gruff.” Her mother’s McHenry family was Irish and a very lively bunch. Now I know from reading about Quakers, they “learn to be silent” (a form of discipline), which was extremely difficult for a lively young girl. I guess Old Webster had a hopeless case.

His efforts of “taming” her must have worked somewhat because she always held a reverence for the little Quaker Meeting House and would often walk up the alley from her house to sit on the bench on the porch and ponder life.

So perhaps in some small way I have brought to life Webster Eves, Millville’s industrious Quaker businessman. Dying at his home on January 13, 1911, from Bright’s Disease, at age 62, he now rests peacefully in Millville Cemetery surrounded by his wife, children and grandchildren in the plot he paid \$25.00 for (yes, I found the receipt). The markers are small and plain, indicative of the simplicity of Quaker beliefs.

Not to slight his brother and partner, Ellis, Ellis Eves died at his home on Center Street, October 25, 1915, age 81. The obituary stated “Paschall L. Eves (Ellis’ son) is manager of the store founded and successfully conducted by Ellis Eves & Brother.”

According to “Millville—the First 200 Years,” by Paul Girton and Paul Trescott, “P.L. Eves ran the store until 1921, and it was then operated by various renters over the years one of which was J. Leon Cole. I coincidentally (or WAS it a coincidence?!) found his December 13, 1927 obituary among my papers I was shuffling through stating he was, “stricken with uremic convulsions while at work at his store and died 20 minutes later. He had taken over the Corner Store formerly owned by P.L. Eves.” The obit seemed to be a little “off” however because Paschall (P.L.) Eves died on August 8, 1938 and per the deed at the Columbia County Courthouse, the executor sold the property described as “a two and one-half frame store building, an old barn, and a bungalow,” to Luther and Enza Baker for \$5750.00, “the possession to be delivered January 1, 1939.”

“Millville-the First 200 Years” continues the story relating that many improvements and modernizations were made to the store, and in 1947 it was doubled in size when a locker plant and meat processing installation was opened. Luther Baker retired in 1969 and sold the business to Dean and Barbara Evens, his son-in-law and daughter. They then leased the store to Lee Ridall and continued to run the meat processing business and locker plant. By the way Mr. Baker passed away on August 5, 2000, at the ripe age of 98!

A quick visit to the Bloomsburg, PA Courthouse Annex completed the list of owners: Marvin, Sr. Kline and Mary Kline, 1972; Marvin Jr. Kline and Bess Kline, 1993; Frederick and Jimmy Klinger, 1993; Jimmy and Amy Klinger 2005.

Quite a legacy, huh! I sigh as I pass that empty weedy lot now, and think of all the people that have passed through the doors of that now imaginary store in my mind—oh the tales they could tell. But nevermore.

So now we know “the rest of the story (or most of it) of the “Corner Store” which ended its life as Fireside Video. I DO miss their delicious chicken salad subs though!