

AN OLD STORE AT MARINE

Calico, coal oil, and plug tobacco are among the items that clutter up the musty daybooks and ledgers of what is believed to be the oldest general merchandise store in Minnesota. It is located at Marine and has been in continuous operation for almost a hundred years. It has not always been in the same building and it has not always operated under the same name, but so far as the records show there has been no break in the operation of the store since it was established in 1839.

At present this venerable store is doing business under the name of R. E. Strand and Company. It has been in the present building since 1872, and at no time in its ninety-eight years of existence has it been more than a block from its present site.

Marine is one of the oldest settlements in Minnesota. It was founded by a group of lumbermen from Marine, Illinois, in 1838. In the following year they built the first sawmill in the St. Croix Valley, and a few months later they opened the store as an adjunct to the mill. At first the store was operated under the name of the Marine Lumber Company, and later under the names of Walker, Judd, and Veazie, the principal owners of the lumber firm. In the middle eighties the lumber company went to the wall and its affairs were liquidated, but the store continued under various names and ownerships until 1914, when Charles Strand, father of the present owners, purchased it. Mr. R. E. Strand took it over in 1927, and in 1935 Mr. Wallace Strand became a partner.

Always it has been a general merchandise store, keeping pace with the changing ideas in that business. In its early years the store catered largely to loggers and rivermen. Old account books of the store now on file at the Minnesota Historical Society give a clear idea of the type of merchan-

dise carried in pioneer years. Here are a few of the items gleaned from the daybook of 1857-58.

1 bbl flour, \$9.50
 3¼ lbs. lard at 20c lb., 65c
 1 plug tobacco 20c
 6 lbs. sugar, \$1
 11 lbs. 30 penny nails, 88c
 8 yds gingham at 30c., \$2.40

Evidently the early Minnesota settlers were more or less fastidious about their appearance, for the daybook records the sale of a bottle of hair oil at twenty-five cents and two pairs of patent-leather shoes. Whalebones were among the items then carried that are practically unknown in modern stores. Coffee sold at twenty cents a pound, vinegar at twenty-five cents a gallon, and raisins at thirty cents a half pound. Fifteen years later the store was still doing a healthy business in tobacco, for the ledger of 1873-74 records the sale of this product at one dollar a pound. Clothing must have been fairly high, for overshirts were priced at four and five dollars, and socks at eighty-five cents a pair.

The ledgers for 1882 include such items as these:

1 gal. coal oil, 30c
 6 lbs. 30 penny nails, 39c
 9½ lb. ham @ 18c lb., \$1.71
 1 spool cotton, 5c
 3¼ lbs. cheese, 58c
 1 lantern, \$1.15
 9 lbs. pork, \$1.26
 1 sack flour, \$3.25
 2 lbs. butter, 44c

Long before the passing of the sawmill and the decline of logging operations on the St. Croix the country around Marine had attracted sturdy Scandinavian farmers and the store was building up a large business among these people. The second and third generations now occupy many of the old farms and still do their trading at the Marine store.

In recent years an entirely different class of trade has

come to Marine. Society folk from the Twin Cities have built a large number of summer homes in and around Marine, and of course the Strand store has to cater to them as well as to the farmers and regular village trade. The store carries about everything that its location demands— notions, dry goods, hardware, and food.

The exterior of the present building is pretty much the same as it was when it was built. In its earlier days the store was compelled to carry large stocks, as for many years Marine had no railroad and of course steamboats could not operate in winter. For that reason there is a full basement in which provisions were stored. Although the superstructure is built entirely of wood, the building is of massive construction, and after sixty-five years of constant use it is still apparently as sound as ever. Huge timbers and heavy joists were laid on thick foundation walls, which themselves rest on solid rock. A well bored through the rock in the early days still supplies the store with water.

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