

Jerome Township

“Honoring the Past”



THE SEELY STORE

Volume 1

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THE SEELY STORE



SEELY STORE PAINTING BY THOMAS H. MALLORY, M.D. 2007.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR...

Jackie Russell, a community historian, is collecting memories, stories and photos of Jerome Township's past to help preserve the heritage and traditions of this wonderful farm community. She is sponsored by Jerome Village Company, LLC, and is working to honor the past as they help the Township build for the future. Born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, her background is in nursing, research and writing. Jackie's passion for local history, warm enthusiasm and the love of a "good story", has helped her connect with many of the Township's residents.

She continues to search for memorabilia. If you find a photo or know a story that would help her, please contact Jackie at jrussell@gohighland.com, or call 614-242-4000 x32. Share your treasures with her; help preserve the legacy so that the future generation of Jerome Township residents will respect the traditions, remember the stories, and mimic the values of family, community and friendship.

INTRODUCTION

For nearly 200 years, a scenic pocket of farmland just northwest of Columbus has served as the home for many hard working, loyal Ohio families. Founded in the early 1800's, the quiet community of Jerome Township boasts a strong heritage, rich with characters and filled with stories that need to be told.

Located in the southeastern corner of Union County and bordered by Delaware, Franklin and Madison counties, the township of Jerome was organized in 1821. The first settlers, Joshua and James Ewing, had discovered an area along the Big Darby Creek in 1798 that they felt was perfect for hunting and farming. They built a log cabin and became permanent residents of this land that would eventually abound with tales of Indian lore, patriotism, churches, business, schools and daily farm life.

Sponsored by the Jerome Village Company, this series of booklets is dedicated to paying tribute to the pioneers, farmers, and families that found a way to live life in harmony with nature while always fostering a strong sense of community. Using first hand stories from the people of Jerome, these booklets aim to depict some of the history and cultural heritage of Jerome Township. Our hope is that in preserving the stories and memories of this extraordinary community, we may keep timeless traditions and the long-standing sense of community alive and well. For in honoring the past, we create a vision for the future.



Let's begin our journey back in time with the story of the first general store in Jerome. It is a shining example of a caring storekeeper's community spirit at its finest, a spirit that thrived through 3 generations of the family and prospered for over 100 years.

Ask any long time resident of Jerome where they used to shop and the answer is always the same, "Seely's Store". Even those newer to the Township are probably familiar with the stories and the shopping experiences recalled by many of their neighbors. But Seely's Store was so much more than a place to shop. It served as more of a community center, a place to meet, greet, and exchange local news. It was a place where the citizens of Jerome Township gathered together.

The Beginning (1868 - 1947)

Herrick Bromley (H. B.) Seely was born in 1835 and moved from Monroe County, New York to Delaware County, Ohio in 1849 with his family, soon relocating to Union County. His marriage to Lurinda Wells occurred in 1862 and they were blessed with 7 children. In 1868, he started his thriving merchandising business by opening a general store at the crossroads of Jerome



LEWIS H. STONE, A LONG TIME EMPLOYEE OF THE STORE, STANDS TO THE LEFT OF THE TREE. PHOTO TAKEN IN 1904, WITH H.B. SEELY'S HOUSE VISIBLE TO THE RIGHT OF THE STORE.



SEELY STORE WATER COLOR PAINTING BY MICHAEL McMAHON, 1999.



H.B. SEELY'S PHOTO, PROUDLY DISPLAYED ON THAD SEELY, SR.'S OFFICE DESK.



SEELY STORE IN 1912; THAD SR. AT AGE 11 (CENTER) WITH HIS SISTERS.

Road and Scioto Road, 20 miles northwest of Columbus. For slightly more than 100 years this successful general store remained in the Seely family.

The store was run by 3 generations, H.B., his son Albert Lee and Albert's son, Thad Sr. (with his son Thad Jr. helping on weekends). When the store first opened in 1868, 3 pounds of coffee sold for 39 cents, "with a free apron thrown in for the housewife". Eggs went for 3 to 5 cents per dozen. On a busy Saturday, the total intake was about \$39.

Early in his career as a storekeeper, H.B. Seely went to a class in Cincinnati for 3 weeks and became a "pharmacist". He bottled and sold a medicinal concoction called "Seely's Manna Cordial". It was billed as "an agreeable and effective remedy for the most common complaints". This unusual tonic of good health remained on the shelves for 70 years.

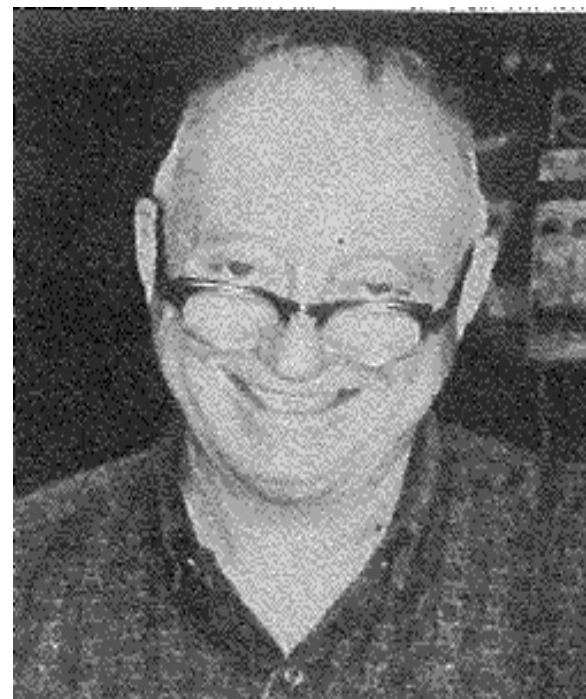
Although the store burned in the 1880's, it was immediately rebuilt. H.B.'S compassionate salesmanship epitomized customer service. His friendly demeanor and never ending generosity became a tradition at the store that was frequently

called the "heart of Jerome". Upon H.B.'s death, his son, Albert Lee, formally took over management of the business. When Albert Lee turned 62, he handed the establishment to his son, Thad Seely, Sr. First hand stories of Thad's practices paint an incredible picture of what this store meant to the Jerome community.

The Third Generation (1926-1975)

On August 10, 1947, The Columbus Dispatch published an article about the store and its owner, Thad Seely, Sr. Thad was described as "red-faced, pleasant, with a narrow strip of hair and friendly eyes". He had assumed the management position in 1926 at the age of 25. In 1947, the store pulled in \$5,000 a month. Although Jerome was a village of less than 80 people, the store drew trade from folks throughout Union, Franklin and Delaware counties.

This robust business was attributed to goodwill and mutual trust. Reportedly 90 percent of Thad's trade was by credit, a practice that was handed down through all 3 generations. Farmers would get their checks from farming and dairy sales every 2 weeks, but they would pay off their bill when they could. When a bill was paid off, the customer was handed a large bag of candy



THAD SR.'S FAMOUS SMILE GREETED CUSTOMERS EVERYDAY.



THAD SR. AND HIS WIFE FRANCES HARD AT WORK.



THAD SR. WITH FLY SWATTERS AND DDT, OIL LAMPS AND LIGHT BULBS.

and gum in gratitude. Only the “unkept” records showed how many people were given grocery products when they were unable to pay, or how long an account went without payment, and without a request for it. Thad Sr. and his wife, Frances, were friends of the community, and farmers knew that they could purchase just about anything at Seely’s that they couldn’t grow themselves.

“I never missed a trip to the store with my Dad when he paid his bill off, because we always were given a big sack of candy. My brother and I hoped that Ed (one of the workers) was at the counter when Dad paid, because his sacks of candy were always the biggest. Also, as a kid after church activities, my girlfriends and I would sneak out and run to the store. With a dime, we would buy the biggest ice cream cone you ever saw.” Ruth Andrews Gamble

Ruth is a local farm wife, and cherishes her childhood memories of all the special sweet treats from the store.

One Stop Shopping

The store was described as a “tunnel filled with all things a farmer needed for living and working”. Antiques could be spied in every corner, such as an original roll top desk, a hand crank phone that worked,

a meat grinder and spice bins from years past. One could smell freshly ground coffee throughout the store as overhead bins held Seely's own brand of beans. The beans could be heard trickling down the metal chute from the bins to the antique coffee grinder. They were ground daily and packaged in the familiar red-bordered sacks that were a farm favorite in 3 counties.

Shoppers could purchase groceries, overalls, work shirts, rope and stock feed. Shelves were filled with medicine, cosmetics, toys, garden tools, wallpaper, horse collars, tractor tires and shoes. No one traveled to the "big city of Columbus" to find an unusual item until they first checked with Thad, as he probably carried it. This was one stop shopping at its finest. The basement held cans of paint, fence posts, snow shovels and rubber boots. Behind the sacks of grain was a hand-operated elevator from 1880, unchanged from when Grandfather H.B. Seely ran the store. This elevator was handy for bringing sides of beef up to the meat refrigerators, or cases of shoes to the balcony shoe department.



ANOTHER BUSY DAY AT THE SEELY STORE WEIGHING PRODUCE FOR CUSTOMERS.



THAD SR. SITS AT HIS OFFICE DESK WITH A PHOTO OF HIS GRANDFATHER, H.B. SEELY, PROUDLY DISPLAYED.



MEAT WAS CUT TO ORDER ON THIS WOOD BLOCK BEHIND SEELY'S MEAT COUNTER.

“I remember going to the store when my work shoes wore out. Thad would ask my size, then run upstairs and grab a box. They always fit just right, and I would walk out of the store happy, wearing my new shoes.”

Gene Depp

_____ Gene lives in Jerome and worked as a beloved Dublin School custodian for over 30 years.

The Best In Customer Service

The meat was always freshly cut to order. Thad knew exactly how to cut that special brand of lean bacon just right. The glass meat counter in the center of the store was filled with beef, chicken, and wieners that were strung together in their casings like a rope. After a farmer's meat purchase, a kid would never leave without a free cold hot dog to munch on the way out. Up front near the cash register, over-eager children pressed their noses to the glass to get a good look at the penny candy counter. What a great childhood memory it was to make that momentous decision of which sugary treat to chose. Frances would patiently wait as children methodically counted their pennies, dropping several on the floor, struggling to get the exact amount.

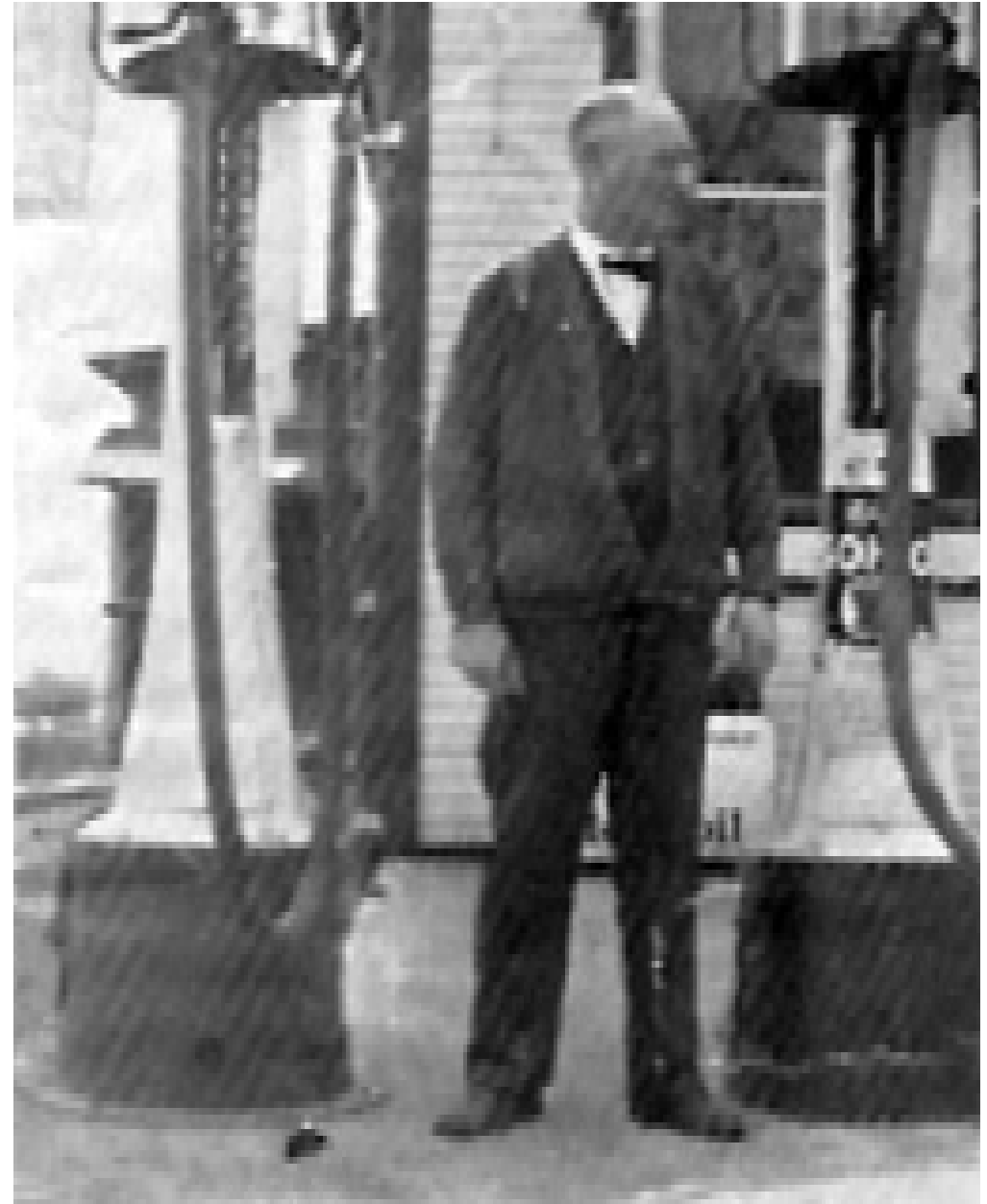


MRS. ROBERT NORRIS SHOPPING IN HER WORK BOOTS, HER CHILDREN ANXIOUSLY AWAITING THEIR PURCHASE OF PENNY CANDY.

“My Grandfather loved all of his relatives, but he really spoiled the kids! There was always a big hug waiting for me, then, of course, our choice of candy, ice cream, or soda pop. Grandfather Thad could never say no to any child that came through his doors. We played hide and seek in the shoe balcony, then we would spin on the stools at the soda bar until we were nearly sick! It was always a wonderful adventure going to my Grandfather’s store.” Debbie Moore

Debbie lives in Plain City. Her mother, Martha Seely Birdwell, is Thad’s daughter. Martha currently lives in Texas, but has never forgotten her roots in Jerome, nor her father’s store.

Thad Sr. knew all 300 regular customers on a first-name basis. He loved to barter with customers and exchange his goods for their fresh farm produce. The store opened at 7:00 am and closed whenever the last customer left, about 9:00 pm. No one ever hurried here; shopping was a pleasant task to be done leisurely and with time for conversation. Many farmers’ wives would anxiously watch the sky for several drops of rain to fall, then excitedly report, “the weather is not good for farming, we’ll have to go shopping”. The long, orange-colored bench in the front of the store, “the loafer’s bench”, was comfortably curved for a man to smoke or relax on when days were too



H.B. SEELY RECEIVED A “FAITHFUL SERVICE” AWARD FROM THE STANDARD OIL COMPANY, IN RECOGNITION FOR CARRYING THEIR PRODUCTS FOR 50 YEARS.



THE ORIGINAL SIGN FROM IN FRONT OF THE STORE. IT NOW HANGS IN A NEIGHBOR'S BASEMENT.



THAD SR. WITH A DISPLAY OF JUST A FEW OF THE ITEMS SOLD EVERY DAY AT THE SEELY STORE.

cold or wet to work the fields. The sign on the front read "Triangle Food Stores", but everyone referred to this gathering place as "Seely's". The sign read "Triangle" because there were 3 Seely brothers; Thad Sr., Eli and Fred, that all had general stores. The other 2 stores were located in Rathbone and Powell.

"I'll never forget bringing my fresh eggs to the store; Thad and I would trade. He took my eggs to sell, and I would get his delicious Colby cheese in exchange. It was priced at 39 cents a pound, but I never paid!"

Mary Alice Schacherbauer

Mary Alice loved every minute of her 14-hour work days as a farmer's wife. The Schacherbauer's big red barn is a Jerome landmark.

A Place to Gather

Seely's was so much more than a place to shop. It was a neighborly gathering center where you could find out who was sick and exchange community news. It was a place to leave your key if the repairman was coming to your house. Thad and Frances were happy to forward messages to other farmers when they came in or mail a letter for them. If the bus was late the children could be found waiting in the Seely Store. Never was a child turned away

from the penny candy counter because they were several cents short. The phrase “put it on my bill” was always met with a kind smile and a nod. The store held memories, kindness and friendships for farmers and families throughout the township. It was truly the heart of Jerome.

“It wasn’t just a store. It was a place to get caught up on everybody’s business. We all went to the store to use the phone, because back then, no one had phones. It was the place I went to call the hospital when my brother was sick. My daughter still talks about running in the back door of the store to get that free handful of candy that Thad always had ready for her.” Marie Faulk

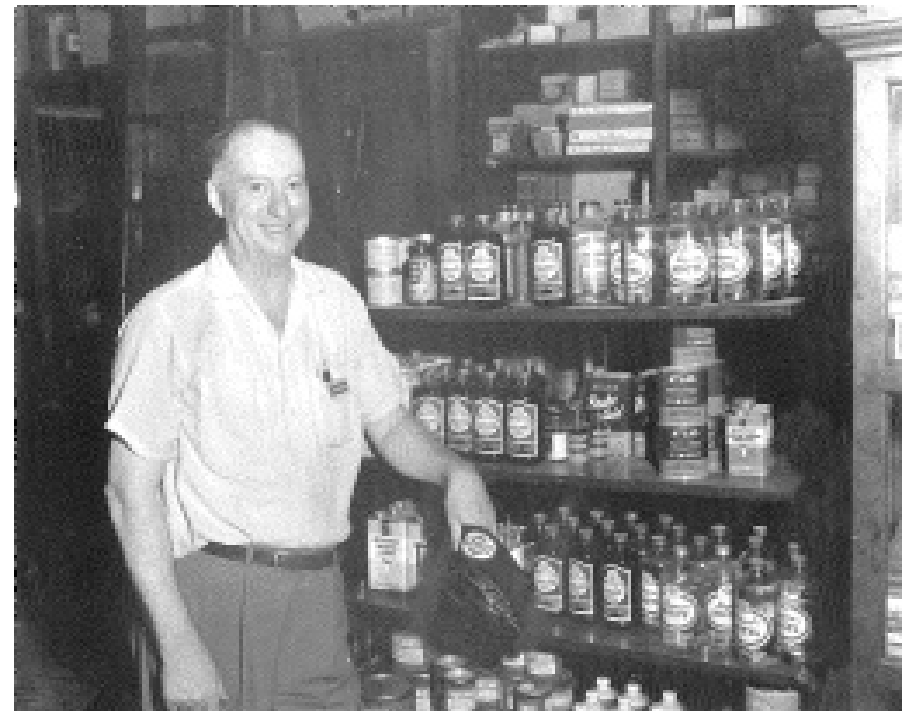
For Marie, her favorite memory is that the store was the heart of the town’s communication. The Faulks, long time residents of Jerome, live just down the road from the Seely Store site.

Buggy Rides

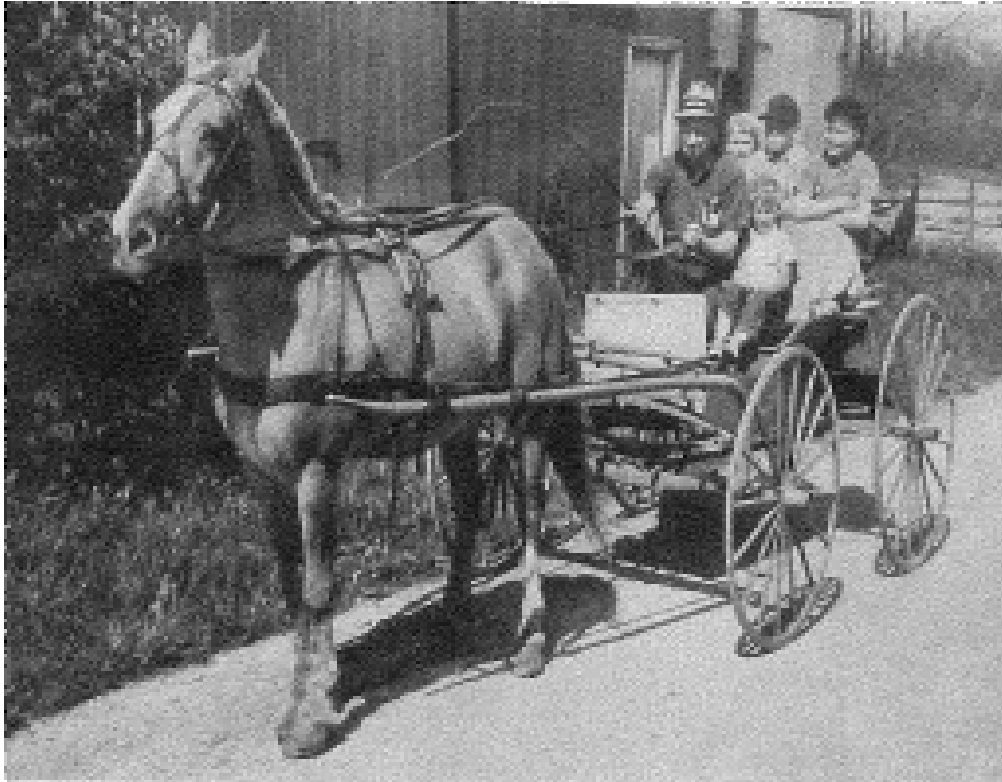
This store boasted another commodity that not all general stores carried; an old-fashioned buggy ride. Every Sunday and most holidays, Thad hitched his 30 year-old pony, Clipper, to a bright red buggy and spent the entire day taking local children for rides. He would taxi youngsters to and from Sunday school, stopping to play at



THE SEELY STORE WAS THE FIRST IN THE AREA TO SELL SOHIO GASOLINE.



THAD’S SHELVES WERE ALWAYS FULLY STOCKED WITH MOTOR OIL AND OTHER FARM MACHINERY NECESSITIES.



THAD SR. AND CLIPPER TAKING THE NEIGHBORHOOD KIDS FOR A SUNDAY BUGGY RIDE.

the schoolyard until they were tired. They ambled through the country to spot bunnies, watch horses in the fields, or just meander through the country lanes. In the winter he would place bells on Clipper and the festive horse pulled a sleigh. If there were more kids than seats in the sleigh, they would just attach their sleds to the back with rope for an exciting joy ride. Thad often told his friends, "I get as much kick out of these rides as the kids!" The sleigh is now the property of a Seely relative currently living in Delaware. It is reportedly still in good shape, and is proudly displayed in their front yard every year at Christmas.

The Fire

Unfortunately, on September 10, 1975, this historic landmark was gutted by a raging fire. On that fateful day, Thad Sr. was 75 years old, working behind the counter helping several customers. He gasped when he saw flames shoot up the wall of the store. An old tractor that was started near the north side of the building sent a spark on ignition that started the blaze. It was a devastating tragedy. Nine fire departments fought the inferno for 6 hours. Thankfully, no lives were lost. As Thad Sr. realized the fire was out of control, he

grabbed the money from the cash register and ran from the store. The store was a total loss, including the antiques; damage was estimated at \$100,000.

In reality, the loss of history, friendship and authentic Americana was far greater. After the fire, letters of condolence poured into the Seely home. Customers vividly described their memories of the store and sadness at the loss. It was as if a member of their family was gone. The tragedy didn't just affect the owners, it was deeply felt by the entire community. It wasn't just a store that burned, it was a way of life. Today, the only remaining tangible evidence of the store is the Triangle Food Stores sign that hangs in a neighbor's basement. But the memories of Seely's Store are still alive and the kindness that was freely handed out there will never be forgotten.

"I just can't imagine Jerome without Seely's store ... it was so many things to so many people. Your kindnesses, friendliness and concerns were a part of the store. It was the hub of the village, and Jerome will never be the same for any of us again!" Virginia Coriell

This is an excerpt from a letter of condolence sent to the Seely's after the store burned.



Owner Shows Fire Damage

THAD SEELY, owner of the Triangle General Store in Jerome which was completely gutted by fire last week, is shown before the building which had been owned and operated by three generations of the Seely family. Cause of the fire was said to have been from the backfire of a tractor near the building, according to Lt. David Hay of the Plain City Fire Department.

THAD SR. SADLY WATCHES HIS "LIFE" GO UP IN FLAMES IN 1975.



FIREMEN BATTLE BLAZE AT GENERAL STORE IN JEROME, OHIO

Old General Store Guttled By Raging Fire at Jerome

Frances Seely (Thad's wife) Memories - 1985

(Source: The Dublin Historical Society website. Written by Troy Will and Doug Olesen, *Dublin High School Journalism Class students*, writing for the "Shanachie, A Magazine of Dublin Culture and History", in 1985.)

"Everyone always said, when you couldn't find anything in any store around, go to Seely's store and you'll find it.

On Saturday night you wouldn't get out of there until midnight. Then men would sit and smoke. I can remember when they had the old pot bellied stove in the 20's and 30's and they'd sit around and talk. The loafers' bench sat out front of the store most of the time and in the winter they moved it inside to the front of the store.

We always kept 10 or 15 bottles of 'Seely's Manna Cordial' that had medicine in them. That medicine is good for anything - it'll stop ya or start ya or anything! We use to sell Mrs. Windlow's Soothing Syrup too. That was for babies when they were cross. I can remember when women would wash on the boards and take all day and if the babies were a little cross, they'd give them a couple drops and they'd sleep all day!

We sold Sohio gasoline. My husband's father started selling Sohio products when all you could buy was axle grease. They kept it in this old barn out back and when they first started selling it, they'd carry gas up in jugs to put in cars.

They had a bin of coffee in the upstairs. They'd get coffee in 250 pound bags and they had these three compartments. It was graded and they'd just grind a pound. It would come down from upstairs in a pipe.

The store burned down September 10, 1975. There were many wet eyes that day. We called them to send a fire truck to put out a tractor fire. I walked into the store a little later and a black man that used to live down here took hold of me and said, 'Come on Mrs. Seely, you'll have to get out of here. The upstairs is all afire and the roof might fall in on you'."

12 *"Mary Jo Edwards, a lovely person, sat outside with me in the car during the fire and wrote this:"*

At Seely's

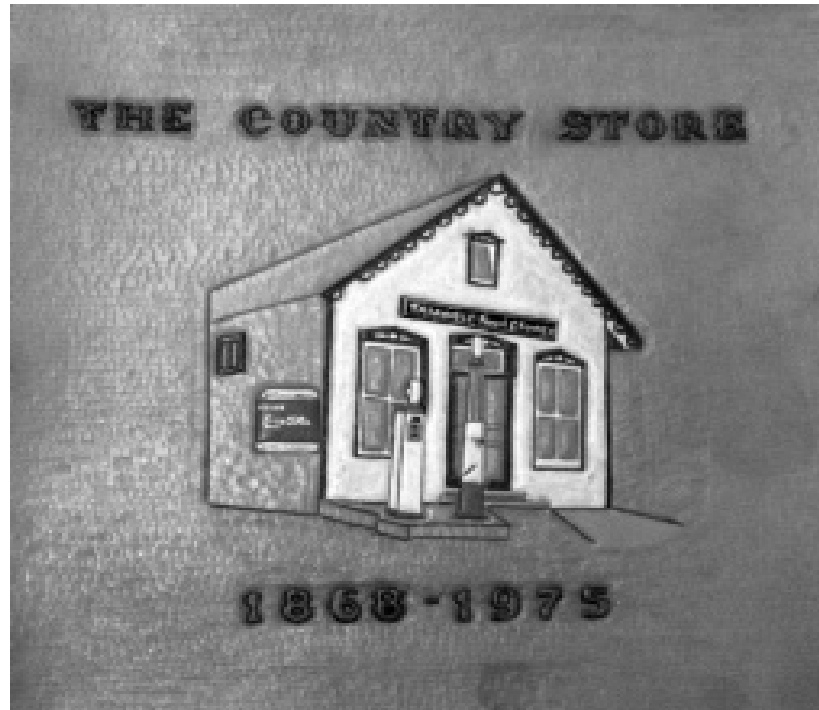
It was always a quarter past eight at the Seely's General Store, the old clock in the window didn't move anymore...

The light was dim inside, footsteps fell soft on the wood floor. People paused and talked and learned about now and what went before.

It was kind of comforting to know in life's hustle-bustle and roar that it was always, quarter past eight at Seely's General Store.

I like to think of that someday when there will be no more war, or trouble, or sorrows, or crying, or hearts that feel heavy and sore, when we'll call it timeless eternity the kingdom, forevermore. It will be, quarter past eight at Seely's General Store.

...Mary Jo Edwards



SCRAPBOOK COVER, HAND TOOLED LEATHER FILLED WITH SEELY MEMORIES. COURTESY OF MARTHA SEELY BIRDWELL.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This chapter of our journey through Jerome would not have been possible without the help of many people. A special thanks to Martha Seely Birdwell (Thad Sr.'s daughter) who sent her cherished Seely Scrapbook (created by Effie Birdwell) to me for reference. Many Dispatch articles and photos were used that were found in this scrapbook. Martha's daughter, Debbie Moore, was instrumental in recreating store memories, transporting the scrapbook, and acting as a wonderful resource. Thanks to Beth Seely Reschke, Chip and Fred Seely for their input. Additional thanks to Mary Alice Schacherbauer, Marie Faulk, Gene Depp, Ruth Gamble, Joe Hofbauer, Mary Jo Edwards, Teddy Brooks, Lesa Seely and Alicia Blackman for their contributions.



Jackie Russell