

A Country Store in 1938

An old ledger for the year 1938 vividly says much about life in the Indian Land community during the Great Depression. The customer accounts show only the dates, names and items charged. When they were later paid, the amount was crossed out. There were no receipts or signatures. There didn't need to be. The relationship of a storekeeper and the buyer (almost always a neighbor) were enough to guarantee payment another day.

The main source of income for most Indian Land folks came from the main cash crop—cotton. Some were farm owners, many of the others were tenant farmers. A few worked in the Springs Cotton Mill in Fort Mill.

This particular ledger was kept by Hall Pettus who handled the store across the road from present Sun City Commons and the cotton gin located on what is now the parkinglot of Harris-Teeter. Until 1940, Pettus had a partner, Jim Wilson, who didn't work in the store or gin but several of his sons did at various times. There were also sheds that housed a blacksmith shop and a battery run gristmill along with an ice house. There were also two gas tanks (Shell) and a kerosene dispenser.

Wilson and Pettus Store sold a wide range of goods. On the shelves and in the warehouse some of the items listed were gas, tires, tubes, batteries, roofing, axes, hoes, plow points, shotgun shells, stove pipes, work shoes, tennis shoes, work pants and shirts, overalls, and grocery items.

The most often charged items were "dope" (or Coca Cola) and other soft drinks, all of which were 6 cents and often purchased with a 10 cent slice of cake or peanut butter crackers. Also, beer was available, but it was charged by only a handful of customers, and with the exception of one who bought four cans (40 cents), the usual purchase was for only one.

And there were tobacco products but surprisingly few users of cigarettes which were 18 cents a pack. The cigarettes were usually bought by young bachelors. Older men might chew plug tobacco. A beer and a plug of tobacco was 20 cents. A can of snuff was 15 cents. Few of the young "dipped" snuff and most of it was sold to older women.

Some items, were sold in bulk. Flour was in sacks of 100, or 50 lbs. Sugar was in 25 lb and 10 lb. bags. On the counter were scales to weigh lesser amounts. Also, there was a coffee grinder and there were special bags for the coffee that were printed in big letters "Wilson and Pettus Coffee."

Jim Wilson, known as "Mr. Jimmy," had a portable sugar cane mill, that ground cane stalks and extracted the molasses in a large vat. The operational power came from a mule that encircled the vat that was over a fire. The molasses, plus "cotton poison" would be slapped on the developing cotton bolls to kill the boll weevils. The boll weevils arrived in this area around 1928.

The ledger shows that Miss Eunice Hall purchased 55 gallons of molasses, \$8.25, and 48 lbs. of poison to apply to her cotton crop.

Local schools ran accounts also. Ed Mattox, the high school agriculture teacher, ordered a file cabinet for the school. El Bethel school for blacks bought a broom, dipper, and bucket— 90 cents, and a mule collar, \$3.00. The store paid Indian Land High School's electricity bill every month. The cost ranged from 80 cents to \$2.56. Six light bulbs cost 90 cents. A phone call was 40 cents.

A major customer was the Lancaster County W.P.A. (Works Progress Administration), a New Deal program that employed over three million unskilled workers to carry out public works projects. They bought a variety of tools, gas and oil.