

Cane Syrup Helps Make a Boy's Career Decision

ASHS Column for May 8, 2008

Jerry Simmons

As with most company towns, Century had a commissary that was in essence a general store. The commissary sold everything from shoes and clothing to groceries and hardware. In truth, most local stores of the period were like that. Transportation for more than a few miles wasn't as easily gotten back then as it is today. It became expedient for many home folks to have stores with most of life's necessities within walking distance or no further than a wagon ride away. During the fifties the immediate Century vicinity had Archer's, Bubba's, Hudson's, Frazier Johnson's, the commissary, and perhaps some others.

However, Saturdays meant downtown Flomaton, more so than Century, would be full of people, cars, trucks and horse- and mule-drawn wagons. Folks from all around came to town to get groceries, hardware, feed, and to bring the kids for haircuts. At one time there were as many as a dozen or more barbers in the two-block area from the railroad to Ringold Street, according to Joe Sunday. Joe's been associated with barbering for over half a century, starting out as a shoeshine boy in one of the local shops.

It was a special occasion when both Flomaton and Century and their outlying area folks could get to Flomaton to shop Edwards' and Lee's clothing stores, Ellis, Sparks' and Watson's grocery stores for groceries and meats, or Watson or McCurdy Hardware for tools. A couple of special Saturday treats for the children might be to visit the Justice Rexall drugstore, where they could patronize the soda fountain, or to take in the Saturday "show" at the Jackson theater, consisting of a serial (you didn't dare miss a week because you'd not know if the hero/heroine would live or die), a western or two. This was a place where you got popcorn and a Coke for a quarter or less.

The 5 & 10 cent store was another place youngsters would love to go into, to see if there were any new dolls or plastic soldiers or cars you could beg mama and daddy for.

Many young men found their calling when they worked after school and on Saturdays helping out in one of these stores. When I say "calling," it meant they found what they did not want to do as a life's vocation. Olin Tisdale is one of those young men.

Olin recently related to me the story of how he worked at the Alger Commissary as a teenager in 1938. One of his duties was to work the stock for the store and any other menial jobs that fell to his lot.



Boxcar mentioned in this story. It was always parked behind the commissary as you see here

Mr. Radney worked for the Alger-Sullivan Lumber Company and was the store's manager. He was always on the lookout for a bargain, so when a fellow came by one day selling syrup by the gallon bucket he listened to his spiel. Radney had been buying the syrup, most of which would be sent to the Alger camps in the woods, from O.O. ("Double Naught") Tisdale of Bluff Springs, Olin's dad. But when this salesman promised he could provide the syrup at a greatly reduced price, Radney decided to buy his product.

Mr. Radney then told O.O. Tisdale he was sorry but he would not buy syrup from him any more. So, time passed and the promised cans of syrup came in, via boxcar. The problem was that the cooking of the syrup had gone wrong. It wasn't cooked long enough and it fermented right there in the boxcar. Needless to say, as the pressure built up in the caps, the tops popped loose and the expanded syrup seeped all over the boxcar. All 300 cans of it!

Olin to the rescue, sorta. He got a new job: to scald and clean the buckets that the syrup came in and salvage what he could of the syrup that was left by pouring that into the freshly cleaned buckets. In doing this he also had to wash out the boxcar floor before the syrup soaked in and made the mess worse.

Out of some 300 gallons of syrup, Olin said they could only save about a third of it. So much for Mr. Radney saving money, but it meant that O.O. Tisdale was back in the syrup business with the commissary once again. It was about at this time that Olin made his decision not to remain a stock boy much longer!

Many of you noticed the absence of an ASHS column a couple weeks back. It wasn't the Ledger's fault; rather, it was mine. After worrying about it for a week I decided the one to blame is me. It seems I did the column and apparently failed to email it to the Ledger. I would have bet everything that I sent it as usual but Jeremy said he never got it. Something went wrong and I'd bet it was my fault.

It would make me feel better if I could blame someone else, but facts prove otherwise.

At the ASHS meeting in April, the report was given concerning the recent Birthday Bash held at the Park. The event was told to be one of the better ones held in recent years, because there were interesting vendors, good food, outstanding talent in the music department, and awesome WBTS (War Between The States) reenactors. Probably the most impressive sight and sound came from the thunder and smoke from the cannon blasts! If you had access to the Internet you may have seen the impressive collection of photos from the event on www.northescambia.com, particularly the one showing the blast

of fire coming from the cannon muzzle at the instant it was fired!

If you haven't visited that site yet and you are interested in keeping up with events and news from this region, you owe it to yourself to bookmark the site. You can see the photos by following this link: http://www.northescambia.com/?page_id=22&g2_itemId=6739

The one disappointment in the event was the relatively small crowd. It happened that the youth baseball teams of Century, Flomaton and Jay had events that day, too. One thing that's very difficult to compete with is an event that has to do with area children!

The ASHS is talking with the Town of Century about something that might happen around July 4th, though, so as Margaret Collier says, "Stay tuned."

Y'all come.