

THE HISTORY OF "THE STORE" IN OKANAGAN CENTRE

The little convenience store on the corner of Okanagan Centre Road West and Fourth Street known by the locals as "the store" began in 1910 in a small part of a little house located at that very spot. Mr. James Alfred Gleed and his wife Edith had bought the house, which had the post office in it, from Mr. Ekins, the manager of the Grandview Hotel at the time. The Gleeds ran the post office and started the general store when the local residents said that it would be nice to have some of the basics readily available instead of having to order everything through the mail. So in 1910 the J.A. Gleed General Merchant store opened up for business with only fifty dollars worth of groceries. Mr. Gleed soon added on to the building so that it was large enough for a full general store with a small room for the post office and larger living quarters.

In the early years of the store Mrs. Gleed ran it by herself quite often because Mr. Gleed was building houses in Carr's Landing. As time went on the business prospered and Mr. Gleed added on to the building a few more times. It was a busy life running the store. The mail would come in twice a day, once from the north and once from the south. So Mr. Gleed would use his wheelbarrow to move the mail bags to and from the lake where the steamers would deliver and pick up the mail. Then the incoming mail would have to be sorted. Mr. Gleed would also wheel blocks of ice up from the lake to keep meats and dairy products fresh in the meat safe. Of course there was also the job of serving customers, giving out the mail when residents came for it and stocking shelves. Doris Phillips (nee Gleed) remembers that things were always so busy while she was growing up; there was always something to do in the store. One of Mrs. Phillips' memories is of the stairwell that was built just underneath the front counter of the store. The stairs in the floor would lead down to the basement where perishable items were kept. So if someone asked for a block of cheese Mr. Gleed, or who ever else may have been working, would disappear beneath the counter and through the floor to get the item!

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The store was busy at all hours of the day and night because the Gleeds were the first family in Okanagan Centre to have a phone. For

years the only phone available in the area was the government phone in the post office. The Gleeds were always more than willing to let people use the phone at any time. They also took phone messages for the residents of Okanagan Centre. This convenience was especially important whenever there was an emergency and outside help was needed. The Gleeds ran the store from 1910 to 1948. During those years James Gleed was also the Okanagan Centre post master. In 1948, when James was seventy-five, the Gleeds decided to sell the store and post office business and retire. It was sold to Carl Arthur "Art" Gabel and John Motowylo.

Art Gabel and his wife Lydia both grew up in Saskatchewan. In June of 1948, eight years after they were married, they moved to Okanagan Centre with their four daughters: Louise, Jeannette, Dianna and Mary. Their fifth child, John Charles, was born in Okanagan Centre in 1950. Art Gabel bought the store from James Gleed with his brother-in-law John Motowylo, his sister's husband in a partnership in 1948; they named it the G&M Store. When they first bought the store, the Gabels lived in the residence part of the store while the Motowylos lived elsewhere. Jeannette Buchholz (nee Gabel) can remember that when her family first bought the store they had an early version of the pop machine in there. It was a large bin of water that was kept cool with some sort of refrigeration, and pop bottles floated around in the cold water. Mr. Gable and Mr. Motowylo were partners for seven years, but their was not enough profit for both of them so in 1955 Mr. Gabel bought out Mr. Motowylo's share.

The Gabels ran a full general store as well as the post office. They also had a gas pump installed in front of the store, but it was not replaced after the fire in 1984. The store was built on to twice during the years the Gabels owned it. The first addition was in 1953 or 1954 while the Motowylos still owned half of the business. Then the second addition was built on in the early 1960's. The additions were necessary because the store was too small for everything that was needed. More refrigeration and freezers were needed as well as more floor space for stock shelves. The Gabels built on the back of the store towards the north.

The building next to the store was a dormitory for the women who worked at the packing house on the lake or at the cold storage right behind the store. There was also a cafe and a house across the street from the cold storage. The men who worked for the packing house boarded in the

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The building next to the store was a dormitory for the women who worked at the packing house on the lake or at the cold storage right behind the store. There was also a cafe and a house across the street from the cold storage. The men who worked for the packing house boarded in the

house, and the cafe was where the workers went for lunch. Mrs. Gabel remembers that the packing house employees would always buy their groceries at the store, and they often came in for small items during their lunch hour. The packing house at Okanagan Centre was located right on the lake across the road from where the women's dormitory was. The apples were brought in and processed there. The boxed apples would either be sent off by boat or brought to the cold storage building which is still being used today. There was a conveyor belt from the packing house that went over the road and up to the cold storage which was used to transport the boxed apples.

When the Gabels and Motowylos bought the store the post office was in a tiny room in the store. Canada Post rented the space from Art Gabel while he was responsible for running it; Mr. Gabel was the post master from 1948 until 1979. In 1967, a new post office was built at the location it is today. The Gabels continued to run it and Art remained post master. In 1979, John Gabel took over the position of post master until he became ill in 1980. Jeannette Buchholz (nee Gabel) then became post master and is still there today.

During the years the Gabels owned the store they offered delivery service to their customers. People would phone in their orders and the Gabels would bag the groceries. One of the Gabel children would then deliver them. Sometimes the ladies would call in an order and their husbands would pick it up on the way home from work. Mrs. Gabel remembers that in the early years a lot of people from Winfield would come to the G&M Store for their groceries or call in their orders because there was only one small store in Winfield. The Gabels also delivered all the groceries that were needed at Camp Kopje on Carrs Landing road during the summer months when youth camps were held. The store supplied all the groceries for the years the camp was running.

In 1955, after Art Gabel bought out John Motowylo's share, he hired Mrs. Muriel Whitehead to work in the store. She worked in the mornings until noon. She would start the day by working in the post office sorting mail, and then she would work in the store when that was done. Mrs. Venita Baker would work in the store in the afternoons. Jeannette can remember that she and her older sister Louise would work in the store after school from 4:30 pm to 8:00 pm. The store was supposed to be open from

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8:00 am to 7:00 pm, but there were always late shoppers. Jeannette says she would never be able to leave before 8:00. In the summer the store was open seven days a week, except for Thursday afternoons when it was closed so that Mr. Gabel could run errands. In the winter months the store was closed on Sundays as well.

In 1969, Art Gabel sold the G&M Store to a Mr. Musatto. The Musatto family had five boys and they came to Okanagan Centre from Hollywood. Their business in the States was selling costumes to the Hollywood movie stars. When they came to the area they brought a van full of costume type clothing which they set up in a room of the store building. The Musatto's had the store for a little over a year, but the business was not doing well. Mr. Musatto had not fully paid off the store and so he was making mortgage payments to Mr. Gabel.

One time in the middle of the night, a little over a year after they had purchased the store, the Musatto's hastily packed up and left. They took most of the stock in the store and just took off. It was assumed that they went back to the States, but Mr. Musatto was never heard from again. Since Musatto had not fully paid for the store Mr. Gabel still owned it legally so the Gabels had to go back to running it. Most of the stock had been cleared out and the store was a mess. The Gabels had to spend a lot of money to restock the shelves and get the place going again. When the Musatto's left they locked the doors and took the keys; the Gabels didn't have keys themselves so John Gabel had to crawl through a window to get in. Mr. and Mrs. Gabel ran the store for a couple more years to get out of debt. After selling the store again (to the Witherns), Mr. and Mrs. Gabel rented an orchard and worked on it for a couple of years. They also ran the post office until 1979. Mr. Gabel passed away in 1981. Mrs. Lydia Gabel still lives in the house at 11391 Okanagan Centre Road West that she and her husband built after selling the store.

In 1972, the Gabels sold the store again and this time it was fully paid for; it was sold to Cathy Withem who ran it with her husband Ron. Unfortunately, however, the marriage broke up and Cathy's mother ran the store until it was sold to Dick and Doreen Young in 1975. They had the store for almost two years and then it was closed down for a while. In 1978, Dr. Richard Baxter of Kelowna bought the store. He kept heritage cars (show cars) in the rooms that had been added to the original store. It was

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when Dr. Baxter owned it that the business changed from a full grocery store to a convenience store. He was also the owner who changed the name to "The Store" as it is known today. The Baxters did not live in the residence part of the store, but lived in the house across from the marina.

In 1981, the store was sold to Ted Fright who still owns it today. His companion, Eunice, had started a beauty salon in one of the rooms of the store, but she no longer lives with Mr. Fright so a hair stylist comes in every Thursday to take appointments. On January 1st 1984 the original store that had started by Mr. Gleed in 1910 burned to the ground. The insurance company was never able to determine the cause of the fire, but it may have started because of faulty wiring. The store was finally rebuilt in 1987 to its present condition. Mr. Fright still owns and runs the business today.

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The J.A. Glead General Merchant store around 1940.



"The Store" in March 1980. At that time it was owned by Dr. Richard Baxter.



The fire of January 1st 1984 that destroyed the original store.



The new store as it looks today.