

# **M. Dyer and Son Store, Winfield, PA**

**by**

## **Phyllis M. Dyer**

Mahlon Dyer started this journey in life and a history to last one hundred and seventeen years on August 8, 1868. He was born the son of Jinks and Deborah Dyer and was one of nine children. On Dec 31, 1891 he married Hannah Elizabeth (Lizzie) Dreese in Lewistown, Mifflin County, Pennsylvania. He was the father of one daughter, Sarah Estella Dyer on March 1893 and one son, Willard Isaac Dyer, Sr., on January 19, 1900. His daughter died on Dec 9, 1898 of diphtheria in Mt. Carmel and was buried in the Dry Valley Cemetery, Dry Valley Pennsylvania. His son, Willard I. Dyer would go on to follow in his father's footsteps.

Mahlon began his career as a store owner in Mt. Carmel Pennsylvania in the early 1890's. This venture continued for some time ending in bankruptcy. [I learned this in 2009 from Mahlon's niece in law, Mrs. Rudolph (Miriam) Moyer, who was 96 years old at the time. She was very hesitant to give me this information since it was told to her in confidence. She thought long and hard before telling me and only after I suggested that after one hundred years it really would not make much difference and I thought it would be relevant to this history—she agreed and told me.] From the information that I have gathered he purchased the store in Winfield during Oct 1893 while continuing to operate the store in Mt. Carmel, PA. He originally bought the business and not the property. The store in Winfield which was originally operated under the name of "Haines and Co." being operated by brothers - William and Anes Haines now became known as "M. Dyer". Anes Haines built many homes in Winfield including the store.

This story covers one hundred and seventeen years of history at the "store property" bought by the Dyer's in Winfield Pennsylvania.

M. Dyer & Son  
Winfield, PA

The first deed I have for the “store property” is dated Nov 1, 1900. It is between Anes Haines and Melinda Dreese Strickler (Lizzie Dreese Dyer’ sister). The description of the “store property” included a frame building constructed for use as two dwellings and store-room, also a warehouse, stable and other outbuildings. According to this deed the property was part of the farm owned by William Haines and conveyed to Anes Haines on Dec. 18<sup>th</sup> 1886. Melinda Strickler paid \$3,000.00 for the “store property”.

The second deed I have for the “store property” is dated June 23, 1902 and is between Melinda Strickler and Isaac Dreese, Isaac Dreese being the father of Melinda Strickler and the father-in-law of Mahlon Dyer. This purchase price was also \$3,000.00.

The third deed I found was dated June 8, 1912 and was from Isaac Dreese to Lizzie Dreese Dyer (Mrs. Mahlon Dyer). The purchase price was \$3,200.00.

The next time the “store property” changed hands was by inheritance. It transferred from Lizzie Dreese Dyer to Willard I. Dyer Sr. and his wife Nina Hummel Dyer. Nina Hummel Dyer Phillips, widow of Willard I. Dyer, Sr. later transferred it to her son and his wife, Willard I. Jr. and Phyllis M. Dyer. Today it is owned by Phyllis M. Dyer.

The store was built with a dwelling on either side. The operator of the store always lived on the right side when facing the store and the older generation lived on the left. Jinks Dyer, father of Mahlon, moved into the home in 1905 and died on the left side of the home in 1926, making him the first of four Dyer generations to live and die in the Winfield store property.<sup>1</sup> Mahlon and Elizabeth (Lizzie) Dyer moved into the home in 1893 and Mahlon died in 1942 in the same room as his father, Jinks. Lizzie Dyer also died in that room in 1952. Willard I. Dyer, Sr. died in 1953 of a heart attack on the sun porch over the kitchen on the right side of the home. Willard I. Dyer, Jr. died in the second living room on the right side of the home in 2003.

The story of the store takes on a very interesting tale and is being told by

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<sup>1</sup> An obituary for Jinks Dyer, “Jinks Dyer Dies,” appears in the Catawissa News Item, May 6, 1926.

Phyllis M. Dyer.



W I Dyer Store, Winfield PA, 2013

Mahlon Dyer operated both stores for about five years before the store in Mt. Carmel went into bankruptcy. He was very successful with the store in Winfield. According to the day book that I found dated Feb. 1904 thru Feb 1905 the items included - eggs, calico, butter, flour, sugar, shoes, shirts, oil, coal, salt, etc. The prices were eggs - \$ .20 a dozen, sugar \$ .10 a pound, flour \$ .05 a pound, coal \$ 7.50 a ton, shoes \$ 1.25 a pair.

Also recorded in the day book were the payment records. Bills were paid by cash, bartering, and labor. One of the ways labor was used was to pay a store bill was to carry x number of buckets of dirt out of the cellar to make it deeper and usable for storage. The dirt was carried to the creek.

The store sold items that were needed or popular according to the times. This is probably the reason the store was able to stay in existence for one hundred and twelve years.

When automobiles came into existence during 1919 the store was operated by Wendell Rohland and Willard Dyer, Sr. under the name "Dyer and Rohland". The store at this time sold items needed to operate an automobile, including tires, belts and a few frequently needed parts. Bicycles were also a premium item

during this time so tires, chains, and other repair items were sold for bicycles.



Original sales counter with merchandise price stampers,  
W I Dyer Store, Winfield PA, 2013

During World War II Nina Dyer drove a truck out over the county side and sold items off the truck. The store had one of the only telephones in the town of Winfield and was used as headquarters for bombing drills. Nina or Willard would go to the Evangelical church and ring the bell when the black curtains were to be hung in the windows. Some of these black curtains are still in the Dyer house. There was also a huge Red Cross banner, which is also still in the Dyer house, that was hung on the front porch. Willard I. Dyer, Jr. was drafted while attending Bucknell University and served in World War II, spending fourteen months in Europe.

In 1936 when the Susquehanna River decided to flood it raised high enough to fill the cellar full of water at the “store property”. In 1972 when the Susquehanna River decided to flood again it rose high enough to put twelve inches of water on the first floor of the “store property.” In 1972 when the water came onto the first floor it came in the back kitchen door on the right side of the store. The sidewalk in front of the store was filled with stoves, refrigerators, and washing machines which had been delivered just before the waters rose. These appliances were carried up the hill behind the barn to keep them dry until they could be added to the inventory in the store. The merchandise in the store was

carried from the basement to the first floor and ultimately onto wagons, and stored in a barn owned by Richard Klingler. When the health inspector arrived to check on the merchandise, he did not believe that the merchandise was moved. Willard Jr. (Johnny) got into the inspector's car and took him to the barn so he could see for himself that the merchandise was dry. The merchandise racks and freezers were raised and put onto crates to keep them out of the water. Of course, the doors were swollen and would not lock, so they were left open and customers could come in and purchase items they needed even when the store was closed.

There were never any items missing that were not paid for. Money or notes were left on the counter or customers came back later when a clerk was available. Many customers came to help with the clean up. Since Willard (Johnny) Dyer had been eleven when the 1936 flood hit he knew how to make sure the "flood mud" was washed out as soon as the water receded with sump pumps. The flood water outside was used to wash the mud off the floors. If the mud was allowed to dry it became like paint and was almost impossible to remove. The Winfield Fire Company did a terrific job taking care of the Winfield people. The men started moving furniture and appliances from the homes on a first water first help basic. Because Dyer' Store was the last in the community to get water in the building, there was lots of help in moving things upstairs and out of the way of the water.

When Willard (Johnny) Dyer, Jr. came home from the war, his passion was radio and television. According to his father's diary, he loved these new inventions and he traveled to Philadelphia to attend school to learn about these new additions to our lives. He installed many, many antennas and televisions throughout the area during this exciting time in history. Also, around this time electric appliances such as stoves, refrigerators, dishwashers, washers and dryers were added to the inventory. For about ten years until the death of Willard Sr. the merchandising of the store was handled by Nina and Willard Sr. while Willard Jr. (Johnny) sold, delivered and repaired radios, televisions and antennas, washers and dryers, and other appliances.

The store always seemed to have at least one employee besides the Dyers. Among them were Carson Brosius, Edith Forbes, Homer Forbes, Irene Hummel,

George Hummel, Ken Zechman, Tom Zechman, Wayne Mallick, Barb Hummel, Ginny Hess and Phyllis Miller who became Mrs. Willard (Johnny) Dyer in 1960. She is the person who is writing this history.



W I Dyer Store, Winfield PA, 2013

Nina and Willard I. Dyer, Sr. operated the store after the death of Mahlon Dyer. They were the parents of Elizabeth Irene Dyer Winters and Willard I. Dyer, Jr. They operated the store after the death of Mahlon Dyer in 1942 and until 1953 which is the anniversary of Willard Dyer's death.<sup>2</sup> The store was then taken over by Willard I. Dyer, Jr. who operated the store with the help of George and Irene Hummel until his marriage in 1960. Irene continued to work at the store until she retired in 1995. Johnny along with his wife Phyllis and their children Willard I. Dyer, III and Gwendolyn Dyer Moyer operated the store until the mid 1980's when the children went out on their own. Phyllis went to work for Northern Central Bank, now known as M & T Bank, in 1989. Willard (Johnny) continued

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<sup>2</sup> An obituary for Willard I. Dyer, Sr., "Winfield Native Dies after Heart Attack at Home," appeared in The Union County Standard Journal in March, 1953.

to operate the store until his death in 2003.<sup>3</sup>

It was the policy of all three generations that parents and children work in the store. Mahlon and Willard Sr. both died at an early age and their sons took over the store. Willard Jr. ran the store for the longest period time that being fifty years in total. Willard I. Dyer, III followed his father's love of new inventions and makes his career in computer programming. Gwendolyn Dyer Moyer makes her living working in the insurance world.

After Willard I. Dyer, Jr. could no longer operate the store it was operated under the name of M. Dyer and Son by Wendy Yoder. This continued for ten months. The store has been closed since Feb. 2004. Phyllis Dyer continues to own the "store property". It is not an operating business.

John and Mollie Hummel, parents of Nina B. Hummel Dyer, lived on the left side of the building for several years before moving into the Evangelical Nursing Home in Lewisburg.

After Willard and Phyllis were married in 1960, they were the only generation to live at the store property so the dwelling on the left side was made into a part of the store. The rooms were used for storage, as well as, for displaying and selling of merchandise. The rooms were given names such as: the "grocery receiving room" where the trucks of merchandise were unloaded, the "freezer room" which held two large freezers of merchandise for sale and a large Pepsi display (this room was also known as the "egg room" because before eggs had to be refrigerated they were sold from here), the "soup room" where the excess soup was stored, and the "cold room" or "lettuce room" where all the fresh produce and fresh fruit were displayed for sale. This room was also used to store dry goods such as paper supplies, puddings, jello, rice, and tobacco products such as cigarettes, chewing tobacco, and cigars. The next room was the "shoe room" where sneakers, dress shoes, winter and work boots were sold from the time the store opened until it closed under the Dyers.

A little history of the Dyer men. Jinks Dyer helped to build the last wooded railroad bridge in Catawissa, PA. He was the last of the builders to pass

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<sup>3</sup> An obituary for Willard I. (Johnny) Dyer, Jr., "Willard I. Dyer Jr., 77, Winfield" appeared in The Daily Item on March 31, 2003, page B5.

away.

Mahlon Dyer was a 32<sup>nd</sup> degree Mason and founded the Winfield Cemetery in 1911 with the help of several men from the area. The first five directors in 1911 were: F. D. Reigle, Isaac Dreese, J. A. Roush, Sherwood Vance, A.E. Creamer and M. Dyer. All of these men resided in Winfield, PA.

Willard Dyer, Sr. sold Equitable Insurance for many years. He also ran for Union County Treasurer as well as operating the store. Some of his insurance clients were:

Winfield Clients:

P. O. S. of A.  
Evangelical Church  
United Quarries, Inc.,

Lewisburg Clients:

Beyer & Fortner, Inc.,  
Dr. James Muffly,  
Union County School District  
County Commissioners of Union Co.

New Berlin Clients:

First Reformed Church

Willard's wife, Nina B. Dyer, drove a truck around the county side during the war and sold items from the truck. She also served as the bus driver using the Dyer car to take the Winfield kids to Lewisburg to attend high school. She worked during the World War II in a factory in Milton.

Willard I. Dyer, Jr. served in World War II as a staff sergeant. He served abroad for just over one year before returning to operate the store.

The store building was used as an undertaker parlor, polling place for election, selling of dog licenses, and many bake sales were held in front of the store.

