

The Unforgettable Five and Ten

by

Manuel and Gale Duque

The O. R. LANEY Co. Five and Ten Cent Store in Mifflinburg, PA. is, in a word, unforgettable! At least it is for most of us lucky enough to have known it, to have walked on its squeaky floors, savored its treats, and marveled at its wide variety of goods. The building, although not in the mint condition it once was, now houses a thrift store, but with the original oiled floors and its reactive boards intact. Alas, things, people and places change, but for many hundreds of O. R. Laney fans, it remains the incomparable 5 & 10 we all treasure in our minds.



Laney's storefront, Chestnut St., March 1990

(J. Russo photo)

Mr. Otha Raymond Laney opened his store in 1936 in the same building on Chestnut Street that had been the Gast Department Store. But that was well before our time; we didn't "discover" O. R. Laney's until the early 1960's when we were working at Bucknell and living in Lewisburg. Newberry's, with its upper and lower floors and with just about everything one needed for home and school,

was Lewisburg's memorable 5 & 10. But O. R. Laney's was more fascinating and more fun to visit. It had a special mystique because of its age and the 19th century look that gave you the odd sense that what was bought there had heightened value because of finding it in that setting.



The Laney store at Christmas time.

Photo courtesy of Jeffrey Mensch

Being in the store could zoom you back in time to childhood days and the 5 & 10 experiences at the Woolworth, Kress and Grant stores of your own hometown. But those stores did not have the unique quality that Laney's had. It was a place we enjoyed going to and taking our out-of-town visitors to at least once, but twice or more if they requested it. Many of the useful, usual dime store items, as well as those we considered singular or rare finds, were certainly not expensive in the 1960's, 70's and 80's, but when we encountered the advertisement for the store's First Anniversary Sale (March 1937), we were struck by the truly low prices during the depression: men's neckties and fancy hose as

well as towels and dishes for 9 cents!

CELEBRATING
OUR 1st ANNIVERSARY
IN MIFFLINBURG

Don't Miss This Sales Event-Saturday, Mar. 20

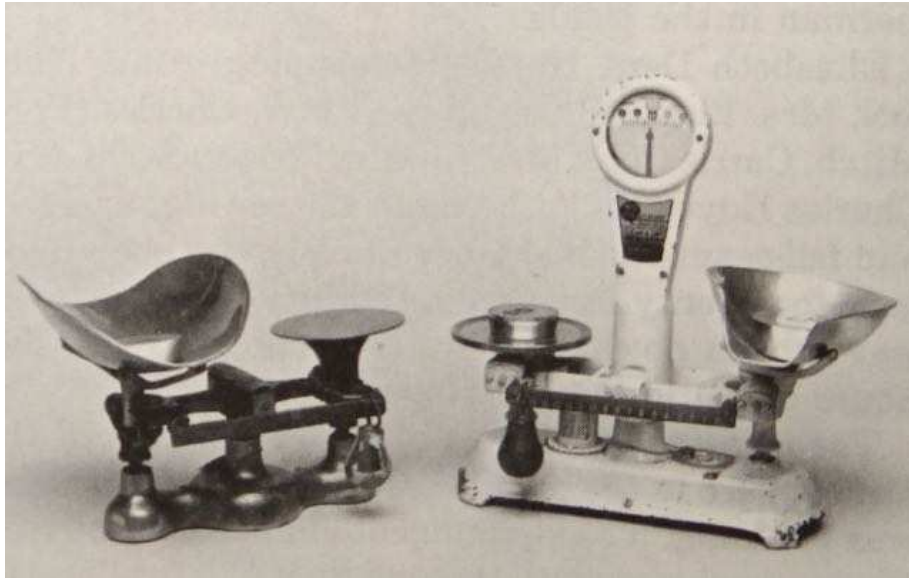
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|---|--|
| <p>Sale of UNDIES Here's your chance of a large assortment of styles in Ladies Rayon Underwear Last Trimmed and Tailored 9c each</p> | <p>STOCK UP ON TOWELS TURKISH TOWELS—made by Cannon A Real Value 9c</p> |
| <p>Green Glass Mixing Bowls A and 4 inch diameter 2 for 9c</p> | <p>Large Assortment of ENAMELWARE Sauce Pans, Pudding Pans, Dishes, Etc. A Real Value, Each 9c</p> |
| <p>Peanut Butter Kisses 9c per pound</p> | <p>ALUMINUM REVUE The 1937 hit parade of REAL VALUES</p> <p>How good our coffee is, imagine your last cup made with instant, better prepared coffee that is dissolved in each cup each. Take advantage of this special offer:</p> <p>1. 5 PC. RANGE WITH SET—This latest model has the price of 10.00. 49c each</p> <p>2. QT. INSULATED BOTTLE—This is the best value in town at 1.00. 49c each</p> <p>3. QT. TEA KETTLE—This comes in a jiffy at 1.00. 49c each</p> <p>4. QT. ALL-PURPOSE KETTLE—This has the best value in town. 49c each</p> <p>5. QT. PONDULATOR—This has never been so cheap before. 49c each</p> |
| <p>Men's Neckties A real value in every Spring Cabinet 9c each</p> | <p>MEN'S FANCY HOSE Wide range of patterns and sizes 9c pair</p> |
| <p>SALAD BOWLS Beautifully decorated, Large Size, Regular Price 1.50. Sale Price 9c</p> | |
| <p>Bon Bon Dishes Regular Price 1.00. Sale Price 9c</p> | |

O. R. LANEY CO.
5c @ 10c Store Mifflinburg,

Mifflinburg Telegraph, March, 1937

Entering the store through its double doors, we were immediately stopped in our tracks by an unusual, wide wooden structure with numerous glass chambers at a child's eye level, each filled with candy—gumdrops, caramels, peppermints, taffies, teaberry balls and the non-pareils (small chocolate disks with white sprinkles on top) that we agreed had “no equals,” as their French name proclaims. Attached to the top of each section was a glass panel that the lady behind the counter lifted in order to scoop our choices into small paper bags before weighing them to determine the price.

The candy transactions ended with the payment for our sweets and the loud “ka-ching” of the old-fashioned cash register. When we spoke to natives of Mifflinburg about their memories of Laney's, the candy counter was always the first thing mentioned. A 25-cent bag of candy was a treat! Saturday nights used to draw people downtown where everyone could see each other, catch up on the latest news, and shop; a visit to O. R. Laney's - especially the candy counter - was always an important stop before going home.



Scales used in weighing candy at O. R. Laney's. (from Snyder 1992, p. 101)

But back to exploring the rest of the store... Further into the store was a section called NOTIONS. Patterns, fabric, buttons, needles and thread; everything needed for making a dress, shirt, apron or night-wear could be found there. Also in that department were crochet hooks, knitting needles and all varieties and colors of yarn.

In another aisle we came across a fascinating counter displaying all sizes of glass globes or “chimneys” to fit kerosene or oil lamps. Some were a couple of inches high while others reached up to a foot tall. We had never seen such a collection at any other place. Along the wall were all sorts of kitchen supplies: mixing bowls, pots, pans, and baking dishes. Among the other unique things in this section were asbestos pads designed to protect counter tops from hot items just off the stove.

Around the corner we could find a grand assortment of dining equipment. Several sets of flatware were available as were various types of plates, soup bowls, cups and saucers. Anything one could want for the table! As we continued toward the back of the store, our eyes landed on rolls of colored material hanging on the wall. As we got closer we realized that we were seeing oilcloth, all sorts of colors and patterns - flowers, red and white checks, blue, yellow, green solid

colors - all rolled neatly on their long spindles, hung one above the other up and down that wall.

Hanging over the next aisle was a sign that said HOSIERY. Along those counters were many shades of nylon stockings for women along with the necessary garter belts to hold them up. In addition, there were socks for men, women and children, some for work, some for school and others for Sunday. Further along the aisle many other items filled the compartments: pen knives, sunglasses with both tortoise shell rims or plain black (our friend from Florida still has one of each!), rulers and yardsticks with the name of the store written on them, and fly paper to catch those pesky flying critters!

One of the highlights of visiting this store, in addition to the candy counter, was tucked away in the back right-hand corner: a player piano! Seated there was a man-sized figure looking for all the world like he was playing the piano. Popular songs of the day came peeling out of that old piano to the delight of all who visited the store. You could always request to have it turned on while you were shopping.



The “piano player” in action and a mannequin in elegant “basic black.” Note oil cloth rolls at right.
(from Snyder 1992, p. 101)



With the player mannequin during closing sale, 1990. Note “Notions” sign, lighting, and interior look of the old store. (J. Russo photo)

Recalling the many visits to our favorite 5 & 10 aroused our curiosity about the history of the store over the years. Our search led us to the *Mifflinburg Telegraph* newspaper archives where we learned about the store's role during World War II. In support of the war effort, it served as a place to buy stamps and order U.S. Defense bonds. One advertisement indicated that employers were

HIT THE ENEMY WHERE IT HURTS

The More Bonds You Buy, The More Planes Will Fly!

Even as you read this, American sailors and soldiers are in action—fighting for you. One extra plane, tank, or gun can often make the difference between victory and defeat. Your dimes, your dollars invested in U. S. Defense Bonds and Stamps may help to buy that very tank or plane . . . may help to spell out VICTORY. Meanwhile, your money will be safe; it will come back to you with interest, \$4 for every \$3 you loan, when bonds are held to maturity. Ask your bank, post office, or employer for details NOW, THIS VERY DAY! Make every pay day "Bond Day!"

U. S. Defense BONDS ★ STAMPS

This Space is a Contribution to America's All-Out War Effort by

The Studio - Mifflinburg, Pa.
Steans Pharmacy
Leopold's Clothing Store
Walters' Clothing Store
Mifflinburg Hardware Co.
Koons Store
Everett M. Baker Store - Main St.
Mifflinburg Silk Mills, Inc.

O. R. Laney Co. - 5c and 10c Store
Mifflinburg Fruit Market
Shively Brothers Meat Market
American Stores Co.
Culp's Store - Mifflinburg, Pa.
B. T. Lance Monument Works
Wittenmyer's Furniture Store
Mifflinburg Bank & Trust Co.

Musser Hardware Co.
Denius Restaurant
Sechler's Easo Servicenter
Klöse's Service Station
Burn's Atlantic Service Station
Mifflinburg Farmers Exchange, Inc.
Sterling Brothers Throwing Co., Inc.
Hackenberg's Restaurant

Mifflinburg Telegraph May 14, 1942

offering workers a payroll savings plan for the purchase of bonds. Also at Laney's residents could find a chart of the Victory Gardens that were set up to aid in war-time food production and for \$1 could sign up for a lot within the garden area, a field owned by the Mifflinburg School district.

WEEK-END SPECIAL!

PERSONALIZED STATIONERY

• 24 Sheets of Paper
• 24 Envelopes

— With Your Initial In Blue —

JUST THE THING FOR YOUR OWN USE
OR FOR A FRIEND

Special 5c per box

O. R. LANEY CO.

Mifflinburg Telegraph April 24, 1941

Every year the plain people of the world make the miracle of Christmas. This is our way of saying we're grateful for being a small part of it. We hope you feel as we do. Merry Christmas!

O. R. Laney Co.
5 & 10c STORE
Mifflinburg, Pa.

Mifflinburg Telegraph
Dec. 25, 1941

The newspaper ran ads for sales at the store and during holiday times

published Christmas greetings to the community. We also learned from the paper that, among many other civic activities the Laney family was involved in, the store served as a collection site for contributions of clothing for the PTA Second Hand Sales (Mrs. Laney was president of the PTA).

In addition to providing the wide variety of items for sale in the store and using the store to serve the community in other ways, the history of the building itself was of great interest to us. This structure at 350 Chestnut Street, currently the site of the American Rescue Workers store, was built in 1883 for Henry Gast who operated the Gast Department Store that sold “dry goods, clothing, house wares, and groceries” (Snyder, p.100). Before Mr. Laney bought the building, Weis Market used it for a few years, but in 1936 the O. R. Laney Co. Five and Ten Cent Store opened for its 50+ year run.

The Laney family lived in an apartment above the store for many years before purchasing the Harry Klingler farm property east of town on March 28, 1957, that included an orchard and a house located at 101 E. Chestnut Street. It was sold from the estate of Mary Laney on September 1, 1984 to David and Michele Holman. Parallel to Chestnut Street about 4 blocks south, no doubt at the edge of the former farmland, is Laney Street, a current reminder of that family who left such an indelible mark on the community.



(authors' photo)

Mr. Laney owned the store for 40 years and upon retirement sold it to Donald and Carolyn Haag who ran it until 1990, under the Laney name. The store finally closed when they were unable to find a new owner. (Mr. Haag died

in the spring of 2014.) In March of 1990, we attended the huge auction of remaining goods, shelving, displays — everything that was left over.



Auction day at the closing of O. R. Laney's, March, 1990. (J. Russo photo)

By chance, close friends from Florida, who loved going to O. R. Laney's whenever they came to see us, were visiting at the time of the sale, so together we witnessed the final days of this memorable 5 & 10. It's hard to believe that it's now 25 years since the store closed...but what truly unforgettable memories remain with us.



Sign thanking customers, 1936-1990, still on the wall of the building's current tenant in 2015 (authors' photo)

Acknowledgements and Sources

The authors thank John Helwig of the *Mifflinburg Telegraph* for our use of the O. R. Laney advertisements appearing in the newspaper in 1937, 1941, and 1942.

Likewise, the authors thank the Hon. Jeffrey Mensch for providing the superb photo of the interior of the Laney store at Christmas time that appears on page 5.

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Snyder, Charles McCool, *Mifflinburg, A Bicentennial History*. Mifflinburg Telegraph: 1992.



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