Summer Expressions

2004

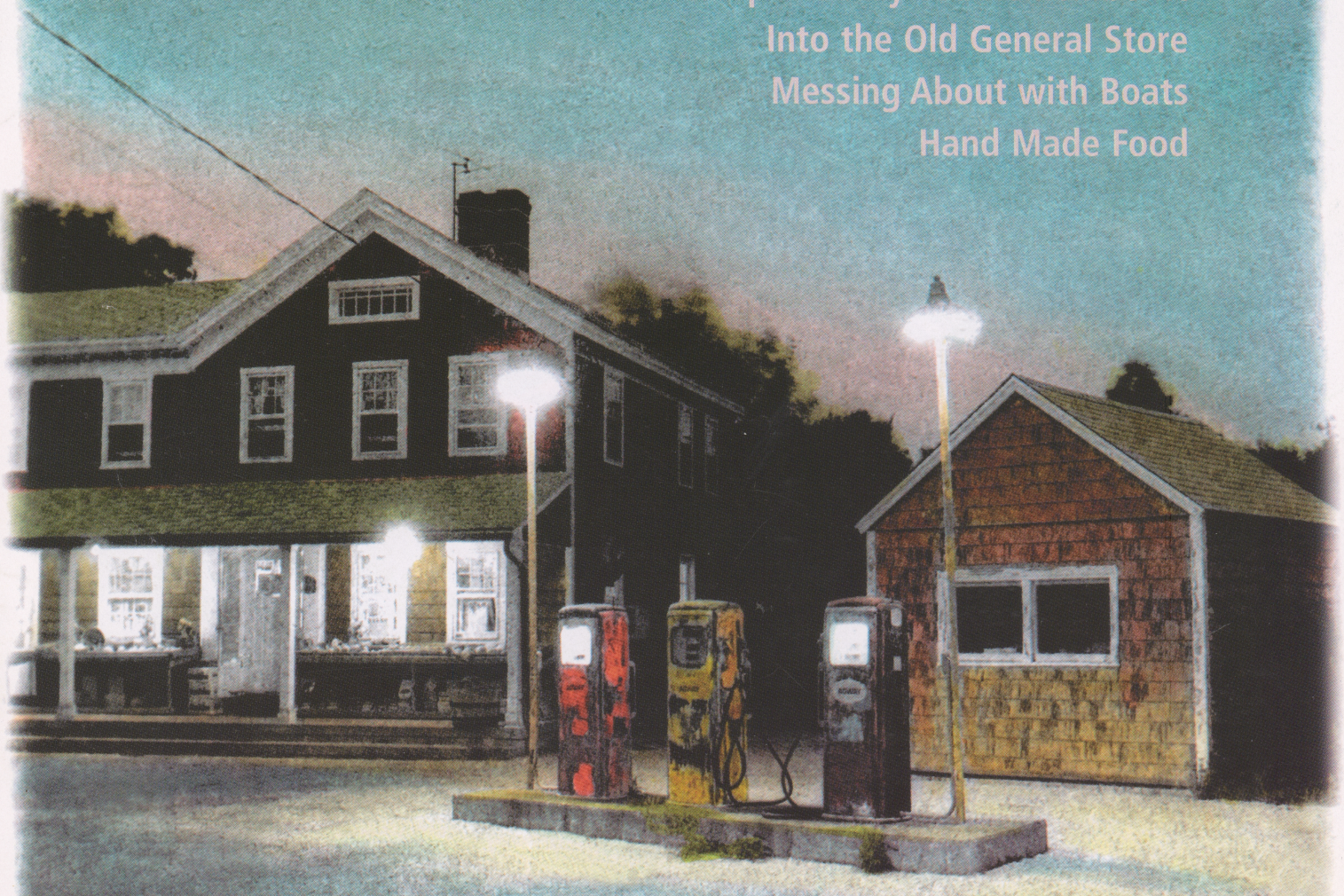
SIMPLE GIFTS

Camp the Way You Remember It

Into the Old General Store

Messing About with Boats

Hand Made Food



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Simple Gifts

Walking to the store in the dusky twilight of early evening for an ice cream after dinner; the air scented with hedge.

The thrill of making something grow and transforming it into something wonderful to share: cold cider for a hot day or creamy cheese to enjoy on your back deck.

Learning to navigate with the wind — or navigate your own life — after the first season of camp. A month or so away from television and video games. Learning, instead, to build fires and build friendships.

The joy of crafting something serviceable or pleasurable with your hands, the sun warm on your face, the smell of salt never far off in the wind.

These are simple gifts.

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Generally Speaking





Country stores have evolved as times have changed ... but have kept that old time flavor

By Peggy Spellman Hoey

How far do you travel to complete the checks on your shopping list? The original settlers on the East End relied mostly on the trading posts, traveling miles by horse and cart just to barter the household goods they could spare in exchange for the bare necessities that they could not live without.

A century later the trading posts evolved into the general stores, not only offering the bare necessities but extravagances such as silk, chocolate and the latest novels. The general store serviced all of the community's needs — as a meeting place, communications hub and post office.

"Hildreth's here in Southampton was originally a general store, however a lot of the other stores started to become more specialized and branched out," said Richard Barons, Director of the Southampton Historical Museum. "You can imagine the gang sitting down and saying, 'What is it that we offer that is different than anyone else and how can we become better?' By the 1890's other merchants opened up, including the green grocers, so, Hildreth's decided – let's become a department store – which is what it remains today."

Back in the day, East Enders were treated to opulent displays of flowers, fresh fruits, home-baked breads and cheeses as they perused the dusty streets of their village.

"Its what Dean and Deluca did 20 years ago," said Barons. "Somehow it just pulled you into the store. It was inviting as you entered, then as you walked into the back it became more spare with the bare necessities."

However, the mom and pop outfits of times long past have all but died out with the building boom of cookie cutter retail franchises on the East End. Today locals opt for convenience rather than tried and true personal customer service as they look for the most bang out of their bucks skipping the IGA for Pathmark. Though some IGA's still retain a passionate following, they are becoming very few and far between as you drive along the winding roads of the Hamptons. Despite the push for mass consumerism, the progeny of the Rockwellian general store continue today.



PEGGY HOEY PHOTOS

Some can't afford to shop local at all and travel as far as Riverhead and Centereach to shop factory outlets and wholesalers.

Before King Kullen came to the Bridgehampton Commons, local people filled their household needs at Schmidt's, Schiavoni's, Dreesen's and Montgomery Ward. Likewise, before Martha Stewart's Super K invaded their sales territory the local mom

HUNTER REYNOLDS (L) ENJOYS A WARM DAY IN FRONT OF SPRINGS GENERAL STORE; THIS PAGE: AT THE SAGG STORE

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The old general store

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and pops had a pretty good business going for themselves.

"There's a cute little five and dime store on Main Street in Sag Harbor – the Variety Store – which is closer to a general store now. It has the close shelving with the melange of toys, clothing and everything – you name it. That is why people who come out to the Hamptons want to visit the Variety Store, because it reminds them of the five and dime's from their childhood."

The Sagg General Store or "Sagg" has become synonymous with the quaint laid-back feel of the hamlet. The building that houses the Sagg General Store is divided between the grocery and local post office. According to Barons, it is one of the few remaining general stores that still serves as a post office. Since 1872, residents have popped in for the sandwiches, molasses cookies and service with a smile. During the summer it's another story, says Beth Ann Terando, the proprietor.

When the Terando family took over the Sagg General Store in 1994 they had no idea what they were getting into.

"We only saw it in October when it was very quiet and we thought we were going to have a nice quiet family business. Now, we giggle about it. On August 4th we opened up thinking that we would just have a few customers or two," said Terando rolling her eyes towards the heavens. "We weren't acquainted with the amount of people that frequent the Hamptons in the summer. I don't think anyone comprehends what the Hamptons are like."

Although Terando was raised out West, she quickly became familiar with the building and its history during autumn trips to her aunt's house. When it became available to lease, Terando knew she had to give it a chance and moved out from Oregon to take over the storefront. She decided to keep everything as authentic as possible by decorating with antique baskets and farm equipment taken out of owner, Merral Hildreth's barn.

"We have a good local crowd," said Terando. "They're very supportive and that's how we make it through the winter."

In her work, Terando exhibits the same sense of pride one can imagine existed long ago, before the invention of the convenience store.

"We try to keep it as 'Sagaponack' as we can, which is nice and clean," said Terando after picking up a sliver of a straw wrapper. "From what people tell me here in Sagaponack we are doing a good job. They like the atmosphere of the country and although they love Dean and Deluca, people tell me not to change anything because they already have that in the city."

One resident feels so comfortable in Teranado's store he walks across the street in his bathrobe and slippers to pick up his newspaper every morning.

With that in mind it was hard for her to decide to close on Sundays, but that is how an old-fashioned general store functioned originally.

"Hey, no Sunday crud!" Terando joked to a regular who shook his head sarcastically.

"Some people still call me astonished, saying how can you do this? But, others come up to me and say, 'Hey, good for you – you need the break."

Just like Sagg, the Springs General Store serves as a hangout for area residents, not to mention day-trippers and the occasional movie star. In particular, people are drawn to the retro feel purveyed by the cedar-shingled farmhouse and gravel parking lot, according to owners Kevin Reynolds and Kristi Hood.

"It's a step back in time," said Reynolds. So many people out here are trying to get away from the ritz and the glitz of the city."

The old-fashioned gas pumps that be-

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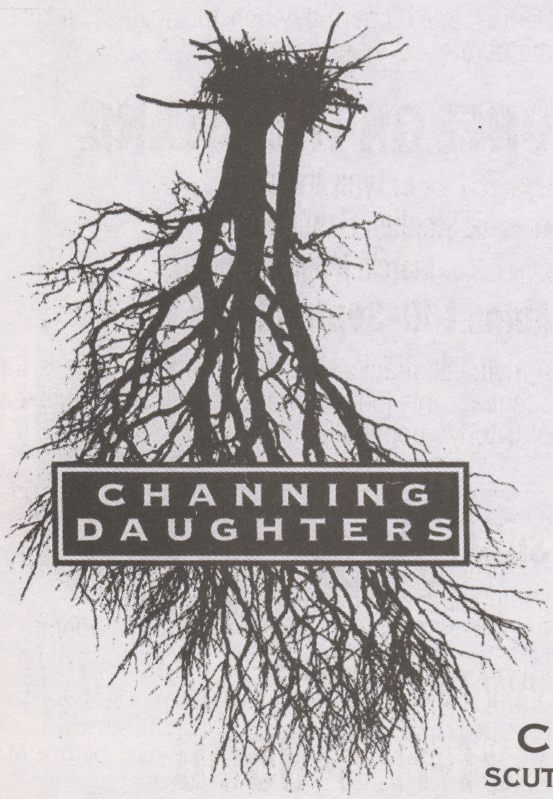

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General store

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come enveloped with trumpet vines by the end of the summer are yet another idiosyncrasy of the store. Whenever Reynolds prunes them he gets hell for it, he says.

"People feel it's as much theirs as it is ours! But that's OK — we want it to be theirs."

Locals still drop in for their morning coffee and paper or just to shoot the breeze. "We really want the store to feel like your home. The best I can think of is — well — I went to school in England so, it's like a pub," said Hood. "They meet their friends, talk and find out what's going on in town. It's part of their routine."

The troubled modernist painter Jackson Pollock once frequented the store to stock up on groceries when he lived across the creek. The Springs General Store was such a staple of Pollock's life in the Hamptons that Hollywood filmed scenes from his life story featuring Ed Harris there. Legend has it that Pollock invoked the old barter system, trading beer and cigarettes for his canvasses, according to owner Kevin Reynolds. Pollock's presence continues to dwell in the establishment as today the customers preparing their morning cup of Joe are greeted by an untitled print of Pollock's which now graces the Musee National d' Art Moderne in Paris.

The display also depicts a photo of Pollock and longtime owner Dan Miller standing in a doorway that has since been covered by sheetrock and plaster. Some speculate that Pollock paid his grocery tab with the Paris painting; however, Reynolds believes it was a genuine gift given in appreciation of their friendship over the years. "I think it was because Pollock confided in him," said Reynolds.

Not only can customers sit down on the porch and enjoy their sandwich, but they can kayak from behind the store as well.

"It gives people a wonderful way to explore the beauty of East Hampton without destroying anything," he said.

If a storyteller were to tell a tale of the general stores of the two forks, one could not neglect the North Fork's Orient Country Store on Village Lane. Nestled off the highway on a tree-lined street, the store appears to be untouched by the sands of time. Its walls are dappled in an aqua blue palette reminiscent of the luncheonettes frequented by our grandparents in the 30's.

Similar to Terando, owner Linton Duel has replaced very little since he purchased the establishment from the village constable 25 years ago. Customers can still enjoy a sandwich while sitting on a hardwood swivel seat bolted to what once served as a luncheon counter, but is now a display for coffee, chips and snack cakes.

"It's unique because it's been in existence since the late 1700's," said Duel. "However, the store as it is has been doing business strictly as a general store since 1850."

In the wintertime, the Orient Country Store is heated by a fully functional coal stove and coiled piping that winds around the ceiling overhead.

"I grew up in Orient and had the option to buy it since I was 18 because I just let the owner know that if he ever decided to sell the store I was interested in buying. It came time and the owner just decided to sell it. I was living in Hawaii at the time and was 29 years old."

Upon his return to the mainland in 1980, Duel introduced the Hawaiian favorite of shave ice. According to Duel, Japanese immigrants brought the iced treat to the island of Oahu. An older version of shave ice utilized a "cuber" technique, shaving a block of ice with a large, sharp blade to be served with flavoring. Duel realized the shave ice machine would find a perfect home on the East End. Time has proved him right, as the Orient Country Store is renowned for their shave ice.

Another feature added recently to the novel atmosphere is the counter style beer tap — which serves Bass Ale to thirsty customers.

"It's just a standard eating place drinking license given by the New York State Liquor Authority," said Duel.

"But the main flavor of the store is really people coming in and eating sandwiches and arguing over politics."

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