

Winfield's General Store

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Jake Winfield's general store doesn't exactly date back to Year 1 like someone said, it just looks that way.

The next time you're in Chappell Hill, near Brenham, drop in and see for yourself. The store's sure an eyepopper, from its high-top shoes to its old pump-handled gas tank.

Winfield, who's turning 88, admits he's a mite out of date with a world his age, why give a whoop and a holler?

This erect man, with a rich head of white hair and a salty turn of phrase, will tell you that "the stuff's been accumulating for 50 years."

There's an amazing conglomeration in the damp, barnlike frame store: High top shoes (like grandma wore), wire fly traps, washing boards, corsets, Army leggings, old cow horns, old scales, old clocks, chicken wire, farm implements, work-clothes and Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes hardware, dry goods, dishes, threads, books, linoleum, groceries, You name it, it's there.

Said Winfield, gingerly dangling a corset that dates to Life with Grandma: "They didn't have what you call bras."

Faded signs line a rugged counter: "Karo," "Garrett's" "Honey Cut (mild-sweet chew)." A sign on the broken-glass front door reads "Stroh's—pure hopped malt syrup."

"That's when you made your own beer," says Winfield.

There's an ancient littered desk and a battered iron safe— "must weigh 5000 pounds, not like the little new ones you can pick up and take off with."

There is a wood-burning iron stove and on chilly days the old man will sit close to it and—with the aid of reading glasses because of the cataracts—peer over newspaper of his 1935 hardware catalogue.

Sometimes he just sits there lost in his memory. Memories of his childhood in New York, as the son of a rabbi. The family moved to Vicksburg, Miss., and he was just 5 when his father died of yellow fever. Returning to New York, he lived on E. Broadway.

"I was a tough kid, but we fought with our fist not with six-shooters. When I was 12 a gang of us went from the Seventh Ward to the Fifth Ward and got in a fight with a gang there.

"I got home with a bloody nose and my mother said I'd been fighting again with that bad Irish boy."

"The Irish boy? It was Al Smith."

The family traveled around and finally settled in Chappell Hill. Jake Winfield got restless feet and journeyed to Houston, worked at a \$3-a-week job in a clothing store for two years, got homesick and returned to Chappell Hill for good.

He acquired the store in 1902. Fire destroyed it in 1914, but it was rebuilt four years later at the same location.

Winfield was married at 24. Nearly 57 years later, in 1952, his wife died. Their two living children are Louis Winfield, a Chappell Hill banker, and Jeanette Wilson, wife of Puny Wilson, Texas Aggie football immortal and former coach.

Jake Winfield, who has three grandchildren and five great-grandchildren, has led a good, full life. And he's still plugging away, a daily tender of the store.

True he is a lot behind the times. Things aren't as they were in the days when mule-drawn wagons brought him 50-Gallon barrels of kerosene, which he sold for 40 cents a gallon to customers hauling in tin cans.

Now he has maybe eight or ten customers a day, many of them farm folks. Occasionally he sells some of his ancient items, such as high-top shoes to "a woman who works in the fields and wanted to protect herself against snakes."

A framed certificate from Gulf Oil Corp. says: "In recognition and appreciation of our business association which began in 1917."

Just outside his store is the hand-operated gasoline pump. Strangers passing through town blink hard with surprise as they see the old man pumping away—serving up a gallon of gas the old fashion way.