



The Stories of General Stores

Sue Lisk suggests online sites that help you understand how general stores played a role in our ancestors' lives

ANYONE WHO TRIES TO BE EVERYTHING to everyone is bound to fail. But businesses are different. For a time, general stores succeeded in satisfying not all the needs, but most of the needs, of their customers.

For cash or barter, general stores offered the items people required and desired. And for free, they often supplied the latest gossip, mail, announcements of local events, and depictions of those individuals most “wanted” by the law.

No two general stores were alike, but every town of any size had one. Most of our ancestors and relatives would have been very familiar with them. Let's consider, via a number of websites, the sorts of general stores they would have frequented and the roles these businesses would have played in their lives.

The American General Store

By way of introduction, Barbara Bamberg-Scott has written a short article on the history of American general stores. You'll find her piece at www.homestead.org/homesteading-history/history-of-the-general-store.

The author notes some of the features of general stores that have survived to the present and other characteristics that vanished long ago. She refers to a book titled *Pills, Petticoats and Plows: The Southern Country Store*, by Thomas D. Clark, which deals with general stores in the southern U.S. from the end of the nineteenth century through the beginning of the twentieth. Bamberg-Scott explains



Interior of the old general store at Historic Richmond Town, an authentic town and farm museum complex on Staten Island in New York City, Carol M. Highsmith. (Library of Congress)



An old general store in Hackberry, AZ, located on the old US Route 66, Carol M. Highsmith. (Library of Congress)