Seven Foot Baron Made Nutley's First Ice Cream

FROM EDMUND GUTHRIE

GUTHRIE's store, where the first telephone in Nutley was installed with wires strung on trees and where Nutley's first ice cream was served, closed after a business career of three-quarters of a century.

Gone is the "ice cream parlor" where Mark Twain tasted the sweet dish for the first time. Gone too is the hall where the Democratic party in Nutley was born, and where the minority group of Patrick Guthrie, Henry Duncan, H. C. Bunner, Mose Halliday and Charles Hampton planned their strategy in a campaign issue between Free Trade and high protective tariffs.

Politics were really vigorous in those days and after one Republican rally and kerosene-torch parade a half century ago, when William Jennings Bryan challenged Major William McKinley, the Republicans let off a blast from a cannon that blew out every window in Guthrie's store. In those days Democrats were considered odd, and their votes were seldom counted after

the polls closed.

The time-stained building, now 66 years old, was designed by a New York architect for the purpose to which it has been put. Its 15 rooms are massive, some of them as large as a four-room house. Edmund J. Guthrie and his sister, Miss May Guthrie, discontinued the old family business and rebuilt the front, removing the store rooms and substituting a residential entrance.

Together with Mark Twain, H. C. Bunner, the witty editor of “Puck,” Frank Stockton and an array of artists and writers from The Enclosure and Nutley Park, many strange characters moved through the quaint setting of the Guthrie store.

None was more striking than the exiled Baron de Saint Mart, who stood 7 feet tall in his cavalry boots and had been exiled from his homeland for having killed a man in a duel. With monocle screwed into his eye, he turned the handle of the first ice cream freezer ever used in Nutley while his wife, a daughter of the De Neuville family from the French court of the Bonapartes, painted miniatures in one of the great rooms upstairs.

Peculiar in his build, the Baron was also peculiar in his dress and frightened the younger generation of Nutley when he stalked the streets wearing a towering bearskin hat to top his 7-foot frame. As a hobby he raised mushrooms in the town’s first commercialized mushroom “farm.”

“The Baron and I relayed each other at the handle of Nutley’s first ice cream freezer, when he wasn’t out lecturing on the Franco-Prussian War in churches and schools over the county,” Edmund Guthrie recalled in traveling down Memory Lane. “I was just a boy, and there was always the prospect of being allowed to lick the paddle, so ice cream making was fun. But the Baron really suffered. He bent his 7-foot frame over the little freezer and turned until his back would ache. He was at a disadvantage, too, because his monocle constantly dropped off into the freezer.

“We had been serving ice cream for some time before the first customer ever asked for an ice-cream soda. It was Dick Kingsland, a student at Princeton, who had learned about that new drink while he was away at college. He was home on vacation when he ordered the drink for the first time.

“It was quite a job mixing an ice-cream soda and involved quite a bit of leg work. The ice cream freezer was kept in a cold room at the back of the place, and the soda was up front. It meant running to the back room, clearing the salt and ice off the ice cream can, juggling the lid with one hand, holding the glass at the same time, and scooping out a generous portion of ice cream.

“It was a delicate operation because, with the hands full of scoop and glass, I still had to fit the lid back on the can carefully so that no salt would drop into the ice cream. Then, before the ice cream in the glass melted, I would have to run to the front, squirt in some flavor and pour out soda water from a bottle. I

thought, always, that it was a nuisance, and I never could understand why Dick Kingsland could not drink his soda straight and eat his ice cream separately the same as everybody else."

Guthrie's store was opened by Patrick Guthrie, father of Edmund Guthrie, who came here from New York. He had married the daughter of the Hanilys, whose great farm lay west of Passaic Avenue where Holy Family Church and school are now located. Brookline Avenue cuts across what was once the family farm.

Her father, Martin Hanily, carried the mail back and forth to the Clay Street Commons in Newark on horseback, throwing the mail pouches across his saddle. Mail was sorted in Newark for the many workers in the Avondale Quarries, and Martin Hanily served, particularly, as mail carrier for the quarry Irish who lived around Harrison Street and Passaic Avenue, where their predominant numbers gave the district the name of "Dublin."

Dipping deep into their combined memories, the Guthries gave the following picturesque recital of the store's history:

"Father and Mother were married in Belleville and resided first in New York. He was a printer and worked for Harper's Weekly, but they loved Nutley and moved back here to go into business. The expressman who moved him out was very discouraging and remarked, 'Say, young man, where did you ever get the idea of coming out to this God-forsaken place and expect to make a living here'?'

"His place of business was to be in a two-story building on the west side of Passaic Avenue, just north of The Enclosure. Dr. Daily's drug store was in the same building and Fryne Cunningham was the druggist. On the opposite side of Frenchman's Lane was Thierfelder's saloon.

"Father opened the store selling dry-goods but the Duncan Mills had shut down a short time before, a few years after the Civil War, and times were bad, so he had to change to another line. He had learned as a boy how to make ice cream at a coffee house in New York City, so he took a chance at making ice cream. On the side he handled New York newspapers which he had sent out every day.

"The ice cream business developed very well. Customers came to his place in carriages or on bicycles from Delawanna and Rutherford and other neighboring towns to get the ice cream. A few years later he moved his business to his own building at 296 Highfield Lane, where it has been ever since. Even before he moved, Patrick Guthrie introduced the telephone to Franklin Township in the old store. The telephone helped his business and he promptly predicted that it would be an essential instrument in everyone's home some day.

"In the new store he installed a novel ice cream parlor, with a huge fireplace

built to burn railroad ties. A North Carolina pine mantel still frames this fireplace. On the mantel now are three beautiful vases contributed by the artist, Arthur Roeber. Francis Day painted a mural for it, picturing a maiden showering roses over a marble bench. The mural was later sold to Adrian Larkin.

“Many writers and artists stopped in to use the telephone or to eat ice cream. Albert Sterner, Frank Stockton, Dana Marsh, Patrick Nelson and Mark Twain, when he came weekends to visit his editor, H. C. Bunner, frequented the place.

“In the rear was a cement room where the ice cream was made. Every morning the iceman would drop off heavy blocks of ice to be crushed into small pieces with an Indian club in a large flat box on the cement floor. A heavy five-foot wheel was whirled around by a crank connected with gears to the freezer.

“For a while we had an exiled French Baron and his wife stopping at the house, and he was put to work by Father turning the crank. He was a big man, seven feet in height, and after he had helped on a batch of ice cream his back would hurt from leaning over.

“We also manufactured root beer and plain unsweetened soda, which were charged from a carbonic gas tank in the cellar, and rocked to distribute the charge. After we made batches of ice cream my treat was to drink pitchers full of foaming root beer, a refreshing drink filled with plenty of nothing.

“Nutley always was politically minded, and the highlight of those days on Passaic Avenue was the Republican torch-light parade. As he was always in the minority group, the Republicans would poke fun at my father. He never was ashamed of the company he kept, for there were H. C. Bunner, Mose Halliday, Henry Duncan and Charley Hampton among the Democrats, who held their meetings and planned their strategy in his store. “One parade included the Frelinghuysen Lanciers, who paraded with kerosene torches all around the township. When they arrived in front of our store they let off a blast from a cannon which shattered every window in the store and shook the whole building. The Republicans paid for all the damage caused by that volley.

“Every Election night Father would take election returns over the town’s one telephone, and announce the results to the waiting crowd jamming the store. The results always were sour to his taste, the Democrats never having a chance. It was customary in those days to wager Derby hats on the elections, but Father always took his defeat with a smile, even though I knew that, bald-headed, he could very well have used a Derby.”

Tags

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- Mark Twain
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