

Local Soda Fountains Used To Be The Place To Hang Out

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Mount Airy's "Great White Way," its Main Drag, once was highlighted by four extremely popular features — the soda fountains that were an integral part of drugstores dotting Main Street.

Drugstore soda fountains — those sparkling monuments to the elbow-grease or scrubbing power of the soda jerks who kept them as spotlessly clean as the inside and outside drugstore windows...those shrines to boys and girls which were responsible for more teen romances than Cupid...those edifices to nostalgia, the Norman Rockwell variety, where starry-eyed youths could sip a Coke and effortlessly dream impossible dreams.

Let's see, now. Starting at the northern end of the central business district and proceeding south, were the Hollingsworth Drug, Turnmyre Drug, Lamm Drug and W.S. Wolfe Drug companies. Hollingsworth Drug was in the upper business block; the other three were in the lower block in the heart of town.

For some reason, all were on the west side of Main Street. There must have been a reason — the proprietors were astute businessmen — but we never heard what it was.

As much of a necessity as a well-stocked pharmacy back in those days of yore was a similarly stocked soda fountain. Soft drinks, milkshakes, candy bars, Nabs, sandwiches — the complete soda fountain had it all. Behind the counters stood fast-moving, efficient clerks known as soda jerks who largely were just making their first steps into the work world.

Cokes, Nabs, candy bars, ice cream cones: all were 5 cents each. Youngsters feeling particularly flush would opt for a milkshake — 15 cents for the 'shake without ice cream and 25 cents for the milkshake made with real ice cream. This was opposed to a milkshake base that came into use later.

The soda fountains were THE place to congregate if you were a



Old-time pharmaceutical tools of the trade were featured in the display window of Lamm Drug Co.

teen-ager. They were where the teens met their friends and found out the latest gossip. Dates were made and broken, hashed and rehashed and "going-steady" couples set plans, or agreed to split.

The soda fountain was almost impossible to get to during the peak rush hours — lunch, after school, early evenings and when the first movie of the night discharged its hordes at 9 p.m. Nearby Mount Airy High School had no lunchroom, so when the bell sounded for the noon recess, the students made a mad dash for their favorite soda fountain or lunch counter.

Each of these businesses had a particular clientele, but one of the most universally popular among the junior set was Lamm Drug Co. It was the store right in the middle between W.S. Wolfe Drug Co. and Turnmyre

Drug, which was located in the corner building at Franklin and Main streets opposite Surry County Loan and Trust Co.

Crowds of youngsters would jam into the drugstore, milling around the soda fountain and spilling out onto the sidewalk in front of the building. It was their own teen-age club and the kids enjoyed the place for years.

DeLay (Mrs. L.M.) Lamm, Vannie Gilbert, Becky McMillian, Virginia Worrell, Lois Weldon, Hazel Simmons, Irene Shockley, Mildred Eckenrod Jones and others were among those taking care of patrons in Lamm Drug Co. at various and sundry times. Old-time customers of the soda fountain still recall with pleasure the pimento-cheese sandwiches, roast-beef sandwiches and other delights to be found there.

A newspaper article, written in

1990 when the drugstore merged with the Rite-Aid pharmacy chain, mentioned that Lamm's was a popular hangout for Mount Airy High School students "who kept the soda fountain attendant a blur of motion."

Those in a certain age group now can recall that sight.

But don't ever think that Lamm Drug was just a place for youngsters. The soda fountain was popular with all ages, as the lunch crowds attested, with the tables favorite congregating places for both young and older folks.

A group of businessmen met regularly each day at Lamm's and/or Hollingsworth's for their morning and afternoon coffee. Ten o'clock in the morning was a near-sacred hour, for that was when a bunch of longtime



Lewis M. Lamm (left) and his son, Bill Lamm, are seated at a table in back of the Main Street drug store.

cronies would get together, drink coffee, smoke cigarettes and talk about whatever businessmen talked about. If one member didn't show up, the others ferreted out the reason — sick, a death in the family or some other personal disaster.

"Pop" Boone, the grand old man of the Grand and Earle theaters in Mount Airy, was one morning regular. He was a Coke man instead of coffee and a drugstore regular watchers-by could set a timepiece by; he always went to Lamm's and for a good reason. "It's the only place you can get a Coke in a glass and not one of those Dixie cups," Pop would snort.

Lamm Drug was opened in 1925 by Lewis M. Lamm and A.P. Turnmyre. In 1933, Lamm bought out

Turnmyre's share of the business and Turnmyre opened his own drugstore, at the corner of Franklin and Main.

The front windows at Lamm Drug Co., on occasion, featured an eye-catching display arranged by DeLay Lamm, old-time pharmaceutical tools of the trade.

In this ever-changing world, nothing remains constant. Businesses, particularly ones downtown, have not proven to be an exception.

The schools were the first to leave downtown, then downtown business mainstays, and then drugstores, yielding to change, joined the flight to Suburbia and the mall. They left in their wake pleasant memories of a time when soda fountains and drugstores were centers of business and social activities.