

# Fourth generation

Mayberry traders find country atmosphere



*First Generation*



*Second Generation*

By Eleanor Powell

Locked out of your car? Need birdseed, a pressure cooker or a safe to hide all of your money?

One-stop shopping at Holcomb Hardware on Main Street, in Mount Airy, can provide you with the locksmith services and more items in the store than shoppers can “shake a stick at.”

Fourth-generation owner Richard Holcomb, a master locksmith, stays on call much of the time unlocking cars and

safe openings throughout North Carolina, and some in Virginia, in the field of home, commercial, industrial and banks.

A pot-bellied stove, located in the middle of the store, is inviting for customers during cold winter days. Chairs are arranged in a semi-circle for those who wish to sit and talk a spell. During hot summer days the antique stove serves as a conversation piece. A bucket of coal and a shovel are close by while scraps of wood are readily accessible for starting the fire on cool mornings.

On a chilly April day this year, the store owner was out the door on a business call but his father, Bill Holcomb, was on call to point out interesting facts covering the years that he worked for his father, the late Hugh Holcomb.

Now retired, Bill Holcomb told about working at the store when he was 12 years old. On a good Saturday he could make a dollar. After serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II, he returned home and entered North Carolina State University. While studying, he also worked at the hardware store part-time. Graduating in 1950, he joined his father



full time in the family business.

Bill Holcomb said, “From the beginning in 1946, we sold general hardware, some building materials, wood and coal heaters, oil space heaters, floor furnaces, appliances and started duplicating keys.

“It was after my father passed away in 1960 that we added landscape design, nursery stock, central air conditioning and locksmithing. We still sell general hardware, along with swimming pool supplies and kerosene heater wicks.

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appealing at downtown Holcomb Hardware



*Third Generation*



*Fourth Generation*

Through the years and because of aging, we stopped carrying several items.”

He showed the machine that duplicates keys, demonstrated the old hand crank cash register and a safe that dates back to around 1888.

Some of these items go back to the days when Richard Holcomb’s great-grandfather, Fletcher Holcomb, owned the hardware store in 1914. The store was purchased from F.L. Smith and it was located in the building now occupied by Main Oak Emporium. When Fletcher Holcomb passed away, his son, Hugh Holcomb, and John Midkiff bought the business and the two stayed there as partners until 1938. Midkiff later bought Holcomb’s interest in the store.

Bill Holcomb recalls that his father opened Holcomb Hardware at 226 North Main Street in January 1946, and they remain there today. He added that they were fortunate to have dedicated and loyal employees such as Frank Scott, who started working for them in 1949 and continued his employment there until 2005 when he passed away at 92.

Since Bill Holcomb’s retirement, Conrad Martin and Rossie George now work with Richard Holcomb and are

joined by R.J. Hiatt on weekends.

The character of the store has remained the same throughout the years. The window displays are creative with shovels, rakes, pots and pans, flash lights, gardening tools, farming equipment, fertilizer and household items galore, all waiting to be purchased.

Where else can you find the charm of a country store that captures the eye of

local folks as well as tourists who visit “Mayberry” each and every day of the week?

And where else can a child look for a red wagon or tricycle and take it on a trial run on the sidewalks of Main Street?

Only at Holcomb’s.

Eleanor Powell is features editor at the Mount Airy News.

