

Dockery Store (at the corner of Twin Oaks Road and Dobbins Mill Road) Elkin, NC address

From Facebook page of Surry County Digital Heritage

Melissa Taylor

The late Thomas Alvin Charley Bryant Taylor Dockery and his wife, Minnie Shinault Dockery, owned this store. He was a farmer, and she, a former teacher in a one-room schoolhouse (Key Field School) close by, up nearby Keyfield (close to the late Roger White & Mrs. Betty White's property) on Twin Oaks Road. Their grandson, Tracy Hayes, now owns the old store and adjacent storage building, along with the land. The store was a "meeting place," of sorts for people in the Union Cross community.

My great-grandmother Dockery was an amazing woman in her time, who believed that everyone deserved an education, so she made arrangements for the bookmobile to visit the store every month, so the neighbors and their children would have access to books and reading materials. She also taught many of the neighborhood children how to add, subtract, multiply and divide by observing them as she allowed them to run the cash register at the store. She also allowed many families to keep a running account at the store, because many people wouldn't have a whole lot of money until it was time for the tobacco crop to come in, especially the closer it got to summertime.

There was a board for checkers, with bottle tops from the "pop" machine used as checkers, and a big glass case filled with candy, "nabs," and other treats for travelers, for folks who were working and tending the tobacco fields, and she carried everything (fresh milk, butter, and eggs from the farm) that the neighbors needed so they wouldn't have to drive to town (then Elkin) to go grocery shopping if they didn't have to.

Back then, as now, they raised cows and hogs, and it was very common for 2 families to split one into halves or quarters. The meat was processed by a neighbor up on Twin Oaks Road whose day job was as a meat cutter/butcher for the grocery store in Dobson, and he butchered, labeled and packaged everything for them - deer too, if necessary. Most of the time, the menfolk took care of that as soon as they fell them; the women were quite adept at killing their own chickens and hens. Mama Juanita always said that old hens made better stew than young chickens, because the meat was stringier, and she was right.

The mailman stopped every day after he ran his route for lunch, which consisted of a "Co-Cola" and a pack of nabs, along with a game of checkers. There were a couple of folks that were unable to care for themselves, and I know that she helped take care of feeding, clothing and trying to help educate them. She was a good listener, and served as a kind of counselor to many of the neighbors, although she refused to give anyone advice, for fear that they would take her advice, and suffer for having done so, then lose a friend or have a neighbor with resentment or harsh feelings toward her for having given them errant advice. She heard many, many stories from her friends and neighbors though, carrying most of them to her grave.

All of the roads around there at that time were dirt, and nobody had air (conditioning). As I understand it, she took it upon herself first to write to then-Governor Bob Scott's Office and ask that the roads be paved. She followed up with a phone call. When it came re-election time, not only were the roads paved, but Gov. Scott came to the newly-constructed Union Cross Ruritan Building to shake her hand, along with many others. Mrs. Dockery donated the land for that building to the Union Cross Ruritans, and the whole community pitched in to farm a crop of tobacco to pay for the building.

Grandpa Dockery died of a massive heart attack in 1967, leaving her to care for the farm and the store. She had some help from a couple of the children, but a few had married and moved; however, none of the seven children they had together ever forgot where they came from, or spent a whole lot of time without coming back home to bring their kids to visit their "Mama." Sunday suppers were always at Grandma Dockery's, with all of the cousins who were around, and that meant fun and games (football and playing "crack the whip") in Grandma Dockery's front yard before supper. The men sat down to eat first, then the children, and then, the women, who'd take their time together, laughing over dessert, coffee and whatever else had happened that week.

Both Grandma and Grandpa Dockery are buried in the cemetery at Union Cross Baptist Church across from the old store building. After she died in 1974, the store was rented a couple of times, but never to the extent that it was in Granddaddy and Grandma Dockery's time, I don't believe. And that's the story of Dockery Grocery! 🌻

(minor edits by David Wright, July 6, 2020)

Janie Dockery Helton (from History of Surry County Facebook page)

This was Dockery Grocery, owned and operated by my grandparents, Alvin and Minnie Shinault Dockery. They built it sometime after I was born (1948). It was a grocery store with a gas pump in front and a gathering place for the community. The bookmobile left books there to be checked out and brought back and there was a bench for seating and checker playing. They sold a few hardware and tire repair items. The candy counter was amazing! You could also get a bologna and cheese sandwich sometimes! I remember when the barrel of salt fish came in and they sold out in a hurry. There was also a building beside the store that contained fertilizer for the farmers. My granddaddy loved to introduce his new grand babies to Coca-Cola-of course , it was from a 6 oz. bottle. I could go on and on.

Karin Dockery Hauser (from History of Surry County Facebook page)

I went there as a child with my granddaddy, David Dockery. I loved going there! I also remember my aunts picking blackberries on grandpa's farm and taking them over for Minnie to sell! Wonderful memories!

Ellen Alvarez (from History of Surry County Facebook page)

My grandparents used to run this store!