

East Falls Past—Shopping in East Falls

The Fallser, November 2011, by Wendy Moody

In a 1981 interview, Ruth Emmert, a lively lady, shared her memories of shopping in East Falls in 1926. Try to imagine...

Where did you go for groceries?

Well, for little things we went to Kelly's, a delicatessen on the corner of Sunnyside and Vaux. Vaux Street, then, was mud, pure mud. It was a chore to get there, but they were nice and you could buy – not fresh meat or vegetables – but almost anything else. When people ran out of money, they let them charge it. My husband never allowed me to, but everybody else did. Then there were butcher shops on 35th Street, now Conrad, and there was Clayton's, who carried meat, freshly cut....



Where was that?

On the corner of Conrad and Bowman, I think. That was the biggest store in the Falls. Then there was Sowden's on Conrad Street between Sunnyside and Ainslie. That was mostly a butcher shop. The young men who worked there would come around with a pad and a pencil and take your order every day – you didn't have to walk there. They'd come in, sit, and you'd try to think what you wanted for dinner and they would mark it down and deliver it later.

They delivered?

Delivered, oh delivered! Everything was taken care of. And there was no higher price for that. And you didn't tip them. It was just a service that was accepted. Then there was Stubblebine's, down on Midvale, who carried very good meat and all the wealthy people in Falls – the ones who had estates farther up – went to Stubblebine's. Mrs. Kelly shopped there. Since they didn't come to take your order, I only went there once in a while. It was easy to get to, but pushing a baby carriage up the hill on Midvale ...that was too much.

What about household items?

There was a spinster on Conrad who had findings for sewing, and an old clock repairman who sold clocks down on Conrad, near Sunnyside. Once I bought an antique cuckoo clock and the bellows was broken and everybody said "No one fixes bellows because they can't get the material". I took it to him and he made a new bellows. He was very valuable to the community. The shop was near the hardware store on the corner.

So Conrad Street was like a shopping area?

Oh yes, a real good shopping center, the one you could walk to. All the shops were occupied. People made good livings there.

Did they have clothing stores?

That was on Ridge near Midvale. There was a department store there where you could buy children's clothing, yard goods, things like that. We had a bank at Midvale and Ridge and Palestine Hall had a store. There was a 5& 10 on the Ridge and on the second floor was where Jack Kelly and his new bride lived when they were first married. There was a drugstore, the Gunboat Café, and there were restaurants on Midvale in 1926. They were all nice!

Did people do their shopping locally?

Germantown was the bigger shopping center. They had Jimmy Jones, Allen's and Rowell's. For your big things you went there. To save carfare, we'd walk on a nice afternoon and push our baby coaches around Germantown.