



Rural
Commerce in
Context:

SOUTH CAROLINA'S COUNTRY STORES, 1850-1950

Cover Image

Country store, location and date unknown, by Beulah Glover.
Courtesy of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South
Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.

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Report Submitted to:
South Carolina
Department of Transportation
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April 30, 2013 • Final Report
New South Associates Technical Report 2159

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the assistance of a number of people and institutions that greatly assisted us with the research, identification, and public outreach aspects of this project. As our main contact for this project, Chad Long, the NEPA Coordinator and Archaeologist with the South Carolina Department of Transportation, provided New South Associates with information, guidance, and expertise throughout the study.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude for the assistance and support of the staff at the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, particularly Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Elizabeth Johnson, Tracy Power, Andy Chandler, David Kelly, and Jennifer Satterthwaite. The time, support, and research material they provided us early on and throughout the project proved invaluable to the development of the project.

The authors visited several research institutions, and we would like to acknowledge these libraries and their staff for their assistance. These include the South Carolina Department of Archives & History; the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina; Ross Taylor, Map Library Manager, and staff at Thomas Cooper Library at the University of South Carolina; the South Carolina Room at the Charleston County Public Library; the South Carolina Historical Society; Mike Bedenbaugh with the Palmetto Trust for Historic Preservation; Keith Hebert with the Center for Public History at the University of West Georgia; and the Baker Library at Harvard University.

Additionally, across the state we met several townspeople, storeowners, and store staff, who graciously arranged meetings with storeowners, allowed us to photograph their stores, and shared their recollections and histories. These include Reiley Jacobs, who arranged for us to meet with Mary McConnell of A.B. McConnell General Merchandise; Tommy Boyd, owner of the former Boyd's Country Store; Russell Cooper and his staff at Cooper's Country Store; the staff of Carolina Country Store; the staff at both locations of the Carolina Cider Company; and the staff of the Lenoir Store. We'd also like to thank Vanessa E. Patrick with the North Carolina Department of Transportation for sharing information about North Carolina's stores with us, as well as George "Buddy" Wingard with the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program for supplying us with historic photos of stores in the state. And finally, we'd like to thank all who contributed to our social media websites for sharing their memories, tips, and photography.

An important thanks goes out to New South Associates staff Natalie Adams and Sarah Stephens for assisting with the identification and survey of country stores, and our colleague Alex Nackashi, who also assisted in photography.

The New South Associates graphics and production team were instrumental in creating this report. A very special thanks goes to graphic designer Tracey Fedor, and the production team led by Jennifer Wilson, including Rebecca Brown, Kristen Puckett, and Sadhana Singh, with GIS assistance from Carmen Beard.

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B.J. Brant, Gen. Mdse., Post Office,
Ashepoo, by Marion Post, Farm Security
Administration, 1939. Courtesy of the
South Caroliniana Library, University of
South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina.



1. Introduction

The country store, also known as a general store, once defined the South's rural roads and crossroads. The few that remain today share a uniformity of geography and architecture that disguises their rich cultural meaning. A simple parapet, double doors, a porch, and a cacophony of advertising characteristically signaled their commercial purpose. Yet on that porch or behind those doors, a variety of other social interactions were happening. Credit was given, politics were discussed, and polling took place. Public discourse between neighbors, black and white, occurred. When widespread use of automobiles began in the 1920s, some country stores added gas pumps, while later country store architecture directly reflected this accommodation of car culture. Happily, some of the stores survive today because of their geography, the owner's commercial acumen, or they were preserved as historic stores/sites. What has not been preserved is an understanding of the complex and central role that they played in the state's historic rural economy, commerce, politics, and lifeways. This context study provides this information, acknowledging the well-deserved nostalgia surrounding these resources that seem like virtual time capsules from the past, but digging deeper into what they meant to rural South Carolinians in the late and early to mid twentieth century. Developing a historical narrative that speaks to the significance of the country store in South Carolina's history is the first objective of the context study.

It also has a second objective. A road-widening project along U.S. Route 1 in Lexington County that would impact a National Register of Historic Places (NRHP)-eligible country store (U/63/0796) was the direct impetus for the development of this historic context. Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, federal agencies must consider the effects of their projects on historically significant sites, buildings, structures and objects. Identified during a survey, the store was then evaluated under the National Register criteria and was considered to be significant. As a result, the South Carolina Department of Transportation, in fulfillment of a stipulation within a Memorandum of Agreement between the Federal Highway Administration, the South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) and the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, funded the study as a consequence of the project's effects on the Lexington County country store.

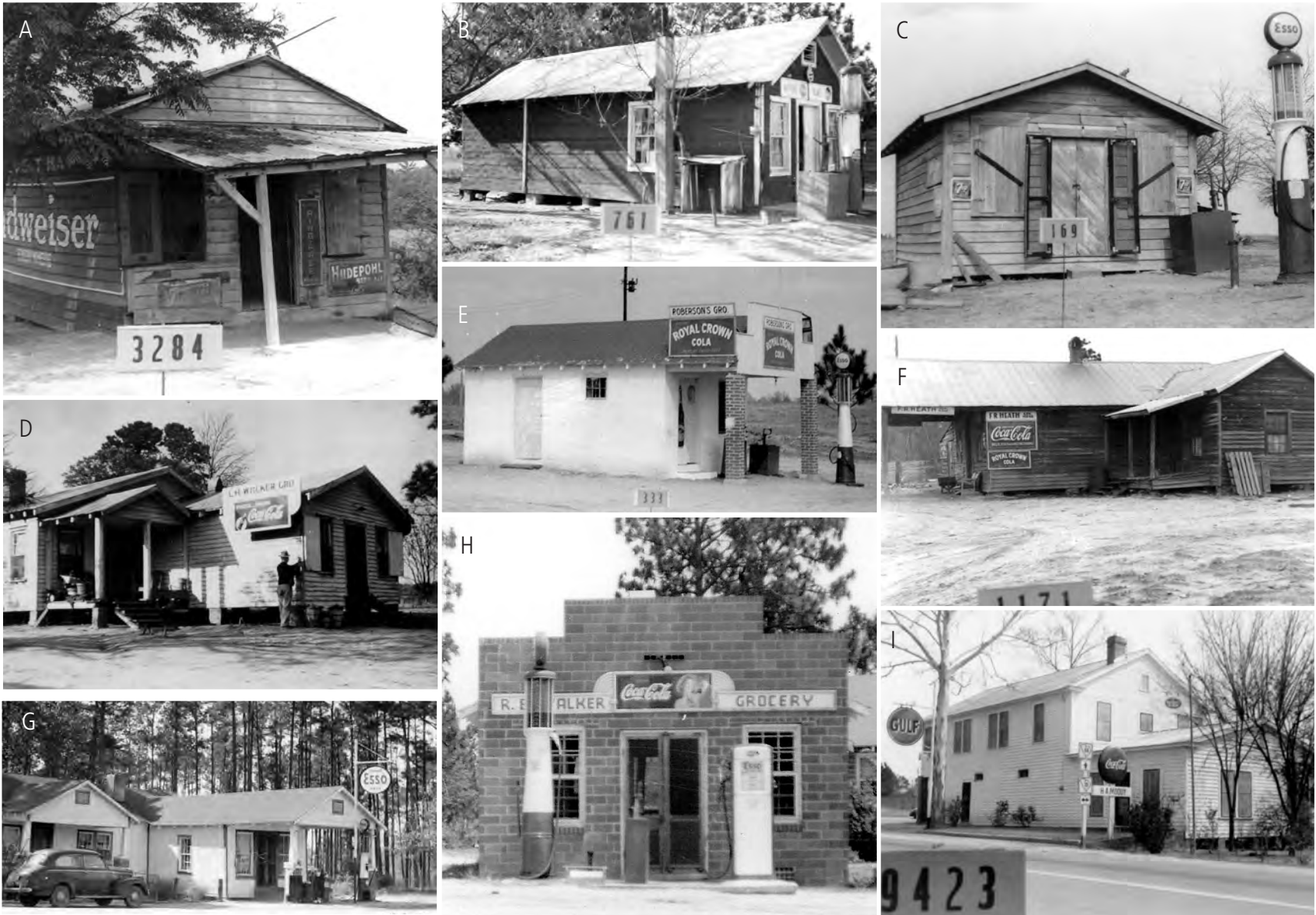
The agreement called for the development of an overview of the historical patterns that led to the development of the country store and its later fit with providing gas in the early twentieth century, an analysis of its character-defining features (the physical features that allow us to recognize a country store), and an evaluative framework for their assessment in their historic context. At the heart of the stipulation was the recognition that the Lexington County example was part of a larger resource group that was familiar on one hand but, as noted above, was actually little studied in terms of its historic significance or its architecture, making evaluation for eligibility to the National Register challenging. This study provides guidance for this process.



Country store interior showing wood plank rear counter, scale, and typical shelving lined with goods. Bert Fore, Storeowner, Rankin County, Mississippi, 1930s. Courtesy of Shorpy.

The document is divided into six chapters, followed by the references cited and multiple appendices. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 contains our methodology for the research and reconnaissance survey. Chapter 3 presents the historical narrative highlighting the themes that defined the country store's establishment, operating life, and demise. The following chapter describes the character-defining features of the country store and its property types. Chapter 5 provides a summary statement of significance, period of significance, and evaluation framework for preservation professionals. The final chapter identifies areas for future research and associated contexts to be considered in an evaluation of the country store. Appendices A through D contain compilation lists of South Carolina's rural stores. Appendix A contains store data culled from Mill's Atlas. Appendices B through D provide statewide lists of country stores taken from the Bradstreet & Company and Dun Company records from 1874, 1920, and 1942 respectively. Appendix E contains a table of previously identified rural stores while the survey photography is presented in Appendix F.

Country Stores, Aiken and Barnwell Counties, 1950



A) Agnes L Hays Store; B) Moyers Place; C) Ellen May Gordon and Mattie Lee Cornwell; D) L.H. Walker Grocery; E) Roberson's Grocery; F) F.R. Heath General Merchandise; G) H. H. Owens Store; H) R.B. Walker Grocery; I) Henry A. Moody's Store. Courtesy of SRARP.

2. Context Research and Reconnaissance Survey

The South Carolina Country Stores study developed on a number of fronts, using more innovative technological outreach as well as traditional archival research. One of the main goals of the project was to connect with as much of the South Carolina community as possible in order to gather local information about these important community landmarks. The three main components of this document, the historic context, discussion of country store types, and reconnaissance survey sections, all required differing strategies for their development, with efforts for each crossing over to supplement all three sections.

Historic Research

The development of the historic context for country stores began with a literature search and the building of a bibliography. The main subjects within the country stores bibliography included the country store, the Reconstruction era of the South, the rise of the automobile, the gas station, and convenience stores. The project team wanted to trace the origin of the country store to its peak and then to its decline, while tying this broader history to the particularities of South Carolina. The historian visited several repositories during the research, including the South Caroliniana Library; University of South Carolina Library and Map Library; South Carolina Department of Archives and History; Emory University; the University of Georgia; and the University of West Georgia Center for Public History.

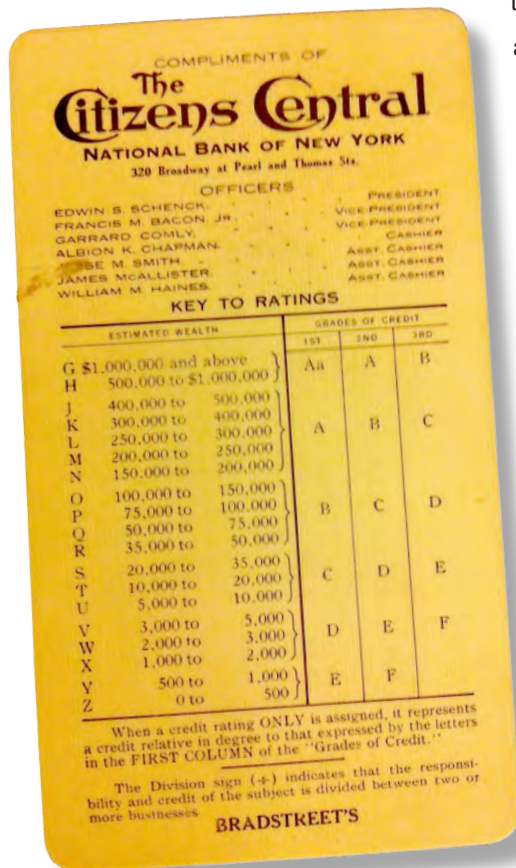
One of the most important things that developed from the early research for the project was a working definition of the country store. The country store and gas station were always two separate entities, but there was some crossover on both sides. Many country stores added gas pumps to the front or side of the building, while many gas stations and convenience stores began selling a variety of merchandise, similar to that found in the country store.

The beginnings of these definitions were found in one of the more important books on country stores, Kentucky historian Thomas D. Clark's *Pills, Petticoats and Plows*. Published in 1944, Clark's seminal work on the subject is full of information based on his research and visits to many country stores throughout the South. Clark uncovered store ledgers and analyzed the credit prices of merchandise, the shopping habits of customers, and the quality of the merchandise. As useful as the book is, it contains a somewhat dated view of the South, and it is not well organized. However, at the same time, the early date of the book is beneficial since Clark was able to visit country stores before their peak was over.

Lewis Atherton's (1968) study of the country store from 1800-1860 is a good source on country stores in the South before the Civil War. Through this work, we understand that the credit system that the country stores operated on prior to the war provided precedence for the way business was conducted after the war.

1908 Code Key for Bradstreet Company Credit Scores. Courtesy of Baker Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina in Columbia was a great resource. The Manuscript collection contains a number of store ledgers, while a few historic photographs of country stores were located. One of the more important finds at the South Caroliniana Library was a group of records with the commercial ratings of bankers, merchants, and manufacturers in South Carolina. At first glance, these records appeared to be R.G. Dun & Company Mercantile Reference Books, the well-known credit rating company that eventually merged with the John M. Bradstreet Company in 1933 to form the Dun & Bradstreet. However, these records had no company name attached to them, as they were photocopied from a larger book, or were pages pulled out of a larger book. The credit code system used for the records dating from 1875 up until the 1930s did not match up with the well-known code system used by Dun & Company. Further research was conducted by contacting the Baker Library at Harvard, a repository housing the most complete Dun & Company and Dun & Bradstreet records. The Baker Library shared a 1908 code key card, which had the Dun & Company code system on one side, and the Bradstreet Company code on the other side. The code key confirmed that the earliest of the records housed at the South Caroliniana Library were Bradstreet Company records, while those dating after 1933 were Dun & Bradstreet records.



In these records, country stores were listed as general stores, and credit ratings were provided for each store. In 1875, the Bradstreet agents visiting South Carolina recorded over 1,400 general stores, a very large number, considering the much smaller numbers of extant country stores that remain today. This number excludes the general stores found in the larger cities like Charleston and Columbia, where a country store would be less likely located. The records uncovered several stores owned by women and African Americans, many of which we cross referenced with the U.S. Census to help shed some light on their lives. The South Caroliniana Library retains copies of the Bradstreet Company records for every year from 1875 until 1958. For the purposes of this context, three years were selected to look at more closely: 1875, 1920, and 1940. These years were selected to reflect the changing times in regards to the country store, with the earliest year available, 1875, and 1920 and 1940 chosen to coincide with the introduction and increasing use of the automobile. A discussion of the findings of these records is included in Chapter 3. The data culled from these records can be found for reference purposes in Appendices B-D.

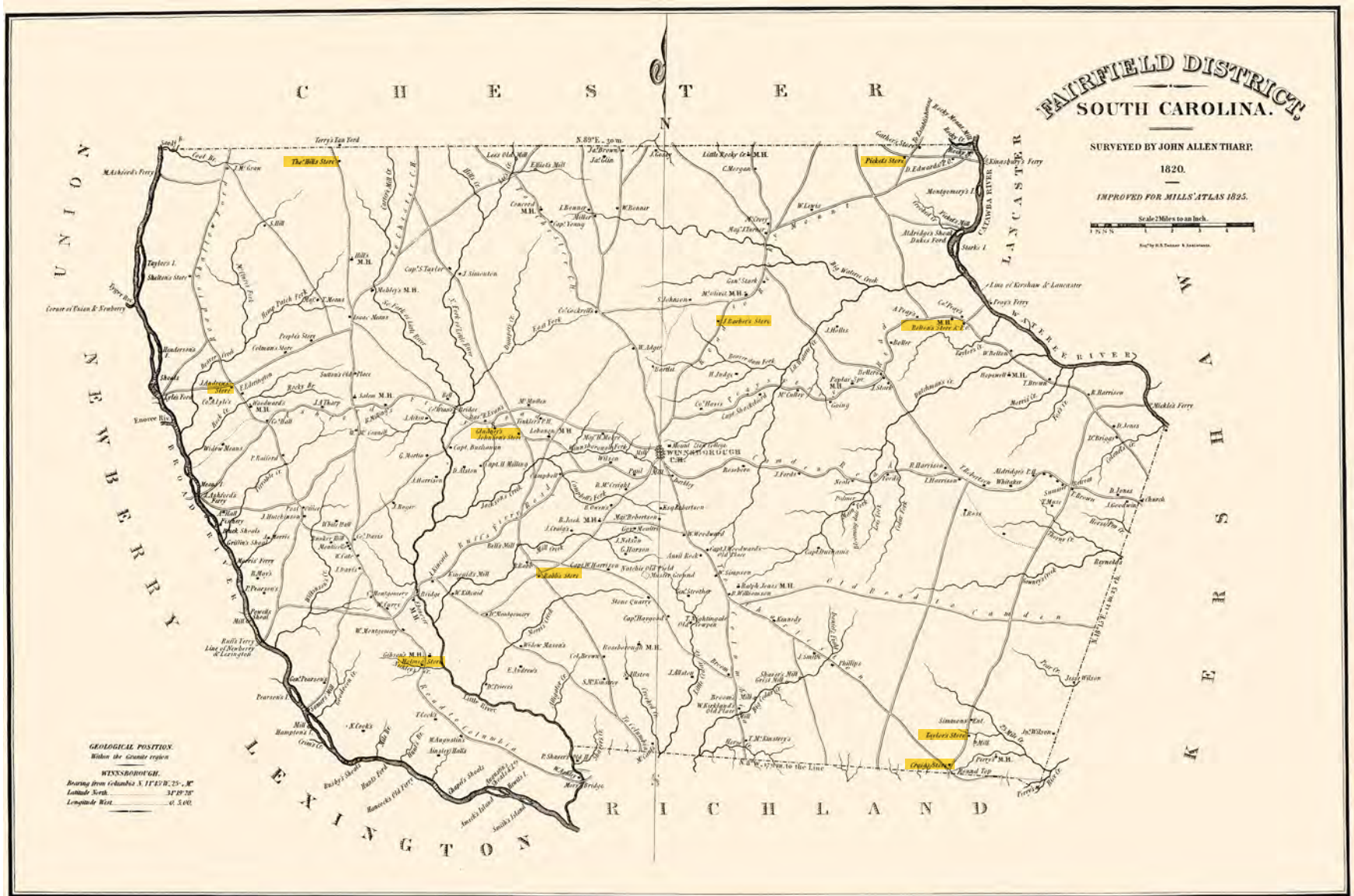
Another publication that aided efforts in identifying country stores was *Post Offices of South Carolina, 1865-1980, and their Postmasters* by Robert J. Stets. Published in 2001, the book lists all of the state's post offices, their location, and their dates of operation. Country stores frequently contained post offices, much more so during the nineteenth century than after the 1920s. This proved to be a good reference for dating country stores, as well as identifying possible storeowners. Maps are also provided for each county, showing the location of the post offices. This resource, along with census data, supplemented the research from the Bradstreet Company and Dun & Bradstreet records. All three resources helped in our efforts to uncover specific stories of country storeowners.

In addition, historians contacted the Savannah River Archaeological Research Program (SRARP) to ascertain whether they had any historic photographs of country stores that had once existed on the land that became the Savannah River Site in the 1950s. SRARP provided us with a small archive of black and white photographs from the Department of Energy's Real Property records that document numerous country stores that had been located in Aiken, Barnwell and Allendale counties (See Introduction Figure). This information was beneficial to our analysis of store types, and their character-defining features. We also contacted several military installations with a similar request, but no further information on country stores was located.

Map Research

Map research was conducted to help the identification of country stores over time, as a way to identify any geographical trends involving country stores in South Carolina. After considering the various maps available, including topographic maps, soil survey maps, and county highway maps, it was concluded that the focus of the map research and analysis should be on those maps where businesses could most easily be identified.

The earliest maps analyzed were the 1825 Mills Atlas maps. Approximately 125 stores, or place names with the word "store" were identified during this analysis (Appendix A). Later, county highway maps were also used, because these maps identified a wide variety of places, including schools, churches, and most importantly for this project, business establishments and post offices. Three county maps covering two different time periods were analyzed to identify potential stores. The three counties were chosen based on their regional locations within the state: Upland, Midland, and Low Country. These maps were spatially analyzed to help determine any trends in locations of and distances between stores. Because country stores are not specifically labeled such on these maps, the analysis is not without its drawbacks. Yet, the valuable information provided by the county highway maps must be taken into account. It is reasonable to assume that a majority of the business establishments identified in rural areas on these highway maps were in fact country stores, based on the Bradstreet Company records, which identified over 1,400 rural general stores in the state in 1875. This map analysis was used in the development of the context section of this report.



Literature Search

The South Carolina Department of Archives and History (SCDAH) was an invaluable resource. SHPO's staff, housed in the SCDAH building, met with the project team, helping to guide our research and focus. The survey cards and National Register Nominations on file at the SCDAH were reviewed, and a table of country stores that had previously been identified in the state was produced from this list (Appendix E). This search identified 277 stores from 15 counties. Some of those identified in the state survey files stem from previous countywide survey efforts but, unfortunately, the majority is the product of older surveys with minimal information. This search also helped guide our strategy for the reconnaissance survey, as under-surveyed counties of the state were picked for survey.

There are only nine country stores in South Carolina that are listed in the NRHP, either individually, or within a historic district. Two of these, the McLeod Store and the Village Store in Cainhoy, are no longer extant.

Social Media Outreach

While conducting historic research, the project team developed public outreach for the project through two social media outlets. The goal of the outreach was to a) involve the public in the project; b) gather information about country stores from the public; and c) use this information to guide the research and survey for the project.

The South Carolina Country Stores and Gas Stations Facebook page was set up in October 2011 as one of the public outreach methods. The page had 127 fans by April of 2012, and has helped identify several country stores throughout the state. It has also been a good indicator of the public's positive attitude towards country stores and their preservation.

A Flickr group page was established as well. There were so many individuals already taking photographs of country stores in South Carolina, and it seemed a natural progression to set up a group page to bring all the photographs together. Photographing country stores is a popular pastime and soon there was a collection of nearly 90 photographs. These photographs not only helped to identify the locations of country stores in the state, but also aided in efforts to define country store building types. Each photograph was "geotagged" with its location embedded in the photograph, so that all the country stores photographed could be pulled up on a map of the state. While some of the stores photographed were known to us, as they are either listed in the National Register or they had been previously identified through county surveys, most others were new. Both aided the survey efforts and also helped define country store types. The Flickr group also gave insight into how the public views and defines country stores.

The Social Media APPROACH

A screenshot of a Facebook page for the group "Historic Country Stores & Gas Stations of South Carolina". The page features a cover photo of a store interior with shelves of goods and a Coca-Cola sign. The profile picture shows a small, single-story building. The page includes a search bar, navigation tabs (Home, You, Organize & Create, Contacts, Groups, Explore, Upload), and a post from 23 hours ago by Sarah Stephens. The post text reads: "Hey, Country Store fans! Check out our 'Posts by Others' to see photos of the Lenoir Store t-shirt! Thanks, Sarah Stephens!". Below the post are options to like, comment, and share. The page also shows a "5 Friends" section and "Recent Posts by Others" with photos and names like Adam Emrick and Sarah Stephens.

A screenshot of a Flickr group page for "South Carolina Country Stores and Gas Stations". The page is signed in as "mahalo1210" and shows navigation options like Home, You, Organize & Create, Contacts, Groups, Explore, and Upload. The group page includes a search bar, a "SEARCH" button, and an "Add photos" link. The main content is a grid of photos from various users, including "From Sautterry", "From krilo", "From michaely", "From mahalo1210", "From JiminSC", "From xpranger", and "RandomConnections". The grid shows a variety of country stores and gas stations. At the bottom, there are navigation controls for "PREV", "1", "2", "3", and "next".

Screenshots of Project Facebook and Flickr Group Page

Reconnaissance Survey

The research conducted at the SCDAH helped the project team strategize for the field survey portion of this project. The main goal of the survey was to lay the groundwork for an ongoing assessment of the general state of country stores in South Carolina, as well as to gain a sense of what other historians could expect to find when conducting fieldwork or researching country stores. The survey was designed as a reconnaissance level survey, or “an examination of all or part of an area accomplished in sufficient detail to make generalizations about the types and distributions of historic properties that may be present” (National Park Service 48:44739). As such, the field survey was intended to provide a sample of previously unidentified country stores for baseline information.

As has been previously stated, the focus of the survey work was on a few counties in the state that had not been the subject of a countywide survey for historic resources. Four counties were chosen for reconnaissance survey: Barnwell, Orangeburg, Greenville, and Cherokee. They are located in the extreme northwest or the midlands of the state. None of these counties had been previously surveyed as part of a countywide survey in the past. Additionally, historians visited several other counties throughout the state to survey a targeted list of country stores that had been compiled through our public outreach efforts and additional research. These stores included many of the stores currently listed on the National Register, as well as other stores where it was felt greater attention was deserved. The areas visited included the Columbia and the surrounding Richland County area, as well as the southeast portion of the state.

Historic county highway maps were analyzed prior to beginning fieldwork. All business establishments in rural areas were identified on the highway maps to assist in locating the country stores. Instead of driving every single road in the county, historians surveyed only those locations found on the maps. Survey in the four selected counties revealed that country stores are, and have been, a dwindling historic resource in South Carolina. For example, of approximately 87 rural business establishments identified on the 1953 Cherokee County Highway map that were sampled during the survey, only 11 extant stores were located. The majority of stores that survive date to the early to mid-twentieth century; the older nineteenth-century examples were especially scarce.

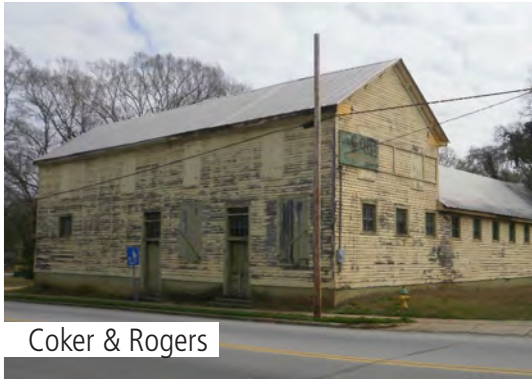
The field survey resulted in the identification of 95 country stores in 24 counties; six of those visited are currently listed in the NRHP. Photographs and descriptions of each are found in Appendix F.



Lenoir Store



T.G. Patrick Store



Coker & Rogers



Village Store, Cainhoy



McDowell Store



Keyserling Store



Ruff Stores

South Carolina's National Register Listed Country Stores

(Opposite)

National Register Stores Individually Listed

Lenoir Store, Sumter County, prior to 1878, listed under Criterion A

E.W. Cannon House and Store, Darlington County, ca. 1870, listed under Criteria A and C (not shown)

Monticello Store and Post Office, Fairfield County, ca. 1850, listed under Criterion C (not shown)

Corner Store and Office, Beaufort County, ca. 1877, listed under Criterion C (not shown)

National Register Historic Districts with Stores as Contributing Resources

Welsh Neck-Long Bluff-Society Hill Historic District, Fairfield County: Coker & Rogers General Store, ca. 1860

White Oak Historic District, Fairfield County: T.G. Patrick Store, ca. 1876, and McDowell Store, ca. 1885

Ridgeway Historic District, Fairfield County: Ruff Stores and Gin, ca. 1860-1947

McLeod Farmstead, Beaufort County: Keyserling Store, ca. 1880, and McLeod Store (no longer extant)

Cainhoy Historic District, Berkeley County: Village Store, ca. 1905, Village Store-Blacksmith Shop (no longer extant)

Research Challenges

One of the challenges of identifying country stores in the field is identifying vacant and abandoned commercial buildings as country stores. Without signage, it is difficult to know whether a building historically served as a country store, or whether it was a more specialized commercial business. Historic research on these properties will aid historians with making these determinations. Tax records, historic maps, census records, and local libraries and historical societies can all be used to gain information about a particular commercial building. These avenues can also be helpful when researching a known country store. When a store is still in operation, it is worthwhile to visit the store and speak with the owners, asking to look at any historic records or photographs. Many stores still in operation are proud of their history and eager to share it with others.

Another factor to take into account while researching is many of the resources are imperfect when identifying country stores. The county highway maps proved to be the best geographic records of country stores in the state; however, the stores are recorded under the wider category of business establishments. The maps, therefore, are not foolproof for identifying historic country stores, but they can be used as an indicator of country store locations. When these maps are analyzed with other resources, like the Bradstreet business records and Stet's *Post Offices of South Carolina*, a better picture can be put together of country stores in the state.



“Community service is what its all about. Service to the people, convenience. Services we can give the people that they appreciate very much, makes life easier for them.”

Mrs. Carrie Lenoir,
Lenoir Store Postmaster, 1942-1976.



Rankin Grocery, Kingsley Hills, Anderson, 2009. Courtesy of V. Lynne Jenkins, Carolina Shots Photography and Fine Art, www.carolinashots.com

“The country store from my youth...”

was Raymond Simmons’ store in the Bethany Church Community in Anderson County. It was about 1.5 miles from my grandparents’ farm, and we would walk down to the store and buy a drink (10 cents) and a snack (crackers, peanuts, Moon Pies, etc). It’s where my love of Mountain Dew began. I still have some of the old “Yahoo! It’s Mountain Dew!” glass bottles with the Hillbilly on the side. He also sold hoop cheese and overalls; pickled pig’s feet and boiled eggs. My grandpa and the other men in the community would hang out there when things were slow around the farm. Good memories!”

- Randy Williamson, SCDOT



3. South Carolina Country Store Context

For many South Carolinians like Randy Williamson, the country store holds a special place in their hearts and minds. It was the community landmark for so many rural areas, a place where you could buy just about anything and fill up your gas tank before heading out. Most country stores are unmistakable by sight: one or two stories in height with a narrow façade covered by a porch. The double doors leading into the store often stand open, especially during the warmer months of the year, inviting passersby inside for a brief respite from traveling or from working on the farm. Country stores were not just retail establishments, but they also served as gathering places for local people; a place to get together and talk about their farms, businesses, and families. A deeper look into the history of the country store reveals that they had an integral role to play in the Southern economy, particularly following the Civil War.

The history of the country store is a complex story of politics, race, and the complete overhaul of the South's economy, something that does not seem readily apparent to most of us today. One historian has said that the country store was one of the most significant institutions in the history of the southeast (Thompson 1989:15). While the goal of this context is to uncover the history of South Carolina's country stores, a look at the broader history of the country store throughout the southeast is needed. The broader southern country store history provides an overview on how country stores operated from before the Civil War to after, when agriculture throughout the South changed vastly and the country store served an important purpose for southerners.

The growth of the country store emerged out of the demise of the slave economy of the plantation system, and it became an important part of the reorganization of the South. Following the Civil War, the Reconstruction era found Southern planters and newly freed African Americans forging new paths. Cash was low to non-existent, and the country store and country store merchant, together with an institutionalized system of credit, quickly became one of the most important parts of the new Southern economy. Today, the country store is often viewed with nostalgia, as the place where neighbors could gather and buy virtually anything they might need. Yet, it was also the place where struggling tenant farmers brought their cotton, hoping to break the perpetual debt cycle of the crop-lien system and where politicians garnered their following and started political movements throughout the state. This historic context will provide a framework within which to view South Carolina's country stores, an important part of the state's past.

The Country Store in the Antebellum Southern Landscape

The South's country store, also referred to as a general store, grew in significant numbers after the Civil War with the collapse of the slave labor based plantation system. General stores existed before this, but not in the same large numbers or in the same economic, social, and agricultural framework, as did later country stores. Nevertheless, the antebellum country store forged the path for the importance it would have in the post-war South. South Carolina had an early history of plantation agriculture, earlier than other southern states due to its coastal

areas, which were conducive to cultivating rice and indigo (Aiken 1998:4–5). A plantation in the southern United States was typically a large commercial farm where usually one cash crop was raised with subsistence crops grown solely to feed the labor force (Aiken 1998:5–6). This focus on one staple crop limited the ability of some plantations to be completely self sufficient, necessitating the local general store or plantation commissary (Atherton 1968:8).

By the 1750s, the southern store building had developed a few typical characteristics that would translate into later stores and even to stores today. For one, the store contained a salesroom, typically there were no windows on the sidewalls, only on the front. This allowed ample space for hanging shelves along the storeroom to display merchandise. Another early characteristic that stayed with stores until contemporary times is the use of a counter to divide the merchant from the customer, a place to set goods and money in order to complete the purchasing process. Early stores also could have a counting room that connected to the salesroom. In two-story stores, many early merchants chose to reside above the salesroom to keep an eye on the merchandise and as an economical way to live (Lounsbury and Patrick 1999:355).



Greetings at the Whitley General Store in Wake County, North Carolina. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

For the antebellum plantation economy and its small yeoman farmers, the country store was important in a number of ways. The colonial era staple crops of rice, indigo, and tobacco were supplemented by cotton beginning in the early 1800s, a crop that could be grown in the Piedmont region of South Carolina (Aiken 1998:5). Because of the nature of cotton and tobacco agriculture, smaller farmers could effectively grow these crops, just as larger planters could. Thus, a population of farmers had a demand for the country store during the first half of the nineteenth century (Atherton 1968:9–10).

The cyclical nature of the farmer's world necessitated the credit system beginning in the early nineteenth century. Just as with the planter, the staple crop yielded income only once a year for farmers. The country store merchant provided the farmer credit the rest of the year for purchasing tools, dry goods, groceries, and a variety of other items. The merchant acted as an intermediary between the small farmer and the big city cotton markets in Charleston and Augusta by taking in the crops in payment for goods, moving the crop to the city merchants, who then sold to markets elsewhere. While planters marketed their crops directly with city merchants or factors in Charleston, farmers were able to deal directly with the country stores located on the interior rural areas of the state. The country store was a critical part of the antebellum farmer's livelihood, as it supplied merchandise on credit and marketed the farmer's crops (Atherton 1968:14–15).

That is not to say that the planters of the south did not also patronize the country store, only to a lesser extent than the farmers. Many of the larger self-contained plantations typically had stores or commissaries on the premises, which also operated on a credit or bartering system. Plantation stores could act as storage for extra goods produced by slaves; for surplus produce; or they could hold merchandise supplied by the plantation owner for credit or trade (Vlach 1993:84–85). Commissaries could also be storehouses and receiving areas for goods provided to slaves by the planter. Commissary stores on plantations came mostly after the Civil War, however, coinciding with the significant growth of the country store at this time and the reorganization of the landscape (Gamble 2008). When planters did operate stores on their plantations, the intent was partially to keep slaves from going into town to trade any extra produce they had grown (Atherton 1968:63).

One of the earliest documents with reference to South Carolina's stores is the Mills 1825 Atlas (Appendix A). These early maps identify 125 place names with the word "store" included in the name. Owen's Store in Barnwell County, General Godbold's Store in Marion County, and Hazzard's Bridge Store in Beaufort County were typical. Other place names in Mills Atlas contain just the word "store" with no other identifiers. Three of these were paired with a tavern, while one accompanied a post office. The combined place names with "store" are spread out across the state geographically. The Upcountry had the most store place names, with 58, followed by the Midlands, or center part of the state, with 39. The Lowcountry had the fewest store place names, with 20. Stores were located along the main roads, with some located at intersections (Mills 1980).

The number of country stores in South Carolina increased beginning in the 1850s, as new rail lines were constructed throughout the state, prompting the growth of existing towns and the introduction of new market towns. In the Upcountry region, the town of Yorkville had 10 stores in 1850. While just two years later, that number more than doubled to 25, after the King's Mountain Railroad, connecting Yorkville to Chester and Columbia, was completed. This dramatic growth was also seen in Laurensville after the Laurens Railroad was constructed in 1853. Three

years prior to the line's completion, the town only had six general stores, but by 1853, the number jumped to 25. New towns like Rock Hill emerged along the railroads, and less than a decade later, the town had two schools, two churches, and several stores. This increase in general stores brought the cotton market which had been more important across the state, into rural areas that had once been insignificant to the cotton trade (Ford 1984:302).

It was during this period that the country store became defined by its wide variety of goods in stock. This vast array of merchandise was important for rural southerners who did not have access to the offerings of the big coastal cities. Merchants had access to the big city wholesalers and kept stores stocked with everything their customers might need. A farmer's wife would pick out fabrics like muslin, linen, and calico, and any number of threads to sew dresses. The farmer himself would buy tools and farm equipment like harnesses and yokes. Tobacco, cigars, sugar, coffee, tea, spices, soaps, candles, hats, boots, guns, and molasses are just a few of the items a country store typically carried. Storekeepers would advertise the dizzying array of goods that they had in stock in the local paper. The typical advertisement was often so packed with item descriptions that they were difficult to read (Atherton 1968:73–74).

The earliest of country stores were much smaller in size than the later incarnations, which had to be of a substantial enough size to hold larger merchandise like plows and coffins. As with other rural buildings of the settlement period, the stores were built of log and replaced shortly thereafter with frame and brick buildings, depending on the success of the storeowner. In southern cities like Baton Rouge, storekeepers began installing storefront windows for display in the 1840s and 1850s, a feature that rural storekeepers did not typically embrace. Generally, country stores were built to be utilitarian, inexpensive, and of an adequate size. The one- and two-story front-facing-gable framed buildings that have become iconic representations of the country store were built in the decades before the Civil War, and storekeepers continued to build these decades after. But other building types were constructed as well, and even houses were converted either partially or entirely for use as stores (Atherton 1968:65–66).

One example of an early South Carolina store that was located in a house was Bailey's Store on Edisto Island. The store was opened around 1820 on the first floor of a two-story framed I-house near Store Creek and on the island's main public road. Several different families, including the Holmes, the Westcoats, and the Jenkins, ran the store over time, and typically lived in the upper floor of the house. After the Civil War, David Augustus Stevens bought the house and reopened the store in 1881. Stevens' sons ran a cotton gin that was built behind the store, a common occurrence for country stores after the war. The store was named Bailey's Store in 1907, when the Bailey family took over the store and moved it into another nearby house (Spencer 2008:117–119).



Bailey-Holmes Store, Edisto Island, South Carolina

Storekeepers developed important roles in their respective communities. Many times, the country store was the first business establishment in an area and drew other businesses and settlers to the region. Atherton's study of country stores from 1800-1860 helps define who the early storekeepers were in their respective communities. Through analysis of census data from 1850 from Perry County in Alabama, Atherton concluded the storekeepers were typically much younger than the farmers and planters, with more than 70 percent ranging from 20-40 years of age. Because of his (and sometimes her) important position in the community, the storekeeper would often belong to city councils, which was of benefit to their business when mercantile laws were on the table. One of the other important jobs many storekeepers held was that of postmaster. Frequently, storekeepers provided additional services for processing agricultural goods, like cotton gins, turpentine stills, gristmills, and sawmills (Atherton 1968:191-193).

The Civil War and Reconstruction

Like much of the rest of the nation, the state of South Carolina remained economically unsettled in 1890. Just three decades prior, South Carolina could boast as being one of the wealthiest states in the country. In the years following the Civil War, the state became consumed by debt. By the late 1880s, residents lost one million acres of land for nonpayment of taxes, where "30-60 percent of cotton was obligated for debt prior to payment to harvest" (Edgar 1992:19). Farmers increased cotton production, abandoning subsistence farming altogether and forcing cotton prices to decrease. The debt cycle that plagued South Carolinians was found throughout the South, and the country store was an integral cog in the wheel.

Tenant Farmers, Crop Liens, and the Country Store

The country store that was born out of the post-Civil War South had a powerful storekeeper, who was also the chief reason for the country store's success (Thompson 1989:15). It became an important part of the New South economy system almost immediately, as planters and freed slaves reoriented the agricultural landscape. Much like the rest of the Piedmont South, cotton had grown in importance as a cash crop in South Carolina in the decades leading up to the Civil War. Because of the restructuring of antebellum plantations after slave labor was eliminated from the equation, cotton grew in importance to become the sole cash crop that drove the New South economy (Ford 1984:303). The country store after the Civil War differed from its earlier counterpart in that the big manufacturers did not largely have dealings with the earlier stores, nor had they been a fundamental part of the Southern plantation economy (Clark 1944:29).



Interior of a Country Store in Moundville, Alabama. Photograph by Walker Evans for the FSA, 1936. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The new systems of labor that emerged from the post-Civil War South changed the antebellum landscape and influenced the power of the country store merchant. South Carolina courts viewed the two main labor systems, tenant and share farming, as two distinct systems, as the definitions had significant legal ramifications. The sharecropper was defined as a wage laborer “who worked as an employee of the landowner and who had no legal interest in the crop except his claim for wages” (Ford 1984:304). The tenant farmers actually rented the land they farmed, paying either

a fixed amount or a share of the crop to the landlord and were considered legal owners of the crop. Freed African Americans rejected the desire of planters to cultivate their crops using gang labor, a form of labor similar to how they were worked as slaves. They instead insisted on farming their rented land independently and as a family farm. They moved their houses away from the planter’s house, on the land they rented to farm, a rejection of the former era of slave labor, in which the slave’s quarters were sited close to the owner’s house (Ford 1984:304–305).

Lacy K. Ford’s study focused on the Upcountry region of South Carolina, where, Ford found, the reconstruction of the agricultural system differed from that of the lower part of the state, and affected the demographic of the country store patron. Plantation agriculture had been more prevalent in the lower Piedmont in the antebellum era, and it was common for the new system of labor to have the planter working the core of the plantation with day laborers, while tenant and share farmers working the remaining land. By 1900, there were almost 24,000 tenant farmers in the lower Piedmont, and the majority (75 percent) were African American. On the other hand, there were less plantations in the upper Piedmont region, and in 1900, over half of the tenant farmers were white. Therefore, the state did not evolve uniformly throughout the Reconstruction era, and the white planter in the lower

Piedmont did not hold the same influence over the restructuring as in the upper Piedmont (Ford 1984:305).

With the emergence of the tenant farmer population, came a growing demand for goods and service. Wholesale merchants saw their opportunities and began helping locate and develop new country stores (Clark 1946:25). The country store merchant was a crucial part of the significant changes the region’s economy underwent after the Civil War. Ford cites changes in the South’s economy, one of which singles out the merchant’s role:

The shift from slave to free labor; the rapid expansion of cotton production at the expense of subsistence crops; the rise of the town merchant as the principal figure in the financing and marketing of cotton; and the emergence of towns themselves as important centers of economic activity, boosterism, and industrial promotion (Ford 1984:303).



Chopping Cotton on Rented Land, 1941. Photographer Jack Delano. Courtesy of Library of Congress.



Commissary at Jimmy Carter Boyhood Home, from the Historic American Buildings (HABS) records from the Library of Congress. The Carters used this building to sell goods to African American sharecroppers who worked their farm during the early 1900s (O'Brien 1991:31).

The country store merchant rose to prominence, filling the need to provide goods and work as an intermediary between the tenant farmer and the wholesale mercantile houses. The environment was prime for the emergence of the country store, as very few people had enough credit to get a bank loan after the Civil War and many communities did not have a bank (Thompson 1989:16). The southern states set up crop lien laws following the war, and South Carolina passed its first lien law in 1866. In South Carolina, the lien law was changed a number of times, but the first incarnation stated “any person who made advances for agricultural supplies, whether merchant or planter, a prior lien on the crop to the extent of the advances, provided the lien was properly recorded” (Ford 1984:307).

Crop liens were set against crops and even livestock, not just the land, as had been practiced prior to the Civil War. The crop lien system made everyone involved, the tenant farmers, the landowners, and the storekeepers dependent on one another for survival. Each merchant issued his own coupon books, which could only be used in that particular store. The merchants were able to offer small amounts of credit, but it was the interest the merchant charged, which could reach 40 percent or higher, that made the merchant rich and the patron bound to the debt cycle (Thompson 1989:16). Conversations common to country stores were ones revolving around the specifics or particularities of farming. Farmers would attempt to estimate their crop production each year, hoping for a good yield to bring to the country store to pay off their debts (Clark 1944:70–72).

Cotton was the chief cash crop for the New South, and the crop lien system country stores and farmers engaged in only exploited this crop further, fully establishing it as the staple crop and diminishing the value of subsistence crops. Storekeepers in South Carolina would nearly always only take cotton as credit for a number of reasons. Cotton was non-perishable and could be stored in a warehouse very easily for quite some time. The market for cotton was year long, so storekeepers could sell it for cash at any time. When the crop was insufficient for collateral, merchants required additional security, like livestock. Storekeepers also accepted other items for exchange to settle accounts, like tar and turpentine, important materials used by the naval industry. As long as there was a market for these items, merchants accepted them, but nothing compared to the sovereignty of cotton for the country store merchant (Prince 2000:40–41).

It was understood between the storekeeper and the customer that with any goods sold on credit the customer was paying a premium. The storekeeper would mark up the base price of the merchandise depending on a number of variables. The markup could have a wide range from 10 to over 25 percent, depending on the store, the item, or the customer’s credit standing. If a customer could pay cash, the price of the item was much lower. A pair of pants paid in cash would cost, for instance, \$4.00, but if purchased on credit earlier in the year, when the debt was settled in the fall (at cotton harvest time), the pants cost \$5.25 (Clark 1946:28).

The majority of country stores were owned by southerners (Ransom and Sutch 1977:120). Returning Confederate soldiers would sometimes open a store in their communities, seeing opportunity in the post-Civil War economy (Clark 1944:23). The Smith and Melton mercantile firm of Chester, South Carolina was formed by C.H. Smith and G.W. Melton, who had started trading cotton as Confederate quartermasters. They opened

up a store in the village of Chester, in the upper Piedmont section of the state, and sold farming equipment and supplies in credit. The business grew successfully, and by 1869, they were able to advance \$20,000 to farmers annually. The firm's worth in just three years was over \$100,000. Another successful firm in Abbeville actually had its start in the 1850s. After the war, the Miller and Robertson general store merchants were able to return to their business after settling debt with their northern creditors. Miller and Robertson grew profitably and were worth over \$60,000 in the early 1870s (Ford 1984:308).

Although the system made the storekeeper very wealthy, they were at risk too, especially in years of drought, when crops were down (Thompson 1989:16). The storeowners were generally comprised of plantation owners, locals, and Jewish businessmen from the northeast (Clark 1944:22). The farmer and storekeeper shared similar concerns with fluctuations in weather and crop conditions, as well as the cotton market. Based on the decline of any of these factors, credit would be limited. Thomas Clark's research on country store ledgers revealed that it was not uncommon for farmers to request more time on their accounts. Additionally, during a bad harvest year when cotton crops were short, farmers would be forced to put up part of their land as collateral or even work for the merchants, delivering goods for them. Merchants maintained they did not make a profit from cotton because of these factors, along with the premise that they "bought cotton as representatives of the cotton brokers and to cover their accounts" (Clark 1946:38). Clark noted some skepticism over this logic, mostly because the accounts he reviewed revealed that customers were hardly extravagant with their purchases, which were always sold on credit with interest, with the storekeeper conceivably making a profit (Clark 1946:38-39).



Farmer purchasing fatback from country store merchant in Florence, SC in 1938. FSA photograph courtesy of Library of Congress



T.G. Patrick Store, ca. 1876, in White Oak,
Fairfield County, South Carolina

For African Americans, no longer enslaved and bound to their owners for food and clothing, the country store offered some new freedoms, but full economic freedom was not one of them (Thompson 1989:16). Clark observed the account of an African American farmer who was a customer of the Jones store in Black Hawk, Mississippi. From 1884-1901, Matt Brown ended each year with a debt of around \$450, even in years where he spent as little as \$43 in credit. Clark looked at one particular year from Brown's patronage of Jones store, 1892, when he entered the year with \$226.84 in previous debt. That year, Brown accrued \$171.12 in credit through the sale of his cotton crop, cutting wood, clearing land, and hauling for the store. He spent about \$35 for food, \$30 for clothes, and \$173 for household and farm supplies, 55 cents for drugs, \$10 for tobacco and a little over \$100 on miscellaneous supplies. That year, and every other year, Brown failed to produce a crop large enough to resolve his debt. Brown ended 1892 with a debt of \$452.41, and he ultimately died in debt in 1905, as the last entry in the ledger for Brown included a coffin and burial supplies, a testament to the difficulty the small farmer faced in the economy of the New South (Clark 1946:40-41).

An unidentified store account ledger in the Abbeville area of South Carolina dating to the 1920s outlines the purchases made by the Freeman family, an African American farming family. Whit Freeman had a debt of \$1,576 in 1923, and he made small purchases from the store throughout the year, like a five-gallon jug of molasses for \$2.10. He also performed manual labor for the storekeeper to help reduce his debt, plowing fields for \$1.50 a day. The Freeman family used the storekeeper's sawmill, and any time that they used the mules or any aspect of the mill and its assets was recorded in the ledgers and added to the debt. Maizel Freeman used the sawmill in July of 1923, and the owner added \$12.60 to his debt balance for the day (Anonymous n.d.).

Another South Carolina country store account book tells the story of a white middle-class farmer, S.R. Simonton, who held an account with Thomas G. Patrick's store. Patrick's store, also a post office, was centered in the small village of White Oak in Fairfield County, on the Southern Railroad. Simonton's debts were much larger than a typical small farmer would have, as was expected with middle-class farmers, according to Clark. Simonton's expenditures varied from year to year, probably depending on the success of his crop. In 1879, he spent a little over \$250 on merchandise, while during the previous year he spent over \$900. In 1879, he could only pay \$3.30 toward settling his debt, signifying the crippling year he had with his farm (Clark 1946:42). These profiles indicate the unfairness that could and often resulted from the credit system. Many, including Henry W. Grady, the proponent of the New South, would criticize the credit system and the country storekeeper for the vicious debt cycle most farmers could not escape (Clark 1944:12).



Country Store in Sprott, Alabama, ca. 1935. Photograph by Walker Evans for the FSA. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

“Jutting out into the apexes of crossroads, perched on river bluffs, or standing at respectful distances from old established church houses were the stores, solid, honestly built structures which reared proud, emblematic faces to cover the matter-of-fact meeting of their shingles and rafters.”

(Clark 1944:34).

Molasses, Red Shirts, and the Potbelly Stove

The farmer comes in contact with the merchant more frequently than with any other agency in the community. He visits the store oftener than he does the school. He engages in conversation with the merchant more frequently than he does with the minister. And it not infrequently occurs that the clothier, the grocer, or the hardware dealer knows more about the farmer and understands his mental attitudes better than any other person in the community (Berger 1979:110).

The country store was a “community clearinghouse,” and an important part of Southerners’ lives (Clark 1944:11). The merchandise, bought almost exclusively on credit, was of course the main draw for visits to the country store. This is one of the most critical aspects of country stores, the vast array of goods they offered their customers, and an important element that defined what a country store was. But country stores also served as political forums, where important South Carolina movements were begun, and where many people cast their vote in an election.

The Building and Its Merchandise; Keep the Cover on the Barrel!

The iconic image of a country store is the front facing gable building that usually had a covered porch. Ubiquitous to the country store were the advertisements affixed to the front of the building. In this way, the front of the store acted as an informal bulletin board with auction notices and leaflets promoting camp meetings.

The store name, hand painted on a wood board, decorated the façade. If the store also served as a post office, signs indicating this function could also be found on the exterior. Looking up from the façade, one would typically see a ridgeline chimney piercing the center of the roof, which connected to the central potbelly stove, the water cooler of the past, where people would discuss religion, politics, and deliberate over their purchases. Some country stores had two stories, and frequently, the construction of the upper level was funded by Masonic or fraternal orders (Grangers, Woodsmen of the World) who utilized that space. Masonic symbols on the front of the building designated the



SHORPY

This famous photograph by Dorothea Lange of a country store in Gordonton, North Carolina, gives a good example of the range of advertisements once featured on country stores throughout the southeast. "High pressure American advertising pecked steadfastly at the sinews of the buildings and like the rings on the body of an aged oak, the layers of nails and tacks divulged the life span of the store" (Clarke 1944:35-36). Courtesy of the Shorpy

space too. On historian Thomas Clark's travels to various country stores throughout the South, he found items sold in the upper stories included factory made coffins and hardware, and the space could also be rented out to milliners. Sometimes, church congregations were given use of the space, although not without conflicts with the store below selling whiskey (Clark 1944:36–37).



Upon entrance through the wide plank double doors into the country store, one would typically find the post office set up near the entrance. The Lenoir Store in Lexington, South Carolina still has its post office intact, on the left side of the store entrance. The storekeeper, who was also postmaster, attained a higher respectability in the community. The government bestowed an official postmaster certificate to the storekeeper who proudly displayed it on the wall. The service he delivered was prodigious - posting customers' letters, cashing money orders for delivery, letter reading and writing for the illiterate, and keeping tabs on mail order and catalog purchases for customers (Clark 1944:96).

Beyond the post office, with its counter, window, and lock boxes, was usually a long counter, behind which were bins or drawers holding flour, rice, sugar, coffee, salt, garden seeds, and dried peas (Clark 1944:39). Most items were bought in bulk, as pre-packaged goods did not become common until after the 1930s. Small items, like sewing supplies, ribbons, buttons, hatpins, and jewelry could be found across the aisle, in a glass showcase. Other shelves held medicinal items. Folk remedies were used frequently by people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in rural areas that were without doctors or drug stores. Different tinctures or tonics were used or combined in a variety of ways to help cure an ailment. Popular drug orders in country stores included Gray's Ointment, chill tonics, bitter herb mixtures, linseed oil, quinine, and turpentine. Plantation Bitters were a bestselling item across the South, with sales amounting to \$5 million annually by the early twentieth century (Clark 1944:85; Thompson 1989:17).

The back of the store held bulk items including barrels of whiskey and molasses, coffee, engine oil, kerosene, salt, and lard. Kerosene and its packaging posed a constant problem in the store, where it would frequently seep into the floor and into nearby goods. For this reason, it was very important where the kerosene was kept in the store, to avoid possible contamination with food. Just as important was making sure the lids were kept securely on the barrels of the different food items, to keep the rats and mice at bay. To facilitate pouring out, the molasses and whiskey were kept raised off the floor on racks. Whiskey, in the form of sour mash or bourbon and with labels like Old Taylor, Old Pepper, and Lexington Club House, was sold at many stores, even if the storekeeper was a teetotaler. There were counters devoted to cutting cheese, selling condiments like vinegar, salt, pepper, and ketchup. To the side of the counter were the big barrels filled with crackers (Clark 1944:41–43).

Farmers took Saturday mornings to write up their orders on any piece of paper available. Field hands (often African American) would deliver the orders to the stores. Typical of these notes was one found in a store ledger, saying “I think there is about \$12 between you and I, and if you can send a barrel of flour and can of lard by surrey, you will oblige, A. Lowry.” According to the ledgers, the merchandise sold at country stores had uneven quality. Complaints of spoiled eggs and “unreal” molasses were seen in the store ledgers. The storekeeper developed methods for sizing a person for clothes and even remembered each customer’s size. Farmers would bring in different lengths of string to buy his family’s shoes for the season; he would cut the string to the length of each foot at home (Clark 1944:76–77, 80).

The telephone became a major focal point of the country store, as it often was the only telephone in the community. It was an important means of communication for those needing to contact a doctor or stay in touch with family members. Customers could also have the storekeeper order items for them from one of the mail order catalogs like Montgomery Ward or Sears that could be found on the counter (Thompson 1989:17). The later affordability of the telephone would negatively impact the country store. Once telephones became a ubiquitous part of most households, there was less need to visit the country store, as one could expect to order over the phone and receive quality merchandise by delivery (Berger 1979:112). The special relationship merchants had with their customers, particularly farmers, helped them keep business even in the face of the large catalog companies, but only for so long (Berger 1979:111).

A Community Place

“To most southerners, they were places where they came in touch with the world outside, and where the world outside came in touch with them (Clark 1944:13–14).

The country store served another very important purpose in the lives of rural Southerners. The critical economic role the country store played should not overshadow the social function the country store provided its community. The country store embodied the three main requirements of a social center. It provided a neutral ground where people from all walks of life could enter without formal invitation and feel welcome. It was a “leveler,” or “an inclusive place...that counters the tendency to be restrictive in the enjoyment of others by being open to all and by laying emphasis on qualities not confined to status distinctions current in the society.” Finally, the country store was a place where conversation was encouraged, much as in coffee shops and bars today. The country store was just as important to the social fabric of a community as it was to its economy in some respects (Oldenburg 1999:22–24).

Red Dot stores

A form of advertising particular to South Carolina, the red dot, developed during the post-prohibition furor between staunch teetotalers, the South Carolina State Tax Commission, and liquor dealers throughout the state. Following reinstatement of the legal sale of liquor in 1935, battles over visible advertisements for the sale of booze led at first to regulation stating that the only identification signifying a store as that which sold liquor, be a modest exterior sign reading only "Retail Liquor Dealer".



In 1945, any symbol or wording signifying the sale of liquor was made even more diminutive by the directive from the newly formed Alcoholic Beverage Control Board (ABC). Lettering of such a sign could be no more than a few inches in height and was to be located in the bottom, right-hand corner of a façade window or on the front door.

With these new protocols in mind, Charleston liquor dealer Jesse J. Fabian hired "Doc" Wansley to create a legal sign design for one of his stores. Upon realizing that many would not notice his lettering design alone, Wansley, inspired by the Lucky Strike Cigarettes logo, encircled his lettering in a bright red circle.

The circle itself became synonymous with the sale of alcohol, and made clear which of those stores—country stores and others—sold liquor. By 1968, the red dot was so widespread that ABC condemned the mere presence of the red dot as blatant advertising that should be banned from the landscape of South Carolina. The General Assembly, however, voted to save the red dot. While at this time stores selling alcohol were limited to one red dot per exterior wall not exceeding 36 inches in diameter, regulations are now more lenient. The red dot itself, of varying sizes, or found in larger numbers, is still seen throughout the state and remains a clear and recognizable indication of liquor sales at country stores, convenient stores, and specialty stores across South Carolina (Moore 2006:781).

While schools and churches remained racially segregated after the war, country stores were the one unifying place in the South. “There was an air of familiarity and tolerance at the store rarely matched elsewhere” (Thompson 1989:16). African Americans viewed country stores and their variety of merchandise as a part of their new freedom. According to Clark, they were not usually discriminated against in country stores (Clark 1944:26).

The country store did not always hold equal roles for all, however. African Americans could shop there and were treated well considering the time, and as long as they were paying customers, but there is not very much evidence that they were able to socialize around the potbelly stove as the white farmers did (Lapczynski 2001:97). Some accounts from the 1930s do tell of black men taking part in conversations in the country store, but usually only in the company of another black man. “All day long this circle around the stove gradually changed its racial complexion, with almost no intermixing of the races” (Raper 1936:276). Women did not take part in the potbelly stove conversations, either, although the credit records from the Dun & Bradstreet reference books show that some women in South Carolina owned general stores (Lapczynski 2001:97).

For the Gullah community on Edisto Island, the country store was an important part of daily life. Located at the intersection of several crossroads throughout the island, country stores on Edisto were primarily run by white storekeepers, although some blacks owned a few of the stores. These stores were places where African American men sat on the front porch, and had conversations while whittling wood. They were also the places where the locals could trade freshly caught fish or newly harvested figs (Crum 1968:27–28).



As late as 1950, the pot belly stove and store served the community. Here, Ellen community members discuss announcement that the Atomic Energy Commission's Savannah River Plant will acquire their town. Courtesy of SRARP.



The Brices, in 1972, Who Owned the General Store in Woodward, Fairfield County, South Carolina. From the *Sandlapper Magazine*, January 1972.

The country store was where, depending on the weather, people would sit on the front porch or by the potbelly stove, and converse about family, politics, farming, and anything else (Thompson 1989:17). A typical Saturday in a farm family's life included driving to the country store to buy supplies, sell produce, and eat lunch in their wagons or trucks. On a given day, men could be found sitting or standing around the central potbelly stove, whittling wood, and conversing about the farm. Other common topics included the poor condition of the local roads, disputes over fence lines, and religion (the Bible was always sold at the country store). Other common conversations revolved around the specifics of farming. Farmers would attempt to estimate their crop production each year, hoping for a good yield to bring to the storekeeper to pay off their debts (Clark 1944:70–72).

People also gathered to eat dinner at the country store. Frequent fare included fried chicken and biscuits, canned oysters and sardines, salmon, and sausage. Farmers would eat at the country store on Saturday mornings and eat oysters, crackers, and pepper sauce, a popular meal that Thomas Clark witnessed on several occasions (Clark 1944:44–45). Farmers gathered to discuss farming practices. They discussed types of seed, methods of harvest and plowing. They even argued over practices. In South Carolina, the Clemson College Experiment Station distributed news and samples of seeds to storekeepers to give to their customers (Clark 1944:70–72).

South Carolina Politics and the Country Store

Politics in South Carolina during the late nineteenth century were framed by the debt crisis that plagued its farmers, a crippling problem that the state did little to change. The men who remained in political power during this time were still rooted in the memories of the war and did little to aid the farmers because they opposed what they viewed as the excesses of Reconstruction policies. Most of these leaders were Confederate veterans who were not attuned to the needs of the state's farmers (Edgar 1992:21–22).

Political discussion at country stores could generate into major political movements in South Carolina. The front porch of the country store was the politician's stump, a place where General Wade Hampton campaigned for the governor's race in 1876 in Lexington, Edgefield, and Abbeville. Hampton's supporters called themselves the "Red Shirts" and followed Hampton as he toured the state. At several country stores, including the McCormick County Ruff Store in Ridgeway, General Hampton's Red Shirts met and gathered arms, which were distributed to the country stores through the Hope Brothers in Columbia. The Red Shirts were organized at stores across the state, like Longshore's Store in Newberry County (Clark 1944:61–62).



Red Shirt from 1898 election courtesy, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Shirts_\(Southern_United_States\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Shirts_(Southern_United_States)), on display at North Carolina Museum of History, from 1898 election.

The white democratic clubs of South Carolina were not organized around county polling offices in the courthouses but around country stores. Country store merchants were in charge of the voting lists, and their stores remained polling places well into the 1920s. Stores would take advantage of political gatherings, hosting barbecues and inviting candidates to speak at the store. Ben Tillman, who later became senator and eventually governor of South Carolina, framed his first campaign against country stores, institutions that he argued were bringing the state's farmers down through price discrimination and high interest rates. Tillman gained a passionate following from the state's farmers, who finally saw a leader that spoke to their problems (Edgar 1992:22). Louisiana's infamous Huey Long knew the important role country stores played in politics and used it during his political life. In his early years, Long was a drummer, selling Cottolene shortening, flour, and patent medicines to the state's country stores (Clark 1944:70).

The store merchant had to stay neutral politically or risk losing customers. He could influence politics in subtle ways though, as long as he knew the customer's views. On the other hand, some storekeepers were not as subtle about their politics or using political feeling to make money. Some storekeepers sold guns and ammunition to the Ku Klux Klan to fortify their night raids (Clark 1944:61).

The Country Store in South Carolina

The Geography of the Country Store

Country stores in the South served as community landmarks and even community buildings. After their numbers climbed following the Civil War, country stores along rural roads grew communities around them (Thompson 1989:16).

The story of the country store and its importance to Southern history revolves around the entire agricultural infrastructure of the New South. Southern plantation geography changed twice after the Civil War, with the rise and decline of tenancy. By 1910, the drastic changes in the spatial

landscape of plantations was firmly entrenched, resulting in very few extant antebellum structures. The rural landscape of the Old South was characterized by dense complexes of buildings, while the New South had a much more dispersed landscape. The explosion of tenant farms shifted the landscape away from the plantation of the Old South, a dense complex of buildings surrounded by agricultural fields, to a dispersed landscape, where tenant farmers were in control of their own farmsteads, located away from the plantation's main house. The country store was frequently located at the intersection or corner of two roads, and a community gin was usually located in proximity to the store, if not behind the store (Aiken 1998:39). The isolation of many parts of the rural South encouraged more stores, with its "poor roads and a lack of railways (Clark 1944:28)."

A few theories have been explored about how country stores impacted the economy of the South and its landscape. Economic historians Ransom and Sutch's classic study, *One Kind of Freedom*, centered on the theory that country store merchants exercised a territorial monopoly throughout the South. Because of the isolation of rural tenant farmers, they had few choices as to where to take their cotton and purchase goods on credit, creating a monopoly of certain areas for store merchants throughout the South. Further study of South Carolina by historian Lacy Ford revealed that the country store dynamic varied greatly between the Upcountry and Lowcountry regions of the state.

It is clear that the country store merchant had a powerful role in the Southern economy, chiefly because of the crop-lien credit system and tenant farming. Economic historians Ransom and Sutch believed their analysis of the U.S. Census and the R.G. Dun & Company credit books revealed that store merchants had a wide area of influence that they "could operate without serious competition." Because of the geographic isolation throughout the South aided by poor roads, the merchant was able to make sure that if the farmer was to receive credit at his store, the farmer could only patronize that particular store. Farmers could not pay with cash, relying exclusively on the credit they received from the country store, so they had no alternative but to relegate their patronage to one particular nearby store. A large part of the monopoly was the merchant's ability to charge high fees for goods purchased on credit. Credit prices versus cash prices always differed greatly, with goods purchased on credit at a 40-70 percent markup, on a sort of interest rate (Ransom and Sutch 1977:127-128).

The geographic area under which the territorial monopoly operated was the immediate neighborhood or community surrounding the country store. There were nearly 8,000 such stores across the southeast by 1880, located at just under 3,000 post office locations (the R.G. Dun & Company categorized the stores by proximity to post office locations). The majority of locations, or 70 percent, had only one or two stores, while 12 percent of locations had six or more stores. Ransom and Sutch deduced that, based on the number of locations and the size of the Cotton South (a specific region that did not encompass the entire South), that the average market area of a country store was 70.3 square miles. The average distance between store locations was estimated at between 5.5 and 9 miles, a distance that would not, in a pre-automobile era, be conducive to comparison shopping (Ransom and Sutch 1977:135-136).

View from Cooper's Country Store on U.S. Highway 521 near Salters shows its geographic command of the highway and its intersection with SR 377



By using the same framework, Ransom and Sutch determined that there was an average ratio of 70 farms per store. The monopoly was not, on average, terribly fruitful, given that most farmers “seldom generate more than \$80 in credit business,” and typically, the rural country store’s volume was about \$5600 annually. A very small percentage, 7.3 percent, of merchants in Ransom and Sutch’s sample had a credit rating of \$50,000 or more for the year 1880. Since most storekeepers had small enterprises, potential competitors were not as likely to try to move in on their territory. Many new stores failed within the first four years, and the successful ones invested in real estate and to a lesser extent, on expanding their businesses (Ransom and Sutch 1977:142–146).

According to Lacy Ford’s study, the country store differed regionally in South Carolina. In the Lowcountry, the territorial monopoly of the country store merchant seemed to be the overall characteristic, while the Upcountry country stores were much more open to competition, with the stores located along railroad lines having the most success. From 1854-1880, the number of stores in the Upcountry saw an increase from 780-1,693, but the numbers of locations the stores were recorded at only increased by 38.5 percent. In the Lowcountry (excluding Charleston), the number of locations increased by 147.6 percent, with the number of stores increasing by 140.3 percent, a dramatic difference from the Upcountry. In the Lowcountry, nearly 46 percent of the new stores were located in larger towns with 20 or more stores, indicating that the remaining stores were scattered in the more rural areas. In the Upcountry, most of the increase, or 82 percent, was seen in towns with 10 or more stores, suggesting “that most of the growth occurred in towns that already existed” (Ford 1984:310–311).

In the Lowcountry, “remnants of the planter elite were successful in maintaining control of credit and assumed a number of mercantile responsibilities,” explaining the different dynamic the country store had in the Upcountry. The location of stores on railroads in the Upcountry facilitated the network between the small merchants and the larger cotton markets and financial centers. A decade before the turn of the century, three railroads crossed the Upcountry, including the Southern Railway and the Seaboard Air Line. The stores located on the railroads profited considerably based on their locations, and towns in the Upcountry that had no previous cotton history were moving vast quantities within decades after the Civil War. Greenville, located on the Atlanta and Charlotte Air Line Railway, had not sold any cotton in 1860 but in 1880, it sold 40,000 bales; the town of Rock Hill on the Charlotte, Columbia, and Augusta Railroad, had its cotton output increase from 5,000-20,000 bales in the same time period (Ford 1984:311).

Upcountry merchants became town builders and prominent members of their communities. The merchants grew towns around their stores and expanded industry and businesses whenever possible. The textile industry was a major part of the Upcountry and the entire state, with over 40,000 textile businesses added between 1880 and 1910. Many of the merchants in the larger towns in the Upcountry became directors or important figures in the textile mills (Ford 1984:312).

At least two other stores in the state found long-term success in locations without direct access to railroads, but adjacent to rivers. In the Horatio Community, the Lenoir Store is the oldest country store still in operation in South Carolina. Situated near the Wateree River, the Lenoir Store has been located in a rural area since at least 1808, serving customers in the area with a post office as well. In the town of Society Hill located on the Great Pee Dee River, the Coker & Rogers Store had also prospered for a number of years without direct access to a railroad. The Coker & Rogers Store opened in 1839 and closed its doors in 1963. These two stores may be examples of stores that developed a territorial monopoly, having served somewhat isolated rural communities, with the exception of the rivers (Brewer 2009).

Analysis of county highway maps from three counties in the three different regions of South Carolina help illustrate the spatial variances between commercial areas that likely contained country stores. The three counties chosen were Cherokee County in the Upcountry, Kershaw County in the Midlands, and Horry County in the Lowcountry. The county highway maps chosen for the analysis are from the late 1930s, a period after agriculture had declined, but when there were still plenty of country stores throughout the state, as indicated by the Bradstreet Company and Dun & Bradstreet records.

Each business establishment located outside the county seat was identified on the county highway maps. In locations where more than one business was identified, a commercial “node” was created, representing a commercial area. Distances between these nodes, which could also be a single isolated store, were measured to help gain a sense of where businesses were established and an indication of how far competitors may have been located from one another, as well as how far people had to travel to a store. Of course, country stores were not specifically identified on county highway maps, which is a flaw in this analysis. However, no other historic maps come close to helping identify retail distribution in the state, and it is surmised, based on the overall quantity of country stores recorded in the Mercantile Reference books, that a great many of these business establishments were likely country stores. Tables 1 and 2 display the total numbers and averages of general stores and grocery stores in these three counties.

Table 1. General Stores, County Level

Year	Cherokee	Horry	Kershaw
1875	N/A	20	5
1920	26	100	59
1942	4	44	32

Table 2. Grocery Stores, County Level

Year	Cherokee	Horry	Kershaw
1920	3	6	17
1942	11	45	49

As these tables show, many of the businesses identified on the county highway maps, or roughly half, were likely grocery stores, as the number of general stores was slightly less than, but still comparable to, the number of grocery stores. Therefore, the map analysis may also be reflecting a similar proportion of grocery stores to general stores. Cherokee County had 36 commercial nodes identified on the highway map. There were 42 different roads connecting these commercial nodes with an average distance between nodes of about three miles. Kershaw County had 57 commercial nodes identified, with 66 roads and an average distance between nodes of almost 3.5 miles. Horry County had a significantly greater amount of commercial nodes, with 118 identified. There was also a much greater number of roads connecting the nodes, 142, with an average distance between nodes of just over 2.5 miles.

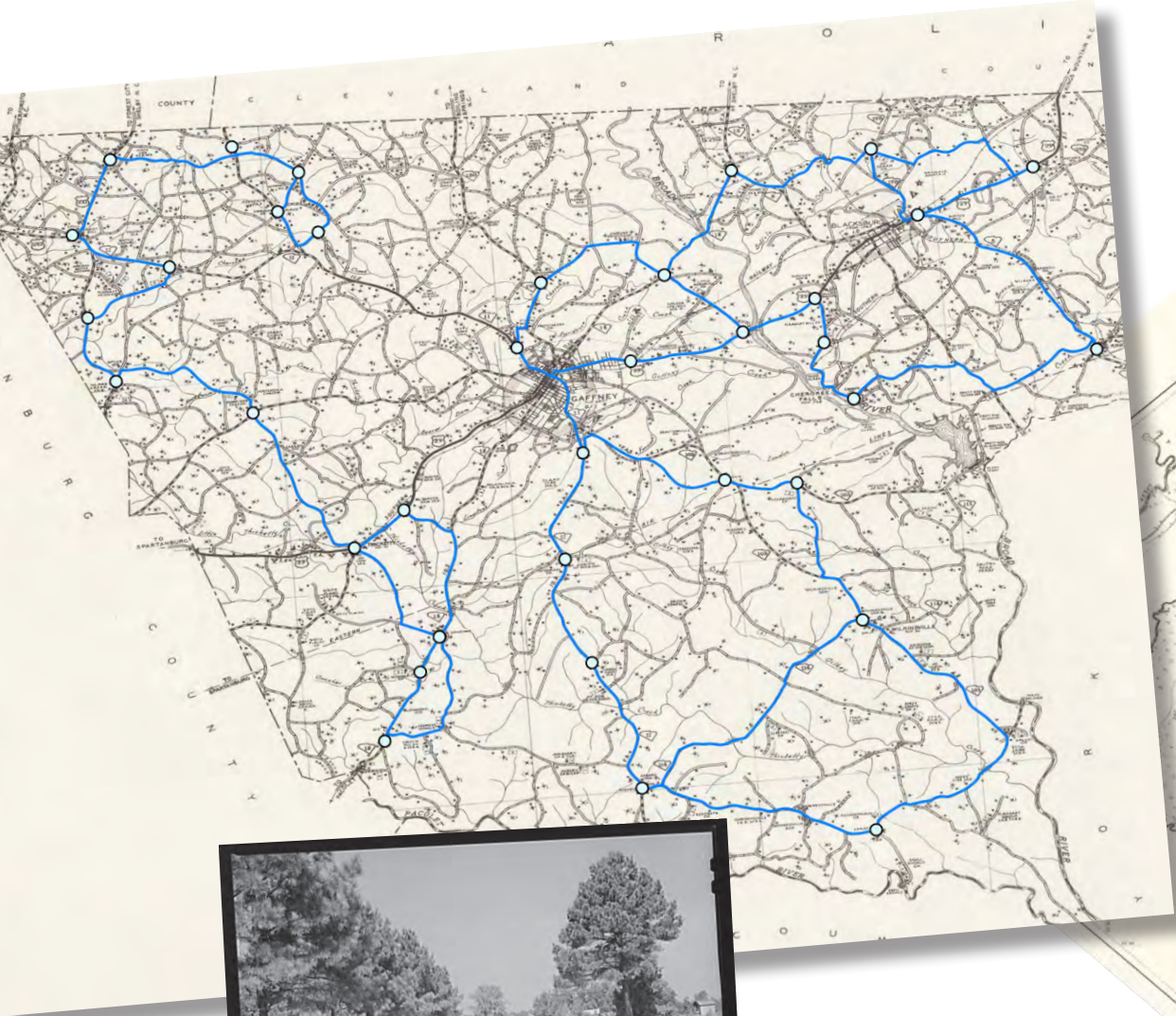
The greater number of commercial nodes in the Lowcountry may reflect Ford's theory that Lowcountry store locations were not as fixed as those in the Upcountry. Ford surmised that the locations in the Upcountry stayed relatively static when compared with the Lowcountry, which may have implications that the Lowcountry stores were competing against each other to gain patrons in a certain radius around their stores. This scenario did not apparently work as well in the Upcountry, where stores tended to be located in areas that already had a proved track record with attracting customers. Another reason for the difference between the Lowcountry, Midlands, and Upcountry may simply be the increased population, industry, and tourism that was in place in the Lowcountry. Additionally, a combination of geographic motivations for the locations of country stores is plausible here as well. Some isolated stores in the Upcountry and Midlands could have easily found success without being located in an emerging market town, or along a railroad, while a store in the Lowcountry could also have success in an established market town.

Analysis of Dun & Bradstreet Records in South Carolina, 1875-1942

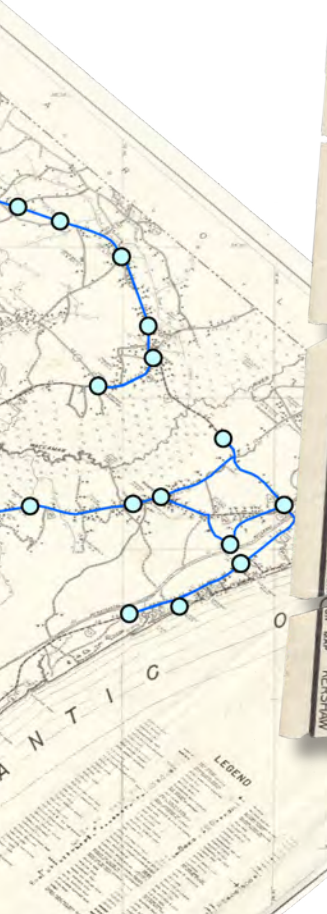
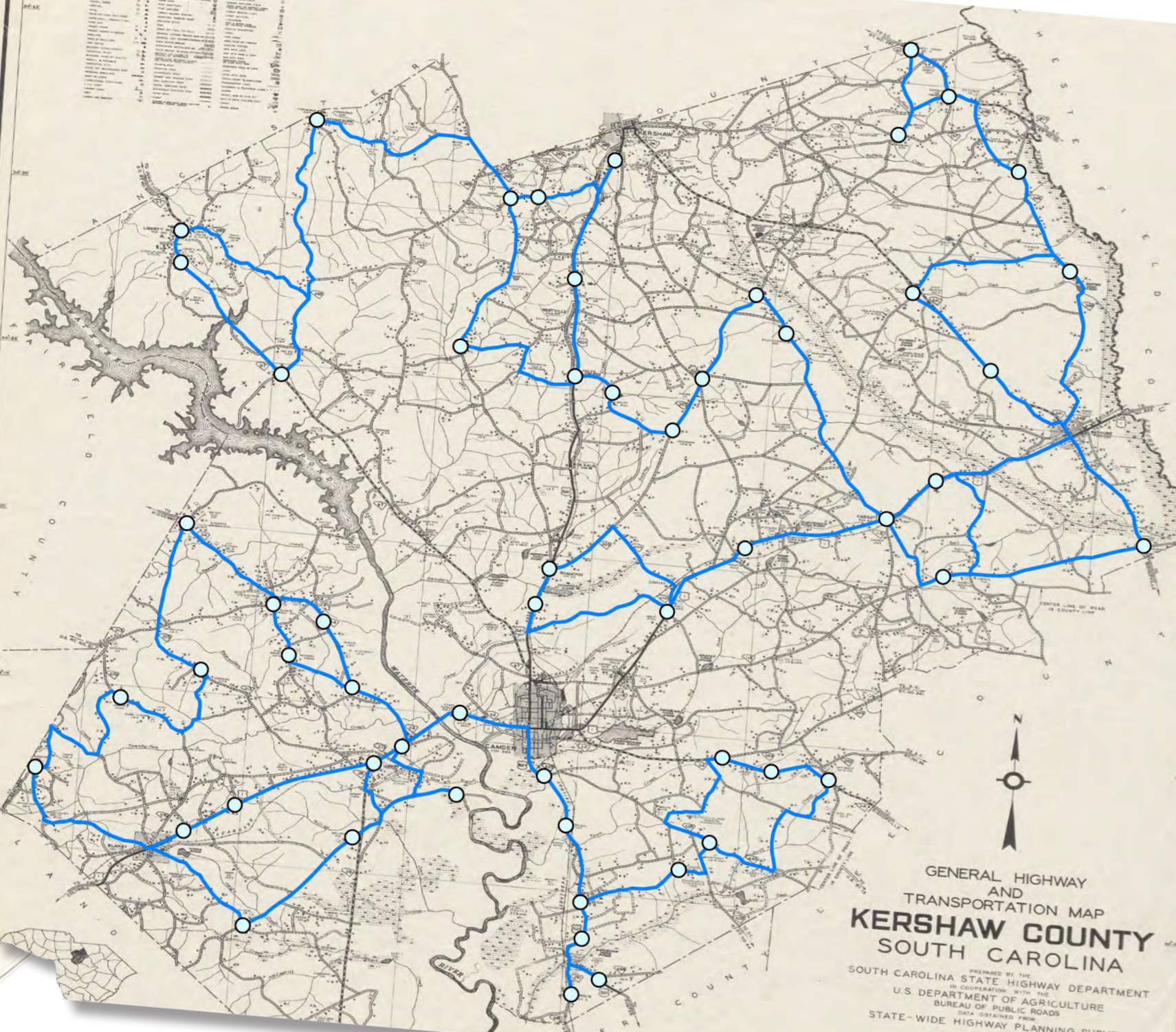
Perhaps some of the most comprehensive information on South Carolina's country stores is located in the James M. Bradstreet Company and later Dun & Bradstreet Mercantile Reference Books (Mercantile Reference Books). The James M. Bradstreet Company merged with the R.G. Dun & Company in 1933 to form the Dun & Bradstreet. Dun & Bradstreet, which is still in existence, reported credit information about all types of businesses throughout the United States. Beginning in the 1840s, companies began collecting information about businesses and printing their findings in a book for subscribers usually annually or later, quarterly. The Mercantile Reference Books lists the businesses alphabetically by the closest post office

Rural Business Distribution Maps

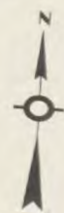
Cherokee, Horry, and Kershaw County Highway Maps, 1938 and 1939.



Symbol	Description
(Symbol)	Interstate Highway
(Symbol)	State Highway
(Symbol)	County Road
(Symbol)	Waterway
(Symbol)	Settlement
(Symbol)	Relief
(Symbol)	Boundary
(Symbol)	Other



GENERAL HIGHWAY AND TRANSPORTATION MAP KERSHAW



GENERAL HIGHWAY
AND
TRANSPORTATION MAP
KERSHAW COUNTY
SOUTH CAROLINA

PREPARED BY THE
SOUTH CAROLINA STATE HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT
IN COOPERATION WITH THE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF PUBLIC ROADS
DATA OBTAINED FROM
STATE-WIDE HIGHWAY PLANNING SURVEY

SCALE OF MILES

General Store and
Filling Station, 1950.
Courtesy of SRARP.



location. The business owner's name would be listed next to the type of business. Two columns measuring the business' credit followed. These ratings assisted wholesale merchants in determining which businesses would be more reliable to sell stock on credit to, and which to avoid. The ratings were imperative for the existence of the Southern crop-lien credit system, so that northern wholesalers could be assured of the credit of the remote small rural stores (Ransom and Sutch 1977:306).

The credit agencies would send agents across the U.S. where they would visit every business and record their findings. Out of the agents' notes sprang a more condensed version of their findings, resulting in the list in the Mercantile Reference Books. In 1875, Bradstreet Company agents visiting South Carolina recorded over 1,400 general stores. This number excludes the general stores found in the larger cities like Charleston and Columbia. What the 1875 reference book reveals is that even very small cross roads communities could typically have more than one general store, which may suggest that country store merchants were exercising a territorial monopoly was not an entirely accurate portrayal in some areas of South Carolina (Dun & Bradstreet 1875-1942).

Besides the 1875 records, the Bradstreet Company 1920 records, as well as the 1942 Dun & Bradstreet books covering the state of South Carolina were analyzed for this project. The focus of this analysis was on general stores in rural areas or small towns or communities. However, the records also revealed that the rise and decline of country stores could be traced through these records by focusing on grocery stores and filling stations as

well. As general stores peaked by 1920 with over 3,400 stores statewide, grocery stores had become a significant competitor in the retail world, with 730 groceries on record (Table 3). Rural automobile related businesses began emerging between 1920 and 1942, and by 1942, stand-alone filling stations, general stores with filling stations, and grocery stores with filling stations numbered 1,713, comparable to the numbers of stand-alone general stores and grocery stores for that same year.

Table 3. Statewide Totals

Year	General Stores	Grocery Stores	Filling Stations	General Store + Filling Stations	Grocery Store + Filling Station
1875	1,423				
1920	3,461	730	3		
1942	1,669	1,666	608	498	607

In order to better understand the distribution of general stores in South Carolina, the state was broken into three regions: the Upcountry, Midlands, and Lowcountry. Both the Upcountry and Midlands regions contain 18 counties while the Lowcountry contains 10. The totals of general stores in each region all reflect a general rise from 1875 to 1920, followed by a decline from 1920 to 1942 (Table 4). Though the totals of stores per region show the Upcountry with the most stores in 1875 and 1920, and the Midlands with the most stores in 1942, the averages per county shown in Table 5 show a different scenario. Despite the Lowcountry having the fewest amount of counties, it averaged the most number of stores per county for both 1920 and 1942. In a general sense, this can likely be attributed to the location of the Lowcountry counties near the coast where the most population, industry and tourism was concentrated.

Table 4. Number of General Stores Per Region

Year	Lowcountry	Midlands	Upcountry
1875	245	571	607
1920	907	1223	1331
1942	477	593	543

Table 5. Average Number of General Stores Per County

Year	Lowcountry	Midlands	Upcountry
1875	35	48	43
1920	91	68	74
1942	48	33	30

It was not until 1942 that the number of grocery stores in the state exceeded the number of general stores, but the numbers remained fairly close (Tables 4, 6, and 7). The Lowcountry continued to have a higher number of general stores that year, while the Midlands and Upcountry had more grocery stores. Between 1920 and 1942, many changes had taken place in the economy and these changes were influenced by the agricultural depression that plagued the South beginning in the 1920s, the nationwide Great Depression of the 1930s, and the significant rise of the automobile. More cars were on the road, roads were greatly improved, and people were able to shop outside their neighborhoods to locate the best deals (Table 8). Specialty stores, like grocery stores and department stores gained popularity for their prices and selection of brands. Packaging made everything in the retail world different, as one no longer had to dip into the cracker barrel for a bag of saltines and hope for a fresh batch. Bulk foods sold in barrels was truly a thing of the past.

Table 6. Number of Grocery Stores Per Region *

Year	Lowcountry	Midlands	Upcountry
1920	105	307	318
1942	326	705	608

*Grocers were minimal in 1875

Table 7. Average Number of Grocery Stores Per County

Year	Lowcountry	Midlands	Upcountry
1942	33	39	34

Table 8. Number of Filling Stations Per Region

Year	Lowcountry	Midlands	Upcountry
1920	0	1	2
1942	87	106	136

As the Bradstreet and Dun & Bradstreet Companies recorded all types of businesses, they chart the evolution of the store types. In the earliest 1875 records, general stores were generally just listed as general stores. But in 1920 and 1942, stores and their specialty became more specific. General stores were listed with cotton gins, tanneries, filling stations, fertilizer, gristmills, livestock, poolrooms, undertaker, and furniture. Grocery stores had similar specialties. These specialties, when combined with general stores, increased between 1920 and 1942, as Tables 9-11 show. By 1942, both general stores and grocery stores had significant increases in numbers of specialty businesses in automobile-related areas, while the number of agricultural side businesses remained fairly low in comparison. The trends of commerce were definitely reflecting what was going on throughout the South during this period, with agriculture dramatically declining and states moving towards attracting other industry to their states.

Table 9. General Stores with Agricultural Related Businesses (cotton gin, fertilizer, etc.)

Year	Lowcountry	Midlands	Upcountry
1875	13	14	12
1920	27	20	37
1942	8	49	47

Table 10. Business Types by Region, 1920

Business Type	Lowcountry	Midlands	Upcountry
General Store & Agricultural Business	27	20	37
General Store & Auto-Related Business	0	0	0
Grocery & Agricultural Business	1	1	5
Grocery & Auto-Related Business	0	0	0

Table 11. Business Types by Region, 1942

Business Type	Lowcountry	Midlands	Upcountry
General Store & Agricultural Business	8	49	47
General Store & Auto-Related Business	239	203	159
Grocery & Agricultural Business	6	20	26
Grocery & Auto-Related Business	169	367	260

A Closer Look at South Carolina Merchants in 1875

Bradstreet Company's Mercantile Reference Books traces the history and development of towns and communities across South Carolina. The small community of Cades in Williamsburg County had two general stores in 1875, and by 1920, with a population of only 100, the number of stores grew to 11. A decade later, Cades' population remained static, and while it had two fewer general stores, it had added a drug store and a service station, marking the rise of the automobile. Cades was located on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, not far from the post office locations of Mouzons and Fowler, indicating that the country stores were likely located within relatively close proximity to one another. In 1930 the population of Cades remained at 100 residents, but there were still nine general stores, and by 1940, with 200 residents, Cades continued to be a somewhat bustling community. In addition to four already established general stores, there were five new general stores with a filling station, and three grocery stores with a filling station. The Gowdy Brothers had owned a general store in Cades since at least the 1920s, and by 1942, they had added a gas pump to the store, anticipating the needs of the locals and travelers alike. By 1920, none of the general storeowners that appeared on the list in 1875 were still there, instead they were replaced by new storeowners (R.G. Dun & Company 1875-1942).

The Mercantile Reference Books also reveal some information about the types of people who owned these stores. In 1875, there were several women merchants listed in the reference book. Mrs. S.A. Buckner owned a general store in Bluffton in Beaufort County. Census research revealed her to be Sarah A. Buckner, who was married to Thaddeus G. Buckner. They had two sons, and by 1880, Sarah had been widowed. Several of the women merchants had similar stories; they were widowed and had taken over their late husband's business for economic survival; they worked with their husbands, side by side; or, they simply ran the store and their husband had a different profession altogether (R.G. Dun & Company 1875-1942; University of Virginia Library 2007).

Mrs. R.J. Medlin of Cheraw in Chesterfield County was never listed as a merchant in the census, but in 1875, the R.G. Dun & Company agents who visited her saw her as the owner of the store. In 1870, Rosanna J. Medlin was 40 years old and was married to James C. Medlin, a 48-year-old merchant. Rosanna's occupation was "keeping house" for her husband and eight sons. Ten years later, Rosanna was still keeping house, with her husband still working as a retail merchant, and with three of their sons working in the store. The working situation recorded by the census worker and the agents of R.G. Dun & Company clearly saw her role in Medlin household differently, with Rosanna, on one hand, responsible for the store in 1875, while, on the other, she was divorced from the store completely (R.G. Dun & Company 1875-1942; University of Virginia Library 2007).

The story of Ann W. Williams appears to be one of survival. When the R.G. Dun & Company agents visited her store in 1875, she was living in the town of Chesterfield (in Chesterfield County). She was living with her widowed 80-year-old father Hugh Craig, her 52-year-old sister Mary Craig, and her 11-year-old daughter Tammie. In the 1880 census, Ann's occupation was postmistress and farmer, and her sister Mary was a

merchant and farmer, so they apparently owned and operated their store together. Ann, originally from Chesterfield, had moved to Galley Rock, Arkansas when she was in her twenties. She moved there with the Williams family, also from her hometown of Chesterfield, probably with the intention of helping the family take care of the children. During the span of the next decade, Mary had married the eldest Williams son, had a child, and was widowed by 1870. Mary was forced to move back home to Chesterfield and become a merchant to raise her daughter and make a living (R.G. Dun & Company 1875-1942; University of Virginia Library 2007).

One final story of a woman merchant recorded in the Mercantile Reference Books is Mary B. Beaty of Conway (formerly Conwayboro), in Horry County. Mary and her husband Thomas W. Beaty were prominent members of their community, Thomas having been a Horry County delegate for the Secession Convention and publisher and editor of the *Horry Weekly News*. Thomas had also maintained a mercantile and naval stores business in Conway. When Thomas went away to serve as a Confederate soldier in the Civil War, he left Mary, described as “a woman of great ability and high intelligence” to maintain his stores (Horry County Historical Society n.d.). It appears that she continued doing so, well after the war ended, as R.G. Dun & Company listed her as the storeowner in 1875 (R.G. Dun & Company 1875-1942; University of Virginia Library 2007).

The 1875 Mercantile Reference Books also identified African American storekeepers. There were fewer African American storekeepers than women storekeepers, and there was only one African American woman storekeeper identified. Catherine Springs, listed as Kitty Springs in the Mercantile Book, owned a country store in the Saint James, Goose Creek area, north of Charleston. According to the 1880 census, Kitty was listed as a 45-year old widow, and as a mulatto. She had a 15-year-old son named Francis, and her occupation was “Merchant.” In 1870, her husband Richard Springs was still living at age 55 as a retired merchant with a real estate value of \$400 and a personal estate valued at \$400. In 1870, both Kitty and Richard were identified as “white” by the census taker. After her husband’s death, Kitty likely took over her late husband’s business to make a living (R.G. Dun & Company 1875-1942; University of Virginia Library 2007).

John A. Williamson owned a store in a community called Whittemore, in Darlington County. In 1870, Williamson, age 35, was married to Laura, age 22, and they had five children. He was listed as a merchant with a real estate value of \$1,500 and a personal estate valued of \$700. In both the 1870 and 1880 censuses, John Williamson was identified as “mulatto”, while his wife Laura and children were listed as “black.” It may be the case that the lighter skin color of African American men and women could have helped make their way into the entrepreneurial realm of the country store; later R.G. Dun & Company records do not identify the race of the business owner, so it is difficult to follow the development or the decline of African American owned country stores (R.G. Dun & Company 1875-1942; University of Virginia Library 2007).

One of the more compelling stories of a black-owned country store takes place in the community of Mitchelville, a town built by the Union for escaped slaves during the Civil War. Mitchelville was located on what is now Hilton Head Island and on the former Drayton Plantation. Between 1862 and 1875, Mitchelville was a thriving community, with churches, schools, and stores. In 1875, the land that had been seized by the Federal

government was returned to its former owners. The Drayton family sold most of the land back to one of Mitchelville's respected residents, March Gardner. March's son Gabriel oversaw the town's businesses, including the gristmill and general store. The Bradstreet Company agents recorded Gabriel Gardner as the owner of the store in Hilton Head in 1875. In 1880, just five years later, Gardner was 40 years old and married to Susan. Their daughter, Sarah worked as a clerk in the store. The store reportedly sold a wide variety of goods, including buckets, coffee pots, cologne, buttons, tobacco, lard, and rice. Mitchelville was plagued by land disputes, a result of alleged reports of Gabriel Gardner putting the deed in his name instead of his father's, who had bought the property. It remained a community until the 1920s, when the population continued to disperse (Chicora Foundation n.d.; R.G. Dun & Company 1875-1942; SCIWAY 2012; University of Virginia Library 2007).

By all accounts, many of the merchants relocating to the south after the Civil War to open general stores were of Jewish descent. In some R.G. Dun & Company Mercantile Books, the Jewish ethnicity of a storekeeper was noted. However, in the South Carolina books, it is not, but there were many towns throughout the state with Jewish communities, with Jewish merchants opening general stores and other businesses. The town of Dillon in the northeast part of the state was built on the railroad in the late nineteenth century. A Jewish community formed in Dillon after the arrival of one of the first Jewish men to settle in the area, Abraham Schafer. Schafer married and opened a general store in nearby Little Rock. The store building had two stories, and the six-person Schafer family lived in the upper story above the store (Rockoff 2006).

Thomas Clark wrote of one South Carolina country store, Glymp's, that was started by a Jewish man from New Jersey, who purchased an older store and expanded it (Clark 1944:23). Immigrant peddlers, traveling throughout the south selling their wares, would set up permanent shops and country stores (Clark 1944:23–24). Orangeburg County had several Jewish communities develop in towns near the City of Orangeburg like Bowman, Branchville, and Eutawville during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Jewish families ran stores in these towns or small communities, like the Nesses in Denmark and the Pearlstines in St. Matthews. Like many other storekeepers, they could become important figures in their respective communities, as with Harry N. Marcus, a merchant in Eutawville, who was mayor of the town during the mid-twentieth century (Rockoff 2006).

Cotton Gins and Country Stores

Although country stores were important in the New South, cotton gins and their locations were also important to the economic system, and one historian, Charles Aiken, has argued the gin surpassed the country store in the significance it played. "As important as furnish merchants were to the agrarian economy of the New South, cotton gins were more fundamental than stores to the spatial reorganization of the landscape" (Aiken 1998:39). The dynamic between the country store and the cotton gin is an important aspect of the story of the country store, and helps explain the context surrounding the stores.

The country store was frequently accompanied by a cotton gin, a pattern that was still in place well into the 1950s in South Carolina in small towns like Ridgeway. The Ruff family has operated a general store in Ridgeway since the 1860s, and it is one of the rare examples of a surviving original store next to a newer store, with an even newer cotton gin behind it. Situated along the town's main thoroughfare and adjacent to other commercial buildings, Ruff's Old Store is a one-story frame building built ca. 1860, while the newer store building, known as Ruff and Company, was built in 1901. The later store is a more substantial, two-story brick building, built with a more urban aesthetic. The circa 1947 Ruff's Gin House is a metal industrial building, "one of the last remnants of the cotton era in Ridgeway (National Park Service 1980:12, 14)."

The cotton gin became one of the technological advances of the New South era. The former slave-based plantation era had incorporated the cotton gin into the system. With the dispersal of agricultural tracts and responsibilities to tenant farmers, it became necessary to have a community cotton gin. Aiken contends that the cotton gin owner was guaranteed a certain stature in a community, whereas a country storeowner was not necessarily going to receive the same prominence. In other words, the gin trumped the store. Indeed, the cotton gin, especially with its improvements, was very important component to the New



The ca. 1860 and 1901 Ruff Family Stores and the 1947 Gin, Ridgeway, Fairfield County



South and worked in tandem with the country store. During the 1880s, steam-powered ginneries were developed, based on the innovations of Robert Munger. The new gins were so effective that when “using fewer laborers, a Munger ginning system could produce twenty-four to forty 500-pound bales of lint cotton in the time the Old South plantation cotton gin could process three or four 400-pound bales” (Aiken 1998:41–43).

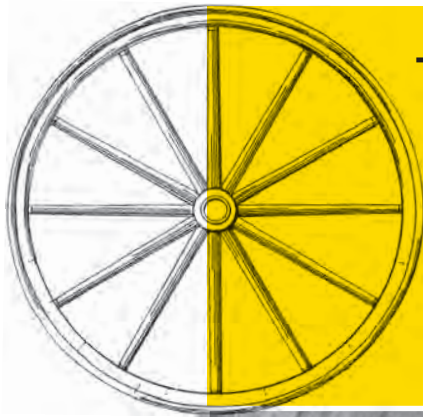
The larger, improved community gin quickly began to replace the small horse or mule-drawn gins across the south. By 1905, there were almost 29,000 cotton gins in the south, with only 587 animal powered and 1,905 water powered. Many gin owners also owned the country store, making the operation a one-stop shop for farmers, and some built warehouses to store the cotton until it was sent to market. Many farmers opted to sell their cotton immediately, but storage offered the possibility of selling the bales when the market was on an upturn. Storage for cotton became a significant issue after the 1900s, and the Populist Party ran on a platform promoting government-sponsored warehouses and grain elevators for the use of farmers. The receipts from the farmer’s stored crops could be put toward obtaining loans (Aiken 1998:42–43). This eventually led to the United States Warehouse Act (USWA) of 1916, which gave farmers a USWA receipt that they could use for credit (U.S. Department of Agriculture n.d.). Compresses were part of the warehouse process, as the large ginneries had special compressing machinery that created bales of cotton, which were easier for storage.

The merchant, gin, and storage operations made way for a number of other related businesses. Commercial fertilizers became a huge business as farmers tried to find ways to restore their lands between plantings and to get the most out of their crops. Many of the country store and gin complexes also opened fertilizer, particularly guano, operations. Cottonseed oil production grew quickly during the last half of the nineteenth century as well, as the demand for vegetable oil increased after the war. During the first decade of the twentieth century, 448 cotton oil mills were constructed throughout the South. Frequently and especially in rural areas, gins could be found alongside cotton oil mills. In towns, cotton gin and mill complexes were much larger industrial operations, usually located on the railroad, and often included ice plants and farm machinery businesses (Aiken 1998:45–47).

The importance of the cotton gin to the New South is obvious; it was an important component in the New South’s economy. However, the cotton gin was not on its own in that endeavor, it was instead a piece in the process in which the store merchant played an important role as well. Country stores made a lasting physical impact on the South’s physical landscape, more so than the gin, because they did not solely serve the cotton farmer’s needs to sell cotton. They also provided a variety of goods for sale and a place to socialize.



Children of Tenant Farmer Working in a Field, Summerton, South Carolina, 1939. Photograph by Marion Post Wolcott, Courtesy of Library of Congress.



THE WHEEL: Lemon McCathern's Friendly Rolling Store

Some creative South Carolina businessmen, like Lemon McCathern, brought the country store directly to people's front yards. McCathern began driving his rolling store in the 1950s, and continued into the 1970s in the Marion County area. Nicknamed "The Wheel," his truck was a 10x20-foot store, complete with a set of wood steps he rolled out for customers at every stop. The truck store contained everything a regular country store might have, such as headache powders, soap, tobacco, and candy. This was certainly an entrepreneurial way to keep a business alive and compete with the larger town stores (Buchan 1972:28-30).



The Decline of the Country Store

From the end of the Civil War to well into the first half of the twentieth century, country stores were community and roadside landmarks, serving the locals as well as the traveler (Thompson 1989:15). There are still country stores in operation in South Carolina and throughout the southeast, but not nearly in the numbers seen from 1870-1920. Many factors contributed to its decline. Thus, the “decline” of the country store refers to its decline in their numbers as it changed along with the society that once sustained it. The country store more or less evolved from a product of the New South, of Reconstruction, and of tenant farming into a product of the automobile age and convenience.

By the 1920s, South Carolina’s agricultural economy had collapsed. In 1919, the boll weevil had reached the lower part of South Carolina. Just four years earlier, cotton prices reached a high and farmers were finally able to make money. During the last half of 1921 though, cotton prices fell from over 40 cents to 13 cents. The crash of the cotton market was initially the result of over production. Then a series of droughts, paired with the boll weevil invasion, poor overused soils, and the decline of overseas markets, compounded the problem. By 1934, eight million acres of cotton were declared destroyed and farmers were forced to use more fertilizers in the attempt to increase their crop outputs (Edgar 1992:46).

In the 1930s, six out of 10 of the state’s farmers were tenants and one-third of the farms were mortgaged. The value of farmland and buildings declined 54 percent during this time and 70 percent of farmers were in debt. Tenant farmers tried seeking better opportunity at other farms and migrated from farm to farm in search of better soils and better tenant conditions. The South Carolinian’s diet suffered during this time, not only because of the agricultural and nationwide depression, but farmers were not raising their own food, only cotton. The state had to import up to \$100 million worth of food every year. The typical diet consisted of pork, cornbread, and molasses. The poor diet contributed to the already hard life that marked this period and resulted in the state having the nations highest mortality rate (Edgar 1992:47).

During the 1920s, rural South Carolinians began leaving the state in massive numbers. Over 30,000 farms were abandoned in the 1920s. African Americans began a mass migration out of the state after 1922, when a devastating crop season blasted any hopes for staying. In 1922 alone, over 50,000 African American farmers left in just an eight-month period, and by the early 1940s, almost 25 percent of those born in South Carolina were living elsewhere. (Edgar 1998:481, 485–486). Counties like Edgefield, McCormick, Abbeville, and Saluda lost over 15 percent of their population (Edgar 1992:49). With the decline of the state’s agriculture, the country store’s importance to the cotton market and tenant farmers was significantly decreased.

The agricultural depression marked a pivotal time for the country store as its main purpose in the South's economy, of perpetuating the crop lien credit system, was severely weakened. Crops could not support even a meager debt payment for most farmers. Store merchants organized "pay up weeks" and "thrift weeks" and published the names of debtors, calling them "deadbeats" in an attempt to get paid (Edgar 1992:51).

There were other factors influencing the country store's decline as well. When Henry Ford introduced the Model T to Americans in 1908, the automobile industry was still in its infancy. But just a few years later in 1913, Ford sold 189,000 Model T's, which he coined "the people's car." The automobile would forever change the rural South, as it changed every other aspect of American society (Jakle and Sculle 2008:12-13).

The automobile created a demand for better roads throughout the South. The good roads movement began in the 1880s, when bicycle enthusiasts began what became a political movement to improve America's roads. The movement really took off in the early 1900s with the increasing popularity of the automobile. There was 2.5 million miles of rural road in the U.S. in 1900 and only 160,000 miles had been improved (Jakle and Sculle 2008:33). South Carolina had a total of 41,830 miles of road in 1909, with only 2,000 miles of improved road (Pratt 1910:109). These figures increased over the following decades, as the demand for improved roads and funding for those roads increased.

Railroad companies were powerful proponents of the good roads movement, as they recognized that the network of roads leading to their railroad lines were imperative to the railroad's success. Farmers needed improved roads to cut down on transportation costs for hauling their goods to market. Improved roads resulted in a significant increase in the loads a farmer could haul, with a major decrease in the transportation costs. In 1909, the cost of hauling one ton of goods over one mile on a broken muddy road was estimated to be \$26, and a sandy road was even more, at \$64, while an asphalt improved road was \$2.70 (Pratt 1910:105, 107).

Although improved roads and automobiles created more opportunity for rural people, there were many drawbacks as the old way of life was quickly being replaced by convenience. The introduction of the automobile to the rural South had a great impact on the country store (Berger 1979:109-110). With improved roads and vehicles, people living in rural areas had more access to a variety of shopping choices, especially in the larger towns and cities (Berger 1979:113).

The automobile brought the country store into closer competition with the larger chains and retail establishments. New sanitary packaging and increased output of merchandise coincided with competitive outside businesses. This changed the feeling of the old country store as employees had less time to interact with customers. "It also meant that the pace of merchandising was quickened, and thus storeowners and employees had less leisure time and diminished interest in the local residents who camped in and around the establishment" (Berger 1979:111).



Log Country Store, ca.
1930, Incorporating
New Autocentric Design
Ethic, Aiken County,
South Carolina

With improved roads and automobiles, the state of South Carolina made its first real concerted efforts to attract industry during the 1950s. In 1954, the state established its first State Development Growth Board, and between 1945 and 1957, \$1.3 million had been invested and 136,000 new jobs had been created. At the same time, farming technology changed and became more mechanized, decreasing the need for such a vast labor force. Tobacco replaced cotton as the state's leading crop by the 1950s. In 1945, one million acres of cotton was planted in the state, and by the 1970s, that number dropped drastically to only 97,000 acres (Edgar 1992:90–97, 116). The country store's place within South Carolina's agricultural system was essentially removed.

While the rural population in South Carolina declined and the country store's necessity was greatly reduced, they still remained important to many of the state's rural communities. Despite the significant changes that altered the South's landscape once again, people still wanted to shop and congregate at country stores well into the 1950s. There were more options for shopping, however, and of course, getting into town was a lot easier with improved roads and cars (Edgar 1992:97).

Like the Internet in recent decades, early twentieth-century technology changed the marketplace. Technological advances made larger scale stores able to sell goods at a lower price and with a quicker turn around time. Farm equipment made improvements as well, increasing in size and making it more difficult for country store merchants to continue selling farm equipment (Berger 1979:112–113). Not only could rural families drive to towns in search of discounted merchandise, but the telephone enabled people to order goods from mail order catalogs, diminishing the need to step outside the house. The delivery wagon and later delivery truck replaced delivery boys on bicycle, making stores more progressive, while lessening the merchant's interaction with his or her customers (Berger 1979:112).

Country stores can still be found in some rural areas in the South, but in order to survive, they likely changed their merchandise and added gas pumps to the front or side of the building to continue to attract customers (Thompson 1989:17). According to Jakle and Sculle, gasoline stations (or filling or service stations) “are roadside facilities specially designed to sell gasoline and other closely related products, such as lubricants, tires, and batteries for the automobile” (Jakle and Sculle 2002:131). A country store is not, by definition, a gas station, but many country stores had gas pumps. Additionally, many gas stations crossed the line into the country store realm by selling some general merchandise. Newly built country stores in the 1930s and 1940s were smaller in scale than the earlier country stores and built specifically to accommodate gas pumps and cars. Many of the later stores eschewed the traditional front-gable building in favor of buildings that looked almost like houses.

When a country store merchant decided to add a gas pump to his or her operation, a wholesaler jobber was contacted. In the early days, during the 1910s and 1920s, the gasoline was transported to various locations in a horse-drawn tank wagon. Corporate gasoline companies were noted for their architect-designed buildings that became synonymous with their company branding. Although country stores were independent of these

corporations, the branding still left its mark on the gas pumps. An early gas pump manufacturer, Gilbert and Barker began labeling the globes on top of pumps in 1912. By the 1920s, corporate logos were silk-screened onto the glass globes and found on virtually every gas pump (Jakle and Sculle 2002:135, 140). On Edisto Island in 1940, “a touch of modernity has been added to these rural establishments in recent years by the presence of brightly painted gasoline pumps” (Crum 1968:27).

Cooper’s Country Store, near the community of Salters, South Carolina, is an example of a store built during this later period. Built in 1937 as a combination general store and gas station, it was constructed by W. Theron Burrows, with a loan from the Esso Company (now the Exxon Corporation). The two-story frame building features a second-story porch where patrons can still view the rural two-lane road the store sits on, while sipping a soda from the store below (Vertical file at SCDAH).

Earlier stores that did not add gas pumps probably did not fare as well as those that did. The Pamplico Supply Company in Florence County did not add gas pumps to its services, and ended up closing its doors in 1970. The store was built in 1912 for \$1500 “in the middle of a cotton field,” and on the only road that ran through Pamplico. The store sold everything from saddles to kerosene lamps, but stopped selling caskets in 1940 (Boling 1970:31).

The gas station, in some respects, replaced the country store as a social institution in the rural South, but the aim was convenience, so the “old, leisurely atmosphere of the country store had been lost forever” (Berger 1979:114). Although some stores reportedly continued a credit system into the modern era, the days of lingering and talking around the potbelly stove had passed (Aiken 1998:312). Convenience stores emerged onto the landscape during the 1970s, and they were more similar to country stores because they offered a wide variety of goods. Even with convenience stores, however, the important role the country store played in rural social life was never completely brought back. According to *Motoring*, the first real convenience store opened in 1927 in Dallas, when a store selling ice added grocery merchandise to its goods for sale (Jakle and Sculle 2008:210–213). The company became the Southland Corporation and had nearly 7,000 7-11 stores by the late 1980s, with 2,100 of those stores also selling gasoline. Convenience stores offered self-service at the gas pumps in the 1970s to help reduce labor costs, especially as the price of gasoline soared with the Arab oil embargo of that time.

In small communities in the South, the country store had been a central focus of the community for generations. The crash of the cotton market, the rise of the automobile, and improved roads caused so many changes in the community. Farmers took jobs in factories and mills and others left town altogether to find employment. Storeowners had to grapple with the drop in sales by taking on other types of work to help support their families. Downtown stores like Woolworth’s replaced the country store, which could not compete with the discount prices.

The Contemporary "Country Store," Cracker Barrel



The social network provided by the country store shifted to the gas stations, convenience stores, and the drive-in restaurants that were popular in the mid-twentieth century. The ways in which people socialized changed as time became more critical. Lingering for hours in the country store was replaced by teenagers hanging out at the local drive-in for a few hours in the evening. Encounters with one's neighbors were briefer as people seemed to have less time in the day to use as before, as the agricultural timetable of former years was no longer. Truly, the decline of the country store signaled the decline of the rural Southern agricultural community and its way of life.

Today, the country store evokes nostalgic memories as a place representing the best qualities of the South. The innocence of a bygone era when time moved slower and children could roam freely around the countryside, stopping by the country store for a bottle of pop and 17.

CONCLUSIONS

In South Carolina, country stores appear to have reached their height between 1900 and 1920, as the number of stores peaked in 1920. With the rise of the automobile during the early twentieth century, older country stores adapted by having fuel pumps installed outside the store, while new stores were built a bit differently to accommodate cars, often with canopies and reoriented façades, making the buildings more visible to attract passersby. The decline of country stores occurs simultaneously with the decline of South Carolina's cotton crops in the 1920s. Compounding the loss of cotton as a crop for credit was the toll the automobile and improved roads took on country stores. People had more options for shopping and could travel into town more easily than before to get the best deals. Country stores were more likely to survive these transitions if they accommodated the automobile culture, were able to maintain a post office, and were fortunate to be located in communities that continued to thrive even after the decline of agriculture.

Country stores also tell the story of the people who owned them, people from different backgrounds, different ethnicities, and sometimes, different races and genders. Today, very few of South Carolina's country stores remain open and are owned by the same family. But those that remain, like the Lenoir Store, are cherished by their respective communities as places that remind them of the past, of what it is like to live in a small community, and of old fashioned customer service.

AUTOCENTRIC COMMERCIAL VERNACULAR



4. Property Types and Features

Commercial buildings are best thought of as “vessels, efficient containers of flexible space” in which merchandise will be sold; and their character-defining features stem from that central function (Longstreth 1986:13). That definition is particularly apt for the form of South Carolina’s most common extant country store—a small, one-story, one-room, rectangular building under a front-facing gable roof. While lacking style and with fewer architectural aspirations than its urban counterparts, this simple form was a pragmatic architectural solution for many southern storeowners/builders between 1850 and 1950. They were joined later by commercial block buildings, urban in design but rural in their geography, and more autocentric commercial forms in the twentieth century as the market changed in favor of gas stations and convenience stores. This chapter looks at the subtle evolution of the rural store as a commercial building type and outlines its character-defining features.

Perspective on Types

Scholarship on early commercial vernacular building types is not extensive. Atherton, in his classic treatment of the *Southern Country Store*, noted that log cabins and houses first served as the region’s early commercial architecture (Atherton 1968:63-64). He strongly considered the antebellum country store to be emblematic of its time and geography, and saw little standardization in either the building or its stock:

Store buildings and stocks of merchandise reflected the rural, agrarian civilization of which they were a part. Regional diversity and the presence of a frontier, however, prevented common standardization, so that there was no such thing as a typical southern store, even at any one time within the period but rather city, country, frontier, and mountain stores, each adjusted to the peculiar social and economic structure of its trade area (Atherton 1968:63).

The earliest extant examples of country stores in South Carolina support Atherton’s recognition of the variety of form and a catering to one’s trade area during the frontier and antebellum periods. The Holmes-Bailey Store, ca. 1820, Charleston County; the McGill Store, ca. 1820, York County; the Monticello Mercantile, ca. 1820, Fairfield County; and the Coker & Rogers, ca. 1830 (rear, one-story portion), ca. 1860s (two-story portion), Darlington County represent examples from the Lowcountry, Midlands, and Upcountry regions of the state. These stores vary in form, size, and materials. The Holmes-Bailey Store, a five bay, two-story, side-gabled frame building, is situated on a creek

Examples of Antebellum Country Stores

(Top Left) Holmes-Bailey Store, ca. 1820, Charleston County

(Top Right) 1820 McGill Store, ca. 1820, York County

(Bottom Left) Monticello Mercantile, ca. 1820, Fairfield County

(Bottom Right) Coker & Rogers, ca. 1830 (rear, one-story portion), ca. 1860s (two-story portion), Darlington County



and main road on Edisto Island in the Lowcountry. Its location on a creek and road attests to the storekeeper's knowledge of his consumer base in the coastal region and how they would travel to the store. The first floor was used as a store; the second story was a residence. The small, single-story McGill Store was constructed of log in circa 1820 on the South Carolina frontier. Monticello Mercantile is a frame one-story commercial building with a T-shaped plan; the rear wing was set aside for residential use. The original building section of the Coker & Rogers store is most similar to the main massing of the Monticello Store, but it was greatly enlarged at an early date with the addition of a large two-story, side-gable addition to its façade. This group, which contains two early store examples paired with adjoining residential units and two stand-alone stores, shows clearly that stores in rural South Carolina in 1820 were not uniform.

Lounsbury and Patrick (1994:355-356) in *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape* indicated that by the middle of the eighteenth century that some standardization in southern stores was evident. Stores tended to have a salesroom that had little or no fenestration on their side and rear walls to accommodate shelving by the late eighteenth century. Windows were critical to the building front with bow windows becoming fashionable. A counting room and storage rooms may also be present and in two-story examples, an upper story apartment was home to the shopkeeper. Aiken's Store in nineteenth-century Winnsboro, Fairfield County, had a store much like Lounsbury and Patrick describes, with a cellar for liquor storage at one end covered by a platform, and a counting room at the opposite end of the store (*News & Herald*, 1901). While the Dickensian term "counting room" would be dropped sometime in the nineteenth century in favor of "office," many stores would continue to have a set aside space for handling business affairs.

By the mid nineteenth-century, architectural standardization had occurred in commercial forms. In his seminal article, "Compositional Types in American Commercial Architecture," Richard Longstreth argued that while some variations may exist, basic commercial types are repeated nationwide despite geography. He pointed out that a commercial building's mass is not a defining feature as it stems from the location, lot size, zoning or other factors, not necessarily a design preference. The floor plan was also not considered a defining trait as it involved various permutations based on its projected secondary or future use, i.e., store and lodge, store and dwelling, or store and bank. More importantly, unlike residential design where room function was designated, the store level was essentially a container meant to hold flexible space. It was a blank slate to be filled. Finally, his study pointed out the lack of significant regional distinctions in commercial architecture.

Locational variations certainly can be found in the use of materials, elements, and historical references. Some types may be more prevalent in certain parts of the country than in others. But when viewed from a national perspective, these aspects are minor compared to the basic similarities that exist. Itinerant builders and architects contributed to this homogeneity before manufacturers' catalogs and trade and professional journals help to codify it (Longstreth 1986:14-15).

The box or container was the preferred architectural solution and its conservative appearance was desirable to the merchant seeking to establish a commercial identity that would have a broad-based appeal. While urban commerce would produce innovation in commercial building features or building materials to maintain or gain an edge, rural counterparts may have preferred a conservative look or may have produced such pared down designs due to necessity.

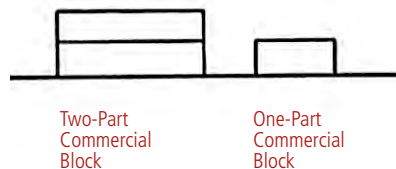
Longstreth created a typology based on what he saw as a nearly universal commercial architectural vocabulary. In it, the building front spelled out its identity. Elements, such as ornaments, signs, and other distinctive features that contributed to that commercial identity are purposely composed on the building front. Workmanship and higher-grade materials are found also on the building front. In contrast, the rear and sidewalls, rarely seen in urban examples, are stark. Where they can be seen, they play a subordinate role to the building's front.

He went on to identify a series of compositional types for commercial buildings of which two are salient to a discussion of the majority of rural stores in South Carolina: the two-part commercial block and the one-part commercial block. A third type in the series, the Temple Front, may also be applicable but no extant examples were identified during this study. The first type refers to commercial buildings of two to four stories that feature a horizontal division into two different zones. The lower story typically contained public space while the upper story offered private space. Built from the first half of the nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, this type enjoyed great popularity. It derived from European vernacular buildings that had a shop at street level and a dwelling above. While most colonial commerce was conducted in marketplaces, taverns, houses or other utilitarian buildings, the "shop-house" had also immigrated to the American colonies and would be used into the early twentieth century (Longstreth 2000:24). Edisto Island's Holmes-Bailey Store reflects this tradition of the shop-house with a ground-level enclosed commercial space and living quarters above. Historian Thomas D. Clark, author of an early study of the southern country store, noted that a typical country store was a two-story or 1½-story building, suggesting that many may have been shop-houses or dual function properties (Clark 1944). The number of these that once existed is up for debate as the preserved architectural record favors the one-story store building.

The one-part commercial block, a one-story commercial building, appears in the mid-nineteenth century and is associated with communities that were newly established or that were in a growth mode. Longstreth argued that this type was more likely constructed with more pressing ideas of necessity: "This type... was probably developed in a short period as an expedient solution to strong pressures for commercial development in areas where available resources limited construction to what is, in essence, a fragment of the two-part commercial type" (1986:20). Noting that this type was prevalent where land values remained low, he warned:

Diagrams of Commercial Building Types

Source: Longstreth 2000



[it...] should not be confused with the one-story shop, freestanding and capped by a pitched roof, which could be found in settlements during the 18th and 19th centuries. Rather than appearing somewhat like a small house or service facility on a sizable farm or plantation, the one-part commercial block is a simple box with a decorated façade and thoroughly urban in its overtones (Longstreth 2000:54).

Clearly, an important tenet of Longstreth's definition of a one-part commercial block was that it was on the fast track to urbanity. It had architectural and commercial aspirations. Vernacular stores do not necessarily impart that ethos. They are buildings that are comfortable in their own skin. Viewed from an evolutionary perspective, these stores belong to the same genus as their urban counterparts. They share a common vernacular parentage, but their paths in the nineteenth century diverged. The freestanding "one-story shop" referred to by Longstreth would be constructed throughout the South through the mid-twentieth century, and it would have a fully realized commercial architectural identity that was decidedly rural in aspect.

While early store examples in South Carolina show a variety of types dependent on geography and the economy, by the mid-nineteenth century, a preference for two- or one-part commercial buildings seems to have prevailed. Plantation commissaries, essentially the freestanding stores noted by Longstreth above and discussed in the preceding historic context, may have played a role in a preference for the one part example in both the antebellum and postbellum periods. Built to serve the immediate farm or plantation community, they were formulaic "containers" with few details and may have been the architectural reference for many of the one-story, rural stores that began to populate the state and region by the end of the nineteenth century. Alternatively, contemporaneous two-story commercial buildings were also constructed essentially using the same architectural design solution to a building that needed to house everything from thread to plows. Purpose-built, style-free, and sporting a spare design ethic, both were as important to the rural community they served and the regional economy as their masonry commercial block cousins were to Main Street. They are considered a rural vernacular commercial building type.



Kensington Plantation, Cypress Sided Store, Exterior and Interior showing open bay and office area, circa 1850, Richland County, HABS SC 129-B, Courtesy of the Library of Congress

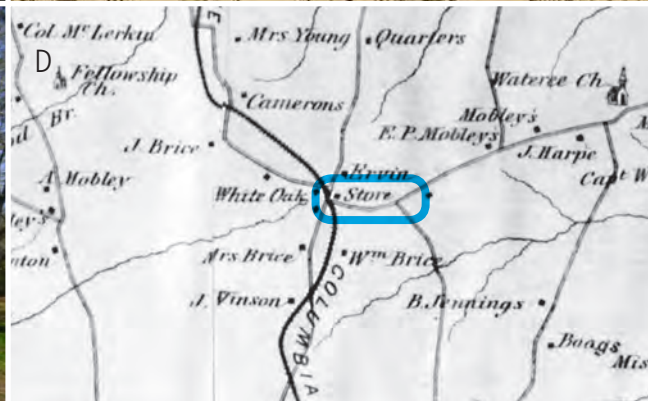
Between 1880 and 1910, masonry commercial block buildings that have an urban aesthetic joined the rural vernacular store type. These stores echoed the interior plan of the vernacular type but possessed more high style storefronts and used different building material. The juxtaposition of their urban appearance with their rural surroundings make them distinctive and show a different architectural intent on the part of the builder/owner and the development and influence of urban commercial architecture to the countryside. Within ten years, more change would occur as stores began to adapt to the automobile age. Building proportions and siting began to change and the addition of a canopy or new construction with an integrated canopy signaled this adaptation. Between 1920 and 1950, transitional forms appeared as country stores endeavored to reconstitute themselves as country stores and gas stations. Many would be quickly eclipsed by the gas station and convenience store as consumer needs change by the mid twentieth century.

Country Store Geography

Store geography is intrinsically tied to the state's transportation systems: waterways, roads, and railroads. As discussed earlier, Sandiford Holmes opened one of the earliest known extant country stores in South Carolina around 1820 in the first story of a large, two-story plantation house on Edisto Island. The location of the store near the geographical center of the island where roads converged as early as the 1820s, coupled with its siting at the head of the navigable Store Creek (once known as General Creek), placed this store at an ideal location for Lowcountry cotton shipping and trading, as well as for general commerce. This type of placement was not uncommon for rural stores, as most were initially founded within close proximity to major navigable bodies of water and/or along roads or railroads leading to and from larger towns or county seats (Stoffle 1972:64).

Proximity to existing railroad tracks was desirable but locations where extant roads converged with rail routes made for more even successful store locations. The circa 1876 T.G. Patrick Store in White Oak is an example. Many country stores were also a corner store, affixed to a crossroads to maximize patronage. It is also quite common for country stores to sit within the V-shaped parcel of land created by a road fork. Some country stores are simply situated along a stretch of roadway—likely placed at such location due to land availability or as a relatively centralized location for customers within the proximity. The historic context provides an analysis of store distribution, however, they appear to be placed with “respectful distances” from another, older community building, the church (Clark 1944:34).

The setback of the country store from the road was usually minimal, allowing for maximum visibility of at least three elevations to passersby. Historical and modern views of South Carolina country stores show little or no surrounding vegetation. Instead flat expanses of dirt, and later, of pavement surround the building, further increasing visibility and giving the building stature. Early stores included hitching posts, which were



Store Geography

A. Holmes-Bailey Store, now a private residence, Charleston County, ca. 1820, was located near Store Creek

B. Detail, Charleston District, Surveyed 1820, Improved for Robert Mills' Atlas 1825. Courtesy of the Thomas Cooper Library, University of South Carolina.

C. T.G. Patrick Store, Fairfield County, ca. 1876 was favorably located near crossroads and railroad.

D. Detail, Map of Fairfield County by Wm. B. Elkin, 1876. Courtesy of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

E. Lenoir Store, Sumter County, ca. 1878, also enjoyed a location near a major road and the railroad.

F. Detail, Map of Sumter County by Wm. B. Elkin, 1876. Courtesy of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

deemed less and less necessary with the rise of the automobile. Some stores maintained wagon yards where those selling their wares and crops from far-off locales might camp after traveling long distances to do so. Shelter, food, and firewood were sometimes also provided for traveling dealers (Atherton 1968:48). As the context shows, gins were sometimes associated with store locations in the New South plantation era. Where this occurred, the gin may be alongside or behind the store building depending on the lot's size and configuration.

Country stores were sometimes constructed in front of or alongside a simple residence or larger farmhouse, in which the storeowner/operator resided. In some examples, the store could be adjacent to the road while the dwelling was further set back. The Padgett Store and House in Edgefield County is a good example of this physical organization with the store located directly on the road frontage at a T-intersection while the house sits back from the road. This distance helped to define the public and private space on the rural property. In other examples, where land was less available, a separate house could immediately join the store to the rear or side.

As noted, twentieth-century examples were surrounded by pavement; older stores operating in the twentieth century followed suit when able. Stores built following the automobile boom were more likely to be constructed with a wider setback, to allow for car parking. Specific parking areas for cars, however, were not important for the success of a country store. Even today, when cars are parked at most country stores, automobiles face all directions in a haphazard manner.

Finally, in some twentieth-century examples, stores were no longer placed transversely to the road but aligned with it lengthwise to make better use of lot size and the road front to garner the attention of the car-traveling consumer. More road front visibility translated into commercial advantage. In addition, stores built and/or operated during the auto era required gas pumps and safe space for a fueling car. This also contributed to the new placement. These auto-centrally placed stores are transitional examples that would later either disappear or reinvent themselves within roadside commerce as consumer tastes and modern road systems would bring the gas station and convenience store into existence.

Types

This discussion of types and character-defining features is based upon a reconnaissance survey of 96 country stores in selected counties, the results of a literature search of previously documented country stores either listed on the NRHP or surveyed, the results of the social media search, and archived historic views (See Chapter II – Methods). In addition, a collection of views taken in 1950 showing 30 stores in Aiken, Barnwell and Allendale counties during the real estate acquisition of land for the Savannah River Plant was also reviewed. The country store is a regional type so contexts and sources from other states were consulted to parse out dates, materials, and the property type discussion. While research looked at the range of stores over time in South Carolina, the study focused on store types that became standard in rural areas from the mid nineteenth century to 1950.

Setbacks and Association



A

A. Padgett Store at T-intersection, associated residence to the south of store, Edgefield County, with minimal setback

B. J.H. Kennedy Store, ca. 1940, in Fairfield County sits within a fork of two roads

C. T.P. Woods Store, County stretches out along Highway with only a minimal setback

D. While the road fronting these two stores in Orangeburg County has been altered since their construction, the stores (Bates Grocery, ca. 1890, left; ca. 1900, right) have likely always had a minimal setback



B



C



D

Conservatism and economics led to few types of rural commercial properties during this period of which the one- and two-part vernacular stores appear to be paramount. Some had residential additions, or other permutations but the store proper remained remarkably static in its form and appearance. One- and two part commercial block buildings were also located in rural contexts. Finally, transitional autocentric forms from the early to mid-twentieth century appear within the study group completing the type inventory.

One- and Two-Part Vernacular Stores

Most extant country store buildings in South Carolina are one-part vernacular stores. In the sample study of 97 rural stores, 73 or 75 percent are this type. This number increases when examples from historic views or the SRS photograph collection are considered. Within the survey group, 13 were two-part vernacular stores. These share the same character-defining features within the building's public or commercial space. The private space on the second story is what differentiates the two. Longstreth considered the one-part commercial building to be a fragment of the two-part store or earlier "shop house" building. The same may be the case here. Clark (1944:37) noted that for many storeowners/builders the long-term objective was to construct a two-story building but that construction could be completed in phases. In some cases, non-commercial partners such as fraternal organizations were responsible for adding an upper story. Regardless, in terms of property type, both mirror the same composition and thus their shared characteristics are discussed here jointly.

Longer than it is wide, the one-and two-part vernacular store is a rectangular building with an open plan on its single or ground floor and a front-facing gable roof. Two-part vernacular stores feature an upper level with a separate internal organization. It is placed transversely to the road it faces. Most are set on pier foundations, are clad in wood weatherboard, and feature a square, three-bay façade. Similar on its exterior to the residential shotgun and bungalow house types, the one-and two-part store is relatively narrow in width, and does have a long length stretching toward the rear of its lot. The two-part vernacular store was constructed from the early nineteenth century to around 1940; the one-part store was constructed from early nineteenth century through 1950.

A centrally placed entrance flanked by two windows marks most country storefronts. The entrance usually consists of a set of double doors, which may be covered by original or added double screened doors. The flanking windows are predominantly wood sash that can either be covered after hours by hefty vertical or diagonal board wood shutters, or are covered at all times by protective metal bars applied to both upper and lower sash, or to lower sash alone.

The exterior walls along the sides of the building are typically windowless. The need for storage trumped lighting and ventilation. Stretching roughly 80-100 feet in length, the interior walls are usually covered in wood shelves running nearly the length of the building. The side exterior walls may, however, have small ventilation windows or fixed windows to allow for additional light near the roofline.

Besides the main double-door entry, a secondary side entrance toward the rear end of the building leading, in many cases, to a rear office, is not uncommon. A wide door on the rear façade, through which large shipments were transported into the store, is also not uncommon.

The shed is the preferred porch type. Porches may have no floors, but wood board porch floors are typical. Porch floors may be set on low piers with no steps or on tall piers with plain wood steps. Set on simple wood picket posts, the shed roof is reinforced by slender wood knee braces. The porch roof is typically clad in standing-seam metal.

The typical front-gable roof of the country store is usually covered in standing-seam metal or re-clad in asphalt shingles. Exposed rafter tails are common along the roof eaves. In the roof surface or ridgeline, a projecting flue often marks the spot of a pot-bellied stove, an interior communal gathering place frequented during colder months.

As noted, these same characteristics are applicable to the two-part store. The organization of the upper story and its space was determined by its function. Many two-part vernacular stores were constructed as combined commercial and residential buildings. A relatively common composition in small towns and cities, the two-story general store/residence combination is slightly more atypical in rural areas. In these arrangements, most second-story living spaces are accessed via exterior staircases along the side or rear of the building, while some may also have an interior staircase. Private porches are also commonplace in second-story units, and are usually found directly above first-floor porches and/or canopies. It is also not uncommon for such second-story porches to be screened.

Community meetings by Masonic, Rotary, or other groups, often took place in a room above the store. At times, this room was added at a later date to an existing one-story building, while in other cases, a two-story building would be the objective from the beginning of construction. In some circumstances, a storeowner would fund the construction of the bottom story general store, while a fraternal organization managed the construction of the second story. Both the storeowner and organization would team to place a roof on the building. As a result of this partnership, some two-story examples were marked with the Masonic emblem (Clark 1944:37). The second stories of many store buildings were also used for hosting local community productions, as temporary worship spaces for churches lacking permanent buildings, or as space for local tailors or milliners to set up shop selling ready-made clothing and hats. Additionally, as larger, factory-made goods became available like large hardware, furniture, and coffins, those items were placed for sale in the upper story (Clark 1944:38-39).

One-story country stores occasionally included rear or side apartments for storeowners and their families as well. Monticello Mercantile is an early example. The A.B. McConnell main storeroom was slightly expanded in the 1960s to include a portion of what was formerly the storeowner's apartment kitchen. At this time, a side gable addition was attached to create an extra bedroom for the apartment. The apartment

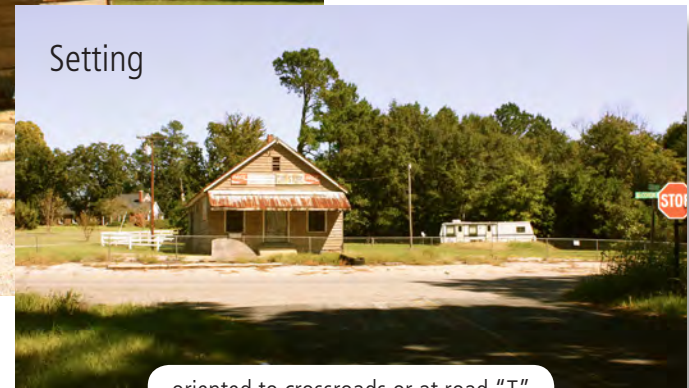
One- and Two-Part Vernacular Store Character-Defining Exterior Features



One-Part

Features

- Longer than it is wide
- One- and two-story
- Front-facing gable most common roof type
- Pier or continuous foundation
- Symmetrical three-bay front
- Controlled entry – minimal doors
- Central door or double doors on front
- Shuttered or barred windows flanking front entry
- Windowless sidewalls or small clerestory type windows on sidewalls
- Sidewalls and front used as open canvas for signage



Wateree General Store
Richland County

- Small flue for stove/chimney
- Porch or canopy
- Some have gas pump/s/ gas pump islands
- Absence of style
- Shed side addition commonly added for post office

Setting

- Small setback from road regardless of size of tract
- Gabled front faces road
- Sited at crossroads, forks, along roads and railroad lines
- No landscaping



Two-Part

front-facing gable roof

stoves or fireplaces to warm public space were not uncommon

second story could be used as storeowner's apartment, office, community space, or additional retail space

shed roof porch most common--maybe later addition or replacement

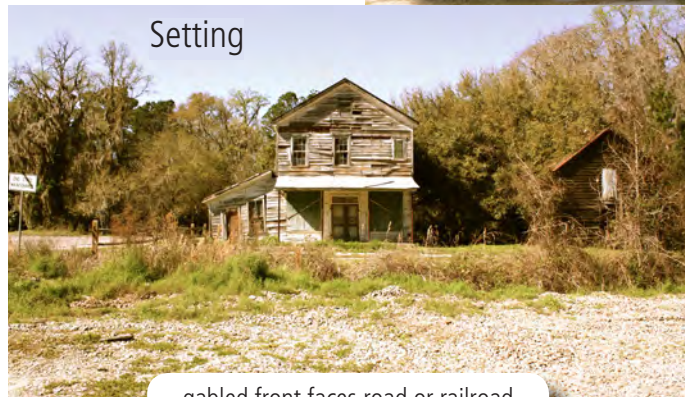
shuttered windows

shed addition common for use as post office, additional retail space

double doors behind double screen doors

paving added for later use by automobiles

examples with second story have exterior and interior staircases leading to private space or community space, may have a second story porch



Setting

gabled front faces road or railroad

Keyserling General Store
Beaufort County

remains in use to date, in its updated mid-twentieth-century form. Other single-story examples of mixed country store-residences include this store at 1890 Trask Parkway in Beaufort County, whose rear residence is clearly discernable via exterior view, and the Carolina Cider Company on Kings Highway, whose side apartment is now used for storage and, like the A.B. McConnell living quarters, is not clearly discernable from the exterior.

One- and Two-Part Commercial Block Stores

The sample survey identified three one-part and one two-part commercial block buildings. All date between 1880 and 1910. These buildings types are already recognized on the SC survey form and state inventory as commercial types and are defined in *The Buildings of Main Street* (Longstreth 2000). What makes these examples distinctive is their rural geography. Although they form only a small percentage of the overall group, they are significant for their urban appearance within a rural environment. Similar examples that are now in more built up contexts may have started out as rural stores originally. Research on individual stores is needed to identify where and when this occurred.

In most commercial block country stores, storefront characteristics are similar to the vernacular country store with the arrangement of symmetrical bays and a narrow street frontage. However, commercial block country stores begin to deviate from the vernacular through a show of embellishments such as quoins or decorative window arrangements uncommon in rural areas. Represented in masonry construction and topped by a cornice or parapet, these stores feature decorated façades and give slight suggestions to style. The commercial block store is thereby straying from architectural suppositions typical to its rural setting through its display of characteristically urban elements.

Examples of a one part Commercial block include the Padgett Store on Highway 125 in Edgefield County built circa 1910. It is a one-part commercial block store situated at a rural crossroads on an ample site associated with a farmhouse of approximately the same date. The store sits adjacent to the road; the house sits back from it. While the brick masonry building features the same plan as the one-part vernacular store, its building materials, recessed double doors with transom, flat and angled display windows, brick stringcourse, sills and lentils, decorative iron grates over its vents, and stepped parapet with space for a signboard are a significant departure from the rural store profile. The early twentieth-century store also served as a bus station (Davis and Ciomek 2010:66). The urban character of the Padgett Store is highly unusual for the study group given its rural location however its character may be indicative of the commercial aspirations of its owner/builder and their economic status.

E.A. Poole General Merchandise is an example of a two-part commercial block form. Constructed circa 1900 at a rural crossroads in Lexington County, this 2 ½-story brick masonry country store was originally associated with a mill. The size of this country store alone gives it a command over the rural intersection. With a corner and two street-facing storefronts, this rural store has become its own small Main Street. Recessed entrances and angled and transom fixed commercial windows, paired with a wrap-around balcony, two gas pump islands, and brick parapet construction reflect both original and added elements not typically reflected in rural country stores. Like the Padgett Store, E.A. Poole General Merchandise is a display of both status and ambition in an unlikely rural setting.

Transitional Autocentric Stores

This variation appears in examples dating primarily from the 1920s through 1950s. The survey identified 10 one-story examples and three two-story examples, with a few others located through country store social media websites. While more survey data is needed to better define the type, it differs from the one-and two-part vernacular store in its proportions, the regular placement of its long side along the highway or facing the corner of an intersection with ample space for parking, and its integrated automobile canopy. The presence of the canopy is important to the function of this transitional building: to serve as a rural store while catering to the automobile driver. Thus, with the addition of the canopy, constructed as part of the original building design, under which a motorist could park his car to fill up his gas tank or to purchase anything from food to hardware, this country store subtype is a form in flux. This subtype creates a physical link between the vernacular country store and the modern gas station. Here, autocentric architecture is visible in its burgeoning stage on the building's exterior, while the interior remains true to open-plan vernacular store ideals.

Examples tend to be built of masonry, particularly concrete block, but some are frame, and most are single-story, though some two-story examples, like Cooper's Country Store in Williamsburg County, also exists. While some storefronts are notable in transitional autocentric stores, with angled, transom-topped display windows present in some cases, most storefronts associated with this type are less noteworthy as the automobile canopy dwarfs much of the façade to secondary importance.

The overall building has less depth than early country store examples, extending laterally along the road or highway or placed with a wide setback at an angle facing a crossroads to increase road front visibility and provide for parking. A circa 1940 example from Lexington County is a case in point with five bays on the building front, three of which are stepped slightly forward to meet an automobile canopy. All windows are large, fixed display windows with transom lights above; bars or shutters are not present. This store in particular may be a transitional autocentric store leading to the gas station/convenience store that attempts to mimic larger commercial operations with its multiple display windows.

One- and Two-Part Commercial Block Stores Character-Defining Exterior Features

One-Part



Features

- Masonry Construction
- Narrow Street Frontage
- Symmetrical Storefront
- Topped by Cornice or Parapet
- Urban Overtones
- Hints of Architectural Style
- Decorated Facade
- Porch or Canopy
- Little or No Fenestration on Side Walls
- Details when Present on Facade

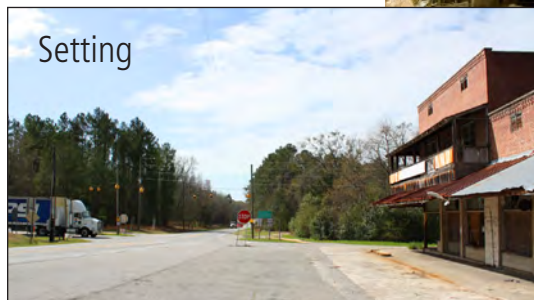


Padgett Store
Edgefield County

Two-Part

Features Continued

- Usually 2 Zones Divided Horizontally
 - Lower Story Used for Commercial Space
 - Upper Story Used for Private Space, Residence, Offices



E.A. Poole General Merchandise
Lexington County

Transitional Autocentric Character-Defining Exterior Features



Cooper's Country Store
Williamsburg County

Features

- Presence of an automobile-width canopy that is original to the building
- Gas pumps or evidence of gas pumps original to the building
 - pump islands or slabs
 - canopy pumps
- Building usually wider in proportion than one- and two-part vernacular store
- Proportions evolving to more square or wider-than-long footprints to better suit highway motorist
- Bulk of building faces highway or intersection
- May have wider setback to allow for parking
- Concrete block most common exterior cladding, but wood weatherboard, shiplap, and brick veneer also common
- Little landscaping with gravel or paved surroundings



Setting



bulk of building faces highway or intersection

wider setback to allow for parking

Style

While style is a critical factor in understanding urban commercial architecture, it is not critical to an understanding of the country store, particularly the vernacular type which seems to eschew style in favor of a set of features that provided a commercial identity. A North Carolina context that looked at 51 rural general stores identified only one style in all of its building descriptions: Rustic Revival (Fearnbach 2012:73). The study categorized the buildings by their materials instead. The South Carolina sample has no buildings that enthusiastically reference an architectural style although some slight nuances are evident. Cooper's Country Store in Williamsburg County, for example (see preceding graphic), depicts basic elements of the Craftsman style through exposed rafter tails and decorative second story porch supports and railings. Constructed with higher aspirations, one- and two-part commercial block country stores are also more likely to display pared-down elements of style. Bates Grocery in Orangeburg County features a segmental arch door and windows on its façade, while Hinnant Store in Fairfield County includes brick quoins, both rare stylistic elements of country stores. In the main, continuity and economy in form appears to have been more important than style. What was important about the container was what was inside.

Building Materials

The majority of the sample survey buildings studied were frame structures, with 35 of the 97 clad in basic wood weatherboard and 11 more covered in wood shiplap siding. Historic views also reflect a preference for frame store buildings. Most country stores were erected atop brick or stone pier or continuous brick foundations. Concrete block is also a common foundation, frame, and exterior wall material, with 27 of the 97 built of this material. A few concrete block stores appear to have once been fully covered in stucco, but no completely stucco-clad stores were detected during the survey. While wood weatherboard was a constant building material throughout the period of significance for the country store, most concrete block stores were constructed between 1920 and 1950.

Stores covered in stone, brick veneer, brick masonry, wood vertical board, and board-and-batten are represented in small numbers. Brick masonry, while rare in country stores, is a good indication of a circa 1880-1910 construction date. Brick veneer, however, could be original to a country store or added later as a façade enhancement. Thus, the presence of brick veneer alone is not a reliable dating source.

Only one log-covered store was located during the sample survey. While it is possible that some country stores originally clad in stone or rock may be extant in South Carolina, none were found during the current survey. Additionally, some stores represented in the sample survey have been re-clad in later replacement materials such as aluminum siding or shingles, asbestos shingles, modern vertical board, and vinyl siding.

Roof Types and Materials

The most predominant roof type is the front-facing gable. Of the sample survey, 75 of 97 surveyed country stores have 1- or 2-story front-facing gable roofs. This number more or less corresponds to the vernacular commercial building type. Stores with hip, side-gable, shed, and jerkinhead roofs are less common. Hip roof lines occur mostly in the autocentric examples.

Though not quite as widespread as the front-facing gable roof type, the predominant roof material is standing-seam metal. Analysis of the sample survey revealed that 58 of the 97 country stores have seamed metal roofs. Thirty country store roofs are covered in asphalt shingles, a common replacement material. Several of these 30 stores likely once had standing-seam metal roofs. Roofs are also found covered in corrugated metal, with extant coverings of pressed tin and wood shingles in rare occurrence.

Parapet/False Fronts

Stepped parapets or false fronts are also quite common when paired with front-gable roofs. Of the 75 surveyed stores with front-facing gable roofs, 13 include stepped parapets or false fronts. On flat-roof stores, stepped brick parapets also common. Five such flat-roof stores with parapets were found during the sample survey. According to Longstreth, the application of the upward-projecting false front to an otherwise modestly statured commercial building gives such stores a “larger and more urban” feeling (Longstreth 1986:21).

Entries and Windows

Whether set within a three- or five-bay façade, perhaps the most pervasive design element of the country store is the central placement of the entrance on the building’s face. In the sample study of 97 country stores, well over half feature a central set of double entrance doors. While centrally placed single doors are not uncommon, the double door is much more common amongst country stores. Double- and single-door types can vary from windowless, diagonally paneled, heavy, functional designs to large panel-below-fixed-light arrangements. Many entries feature double screen doors with advertisements.



Unnamed Store with Parapet, Sumter County

Examples of Entries and Windows



A. ca. 1890, Charleston County

B. ca. 1920, Sumter County

C. Johnson's Place, ca. 1920, Darlington County

D. Boykin Country Store, ca. 1900, Kershaw County

E. ca. 1940, Lexington County

F. T.P. Wood Store, 1881, Greenville County

G. Bates Grocery, ca. 1890, Orangeburg County

H. Little Red Barn, ca. 1919, Barnwell County

Though the symmetrical, central-bay door storefront layout may be widespread, it is not completely universal. The circa 1905 Cainhoy Village Store in Berkeley County features a rare corner entrance. Though the double country store doors are still featured in this design, the placement of the entrance at the corner of this rural store is a design much more common in urban environments.

Some stores also include more than one front door for use by customers, or to separate entrance into an attached post office. Other stores, like Roberson's Grocery (no longer extant) mimic tiny shotgun houses, with one window bay and one entrance bay on the narrow façade.

While symmetrical placement of storefront windows is nearly universal, this building element is perhaps the most varied among country stores. Most windows are composed of wood sash, but vary in light number. While some metal casement windows are found in some later country stores, wood windows of many types are common on country storefronts.

Country store window types are diverse, including: wood sash; fixed four-light wood; fixed multi-light wood or metal; fixed single- or double-light display; sash set within brick arches; and metal commercial casement.

Security

During survey, it is not uncommon to encounter shuttered windows in vacant or closed country stores. Though the presence of such shutters may make full analysis of window composition impossible, these elements were once vital to storekeepers in maintaining security over store merchandise and are important design features of many country stores. Though some later country stores may include wood shutters, the appearance of such may indicate a nineteenth-century building. Shutters are normally paneled, board-and-batten, or composed of diagonal board. Shutters may also be found hung alone or in pairs and may be hung with original hardware such as latches, holdbacks, or diagonal lock bars.

A diagonal-board door may indicate another security element not uncommon to country stores. In some cases, diagonal-board doors may be lined in vertical boards on the opposite, or interior, side. This composition creates a double-thickness door and provides additional security against intruders (Fearnbach 2012:78).

Metal security bars are also common to country stores. Metal security bars may be located on the exterior or interior, and, at times are found paired with opposite interior or exterior shutters. While wood shutters are more likely to be found on earlier country stores, metal security bars were often either later additions or indicate a later building construction date.

Examples of Signage Types

A. S.F. Singletary & Son, ca. 1920, Berkeley County

B. Boyd's Store, ca. 1938, Williamsburg County

C. Painted sign for 7-Up in Cherokee County, ca. 1930s

D. T.P. Wood Store, 1881, Greenville County

See back cover for more sign examples



Porch

Country store porches vary more so in form than many other elements of the building type. While the shed type is the most ubiquitous, hip porches are also quite common, as are country store façades with no porch. In the case of the flat-front store, aluminum awnings were often added in the mid-twentieth century. Engaged and gable porches, while not as common, are also found on country storefronts.

A vital feature of every country store, signage, once completely covering these buildings has, in most cases, been almost completely removed or worn away. Advertisements for cola, snuff, and cigarettes, usually printed on thin and durable tin, covered nearly all visible spaces including: building fronts, sides, doors, and window shutters.

Painted murals advertised for Coca-Cola and other products on side exterior walls of stores. Total or near lack of windows along such walls left a large canvas upon which advertisers could make their mark. These signs, once clearly visible on exterior walls of country stores are now often only visible in faded, ghost forms.

Painted or pressed tin signs signifying store names, usually in black or white print, were often flanked by sponsored advertisements for Coca-Cola, while advertisements for the same, or a rival products, were featured on painted murals or on other signs covering the building's exterior.

It was also common for corporations to provide other functional items for exterior use that doubled as advertisements. Merita Bread made certain their goods were advertised by supplying storeowners with pre-adorned screened doors. Though now housed inside A.B. McConnell General Merchandise, this tin towel holder was once posted near exterior gas pumps for use by motorists. The holder was provided by Atlas Glas-Kleen, who urged customers to take home their cleaning products, sold inside the store.

At times, a metal post, hung perpendicular to the store's exterior wall, placed above the porch held a metal sign signifying the presence of a United States Post Office. Such types of signposts were also used to display store names or to advertise gasoline at better visibility to passersby.

As automobile traffic increased, signs for gasoline were often installed alongside buildings. These signs, advertising fuels by companies such as Esso and Gulf, were often placed alone on metal posts, with signs stretching high into the sky for maximum visibility by motorists.

Signage on country stores was not limited to permanent advertisements, but also consisted of paper handbills hung below weather-protected porch roofs and eaves, in all available nooks and crannies. Using the country store exterior as a bulletin board, traveling salesmen, called "drummers", posted advertisements, while tearing down those of competitors; United States Marshals sheriffs and bailiffs hung legal notices; and auctioneers, politicians, musicians, and churches nailed announcements of speeches, camp meetings, sales, and performances. Hung amongst these posts were also once-common funeral invitations. Years of posting provided the country store with a singular wear of nail and tack heads and holes:

Some storefronts were virtually covered with nails and tack heads. High-pressure American advertising pecked steadfastly at the very sinews of the building and like the rings on the body of an aged oak, the layers of nails and tacks divulged the life span of the store (Clark 1944:35-36).

Interior signage was slightly different than that found on the store's exterior. Here, advertisements could be slightly smaller and made of materials not as suitable for the elements of weather. An interior advertisement was more likely to feature a painted canvas depiction of a beautiful woman extoling the virtues of using Ajax in your cleaning routine, or could consist of a functional paper calendars or plastic clocks featuring new and exciting farm implements.

Canopies and Gas Pumps

With the rise of the automobile, country stores added gasoline to their collection of sellable wares. For the country storekeeper to make alterations and additions to cater to the automobile driver was no small feat. To add gasoline as a product or construct a new country store that sold gasoline, underground tanks were required. The placement of tanks was a commitment often resulting in a temporary upheaval of a country store's immediate physical surroundings.

Like the items for sale inside the stores, gasoline pumps were placed wherever they fit: at roadsides, affixed to porch ends, alongside existing buildings, or atop concrete pads poured into spaces where horses were once hitched. Extant gas pumps can aid in determining construction dates, or the date of integrating gasoline into an older country store's bevy of merchandise for sale. Pumps themselves vary in design based on age, but were often updated, replaced, or completely removed depending on the storeowner's decision to continue gasoline sales into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

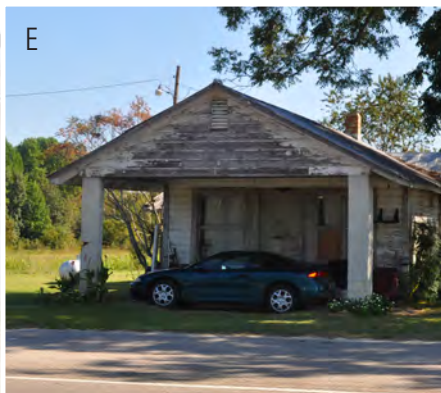
Beginning in the 1920s, many new country stores were constructed with automobile canopies, while some older stores sometimes detached well-worn porches and replaced them with this new auto-centric design feature. Normally, canopies cover or nearly cover the entire façade of the country store but may only include central bays in the side-gable store. Below the canopy is the entrance to the building, as well as flanking window bays. The canopy is usually wide enough to cover at least one automobile.

Canopies, like porches, are found in an array of materials and types. Canopy roof shapes include:

- Front-facing gables;
- Hip;
- Flat;
- Engaged front-facing gable;
- Shed; and
- Engaged hip.

Square brick piers reaching from ground to roofline typically carry canopy roofs. However, supports for canopy roofs also vary. Metal, and sometimes wood, posts set into square brick piers or directly into the ground are also common. Stone full or partial piers and log post supports are also found at times but are much less common. Normally, gas pumps are located between posts, which vary in number, allowing for the fueling of one automobile underneath the canopy, and another outside of the canopy. In some cases, a single, central brick pier or metal post creates an arching Y shape to support the canopy roof instead.

Canopy Examples



A. Gas Pump Affixed to Pre-automobile Monticello Mercantile, ca. 1820, Fairfield County

B. Boyd's Store, ca. 1938, Now the Woodworking Shop of Tommy Boyd, Williamsburg County

C. Hinnant Store, ca. 1885, Fairfield County

D. ca. 1890, Charleston County

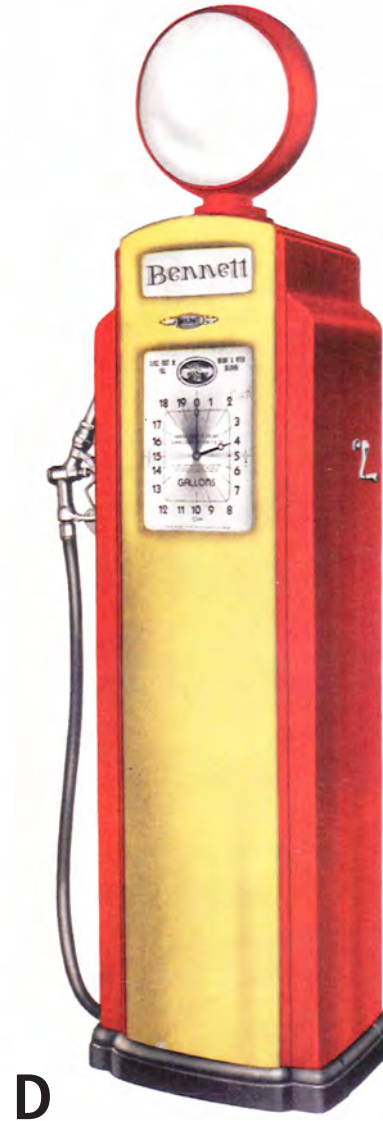
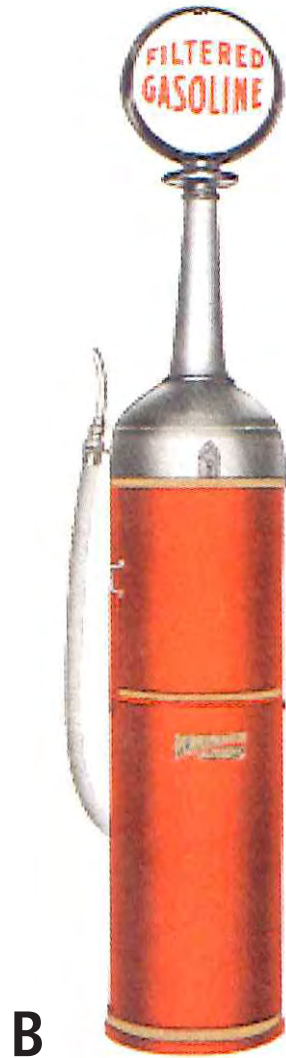
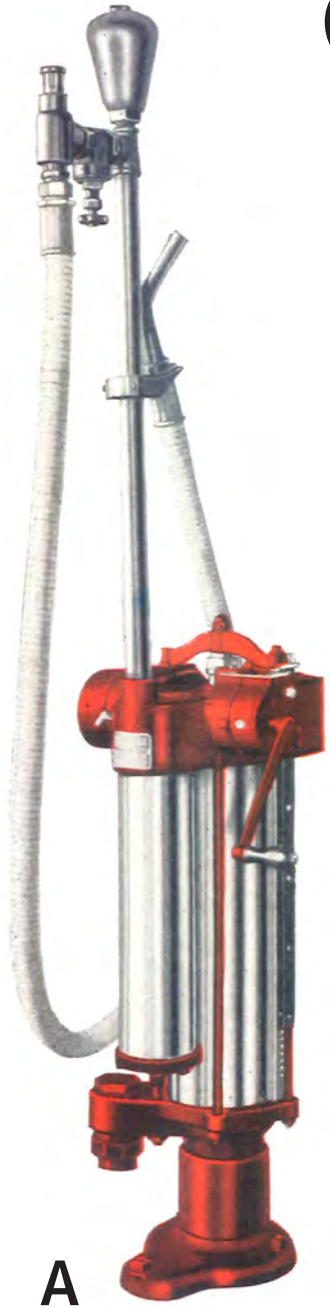
E. This Barnwell County store, ca. 1920, is now a private residence, and its canopy is now used as a carport.

F. Carolina Cider Company, 1910, Jasper County

G. S.F. Singletary & Son General Store, ca. 1920, Berkeley County

H. Carolina Country Store, 1929, Georgetown County

Gas Pump Typology



A Curb Pumps

- 1905
- Hand cranked pump
- Large underground tank
- Utilitarian design with exposed mechanisms

B Curb Pumps with Cabinets

- 1920
- The exposed pump mechanisms were enclosed in cabinets

C Visible Pumps

- 1918
- Glass cylinder placed above pump to show amount of gas being pumped
- Company logos decorated globes at the top

D Clock Meter Pumps

- 1925
- Large clock face on front showing amount of gas and price being pumped
- By the 1930s, motorized pumps were replacing hand cranks where electricity was available

E Computer Meter Pumps

- 1934
- Invented by Wayne Pump Company
- More digital display of gallons and price
- Pump designs reflected the Art Deco and Streamline Modern styles of the era

F Low Profile Pumps

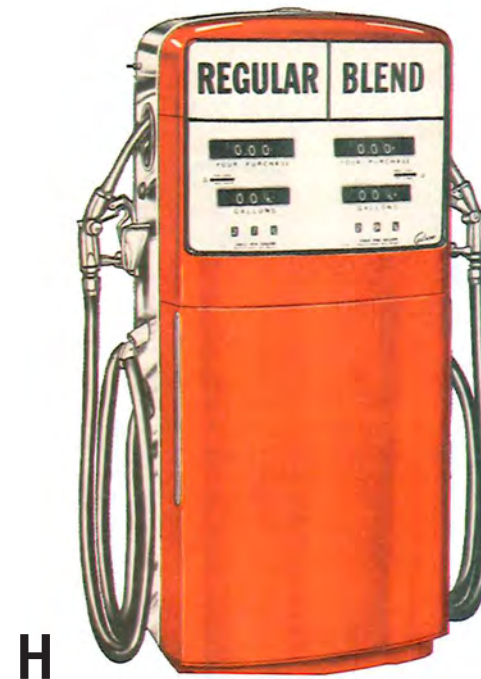
- 1947-1948
- As automobile designs of the era were shorter in height, pumps were also lowered
- Designed with rounded edges
- Stainless steel trim
- Large meter faces

G Stainless Steel Pumps

- Late 1950s
- Pumps lowered again and the 48" pump was introduced
- More stainless steel and less painted surfaces
- Remote operated pumps began being used
- Pump design featured a tapered base

H Blended Pumps

- 1960s
- Stainless steel pump with dual grades or types of fuel



Images and information courtesy, *An Illustrated Guide to Gas Pumps* by Jack Sim 2002.

Country Store Interiors

Whether one-story, two-story, front-gable, or side-gable, the country store interior plan was often relatively similar: one open-space store room up front, with variations and additions to the rear, sides, and possibly a second story. The “counting room” Lounsbury describes in his definition of the store has been replaced with a storekeeper office. If present, offices were added to the rear of the building if not included in the original design. If a restroom was present, it was often also added to the rear of the building. Both restrooms and offices were, at times, only accessible through doors located on the building’s exterior walls.

The interior finishes usually consist of tongue-and-groove wood board for flooring, while walls are normally clad in wood flush board, vertical board, or beadboard. Removable floorboards and/or cellar doors may reveal underground storage areas once used for the storage of more illicit merchandise like liquor or guns. Beadboard or simple flush wood board stretches from end-to-end to form the ceilings of the country store.

A low corner or straight wood counter, sometimes carried by a glass display case or lined in wood flush board or vertical beadboard, serves as the cashier station. These heavy counters were often handmade of heart pine and sometimes featured paneling and molding (Clark 1944:39). Small walnut or cherry cases are often found along countertops as well.

Large walk-in coolers and screened-in store racks for meat curing are also common interior features of country stores.

Narrow wood shelves line the walls of the store from front to back storing goods from floor to ceiling. The uninterrupted wall space, a result of no fenestration, allowed storekeepers to use every available inch for storage and display. Many customers, however, believed that the lack of windows simply assured that the storekeeper’s goods would be kept out of sight from exterior views (Carson 1955:8).

Wood or wood-and-glass display shelves and/or simple wood tables are fully stocked and centrally located, dividing the room into two or more aisles, depending on building width. These shelving units may also include low heavy drawers, where additional items for sale are housed.

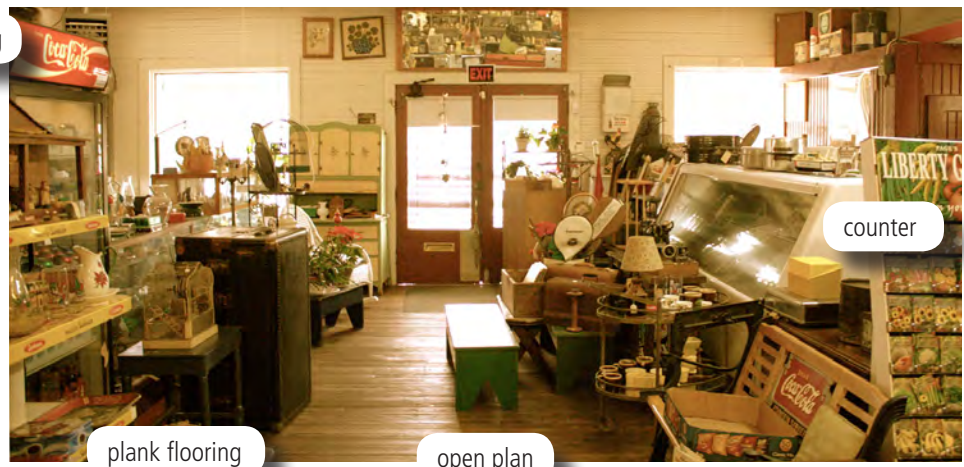
The rear wall is traditionally lined in runner-mounted bulk bins, barrels, or drawers, where loose flour, coffee, salt, sugar, rice, dried peas, and seed are located. Hardware is also usually located toward the rear of the store when side rooms are not present.



beadboard walls

beadboard ceiling

Cooper's Country Store
Williamsburg County



plank flooring

open plan

counter



minimal lighting

Lenoir Store
Sumter County

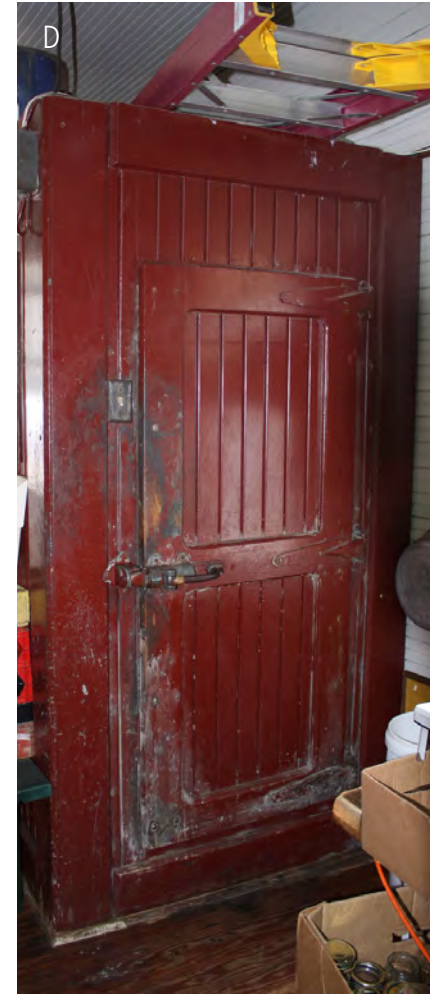
A.B. McConnell General Merchandise
Charleston County

Interior Character-Defining Features

Features

- Open plan
- Beadboard ceiling and walls
- Plank walls and floors
- Minimal lighting
- Extensive wood shelving along sides
- Post office area
- Counter(s)

“The external appearance of the average store was as superficial as the hull on a black walnut. It was the inside that counted” (Clark 1944:39).



Representative Interior Views



A. No longer used as the cashier counter, this nook at Cooper's Country Store, 1937, in Williamsburg County is now used as a lottery station.

B. While the apartment in Cooper's Country Store, 1937, in Williamsburg County is no longer in use, it is still accessible via both interior and exterior steps. This door leads from the first-story store interior to the second-story apartment

C. Carolina Country Store, 1929, Georgetown County

D. Walk-in cooler at A.B. McConnell General Merchandise, 1939, Charleston County

E. Cooper's Country Store, 1937, Williamsburg County

F. These heavy wood drawers by Sherer were purchased from an earlier country store when the McConnell's constructed A.B. McConnell General Merchandise in 1939 in Charleston County

G. Carolina Cider Company, 1910, Jasper County

H. Cheese wheel cutter like those typically found in a country store.

Many early country stores also had a centrally located pot-bellied stove, which served as a second only to the front porch as a communal place for tall-tale-telling and politicking. Storekeepers placed buckets or small troughs of sand around the stove to catch the spittle of dawdling patrons. Placement of these stoves can be easily detected from the exterior, where flues at or near the center ridgeline are present. Brick chimneys were also not uncommon, and were often placed on walls adjoining private living quarters when such apartments were present in single-story stores.

It was also typical for many store buildings to include a single-story shed addition along one or both side elevations to house feed and/or serve as “whispering rooms,” where male customers and storeowners could conduct business and carry on in all manner unsuitable in the presence of a woman (Clark 1944:35). These small additions were also used to house large hardware items or machinery.

Around the 1940s, some stores began to use shed additions or original side wings as space for restrooms, with one shed for “whites” and another, on the opposite side of the main store room, for “blacks.” One of two Carolina Cider Company stores, this country store in Beaufort County originally included two sets of bathrooms on either side of the main storeroom. These restrooms were accessible via both the interior and exterior doors.

The Post Office Nook

When located inside a country store, the United States Post Office was often located immediately inside the main entrance, usually to the right, in a place of honor. Here, either homemade or official postal service lock boxes were rented by surrounding community members. Also in this nook was a stamp and delivery window, where the postmaster, usually the storeowner himself, managed the internal workings behind an oak panel (Clark 1944:39).

Today, some country stores continue to serve postal needs in rural communities. The Lenoir Store in Horatio, South Carolina has served as this small community’s post office since 1900. Though the Lenoir Store USPO nook has been modernized to some extent, its mere presence in this mercantile of sundries provides a singular expression of rural life and community in South Carolina and in the south. The Horatio Post Office in Lenoir Store is slated for closure in 2012.



This Post Office sits alongside sundry goods and produce at the ca. 1878 Lenoir Store in Sumter County

Summary

As nineteenth- and twentieth-century rural buildings, country store types, materials, and interiors reflect necessity, function, status, and geography. A simple but well-honed architectural grammar is present in each design. As a time-honored “vessel,” the vernacular store form was repeated in its most basic sense for over a century, while a small number of more ambitious forms occasionally dotted the landscape at the turn of the twentieth century with the typically urban commercial block form. As the automobile rose to popularity, country stores began to adopt a transitional autocentric form, while maintaining the unchanging interior character of the rural one-stop shop. The physical characteristics of the country store, however modest, practical, or functional, play a vital role in conveying a complete history of rural South Carolina communities.

Surveyor in Front of A.B. McConnell General Merchandise



5. Survey and Evaluation Framework

This context was compiled to provide documentation of country stores in the state of South Carolina and to help preservation professionals record and evaluate them for their National Register eligibility. Research has underscored how few of these commercial properties, once strong in numbers, remain standing. In addition, the vernacular store with its long period of significance and its spare architecture contains few clues as to its origins, making it a challenge to date and evaluate. This chapter contains survey tools, dating information, and presents an evaluation framework for these properties.

Identification

Thorough fieldwork sets the foundation for strong NRHP evaluations. The guidelines for conducting historic resources survey in South Carolina are spelled out in *Survey Manual: South Carolina Statewide Survey of Historic Properties* (2011) and the field data is captured on a survey form. All exterior character-defining features should be noted as well as any idiosyncratic features. Interior inspection is encouraged and preserved details such as spatial divisions, shelving, and other store furniture, as well as any other interior character-defining feature should be recorded. The presence of these details will carry weight in a NRHP evaluation.

To identify and record a country store properly, an understanding of its geography is essential. Its setting, setback, relationship to the road and any changes to that relationship need to be documented photographically and in a site plan. Field survey and research indicates that country stores can be found as stand alone properties as well as in association with other buildings or structures such as a house (residence), cotton gin, cotton warehouse, and other agricultural buildings or structures.

The field survey portion of this project resulted in only one site that incorporates a country store and a cotton gin: the Ruff Stores in Ridgeway (See Appendix F). However, the historic context supports that this pairing was common from the 1860s until at least the 1930s. Therefore, the potential of finding another intact store and gin complex (possibly also including cotton warehouses) is strong. Many stores had an associated house or residential components attached to the store building. The historic context also showed that other types of agricultural-related buildings may be associated with country stores. These could include storage buildings, barns, grain and feed mills, and turpentine stills. Stores should be recorded and evaluated with their associated properties. Stores may also be recorded within larger historic districts that include more general community property types.

DATING A COUNTRY STORE

Form

The predominant extant country stores form, the one- and two-part vernacular store, remained static throughout the period of significance spanning from the antebellum period to the mid-twentieth century. Despite decades of variation in other residential and commercial types and styles, the interior and overall exterior form remained primarily simple and functional, focusing less on specific layout or design elements typical of other building types.

Some country store subtypes were constructed during shorter windows of time:

One-part commercial block: circa 1880-1900

Two-part commercial block: circa 1890-1910

Autocentric: circa 1920-1950.

Materials

Wood weatherboard is as common as the vernacular store type, thus dating a store based on the presence of this exterior feature alone is difficult. In contrast, the concrete block country store was primarily constructed between 1920 and 1950 and will therefore be much easier to correctly date. Furthermore, analysis of the sample survey found that brick masonry country stores were quite rare and only constructed from around 1880-1900.

Later added exterior materials can also make dating problematic. Applying a whitewash or veneer to an older country store was not uncommon as storekeepers sought to alter storefronts to keep up with competition and/or changing trends. Brick veneer can often give a storefront a later appearance, while a stone veneer might invoke a feeling of an aged façade.

Background Data

Background data from maps (USGS topographic, county highway, Mills' Atlas, etc.) and United States Post Office lists can prove most successful in dating a country store. However, beware of stores reconstructed at the same site as earlier stores labeled or listed on such—some are reconstructed under the same owner and called by the same name.

Signage

Signage can be both helpful in dating, as well as problematic. Historic signage can provide names of stores, as well as construction dates. Historic advertisements for products specific to a period of time may also aid in dating.

Unfortunately, the small size and relative portability of much country store signage has led to pilfering and sale of many original country store signs. Thus, original, on-site country store signs are not as prevalent as they were during the hey-day of the country store.



Additionally, acquired older signs by owners of newer stores and/or hobbyists, may give non-historic stores and non-commercial outbuildings and/or residences the appearance of a historic country store.

As stated above, at times, later stores are constructed at the same site with the same name to replace an older store. In some cases, signs giving an “established circa ...” date may provide a date much older than the extant building.

Pumps

A brief gas pump chronology is provided in Chapter 4 to help date gas pumps at rural stores. If gasoline is still sold, it is likely that none of these pumps will be in active use. When possible, though, some country stores retain their old pumps for decorative purposes. While their presence may aid in dating a store, keep in mind that such pumps may have been installed at a store constructed at an earlier date, or added to a later building (which possibly never sold gas) to evoke feelings of nostalgia.

Interior Features

When analyzing country store interiors for dating purposes, the presence of certain appliances, counters, drawers, or other features may at first indicate a particular construction date. However, according to some country storeowners, items like these were often purchased from recently closed stores or other enterprises for continued use in a new store. For instance, when Mrs. Mary McConnell and her husband constructed A.B. McConnell General Merchandise in Charleston County in 1939, an older large sink was purchased from a local plantation for use in the store. The McConnells also bought a set of heavy drawers from a country store that had recently closed for use in their new store, and later added even more previously used items (Mary McConnell, Personal Communication, 2012). The presence of such features may make the country store appear older than it is in reality.

Tax Data

While not always accurate, tax data can sometimes aid in dating any historic resource. In many survey cases, a quick search of a county’s online Tax Assessor GIS database can reveal possible dates of construction. However, many extant country stores are located in counties that are still quite rural, and online data may not be available at all. Furthermore, since some country stores were constructed as secondary buildings on parcels shared with residences, a quick online data check could reveal the date of construction for an associated house, but not necessarily for the country store building. Of course, if there is time in a study, an on-site deed search at the county courthouse will likely lead to more accurate data.

Security Measures

As discussed above, heavy wood shutters may indicate an earlier construction date. However, wood shutters are, at times, later additions applied to country store interiors or exteriors.

Metal security bars original to country store windows often indicate at least a twentieth-century construction date. Some stores, however, may also include metal security bars applied at a later date. In most cases, if the security bars are in any way decorative, they were likely applied at a later date and should not weigh heavily in determining a date of construction.

Finally, do not forget to talk with the owner or operator if it is still in use about the history of the building. He or she is your most important source of information.

Historical research at the state archives and local libraries can yield the history of a store, its date of construction, and the community it served. Appendices A through D contain historical information about country stores that once operated in South Carolina between 1875 and 1940 and more records are available at the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina for further research into individual operations. Finally, oral history gathered through talking with knowledgeable local individuals in person, by telephone, or via social media might be key to your research. The following sidebar touches upon some of the survey issues with country store identification.

Evaluation

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 established the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) as the nation's official list of significant historic and prehistoric properties. In order for a country store to be eligible for the NRHP, it must be 50 years of age and must meet specific criteria established by the NRHP.¹ The main four criteria are described below:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or*
- B. That are associated with the lives of significant persons in or past; or*
- C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master; or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or*
- D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory (National Park Service 1995:2).*

Additionally, there are Criteria Considerations that can be used to evaluate certain properties that are not normally considered eligible for the NRHP, such as buildings that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed buildings, and religious properties or those that are less than 50 years of age.

The historic context is an important consideration in this process, and is the framework through which a property is evaluated. The context presented in this report defines themes in the development of South Carolina's country stores. These themes highlight the country store's importance in the state and region, through its agricultural history extending from the Old Plantation to the Reconstruction era and the New South Plantation, the rich social and community history of rural South Carolina, the story of the state's rural commercial businesses and commerce, and the fascinating political history of the state, a tradition that evolved out of the country store.

¹ Guidance for how to evaluate a property for its eligibility for the NRHP is provided through a series of National Register Bulletins produced by the National Park Service and available online, www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins.

A country store should be evaluated using these themes in conjunction with the four NRHP criteria cited above. This process will lead to the definition of an area or areas of significance that are relevant to the history of the country store. Some examples may be eligible under one criterion (see below) or several depending on their context and integrity. In addition, more than one context may be applicable. Table 12 shows those country stores already individually listed in the NRHP, and Table 13 shows National Register-listed districts that include country stores as contributing resources.

Table 12. Country Stores Individually Listed in the NRHP

Name	County	Date	Criteria
Lenoir Store	Sumter	Ca. 1878	A
E.W. Cannon House and Store	Darlington	Ca. 1870	A & C
Monticello Store and Post Office	Fairfield	Ca. 1850	C
Corner Store and Office	Beaufort	Ca. 1877	C

Table 13. National Register Historic Districts with Country Stores as Contributing Resources

Name	Historic District	County	Date
Coker & Rogers General Store	Welsh Neck-Long Bluff-Society Hill	Fairfield	Ca. 1860
T.G. Patrick Store	White Oak	Fairfield	Ca. 1876
McDowell Store	White Oak	Fairfield	Ca. 1885
Ruff Stores and Gin	Ridgeway	Fairfield	Ca. 1860-1947
McLeod Store	McLeod Farmstead	Beaufort	No longer extant
Keyserling Store	McLeod Farmstead	Beaufort	Ca. 1880
Village Store-Blacksmith Shop	Cainhoy	Berkeley	No longer extant
Village Store	Cainhoy	Berkeley	Ca. 1905

Country Store Evaluation Under Criterion A

Country stores are significant as commercial, social and political centers anchoring local communities in rural South Carolina to the local, state, and regional economy between 1850 and 1950. These buildings may be eligible under Criterion A at the local level in the areas of agriculture, commerce, ethnic heritage-Black, European, Jewish; social history/politics; and transportation. A country store can also be eligible under Criterion A in the area of community planning and development or exploration/settlement if it played a role in the developmental history of a location.

Listed in 1984, the White Oak Historic District in Fairfield County contains a range of rural property types that reflect a late nineteenth–early twentieth-century trading community. Nine buildings including two stores and warehouses contribute to the district’s significance under Criterion A for commerce and community planning and development and Criterion B for the involvement of the Patrick family who developed and shaped the rural community.

Country Store Evaluation Under Criterion B

Evaluating the country store under this criterion is fairly straightforward in that the statement of significance needs to demonstrate that the property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past. An example of an eligible rural store under Criterion B might be a store that was associated with an individual or family that was significant at the local or state level (see White Oak Historic District example above).

Country Store Evaluation Under Criterion C

A country store is eligible in the area of architecture if it retains its location; essential character-defining features; most of its historic building materials; evidence of its workmanship; and its setting, feeling, and association.

Listed on the NRHP in 1984, the Monticello Store and Post Office in Fairfield County, is a good example of an antebellum store recognized for its architectural significance. Dating to the first half of the nineteenth century, the one-story, frame, T-shaped vernacular store possesses numerous character-defining features of one part vernacular store including its situation facing a road and a typical façade with a double entry and flanking windows. It is also distinctive for its undercut gallery with a pedimented gable supported by octagonal wooden columns. The building is clad in weatherboard but its front is sheathed in flushboard with a chair rail.

Periods of Significance, 1850-1920, 1921-1950

There are two periods of significance for country stores in South Carolina that parallel two main themes in the state's history. These dates also reflect what is known about the state's earliest and latest extant stores. The two periods cover a century of history for rural commercial architecture. The first extends from 1850-1920, a period that extends from the antebellum era to the New South Plantation era. Most of the earliest remaining stores identified during this project date to circa 1850, helping to mark the beginning of this period. These are stores that were built when the plantation slave economy was still in existence. The period ends at 1920, a pivotal decade for the state, as the New South plantation era drew to a close. Country stores reached their peak by 1920, only to decline in the following decades. The second period begins in 1921 and closes in 1950, an era marked by the influence of the automobile, when country stores were constructed in more autocentric forms.

Country Store Evaluation Under Criterion D

The archaeological remains of a country store have the potential to yield important information about country stores, the early construction of country stores (methods, materials, and techniques), the landscape of country stores (ie., a cotton gin complex), local trade networks, and the types of goods sold at the stores. This information can also potentially yield data pertaining to the lifeways of an area, including local politics, economy, and commerce.

Integrity

The National Register defines integrity as the ability of a property to convey its significance. Not only does a property need to be significant under one or more of the criteria, but it must also have integrity. A country store is significant under Criteria A, B, or C if it sits on its original location, possesses intact character-defining features, retains its principal historic building materials, and has the basic features of its design or type. There are seven aspects of integrity but recognition of which aspects are most important in an evaluation stems from the context research.

Location

Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred. For country stores, integrity of location is particularly important, as stores were often purposefully sited in particular ways on roads, waterways, or within larger properties to garner consumer traffic. Due to their locations along roads and minimal setbacks, some stores may have been relocated due to a road widening. If the relocation is minimal and the store remains on its lot and in its original orientation, this change may not affect its eligibility. Stores that have been moved from their original location to a new location or that have experienced a dramatic change in orientation however may no longer be able to convey their significance, particularly under Criterion A. The consideration of moved properties is limited by the NRHP criteria because significance is tied to locations and settings. Moving a property destroys spatial and historical relationships between a property, its surroundings, and associated historic events and persons. Historic features can also be lost such as chimneys, porches, foundations, and archaeological remains. Further guidance on moved properties is provided in National Register Bulletin 15 on *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*.



Lone Star Barbecue & Mercantile, Santee. Development, the immediate proximity of many stores to roads and highways, and the convenience store have placed the country store at risk. Relocation is sometimes used as a preservation tool. These four stores or commissaries were relocated to this location for reuse as a restaurant and shops. The relocation successfully allowed for the preservation of these historic local stores, providing a strong connection with the past for restaurant goers. However, physical and historical associations with their original sites have been diminished, lessening their potential eligibility.

Design

Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.

The country store form is an important aspect of design. Scale can be an issue when evaluating additions. Those that occur on vernacular or smaller examples more seriously compromise the integrity of the property than that same alteration on larger examples. In order for a country store to retain integrity of design, it should have no obtrusive additions that detract from the original form. Historic additions towards the rear of the building, or smaller scale shed-roof side additions that are historic should not be considered to diminish a store's integrity of design. More recent and overwhelming additions should be weighed in an assessment of a store's integrity of design.

A second important part of the country store's design is its façade. An intact façade is a critical feature of a store, where the entry and windows all have their original placement and design. In vernacular examples, each character-defining feature counts. Conversely, some storefronts have been historically altered to appear more high style and less "a barnlike wood frame structure" (Thompson 1989:17). Alterations such as the addition of a new store face were important to the longevity of the country store. As times and tastes changed, stores evolved and relabeled themselves in order to retain and grow a customer base. The two-part Hester Store in Dacusville, Pickens County is a good example of this. Thus a historic storefront alteration aimed at garnering and retaining a customer base does not detract from a store's eligibility; it may strengthen its potential for listing.

Setting

Setting is the physical environment of a historic property. A store's setting may be impacted by newer nearby development or major road expansion projects. A formerly agricultural and rural landscape surrounding a country store may have been an important part of its integrity, and while alteration of setting doesn't necessarily negate a store's eligibility, it should be weighed along with the other aspects of integrity.



Hester's Store, Dacusville, was constructed in 1893. Originally clad in weatherboard, it was refaced with granite in the 1930s to update the appearance of the store. This alteration is historic and reflects the intent of the storeowner to further his commercial business. Such alterations do not compromise the eligibility of a store instead they convey cultural information about evolving commercial and consumer practices.

Materials

Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. Material integrity is of particular importance to country stores, and replacement siding, windows, or interior finishes should be considered in its evaluation. Vernacular stores, which are characterized by spare details, need to possess original materials.

Workmanship

Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory. The integrity of workmanship for a country store should reflect the building techniques of the period in which it was built. Frame construction covered with drop wood siding would be an appropriate reflection of construction from the early decades of the twentieth century, while concrete masonry units would reflect those of the 1940s and 1950s.

Feeling

Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time. The physical features of a particular store should together convey the store's historic character. This aspect of integrity requires a good degree of integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and setting to come together and convey the integrity of feeling.

Association

Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property. Association is a critical aspect of integrity if a property's significance lies in Criterion A, for association with significant events or activities. As with integrity of feeling, association requires the presence of physical features that convey a property's historic character.

An eligible property will typically possess several, if not the majority, of the seven aspects of integrity. Because of the dwindling number of nineteenth-century country stores, in some cases, integrity may be weighed somewhat less stringently. There is no one formula for evaluating a particular property's integrity. Each aspect of integrity must be considered individually and then weighed together to determine whether a property has retained its integrity. If historical research or interviews with current or past owners determines that the store was once associated with a gin,



A.B. McConnell General Merchandise is another case in point. The store, which remains on its original lot, was moved back from its original setback to accommodate a road widening. The depth of the new setback coupled with new development surrounding the store may detract from the building's integrity in regard to setting, feeling, and association.

but that gin is no longer extant, this fact does not inherently make the store not eligible for NRHP listing. The context presented in this report reveals that a great many stores had gins, but field reconnaissance survey indicates it is a rare example that retains its gin. Therefore, integrity must be weighed for the store on the merits outlined above.

Similarly, historic signage has been shown to historically be a part of a typical country store, from store name signs to metal advertising signs affixed to the front and sides of the building. Signs are artifacts that are easily removed and rarely remain at original locations. Therefore, if a store does not retain its original signage, it does not automatically negate its eligibility for the NRHP. Likewise, store interiors are subject to change over time. Beadboard wall and ceiling panels may in some cases be the only intact interior features remaining, especially if a store is vacant or abandoned. Again, integrity should be weighed when evaluating the whole resource, and no one missing feature will automatically make a store not eligible for listing.

Levels of Significance

Country stores in South Carolina will primarily have a local level of significance, and in rare cases, a state level of significance may apply.

Conclusions

This context provides guidance on the identification and evaluation of the state's country stores. As discussed earlier, these rural resources are on one hand familiar, and on another, unknown. Perhaps, in part, this is due to their familiarity. Hopefully this context, which stems from the identification of an eligible historic store and its mitigation, will jar our architectural complacency to look more closely at these simple commercial resources to better understand their complex history and function.

Research suggests that the architectural lineage of the country store seems to date to the pre-Civil War era and may have been culturally transmitted by the European tastes of plantation owners. The long front-gable country store building definitely represents the iconic image of the country store, but there were some variations as time went on and more modern approaches

came into fruition. The architectural influence of house construction from the 1920s-1940s appears to have had an impact on these commercial buildings, just as they did with gas stations. Additional survey and research will enrich our understanding of this evolution.

For future research on country stores, there are areas that require more study. These include African Americans and women as store patrons and as storeowners. Additionally, research on the gas fuel pumps added to country stores would be beneficial, specifically how they were installed, at what cost to the owner, and how much additional business or profit was gained by the country store in adding this service. Analyzing underground storage tank records held by the state would likely assist this research, as would studying available store ledgers and receipts, and interviewing former or current country storeowners.

The country store once defined South Carolina's rural roads and crossroads. Few remain today to speak to the complex and central role that they played in the state's historic rural economy, commerce, politics, and lifeways. This context study provides a start to that conversation. Continued research and identification efforts will help preserve these rural buildings for future generations as hallmarks of the state's rural heritage.



Preservation of the Hester Store is ongoing through a partnership between a private firm, the Dacusville Historic Commission and The Palmetto Trust for Historic Preservation.

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