

NINETY PLUS YEARS OF RETAILING
A Brief History
of
PLUMMER'S STORE

This history begins with the birth of Percy William Plummer in July, 1896. Son of William A. Plummer, a butcher by trade, and Susie Miller Plummer in Kennebunkport, ME.

Percy (henceforth referred to as "P.W." as most of his family and friends knew him) moved with his family to Biddeford as a young boy. As many boys did in that era, he dropped out of school at the age of 15. Lying about his age, he was able to secure a job at the Saco Lowell Shops in Biddeford, but was eventually laid off because work was slow. Soon after though he heard from his brother Alfred that brothers Ira and William Cole were seeking a full time employee for their grocery store in East Raymond. " P.W." spent one whole day traveling from Biddeford to East Raymond, walking the last five miles to meet with the Cole brothers. He got the job. This was the beginning of his love of the retail business.

While employed at the Cole Bros. Store "P.W." met his wife to be, miss Stella Gerry. "P.W." and Stella were married on December 17, 1915. With the birth of their first child, son Donald in late 1916, "P.W." realized that he would not be able to support his new family on the salary of a clerk and moved back to Biddeford where he worked various jobs.

In 1922 "P.W." learned that the Cole Bros. Store was for sale. Meeting with the Cole brothers he worked out an agreement to purchase the stock in the store and lease the building and equipment. By the end of the first year "P.W." had earned enough to purchase the building and equipment. He now was fully self employed.

By the year 1927, with Stella and six children to provide for, "P.W." began looking for an area with a larger population base to support his business. Searching out several opportunities he found that if he could sell his East Raymond business he would be able to purchase a partnership in the Buxton Milling Paris Flour Co. in West Buxton, located on the ground floor of the brick Masonic Building. The deal got done. In 1928 "P.W." moved his family to West Buxton. Within two years he was able to purchase the remaining shares of the Buxton Milling Company and became affiliated with IGA of Maine. Along with 1933 came the "Great Depression" and like many businessmen at that time "P.W." was unable to meet his financial obligations and lost not only his business, but also his home.

Somehow, between 1934 and the Spring of 1936, "P.W." was able scrape up enough money to open another store in West Buxton. This store was located on the Hollis side of West Buxton Village near the end of the bridge. In the Spring of 1936 a great flood swept down the Saco River, taking with it many homes and businesses located near the river. Plummer's Store was one of those businesses.

Again, "P.W." had lost everything. A good friend, Charles Pinkham, offered the use of his garage, located on High Street in Hollis. "P.W." eagerly accepted the offer. This property on High Street is now the residence of Mrs. Betsy Clay.

A new one room building was then constructed to be the home of Plummer's Store. This building sat on a triangular piece of land between the I.O.O.F. Building and what is now the entrance to the

“power companies” river maintenance facilities.

During the year after the flood son Reginald joined his father in the business. Soon after son Roger (“Pete”) joined his father and older brother. In 1947 or 48 a large two story brick building, almost directly across the street from the one room store, was purchased and became the new home of Plummer's Store. It was at this location that the business became firmly established and expanded it's sale items to include hardware, dry goods, sporting equipment and gasoline. In the mid 1950's “P.W.” eldest son Donald sold his dairy farm and joined his father and two younger brothers as a retailer.

Around this time a store located at Standish Corner was purchased. Plummer's now had two locations. Within several years the old Goodwins Garage building on Depot Street in Bar Mills was purchased, renovated and opened as the third location of Plummer's. Reg managed the West Buxton store, Don managed the Standish store and Pete managed the Bar Mills Store

During this period of growth, two, third generation, family members joined the business. Reginald Sr's. two sons. Reginald Jr. in 1958 and Barry in 1965. It was also during the time period of the mid to late 1950's that “P.W.” retired from the business.

By the mid 1960's it had become evident that the old brick building in West Buxton Village was no longer adequate. It was decided to build a new, modern structure to replace it. Land was purchased at the intersection of routes 22 & 112 in Buxton and construction was started in 1967. Knowing that it would require more people to oversee the day to day operation of the new store it was decided to close the Standish Store and bring Don and any employee who wanted to West Buxton. The new 5,000 Sq. Ft. building opened in June of 1969 to much fan fare. Then in December of 1971 the unthinkable happened. “Pete” unexpectedly died. Leaving a great void. After several months it was decided to close the Bar Mills store and consolidate the businesses under one roof. Since the opening in 1969 two additions have been made to the shopping plaza. The first in 1983 relocated the hardware business to it's own store and added a pharmacy. The second addition in 1987 brought in the NAPA Auto Parts store and Casco Northern Bank as it's main tenets.

During the 1990's the hardware side of the business experienced growth. Two new stores were opened. The first in Limerick. The second in Waterborough.

The passing years have brought many changes to the business. What began as P.W. Plummer's in 1922 has evolved to P.W. Plummer & Son to P.W. Plummer & Sons. In today's business world each division has it's own managing title, however, the name Plummer remains the one constant.

the Family Business

Percy and Stella had six children: Donald “Don”, Theodore “Ted”, Guy, Reginald “Reg”, Bessie “Betty” and Roger “Pete”. Their six children produced twenty one (21) grandchildren.

In the early years when “P.W.” would travel to Portland to pick up supplies, wife Stella and the older children would tend the store. All of their children at sometime in their lives worked in the business. With the exception of Betty's two children, who lived out of state, all of their grandchildren worked in the store at sometime during their teenage years.

The past: Percy W. Plummer died in 1966. Founder
Roger "Pete" died in 1971. Second generation.
Donald "Don" died in 1992. Second generation.
Reginald Sr. "Reg" died in 2000. Second generation.

It is worthy to note that Reg Sr.'s wife Grace and Pete's wife Madeline worked many years in the business before their retirement. Reg Jr.'s first wife Joan has devoted many years to the business.

Third generation: Reginald Jr. and his brother Barry are now enjoying their retirement. Reg and his wife Sandra reside in Limerick. Barry and his wife "Beth" reside in Buxton.

The Plummer family business is now owed and operated by four – fourth generation family members: Reg Jr.'s and Joan's two sons Troy and Garrett.
Barry and Beth's son Christopher "Chris".
Donald's grandson Christopher Sanborn. (son of Donald's daughter Judith Plummer Sanborn).

Fifth generation: Troy's two daughters Jillene and Janessa, Chris Plummer's two sons Shayne and Ryan and Chris Sanborn's daughter Ashley are currently employed or have been employed in the past.

On a personal note: I consider myself to be very fortunate to be able to say that I have known all of the afore - said individuals. "P.W." was my grandfather. My earliest recollections of him are from when my father, mother, brother and I would visit Grammy and Grampa at their home in Groville. He always had a cigar in his fingers and would pay any of his grandchildren a nickel to tickle his feet for five minutes. I also recall going into the store as a child with my mother and running to the office to beg Grampa for a penny or a nickel, as all of the Plummer grandchildren did, so I could buy candy. Like most of my cousins I worked at "the store" throughout my high school years. As I was beginning my working years he was ending his. I fondly recall the family gatherings at the cottage at Gooserocks Beach. How he would roll up his pant legs and wade into the water and chew on his cigar. How he would try to remember the names of all his grandchildren. He never got mine right the first time.

How many people can say that they worked along side their grandfather, their father and mother, their brother, their uncles and aunts, their cousins, their children, their nephews and nieces, their grandchildren. I can.

With respect and admiration for all who paved the way,

Barry W. Plummer: Grandson of Percy and Stella,
Son of Reginald and Grace,
Brother of Reginald Jr.

March 7, 2016