

Arthur Quackenbushes Recall Early Eugene

By BOB NEWCOMB
Of the Register-Guard

At the respectable age of 80, Arthur R. Quackenbush is not about to retire as owner and manager of what is probably the oldest retail firm in Eugene in terms of single ownership.

Quackenbush's years do not deter him from working daily — every day of the week — at the store in downtown Eugene that bears his name.

"You can just about set your watch by the time he passes by here in his pickup truck on his way to work," one longtime Eugene businessman says of him.

This spring, Quackenbush Hardware Store at 160 E. Broadway will mark its 60th year of continuous operation at its original location. The other day Quackenbush and his wife, Helen, who serves as a partner in the firm, cast an eye on an earlier era in Eugene. They saw more than a few contrasts.

Quackenbush, wearing a tan coat with a cluster of pencils sticking out of the pocket, pointed to the ceiling of the

two-story store building in which he has worked since he was 20 years old. He helped build it.

"I was young and husky back in those days," he recalls. "I remember I helped raise the 2-by-12 ceiling beams. We had to raise them by hand—it was the only way then." He speaks quietly in reflection, smiling a little. His brown eyes are clear—as is his memory.

He recalls, without having to look up the date, that it was in the spring of 1902 that he and his father, J. W. Quackenbush, arrived in Eugene from Nebraska with intentions of opening a hardware and farm machinery business.

And he recalls, also vividly, the time he and his family attended the 1898 Trans-Mississippi Exposition in Omaha. He was then 16.

"My father spent quite a bit of time at the Oregon exhibition," he says, adding that the Oregon booth was fronted by a 36 square-inch timber. He remembers the size.

How much influence that exhibit had on his father's

decision to move to Oregon, he doesn't know. But the elder Quackenbush made a study of various parts of the country before deciding, he says.

The father and son preceded the other family members to Oregon. They came by train, "which crossed the Columbia River on a ferry. And we stopped in Portland and Albany before coming to Eugene," he reflects.

"I remember father said, 'This Eugene ought to be all right. It'll make a good town . . . not a big city.' That's just the way he sized it up."

The younger Quackenbush was 19 when he and his father settled on Eugene as the family's future home. He had finished a year and a half of undergraduate study at the University of Nebraska. After arriving in Eugene, he enrolled at the University of Oregon, but left after one semester to help his father build the new store. He's still there.

The firm opened in 1903 as a hardware and farm machinery store. It featured horse-drawn farm equipment in those days. It was founded

as J. W. Quackenbush & Sons, a partnership of the senior Quackenbush, Arthur, and another son, Ivan C., who died in 1917. The senior Quackenbush died in 1925. The firm still carries the assumed name — J. W. Quackenbush & Sons.

In those days when the 20th Century was in its infancy, so was the city of Eugene. Today Quackenbush recalls that Broadway (then Ninth Street) and Willamette Street were gravel roads, edged with trees and boardwalks.

The Quackenbushes both laughed as they told of the board crosswalks at intersections. A badly placed foot could prove embarrassing.

"There were no automobiles then," he said. "The Southern Pacific depot at the foot of Willamette was just a little wooden building. There were hitching posts all around the city park."

It was because of a petition circulated by Arthur Quackenbush in that horse-and-buggy era that the present Broadway Street is so named. Another man by the name of Johnston—"I can't recall his first name now"—helped circulate the petition. "And not a one refused to sign."

There were then about 3,000 people living in Eugene, he recalls.

Quackenbush has not seen any wartime service. "I was a little bit too young for the Spanish-American War," he says, "and about 30 at the time of World War I."

Has Eugene changed much? Are the people different today than they were then?

Quackenbush answers the question with a gentle laugh. "There were doctors, storekeepers, preachers and real estate men."

But business has changed considerably, as has the pace of life. The store then sold chipping and splitting tools to farmers, who provided the Southern Pacific with wood for their old steam engines. "The Oregon Electric was not here then."

Quackenbush did a big business in buggies, buggy whips and coal-oil lanterns, he remembers.

And the weather has changed — it's become more blustery. Quackenbush says he can't recall a windstorm to match the Columbus Day storm of last year.

Quackenbush's Hardware has become almost legendary in Eugene as a place where almost anything can be purchased. One story has it that long after horse and buggies had given way to the automobile, a man from Goshen walked into the store wondering if he could buy a buggy through the store's ordering service.

The clerk, according to the story, said, "just a minute." Then a minute later wheeled a buggy out of the storeroom.



Arthur Quackenbush Sends Sales Slip to Office

The store itself has undergone big changes over the years. After the senior Quackenbush died, in 1925, it began taking on a different character, under a woman's touch.

Mrs. Arthur Quackenbush, who formerly was a teacher, recalls that she started working at the store about that time, part time, and gradually became a full working partner.

Today she manages a portion of the store devoted to chinaware, costume jewelry, toys and a variety of other things—"principally of interest to women," she says. The

store has been enlarged several times.

Mr. and Mrs. Quackenbush, who were married July 12, 1922, each often put in a seven-day week at the store.

Quackenbush also operates a 220-acre orchard near Springfield, and is one of the largest filbert growers in the state. He and his wife live in Eugene, however, at 1995 Potter St.

And he has no thought of retiring from business.

Says Mrs. Quackenbush of her husband's work: "It's so much a part of him

now he has to come down here even on Sundays. I don't know what he'd do without it."



Helen Quackenbush Checks China Shelves

(Register-Guard photos by Phil Grenon)



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Stamps

Commemoratives Planned

THE UNITED NATIONS Postal Administration will issue a set of commemoratives in October to honor the role of the U.N. in West New Guinea. During the month of June the U.N. will issue three airmail stamps (6 cents, 8 c and 13 c). The 13-center will show the slender figure of a bird in the shape of a palm leaf.

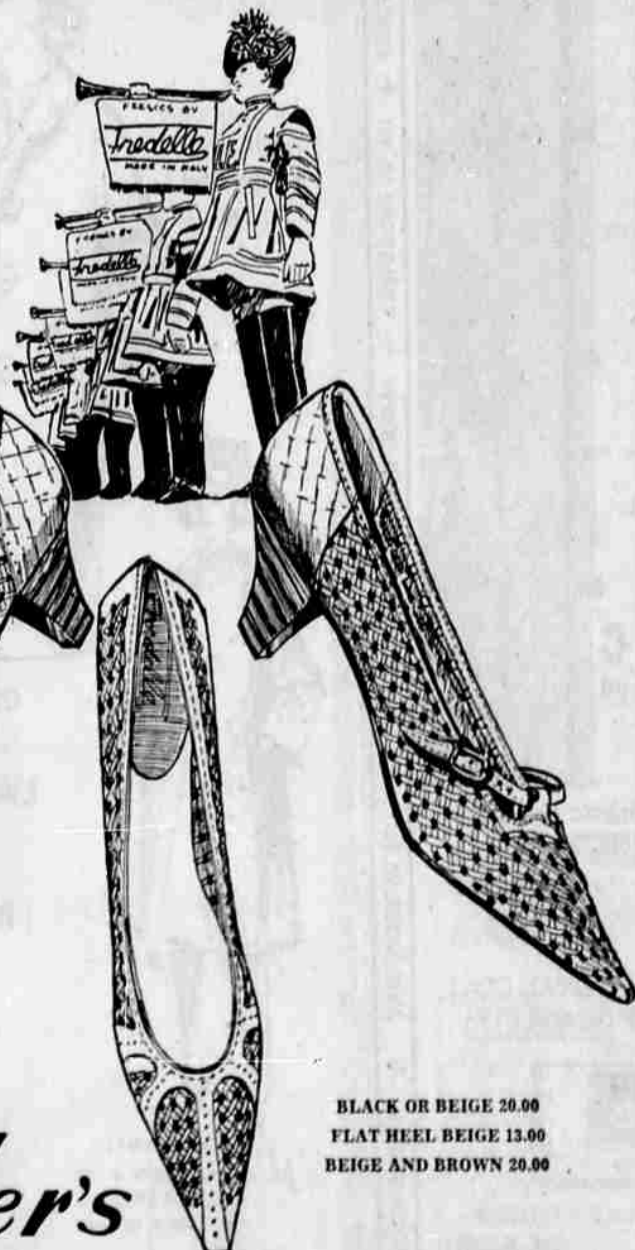
Further details and dates of issuance will be reported in this column as soon as they become available.

THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA reports that it has overprinted its 5 cents, 10 c and 31 c stamps which honored the orbital flight of Col. John Glenn with a Red Cross emblem in red. Also overprinted on these stamps are the dates 1963-1963 to mark the centenary of the International Red Cross. The first day of issue was March 4.

THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC has announced from Damascus the issuance of several sets of new stamps. Included are: a set of airmails featuring a portrait of Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra; an airmail showing a portrait of Sa'adallah Jabiri; and airmails depicting native costumes.

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