

Macy Livens Up Local History

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Go to Dan Macy for a roll of stamps and you might be hard put to melt his stern glare. But ask him about his forty-two years in Warm Springs and watch the gleam in his eye as he regales you with stories about the recent past. With the curiosity of an immigrant and the pride of a native Macy preserves local heritage, both material and oral. His office is a storehouse of old photographs and documents and his mind is chock full of anecdotes.

And what really makes the past seem alive is the general store owned by Dan's wife Priscilla and dominated by Dan himself. "Macy's" bears no sign identifying it as such, but it lives on at the heart of the Warm Springs community providing the same social function that it did fifty years ago.

Macy remembers the depression days when "nobody had nothin'" and the store was a cheerful gathering place for idle locals. The prime spot was the cold wood stove. Poor people with shoes made of gunny sack and baling wire would wander in from the cold, gainless world and engage in good-humored joking and teasing around the pot belly stove. It was here that Macy picked up many of his treasured stories about the generations before.

For instance . . . The names hardly matter anymore but one object of friendly teasing was a man who sported a long Oriental-style mustache. Apparently he frequented the saloon and red light district in Shaniko which was a booming, wool-producing town at the time. One stove sitter remarked that he had just made a trip to Shaniko and, "Why, do you know something? All the little kids up there are running around with long whiskers!"

Macy's, which was then Massey's, still serves as a meeting place where news is shared and spread in a most efficient manner. Instead of the wood stove there is the mailbox area, the bulletin board and the "catch-all for local hangers-on" behind the meat counter.

One tries to imagine what a sleek new Macy's Supermarket in the shopping center would be like. But Macy dispelled any fears that people may have had. "I won't even know the shopping center's down there. We're established and operating — I'll just sit here and watch them."

The history of the store is one of great change. The not-too-distant ancestor of Macy's was the Mecca Trading Company which was located "under the hill" on Shittike Creek, south of the present site. Owned by a man named Klupke, the Mecca store was on the main thoroughfare through Warm Springs which then crossed the creek and paralleled it. H.E. Massey bought the store and in 1924 he "sawed it up so he could get it through the bridge" and brought it up to its present location. It was re-assembled and the original wood floor can still be seen in the east end of the store where the museum and clothing are housed.

Dan Macy was an employee of Massey's from 1934 to 1947, then his wife Priscilla, a tribal member, bought the business. In 1953 Macy became the Postmaster and the mail service was moved from See Mercantile next door. This neighboring store suffered from the tough competition and was bought up by the Macys shortly after. The building has had a variety of uses but is best known for housing the Teen Center.



MACY'S as it is today.

Photo by Cynthia Stowell

The first major expansion of Macy's came in 1959 when the original 24' x 40' structure was given a new roof and added to on the west. The last half of the present store was completed in 1964. About ten years ago the little museum of personally owned artifacts was set up by Macy. And until this month things stayed much the same. Now 714 new mailboxes have been installed, doubling the capacity, and new display cases for the relics have been constructed. Re-decorating and re-arranging are underway presently.

The store once had a slightly different stock than it does now. Butter churns, whip stocks, whip lashes, single and double trees for wagons, bridles and reins can still be found

in the store's basement — and they're still for sale. But food and modern hardware are now the featured items. Even the food has changed over the years. "Back when people cooked," says Macy, the store just stocked basics like grains and produce. But now there is a demand for more convenience-type foods, much to his dismay.

Macy's reasonable prices are set by the wholesalers, United Grocers. He has no particular business philosophy, he says, but one suspects that he has the interest of his customers in mind. There are several hundred steady customers, some of whom do all their trading there rather than in Madras. "They're treated more friendly here — in town people don't even know their names." Macy has watched generations of shoppers come into the store: "I've known the 20 year olds since they were babies. I started out selling them penny candy and now I'm selling them beans."

Macy extends credit fairly liberally, usually to people who are known to be steady. Payment coincides with tribal pay checks and woe to the person who misses those first payments! But Macy is pleased with the credit system: "It's like a poker game. After 40 years there's no reason to think it won't work."

A Matter of pride to Macy is his contention that he has the "highest percentage of Indian employees of any operation on the reservation." There is a total of thirteen employees and since only six are needed at one time there is a sizable back-up crew. This means that the business can go on even when funerals, pow-wows,

weddings or other local events arise. Macy sees tradition as compatible with the successful operation of a business.

Some of the stalwarts of the staff are Waldron Lessert, of Sioux descent, who came to Warm Springs in 1944 and has worked at the store ever since; Elizabeth Reese who has worked in the post office since 1966; Ernie Henderson who hails from the southwest and can often be seen in butcher's apron; and Julie Mitchell, a cashier since 1972. The rest of the staff has a fairly high turnover rate.

In this truly community-oriented store, local craftwork is prized as a sales item. Craftspersons bring their work, most of which is beaded, to Macy and he pays them cash in advance. Items are sold at a mere 10 percent mark-up. Macy says most of the craftwork is purchased by local people, not tourists.

Perhaps one of the most interesting parts of the store is the corner where there are cases of locally crafted items, artifacts and photographs — none of which is for sale. Macy bought out the collection of the man who owned the Battle Axe Inn at Timberline. To this collection he added some of his own "finds" and his historical conscience persuaded him to display his valuable belongings ten years ago. Among the display cases one can find ancient stone implements, beaded and feathered clothing, basketry, and an array of other artifacts comprising an impressive collection. The photographs provide nostalgic and sometimes amusing glimpses of the Warm Springs remembered by many older folks but only imagined by the young.



MACY'S when it was Massey's - pre 1949.

Photo courtesy of Dan Macy

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