

# Mountainside General Store

As early as 1913—Present

*The Mountainside Store is an eye catcher, no doubt about it, and it's hard to miss while driving down Mountainside Road. For years I have passed this building – even pointed it out on my heritage tours – without knowing when it was built, by whom, and most of all: why it was painted.*

*These questions, and more, were easily answered once I found the right people to ask. In the fall of 2012 I sent a couple of my board members to interview Ben Arde who had owned and operated the Mountainside store for 14 years in the '50s and '60s. This interview left me aquiver with more questions and in January 2013 I contacted three generations of the Black family: Ethel Black was born and grew up in Mountainside, her son Larry Black spent his childhood there and his son David Black owned and lived in the Mountainside building in the early 2000s.*

Before the story of the Mountainside store began, another general store operated in the village. This early store burned down, probably in the early 1900's. The general store that exists to this day was built by Walter Tabberner sometime before 1927—at least the store was already in place when the Mountainside School was constructed in that year. Tabberner built the school with the help of Ethel Black's father, Albert Truax, who at that time was about 15 years old. By the time Ethel was attending school – 1943 – Walter Tabberner had sold the Mountainside store to Ed Tufts.

Ethel remembers the layout of the general store: the north wall was where the hardware was sold and the south

side featured a long counter with the till and shelves from floor to ceiling behind it. Beside the till was a book into which every purchase was recorded and customers were given handwritten receipts. A potbelly stove warmed the building. In the northwest corner of the store was the post office and mail room.

Children attending next-door Mountainside School often visited the store at lunchtime or after school to pick up mail and groceries for their families or to buy treats for themselves. Children there didn't have much for disposable cash, but a penny in those days could buy a handful of candies.

Ben Arde took over the store in 1949



▲ The Mountainside store was painted by Dave and Ashley Black, dairy farmers who were using the top floor as a residence at the

(see bottom panel) and operated it for 14 years. Ben sold the store to Mike and Adeline Michaluk in the early 1960s and Mike kept the store running for a few years after that. Larry Black remembers Mike setting up a refreshment stand at school picnics. Mike and Adeline soon stopped operating the store but continued to use the upstairs as a residence where they raised their three children. After the school closed in 1967 the lower floor of the store was used for community events. By this time, though, the railway through Mountainside had stopped operating and many people were moving out of the community.

## Ben Arde: Store Operator for 14 Years

*Ben Arde was born in Saskatchewan in October of 1926. His parents farmed there until the 1930s. When Ben was eight his father, originally from Wakopa, moved his family back to Manitoba, this time settling south of Mountainside.*

*Ben farmed for a couple of years but he found it difficult to make a living—he bought the store in Mountainside as an alternative. He married Phyllis Halliday in 1952.*

"I bought the store from Tufts in 1949, it was called B.A. Arde. It was a general store and a hardware store, and I had a television business out of there as well: selling and repairing televisions.

"I never wanted to repair televisions.

I used to like fixing radios and I always did that. Sammy Oak was selling television sets in Boissevain. He would change tubes but he didn't know anything about them. He phoned me one night and asked if I'd try to do some repairs. I said that I didn't want anything to do with them, but he said that he would bring them down anyways. He seemed to have enough parts to do it so we fixed those. The next week he brought in five more for repair. Then I took a correspondence course with National Schools one winter.

"So I did repairing for Sammy Oak, and a guy in Killarney, and another guy in Elgin. They brought the

televisions up after supper and I'd work half the night on those things. I didn't get paid for the first ones I fixed. So I said to Phyllis, 'If we're going to be fixing these televisions for nothing, we might as well be selling them.' We sold 45 of them that first winter. I think we used to sell that Phillips television for \$225. They were something that was pretty sophisticated. There were 21 tubes in them.

"The store also sold gas, coal oil and oil. We had underground gas tanks. The living space upstairs was big enough for us. It had 3 bedrooms and was warm enough in winter after I insulated it.

"We had the post office in the store.

Mike worked for Drings (the precursor to Western Archrib), and he built a small room onto the west end of the store to use as a “glue room” for the furniture he built on the side. He installed a bathroom in this room, also. Mike stayed in the store until he died in the late 1990s. Adeline had moved out a few years before, after getting tired of walking up and down the stairs all the time.

In the year 2000 Adeline was ready to sell the store. She put an ad in the paper, asking for bids on the place. At the time David Black was dairy farming with his parents, Larry and Sue, but wanted to have a place of his own nearby. There were few rural options available, so he put in a bid for the building. Adeline was glad to sell it to him, happy that someone else saw value in the building as a home.

The place was in pretty rough shape when Dave moved in, as it had been empty for a year or two. He knocked out a wall upstairs, painted and put in some carpet to make the place more comfortable. The space suited his needs—it was his first home away from his parents.

Dave lived in the building for over five years. In 2004 his fiancée Ashley joined him. Ashley was good natured in her acceptance of the store, saying “I think everybody’s first home should be memorable.” They lived on the top floor, where there were two bed-

**“I think everybody’s first home should be memorable.”**

rooms, a kitchen, a living room and a bathtub. A combination of single-pane windows and old wood chip insulation made the building difficult to keep warm. The wood stove was in the same room as the bathroom, on the main level. They later replaced the wood stove with a wood furnace made out of

an oil drum, to keep the winter cold at bay. The building was far from airtight, and it wasn’t uncommon for a mouse or shrew to run across

the floor. The bottom level was used for storage, laundry and a workshop. They didn’t use the basement.

The idea of painting the store occurred to Dave and Ashley while on a trip west. The building needed a paint-job anyway, and they thought a Holstein cow design would be a hoot.

When the winter of 2006 started approaching, Ashley felt that it was time to move. She had loved starting her life with Dave in the old store, and—though it had its quirks—good memories had been made there. But the thought of staying

► *The general store at Mountainside (date unknown), the gas pump visible at far right.*



for another winter was not an attractive one. They moved out to another property close to Dave’s parents and sold the store to Metro Klym. Metro was attracted to the building for the same reasons as Dave: it was an opportunity to live rurally.

Metro continues to live in the building today. He is a self-employed carpenter, and has put energy into renovating parts of the building. Metro has made the bottom floor habitable and uses both storeys as a home for himself and his brother.

Dave and Ashley have always been under the impression that the building had been built in 1913, but they don’t remember where they heard this from. If they are correct, then this building is seeing its 100th year this year!

**Sources:**

- Arde, Ben. Interview conducted by Leona Devuyt and Mary Conway. 19 Oct 2012.
- Black, Ashley. Personal Interview. 22 Jan 2013.
- Black, David. Personal Interview. 24 Jan 2013.
- Black, Larry, Sue and Ethel. Personal Interview. 5 Jan 2013.
- Photos: TM-SPHA. 27 July 2009.

Phyllis was the postmaster and she used to get \$16 a month. We had 200 mail customers: everybody in the bush went to Mountainside to get their mail. The mail was brought up in a car three times a week from Whitewater. The store owner at Whitewater did the separating of the mail based on whether it went east or west, on the CP or CN railways. There were all kinds of mail, from Eaton’s and Simpson’s catalogs to welfare and pension cheques.

“There was always something interesting going on in Mountainside. People in that little place all stuck together.” In addition to the store there were nine houses, the school and two elevators in town. “Nobody plowed the streets or anything in the winter. If you

got stuck, you’d only be stuck for 10 minutes and there’d be guys coming out of their houses with shovels over their backs, coming to help you out. They had church in the school and there was a public dancehall in the basement which had a hardwood floor. There were a lot of good dances there.

“All the kids in Mountainside, whenever one of them had a birthday, I had to give them a bar and a coke (worth 5 cents each). So they always let me know when somebody had a birthday. If there were any bicycles or wagons that needed fixing in the spring and sleighs in the fall, I always did that for them.

“Trying to make payments on the store was hard. We had just got it paid

for and had three years good going before they pulled the railway on us. I could see every couple of months we were digging into our savings to pay the bills and finally we couldn’t make it anymore. We were there until ‘62. Michealuks bought the store from us. When they bought it, we told them that it was no longer a viable store.

“After that I went to work for Alton Breault for eight years working on televisions, including the first colour TV. Then I got a job at the hospital in maintenance and was there for 18 years until 1998. After that, I retired.”

*Ben Arde is well known in Deloraine for his volunteer position at the rural airport, where he maintained the grounds and runway for many years.*