

Evans Store in South Beach, Gimli

Written by Evelyn Ward

Evans Store on Hansson Ave, at the corner of Anna, was a fixture to every kid in South Beach, Gimli. Forever.



Evans Store Building in 2017. Put out to pasture behind 15 Hansson Avenue, Gimli.

My first memory of spending money was at Evans Store. My grandpa **Percy** Carter would give me a nickel or dime and I would be allowed to walk by myself the 50 feet down the gravelly road to this tiny little convenience store.

Loose candy was laid out in the very boxes it came in from the wholesaler. Three for a penny. Five cents would yield 15 mint leaves! Bright green leaf-shaped gummies, the size of my thumb, covered with crystalline sugar. A wee brown paper bag was given to me to select my candy. Liquorice

'cigars', blackballs, pixie stix, and the famous Koko bars. Old Dutch Potato Chips, Hawkins Cheezies and sunflower seed bags were neatly displayed in rows on a metal stand with little clips.

And soda pop. I don't remember my mother ever buying pop at home in the city. Maybe we would be allowed one if we went to A & W. But in the summer I was allowed to go to Evans Store to buy pop.

Depositing my coins in the slot and extracting my pop meant sticking my hand into the ice cold water of the red Coca-Cola dispenser and grabbing the protruding bottle neck. There was a rag hanging on the side of the cooler to wipe the water off the bottle. Cream Soda, Orange Crush or Seven-Up. A summertime treat.

Evans Store was owned by Anne and Mike Evans. The store was only 12 x 17 feet, really a glorified fruit stand. Judging by its construction it was no doubt built around the same time as [Camp Sparling](#), the fresh air camp on the lake directly at the end of Hansson Ave. Farmers donated food to the fresh air camp but Evans Store serviced the camp staff for their treats. And cottagers for their staples. (In the early days cottagers were called campers.)

Mike and Anne, were of Ukrainian descent. Their name was undoubtedly changed from Ewanchuk.

Mike was a fisher and added to his income doing carpentry and odd jobs taking care of people's cottages in the off-season. The store was in direct competition with Mike Shewega, his wife's brother who had an identical camper's convenience store only two blocks away on what was Colonization Road. However the Evans were reputed to have the best ice cream in the area.*

It had one of those screen doors with a metal band across as a push bar, the type which sported advertising. Evans Store was Coca Cola all the way. Ice cold coke in glass bottles. We would scour the ditches for empty pop bottles which could be redeemed for 2 cents a piece. Which meant more candy!



Eileen Evans, circa 1940

Opening the screen door would activate a lively bell which alerted Mr. or Mrs. Evans of a customer's arrival. Hung inside among the sticky fly-catching strips coiling down from the ceiling was bologna and other quality deli meats from Manitoba Sausage. And great wieners for roasting over a bonfire. Mr. Evans would cut bacon slices individually off a big slab with a very sharp and well-worn knife. Shallow shelves nearly to the ceiling were lined with canned goods; coffee, jam, Red Rose tea, Klik, Spam, soup, Del Monte vegetables and fruits, pickles, cat and dog food. And fresh bread, milk and butter. Most of the basics needed by cottagers. When South Beach girls got old enough to need feminine hygiene products we could count on Evans Store to get us out of a jam. They were wrapped in brown kraft paper for discretion! And of course Evans carried the ubiquitous cigarettes, chewing tobacco and cigars, no doubt the real profit makers.

In the 1940's the Evans girls Eileen and Eleanor's friend Marie [Isfeld](#) took a path all the way from the south end of Colonization Road through the

wooded field to the store. Or Marie would meet them at the end of Hansson Ave and walk to school with them, either following the Arnason Dairy truck to break trail in the snow or riding on it. And much later her son Lawrence would be sent by his Afi (grandfather in Icelandic) to get cigarettes at the store, on credit. Credit was extended, graciously to most people in the area. When the South Beach mink ranchers sold off their pelts in November they would pay off their debt to the Evans.

All the overstock cigarettes and paper goods were stored in a shed behind the store, secured with a simple padlock. Evan's granddaughter Lois remembers occasions when she would sleep over at her grandparents in the 1960's waking up in the night to the sound of someone breaking in to the shed, mostly to steal cigarettes. In the winter the Evans would move the store into the porch area of their house directly behind the wee store.

In later years burglars came in the early morning hours, terrified the elderly couple by tying them up and threatening them with a comb (though they thought it has a knife or gun) and robbed them. It made the Winnipeg radio news and that's how their daughter Eileen found out about it.

One day in May 1967 Anne Evans happened to look west down Hansson Ave. She saw a man lying on his front lawn. That man was my grandpa, Percy Wallace Carter. He was dead from a massive heart attack. The rake beside him. He'd been raking leaves in the early spring. Dead beside a cotoneaster bush. My grandmother napping only a few feet away in their cottage. Anne Evans called the RCMP who contacted my mother in the city. Anne Evans, the woman who stayed and comforted my grandmother.

Up until 1980, when my own father had heart problems, we never had a phone at our cottage. No one did. We always walked uptown to the harbour where there was a pay phone booth near the pier. But in an emergency everyone in South Beach knew they could use the Evans phone. It was in their house, right behind the store.

Anne Evans a stern, well-dressed woman, mother of Eileen and Eleanor. Awarded a life membership in the Gimli Women's Institute and noted best canvasser for the Cancer Society.** She herself died of cancer June 12, 1972 at the age of 69. The store had been closed before that when Anne

had to go live in Winnipeg with her daughter Eileen due to ill health. Mike passed away in the early 1980's.

The fact that my grandpa died raking leaves on the front lawn of what is now my cottage is actually a beautiful, comforting memory to me. Of course it was a traumatic event for my family, what death isn't, causing all sorts of repercussions. But I will always remember Anne Evans and her compassion. And I will never forget Evans Store where I received my first education in financial literacy.

Sources:

* "The Stores of Gimli", by David Arnason, Interlake Pulse, 2013, pp. 44-45.

** Gimli Saga: The History of Gimli, Manitoba. Gimli: Gimli Women's Institute, 1975, pp. 275 and 336.

Many thanks for the black and white photos, memories and fact checking of Evan's grand-daughter Lois Bergman Marotta. Also memories of Lorraine Hicks, Marie Isfeld, Lawrence Frantz, Susan Woodruff, Julie Ewanchuk, Sheryl Stephen, Wendy Rothwell Dunlop, Dan McKelvey, Barbera Buffie, Ken Kristjanson, Val Sobkowich Verity and Joanne Couture Burns.