

Locals flocked to Hosley Block for food, hardware



PICTURES OF THE PAST

Jane Peterson Bouley

Until the 1950s, Branford had many neighborhood grocery stores where the shopper could be welcomed with personal service or have their groceries delivered on a weekly basis. One of the many old-time grocery stores in Branford was operated by Chet Prann.

The Hosley Block was built at the west corner of Main and Park streets in 1891 by local contractor Benjamin Hosley. The first tenants were Prann and Stannard, both of Westbrook. Chester "Chet" Prann ran the hardware business. George Stannard retired in 1920 and Chet moved his grocery store to the former St. Mary's Church building at 112 Montowese St. in 1925. Only a few years later the Hosley Block was destroyed by fire.

Customers entering Prann's store were greeted by the stout gentlemen singing songs, such as "Can She Bake a Cherry Pie" or "The Horse Marines." Customers were enticed by a free nibble of the huge rounds of cheese, which stood in back of the big, red coffee grinder. Brother Fred Prann filled the pastry case with fresh bread and other baked goods. There were barrels of molasses, vinegar, pickles and apples. Penny candy was a popular item for the youth of all ages. The immense ice box was filled twice a day by the local iceman and was filled with butter, lard, cream and milk. The news of the day was exchanged and the local sports scene was discussed. Chester Prann was an avid supporter of all Branford sports and sponsored many teams.

Chet and Alice Prann raised their four sons in Branford and all of them had successful careers in engineering after graduating from Yale. Chet retired from the grocery business in 1938 after 47 years and died the following year at the age of 75.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Jane Peterson Bouley is the town historian in Branford.

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▲ Inside the Prann Grocery Store, Chet Prann serves his customers from behind the counter. The younger man with the white shirt and tie is his youngest son, Clifford Prann. The woman with her back turned is assistant librarian Harriet Palmer.

➤ *The Hosley Block, with horse-drawn carriages in front was built in 1891. The building housed Prann and Stannard's grocery and hardware business on the first floor, the Delavan Hotel on the second. (Photos courtesy of the Branford Historical Society)*

