

close to him. Moreover, there was a rare and almost unmatched warmth in Roosevelt's relations with his family, which the author has caught. Well written and full of interesting details, this volume will delight practically everyone interested in an unabashed admiring account of one of America's most colorful and prominent families.

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The Old Country Store. By Gerald Carson. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954, pp. xvi, 330. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$5.00.)

The academic historian is likely to approach Gerald Carson's *The Old Country Store* with skepticism if, before reading it, he has taken note of its somewhat loose-jointed style and the author's background as an advertising executive. What, he might ask, could possibly be added to the story of this peculiarly American institution as related so well in several other works, among them Professor Thomas D. Clark's *Pills, Petticoats, and Plows*. If these doubts still exist 300 pages later, however, the reader must be either totally lacking in imagination or unreasonably demanding.

This reviewer was pleasantly surprised to find *The Old Country Store* both historically sound and extremely entertaining. But it is more than interesting economic and social history. What might appear at first glance to be a casual assemblage of random anecdotes and factual data is in reality a mirror of everyday life in much of the United States of the nineteenth century. By his deft focusing of this literary looking-glass, Carson has caught the flavor and atmosphere of the country store as our forebears knew it and at the same time he has placed it in its proper historical perspective.

Carson's professional experience inspired his interest in the general store and stimulated a quest for knowledge that led him to libraries, museums, and out-of-the-way communities. During his years as vice-president of Benton & Bowles, Inc., and later of Kenyon & Eckhardt, Inc., while he was promoting automobiles, cereals, and soaps, he was also attracting attention with his articles on business, advertising, and historical subjects. The avocation finally gained the upper hand and he retired from the business world to devote his

time to writing. The number and variety of books, professional journals, periodicals, and manuscripts cited in the appendix and the chapter references are indicative of the extensive research performed by the author in preparing the present volume. In addition, he interviewed many old storekeepers and descendants of others, and studied the contents of country store replicas in various museums. His attention was centered largely upon the northeastern and north central states, thus neatly complementing Clark's study of the southern general store.

The author designates the year 1791 as the beginning date for the development of the merchandising system that produced the country store. The adoption of Alexander Hamilton's proposals for a stable financial system encouraged men of moderate means to open small stores with more assurance of success than during the preceding decade. As the frontier pushed westward, the merchant followed and set up shop, often in a one-room log cabin. In these isolated settlements the general store reached full flower. It eventually became not merely good business but a virtual necessity for the storekeeper to dispense, along with certain foodstuffs, such varied items as hardware, shoes, clothing, drugs, jewelry, dry goods, crockery, books, candy, and tobacco. Moreover, he usually served as postmaster and legal and medical adviser to the community. In the early nineteenth century, with the scarcity of money and the inadequate transportation facilities, it was inevitable that the barter system found wide favor. In addition, much business was transacted on credit, forcing the storekeeper to toil laboriously over his ledger in the hope that he might persuade his customers to settle their accounts at least once a year.

Before long the primitive roads were being trod by itinerant peddlers who became familiar figures in rural areas. The appearance of one of these traveling vendors at a farm house was usually the signal for the family to gather round to gaze longingly at the wonders revealed as the peddler unrolled his pack. As soon as the roads and his financial circumstances permitted, the peddler bought a horse and wagon and carried a larger stock of merchandise over a greater area.

By the 1850's it had become common practice for the rustic storekeeper to don his Sunday suit and journey to New

York City once or twice a year. There he enjoyed the pleasures of the metropolis while selecting new clothing styles and other stock for his store back home. There he was also exposed to the "drummers of Pearl Street," the high pressure salesmen who wined and dined the visiting merchant and swindled him out of his bankroll if the opportunity presented itself.

This phase in the saga of the country storekeeper began to fade away with the westward extension of the railroad. After the Civil War, Americans in far-flung towns and hamlets were introduced with growing frequency to the sight of the commercial tourist or the drummer on the road. This was the original traveling salesman whose exploits have long been the subject of ribald humor. He usually arrived in town with a flourish and attracted a crowd on his way to the general store where he held forth with a rapid-fire patter of jokes and the latest news from up and down the line, and finally made his play for the storekeeper's business. Frequently the merchant was so charmed by the persuasive manner of the drummer that he ordered more crockery, tobacco, or what-have-you than he could sell in a year. There were two types of commercials, the fly-by-night agent for new inventions and specialties and the more honest representatives of wholesale houses interested in gaining their customers' good will and repeat orders. From the latter group came many who later rose to prominence in business, among them Marshall Field, Aaron Montgomery Ward, and King C. Gillette. Theirs was a glamorous occupation in a romantic era but it was not an easy life for a man, being on the road for months at a time, sleeping in second-rate hotels and boarding-houses, and facing strenuous competition at every turn.

The decline and ultimate demise, for all practical purposes, of the country store were attributable to two innovations, the mail-order house and the automobile. The famous catalogs of Sears, Roebuck and of Montgomery Ward offered a variety of merchandise that the rural merchant could never hope to match, and on liberal credit terms, as well. The automobile, on the other hand, brought the farmer and his family into closer contact with cities miles away. Nearly everyone wanted an auto for it pointed the way to an entirely different mode of living. As one farm wife, whose family had a Ford but no bathtub, put it, "You can't go to town in a

bathtub." By 1921 the transition was virtually complete and the country store had become little more than a memory.

So skillfully does Carson recreate the atmosphere of the general store that the reader has no difficulty in visualizing its crammed shelves and its cheery stove surrounded by idlers who exchanged stories and munched crackers from a nearby barrel while they wrinkled their noses at the pungent smell of raw kerosene or the fragrant aroma of roasting coffee beans. He is alternately sympathetic toward the storekeeper when the latter is given in trade eggs about to hatch or butter churned from cream in which a mouse had drowned, and critical of him when he wipes the mold off the pork sausage and rubs it with butter to freshen it up. Such characters and incidents provide the basis for Carson's thorough and well-rounded treatment. Indeed, the pages of *The Old Country Store* sparkle with as many colorful, humorous, and interesting people and products as its subject did in its heyday.

Ohio Historical Society

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Alexandra Gripenberg's A Half Year in the New World: Miscellaneous Sketches of Travel in the United States (1888). Translated and edited by Ernest J. Moyne. (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1954, pp. xv, 225. Illustration and index. \$4.00.)

Throughout the nineteenth century books on the United States by European travellers were popular in this country as well as in Europe. Some of them remain important sources of social history. To the accounts of earlier feminine visitors, such as Frances Trollope, Harriet Martineau, and Frederika Bremer, which have long been familiar to American readers, is now added *A Half Year in the New World* by Alexandra Gripenberg. The book, which appeared in 1889 and 1891 in Swedish and Finnish editions respectively, has recently been translated into English and edited by Ernest J. Moyne.

Alexandra Gripenberg, member of a distinguished Swedish-Finnish family, was the author of several other books and a leader in securing the emancipation of Finnish women. The present book is in the form of random recollections of her travels and observations during a six months tour of the