



*Main Street in Somesville, early 1900s, Fernald Store right*

# A. C. FERNALD'S STORE

SOMESVILLE, MAINE

*"As I remember it"*

ALLEN FERNALD

In 1940, when my father, Burton Fernald, worked at the general store on Main Street in Somesville, I was always very excited when he let me visit him there. The store was owned by my grandfather, Abraham Chadwick Fernald, Jr., and it was one of three stores in Somesville at that time; the others were owned by Bloomfield Smith and A. V. Higgins. There was a lot of competition among them.

My grandfather, usually known as A. C., and his brother, R. H. Bridgham Fernald, had purchased the building from Andrew J. Whiting and his wife, Mehitable, in 1887. The Whitings acquired the land and building from Daniel Somes, Jr. and his wife, Sally, proprietors of the Mount Desert House directly across the street, for \$200 in 1868.

In 1905 my grandfather became the sole owner when Bridgham and Carrie, his wife, sold him their share of the property and general store.

Our store, which was one of four IGA stores on the island, was generally open six days a week from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (9:00 p.m. in the summer). My father often took me with him when he worked on Saturday.

The store was a large two-story wooden building with two aisles, a back storage area, and a stairway to the second floor. The store was lined with glass display cases for smokes, candies and cookies. We could peek at the cookies stored in a large box with a glass drop-front.

Each area of the store was stocked with particular items: oranges and grapefruit in the street-front window, cigars, cigarettes and chewing tobacco in the front showcase as you entered from the street, candies at the left, and a few dry goods – galoshes, flashlights, iodine, Mercurochrome, toothpaste, toothbrushes, bandaids, Vaseline and so on – in a show case on the right.

*Mt. Desert, Me., ..... 189*

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**Bought of FERNALD BROS.,**

—DEALERS IN—

**Fine Groceries, Grain, Feed and Family Supplies.**

**ALSO DEALERS IN GRANITE.**

R. H. B. FERNALD.

A. C. FERNALD, JR.

*Fernald Store receipt, 1890s*

The cash register and counter were in the center at the front part of the store. There was a pot-bellied stove near the back, always an area for gatherings and gossip. Fly catchers hung from the ceiling in the summertime.

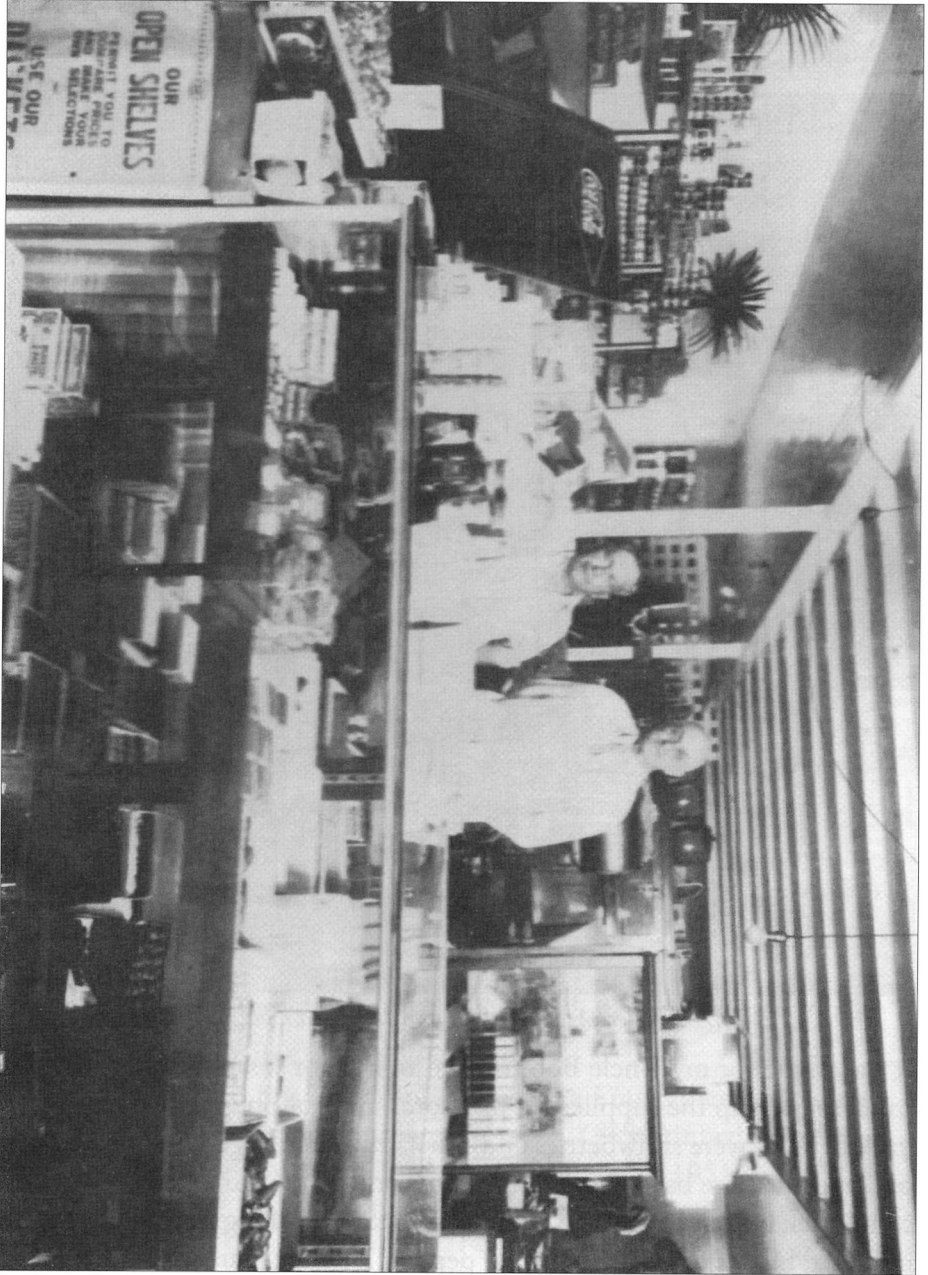
The floor was made of boards oiled a deep brown, and it was swept clean by the workers once a day or more often if needed. Everything inside the store was painted. The wooden shelves along the sides and all the showcases were all white. The showcases had glass covers so that the contents were visible.

As you walked toward the back of the store, you passed a counter filled with crackers and coffee and a refrigerated meat showcase (pork, hamburger, lamb and chicken), a meat-cutting block and freezer, and machines for slicing and grinding meat.

Scallops, clams, cod cheeks, salt fish and corned fish were also sold. Some seafood was displayed in a showcase, while other fresh fish was kept in buckets. At that time, most people bought from fish carts that went house to house.

Along the back wall, behind the pot-bellied stove, were the hardware items: nails, screws and paint.

There was a small office on the right at the back with a safe, a desk, file cabinet and phone. Through a door, you entered a back room where grain was stored. There were scales and barrels of molasses, vinegar and oil. People would bring their own containers when they purchased these. Salt fish was hung and dried in the back. Beef was corned in barrels, and there were also barrels of salted pork.



*A. C. Fernald (r) and Stearns Harriman (l) in the 1930s*

Gulf Gas (regular and hi-test) was sold from pumps out front. An air pump stood to the right of the store entrance. A road circled the back of the building and deliveries could be made through a rear door.



*A. C. Fernald, Stearns Harriman and the Coca Cola deliveryman*

My father or my Uncle Bob traveled to Bangor weekly in the company truck to pick up the supplies for the store. Bags of potatoes were bought in Bangor, as were strawberries and other fruits and vegetables. Flour was packaged in large bags (25 lb. bags were common). Other staples would come back on the company truck: Crisco, Spry, baking powder and baking soda, blocks of lard, salt, sugar, pepper, Dundee marmalade (for the summer people), Swift and Armour canned meats, and bottled juices. Upstairs, on the second floor, was a stockroom lined with canned and boxed goods.

Emmons Brown was employed in the store before he entered the poultry business with his brother, Julian, and he supplied the store with eggs and chickens after that. James Grant also worked there after he closed his grocery in Hall Quarry.

Deliveries were made in response to phone orders, although during the summer my father would go house-to-house soliciting orders from summer folk, returning to make delivery before noon. Goods charged on account were written on slips of paper and clipped in a metal file case near the cash register.

Both natives and summer people came into the store. Sometimes a customer could be a bit impatient. One man who summered on Beech Hill brought his glass milk bottle in one day, marched up to the counter, and declared, "I need my milk now!" And he slammed that bottle down on the counter – and it smashed to smithereens!

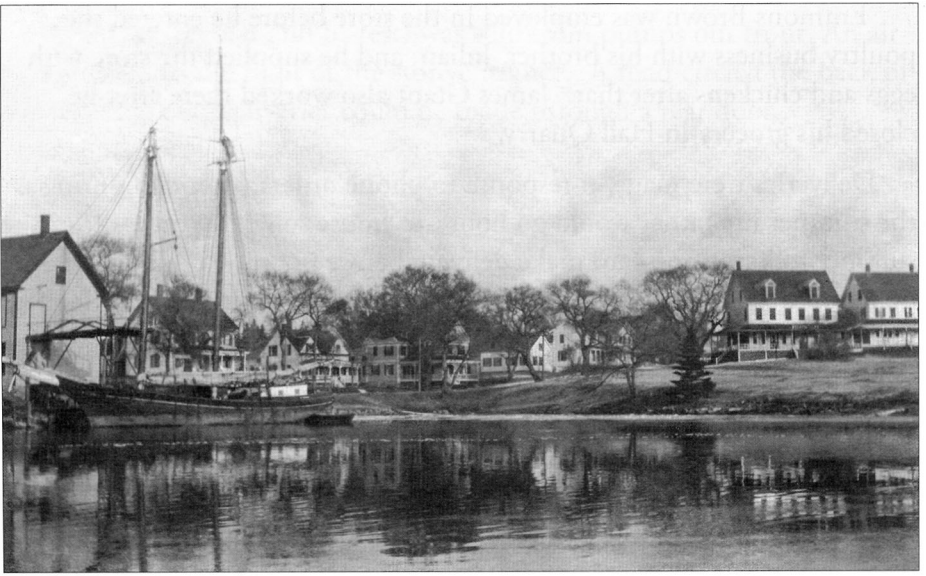
There were lots of practical jokes. My mother's brother went in one day and was talking to Uncle Bob, who was working at the front counter. A customer asked a question and Bob set down the Coke he had been drinking to check on something in the back room. My uncle reached across the counter, took Bob's Coke and finished it off. A few minutes later Bob and the customer returned. When Bob reached for his drink, he did a double-take and looked pretty perplexed. The bottle was empty, but my uncle was poker-faced.

Hank Joyce worked for Clark's Dairy, and Clark's was changing from glass to plastic bottles for milk. Uncle Bob said, "We can't use that plastic. It's going to leak." Well, Hank decided to show him. He walked in the front door with a plastic bottle and flung it all the way to the back of the store. "There, that didn't leak," Hank said. Uncle Bob had to take back his words.

My grandfather, my Uncle Bob Fernald, and my father worked together in the general store for many years. A. C. continued to go into work until his late 80s; he died, at 91 years of age, in 1951.



A. C. Fernald also had a mortuary business. My father worked for him after he had finished business school, gone to mortuary school in Boston, and done an apprenticeship in Bangor.



*Houses on Main Street Somesville; Fernald's Store is left*

The casket room was located at the front of the second story of the General Store, and the caskets were visible through the windows. There was also an embalming room on the same floor. My father was in charge of the embalming process. Bodies were embalmed, dressed, made up, put in the casket and brought downstairs by means of a very steep staircase on the outside of the building. Often four to six strong men were required to take the casket down the stairs and load it into the hearse. Passersby might be asked to help carry.

In those days, viewings and funerals were held in the deceased's or a relative's home or in a church.

The hearse and horses were originally kept in A. C.'s barn, located where the Jordan-Fernald funeral chapel now stands. A. C. also kept a truck and a motorized hearse there.

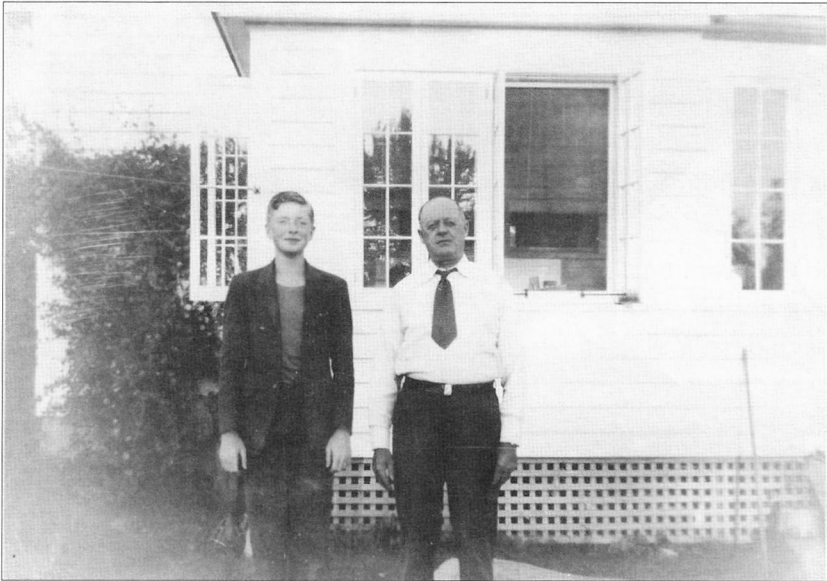
Sometimes being in the mortuary business was hard. Fred Parker, Mary Parker Smith's father, used to deliver eggs and milk and things of that sort. He died, and my father was just loading his casket into the hearse when a uniformed gentleman from the Army drove up. He said Fred's son, Robert, has just been killed in Korea. The military chap wanted to know where Fred Parker lived so that he could inform him. My father had to tell him that Fred himself had just died, and then he



directed the man over to the family's house on the Parker Farm Road. Quite a sad moment! To have a husband die and then, within the same week, a son in the war!



*Allen Fernald was born in Ellsworth Falls. Except for four years, he has lived in Somesville since 1936 in the house built by his father's brother John. Allen has made a career of his love of music. He graduated from Husson College, then taught piano at the Northern Conservatory in Bangor and also worked as a bookkeeper. He has served as organist in many churches*



*Allen and Burton Fernald, 1947*