

BARKER'S CORNER HOW IT ALL BEGAN

By Callie Foreman and Kathy Foxworth



...”But things can come together in strange ways. The wood was at the center, the hub of the wheel. All wheels must have a hub. A Ferris wheel has one, as the sun is the hub of the wheeling calendar. Fixed points they are, and best left undisturbed, for without them, nothing holds together.”

—Natalie Babbitt



Once upon a time, there was a wood; or rather, an open range of field, but in the year of 1937 things took place that would soon change this once typical landscape that was much like all the other land around it. A man by the name of Atwood Barker sold twenty head of cattle. He made \$750 and used that money to build the first small store in his area. With \$150 left over, he stocked his store purchasing loaves of bread for three cents and selling them for a nickel.

By 1938, Atwood decided it would be a wise decision to move his establishment further up the road. So, he purchased seventy-five acres of corner property where Lee Road met Highway 40. The land sold for \$7.50 an acre.

There was not much around this area at the time other than home sites, cattle and grassland fed by creeks. But Atwood built his store that would be known by all locals as Atwood Barker's General Store. After doing this, he donated ten acres to the school board so that three area schools could

be consolidated and formed into one school just walking distance from his store. In return for this, there was a deal on a handshake that the students would be allowed to come place their mama's grocery order at lunch so that the items could be gathered and prepared for departure when they boarded their bus each afternoon.

As many find when looking back over the clarity of history, Atwood Barker was a clever man and a hard worker to boot. He provided the community with groceries, gas, car service, fresh meats, and of course candy. And when people could not pay their bill after harvest, he would gladly accept an acre of land which was worth far less at the time than a bill that had accumulated over the course of six months.

Before long, he was quoted in the REA paper saying, "Give me twenty head of cattle, and I'll never go broke." And he did not. The area grew. Families would come down from New Orleans for their summer vacations in the country. Many



would walk to the local store for goods and entertainment. On balmy summer nights, crickets would chirp in unison with the rattling juke box as locals and visitors stood around trucks and caught up on the latest news.

Over the years, the store grew. Atwood added on more room being that he, his wife and his only child, Frances Barker lived in the back. And as the hub of the wheel grew, the community grew as well. Atwood sold off property around his store as other businesses began to pop up. But, he never failed to remain the central pulse of what by the 1960's became known to folks as "Barker's Corner,"... because it was.

Atwood's daughter, Frances Barker, recalls the night she won Homecoming Queen at Covington High. Before she left for the game, she had to stock the shelves for Saturday groceries. Her parents were not at the event because the establishment that was open seven days a week, pretty much

around the clock had to be operated. The family never took a vacation. In 1955 at the age of 43, Atwood Barker made his first trip to our Capitol, Baton Rouge. And it was, of course, over store business. Other than that, Atwood Barker and his wife remained at home in the center of a community they had come to know as family.

Francis Barker is quick to tell one "Money buys material things, but time makes memories." And over time the memories created around this old country store have been passed down for generations.

At the end of 1968 Atwood leased out his store to Mr. Ado Jenkins Atwood Barker died a little over a year later. The Atwood Barker General Store, was last known to locals as Lee Road Feed. And now, the hub of the community wheel has been removed. In August of 2008, locals passed the empty building as they headed into work and upon return found an empty slab. The community

Atwood Barker generated around his store is now thriving and holding its own. Many of the businesses and residents who purchased land from Mr. Barker are still in existence. And even though the old white wooden building, with a slight scent of saw dust and feed no longer stands on its proud corner, all who ever frequented it will forever remember.

The other day when I was passing by, I saw three former students of Lee Road Junior High. These three teenage boys had their pickup truck parked upon what is now a bald spot that was once the foundation of Barker's store. These fine young entrepreneurs had the truck loaded down with melons for sale. It seems Atwood's spirit for business is a magnet to the area. I could hear his whispered laughter as he would likely have said, "Give'em a truck load of melons, and they'll never go broke."

